Title: His Excellency the Minister

Author: Jules Claretie
Translator: Henri Roberts

Release date: May 29, 2005 [EBook #15934]
Most recently updated: December 14, 2020

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Audrey Longhurst, Jonathan Niehof and the
Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

THIS EDITION

DEDICATED TO THE HONOR OF THE

ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

IS LIMITED TO ONE THOUSAND NUMBERED AND REGISTERED SETS, OF WHICH THIS IS

NUMBER 358

THE ROMANCISTS

JULES CLARETIE

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER

BIBLIOTHÈQUE DES CHEFS-D'ŒUVRE DU ROMAN CONTEMPORAIN

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER

JULES CLARETIE

OF THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY BY

GEORGE BARRIE & SONS, PHILADELPHIA

THIS EDITION OF

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER

HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY

HENRI ROBERTS

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

EUGENE WALLET

AND DRAWINGS BY

ADRIEN MARIE

TO ALPHONSE DAUDET

TOC

My dear friend,

Ideas sometimes float about in the air like the pollen of flowers. For years past I have been at work collecting notes for this book which I have decided to dedicate to you.

In one of your charming prefaces, you told us lately that you only painted from nature. We are both of us, I imagine, in our day and generation, quite captivated and carried away by that modern society from which in your exquisite creations you have so well understood how to extract the essence.

What is it that I have desired to do this time? That which we have both been trying to do at one and the same time: to seize, in passing, these stirring times of ours, these modern manners, that society which perpetuates the antediluvian uproar, that feverish, bustling world always posing before the footlights, that market for the sale of appetites, that kirmess of pleasure that saddens us a little and amuses us a great deal, and allows us romance-writers, simple seekers after truth, to smile in our sleeves at the constant seekers after portfolios.

This book is true, I have seen the events narrated in it pass before my own eyes, and I can say, as a spectator greatly interested in what I see, that I am delighted, my old fellow-traveller, to write your great and honored name on the first page of my book as a witness to the sincere affection and true comradeship of

Your devoted,

JULES CLARETIE.

PREFACE

TOC

There was once a Minister of State who presented to his native land the astonishing spectacle of a Cabinet Minister dying whilst in office. This action was so astounding to the nation at large that a statue has since been erected to his memory.

I saw his funeral procession defile past me, I think I even made one of the Committee sent by the Society of Men of Letters to march in the funeral convoy. It was superb. This lawyer from the Provinces, good honest man, eloquent orator, honest politician that he was, who came to Paris but to die there, was buried with the greatest magnificence.

De Musset had eight persons to follow him to the grave; his Excellency had one hundred thousand.

I returned home from this gorgeous funeral in a thoughtful mood, thinking how much emptiness there is in glory, and particularly in political glory. This man had been "His Excellency the Minister" and not

only his own province, but the whole country had placed its hopes on him. But what had he done? He had left his home to cast himself into the great whirlpool of the metropolis. It was the romance of a great provincial plunged in Paris into the reality of contemporary history, and become as ordinary as the commonplace items of the Journals. "What a subject for a study at once profoundly modern and perfectly lifelike!" The funeral convoy had hardly left the church of the Madeleine when my plot of this romance was thought out, and appeared clearly before me in this title, very brief and simple: His Excellency the Minister*.*

I have not drawn any one in particular, I have thought of no individual person, I even forgot all about this departed Minister, whose face I hardly caught even a glimpse of, and of whose life I was completely ignorant; I had only in my mind's eye a hero or rather a heroine: Politics with all its discouragements, its vexations, its treacheries, its deceptions, its visions as fair as the blue sky of summer, suddenly bursting like soap bubbles; and to the woes of Politics, I naturally endeavored to add those of the pangs of love.

And this is how my book came to see the light. I have been frequently asked from what living person I borrowed the character of Vaudrey, with its sufferings, its disappointments, its falterings. From whom? An American translator, better informed, it appears, than myself, has, I believe, brought out in New York a key *to the characters presented in my book. I should have publicly protested against this* Key *which unlocks nothing, however, had it been published in France. Reader, do not expect any masks to be raised here—there are no masks; it is only a picture of living people, of passions of our time. No portraits, however, only types. That, at least, is what I have tried to do. And if I expected to find indulgent critics, I have certainly succeeded, and the two special characters which I sought to portray in my romance—in Parisian and political life—have been fortunate enough to win the approval of two critics whose testimony to the truth of my portraitures I have set down here.*

An author of rare merit and an authority on Statecraft, Monsieur J.-J. Weiss, was kind enough one day to analyze and praise, apropos of the comedy founded upon my book, the romance which I am to-day republishing. It has been extremely pleasant for me to put myself under the sponsorship of a man of letters willing to vouch for the truth of my portrayals. I must beg pardon for repeating his commendations of my work, so grateful are they to me, coming from the pen of a critic so renowned, and which I take some pride in reading again.

"I had already twice read Monsieur le Ministre*," wrote Monsieur J.-J. Weiss in the* Journal des Débats *the day following the production at the Gymnase, "before having seen the drama founded on the book, and I do not regret having been obliged to read it for the third time. The romance is both well conceived and admirably executed. To have written it, a union of character and talent was necessary. A Republican tried and proved, permitting his ideal to be tarnished and sullied; a patriot wronged by the vices of the times in which he lived; an honest, clean-handed man; the representative of a family of rigid morality; the strict impartiality of the artist who cares for nothing but his ideas of art, and who protects those ideas from being injured or influenced by the pretensions of any group or coterie; a close and long acquaintanceship with the ins and outs of Parisian life; an eye at once inquiring, calm and critical, a courageous indifference, hatred for the mighty ones of the hour, and a loftiness of soul which refuses to yield to the unjust demands of timid friendship: such are the qualities that make the value of this matchless book. Monsieur Claretie has been accused of having gathered together and exposed to the public gaze two or three more or less scandalous episodes of private life, and using them as the foundation of his romance. The fictitious name of Vaudrey has been held to cloak that of such and such a Minister of State. Those, however, who search for vulgar gossip in this book, or who look for private scandal are far astray. They are quite mistaken as regards the tendency and moral of Monsieur Claretie's book. The Vaudrey of the romance is no minister in particular, neither this statesman nor that. He is the Minister whom we have had before our eyes for the last quarter of a century. He is that one, at once potential and universal. In him are united and portrayed all the traits by which the species may be determined. He had been elected to office without knowing why, and to do him this justice, at least without any fault of his; he was deposed from power without knowing the reason, and we have no hesitation in saying, without his having done anything either good or bad to deserve his fall. There he is minister, however; Minister of the Interior, and who knows? in a fair way, perhaps, to be swept by some favorable wind to the post of President of the Council; while not so very long ago to have been made sub-prefect of the first class, would have surpassed the wildest visions of his youth. In Monsieur Claretie's romance it is the old Member of Parliament, Collard—of Nantes—converted late in life to Republicanism, who chose the provincial Vaudrey for his Minister of the Interior; this may, with equal probability be Marshal MacMahon.*

"In Monsieur Claretie's romance, Monsieur le Ministre *is of the Left Centre or the so-called Moderate Party, he is therefore on the side of Law and Order. He enters into the Cabinet with the determination to reform every abuse, to recast everything; to seek for honest men, to make merit and not faction, the touchstone of advancement. In short, to apply in his political life the glorious principles which—and the noble maxims that—He is only, however, forty-eight hours in office when he becomes quite demoralized, paralyzed and stultified for the rest of his ministerial life. It is the phenomenon of crushing demoralization and of complete enervation of which the public, from the situation in which it is placed, sees only the results of which Monsieur Claretie, with a skilful hand describes for us the mechanism and the cause. This Minister of State, supposed to be omnipotent in office, has not even the power to choose an undersecretary of State for himself. The Minister who only the day before, from his seat upon one of the benches of the Opposition, sat with his head held aloft, his long body erect, with rigid dignity, as if made of triple brass, cannot now take the initiative in the appointment of a 'garde champêtre.' His undersecretaries of State, his* gardes champêtres*, he himself, his whole environment, in fact, are only painted dummies and the meek puppets that a director of the staff, a*

chief of a division, or a chief of a bureau sets in motion, to the tune he grinds out of his hand-organ, or moves them about at his will like pawns upon a chess-board. The Minister will read with smiling confidence the reports by which his subordinates who are his masters, inform him—what no one until then had thought of—that he has been called by the voice of the nation to his high office, and that he can in future count upon the entire and complete confidence of the country. To please these obliging persons, the hangers-on of governments that he has passed a quarter of his life infighting against and whom he will call gravely, and upon certain occasions, very drolly, the hierarchy, he will betray without any scruples all those whose disinterested efforts and great sacrifices have brought about the triumph of the cause which he represents.

"Monsieur le Ministre is from the Provinces! You understand. Solemn and pedantic, if his youth has been passed upon the banks of the Isère, a puppy with his muzzle held aloft and giddy, if Garonne has nourished him, broad faced and vulgarly pedantic if his cradle has been rocked in upper Limousin. But whether he comes from Corrèze, from Garonne or Isère, it is always as a Provincial that he arrives in Paris, the air of which intoxicates him. He is in the same situation and carries with him the same sentiments as Monsieur Jourdain when invited to visit the Countess Dorimène. For the first adventuress who comes along, a born princess who has strayed into a house of ill fame, or one who frequents such a house, who masquerades as a princess in her coquettish house in Rue Brèmontier, he will forsake father, mother, children, state documents, cabinet, councils, Chamber of Deputies, everything in fact. He will break away from his young wife who has grown up under his eyes in the same town with him, among all the sweet domestic graces, moulded amid all the fresh and sapid delicacies of the provinces, but pshaw! too provincial for a noble of his importance, and he will go in pursuit of some flower, no matter what, be it only redolent of Parisian patchouli. He will break the heart of the one, while for the other, he will bring before the councils of administration suspected schemes, blackmailings, concessions, treachery and ruin. Monsieur Claretie had shown us the Vaudrey of his romance involved in all these degradations, although he has checked him as to some, and in his novel, at least, with due submission to the exalted truth of art, he has not shrunk from punishing this false, great man and pretended tribune of the people, by the very vices he espoused.

"I do not stop to inquire if even in the story, Monsieur Claretie's 'Marianne Kayser' is frequently self-contradictory, and if in some features I clearly recognize his Guy de Lissac; two characters that play an important part in the narrative! But after all, what does it matter? It suffices for me that his Excellency the Minister and all his Excellency's entourage are fully grasped and clearly described. Granet, the low intriguer *of the lobbies; Molina, the stock-company cut-throat and Bourse ruffian; Ramel, the melancholy and redoubtable publicist, who has made emperors without himself desiring to become one, who will die in the neighborhood of Montmartre and the Batignolles, forgotten but proud, poor, and unsullied by money, true to his ideals, among the ingrates enriched by his journal and who have reached the summit only by the influence of his authority with the public; Denis Garnier, the Parisian workman who has had an experience of the hulks as the result of imbibing too freely of sentimental prose and of lending too ready an ear to the golden speech of some tavern demagogue, who has now had enough of politics and who scarcely troubles to think what former retailer of treasonable language, what Gracchus of the sidewalk may be minister, Vaudrey or Pichereau, or even Granet: all these types are separately analyzed and vigorously generalized. Monsieur Claretie designated no one in particular but we elbow the characters in his book every day of our lives. He has, moreover, written a book of a robust and healthy novelty. The picture of the greenroom of the Ballet with which the tale opens and where we are introduced in the most natural way possible to nearly all the characters that play a part in the story of Vaudrey is masterly in execution and intention. It is Balzac, but Balzac toned down and more limpid."*

I will stop here at the greenroom of the Ballet commended by Monsieur J.-J. Weiss, to give a slight sketch, clever as a drawing by Saint' Aubin or a lithograph by Gavarni, which Monsieur Ludovic Halévy has contributed to a journal and in which he also praises the romance that the feuilletoniste *of the* Débats *has criticized with an authority so discriminating and a benevolence so profound.*

It was very agreeable for me to observe that such a thorough Parisian as the shrewd and witty author of Les Petites Cardinal *should find that the Opéra—which certainly plays a rôle in our politics—had been sufficiently well portrayed by the author of* Monsieur le Ministre*. And upon this, the first chapter of my book, Monsieur Ludovic Halévy adds, moreover, some special and piquant details which are well worth quoting:*

"That which gave me very great pleasure in this tale of a man of politics is that politics really have little, very little place in the novel; it is love that dominates it and in the most despotic and pleasant way possible. This great man of Grenoble who arrives at Paris in order to reform everything, repair everything, elevate everything, falls at once under the sway of a most charming Parisian adventuress. See Sulpice Vaudrey the slave of Marianne. Marianne's gray eyes never leave him—But she in her turn meets her master—and Marianne's master is Adolphe Gochard, a horrid Parisian blackguard—who is so much her master that, after all, the real hero of the romance is Adolphe Gochard. Such is the secret philosophy of this brilliant and ingenious romance.

"I have, however, a little quarrel on my own account with Monsieur Jules Claretie. Nothing can be more brilliantly original than the introductory chapter of Monsieur le Ministre*. Sulpice Vaudrey makes his first appearance behind the scenes of the Opéra, and from the sides of the stage, in the stage boxes, opera-glasses are turned upon him, and he hears whispered:*

"'It is the new Minister of the Interior.'

"'Nonsense! Monsieur Vaudrey?'

"'Yes, Monsieur Vaudrey—'

"In short, the appearance of his Excellency creates a sensation, and it is against this statement that I protest. I go frequently to the Opéra, very frequently. During the last ten years I have seen defile before me in the wings, at least fifty Ministers of State, all just freshly ground out. Curiosity had brought them there and the desire to see the dancers at close quarters, and also the vague hope that by exhibiting themselves there in all their glory, they would create a sensation in this little world.

"Well, this hope of theirs was never realized. Nobody took the trouble to look at them. A minister nowadays is nobody of importance. Formerly to rise to such a position, to take in hand the reins of one of the great departments, it was necessary to have a certain exterior, a certain prominence, something of a past—to be a Monsieur Thiers, Monsieur Guizot, Monsieur Mole, Monsieur de Rémusat, Monsieur Villemain, Monsieur Duchátel, Monsieur de Falloux or Monsieur de Broglie—that is to say, an orator, an author, a historian, somebody in fact. But nowadays, all that is necessary to be a minister is the votes of certain little combinations of groups and subsidiary groups, who all expect a share of the spoils. Therefore we are ruled by certain personages illustrious perhaps at Gap or at Montélimar but who are quite unknown in the genealogical records of the Boulevard Haussmann. Why should you imagine that public attention would be attracted by news like this:

"'Look!—There is Monsieur X, or Monsieur Y, or Monsieur Z.'

"One person only during these last years ever succeeded in attracting the attention of the songstresses and ballet-girls of the Opéra. And that was Gambetta. Ah! when he came to claim Monsieur Vaucorbeil's hospitality, it was useless to crouch behind the cherry-colored silk curtains of the manager's box, many glances were directed toward him, and many prowling curiosities were awakened in the vicinity of the manager's box. Little lassies of ten or twelve came and seized your hand, saying:

"'Please, monsieur, point out Monsieur Gambetta to me—he is here—I would so much like to see him.'

"And then Gambetta was pointed out to them during the entr'acte—after which, delighted, they went off caracoling and pirouetting behind the scenes:

"'You did not see Monsieur Gambetta, but I saw him!'

"This was popularity—and it must be confessed that only one man in France to-day receives such marks of it. This man is Gambetta.

"Meanwhile Claretie's minister continues his walk through the corridors of the Opéra house. He reaches the greenroom of the ballet at last and exclaims:

"'And that is all!'

"Alas, yes, your Excellency, that is all!—"

And everything is only a "that is all," *in this world. If one should set himself carefully to weigh power or fame,—power, that force of which Girardin said, however: "I would give fifty years of glory for one hour of power,"—even if one tilted the scale, one would not find the weight very considerable.*

It would be necessary to have the resounding renown of a personality like that one who, if I am to believe Monsieur Halévy, alone enjoyed the privilege of revolutionizing the foyer of the ballet, in order to boast of having been someone, or of having accomplished something.

A rather witty skeptic once said to a friend of his who had just been appointed minister:

"My dear fellow, permit me as a practical man to ask you not to engage in too many affairs. Events in this world are accomplished without much meddling. If you attempt to do something to-day, everyone will cry out: 'What! he is going to demolish everything!' If you do nothing, they will cry: 'What! he does not budge! If I were minister, which God forbid, I would say nothing—and let others act—I would do nothing—and let others talk.'"

Everybody, very fortunately—and all ministers do not reason like this jester. But the truth is that it is very difficult for an honest man in the midst of political entanglements as Vaudrey was, to realize his dream. When opportunities arise—those opportunities that march only at a snail's pace—one is not allowed to make use of them, they are snatched from one. They arrive, only to take wings again. And in those posts of daily combat, one has not only against one the enemies who attack one openly, which would be but a slight matter, a touch with a goad or a prick of the spur, at most—but one has to contend with friends who compromise, and servants who serve one badly.

Every man who occupies an office, whatever it may be, has for his adversaries those who covet it, those who regret it, those who have once filled it, and those who desire to fill it. What assaults too! Against a successful rival, there is no infamy too base, no mine too deep, no villainy too cruel, no lie too poisoned to be made use of—and the minister, his Excellency, is like a hostage to Power.

And yet one more point, it is not in his enemies or his calumniators that his danger lies. The real, absolute evil is in the system of routine and ill-will which attack the statesmen of probity. It will be seen from these pages that there is a warning bell destined, alas! to keep away from those in power the messengers who would bring them the truth from outside, the unwelcome and much dreaded truth.

The novel may sometimes be this stroke of the bell,—a stroke honest and useful,—a disinterested warner, *and I have striven to make* Monsieur le Ministre *precisely that, in a small degree, for the*

political world. I have essayed to paint this hell paved with some of the good intentions. The success which greeted the appearance of this book, might justify me in believing that I have succeeded in my task. I trust that it will enjoy under its new form—so flattering to an author, that an editor-artist is pleased to give it,—the success achieved under its first form.

Monsieur le Ministre *is connected with more than one recollection of my life. I was called upon one day to follow to his last resting-place—and it is on an occasion like this that one discovers more readily and perceives more clearly life's ironies—one of those men "who do nothing but create other men," a journalist. It was bitterly cold and we stood before the open grave, just in front of a railway embankment, in an out of the way cemetery of Saint-Ouen,—the cemetery called* Cayenne, *because the dead are "deported" thither. We were but four faithful ones. Yes, four, but amongst these four must be included a young man, bare-headed and wearing the uniform of an officer, who stood by the deceased man's son.*

Whilst one of us bade the last farewell to the departed on the brink of the grave, the scream of the railway engine cut short his words, and seemed to hiss for the last time the fate of the vanquished man lying there. As we were quitting the cemetery, a worthy man, a song-writer, observed to me: "Well, if all those whom Léon Plée helped during his lifetime had remembered him when he was dead, this little Campo Santo *of Saint-Ouen would not have been large enough to hold them all!"*

Doubtless. But they did not remember him.

And from the contrast between the shabby obsequies of the old journalist and the solemn pomp of that of the funeral service of the four days' minister came the idea of my book. It seemed to me that here was an appropriate idea and a useful reparation. Art has nothing to lose—rather the contrary, when it devotes itself to militant tasks.

Ah! I forgot—When one mentions to-day the name of this illustrious minister whose funeral convoy was in its day one of the great spectacles of Paris, and one of the great surprises to those who know how difficult it is for a minister to die in office—like the Spartan still grasping his shield—those best informed, shaking their heads solemnly will say:

"Ricard?—Oh! he had great talent, Ricard—I saw lately a portrait of Paul de Musset by him—It is superb!"

They confound him with the painter to whom no statue has been erected, but whose works remain.

Be, then, a Cabinet Minister!

JULES CLARETIE.

Viroflay, September 1, 1886.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER

TOC

PART FIRST

I

The third act of L'Africaine had just come to a close.

The minister, on leaving the manager's box, said smilingly, like a man glad to be rid of the cares of State: "Let us go to the greenroom, Granet, shall we?"

"Let us go to the greenroom, as your Excellency proposes!"

They were obliged to cross the immense stage where the stage carpenters were busy with the stage accessories as sailors with the equipment of a vessel; and men in evening dress, with white ties, looked natty without their greatcoats, and with opera hats on their heads were going to and fro, picking their way amongst the ropes and other impedimenta which littered the stage, on their way to the greenroom of the ballet.

They had come here from all parts of the house, from the stalls and boxes; most of them humming as they went the air from Nélusko's ballad, walking lightly as habitués through the species of antechamber which separates the body of the house from the stage.

A servant wearing a white cravat, was seated at a table writing down upon a sheet of paper the names of those who came in. One side of this sheet bore a headline reading: *Messieurs*, and the other *Médecin*, in two columns. From time to time this man would get up from his chair to bow respectfully to some official personage whom he recognized.

"Have you seen Monsieur Vaudrey come in yet, Louis?" asked a still young man with a monocle in his eye, who seemed quite at home behind the scenes.

"His Excellency is in the manager's box, monsieur!" answered the servant civilly.

"Thank you, Louis!"

And as the visitor turned to go up the narrow stairway leading to the greenroom, the servant wrote down in the running-hand of a clerk, upon the printed sheet: *Monsieur Guy de Lissac*.

Upon the stage, Vaudrey, the Minister whom Lissac had been inquiring for, stood arm in arm with his companion Granet, looking in astonishment at the vast machinery of the opera, operated by this army of workmen, whom he did not know. He was quite astonished at the sight, as he had never beheld its like. His astonishment was so evident and artless that Granet, his friend and colleague in the Chamber of Deputies, could not help smiling at it from under his carefully waxed moustaches.

"I consider all this much more wonderful than the opera itself," observed his Excellency. The floor and wings were like great yellow spots, and the whole immense stage resembled a great, sandy desert. Vaudrey raised his head to gaze at the symmetrical arrangement of the chandeliers, as bright as rows of gas-jets, amongst the hangings of the friezes. A huge canvas at the back represented a sunlit Indian landscape, and in the enormous space between the lowered curtain and the scenery, some black spots seemed as if dancing, strange silhouettes of the visitors in their dress clothes, standing out clearly against the yellow background like the shadows of Chinese figures.

"It is very amusing; but let us see the greenroom," said the minister. "You are familiar with the greenroom, Granet?"

"I am a Parisian," returned the deputy, without too great an emphasis; but the ironical smile which accompanied his words made Vaudrey understand that his colleague looked upon his Excellency as fresh from the province and still smacking of its manners.

Sulpice hesitatingly crossed the stage in the midst of a hubbub like that of a man-of-war getting ready for action, caused by the methodical destruction and removal of the scenery comprising the huge ship used in *L'Africaine* by a swarm of workmen in blue vests, yelling and shoving quickly before them, or carrying away sections of masts and parts of ladders, hurrying out of sight by way of trap-doors and man-holes, this carcass of a work of art; this spectacle of a great swarm of human ants, running hither and thither, pulling and tugging at this immense piece of stage decoration, in the vast frame capable of holding at one and the same time, a cathedral and a factory, was rather awe-inspiring to the statesman, who stopped short to look at it, while the tails of his coat brushed against the fallen curtain.

From both sides of the stage, from the stage-boxes, opera-glasses were turned upon him here and there and a murmur like a breeze came wafted towards him.

"It is the new Minister of the Interior!"

"Nonsense! Monsieur Vaudrey?"

"Monsieur Vaudrey."

Vaudrey proudly drew himself up under the battery of opera-glasses levelled at him, while Granet, smiling, said to the master of the chorus who, dressed in a black coat, stood near him:

"It can be easily seen that this is his first visit here!"

Oh! yes, truly, it was the first time that the new minister had set his foot in the wings of the Opéra! He relished it with all the curiosity of a youth and the gusto of a collegian. How fortunate that he had not brought Madame Vaudrey, who was slightly indisposed. This rapid survey of a world unknown to him, had the flavor of an escapade. There was a little spice in this amusing adventure.

Behind the canvas in the rear, some musicians, costumed as Brahmins, with spectacles on their noses, the better to decipher their score, fingered their brass instruments with a weary air, rocking them like infants in swaddling clothes. Actors in the garb of Indians, with painted cheeks, and legs encased in chocolate-colored bandages, were yawning, weary and flabby, and stretching themselves while awaiting the time for them to present themselves upon the stage. Others, dressed like soldiers, were sleeping on the wooden benches against the walls, their mouths open, their helmets drawn down over their noses like visors. Others, their pikes serving them for canes, had taken off their headgear and placed it at their feet, the better to rest their heads against the wall, where they leaned with their eyes shut.

Little girls, all of them thin, and in short skirts, were already pirouetting, and humming airs. Older girls stood about with their legs crossed, or, half-stooping, displayed their bosoms while retying the laces of their pink shoes. Others, wearing a kind of Siamese headdress with ornaments of gold, were laughing and clashing together their little silver cymbals. Awkward fellows with false beards, dressed like high priests in robes of yellow, striped with red, elbowed past and jostled against the girls quite unceremoniously. An usher, dressed à la Française, and wearing a chain around his neck, paced, grave and melancholy, amongst these shameless young girls.

The greenroom at the end of the stage was entered through a large vestibule hung with curtains of grayish velvet shot with violet, and at the top of the steps where some men in dress-clothes were talking to ballet-girls, Vaudrey could see in the great salon beyond, blazing with light, groups of half-nude women surrounded by men, resembling, in their black clothes, beetles crawling about roses, the whole company reflected in a flood of light, in an immense mirror that covered one end of the room. Little by little, Vaudrey could make out above the paintings representing ancient dances, and the portraits by Camargo or Noverre, a confusion of gaudy skirts, pink legs, white shoulders, with the ubiquitous black coats sprinkled about here and there amongst these bright colors like large blots of ink upon ball-dresses.

Sulpice had often heard the greenroom of the ballet spoken about, and he was at once completely disillusioned. The glaring, brutal light ruthlessly exposed the worn and faded hangings; and the pretty girls in their full, short, gauzy petticoats, with their bare arms, smiling and twisting about, their satin-shod feet resting upon gray velvet footstools, seemed to him, as they occupied the slanting floor, to move in a cloud of dust, and to be robbed of all naturalness and freshness.

"And is this all?" the minister exclaimed almost involuntarily.

"What!" answered Granet, "you seem hard to please!"

Amongst all these girls, there had been manifested an expression of mingled curiosity, coquetry and banter on Vaudrey's appearance in their midst. His presence in the manager's box had been noticed and his coming to the greenroom expected. Every one had hurried thither. Sulpice was pointed out. He was the cynosure of all eyes. On the divans beneath the mirror, some young, well-dressed, bald men, surrounded—perhaps by chance—by laughing ballet-girls, now half-concealed themselves behind the voluminous skirts of the girls about them, and bent their heads, thus rendering their baldness more visible, just as a woman buries her nose in her bouquet to avoid recognizing an acquaintance.

Vaudrey, observing this ruse, smiled a slight, sarcastic smile. He recognized behind the shielding petticoats, some of his prefects, those from the environs of Paris, come from Versailles and Chartres, or from some sub-prefectures, and gallantly administering the affairs of France from the heart of the greenroom. Amiable functionaries of the Ministry of Fine Arts also came here to study æstheticism between the acts.

All members of the different régimes seemed to be fraternizing in ironical promiscuousness here, and Vaudrey in a whisper drew Granet's attention to this. Old beaux of the time of the Empire, with dyed and waxed moustaches, with dyed or grizzled hair flattened on their temples, their flabby cheeks cut across by stiff collars as jelly is cut by a knife, were hobnobbing, fat and lean, with young fops of the Republic, who with their sharp eyes, wide-open nostrils, their cheeks covered with brown or flaxen down, their hair carefully brushed, or already bald, seemed quite surprised to find themselves in such a place, and chattered and cackled among themselves like beardless conscripts, perverted and immoral but with some scruples still remaining and less cunning than these well-dressed old roués standing firmly at their posts like veterans.

"The licentiates and the pensioners," whispered Vaudrey.

"You have a quickness of sight quite Parisian, your Excellency," returned Granet.

"There are Parisians in the Provinces, my dear Granet," replied Sulpice with a heightened complexion, his blood flowing more rapidly than usual, due to emotions at once novel and gay.

"Ah! your Excellency," exclaimed a fat, animated man with hair and whiskers of quite snowy whiteness, and smiling as he spoke, "what in the world brought you here?"

He approached Vaudrey, bowing but not at all obsequiously, with the air of good humor due to a combination of wealth and embonpoint. Fat and rich, in perfect health, and carrying his sixty years with the lightness of forty, Molina—Molina the "Tumbler" as he was nicknamed—spent his afternoons on the Bourse and his evenings in the greenroom of the ballet.

He had a small interest in the theatre, but a large one in the coryphées, in a paternal way, his white hair giving him the right to be respected and his crowns the right to respect nothing. Beginning life very low down, and now enjoying a lofty position, the fat Molina haunted the Bourse and the greenroom of the Opéra. He glutted himself with all the earliest delicacies of the season, like a man who when young, has not always had enough to satisfy hunger.

Pictures that were famous, women of fashion, statues of marble and fair flesh, he must have them all. He collected, without any taste whatever, costly paintings, rare objects; he bought without love, girls who were not wholly mercenary. At a pinch he found them, taking pleasure in parading in his coupé, around the lake or at the races, some recruit in vice, and in watching the crowd that at once eagerly surrounded her, simply because she had been the mistress of the fat Molina. He had in his youth at Marseilles, in the Jewish quarter of the town, sold old clothes to the Piedmontese and sailors in port. Now it was his delight to behold the Parisians of the Boulevard or the clubs buy as sentimental rags the cast-off garments of his passion.

"You in the greenroom of the ballet, your Excellency?" continued the financier. "Ah! upon my word, I shall tell Madame Vaudrey."

Sulpice smiled, the mere name of his wife sounded strange to his ears in a place like this. It seemed to him that in speaking of her, she was being dragged into a strange circle, and one which did not belong to her. He had felt the same only a few days before upon his entrance into the cabinet, on seeing a report of his marriage, his dwelling minutely described, and a pen portrait of that Adrienne, who was the passion of his life.

"After all," continued Molina, "Madame Vaudrey must get used to it. The Opéra! Why, it is a part of politics! The key of many a situation is to be found in the greenroom!"

The financier laughed merrily, a laugh that had the ring of the Turcarets' jingling crowns.

He went on to explain to his Excellency all the little mysteries of the greenroom, as a man quite at home in this little Parisian province, and lightly, by a word, a gesture even, he gave the minister a rapid biography of the young girls who were laughing, jesting, romping there before them; flitting

hither and thither lightly across the boards, barely touching them with the tips of their pink satin-shod feet.

Sulpice was surprised at everything he saw. He did not even take the pains to conceal his surprise. Evidently it was his first visit behind the scenes.

"Ah! your Excellency," said Molina, delighted with his rôle of cicerone, "it is necessary to be at home here! You should come here often! Nothing in the world can be more amusing. Here behind the scenes is a world by itself. One can see pretty little lasses springing up like asparagus. One sees running hither and thither a tall, thin child who nods to you saucily and crunches nuts like a squirrel. One takes a three months' journey, and passes a season at Vichy or at Dieppe, and when one returns, presto! see the transformation. The butterfly has burst forth from its cocoon. No longer a little girl, but a woman. Those saucy eyes of old now look at you with an expression which disturbs your heart. One might have offered, six months before, two sous' worth of chestnuts to the child; now, however, nothing less than a coupé will satisfy the woman. It used to jump on your knee at that time, now every one is throwing his arms around its pretty neck. Thus from generation to generation, one assists at the mobilization of a whole army of recruits, who first try their weapons here, pass from here into the regiment of veterans, build themselves a hospital in cut-stone out of their savings, and some of them mount very high through the tips of their toes if they are not suddenly attacked by *the malady of the knee*."

"Malady of the knee?" inquired Vaudrey.

"A phrase not to be found in the *Dictionary of Political Economy* by Maurice Block. It is a way of saying that ill-luck has overtaken one. A very interesting condition, this malady of the knee! It often not only shortens the leg but the career!"

"Is this malady a frequent one at the Opéra?"

"Ah! your Excellency, how can it be helped? There are so many slips in this pirouetting business! It is as risky as politics!"

Fat Molina shouted with laughter at this clumsy jest, and placing a binocle upon his huge nose, which was cleft down the middle like that of a hunting-hound, he exclaimed suddenly, turning towards the door as he spoke:

"Eh! Marie Launay? What is she holding in her hand?"

Light, nimble and graceful in her costume of a Hindoo dancing girl, a young girl of sixteen or seventeen summers, already betraying her womanhood in the ardent glances half-hidden in the depths of her large, deep-blue eyes, tripped into the greenroom, humming an air and holding in her hand a long sheet of paper.

She shook, as if embarrassed by it, the broad necklace of large imitation pearls that danced on her fine neck and fell on her undeveloped bosom; and looking in search of some one among the crowd of girls, cried out from a distance to a plump little brunette who was talking and laughing within a circle of dress-coats at the other end of the room:

"Eh! Anna, you have not subscribed yet!"

The brunette, freeing herself unceremoniously enough from her living madrigals, came running lightly up to Marie Launay, who held out towards her an aluminum pencil-case and the sheet of paper.

"What the devil is that?" asked Molina.

"Let us go and see," said Granet.

"Would it not be an indiscretion on our part?" asked Vaudrey, half seriously.

The financier, however, was by this time at the side of the two pretty girls, and asked the blonde what the paper contained, the names on which her companion was spelling out.

Marie Launay, a lovely girl with little ringlets of fair hair curling low down upon her forehead, smiled like a pretty, innocent and still timid child, under the luring glances of the fat man, and glancing with an expression of virgin innocence at Sulpice and Granet, who were standing beside him, replied:

"That—Oh! that is the subscription we are getting up for Mademoiselle Legrand."

"Oh! that is so," said Molina. "You mean to make her a present of a statuette?"

"On her taking her leave of us. Yes, every one has subscribed to it—even the boxholders. Do you see?"

Marie Launay quickly snatched the paper from her friend; on it were several names, some written in ink, others in pencil, the whole presenting the peculiar appearance of schoolboys' pot-hooks or the graceful lines traced by crawling flies, while the fantastic spelling offered a strange medley. Molina burst out laughing, his ever-present laugh that sounded like the shaking of a money-bag,—when he ran his eye over the list and found accompanying the names of ballet-dancers and members of the chorus, the distinguished particles of some habitués.

"Look! your Excellency—It is stupendous! Here: *Amélie Dunois*, 2 francs. *Jeanne Garnot*, 5 francs. *Bel-Enfant—Charles—*, 1 fr., 50 centimes. *Warnier I.*, 2 francs. *Warnier II.*, 2 francs. *Gigonnet*, 4 francs. *Baron Humann*, 100 francs. *The baron*!—the former prefect! Humann writing his name down here with *Bel-Enfant* and *Gigonnet*. Humann inscribing above his signature—*I vill supscribe von*

hundertfranc! If one were to see it in a newspaper, one would not believe it! If only a reporter were here now! For a choice *Paris echo* what a rare one it would be!"

Granet examined little Marie Launay with sly glances, toying with his black moustache the while, and the other young girl Anna, very much confused at the coarse laughter of Molina the "Tumbler," kept turning around in her slender fingers the aluminum pencil-case and looking at Marie as much as to say:

"You know I can never muster up courage to write down my name before all these people!"

"Lend me your pencil, my child," Molina said to her.

She held it out towards him timidly.

"Where the baron has led the way, Molina the Tumbler may certainly follow!" said the financier.

He turned the screw of the pencil-case to extend the lead, and placing one of his huge feet upon a divan to steady himself, wrote rapidly with the paper on his knee, as a man used to scribbling notes at the Bourse:

"Solomon Molina, 500 francs."

"Ah! monsieur," exclaimed Marie Launay upon reading it, "that is handsome, that is! It is kind, very kind! If everybody were as generous as you, we could give a statue of Terpsichore in gold to Mademoiselle Legrand."

"If you should ever want one of Carpeaux's groups for yourself, my child," said Molina, "you may go to the studio in a cab to look at it, and fetch it away with you in—your own coupé."

The girl grew as red as a cherry under her powder, even her graceful, childish shoulders turned pink, enhancing her blonde and childlike beauty.

Vaudrey was conscious of a strange and subtle charm in this intoxicating circle,—a charm full of temptations which made him secretly uneasy. There passed before his eyes visions of other days, he beheld the phantoms of gay dresses, the apparitions of spring landscapes, he felt the breezes of youth, laden with the scents of the upspringing grass, the lilacs at Meudon, the violets of Ville-d'Avray, the souvenirs of the escapades of his student days. Their short, full skirts reminded him of white frocks that whisked gayly around the hazel-trees long ago, those ballet-girls bore a striking resemblance to the pink and white grisettes that he had flirted with when he was twenty.

He extended his hand in turn towards the sheet of paper to which Molina had just signed his name, saying to Marie Launay as he did so:

"Let me have it, if you please, mademoiselle."

Granet began to laugh.

"Ah! ah!" he cried, "you are really going to write down under Monsieur Gigonnet's signature the name of the Minister of the Interior?"

"Oh! bless me!" said Vaudrey, laughing, "that is true! You will believe it or not as you please, but I quite forgot that I was a minister."

"It was the same with me when I was decorated," said Molina. "I would not receive my great-coat from box-openers because I saw the morsel of red ribbon hanging on it, and I was sure the garment was not mine. But one grows used to it after a while! Now," and his laugh with the hundred-sou piece ring grew louder than ever, "I am really quite surprised not to find the rosette of red ribbon sticking to my flannel waistcoats."

Vaudrey left Marie Launay, greatly to her surprise, and listened to Molina's chronicles of the ballet.

Ah! if his Excellency had but the time, he would have seen the funniest things. For instance, there was amongst the dancers a marble cutter, who during the day sold and cut his gravestones and came here at night to grin and caper in the ballet. He was on the scent of every funeral from the Opéra; he would get orders for tombstones between two dances at the rehearsals. One day Molina had been present at one of these. It seems incredible, but there was a bank clerk in a gray coat, a three-cornered hat upon his head and a brass buckler on his arm, who sacrificed to Venus in the interval between his two occupations, dancing with the coryphées; a dancer by night and a receiver of money by day. A girl was rehearsing beside him, in black bands and skirt. Then Molina, astonished, inquired who she might be. He was told that it was a girl in mourning, whose mother had just died. The Opéra is a fine stage upon which to behold the ironies and contrasts of life.

The financier might have related to Sulpice Vaudrey a description of a journey to Timbuctoo and have found him less amused and less interested than now. It was a world new and strange to him, attractive, and as exciting as acid to this man, still young, whose success had been achieved by unstinted labors, and who knew Paris only by what he had learned of it years ago, when a law student: the pit of the Comédie Française, the Luxembourg galleries and those of the Louvre, the Public Libraries, the Hall of Archives, the balls in the Latin Quarter, the holidays and the foyer of the Opéra once or twice on the occasion of a masked ball. And, besides that?—Nothing. That was all.

The great man from Grenoble arrived in Paris with his appetite whetted for the life of the city, and now he was here, suddenly plunged into the greenroom of the ballet, and all eyes were turned towards

him, almost frightened as he was, on catching a glimpse of his own image reflected in the huge mirror glittering under the numerous lights, in the heart of this strange salon and surrounded by half-clad dancing girls. Then, too, everybody was looking at him, quizzing him, shrinking from him through timidity or running after him through interest. The new Minister of State! The chief of all the personnel of prefects, under-prefects, and secretaries-general represented there, lolling on these velvet divans in this vulgar greenroom.

All the glances, all the whisperings of the women, the frowns of his enemies, the cringing attitudes of dandified hangers-on, were making Vaudrey feel very uncomfortable, when to his great relief he suddenly observed coming towards him, peering hither and thither through his monocle, evidently in search of some one, Guy de Lissac, who immediately on catching sight of Vaudrey came towards him, greeting him with evident cordiality, tinged, however, with a proper reserve.

Sulpice was not long in breaking through this reserve. He hurried up to Guy, and seizing him by the hand, cried gayly:

"Do you know that I have been expecting this visit! You are the only one of my friends who has not yet congratulated me!"

"You know, my dear Minister," returned Guy in the same tone, "that it is really not such a great piece of luck to be made Minister that every one of your friends should be expected to fall upon your neck, crying bravo! You have mounted up to the capitol, but after all, the capitol is not such a very cheerful place, that I should illuminate *à giorno*. I am happy, however, if you are. I congratulate you, if you wash your hands of it, and that is all."

"You and my old friend Ramel," answered Sulpice, "are the two most original men that I know."

"With this difference however, Ramel is a Puritan, an ancient, a man of marble, and I am a *boulevardier* and a skeptic. He is a man of bronze—your Ramel! And your friend Lissac of *simili-bronze*! The proof of it is that I have been seeking you for half the evening to ask you to do me a favor."

"What favor, my dear fellow?" cried Vaudrey, his face lighting up with joy. "Anything in the world to please you."

"I was in Madame Marsy's box,—you do not know Madame Marsy? She is a great admirer of yours and makes a point to applaud you in the Chamber. She has prayed for your advent. She saw you in the manager's box a while ago, and she has asked me to present you to her, or rather, to present her to you, for I presume for your Excellency the ceremony is modified."

"Madame Marsy!" said Vaudrey. "Is she not an artist's widow? Her salon is a political centre, is it not?"

"Exactly. A recent salon opened in opposition to that of Madame Evan. An Athenian Republic! You do not object to that?"

"On the contrary! A republic cannot be founded without the aid of women."

"Ah!" cried Lissac, laughing. "Politics and honors have not changed you, I see."

"Changed me? With the exception that I have twenty years over my head, and alas! not so much hair as I had then upon it, I am the same as I was in 1860."

"*Hôtel Racine! Rue Racine!*" said Lissac. "In those days, I dreamed of being Musset, I a gourmand, and what have I become? A spectator, a trifler, a Parisian, a rolling stone.—Nothing. And you who dreamed of being a second Barnave, Vergniaud or Barbaroux, your dream is realized."

"Realized!" said Vaudrey.

He made an effort to shake his head deprecatingly as if his vanity were not flattered by those honeyed words of his friend; but his glance displayed such sincere delight and so strong a desire to be effusive and in evidence, that he could not repress a smile upon hearing from the companion of his youth, such a confirmation of his triumph. They are our most severe critics, these friends of our youth, they who have listened to the stammering of our hopes and dreams of the future. And when at length we have conquered the future, these are often the very ones to rob us of it! Lissac, however, was not one of these envious ones.

"Let us go to Madame Marsy's box, my dear Guy," said Sulpice. "The more so because if she at all resembles her portrait at the last Salon, she must be lovely indeed."

He left the greenroom, leaning on the arm of Lissac, after throwing a glance backward, however, at the girls whirling about there, and where in the presence of their stiff, ancient superiors, the young sub-prefects still hid their faces behind their opera hats. Granet with Molina went to take leave of Vaudrey, leaving little Marie Launay smiling artlessly because the financier, the *Tumbler*, had said to her, in drawing down her eyelids with his coarse finger: "Will you close your periwinkles—you *kid*?"

"Your Excellency," the banker had said, cajoling his Excellency with his meaning glance, "I am always at your orders you know."

"To-morrow, at the Prisons' Commission, Monsieur le Ministre," said Granet. And amid salutations on every side Vaudrey withdrew, smiling and good-humored as usual.

In order to reach the box, Vaudrey had to cross the stage. The new scene was set. Buddhist temples with their grotesque shapes and huge statues stood out against a background of vivid blue sky, and on the canvas beyond, great pink flowers glowed amid refreshing verdure. Over all fell a soft fairy-like light from an electric lamp, casting on the floor a fantastic gleam, soft and clear as the rays of the moon. Sulpice smiled as he passed beneath this flood of light and saw his shadow projected before him as upon the glassy waters of a lake. It seemed to him that this sudden illumination, a sort of fantastic apotheosis as it were, was like the fairy-like aureole that attended his progress.

At the very moment of leaving the greenroom, Sulpice had jostled accidentally against a man of very grave aspect wearing a black coat closely buttoned. He was almost bald save for some long, thin, gray locks that hung about his huge ears, his cheeks had a hectic color and his skull was yellow. He entered this salon in a hesitating, inquisitive way, with wide-open eyes and a gourmand's movement of the nostrils, and gazed about the room, warm with lights and heavy with perfume.

Sulpice glanced at him carelessly and recognized him as the man whom he himself had superseded on Place Beauvau—a Puritan, a Huguenot, a widower, the father of five or six daughters, and as solemn and proper in his ordinary demeanor as a Sunday-school tract. Sulpice could not refrain from crying out merrily: "Bless me! Monsieur Pichereau!"

The other shook his butter-colored skull as if he had suddenly received a stinging blow on it with a switch, and his red face became crimson-hued at the sight of Sulpice, his successor in office, standing before him, politely holding out to him his two gloved hands.

Guy de Lissac was no longer laughing.

Their two Excellencies found themselves face to face at the foot of the greenroom staircase, in the midst of a crowd of brahmins, dancers, negresses, and female supernumeraries; two Excellencies meeting there; one smiling, the other grimacing beneath the glance of this curious, shrewd little world.

"Ah! I have caught you, my dear colleague," cried Sulpice, very much amused at Pichereau's embarrassed air, his coat buttoned close like a Quaker's and his little eyes blinking behind his spectacles, and looking as sheepish as a sacristan caught napping.

"Me?" stammered Pichereau. "Me? But my dear Minister, it's you—yes, you whom I came expressly to seek!"

"Here?" said Vaudrey.

"Yes, here!"

"Really?"

"I had something to say to you—I—yes, I wanted—"

The unlucky Pichereau mechanically pulled and jerked at his waistcoat, then assuming a dignified, grave air, he whistled and hesitated, and finally stammered:

"I wished to speak with you—yes—to consult with you upon a matter of grave importance—concerning Protestant communities."

Sulpice could not restrain his laughter.

Pichereau, with his look of a Calvinistic preacher, was throwing from behind his spectacles glowing looks in the direction where Marie Launay stood listening to and laughing at the badinage of Molina. Some newspaper reporters, scenting a handy paragraph, came sauntering up to overhear some fragment of the conversation between the minister of yesterday and him of to-day.

Guy de Lissac stood carelessly by, secretly very much amused at Pichereau, who did not move, but rubbing his hands nervously together was trying to appear at ease, yet by his sour smile at his successor allowing it to be plainly seen how gladly he would have strangled Vaudrey.

"My dear colleague," said Sulpice, gayly, "we will talk elsewhere about your communities. This is hardly the place. *Non est hic locus!* Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, your Excellency," replied Pichereau with forced politeness.

Vaudrey drew Lissac away, saying with a suppressed laugh:

"Oh! oh! the Quaker! He has laid down his portfolio, but he has kept the key to the greenroom, it seems."

"It would appear," replied Guy, "that the door leading into the greenroom may open to scenes of consolation for fallen greatness. The blue eyes of Marie Launay always serve as a sparadrap to a fallen minister!"

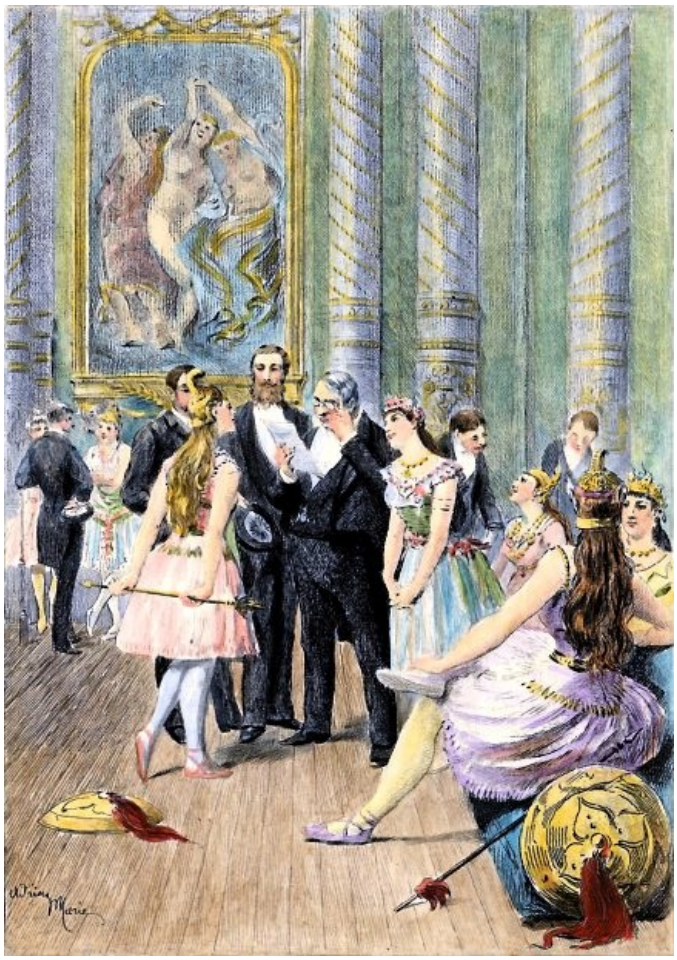
"Was the fat Molina right? To lose the votes of the majority is perhaps the malady of the knee of ministers," said Vaudrey merrily.

He laughed again, very much amused at the irritable, peevish yet cringing attitude of Pichereau, the Genevan doctrinaire, who sought consolation in the greenroom of the ballet, whilst his five or six daughters sat at home, probably reading some chaste English romance, or practising sacred music within the range of the green spectacles of their governess.

"But!" said he gayly, "to fall from power is nothing, provided one falls into the arms of ballet-girls."

Part First Chapter I

Molina burst out laughing ... when he ran his eye over the list and found accompanying the names of ballet-dancers and members of the chorus, the distinguished particles of some habitués.



II

TOC

Madame Marsy was awaiting Guy de Lissac's return from the greenroom. From the moment she caught sight of Vaudrey standing within the range of her opera-glasses, she was seized with the eager desire to make him an habitué of her salon, the new salon that had just been launched. Madame Marsy was bitten by that tarantula whose bite makes modern society move as if afflicted with Saint Vitus's dance. A widow, rich and still young, very much admired, she had set herself to play the rôle of a leader in society to pass away the time. She was one of those women forever passing before the reporters' note-book, as others pass in front of a photographic apparatus. Of her inner life, however, very little was known to the public. But the exact shade of her hair, the color of her eyes, the cut of her gowns, the address of her tradesmen, the *menu* of her dinners, the programme of her concerts, the names of her guests, the visitors to her salon, the address of her mansion, were all familiar to every one, and Madame Marsy was daily reported by the chroniclers to the letter, painted, dressed and undressed.

There was some romantic gossip whispered about her. It was said that she had formerly led Philippe Marsy, the artist, a *hard life*. This artist was the painter of *Charity*, the picture so much admired at the Luxembourg, where it hangs between a Nymph by Henner and a Portrait of a Lady by Carolus Duran. She was pretty, free, and sufficiently rich since the sale of the contents of Philippe Marsy's studio. His slightest sketches had fetched enormous sums under Monsieur Pillet's hammer at the Hôtel Drouot, and Sabine after an appropriate interval of mourning, opened her salon.

Solitary, though surrounded by friends, she created no jealousy among her admirers, whose homage she received with perfect equanimity, as if become weary and desirous of a court but not of a favorite. She had a son at college who was growing up; he, however, was rarely to be met with in his mother's little hôtel in the Boulevard Malesherbes. This pale, slender youth in his student's uniform would sometimes steal furtively up the staircase to pay his mother a visit as a stranger might have done, never staying long, however, but hurrying off again to rejoin an old woman who waited at the corner of the street and who would take him by the arm and walk away with him—Madame Marsy, his grandmother.

It was the grandmother who was bringing up the boy. She and a kind-hearted fellow, François Charrière, a sculptor, who as he said himself, was nothing of a genius, but who, however, designed models and advantageously sold them to the manufacturers of lamps in the Rue Saint-Louis au Marais. It was Charrière who, in fulfilment of a vow made to his friend Marsy, acted as guardian to the boy.

Nobody in Paris now remembered anything about Philippe Marsy. In the course of time, all the little rumors are hushed in the roar and rattle of Parisian life. Only some semi-flattering rumors were connected with Sabine's name, together with some mysterious reminiscences. Moreover, she had the special attraction of a hostess who imparts to her salon the peculiar charm and flavor of unceremonious hospitality. One was only obliged to wear a white cravat about his throat, he did not have to starch his wits.

Only very recently had Sabine Marsy's salon acquired the reputation of being an easy-going one, where one was sure of a welcome, a sort of rendezvous where every one could be found as in the corridor of a theatre on the night of a first appearance, or on the sidewalk of a boulevard; a salon well-filled, that could rank with the semi-official and very distinguished one presided over by Madame Evan, and those others quieter, more sober—if a little Calvinistic—of the select Alsatian colony.

Sabine Marsy must have had a great deal of tact, force of character and perseverance in carrying out her plans, to have reached this point, more difficult to her, moreover, than it would have been to any other, as she had no political backing whatever. Her connection with society was entirely through the world of artists. Many of these, however, had brought to her salon some of the Athenians of the political world, connoisseurs, good conversationalists, handsome men, who freely declared with Vaudrey, that a republic could not exist without the assistance of women, that to women Orleanism was due, and those charming fellows had made Madame Marsy's hospitable salon the fashion.

Besides it is easy enough in Paris to have a salon if one knows how to give dinners. Some squares of Bristol board engraved by Stern and posted to good addresses, will attract with an almost disconcerting facility, a crowd of visitors who will swarm around a festive board like bees around a honeycomb.

Paris is a town of guests.

Then too, Madame Marsy was herself so captivating. She was always on the watch for some new celebrity, as a game-keeper watches for a hare that he means to shoot presently. One of her daily tasks was to read the *Journal Officiel* in order to discover in the orator of to-day the Minister of State of to-morrow. She was always well informed beforehand which artist or sculptor would be likely to win the medal of honor at the Salon, and was the first to invite such a one and to let him know that it was she who had discovered him. In literature, she encouraged the new school, liking it for the attention it attracted. It was also her aim to give to her salon a literary as well as a political color. Artists and statesmen elbowed one another there.

For some days now, she had thought of giving a reception which was to be a surprise to her friends. She had heard of Japanese exhibitions being given at other houses. She herself was determined to give a *soirée exotique*. It happened just then that a friend of Guy de Lissac, Monsieur José de Rosas, a great lounger, had returned from a journey around the world. What a piece of good fortune! She too had known De Rosas formerly, and if she could only get him to consent, she could announce a most attractive soirée: the travels of such a man as Monsieur de Rosas: a rare treat!

"The Comtesse d'Horville gives literary matinées," said Sabine, quite on fire with the idea; "Madame Evan has poems and tragedies read at her receptions, I shall have lecturers and savants, since that is fashionable."

And what a woman wishes, a grandee of Spain willed, it appeared. Monsieur de Rosas decided, egged on a little by Guy de Lissac, to come and relate to Madame Marsy's friends his adventures in strange lands. The invitations to the soirée were already out.

Madame Marsy had also obtained a promise from three Ministers of State that they would be present. She had spread the news far and wide. A little more and she would have had their names printed on the programmes for the evening. She had had a success quite unlooked for—a promise from Monsieur Pichereau to be present—from Pichereau, that starched Puritan, and all the newspapers had announced his intention. When suddenly—stupidly—a cabinet crisis had arisen at the most unexpected moment, a useless crisis. Granet had interpellated Pichereau with a view to succeed him, and Pichereau fell without Granet succeeding him. A Ministry had been hastily formed, with Collard at its head, and Sulpice Vaudrey as Minister of the Interior in place of Pichereau! And all those Ministers of State who had promised to be present to hear Monsieur de Rosas at Madame Marsy's, fell from power with Pichereau.

"Such a Cabinet!" Sabine had exclaimed in a rage. "A Cabinet of pasteboard capuchins."

"A Ministry of pasteboard, certainly," Guy had answered.

Madame Marsy was quite beside herself. Granet indeed! Why could he not have waited a day or two longer before upsetting the whole administration. It would have been quite as easy to have overthrown Pichereau a day after her soirée as a few days before. Was Granet then, in a great hurry to be made minister? Oh! her opinion of him had always been a correct one! An ambitious schemer. He had triumphed, or at least he had expected to triumph. And the consequence was that Sabine found herself without a Minister to introduce to her guests. It was as if Granet had purposely designed this.

No, she did not know a single member of the new Cabinet. She had spoken once to the President of the council, Collard, a former advocate of Nantes, at a reception at the Élysée. Collard had even, in passing by her, torn off a morsel of the lace of her flounce. How charmingly, too, he had excused himself! But this acquaintanceship with him would hardly justify her in asking him brusquely to honor her with his presence at this soirée upon which her social success depended.

Her intimate friend, pretty Madame Gerson, who assisted her in doing the honors of her salon until the time when she herself would have a rival salon and take Sabine's guests away from her, sought in vain to comfort her by assuring her that Pichereau would be sure to come. He had promised to do so. He was a sincere man, and his word could be relied on. He would, moreover, bring his former colleagues from the Departments of Public Instruction, and Post and Telegraph. He had promised. Oh! yes, Pichereau! Pichereau, however, mattered very little to Sabine now! *Ex*-ministers, indeed! she could always have enough of them. It was not that kind that she wanted. She did not care about her salon being called the *Invalides* as that of a rival was called the *Salon des Refuseès*. No, certainly not, that was something she would never consent to.

Granet's impatience had upset all her plans.

So Madame Marsy, side by side in her box with Madame Gerson, whose dark, brilliant beauty set off her own fair beauty, had listened with a bored and sulky manner to the first act of *L'Africaine*, while Monsieur Gerson conversed timidly, half under his breath, with Guy de Lissac, who made the fourth occupant of the box.

At the end of the second act, however, Lissac suddenly caught sight of Vaudrey's smiling countenance beside Granet's waxed moustaches in the manager's box.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "there is Vaudrey!"

Madame Marsy, however, had already caught sight of him. She turned her opera-glass upon the new Cabinet Minister, whose carefully arranged blonde beard was parted in the middle and spread out in two light tufts over his white necktie, his silky moustaches turned jauntily upwards against his fleshy cheeks. Sabine, continuing to look at the newcomer through her glass, saw as he moved within the shadow of the box, this man of forty, with a very agreeable and still youthful face, and as he leaned over the edge of the box to look at the audience, she noted that he had a slight bald spot on the top of his skull between the fair tufts that adorned the sides of his head.

"Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly, "I thought that he was a dark man."

"No, no," answered Lissac, "on the contrary, he was a fair, handsome youth when we both studied law here in Paris together."

Madame Marsy, as if she had been touched by an electric spark, turned quickly round on her chair to look at Guy, displaying to him as she did so, a lovely face, surmounting the most beautiful shoulders imaginable.

"What! you know the minister so intimately?"

"Very intimately."

"Then, my dear Lissac, you can do me the greatest favor. No, I do not ask you to do it, I insist on it."

Over the pretty Andalusian features of Madame Gerson, a mocking smile played.

"I have guessed it," she exclaimed.

"And so have I," said Lissac. "You wish me to present the new Minister of the Interior to you? You have a friend you want appointed to a prefecture."

"Not at all. I only want him to take Pichereau's place at my reception. My dear Lissac, my kind Lissac," she continued in dulcet tones, and clasping her little gloved hands entreatingly, like a child begging for a toy, "persuade Monsieur Vaudrey to accept this invitation of mine and you will be a love, you understand, Lissac, a love!"

But Guy had already risen and with a touch of his thumb snapping out his crush hat, he opened the door of the box, saying to Sabine as he did so:

"Take notice that I ask nothing in return for this favor!"

Madame Marsy began to laugh.

"Ah!" she cried, "that is discreet, but I am willing to subscribe to any condition!"

"Selika is cold beside you," said Lissac as he disappeared through the open doorway, "I will bring you your minister in ten minutes."

Sabine waited nervously. The curtain had just fallen on the third act. The manager's box was empty. Guy would doubtless be obliged to rejoin Vaudrey, and neither the minister nor his friend would be seen again. Just then some one knocked at the door of the box. Monsieur Gerson, overcome by fatigue, and weary as only a man can be who is dragged against his will night after night to some place of amusement, was dozing in the rear of the box. At a word from his wife he got up and hastened to open the door. It proved to be an artist, an old friend of Philippe Marsy, who came to invite Sabine to his studio to "admire" *his Envoy* that he had just finished for the Salon. Sabine received him graciously, and promised him somewhat stiffly that she would do so. She tapped impatiently with her fan upon

her fingers as the orchestra began to play the prelude to the fourth act. It was quite certain that Lissac had failed in his mission.

Suddenly, in the luminous space made by the open door, Guy's elegant figure appeared for a moment, disappearing immediately to allow a man to pass who entered, smiling pleasantly, and at whom a group of people, standing in the lobby behind, were gazing. He bowed as Lissac said to Sabine:

"Allow me, madame, to present to you His Excellency the Minister of the Interior."

Sabine, suddenly beaming with joy, saw no one but Sulpice Vaudrey amongst the group of men in dress-clothes who gave way to allow the dignitary to pass. She had eyes only for him!

She arose, pushing back her chair instinctively, as the Minister entered, Monsieur and Madame Gerson standing at one side and Sabine on the other and bowing to him,—Sabine triumphant, Madame Gerson curious, Monsieur Gerson flattered though sleepy.

Sulpice seated himself at Madame Marsy's side, with the amiable condescension of a great man charmed to play the agreeable, and to visit, at the solicitation of a friend, a fair woman whom all the world delighted to honor. It seemed to him to put the finishing touch to that success and power which had been his only a few days.

He went quite artlessly and by instinct wherever he might have the chance to inhale admiring incense. It seemed to him as if he were swimming in refreshing waters. Everything delighted him. He wished to be obliging to every one. It seemed to him but natural that a woman of fashion like Sabine should wish to meet him and offer him her congratulations, as he himself, without knowing her, should desire to listen to her felicitations. To speak in complimentary terms was as natural to him as to listen to the compliments of others.

He delighted in the atmosphere of adulation which surrounded him, these two pretty women who smiled upon him with a gratitude so impressive, pleased him. Sabine appeared especially charming to him when, speaking with the captivating grace of a Parisian, she said:

"I hardly know how to thank my friend Monsieur de Lissac for inducing you to listen to the entreaties of one who solicits—"

"Solicits, madame?" said the minister with an eagerness which seemed already to answer her prayer affirmatively.

"I hope your Excellency will consent to honor with your presence a reunion of friends at my house—a reunion somewhat trivial, for this occasion, but clever enough."

"A reunion?" replied Vaudrey, still smiling.

"Monsieur de Lissac has not told you then, what my hopes are?"

"We are too old friends, Lissac and I, for him not to allow me the pleasure of hearing from your own lips, madame, in what way I may be of service to you, or to any of your friends."

Sabine smiled at this well-turned phrase uttered in the most gallant tone.

Who then, could have told her that Vaudrey was a provincial? An intimate enemy or an intimate friend. But he was not at all provincial. On the contrary, Vaudrey was quite charming.

"Monsieur de Rosas has had the kindness, your Excellency, to promise to come to my house next Saturday and give a chatty account of his travels. He will be, I am quite sure, most proud to know that in his audience—"

Sulpice neatly and half modestly turned aside the compliment that was approaching.

He knew Monsieur de Rosas. He had read and greatly admired some translations of the Persian poets by that lettered nobleman, which had been printed for circulation only amongst the author's most intimate friends. Vaudrey had first met Monsieur de Rosas at a meeting of a scientific society. Rosas was an eminent man as well as a poet, and one whom he would be greatly pleased to meet again. A hero of romance as erudite as a Benedictine. Charming, too, and clever! Something like a Cid who has become a boulevard lounger on returning from Central Asia.

This portrait of Rosas was a clever one indeed, and Sabine nodded acquiescence again and again as each point was hit off by Vaudrey. He, in his turn, basked comfortably in the light of her smiles, and listened with pleasure to the sound of his own voice. He could catch glimpses through the box curtains from between these two charming profiles—one a brunette, the other a blonde—of the vast auditorium all crimson and gold, blazing with lights and crowded with faces. From this well-dressed crowd, from these boxes where one caught sight of white gleaming shoulders, half-gloved arms, flower-decked heads, sparkling necklaces, flashing glances, it seemed to Vaudrey as if a strange, subtle perfume arose—the perfume of women, an intoxicating odor, in the midst of this radiancy that rivaled the brilliant sun at its rising.

Upon the stage, amid the dazzling splendor of the ballet, in the milky ray of the electric light, the swelling skirts whirled, the pink slippers that he had seen but a moment before near by, and the gleaming, silver helmets, the tinfoil and the spangles shone in the dance. A fairy light enveloped all these stage splendors; and this luxurious ensemble, as seen from the depths of the box, seemed to him to be the glory of an unending apotheosis, a sort of fête given to celebrate his entrance on his public career.

Then, in the unconcealed effusion of his delight, without any effort at effect, speaking frankly to this woman, to Guy, and to Gerson, as if he were communing with himself to the mocking accompaniment of this Hindoo music, he revealed his joys, his prospects, and his dreams. He replied to Sabine's congratulations by avowing his intention to devote himself entirely to his country.

"In short, your Excellency," she said, "you are really going to do great things?"

He gazed dreamily around the theatre, smiling as if he beheld some lucky vision, and answered:

"Really, madame, I accepted office only because I felt it was my duty and as a means of doing good. I intend to be just—to be honest. I should like to discover some unappreciated genius and raise him from the obscurity in which an unjust fate has shrouded him, to the height where he belongs. If we are to do no better than those we have succeeded, it was useless to turn them out!"

"Ah! *pardieu*," said Lissac, while Madame Marsy smiled and nodded approval of Vaudrey's words, "you and your colleagues are just now in the honeymoon of your power."

"We will endeavor to make this honeymoon of as long duration as possible," laughingly replied Sulpice. "I believe in the case of power, as in marriage, that the coming of the April moon is the fault of the parties connected with it."

"It takes a shrewd person indeed to know why April moons rise at all!" said Guy. Vaudrey's thoughts turned involuntarily toward Adrienne, his own pretty wife, who was waiting for him in the great lonely apartments at the Ministry which they had just taken possession of as they might occupy rooms at a hotel.

He felt a sudden desire to return to her, to tell her of the incidents of this evening. Yes, to tell her everything, even to his visit behind the scenes—but he remained where he was, not knowing how to take leave of Madame Marsy just yet, and she, in her turn, divined from the slackened conversation that he was anxious to be off.

"I was waiting for that strain," said Madame Marsy to Guy, "now that it is over, I will go."

Vaudrey did not reply, awaiting Sabine's departure, so as to conduct her to her carriage.

People hurried out into the lobbies to see him pass by. Upon the staircases, attendants and strangers saluted him. It seemed to Vaudrey that he moved among those who were in sympathy with him. Lissac followed him with Madame Gerson on his arm; her jaded husband sighed for a few hours' sleep.

In the sharp, frosty air of a night in January, Sulpice, enveloped in otter fur, stood with Madame Marsy on his arm, waiting for the appearance of that lady's carriage, which was emerging from the luminous depths of the Place, accompanied by another carriage without a monogram or crest; it was that of the minister.

Sulpice gazed before him down the Avenue de l'Opéra, brilliant with light, and the bluish tints of the Jablockoff electric apparatus flooded him with its bright rays; it seemed to him as if all this brilliancy blazed for him, like the flattering apotheosis which had just before fallen upon him as he crossed the stage of the Opéra. It seemed like an aureole lighted up especially to encircle him!

Sabine asked Vaudrey as he escorted her to her carriage:

"Madame Vaudrey will, I trust, do me the honor to accompany your Excellency to my house? I will take the liberty to-morrow of calling on her to invite her."

The Minister bowed a gracious acquiescence.

Sabine finally thanked him by a gracious smile: her small gloved hand raised the window of the coupé, and the carriage was driven off rapidly, amid the din of horses' hoofs.

"Good-bye," said Lissac to Vaudrey.

"Cannot I offer you a seat in my carriage?"

"Thank you, but I am not two steps away from the Rue d'Aumale."

Vaudrey turned towards Madame Gerson; she and her husband bowed low.

"May I not set you down at your house, madame?"

"Your Excellency is very kind, but we have our own carriage!"

"Au revoir," said Vaudrey to Lissac, "come and breakfast with me to-morrow."

"With pleasure!"

"To the ministry!" said Vaudrey to the coachman as he stepped into his carriage.

He sank back upon the cushions with a feeling of delight as if glad to be alone. All the scenes of that evening floated again before his eyes. He felt once more in his nostrils the subtle, penetrating perfume of the greenroom, he saw again the blue eyes of the little danseuse. The admiring looks, the respectful salutes, the smiles of the women, the soft, caressing tones of Sabine, and Madame Gerson's pearly teeth, he saw or heard all these again, and above all, this word clear as a clarion, triumphant as a trumpet's blast: *Success!* All this came back again to him.

"You have succeeded!"

He heard Guy's voice again speaking this to him in joyous tones. Succeeded! It was certainly true.

Minister! Was it possible! He had at his beck and call a whole host of functionaries and servitors! He it was who had the power to make the whole machine of government move—he, the lawyer from Grenoble—who ten years ago would have thought it a great honor to have been appointed to a place in the department of Isère!

All those people whom he could see in the shadow of the lighted boulevards buying the newspapers at the kiosks, would read therein his name and least gesture and action.

"Monsieur le Ministre has taken up his residence on the Place Beauvau. Monsieur Vaudrey this morning received the heads of the Bureaus and the personnel of the Department of the Ministry of the Interior. Monsieur Vaudrey, with the assistance of Monsieur Henri Jacquier of Oise, undersecretary of State, is actively engaged in examining the reports of prefects and under-prefects. Monsieur will doubtless make some needed reforms in the administration of the prefectures." Everywhere, in all the newspapers, Monsieur Vaudrey! The Minister of the Interior! He, his name, his words, his projects, his deeds!

Success! Yes, it was his, it had come!

Never in his wildest visions had he dreamed of the success that he had attained. Never had he expected to catch sight of such bright rays as those which now shone down upon him from that star, which with the superstition of an ambitious man, he had singled out. Success! Success!

And now all the world should see what he would do. Already in his own little town, in his speeches, during the war, at the elections of 1871, and especially at Versailles, during the years of struggle and political intrigue, in the tribune, or as a commissioner or sub-commissioner, he had given proofs of his qualifications as a statesman, but the touchstone of man is power. Emerging from his semi-obscurity into the sunshine of success, he would at last show the world what he was and what he could do. Power! To command! To create! To impress his ideas upon a whole nation! To have succeeded! succeeded! succeeded! Sulpice's dreams were realized at last.

And whilst the ministerial carriage was driving at a gallop towards the Place Beauvau, Sabine, muffled up in her furs, her fine skin caressed by the blue-fox border of her pelisse, said to herself, quite indifferent to the man himself, but delighted to have a minister's name to enroll upon her list of guests:

"He is a simpleton—Vaudrey—but a very charming simpleton, nevertheless."

The iron gates of the Place Beauvau were thrown back for his Excellency's carriage to enter. The gravel creaked under the wheels, as the coupé turning off to the left, stopped under the awning over the door.

Sulpice alighted. The great door opened to admit him. Two white-cravatted servants occupied a bench while awaiting the minister's return.

Sulpice ran lightly up the great marble staircase leading to his private apartments. Handing his hat and coat to a servant in the antechamber, he gayly entered the little salon, where he found his wife sitting by a table reading *La Revue* by the light of a shaded lamp. At the sight of her pretty, fresh young face extended to greet him, with her blue eyes and smiling air, at the sound of her clear, sweet, but rather timid voice asking a little anxiously: "Well?" Sulpice took the fair face in both his hands and his burning lips imprinted a long kiss on the white forehead, over which a few curls of golden hair strayed.

"Well, my dear Adrienne, I have been greatly interested. All the kindness with which I was received, the evident delight with which the new cabinet has been welcomed by the people, even the grimaces of Pichereau whom I met,—if you only knew where—all gave me pleasure, delighted me, and yet made me fear. Minister! Do you know what I have been thinking of since I was made a minister?"

"Of what have you been thinking?" asked the young wife, who, with her hands folded, gazed trustingly and sweetly into Sulpice's feverish eyes.

"I?—I have been telling myself that it is not enough to be a minister. One must be a great minister! You understand, Adrienne, a great minister!"

As he spoke he took Adrienne's hands in his, and the young wife glanced up admiringly at this young man burning with hope, who stood there before her, declaring: "I will be great!"

She had never dreamed of his reaching such heights as these on that day when she felt the fingers of her fiancé trembling in her hand, the day that Sulpice had whispered the words in her ear which made her heart leap with joy: "I love you, Adrienne, I shall always love you—Always!"

III

TOC

Sulpice Vaudrey had married Adrienne for love. She brought to him from the convent at Grenoble where she had been educated, the charming innocence of a young girl and the innate devotion of a woman. She was an orphan with a considerable fortune, but although Sulpice had only moderate

resources, he had scarcely thought of her wealth, not even inquiring of her guardian, Doctor Reboux, on the occasion of his formal demand for her hand, about the dowry of Mademoiselle Gérard.

He had met her at more than one soirée at Grenoble, where she appeared timid, dazzled and retiring, and quietly interrogating everything by her sweet glance. Some few words exchanged carelessly, music which they had listened to side by side, the ordinary everyday intercourse in society, had made Sulpice acquainted with his wife; but the sight of the pretty blonde—so sweet and gentle—the childlike timidity of this young girl, something rather pensive in the confiding smile of this blooming creature of eighteen summers, had won him completely. He was free, and alone, for he had lost, but a short time before, the only creature he loved in the world, his mother, of whom he was the son in the double sense of flesh and spirit, by the nourishment of her breast and by the patient teaching that she had implanted in his mind.

He remembered only his father's dreamy and refined face in the portrait of a young, sad-looking man in a lawyer's black gown, before which he had stood when quite small, and spelled out as he might have lisped a prayer, the four letters: *papa*. Alone in this little town of Grenoble, for which he had left his native village of Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, he had, just before meeting Adrienne, fallen a victim to a profound melancholy and realized the necessity of deciding upon his career.

He was then thirty-four. Except the years spent in the study of law at Paris amid the turmoil of the left bank of the Seine, he had always lived in the province—his own province of Dauphiné. He had grown up in the old house at Saint-Laurent, where every nook and corner kept for him its own sweet memory of his childhood and youth. The great white drawing-room with its wainscotings of the time of Louis XVI., which opened out upon a flight of steps leading down into a terraced garden; the portraits of obscure ancestors: lawyers in powdered wigs and wearing the robes of the members of the Third estate, fat and rosy with double chins resting upon their broad cravats, amiable old ladies with oddly arranged hair and flowered gowns, coquettish still as they smiled in their oval, wooden frames, and then the old books in their old-fashioned bindings slumbering in a great bookcase with glass doors, or piled up on shelves below the fowling-pieces, the game-bags and the powder-horns.

With this dwelling of which he thought so often now, his whole past was linked, about it still clung something of its past poetry, and it was sacred through the memories it preserved, and as the scene of the unforgotten joys of childhood. He could see again, the great stone-flagged kitchen, where they sat up at nights telling stories, the chamber above it, the bed with its heavy serge curtains, where he lay—sometimes shaking with terror—all alone, adjoining the room once occupied by his father, and the moonlight shining through the tall old trees in the courtyard outside, that entering by the half-open blinds cast shadows like trembling lace on the wall opposite to him. It seemed to Sulpice then that he could hear the sounds of the weird demon's chase as told by old Catherine, the cook, in bated tones during their vigils.

It was there that he went every year to pass his holidays with his mother, who had had the courage to send him away,—just as during winter she had plunged him into cold water—to the Lyceum at Grenoble, whence he would return to Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, "so thin, poor child!" as his mother said.

And how fat she would send him back again to school,—to make the masters ashamed of their stinginess.

How pleasant were the reminiscences of those sunny days amongst the mountains, the excursions to Grande Chartreuse, where the murmuring brook trickled among the rocks, the halts at Guiers-Mort or under the trees in the stillness of a drowsy day in summer; how delightful to stretch one's self out at the foot of the cliffs or on a grassy slope with a book, pausing now and then to indulge in day-dreams or glance up at the fleecy clouds floating in the blue sky above his head and watch them gathering, then vanishing and melting away like smoke wreaths! Ah! how sweet were those long, idle days full of dreams, when the noise of the waterfall dashing over the rocks lulled the senses like some merry song, or a nurse's tender, crooning lullaby.

In those days Sulpice made no plans for his future, where he would go, what he would do, or what would become of him; but he felt within himself unbounded hope, a hope as limitless and bright as the azure sky above him, the inspiration of devotion, love and poetry. He asked himself whether he should be a missionary or a representative of the people. It seemed to him that his heart was large enough to contain a world, and as he grew up he began to ask himself the terrible question: "Will a woman ever love me?"

To be loved! What a dream! One day he put this question to one of his comrades at college, Guy de Lissac, the son of a country gentleman in the neighborhood, who answered:

"Booby! every one is loved some day or other, and there are some who are loved even too much!"

Sulpice had received a patriarchal and half-puritanical training, but softened materially by his mother's almost excessive care, it had left, as it were, a kind of poetic perfume that clung about him and never left him.

Even during the days of his struggle in crowded Paris, in the heat of political strife, his thoughts would fly back to the old home at Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, recalling to mind the old armchair where his father used to sit, the father whose kiss he had never known, hearing again his mother's voice from the great oak staircase with its heavy balusters, and he recalled at the same moment, the landscape with its living figures, the spotted, steel-colored guinea-fowl screaming from the branches of the elms, the vineyard hands returning from work, to trample with bare feet the great clusters of grapes piled up in the wine-vat in the cellar whose odor intoxicated! Even as a representative or minister, musing over

his past that seemed but yesterday, Sulpice wandered again in thought to this quiet country spot, so loved by him, so sweet, so still, reposing in the silence of provincial calm—far away, removed from all the noise and bustle of Paris.

The farmers of Dauphiné generally think of making their sons tillers of the soil, sending them to school and to college, perhaps to begin later the study of law or medicine, but welcoming them joyfully back again to their native fields, to their farms, where the youths soon forget all they may have learned of the Code or the Codex and lead the healthy, hardy life of the country. Good, well-built fellows, their chests enlarged by their daily exercise, their thighs strengthened by mountain-climbing, gay young men, liking to hunt and drink on the banks of the Isère and caring more for good harvests than for the songs of the wind amongst the branches of the poplars upon the river-banks.

Sulpice had an old uncle on his father's side who proposed to his sister-in-law to give up his broad acres—a fortune in themselves—to Sulpice, if his nephew would consent to marry his daughter. Sulpice refused. He would not marry for money.

"Fiddle-faddle!" cried his uncle. "Sickly sentimentality! If he cultivates that *grain*, my brother's son will not make much headway."

"There is where you are mistaken, brother-in-law. What my poor Raymond had not time to become, his child will be: a lawyer at once eloquent and honest."

"Well, well," replied the uncle, "but he shall not have my girl."

Sulpice, after finishing his studies at Paris, returned to his mother at Grenoble, took her away from the old house at Saint-Laurent and installed her in the town with himself, where he began the practice of law and attracted everybody's attention from the first. He made pleading a sacred office and not a trade. Everyone was astonished that he had not remained in Paris.

Why? He loved his native province, the banks of the Isère, the healthy, poetic atmosphere hanging over the desert of the Chartreuse and the snows of the Grand-Som. A talented man could make his way anywhere,—moreover, it was his pleasure to consider it a duty not to leave this secluded corner of the earth where he would cause freedom of speech to be known. Sulpice, whose heart was open to every ardent and generous manifestation of human thought, had imbibed from his mother, as well as from his father's writings and books, and from the *Encyclopædia* that Raymond Vaudrey had interlined with notes and reflections, not merely traditional information, but also, so to speak, the baptism of liberty. He had lived in the feverish days of the past eighty years, through his reading of the *Gazette Nationale* of those stormy days. The speeches that he found in those pages—speeches that still burned like uncooled lava—of Mirabeau, Barnave, and Condorcet, a son of Grenoble, seemed to impart a glow to his fingers and fire to his glance. Then, too, the magnificent dreams of freedom proclaimed from the tribune inflamed his mind and made his heart beat fast. He saw as in a vision applauding crowds, tricolors gleaming in the clear and golden sunlight, processions moving, files marching past, and heard eternal truths proclaimed and acclaimed.

His mother smiled at all this enthusiasm. She did not however try to repress it. It would vanish at the touch of years, just as the leaves of the trees fly before the winds of October. And besides, the dear woman herself was in sympathy with his hopes, his dreams and visions, remembering that her lost Raymond had loved what his son in his turn so much adored.

The termination of the war and the fall of the empire found Sulpice a popular man at Grenoble; loved by all, by the populace who knew how generous he was, and by the middle-class who regarded him as a prudent man, hence the February elections saw him sent to Bordeaux, a member of the National Assembly. He had just passed his thirty-fourth year.

His mother lived long enough to see this event, and to be dazzled by this brilliant launch on his career.

With what deep emotion, even to-day, Vaudrey recalled that Sunday in February, a foul, wet day, when he returned home in a closed carriage with a friend, from an electioneering tour. The day before he had made a speech in a wineshop to an audience of peasants, who listened, open-mouthed, but withal suspicious, examining their candidate as they would have handled a beast offered at the market, and who, step by step, applauded his remarks, stretching out their rasp-like hands as he left them, and crying out: "You are our man!"

That very morning he returned to Grenoble in the rain, passing through villages where the posters bearing his name and those of his friends, half-demolished by the rain, flapped dismally in the wind. Before the mayor's office, little groups were gathered, peaceful folk; a gendarme paced slowly to and fro, and bulletins littered the muddy thoroughfare. But there was no excitement. Nothing more. Not even a quickened pulse-beat was felt by those stolid men upon whose votes depended the fate of the nation. Sulpice could not help marvelling at so much indifference, but he reflected that it was thus throughout all France, and that not only his name but the destiny of the nation was involved in the struggle.

Moreover, at night, with what feverish transport he watched the returns of the election as they reached the Palais de Justice, black with the crowd, and filled with uproar! With what a fearfully fast-beating heart he saw the rapidly swelling number of ballots cast for him! Dispatches came, and pedestrians hurried in from the country, waving their bulletins above their heads, and Sulpice heard on every lip the same cry: "Vaudrey leads!"

Some cried bravo, while others clapped their hands. A crowd quickly gathered about Vaudrey. It already seemed to him that he was lifted up by a great wave and carried to a new world.

A friend seized him by the arm and drew him into a corner of the hall, away from the others, and hurriedly said: "You know I am not one to ask much of you, to ask anything of you, in fact. I merely reckon on a receivership. That is easily done, eh? A mere nothing?"

Sulpice, whose feelings were overcome by this great popular consecration, felt a kind of anger stir his heart against this solicitor, who, in the triumph of a great popular cause, saw only a means of self-advancement, of securing an appointment. The deputy—for he was a deputy now, each commune adding its total to the Vaudrey vote—was moved by a feeling of disgust.

The crowd followed him home that evening, shouting in triumph.

Amid the joy of victory, Sulpice felt the burden of the anxiety caused by duties to be done: a treaty of peace to be signed, and what a peace! Must he, alas! append his signature to a document devoted to the dismemberment of his country? Far into the night he stood in reverie in his chamber, his brow resting against the cold window-pane.

He retired to rest very late, and arose with the gray dawn of February, but without having slept.

He looked across the street to a convent garden, with its square and lozenge-shaped beds regularly arranged, its bare trees and box-wood borders, that he had often gazed upon. Some nuns in their black robes passed slowly across this cold and calm horizon that for many years had also been the range of his vision.

Henceforth this familiar spot, this sad garden, whose cloistral associations charmed him, would be lost to his view. It was Paris now that awaited him, feverish Paris, burning with anger and odorous of saltpetre. Its very pavements must burn. Sulpice was in haste, however, to see it once more, to pass with head aloft beneath the garrets where he had once dreamed as a student, fagging and striving to get knowledge. How often he would regret that convent garden, those familiar flower-beds, the deep silence that enveloped him as he sat working by the open window, the passage of a bird near him, as if to fan him with its wing, and the vague murmur of the canticles of the sisters ascending to his window like the echo of a prayer!

In the recess during one of the years following his election to the Assembly, he married Mademoiselle Gérard. Doctor Reboux, her guardian, charmed to give his ward to a man with a future like Vaudrey's, had not hesitated long about consenting to the marriage. Adrienne delighted Sulpice, and the young girl herself was quite happy to be chosen by this good-natured, distinguished young man whom everybody at Grenoble, not excepting his political adversaries, admired and spoke well of. With large, brilliant, black eyes lighting up a thin, fair face, a full beard, a high forehead with a deep furrow between the eyebrows, giving to his usually wandering, keen and restless glance a somewhat contemplative expression, Sulpice was a decidedly attractive man. He was not a handsome or a charming fellow, but a good-natured, agreeable, refined man, a fine conversationalist, persuasive, enthusiastic and alert; learned without being pedantic, a man who could inspire in a young girl a perfect passion. Adrienne joyfully married him, as he had sought her from love.

And now all the poetry and romance of his youth blossomed again in his heart, in the thick of the political struggle in which he was engaged; he forgot, amid the idyllic scenes of domestic life, the storms of Versailles, the political troubles, forebodings as to the future, all anxieties of the present, the routine life of the Assembly into which he plunged with all his mind, and the excitement of his labors, his debates and his duties.

Sulpice thought again and again of the summer morning when he led his wife to the altar, and compared it to a day's halt in the course of a journey under the blaze of the sun; he recalled the old house full of noisy stir, the crowd of relatives and friends in festive attire, the stamping of the horses' feet before the great open gate, the neighbors standing at the windows, and the little street-boys scuffling upon the pavement, all the joyous bustle of that happy day. It seemed to Sulpice that the sunlight came streaming in with Adrienne's entrance into the vast salon, from the walls of which her pictured ancestresses in their huge leg-of-mutton sleeves seemed to smile at her.

Beneath the orange wreath sent from Paris, her face expressed the happy, surprised, and sweetly anxious look of a young communicant wrapped in her veil.

Sulpice had never seen her look more beautiful. How prettily she came towards him, blushing vividly, and holding out her two little white gloved hands! He, somewhat bored by the company that surrounded them, cast an involuntary glance at a mirror hanging opposite and decided that he looked awkward and formal with his hair too carefully arranged. How they had laughed since then and always with new pleasure at these recollections, so sweet even now.

His happiness on that joyous day would have been complete had his mother been present, when in the presence of the old priest who had instructed Adrienne in her catechism, Sulpice stood forward and took by its velvet shield the taper that seemed so light to him, and awkwardly held the wafer that the priest extended to him. It was a great event in Grenoble when the leader of the Liberal Party, who headed the list at the last election, was seen being married like a believing bourgeois. The organ pealed forth its tender vibrations, some Christmas anthem, mysterious and tremulous, like an alleluia sounding through the aisles of centuries; the light streamed through the windows in floods and rested upon Adrienne, who was kneeling with her childlike head leaning on her gloved hands, kissing her fair locks with sunlight and illumining the gleaming satin of her dress with its long train spreading out over the carpet.

Sulpice took away from this ceremony in the presence of a crowded congregation an impression at

once perfumed and dazzling: the perfumes of flowers, the play of light, the greetings of the organ, and within and about him, all the intoxication of love, singing a song of happiness.

All that was now far away! nearly six years had elapsed since that day, six years of bitter struggle, during which Vaudrey fought the harder, defended his ideas of liberty with fervid eloquence, disputed step by step, and through intense work came to the front, living at Paris just as he did in the province, having his books brought from there to his apartment in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, close to the railroad that he took every morning when he regretfully left Adrienne, Adrienne to whom he returned every evening that political meetings and protracted sittings did not rob him of those happy evenings, which were in truth the only evenings that he really lived.

Adrienne seldom went out, not caring to display herself and shunning the bustle, living at Paris, as at Grenoble, in peaceful seclusion, caring only for the existence of her husband, his work, and his speeches that he prepared with so much courageous labor. She sat up with him until very late, glancing over the books, the summaries of the laws and the old parliamentary reports.

At times she was terrified at the ardor with which Sulpice devoted himself to these occupations. She greatly desired to take her part and was grieved at being unable to assist him by writing from his dictation, or by examining these old books. She felt terribly anxious when Vaudrey had to make a speech from the tribune. She dared not go to hear him, but knowing that he was to speak, she had not the courage to remain at home. Anxiously she ascended to the public gallery. She shuddered and was almost ready to faint, when she heard the voice of the president break what seemed to her an icy silence, with the words: *Monsieur Vaudrey has the ear of the Assembly*.

The sound of Sulpice's voice seemed changed to her. Fearfully she asked herself if fright was strangling him. She dared not look at him. It seemed to her that the people were laughing, making a disturbance and coughing, but not listening to him. Why had she come? She would never do so again. An icy chill took possession of her. Then suddenly she heard a storm of applause that seemed like an outburst of sympathy. Hands were clapped, voices applauded. She half raised herself, and leaning upon the rail of the gallery, saw Sulpice between the crowded heads, towering above the immense audience, radiant and calm, standing with his arms folded or his hands resting on the tribune, below the chair occupied by a motionless, white-cravatted man, and throwing back his fair head, hurling, as from a full heart, his words, his wishes and his faith. All this she saw with supreme happiness and felt proud of the man whose name she bore.

At that moment, she would fain have cried out to every one that she was his, that she adored him, that he was her pride, even as she was his joy! She would like to have folded him to her, to cling to his neck and to repeat before all that crowd: *I love you!*

But she reserved all her tender effusions for the intimacy of their home, in order to calm the enthusiasm, oftentimes desperate, of this nervous man whom everything threw into a feverish excitement, this grand man, as they called him at Grenoble, who was for her only a great child whom she adored and kept in check by her girlish devotion combined with her motherly, delicate attentions.

Vaudrey, however, more ambitious to do good than to obtain power, and spending his life in the conflicts of the Chamber, saw the years slipping away without realizing that he was making any progress, not a single step forward in the direction of his goal. Since the war, the years had passed for him as well as for those of his generation, with confusing rapidity, and suddenly, all at once, after having been in some sense slumbering, flattering himself that a man of thirty has a future before him, he was rudely awakened to the astonishing truth that he was forty.

Forty! Sulpice had experienced a certain melancholy in advancing the figure by ten, and whatever position he had acquired within his party, within the circle of his friends, his dream was to reach still higher, he was tired of playing second-rate parts, and eager to stand before the footlights in full blaze, in the first rôle.

In the snug interior that Adrienne furnished, he enjoyed all material happiness. She soothed him, brought his dreams back to the region of the real, terrified at times by his discouragements, his anger, and still more by his illusions concerning men and things.

Sulpice often reproached her for having clipped the wings of his ambition.

"I!" she would say, "it is rather the fans of your windmills that I break, you Don Quixote!"

He would then smile at her, and look earnestly into the depths of the timid creature's lovely blue eyes, causing her to blush as if ashamed of having seemed to be witty.

Her chief aim was to be the devoted, loving friend of this man whom she thought so superior to herself, and although she was totally ignorant of political intrigues, she was by virtue of the mere instinct of love, his best and most perspicacious adviser and felt delighted only when Vaudrey, by chance, listened to her counsel.

"I love you so dearly!" she confessed with the unlimited candor of a poor creature who has but a single affection, a single pretext for loving.

He saw in the life he led, only the penumbra: his neglected youth, his hopes fled, his fears, the disgust which at times filled him as he thought of the never-ending recommencements and trickeries of political life. So dearly cherished, so beloved, it seemed to him, nevertheless, that his life lacked something. He would have liked a child, a son to bring up, a domestic tie, since political conditions prevented him from accomplishing a civic duty. Ah! yes, a son, a being to mould, a brow to kiss, a soul

to fashion after the image of his own, a child who would not know all the sorrows of life that his own generation had laid on him! Perhaps it was only a child that he needed. Something, however, he evidently lacked.

Still he smiled, always in love with that young woman of twenty-four years, delicate, slender, and full of the fears and artlessness of a child. Accustomed to the quiet solitude of the house of her guardian, she, when at Paris, in her husband's study, arranging his books, his papers, his legislative plans and reports, sought to surround her dear Sulpice with the comforting felicity of bourgeois happiness that was enjoyed calmly, like a cordial sipped at the fireside.

Then suddenly one day, the news of a startling political change broke in on this household.

Sulpice reached home one evening at one and the same time nervous, anxious, and happy.

His name was on almost every lip, in connection with a ministerial combination. His last speech on domestic policy had more than ever brought him into prominence and he was considered to have boldly contributed to the development of a fearful crisis.

A minister! he might, before the morning, be a minister! His policy was triumphant.

The advocate Collard—of Nantes,—who was pointed out as the future head of the Cabinet, was one of his intimate friends. It was suggested—positively—that Sulpice should be intrusted with one of the most *important portfolios*, that of the Interior or of Foreign Affairs, the *lesser portfolios* being considered those of Public Instruction and of Agriculture and Commerce, the former of which concerns itself with the spiritual welfare of the people, and the latter with their food supply.

Sulpice told all this to Adrienne while eating his dinner mechanically and without appetite.

There was to be a meeting of his coterie at eight o'clock. It was already seven. He hurried.

Adrienne saw that he was very pale. She experienced a strange sensation, evidently a joyful one although mingled with anxiety. Politics drew him away from his wife so frequently, and for so long a time, that she was already compelled to live in such solitude that the secluded creature wondered if in future she would not be condemned to still greater isolation. But all anxiety disappeared under the influence of Sulpice's manifest joy. He was feverishly impatient. It seemed to him that never had he known so decisive a moment in his life.

The sound of the bell, suddenly ringing out its clear note in the silence, caused him to start.

The dining-room door was opened by a servant, who handed a letter to Vaudrey, bearing on one corner of the envelope the word: *Urgent*.

Sulpice recognized the writing.

It was from Collard of Nantes.

Adrienne saw her husband's cheek flush as he read this letter, which Sulpice promptly handed her, while his eyes sparkled with delight.

"It is done! Read!"

Adrienne turned pale.

Collard notified his "colleague" that the ministerial combination of which he was the head had succeeded. The President awaited at the Élysée the arrival of the new ministers. He tendered Vaudrey the portfolio of the Interior.

"A minister!" said Adrienne, now overcome with delight.

Vaudrey had risen and, a little uneasy, was mechanically searching for something, still holding his napkin in his hand.

"My hat," he said. "My overcoat. A carriage."

Adrienne, with her hands clasped in a sort of childish admiration, looked at him as if he had become suddenly transformed. All his being, in fact, expressed complete satisfaction. He embraced Adrienne almost frantically, kissed her again and again, and left her, then descended the staircase with the speed of a lover hastening to a rendezvous.

This political honeymoon was still at its height at the moment when the delighted Vaudrey, seeing everything rosy-hued, was satisfying his astonished curiosity in the greenroom of the ballet. He entered office, animated by all the good purposes inspired by absolute faith. It seemed to him that he was about to save the world, to regenerate the government, and to destroy abuses.

"It is very difficult to become a minister," he said, smiling, "but nothing is easier than to be a great minister. It only demands a determination to do good!"

"And the power to do it," replied his friend Granet, somewhat ironically.

What! power? Nothing was more simple, since Vaudrey held the reins of power!—If others wrecked the hopes of their friends, it was because they had not dared, because they had not the will!

They would now see what he would do himself! Not to-morrow either, nor in a month—but at once.

He entered the ministry boldly, like a good-natured despot, determined to reform, study and

rearrange everything; and a victim to the feverish and glorious zeal of a neophyte, he was a little surprised to encounter, at the very outset, the obstinate resistance of routine, ignorance, and the unyielding mechanism of that vast machine, more eternal than empires: Ad-min-is-tra-tion.

Bah! he would have satisfaction! Patience would overcome all. After all, time is on one's side.

"Time? Already!" replied Granet, who was a perpetual scoffer.

Adrienne, overwhelmed with surprise, enjoyed the reflections from the golden aurora of power that so sweetly tinted Sulpice's life. She shared her husband's triumphs without haughtiness, and now, however she might love her domestic life, it was incumbent upon her to pass more of her time in society than formerly, *to show herself*, as Sulpice said, and, surrounded by the success and flattery she enjoyed, she felt that that obligation was only an added joy, whose contentment she reflected on her husband.

When she entered a salon, she was greeted with a flattering murmur of admiration and good-natured curiosity. The women looked at her and the men surrounded her.

"Madame Vaudrey?"

"The minister's wife!"

"Charming!"

"Quite young!"

"Somewhat provincial!"

"So much the more attractive!"

"That is true, as fresh as a peach!"

She endeavored to atone by a gracious, very sincere modesty, for the enviable position in which chance had suddenly placed her. It was said of her that she accepted a compliment as timidly as a boarding-school miss receives a prize. They forgave her for retaining her rosy cheeks because of her white and exquisitely shaped hands. She was not considered to be "*trop de Grenoble*." Witty people called her the pretty *Dauphinoise*, and the flatterers the little Dauphine.

In short, her *success* was great! So said the chroniclers; the entrance of a fashionable woman into a salon being daily compared with that of an actress on the stage.

It was especially because Vaudrey appeared to be so happy, that his young wife was so contented. She felt none of the vainglory of power. Generally alone in the vast, deserted apartments of the ministry, with all their commonplace, luxurious appointments, she more than once regretted the home in the Chaussée-d'Antin, where they enjoyed—but too rarely—a renewal of the cherished solitude of the first months of their union, the familiar chats of the Grenoble days, the prolonged conversations, exchanges of thoughts, hopes and reminiscences—already! only recollections,—and she sometimes said to Sulpice, who was feverishly excited and glowed with delight at having reached the summit of power:

"Do you know what this place suggests to me? Why, living in a hotel!"

"And you are right," Vaudrey gaily answered; "we are at a hotel, but it is the hotel in which the will of France lodges!"

"You understand, my dear, that if you are happy—"

"Very happy! it is only now that I can show what I am made of. You shall see, Adrienne, you shall see what I will do and become within a year."

Within a year!

IV

TOC

Guy de Lissac occupied a small summer-house forming a residence situated at the end of a court on Rue D'Aumale. He had given carte-blanche for the arrangement of this bachelor's nest,—a nest in which sitting-hens without eggs succeeded each other rapidly,—to one of those upholsterers who installed, in regulation style, the knickknacks so much in vogue, and who sell at very high prices to Bourse operators and courtesans the spurious Clodions and imitation Boulles that they pick up by chance at auction sales.

Lissac, who had sufficient taste to discover artistic nuggets in the gutters of Paris, had found it very convenient to wake up one fine morning in a little mansion crowded with Japanese bric-à-brac, Chinese satin draperies, tapestries, Renaissance chests and terra-cotta figures writhing upon their sculptured bases. The upholsterer had taste, Lissac had money. The knickknacks were genuine. There was a coquettish attractiveness about the abode that made itself evident in every detail.

This bachelor's suite lacked, however, something personal, something living, some cherished object, the mark of some particular taste, some passion for a period, for a thing, or pictures or books. In this jumble of ill-matched curiosities, where ivory *netzkés* on tables surrounded Barye bronzes and

Dresden figures, there lacked some evidence of an individual character that would give a dominant tone, an original key, to the collection. This worldly dwelling, with its white lacquered bed and Louis XV. canopy and its heads of birds carved in wood like the queen's bed at Trianon, vaguely resembled the apartments of a fashionable woman.

But Guy had hung around here and there a Samouraï sabre, Malay krises, Oriental daggers in purple velvet sheaths, and upon the green tapestry background of the antechamber a panoply on which keen-bladed swords with steel guards were mingled with Scotch claymores with silver hilts, thus giving a masculine character to this hôtel of a fashionable lounger, steeped with the odor of ylang-ylang like the little house of a pretty courtesan.

This Guy enjoyed in Paris a free and easy life, leaving to Vaudrey, his old college-comrade at Grenoble, the pursuit of the pleasures of political life, and, as Lissac said in that bantering tone which is peculiar to Parisian gossip, the relish of the "sweets of power"; for himself, what kept him in Paris was Paris itself, just that and nothing more:—its pleasures, its first nights, its surprises, its women, that flavor of scandal and perfume of refined immorality that seemed peculiar to his time and surroundings.

He had squandered two fortunes, one after the other, without feeling any regret; he had made a brush at journalism, tried finance, won at the Bourse, lost at the clubs, knew everybody and was known by all, had a smiling lip, was sound of tooth, loved the girls, was dreaded by the men, was of fine appearance, and was unquestionably noble, which permitted him to enjoy all the frolics of Bohemian life without sullying himself, having always discovered a forgotten uncle or met some considerate friend to pay his gambling debts and adjust his differences on the Bourse speculations at the very nick of time; just now he was well in the saddle and decidedly attractive, with a sound heart and a well-lined pocket, enjoying, not disliking life, which seemed to him a term of imprisonment to be passed merrily—a Parisian to the finger-tips and to the bottom of his soul, worse than a Parisian in fact, a Parisianized provincial inoculated with *Parisine*, just as certain sick persons are with morphine, judging men by their wit, actions by their results, women by the size of their gloves; as sceptical as the devil, wicked in speech and considerate in thought, still agile at forty, claiming even that this is man's best time—the period of fortune and gallantry—sliding along in life and taking things as he found them, wisely considering that a day's snow or rain lasts no longer than a day's sunshine, and that, after all, a wretched night is soon over.

On leaving Vaudrey the previous night, Lissac had passed part of the night at his club on Place Vendôme. He had played and won. He had gone to sleep over a fashionable novel, very faithfully written, but wearisome in the extreme, and he had awakened late and somewhat heavy-headed. There were fringes of snow upon the window-sills and upon the house facing his little mansion. The roofs were hidden under a large white sheet and half lost in the grayish-white background of the sky.

"Detestable weather! So much the better," thought Lissac, "I shall have no visitors."

"I will see no one," he said to his servant. "In such weather no one but borrowers will come."

He had just finished his déjeuner, plunging a Russian enamelled silver spoon into his egg, his tea smoking at his side in a burnished silver teapot with Japanese designs, when, notwithstanding his orders, the servant handed him a card written in pencil on a scrap of paper torn from a note-book.

"It is not a borrower, monsieur!"

Guy seized the paper disdainfully, thinking, in spite of the servant's opinion, that he would find the name of a beggar who had not even had his name printed on a piece of Bristol-board, and, adjusting his glass, he deciphered the fine writing on the paper; then after involuntarily exclaiming: *Ah! bah*! and *well! well!* greatly astonished, he said as he rose:

"Show her in!"

He had thrown on a chair his damask napkin of Muscovite pattern, and instinctively glanced at himself in the mirror, just as a coquette might do before a rendezvous, smoothing out his flannel vest and spreading out his cravat that only half-fastened the blue foulard collar of his dressing-gown.

At the moment that he was examining the folds made on his red leather slippers by his ample flannel trousers, a woman half-raised the satin portière, and, standing within a frame formed by the folds of yellow satin, looked at the young man, displaying her brilliant teeth as she smilingly said:

"Good-morning, Guy!"

Lissac went straight toward her with outstretched hands.

She allowed the large satin portière to fall behind her, and after having permitted her little suède gloved hands to be raised for a moment, she boldly abandoned them to Guy, laughing the while, as they looked at each other face to face. He betrayed some little astonishment, gazing at her as a person examines one whom one has not seen for a long time, and the young woman raised her head unabashed, displaying her features in full light, as if submitting to an inspection with confidence.

"You did not expect me, eh?"

"I confess—"

"Doubtless it is a considerable time since you thought of me."

Guy was inclined to bow and, as his only reply, to kiss the tips of her fingers; but he reflected that, since they last met, the parting of his brown locks had been devilishly widened, and he remained

standing, answering with the conceit of a handsome man:

"You are mistaken, I often think of you."

She had, with, a sweeping glance around the room, examined the furniture of the apartment, the framed pictures, the designs and the gilding, and, on sitting down near the fire with her little feet crossed, she expressed her opinion:

"Very stylishly ensconced! You always had good taste, I know, my dear Guy."

"I have less now than formerly, my dear Marianne," he said, giving to this airy remark the turn of a compliment.

Marianne shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Do you find me very much altered?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, rejuvenated."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Upon my honor. You look like a communicant."

"Good heavens! what kind?" said Marianne, laughing in a clear, ringing, but slightly convulsive tone.

He was still looking at her curiously, seated thus near the fireplace.

The bright and sparkling fire cast its reflections on the gold frames in waving and rosy tints that brightened the somewhat pale complexion of this young woman and imparted a warm tone to her small and brilliant gray eyes. She half turned her fair face toward him, her retroussé nose was tiny, spirituelle and mobile, her large sensuous mouth was provoking and seductive, and suggested by its upturned corners, encouragement or a challenge.

She had allowed her cloak, whose fur trimming was well-worn, to slip from her shoulders, exposing her form to the waist; she trembled slightly in her tight-fitting dress, and golden tints played on her bare neck, which was almost hidden under the waves of her copper-colored hair.

She had just taken off her suède gloves with a jerky movement and was abstractedly twisting them between her fingers.

In spite of the somewhat depressing effect of her worn garments, she displayed a natural elegance, a perfect form and graceful movements, and Guy, accustomed as he was to estimate at a glance the material condition of people, divined that this woman felt some embarrassment. She whom he had known four or five years previously so charming amid the din of a life of folly, and the coruscation of an ephemeral luxury, was now burned out like an exploded rocket.

Marianne Kayser!

Of all the women whom he had met, he had certainly loved her the most sincerely, with an absolute love, unreflecting, passionate and half-mad. She was not dissolute but merely turbulent, independent and impatient of restraint. Too poor to be married, too proud to be a courtesan, too rebellious to accept the humiliations of destiny.

She was an orphan, and had been brought up by her uncle, Simon Kayser, a serious painter, indifferent to all that did not concern his art,—its morality, its dignity, its superiority—who had, under cover of his own ignorance, allowed the ardent dreams of his niece and her wayward fits to develop freely like poisonous plants; near this man, in the vicious atmosphere of an old bachelor's disorderly household, Marianne had lived the bitter life of a young woman out of her element, poor, but with every instinct unswervingly leaning towards the enjoyments of luxury.

She had grown up amid the incongruous society of models and artists and, as it were, in the fumes of paradoxes and pipes. A little creature, she served as a plaything for this painter without talent, and he allowed her to romp, bound and leap on the divans like a kitten. Moreover, the child lighted his stove and filled his pipe.

The studio was littered with books. As chance offered, she read them all eagerly and examined with curiosity the pictures drawn by an Eisen or a Moreau, depicting passionate kisses exchanged under arbors, where behind curtains, short silk skirts appeared in a rumpled state. She had rapidly reached womanhood without Kayser's perceiving that she could comprehend and judge for herself.

This falsely inspired man, entirely devoted to mystical compositions, vaguely painted—philosophical and critical, as he said—this thinker, whose brush painted obscure subjects as it might have produced signs, did not dream that the girl growing up beside him was also in love with chimeras, and drawn toward the abyss, not however to learn the mysteries hidden by the clouds, but the mystery of life, the secret of the visions that haunted her, of the disquieting temptations that filled her with such feverish excitement.

If Uncle Kayser could for one moment have descended from the nebulous regions, and touched the earth, he would have found an impatient ardor in the depth of Marianne's glance, and something feverish and restless in her movements. But this huge, ruddy, rotund man, speaking above his rounded stomach, cared only for the morality of art, æsthetic dignity, and the necessity of raising the standard of art, of creating a mission for it, an end, an idea—*art the educator, art the moralizer*,—and allowed this feverish, wearied, impulsive creature, moulded by vice, who bore his name, to wander

around his studio like a stray dog.

Isolated, forgotten, the young girl sometimes passed whole days bending over a book, her lips dry, her face pale, but with a burning light in her gray eyes, while her fingers were thrust through her hair, or she rested upon a window-sill, following afar off, some imaginary picture in the depths of the clouds.

The studio overlooked a silent, gloomy street in which no sound was heard save the slow footfalls of weary and exhausted pedestrians. It was stifling behind this window and Marianne's gloomy horizon was this frame of stones against which her wandering thoughts bruised themselves as a bird might break its wings.

Ah! to fly away, to escape from the solemn egotism and the theories of Simon Kayser, and to live the passionate life of those who are free, loved, rich and happy! Such was the dream upon which Marianne nourished herself.

She had perpetually before her eyes, as well as before her life, the gray wall of that high house opposite the painter's studio, pierced with its many eyes, and whether on summer's stifling evenings, the shutters closed—the whole street being deserted, the neighbors having gone into the country—or in winter, with its gray sky, the roofs covered with the snow that was stained all too soon, when the brilliant lights behind the curtains looked like red spots on the varnished paper, Marianne ever felt in her inmost being the bitter void of Parisian melancholy, the overwhelming sadness of black loneliness, of hollow dreams, gnawing like incurable sorrows.

She grew up thus, her mind and body poisoned by this dwelling which she never left except to drag her feet wearily through the galleries of the Louvre, leaning on the arm of her uncle, who invariably repeated before the same pictures, in the loud and bombastic tone of a *comediante*, the same opinions, and grew enthusiastic and excited according as the pictures of the masters agreed with his *style*, his *system*, his *creed*. One should hear him run the gamut of all his great phrases: My *sys-tem!* Marianne knew when the expression was coming. All these Flemish painters! Painters of snuff-boxes, without any ideal, without grasp! "And the Titian, look at this Titian! Where is *thought* expressed in this Titian? And *mo-ral-i-ty?* Titian! A vendor of pink flesh! Art should have a majesty, a dignity, a purity, an ideality very different."

Ah! these words in *ty*, solemn, bombastic, pedantic, with a false ring, they entered Marianne's ears like burning injections.

These visits to the museum impressed her with a gloom such as a ramble in a cemetery would create, she returned to the house with depressing headaches and muttering wrathful imprecations against destiny. She even preferred that studio with its worn-out divans and its worm-eaten tapestries that were slowly shredding away.

There, at least, she was all alone, face to face with herself, consumed by a cowardly fear—the fear of the future—this young girl who had read everything, learned everything, understood everything, knew everything, sullied by all the jokes of the Kayser studio, which, in spite of the exalted, sacrosanct, æsthetic discussions which took place therein, sometimes shockingly resembled a smoking-room—this physical virgin without any virginity of mind, could there take refuge in herself, and there in the solitude to which she was condemned, she questioned herself as to the end to which her present life would lead her.

Of dowry she had none. Her father had left her nothing. Kayser was poor and in debt. She had no occupation. To run about giving private lessons on the piano, seemed to Marianne to degrade her almost to the level of domestic service. Those who wished to pose for the Montyon prize might do so! She never would!

Ah! what sufferings! what would be the end of such a life? Marriage? But who desired her? One of those talentless painters, who ventilated at Kayser's house, not merely their contemptuous theories, but also their down-at-the-heel shoes? To fall from one Bohemian condition to another, from exigency to want, to be the wife of one of these greasy-haired dreamers? Her whole nature shuddered in revolt at this idea. Through the open window, the tepid breath of nature wafted toward her the odor of the rising sap in gentle, warm whiffs that filled her with a feverish astonishment. Stretched on the patched divan, her eyes closed and her lovely form kissed by the tepid breeze, she dreamed, dreamed, dreamed—

The awakening was folly, a rash act, an elopement.

In the house on Rue de Navarin there happened to be one fellow more daring than the rest, he was an artist who, in the jostling daily life, kindled his love at the strange flame that burned in the lustful virgin's eyes. A glance revealed all.

The meeting with a rake determined the life of this girl. She fell, not through ignorance or curiosity, but moved by anger and, as it were, out of bravado. Since she was without social position, motherless and isolated, having no family, without a prop and unloved, well, she threw off the yoke absolutely. She broke through her shackles at one bound. She rebelled!—

She eloped with this man.

He was a handsome fellow, who thirsted for pleasure, and took his prize boldly about, plunging Marianne into the ranks of vulgar mistresses, and had not the mad woman's superior intelligence, will, and even her disgust, ruled at once over this first lover and the equivocal surroundings into which he had thrust her, she would have become a mere courtesan.

Kayser had experienced only astonishment at the flight of his niece. How was it that he had never suspected the cause that disturbed her thoughts? "These diabolical women, nobody knows them, not even those who made them. A father even would not have detected anything. The more excuse therefore for an uncle!" So he resumed his musing on elevated art, quieting his displeasure—for his comrades jeered him—by the fumes of his pipe.

Moreover, all things considered, the painter added, Marianne had followed the natural law. Full liberty for everybody, was still one of Simon Kayser's pet theories. Marianne was of age and could dispose of her lot without the necessity of submitting to a strict endorsement of her conduct. When she had "sounded all the depths of the abyss,"—and Kayser pronounced these words while puffing his tobacco—she would return. Uncle Kayser would always keep a place for her at what he called *his fireside*.

"The fireside of your pipe," Marianne once remarked to him.

So Kayser consoled himself for this escapade by the sacredness of art, the only sacredness he recognized. On that indeed he yielded nothing. What mattered it to the world, if a girl went astray, even if that girl were his niece? Public morality was not hurt thereby. Ah! if he, Kayser, had exhibited to the world a lewd picture, it would have been "a horse of a different color"! The dignity, seriousness, purity of art, that was right enough!—But a woman! Pshaw! a woman!—Nor was he heard once to express any uneasiness as to what might become of Marianne.

In the course of her perilous career, which, however, was not that of a courtesan, but that of a freed woman avenging herself, Marianne had met Guy de Lissac and loved him as completely as her nature allowed her to love. Guy entertained her. With him she talked over everything, she gave herself up to him, and made plans for the future. Why should they ever separate? They adored each other. Guy was rich, or at any rate he lived sumptuously. Marianne was a lovely mistress, clever, in fact, ten women in one. Guy became madly attached to her and he felt himself drawn closer to her day by day. She often repeated with perfect sincerity that she had never loved any one before.

The first lover, then? She did not even know his name now!

There was no reason why they should not live together for ever, a life of mutual joy and happiness, led by the same fancies, stirred by the same desires. Why ever leave each other, even once? But it was just this that induced Guy to abandon this pretty girl. He was afraid. He saw no end to such a union as theirs. The little love-affair that enticed him assumed another name: *The Chain*. He sometimes debated with himself seriously about marrying this Marianne, whose adventures he knew, but who so intoxicated him that he forgot all the past.

Uncle Kayser, entirely engrossed in the "dignity of art," and occupied with the composition of an allegorical production entitled *The Modern Family*,—a page of pure, mystic, social, regenerative art,—had certainly forgotten his niece; nevertheless, Lissac at times felt somewhat tempted to restore her to him. He was grieved at the thought of abandoning Marianne to another. His dread of marriage triumphed over his jealousy. One fine day, Guy suddenly brought about a separation. Feeling ill, he took to his bed, when one morning Marianne came to him and said in passionate tones:

"Now I will never leave you again! You are in danger, and I am here to save you!"

Guy now felt himself lost. His rapid perception, whose operation was as sudden as a blow of the fist, warned him that if he allowed this woman to install herself in his house, he might say good-by to liberty, and probably also to his life. This Parisian had laid down as a principle, that a man should always be *unfettered*. He held in horror this shameful half-marriage that the language of slang had baptized, as with a stain: *Collage*. He therefore decided to play his life against his liberty, and during the temporary absence of this nurse established at his bedside, he packed his clothes in his trunk at random, shivering as he was with fever, threw himself into a hack, and, with chattering teeth and a morbid shudder creeping over his entire body, had himself driven to the railroad station and departed for Italy.

Marianne was heartbroken anew at this unexpected departure. A hope had vanished. She loved Guy very sincerely, and she vainly hoped that she would hold him. He fled from her! Whither had he gone? For a moment, she was tempted to rejoin him when she received his letters. She surmised, however, that Guy, desiring to avoid her, caused his brief notes to be sent by some friend from towns that he had left. To play there the absurd part of a woman chasing her lover would have been ridiculous. She remained, therefore, disgusted, heartbroken for a moment like a widow in despair, then she retraced her steps to the Rue de Navarin, and returned to the fold, where she found Uncle Kayser still quite unruffled, with the almost finished picture of *The Modern Family*.

"That is, I verily believe, the best I have done, the most moral," said Kayser to her. "In art, morality before everything, my girl! Come, sit down and tell me your little adventures."

It was five years—five whole years—since Lissac had seen Marianne. Their passion had subsided little by little into friendship,—expressed though by letters. Marianne wrote, Guy replied. All the bitter reproofs had been exchanged through the post, yet, in spite of this correspondence, neither had sought the opportunity nor felt the desire to meet. The fancy was dead! Nevertheless, they had loved each other well!

Suddenly, without overtures, on this bitingly cold morning, Marianne arrived, half shivering, in the new apartment, warmed her tiny feet at the fire and raised to him the rosy tip of her cold nose.

Guy was somewhat surprised.

He looked with a curiosity not unmixed with pain at that woman whom he had loved truly enough to suffer love's pangs,—the innocents say to die of it. He tried to find again in the depths of those gray eyes, sparkling and malicious, the old burning passion, extinguished without leaving even a fragment of its embers. To think that he had risked his life for that woman; that he should have sacrificed his name; that he should have torn himself from her with such harsh bravado; that he should have cut deep into his own being in order to leave her; that he had fled, leaving for Italy with a craving desire for solitude and forgetfulness! Eh! yes, Marianne had been his true love, the true love of this blasé Parisian sceptic and braggart, and he sought, while again looking at the lovely girl, to recover some of the sensations that had flown, to recall some of those reminiscences which more than once had agreeably affected him.

Marianne evidently understood what was passing in Guy's mind. She smiled strangely. Buried in the armchair, whose back supported her own, and half-bending her fair neck that reclined on the lace-covered head-rest, she looked at Lissac fixedly with an odd expression, the sidelong glance of a woman, that seems to be her keenest scrutiny.

Through her half-closed lashes he seemed to feel that a malicious glance embraced him. The mobile nostrils of her delicate nose dilated with a nervous trembling that intensified the mocking smile betrayed by her curling lips. Her hands were resting upon her plump arms, and with a trembling motion of the fingers beat a feverish little march as if she were playing a scale on a keyboard.

Guy sought to evoke from the well-set, gracefully reclining form, from the half-sly and half-concealed glance, from the palpitating nostrils, something that reminded him of his former ecstasies. Again he saw, shadowed by the chin, that part of her neck where he loved to bury his brow and to rest his lips, greedily, lingeringly, as when one sips a liqueur. A strange emotion seized him. All that had not yet been gratified of his shattered, but not wholly destroyed love, surged within him.

Were it fancy or reminiscence, beside this woman he still felt as of old, a feeling that oppressed his heart and caused him that delightful sensation of uneasiness to which he had been a stranger in connection with his many later easy love adventures. A light, penetrating and sweet odor floated around Marianne, reminding Lissac of the intoxicating perfume of vanished days, an irritating odor as of new-mown hay.

He said nothing, while she awaited his remarks with curiosity. Guy's mute interrogation possibly embarrassed her, for she suddenly shook her head and rose to her feet.

"May one smoke here?" she said, as she opened a Russia leather cigarette-case bearing her monogram.

"What next?" said Guy, lighting a sponge steeped in alcohol that stood in a silver holder and offering it to Marianne.

She quickly closed her fine teeth on the end of the paper cigarette that she had rolled between her fingers and lighted it at the flame. The gleam of the alcohol brightened her eyes and slightly flushed her pale cheeks, which Guy regarded with strange feelings.

"Your invention is an odd one!" she said, as she returned him the little sponge upon which a tongue of blue flame played.

He extinguished it, and abandoning himself to the disturbing charm of reminiscences, watched Marianne who was already half-enveloped in a light cloud of smoke.

"There is one thing you do not know," he said. "More than once—on my honor—at the corner of the street, at some chance meeting, my old Parisian heart has beaten wildly on seeing in some coquettish outline, or in some fair hair falling loosely over an otter-skin cloak, or in some fair, vanishing profile with a pearl set in the lobe of the ear, something that resembled you. Those fur toques with little feathers that everybody wears now, you wore before any one else, on your fair head. Whenever I see one, I follow it. On my word, though, not for her. The fair unknown trotted before me, making the sidewalks echo to the touch of the high heels of her little shoes, while I continued to follow her under the sweet illusion that she would lead me at the end of the journey to a spot where it seemed to me a little of paradise had been scattered. It is thus that phantoms of loved ones course through the streets of Paris in broad daylight, and I am not the only one, Marianne, who has felt the anguish and heart-fluttering that I have experienced. Often have I found my eyes moist after such an experience; but if it were winter, I attributed my tears simply to a cold. Tell me, Marianne, was it really the cold that moistened my eyes?"

Marianne laughed.

"Come, but you are idyllic, my dear Guy," said she, looking at Lissac.

"Melancholy, nothing more."

"Let us say elegiac. Those little fits have come upon you rather late in the day, have they not? A little valerian and quinine, made up into silver-coated pills, is a sovereign remedy."

"You are making fun of me."

"No," she said. "But it was so easy then, seeing that the recollection of me could inspire you with so many poetic ideas and cause you to trot along for such a distance behind plumed toques—it was so easy not to take the train for Milan and not to fly away from me as one skips from a creditor."

Guy could not refrain from smiling.

"Ah! it is because—I loved you too dearly!"

"I know that!" exclaimed Marianne with a tone, in contrast with her elegance, of an artist's model giving a pupil a retort. "A madrigal that has not answered, no; does it rain?"

"I have perhaps been stupid, how can it be helped?" said Lissac.

"Do not doubt it, my dear friend. It is always stupid to deprive one's self of the woman who adores one. Such rarities are not common."

"You remember, dear Marianne," said Guy, "the day when you boldly wrote upon the photographs to some one who loved you dearly: 'To him I love more than every one else in the world?'"

"Yes," said Marianne, blowing a cloud of smoke upward. "Such things as that are never forgotten when one writes them with the least sincerity."

"And you were sincere?"

"On the faith of an honest man," she answered laughingly.

"And yet I have been assured since that time, that you adored another before that one."

"It is possible," said Marianne with sudden bitterness; "but, in the life that I have led, I have been so often purchased that I have been more than once able to mistake for love the pleasure that I have derived."

In those words, uttered sharply, and in a hissing tone like the stroke of a whip-lash in the air, she had expressed so much suffering and hidden anger that Lissac was strangely affected.

Guy, the Parisian, experienced a sentiment altogether curious and unexpected, and this woman whose bare neck was resting on the back of the armchair, allowing the smoke that issued from her lips in puffs to enter her quivering nostrils, seemed to him a new creature, a stranger who had come there to tempt him. In her languishing and, as it were, abandoned pose, he followed the outline of her graceful body, blooming in its youth, the fulness of her bust, the lines of her skirt closely clinging to her exquisite hips, and the unlooked-for return of the lost mistress, the forgotten one, assumed in his eyes the relish of a caprice and an adventure. And then, that bitter remark, spoken in the course of their light Parisian gossip, whetted his curiosity still further and awoke, perhaps, all the latent force of a passion formerly suddenly severed.

He was seated on an ottoman beside Marianne, gazing into the young woman's clear eyes, his hand endeavoring to seize a white hand that nimbly eluded his grasp. The movement of his hands suggested the embrace that his feelings prompted.

Marianne suddenly looked him full in the face and curtly said, in a tone of raillery, that suggested a past that refused to reopen an account for the future:

"Oh! oh! but is that making love, my friend?"

Lissac smiled.

"Come," she said, "nonsense! That is a romance whose pages you have already often turned over."

"The romance of my life," whispered Lissac in Marianne's ear.

"The more reason that it should not be read again. It is true there are books one never reads but once. And for that reason, probably, one never forgets them."

She rose abruptly, threw the stump of her cigarette into the fire and looked with a bright, penetrating glance, into Lissac's surprised eyes.

"Ah! it is a long while, you see, since you spoke laughingly—we have both heartily laughed at it—of the 'caprices of Marianne.' Do you know what I am, my dear Guy? Yes, where is the mad creature who was formerly your mistress? Abandoned to dark, profound and incurable *ennui*, I yawn my life away, as some one said, I yawn it away even to the point of dislocating my jaw. The days seem dull to me, people stupid, books insipid, while fools seem idiots and witty people fools. It is to have the blues, if you will, or rather to have the grays, to hate colorless objects, to be weary of the commonplace, to thirst for the impossible. A thirst that cannot be allayed, let me add. The pure, fresh spring that should slake my thirst has not yet gushed."

She talked in a dry, bitter tone, with a smile that frequently gave way to slight outbreaks of convulsive laughter almost as if she were attacked with a fit of coughing. From time to time, she blew away a cloud of smoke that escaped from her lips, for she had resumed her cigarette, or with the tip of her nail struck her papelito, knocking the ashes on the carpet.

Moved and greatly puzzled, but no longer thinking of the temptation of a moment before, Guy looked at her and nodded his head gravely, like a physician who finds a patient's illness more serious than the latter is willing to acknowledge.

"You are very unhappy, Marianne!" he remarked.

"I? Nonsense! Weary, disgusted, bored, yes; but not unhappy. There is still something great in misery. That can be battled against. It is like thunder. But the rain, the eternal rain, incessantly falling, with

its liquid mud, that—ah! that, ugh! that is crushing. And in my life it rains, it rains with terrible constancy."

As she uttered these words, she stretched her arms out with a movement that expressed boundless weariness and disclosed to Guy the dull dejection that followed a great deception and a hopeless fall.

"Life? My life? A mere millstone mechanically revolving. A perpetual round of joyless love-episodes and intoxication without thirst. Do you understand? The life of a courtesan endured by a true woman. My soul is mine, my spirit and my intellect, but these are chained to a body that I abandon to others—whom I have abandoned, thank God! for I am satiated at length and have now no lover, nor do I desire one. I desire to be my own mistress, in short, and not the mistress of any person. I have but one desire, hear—"

"What?" asked Guy, who was deeply moved by this outburst of anger and suffering, this cry of pain that declared itself involuntarily, his feelings vacillating between doubt and pity.

"My pleasure," Marianne replied, "is to shut myself up alone in a little room that I have rented at the end of an unfrequented lane near the Jardin des Plantes, whither I have had transported all the wreckage saved from my past life: books, knickknacks, portraits, and I know not what. My intention is that I shall remain there unknown to all, my name, whence I come, where I go, my thoughts, my hatred, my past loves, everything, in fact, a secret. I shall cloister myself. I shall stretch myself out on a reclining-chair and think that if, by chance,—as happens sometimes—an aneurism, a congestion, or I don't know what, should strike me down in that solitude, no one would know who I am, nobody, nobody, and my body would be taken to the Morgue, or to the grave, it matters little to me, that body of which the little otter-trimmed toques recall to you the graceful, serpentine line. Ah! those plans are not very lively, are they? Well, my dear, such are my good moments. Judge of the others, then."

Lissac was profoundly stirred and very greatly puzzled. To call on him: that implied a need of him. But there was no attempt to find the marker at the place where the romance had been interrupted: therefore the visit was not to renew the relations that had been severed, yet not broken.

What, then, brought this creature, still charming and giddy, whose heart was gnawed and wrung with grief? And was she the woman—Guy knew her so well!—to return thus, only to conjure up the vanished recollections, to communicate the secret of her present sorrows and to permit Lissac to inhale the odor of a departed perfume, more airy than the blue smoke-wreaths that escaped from her cigarette?

After entrusting Guy with the secret of her yearning for solitude, she again indulged in her sickly smile, and still looking at Guy:

"You are, I am told, a constant guest at Sabine Marsy's receptions?" she said abruptly.

"Yes," replied Lissac. "But I have no great liking for political salons."

"It is a political centre, and yet not, seemingly. It is about to become a scientific one, if one may believe the reporters—Monsieur de Rosas is announced.—By the way, my dear Guy, you still see Monsieur de Rosas!"

While Marianne uttered this name with an indifferent tone, she slightly bent her head in order to scrutinize Guy.

He did not reply at once, seeking first to discover what object Marianne had in speaking to him about De Rosas. In a vague way he surmised that the great Castilian noble counted for something in Marianne's visit.

"I always see him when he is in Paris," he said after a moment's pause.

"Then you will see him very soon, for he will arrive to-morrow."

"Who told you that?"

"The newspapers. You don't read the newspapers, then?—He is returning from the East. Madame Marsy is bent on his narrating his travels, on the occasion of a special soirée. A lecture! Our Rosas must have altered immensely. He was wild enough of old."

"A shy fellow, which is quite different. But," asked Lissac after a moment, "what about Rosas?"

"Tell me, in the first place, that you know perfectly well that he will arrive to-morrow."

"I know it through the reporters, as you say. To-day, it is through the reporters that one learns news of one's friends."

"The important fact is that you know him, and it is because I am particularly anxious to hear Monsieur de Rosas that I come to ask you to present me at Madame Marsy's."

"Oh! that is it?" Guy began.

"Yes, that is it. I am weary. I am crazy over the Orient. You remember Félicien David's *Desert* that I used to play for you on the piano? I would like to hear this story of travel. It would make me forget Paris."

"You shall hear it, my dear Marianne. Madame Marsy asked me to introduce Vaudrey to her the other evening. You ask me to present you to Madame Marsy. I am both crimp and introducer; but I am

delighted to introduce you to a salon that you will, I trust, find less gloomy than your little room of the Jardin des Plantes. In fact, I thought you were one of Sabine Marsy's friends. Did I dream so?"

"I have occasionally met her, and have found her very agreeable. She invited me to call on her, but I have not dared—my hunger for solitude—my den yonder—"

"Is the little room forbidden ground, is one absolutely prohibited from seeing it?" said Guy with a smile.

"It is not forbidden, but it is difficult. Moreover, I have nothing hidden from my friends," said Marianne, "on one condition, which is, that they are my friends—"

She emphasized the words: "Nothing but my friends."

"Friendship," said Guy, "is all very well, it is very good, very agreeable, but—"

"But—?"

"Love—"

"Do not mention that to me! That takes wings, b-r-r! Like swallows. It flits. It leaves for Italy. But friendship—"

She extended her small firm hand as rigid as steel.

"When you desire to visit me over there, I shall be at home. I will give you the address. But it is not Guy who will come, but Monsieur de Lissac, remember. Is that understood?"

"I should be very silly if I answered *yes*."

Marianne shrugged her shoulders.

"Compliments! How foolish you are! Keep that sort of talk for others. It is a long time since they were addressed to me."

She took that man's face between her hands and kissed his cheeks in a frank, friendly way. Guy became somewhat pale.

"I have loved you, and truly, that is enough. Do not complain or ask aught besides."

Ah! what an eager desire now prompted him to possess her again, to find in her his mistress once more, to restrain her from leaving until she had become his, as of old.

She had already thrown her cloak over her shoulders, and said, as she gently pushed open the door:

"So it is agreed? I am to go to Madame Marsy's?"

"To Madame Marsy's. I will have an invitation sent you."

"And I will call for you and take you. Yes, I, here, like a jolly companion. Or I'll go with my uncle. You will present me to Rosas. We shall see if he recognizes me."

She burst out laughing. "You will also introduce me—since that is your occupation—" and here her smile disclosed her pretty, almost mischievous-looking teeth—"to Monsieur Vaudrey, your comrade. A minister! Such people are always useful for something. *Addio, caro!*"

Guy de Lissac had hardly taken two steps toward Marianne before she had vanished behind the heavy folds of the Japanese portière that fell in its place behind her. He opened the door. Mademoiselle Kayser was already in the hall, with her hand on the handle of the door.

"At nine o'clock I shall be with you," she said to Lissac as she disappeared.

She waved a salutation, the valet de chambre hastened to open the door, and her outline, that for a moment stood out in the light of the staircase, vanished. Guy was almost angry, and returned to his room.

Now that she had left, he opened his window quickly. It seemed to him that a little blue smoke escaped from the room, the cloud emitted by Marianne's cigarette. And with this bluish vapor also disappeared the odor of new-mown hay, bearing with it the passing intoxication that for a moment threatened to ensnare this disabused man.

The cold outside air, the bright sunshine, entered in quivering rays. Without, the snow-covered roofs stood out clearly against a soft blue sky, limpid and springlike. Light wreaths of smoke floated upward in the bracing atmosphere.

Guy freely inhaled this buoyant atmosphere that chased away the blended odor of tobacco and that exhaled from the woman. It seemed to him that a sort of band had been torn from his brow which, but a moment ago, felt compressed. The fresh breeze bore away all trace of Marianne's kisses.

"Must I always be a child?" he thought. "It is not on my account that she came here, but on Rosas's. Our friends' friends are our lovers. Egad! on my word, I was almost taken in again, nevertheless! Compelled, in order to cut adrift again, to make another journey to Italy,—at my age."

Then, feeling chilly, he closed the window, laughing as he did so.

V

TOC

On the pavement of the Boulevard Malesherbes, two policemen, wrapped in their hooded coats, restrained the crowd that gathered in front of the huge double-door of the house occupied by Madame Marsy. A double row of curious idlers stood motionless, braving benumbed fingers while watching the carriages that rolled under the archway, which, after quickly depositing at the foot of the brilliantly lighted perron women enveloped in burnooses and men in white gloves, their faces half-hidden by fur collars, turned and crossed the row of approaching coupés.

For an hour past there had been a double file of carriages, and a continuous stream of guests arriving on foot, who threw their cigars at the foot of the perron, chatting as they ascended the steps, which were protected by a covering of glass. The curious pointed out the faces of well-known persons. It was said in the neighborhood that the greater part of the ministers had accepted invitations.

Madame Marsy's salons were brilliant under the blazing lights. Guests jostled each other in the lobbies. Overcoats and mantles were thrown in heaps or strung up in haste, the gloved hands reaching out as in the lobby of a theatre to receive the piece of numbered pasteboard.

"You have No. 113," said Monsieur de Lissac to Marianne, who had just entered, wearing a pale blue cloak, and leaning on his arm.

She smiled as she slipped the tiny card into her pocket.

"Oh! I am not superstitious!"

She beamed with satisfaction.

People in the hall stood aside in order to allow this pretty creature to pass by; her fair hair fell over her plump, though slender, white shoulders, and the folds of her satin skirt, falling over her magnificent hips, rustled as she walked.

Lissac, with his eyeglass fixed, and ceremoniously carrying his flattened opera-hat, advanced toward the salon, amid the greedy curiosity of the guests who contemplated the exquisite grace of the lovely girl as if they were inhaling its charm.

Madame Marsy stood at the entrance of the salon, looking attractive in a toilet of black silk which heightened her fair beauty, and, with extended hands, smilingly greeted all her guests, while the charming Madame Gerson, refined and tactful, aided her in receiving.

Sabine appeared perfectly charmed on perceiving Marianne. She had felt the influence formerly of this ready, keen and daring intelligence. She troubled herself but little about Marianne's past. Kayser's niece was received everywhere, and had not Kayser decided to accompany her? He followed in the rear of the young girl. People had not observed him. He chatted with a man about sixty years old, with a white beard and very gentle eyes who listened to him good-naturedly while thinking perhaps of something else.

"Ah! my old Ramel, how glad I am to see you!" he said with theatrical effusion.

"It is a fact that we rarely see each other. What has become of you, Kayser?"

"I? I work. I protest, you know, I have never compromised—Never—The dignity of art—"

Their voices were drowned by the hubbub of the first salon, already filled with guests; Sabine meanwhile took Marianne, whom Lissac surrendered, and led her toward a larger salon with red decorations, wherein the chairs were drawn up in lines before an empty space, forming, thanks to the voluminous folds of the curtains, a sort of stage on which, doubtless, some looked-for actor was about to appear.

Nearly all these chairs were already occupied. The lovely faces of the women were illuminated by the dazzling light. Everybody turned toward Marianne as she entered the room, under the guidance of Sabine, who led her quickly toward one of the unoccupied seats, close to the improvised stage on which, evidently, Monsieur de Rosas was going to speak.

Madame Gerson had taken her seat near Marianne, who searched her black, bright eyes with a penetrating glance in order to interrogate the thoughts of this friend of the family. Madame Gerson was delighted. Sabine, dear Sabine, had achieved a success, yes, a success! Monsieur Vaudrey was there! And Madame Vaudrey, too! And Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—the President of the Council! And Monsieur Pichereau, who, after all, had been a minister!

"That makes almost three ministers, one of whom is President of the Council! Sabine is overcome with joy, yes, absolutely crazy! Think of it: Madame Hertzfield, Sabine's rival, never had more than two ministers at a time in her salon."

She added, prattling in soft, linnet-like tones, that Madame Hertzfield's salon was losing its prestige. Only sub-prefects were created there. But Sabine's salon was the antechamber to the prefectures!

"And if you knew how charming Monsieur Vaudrey is—a delightful conversationalist—he has dined excellently—he was twice served with an entrée!"

Marianne listened, but her mind was wandering far away. She was debating with herself as to when

Monsieur de Rosas would appear on that narrow strip of waxed floor before her.

Guy had correctly surmised: it was Rosas and Rosas only whom this woman was seeking in Sabine's salon. She wished to see him again, to talk to him, to tempt destiny. A fancy.—A final caprice. Why not?

Marianne thought that she played a leading part there. She remembered this José very well, having met him more than once in former days with Guy. A Parisian Castilian, more Parisian than Spanish, he spoke with exquisite finish the classic tongue, and with the free-and-easy manner of a frequenter of the boulevards, chatted in the slang of the pavement or of the greenroom; he was an eminent virtuoso and collector, an author when the desire seized him, but only in his own interest, liberal in his opinions, lavish in his disposition, attractive in his manners; an eager traveller, he had, at thirty years of age, seen all that was to be seen, he had visited India and Japan, drunk camel's milk under the tents of the Kirgheez, and eaten dates with the Kabyles, and narrated with a sort of appetizing irony, love adventures which might have seemed romantic brag, if it were not that he lessened their improbability by his raillery. He was a kind of belated Byron, who might have been cured of his romantic tastes by the wounds and contact of reality.

She especially recalled a visit in Guy's company to José at an apartment that the duke had furnished in Rue de Laval. He occupied a painter's large studio, draping it with Oriental tapestry, crowding it with knickknacks and panoplies of weapons: an extravagant luxury,—something like the embarrassment of riches in a plundered caravansary. It was there that José had regaled Marianne and Guy with coffee served in Turkish fashion, and while they chatted, they had smoked that pale Oriental tobacco, that the Spaniard, quoting some Persian poets, gallantly compared to the perfumed locks of Mademoiselle Kayser.

During her years of hardship, she had many a time recalled that auburn-haired, handsome fellow, with his blue eye, pensive and searching, and lower lip curled disdainfully over his tawny beard trimmed in Charles V. style, as he reclined there, stretched on Hindoo rugs, chanting some monotonous song as slow as the movement of a caravan.

"Isn't my friend Rosas a delightful fellow?" Guy had asked her.

"Delightful!"

"And clever! and learned! and entertaining! and, what is not amiss, a multi-millionaire!"

Marianne thought of the absolute power, satisfied desires, whims and possible dreams that were linked with that man. He was a mass of perambulating gold. How many times she had dreamed, in the mists of her recollection, of that somewhat haughty smile that curled his delicate mustache, and those keen-edged teeth gleaming though his reddish beard, as if greedy to bury themselves deep in flesh!

But where was the duke now? Among the Kabyles or the Mormons? At Tahiti, Greenland, or gone to the devil? The papers had once announced that he was organizing an expedition to the North Pole. Perhaps he was lost among the icebergs in the Arctic Seas! She smiled at that, sighing involuntarily with sincere emotion, but prompted by selfish regret.

It had seemed to her that José had more than once permitted himself to express his affection for her. Politely, correctly, of course, as a gallant man addresses a friend's mistress, but manifesting in his reserve a host of understood sentiments and tender restraint that suggested hidden or implied declarations. Marianne had pretended not to understand him. At that time, she loved Guy or thought that she loved him, which amounts to the same thing. She contented herself with smiling at the flirtation of Monsieur de Rosas.

"I have perhaps been very stupid," she said to herself. "Pshaw! he might have been as silly as I, if occasion demanded. The obligations of friendship! The phantom of Guy!"

She suddenly stopped and this name escaped her lips: *José—Joseph!*

Nevertheless, this was one of the vexations of this girl: she was angry because she had acted rightly. Others suffer remorse for their ill deeds, but she suffered for her virtue. She often thought of the Duc de Rosas, as her mother Eve must have thought of Paradise lost. She would have stirred, astonished, conquered, crushed Paris, if she had been the mistress of Rosas.

"What then! Whose fault was it? How foolish of one not to dare everything!"

Now see how suddenly and unexpectedly, just as an adversary might offer an opportunity for revenge, chance, at the turning-point of her life, had brought back to Paris this José whom she had never forgotten, and who perhaps remembered her, and by whom she would be recognized most assuredly, in any case. It was an unhoped, unlooked-for opportunity that restored Marianne's faith in herself, superstitious as she was, like all successful gamblers.

She had fallen, but how she could raise herself by the arms of the duke! One must be determined.

Guy and Sabine were met on the way, like two helpers. She profited by this circumstance, using the one to reach the other and to gain Rosas from the latter. She bore a grudge, nevertheless, against Guy de Lissac, the insolent and silly fellow who had formerly left her. Bah! before taking vengeance on him, it was most important to make use of him, and, after all, revenge is so wearisome and useless.

Now Kayser's niece, Guy's mistress, a woman who had given herself or who had been taken, who had sold herself or who had been purchased, a young girl who remained so in features, gracefulness and

the virgin charms that clothed her courtesan's body—her smile a virgin's, her glance full of frolic—Marianne was now within a few feet of him whom she expected, wishing for him as a seducer desires a woman.

"If he has loved me one moment, one single moment, Rosas will love me," she thought.

The salon was stiflingly hot, but Marianne was determined to keep herself in the first row, to be directly under the eye of the duke.

She felt the waves of over-heated air rise to her temples, and at times she feared that she would faint, half-stifled as she was and unaccustomed now to attend soirées. She remained, however, looking anxiously toward the door, watching for the appearance of the traveller and wondering when the pale face of the Spaniard would show itself.

At a short distance from her there was a young woman of twenty-three or twenty-four, courted like a queen and somewhat confused by the many questions addressed to her; robed in a white gown, she was extremely pretty, fair, and wore natural roses in her ash-colored hair, her eyes had a wondering expression, her cheeks were flushed, and in her amiable, gracious manner, she disclosed a touch of provincialism, modesty and hesitation—Marianne heard Madame Gerson say to her neighbors:

"It is the minister's wife."

"Madame Vaudrey?"

"Yes! Very charming, isn't she?"

"Ravishingly pretty! Fresh-looking!"

Then in lowered tone:

"Too fresh!"

"Rather provincial!"

And one voice replied, in an ironical, apologetic tone:

"Bless me, my dear, nothing dashing! Hair and complexion peculiarly her own! So much the better."

Notwithstanding the low tone of this conversation, Marianne heard it all. One by one, every one looked at this young woman who borrowed her golden tints from the rising sun. She bore the popular name of the new minister. She entered into prominence with him, accepting gracefully and unaffectedly the weight of his fame. Her timid, almost restless, uncertain smile, seemed to crave from the other women pardon for her own success, and there, surrounded by a group of men seated near the window, were two persons for whom chairs had just been placed, one of whom was a young, happy man, who exhaled an atmosphere of joy, and looked from time to time toward Adrienne and Marianne as if to see if the young wife were annoyed.

"Where is Monsieur Vaudrey then?" Marianne asked Madame Gerson.

"Why, he is just opposite to you! There on your right, beside Monsieur Collard, and he is devouring you with his glances."

"Ah, bah!" said Marianne with an indifferent smile.

And she looked in her turn.

She had, in fact, already noticed this very elegant man who had been watching her for some time.

But how could she know that he was Monsieur Vaudrey? He was delightful, moreover, sprightly in manner and of keen intelligence. A few moments before, she had heard him, as she passed by him under Sabine's guidance, utter some flattering remarks which had charmed her and made her smile.

Ah! that was Vaudrey?

She had often heard him spoken of. She had read of his speeches. She had even frequently seen his photograph in the stationers' windows.

The determined air of this young man, whom she knew to be eloquent, had pleased her. She ought then to have recognized him. He was exactly as his photographs represented him.

Of all the glances bestowed on the minister, Marianne's especially attracted Sulpice. A moment previously he had felt a singular charm at the appearance of this woman, threading her way directly between the rows of men by whom she was so crowded as to be in danger of having her garments pulled from her body. In his love of definitions and analyses, Vaudrey had never pictured the Parisian woman otherwise, with her piquant and instantaneous seductiveness, as penetrating as a subtle essence.

Marianne, smiling restlessly, looked at him and allowed him to look at her.

Her cheeks, which were extremely pale, suddenly became flushed as if their color were heightened by some feverish attack, when, amid the stir caused by the curiosity of the guests, and a greeting manifested by the shuffling of feet and the murmuring of voices, Monsieur de Rosas appeared; his air was somewhat embarrassed, he offered his arm to Madame Marsy, who conducted him to the narrow stage as if to present him.

"At last! ah! it is he!"

"It is really the Duc de Rosas, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, it is he!"

"He is charming!"

The name of Rosas, although only repeated in an undertone by the lips of these women, rung in Marianne's ears, sounding like a quickstep played on a clarion. It seemed to her that a decisive moment in her life was announced fantastically in those utterances. Even now, while burning with the very fever of her eagerness, she felt the gambler's superstition. As soon as she saw José, she said to herself at once that if he saw her and recognized her first glance, then he had not forgotten her and she could hope for everything. Everything! "Men happily forget less quickly than women," she thought. "Through egotism, or from regret, some abandon themselves to their reminiscences with complacency, like this Guy, and recognize on our countenances the lines of their own youth. Others, perhaps, mourn over the lost opportunity, and the duke is sentimental enough to be of that class."

She thought that Rosas must look at her, yes, at any cost; and with body inclined, her chin resting on her gloved right hand, while the other handled her fan with the skill peculiar to the Spanish women, she darted at the duke a rapid glance, a glance burning with desire and in which she expressed her whole will. The human eye has within it all the power of attraction possessed by a magnetic needle. As if he had experienced the actual effect of that glance fixed on his countenance, the duke raised his head after a polite but somewhat curtly elegant bow, to look at the audience of lovely women whom Sabine had gathered to greet him, and, as if only Marianne had been present, he at once saw the motionless young woman silently contemplating him.

Rosas, as he appeared within the frame formed by the red curtains, his thin, regular and ruddy face looking pale against the white of his cravat and the bosom of his shirt, looked like a portrait of a Castilian of the time of Philip II., clothed in modern costume, his fashionable black clothes relieved only by a touch of vermilion, a red rosette. But however fashionable the cut of his clothes might be, on this man with the vague blue eyes, and looking contemplative and sad with his upturned moustache, the black coat assumed the appearance of a *doublet* of old, on which the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor looked like a diminutive cross of Calatrava upon a velvet cloak.

In fixing, to some extent, his wandering glance on the fervent look of Marianne, this melancholy Spanish face was instinctively lighted up with a fleeting smile that immediately passed and was followed by a slight, respectful bow, quite sufficient, however, to surround the young woman with an atmosphere that seemed to glow.

"He has recognized me! at once! come!—I am not forgotten."

As in the glorious moment of victory, her bloodless face was overspread with a dazzling expression of joy. Boldly raising her head and inviting his glances as she had braved them, she listened, with glowing eyes, drinking each word that flowed from his lips, her nostrils distended as if to scent the approach of an Oriental perfume, to the recital of the narrative commenced by the duke in a measured, cajoling tone, which grew animated and louder.

Everybody listened to Rosas. Only the slight fluttering of fans was heard like a beating of wings. Without changing the tone of his discourse, and recounting his travels to his audience as if he were addressing only Marianne, he told in a voice more Italian than Spanish, in musical, non-guttural cadences, of his experiences on the borders of the Nile, of the weariness of the caravans, of the nights passed under star-strewn skies, of the songs of the camel-driver, slowly intoned like prayers, of the gloom of solitary wastes and of the poetic associations of the ruins slumbering amid the red sands of the desert. At times he recited a translation of an Arabian song or remarked in passing, on some mournful ballad, refined as a Sennett, deep as the infinite, in which the eternal words of love, tender and affecting in all languages, assumed an intensely poetic character under the influence of their Semitic nature; songs in which passers-by, strangers, lovers dead for centuries, who had strewed, as it were, their joys and their sobs over the sands of the desert, told the color of the hair and of the eyes of their dear ones, pleaded with their betrothed dead for the alms of love, and promised to spectres of women rose-colored garments and flowers that time would never wither.

These songs of Arabs dying for Nazarenes, of sons of Mohammed sacrificing themselves for the daughters of Aïssa were so translated by this Castilian that the exquisite charm of the original, filtered through his rendering, lost none,—even in French,—of the special characteristics of his own nation, a half-daughter of the Orient. And inevitably, with its melancholy repetition, the poetry he spoke of dwelt on wounded, suffering love, on the anguish of timid hearts, and the sobs of unknown despairing Arabs, buried for ages under the sands of the desert.

The duke seemed to take pleasure in dwelling on these poetic quotations rather than on the reminiscences of his travels. His individuality, his own impressions vanished before this passionate legacy bequeathed by one human race to another. Marianne trembled, believing that she could see even in Rosas's thoughts a desire to speak especially for her and to her. Was it not thus that he spoke in his own house in the presence of Lissac, squatting on his divan like an Arab story-teller?

She felt her youth renewed by the memory of all those past years. She thought herself back once more in the studio on Rue de Laval. Sabine Marsy's salon disappeared, Rosas was whispering in her ear, looking at her, and allowing the love that he felt to be perceived, in spite of Guy.

Guy! who was Guy? Marianne troubled herself about no one but De Rosas. Only the duke existed now.

Had Guy been blended with her life but for a single moment? She embraced Rosas with her burning glance.

She no longer saw Sulpice, but he never looked away from Mademoiselle Kayser. He thought her a most charming woman. A magnetic fluid, as it were, flowed from her to this man, and he, with wandering mind, did not hear one word of Monsieur de Rosas's narrative, but concentrated his thoughts upon that pretty, enticing woman, whom he could not refrain from comparing with his wife, sitting so near her at this moment.

Adrienne was very pretty, her beauty was more regular than the other's. Her smooth, blond hair was in contrast with the tumbled, auburn locks of Marianne, and yet, extraordinary as it was—Adrienne had never seemed to be so cold as on that evening, as she sat there motionless, watching, while a timid habitual smile played over her lips.

Sulpice suffered somewhat in consequence of this awkwardness on Adrienne's part, contrasted as it was with the clever freedom of manner, graceful attitude, and flowing outlines of that disturbing neighbor, with her dull white countenance, half-closed mouth, strange curl of her lips, which seemed turned up as if in challenge. She was decidedly a Parisian, with all her intoxicating charms, that alluring, if vicious attraction that flows from the eyes of even modest girls. Some words spoken by Monsieur de Rosas reaching Vaudrey's ears—a description of the somewhat fantastical preparation of poison by the Indians, explained by the duke by way of parenthesis—suggested to Sulpice that the most subtle, the gentlest and most certainly deadly poison was, after all, the filtering of a woman's glance through the very flesh of a man, and he thirsted for that longed-for poison, intoxicating and delicious—

He was anxious for the duke to finish his remarks. What interest had he in all those travels, those Arabic translations, that Oriental poetry, or that poison from America? He was seized with the desire to know what such a charming creature as Marianne thought. Ah! what a pretty girl! He had already inquired her name; he happened to know Uncle Kayser; the painter had formerly sent him a printed memoir *On the Method of Moralizing Art through the Mind*.

The minister experienced on hearing Rosas the feeling of enervation that attacked him in the Chamber when, near the dinner-hour, an orator became too long-winded in his speech. He was unable to resist remarking in a whisper to the President of the Council, who was near him:

"Suppose we call for the clôture?"

Monsieur Collard in a diplomatic way expressed his approval of Rosas by a look that at the same time rebuked his colleague Vaudrey for his lack of sufficient gravity.

The duke did not tire any one except Sulpice. He was listened to with delight. The sentimental exterior of this man concealed a jester's nature, and the sober appearance of this Castilian wore all the characteristics of a polished lounger. The least smile that animated his passive countenance became at once attractive. Marianne thought him most delightful, or rather, she found him just what she had formerly believed him to be, a refined, delicate and very simple man in spite of his graciously haughty manner. When he concluded, the room echoed with the thunder of the applause. Even in the adjoining rooms the people applauded, for silence had been secured so as to hear his remarks. With a wave of his gloved hand, Rosas seemed to disclaim that his discourse merited the applause, and he received the greetings as a man of the world receives a salutation, not as a tenor acknowledging the homage paid to him. He strove to make his way through the group of young men who were stationed behind him.

"At last!" said Vaudrey, in a half-whisper.

It was the moment for which he had been waiting. He would be able now to address himself to Mademoiselle Kayser!

He hastened to offer his arm to Marianne.

Madame Marsy, eagerly and quickly, had already appropriated Monsieur de Rosas, who was moreover surrounded and escorted by a crowd who congratulated him noisily. Except for that, Marianne would have gone direct to him in obedience to her desires.

Vaudrey's arm, however, was not to be despised. The new minister was the leading figure in the assembly. She looked at Sulpice full in the face as if to inquire the cause of his eagerness in placing himself at her side, and observing that this somewhat mocking interrogation disconcerted him, she smiled at him graciously.

She passed on smiling, amid the double row of guests who bowed as she passed. She suddenly felt a sort of bewilderment, it seemed to her that all these salutations were for her benefit. She believed herself created for adoration. Inwardly she felt well-disposed towards Sulpice now, because he had so gallantly chosen and distinguished her among all these women.

After all, she would easily find Rosas again. And who knows? It would perhaps be better that the duke should seek her. Meanwhile, she crossed the salons, leaning on the arm of the minister. It was a kind of triumph.

Good-naturedly and politely, but without pride, the minister received all these attentions, becoming as they were to him in his official capacity, and as he moved on he uttered from time to time some commonplace compliment to Marianne, reserving his more intimate remarks for the immediate future.

Before the buffet, brilliant with light and the gleaming of crystal, the golden-tinted champagne sparkling in the goblets, the ruddy tone of the punch, the many fruits, the bright-colored *granite* and the ices, Vaudrey stopped, releasing the arm of the young girl but remaining beside her and passing her the sherbet which a lackey handed him over the piled-up plates.

Groups were always encircling him; searching, half-anxious glances greeted his. An eager hunt after smiles and greetings accompanied the hunt for *tutti frutti*. But the minister confined his attentions to Marianne, chafing under the eagerness of his desires, though bearing them with good grace, as if he were really the lover of the pretty girl.

Marianne stood stirring the sherbet with the point of a silver-plated spoon, examining this statesman, as seductive as a fashionable man, with that womanly curiosity that divines a silent declaration. A gold weigher does not balance more keenly in his scales an unfamiliar coin than a woman estimates and gauges *the value* of a stranger.

Marianne readily understood that she had fascinated Vaudrey. This Vaudrey! Notwithstanding that he possessed a charming wife, he still permitted himself to recognize beauty in other women, and to tell them so, for he so informed Marianne! He declared it by his smile, his sparkling eyes, and the protecting bearing that he instinctively manifested in the presence of this creature who glanced at him with perfect composure.

In the confusion attending the attack on the buffet and in the presence of the crowd that formed a half-circle round the minister, it was not possible for him to commit himself too much; and the conversation, half-drowned by the noise of voices, was carried on by fits and starts; but in order to make themselves understood, Vaudrey and Marianne drew nearer each other and found themselves occasionally almost pressed against each other, so that the light breath of this woman and the scent of new-mown hay that she exhaled, wafted over Sulpice's face. He looked at her so admiringly that it was noticeable. She was laced in a light blue satin gown that showed her rosy arms to the elbows, and her shoulders gleamed with a rosy tint that suggested the rays of a winter sun lighting up the pure snow. A singular animation, half-feverish, beamed in her small, piercing, restless eyes, and her delicate ears with their well-marked rims were quite red. The light that fell from the wax candles imparted to her hair a Titian red tint as if she had bound her locks with henna during the night. She was visibly assured of her power and smiled with a strange and provoking air.

Vaudrey felt really much disturbed, he was attracted and half-angered by this pretty girl with dilating nostrils who calmly swallowed her glass of sherbet. He thought her at once exquisite and lovely, doubly charming with her Parisian grace and in her ball costume, her bare flesh as lustrous as mother-of-pearl under the brilliant light.

Her corsage was ornamented on the left side by an embroidered black butterfly, with outstretched wings of a brownish, brilliant tint, and Vaudrey, with a smile, asked her, without quite understanding what he said, if it were an emblematic crest.

She smiled.

"Precisely," she replied. "What I wear in my corsage I have in my mind. Black butterflies—or *blue devils*, as you choose."

"You are not exceptional," said Sulpice. "All women are such."

"All women in your opinion then, are a little—what is it called? a little out of the perpendicular—or to speak more to the point, a little queer, Monsieur le Ministre?"

The minister smiled in his turn, and looked at Marianne, whose eyes, seen between the blinking lids, gleamed as the electric eyes of a cat shine between its long lashes.

"No," he said, "no, but I blame them somewhat for loving the blue only in the butterflies of which you speak, the *blue devils* that penetrate their brain! They are born for blue, however, for that which the provincial poets style 'the azure', and they shun it as if blue were detestable. *Blue!* Nonsense! Good for men, those simpletons, who in the present age, are the only partisans of *blue* in passion and in life."

Whether he desired it or not, he had drawn still closer to this creature who studied him like a strategist while he fawned on her with his glances, losing himself in that "blue" of which he spoke with a certain elegance, in which he desired to express mockery, but which was nevertheless sincere. In the same jesting tone, pointing to the light blue of her gown, she said:

"You see, your Excellency, that all women do not dislike blue."

"If it is fashionable, *parbleu!* And if it becomes their beauty as well as this stuff of yours, they would adore it, most assuredly."

"They love it otherwise, too—In passion and in life. That depends on the women—and on men," she added, showing her white teeth while smiling graciously.

She dropped her spoon in the saucer and handed the sherbet to a servant. With an involuntary movement—or perhaps, after all, it was a shrewdly calculated one—she almost grazed Sulpice's cheek and lips when she extended her round and firm arm, and Sulpice, who was somewhat bewildered, was severely tempted, like some collegian, to kiss it in passage.

He closed his eyes and a moment after, on reopening them, the disturbing element having passed, he

saw Marianne before him with her fan in her hand, and as if the image of which he spoke only now recurred to his memory, he said:

"Mademoiselle, it seems to me that in this very costume and as charming as you are at this moment, I have seen your portrait at the Salon; is it not so?"

"Yes," she said. "It is the very best painting that my uncle has produced."

"I thought it excellent before seeing you," said Sulpice, "but now—"

She did not feel satisfied with the smile that accompanied the compliment. She wished to hear the entire phrase.

"Now—?" said she, as a most seductive smile played on her lips.

"Now, I find it inferior to the original!"

"One always says so, your Excellency, except perhaps to the artist; but I was greatly afraid that you would not think me so, arrayed in this—this famous blue—this sky-blue that you love so much."

"And that I love a hundred times more from this evening forward," said he, in a changed and genuinely affected tone.

She did not reply, but looked at him full in the face as if to inform him that she understood him. He was quite pale.

"Would you not like to be one of the bright ornaments of my salon, as you are of that of Madame Marsy?" said he, in a whisper.

"With the greatest happiness, your Excellency."

What Sulpice said was not heard by the others; but Marianne felt that she was observed, envied already, and manifested her complete satisfaction with a toss of her head. In this atmosphere of flattery, oppressive as with the heavy odor of incense, she experienced a sensation of omnipotence, the intoxication of that power with which Vaudrey was invested, whose envied reflection was cast on her by that simple aside spoken in the midst of the crowd.

She was delighted and exceedingly proud. She almost forgot that her visit had been made on Rosas's account.

Vaudrey was about to add something, when Madame Marsy in passing to greet her guests, noticed Marianne and grasping her hand:

"I beg your pardon, your Excellency," she said, "but I must take her away from you. I have been asked for her."

"By whom?" said Vaudrey.

"Monsieur de Rosas!"

Vaudrey looked at Marianne. He observed distinctly a flash of joy illuminate her pale face and he felt a sudden and singular discontent, amounting almost to physical anguish. And why, great heavens?

Marianne smiled a salutation; he half-bowed and watched her as she went away, with a sort of angry regret, as if he had something further to say to this woman who was almost a stranger to him, and who, guided by Sabine, now disappeared amid the crowd of black coats and bright toilets. And then, almost immediately and suddenly, he was surrounded and besieged by his colleagues of the Chamber, men either indifferent or seeking favors, who only awaited the conclusion of the conversation with Mademoiselle Kayser, which they would certainly have precipitated, except for the fear of acting indiscreetly, in order to precipitate themselves on him. Amid all those unknown persons who approached him, Vaudrey sought a friend as he felt himself lost and taken by assault by this rabble.

The sight of the face of a friend, older than himself, a spare man with a white beard very carefully trimmed, caused him a feeling of pleasure, and he joyfully exclaimed:

"Eh! *pardieu!* why, here is Ramel!"

He immediately extended both hands in warm greeting to this man of sixty years, wearing a white cravat twisted round his neck, like a neckerchief in the old-fashioned style, and whose black waistcoat with its standing collar of ancient pattern was conspicuous amid the open waistcoats of the fashionably-dressed young men who had been very eagerly surrounding the minister for the last few moments.

"Good day, Ramel!—How delighted I am to see you!"—

"And I also," said Ramel in a friendly and affectionate tone, while his face, that seemed severe, but was only good-natured and masculine, suddenly beamed. "It is not a little on your account that I came here."

"Really?"

"Really. I was anxious to shake hands with you. It is so long since I saw you. How much has happened since then!"

"Ah! Ramel, who the devil would have said that I should be minister when I took you my first article

for the *Nation Française*!" said Vaudrey. "Bah! who is not a minister?" said Ramel. "You are. Remember what Napoléon said to Bourrienne as he entered the Tuileries: 'Here we are, Bourrienne! now we must stay here!'"

"That is exactly what Granet said to me when he told me of the new combination."

"Granet expressed in that more of an after-thought than your old Ramel."

"My best friend," said Sulpice with emotion, grasping this man's hands in his.

"It is so much more meritorious on your part to tell me that," said Ramel, "seeing that now you do not lack friendships."

"You are still a pessimist, Ramel?"

"I—A wild optimist, seeing that I believe everything and everybody! But I must necessarily believe in the stupidity of my fellows, and upon this point I am hardly mistaken."

"But what brings you to Madame Marsy's, you who are a perfect savage?"

"Tamed!—Because, I repeat to you, I knew that you were coming and that Monsieur de Rosas was to speak on the subject of savages, and these please me. If I had been rich or if I only had enough to live on, I should have passed my life in travelling. And in the end, I shall have lived between Montmartre and Batignolles: a tortoise dreaming that he is a swallow—"

"Ramel, my dear fellow," said the minister, "would you wish me to give you a mission where you could go and study whatever seemed good to you?"

"With my rheumatism? Thanks, your Excellency!" said Ramel, smiling. "No, I am too old, and never having asked any one for anything, I am not going to begin at my age."

"You do not ask, it is offered you."

"Well, I have no desire for that. I am at the hour of the *far niente* that precedes the final slumber. It is a pleasant condition. One has seen so many things and persons that one has no further desires."

"The fact is," said the minister, "that if all the people you have obligated in your life had solicited an invitation from Madame Marsy, these salons would not be large enough to contain them."

"Bah! they have all forgotten as I have, myself," said Ramel, with a shake of his head and smiling pleasantly.

Vaudrey felt intense pleasure in meeting, in the midst of this crowd of indifferent or admiring persons, the man who had formerly seen him arrive in Paris, and with whom he had corresponded from the heart of his province, as with a kinsman. There was, in fact, between them, a relationship of mind and soul that united this veteran of the press with this young statesman.

The ideal sought was the same, but the temperaments were different. Ramel, although he had known them, had for a long time avoided those excitements of struggle and power that inflamed Vaudrey's blood.

"It was a glorious day when my pulse became regulated," he said. "Experience brought me the needed tonic."

Denis Ramel was a wise man. He took life as he found it, without enthusiasm as without bitterness. He was not wealthy. More than sixty years old, he found himself, after a life of hard, rough and continuous struggle, as badly off as when he started out on his career, full of burning hopes. He had passed his life honorably as a journalist—a journalist of the good old times, of the school of thought, not of news-tellers,—he had loyally and conscientiously exercised a profession in which he took pleasure; he had read much, written much, consumed much midnight oil, touched upon everything; put his fingers into every kind of pie without soiling them, and after having valiantly turned the heavy millstone of daily labor incessantly renewed for forty years, he had reached the end of his journey, the brink of the grave, almost penniless, after having skirted Fortune and seen Opportunity float toward him her perfumed and intoxicating locks more than a hundred times. Bent, weary, almost forgotten, and unknown and misunderstood by the new generation, that styled this enthusiasm, more eager, moreover, than that of juvenile faith, "old"—he saw the newcomers rise as he might have beheld the descent of La Courtille.

"It amuses me."

Ramel had, in the course of his career as a publicist, as a dealer in fame, assisted without taking part therein, in the formation of syndicates, allotments of shares and financial intrigues; and putting his shoulder to the wheel of enterprises that appeared to him to be solid, while seeking to strike out those which appeared to be doubtful, he had created millionaires without asking a cent from them, just as he had made ministers without accepting even a thread of ribbon at their hands.

This infatuating craft of a maker of men pleased him. All those pioneers in the great human comedy, he had seen on their entrance, hesitating and crying to him for assistance. This statesman, swelling out with his importance in the tribune, had received the benefit of his correction of his earlier harangues. He had encouraged, during his competition for the Prix de Rome, this member of the Institute who to-day represented national art at the Villa Médicis; he had seen this composer, now a millionaire, beg for a private rehearsal as he might ask alms, and slip into one's hands concert tickets

for the Herz hall. He was the first to point out the verses of the poet who now wore *l'habit vert*. He had first heralded the fame of the actor now in vogue, of the tenor who to-day had his villas at Nice, yes, Ramel was the first to say: "He is one of the chosen few!"

Old, weary and knowing, very gentle and refined in his banter, and refusing to be blinded or irritated by the trickeries of destiny, Denis Ramel, when asked why, at his age and with his talents, he was neither a deputy, nor a millionaire, nor a member of the Institute, but only a Warwick living like a poor devil, smiled and said, with the tone of a man who has probed to the bottom the affairs of life:

"Bah! what is the use? All that is not so very desirable. Ministers, academicians, millionaires, prefects, men of power, I know all about them. I have made them all my life. The majority of those who strut about at this very time, well! well! it is I who made them!"

And, like a philosopher allowing the rabble to pass him, who might have been their chief, but preferred to be their judge, he locked himself in his apartments with his books, his pictures, his engravings, his little collection slowly gathered year by year, article by article, smoking his pipe tranquilly, and at times reviewing the pages of his life, just as he might have fingered the leaves of a portfolio of engravings, thinking when he chanced to meet some notable person of the day who shunned him or merely saluted him curtly and stiffly:

"You were not so proud when you came to ask me to certify your pay-slip for the cashier of the journal."

Ramel had always greatly esteemed Sulpice Vaudrey. This man seemed to him to be more refined and less forgetful than others. Vaudrey had never "posed." As a minister, he recalled with deep emotion the period of his struggles. Ramel, the former manager of the *Nation Française*, was one of the objects of his affection and admiration. He would have been delighted to snatch this man from his seclusion and place him in the first rank, to make this sexagenarian who had created and moulded so many others, noteworthy by a sudden stroke.

Amid the tumultuous throng, and feeling overjoyed to find once more one whom he could trust, to whom he could abandon himself entirely, he repeated to him in all sincerity:

"Come, Ramel! Would you consent to be my secretary general?"

"No! your Excellency," Ramel answered, as a kindly smile played beneath his white moustaches.

"To oblige me?—To help me?"

"No—Why, I am an egotist, my dear Vaudrey. Truly, that would make me too jealous. Take Navarrot," he added, as he pointed to a fashionable man, elegantly cravatted, carrying his head high, who had just greeted Vaudrey, using the same phrase eight times: "My dear minister—your Excellency—my minister—"

"Navarrot?"

"He appears to be very much attached to you!"

"You are very wicked, Ramel. He holds to the office and not to the man. He is not the friend of the minister, but of ministers. He is one of the ordinary touters of the ministry. He applauds everything that their Excellencies choose to say."

"Oh! I know those touters," said the old journalist. "When a minister is in power, they cheer him to the echo; when he is down, they belabor him."

Vaudrey looked at him and laughingly said: "Begone, journalist!"

"But at any rate,"—and here he extended his hand to Ramel,—"you will see me this evening?"

"Certainly."

"And you still live at—?"

"Rue Boursault, Boulevard des Batignolles."

"Till then, my dear Ramel! If occasion require, you will not refuse to give me your advice?"

"Nor my devotion. But without office, remember without office," said Ramel, still smiling.

Vaudrey took great delight in chatting with his old friend, but for a moment he had been seized with an eager desire to find amid the increasing crowd that thronged the salons, the pretty girl who had appeared to him like a statue of Desire, whetted desire, but even in her charms somewhat unwholesome, yet disturbing and appetizing.

He had come to Sabine Marsy's only by chance and as if to display in public the joy of his triumph, just as a newly decorated man willingly accepts invitations in order to show off his new ribbon, but he now felt happy for having done so. He had promised himself only to put himself in evidence and then disappear with Adrienne to the enjoyment of their usual chats, to taste that intimacy that was so dear to him, but which, since his establishment on Place Beauvau, had vanished.

He habitually disliked such receptions as that in which he now took part, those soirées as fatiguing as those crowds where one packs six hundred persons in salons capable of holding only sixty: commonplace receptions, where the master of the house is as happy when he refuses invitations as a

theatre-manager when his play is the rage; where one is stifled, crushed, and where one can only reach the salon after a pugilistic encounter, and where the capture of a glass of syrup entails an assault, and the securing of an overcoat demands a battle. He held in horror those salons where there is no conversation, where no one is acquainted, where, because of the hubbub of the crowd or the stifling silence attending a concert, one cannot exchange either ideas or phrases, not even a furtive handshake, because of the packing and crushing of the guests. It was a miracle that he had just been able to exchange a few words with Mademoiselle Kayser and Ramel. The vulgarity of the place had at once impressed him,—the more so because he was the object of attraction for all those crowded faces.

All that gathering of insignificant, grave and pretentious young men, who, while they crowded, made their progress in the ranks of the sub-prefects, councillors of prefectures, picking up nominations under the feet of the influential guests as they would cigar stumps, disgusted him; men of twenty years, born, as it were, with white cravats, pretentious and pensive, creatures of office and not of work, haunting the Chambers and the antechambers, mere collectors of ideas, repeaters of serious commonplaces, salon democrats who would not offer their ungloved hand to a workman on the street; staff-majors ambitious of honors and not of devotion, whom he felt crowding around him, with smiles on their lips and applications in their pockets. How he preferred the quiet pleasure of reading at the fireside, a chat with a friend, or listening to one of Beethoven's sonatas, or a selection from Mendelssohn played by Adrienne, whose companionship made the unmarked flight of the hours pass more sweetly.

It was for that that he was created. At least he thought so and believed it. And now this salon that he had simply desired to traverse, at once seemed altogether delightful to him. And all this was due to his meeting a divine creature in the midst of this crowd. He was eager to find Marianne, to see her again. She aroused his curiosity as some enigma might.

What, then, was this woman, was she virtuous or of questionable status? Ah! she was a woman, or rather ten women in one, at the very least! A woman from head to foot! A woman to her finger tips, a refined, Parisian woman, perverse even in her virginity, and a virgin perhaps in her perversity. A problem in fair flesh.

As Vaudrey hurriedly left the buffet, every one made way for him, and he crossed the salons, eagerly looking out for Marianne. As he passed along, he saw Guy de Lissac sitting on a chair upholstered in garnet satin, his right hand resting on the gilded back and chatting with Adrienne who was fanning herself leisurely. On noticing Sulpice, the young woman smiled at him even at a distance, the happy smile of a loving woman, and she embraced him with a pure glance, asking a question without uttering a word, knowing well that he habitually left in great haste.

"Do you wish to return?" was the meaning of her questioning glance.

He passed before her, replying with a smile, but without appearing to have understood her, and disappeared in another salon, while Lissac said to Adrienne:

"What about the ministry, madame?"

"Oh! don't speak to me of it!—it frightens me. In those rooms, it seems to me that I am not at home. Do you know just what I feel? I fancy myself travelling, never, however, leaving the house. Ministers certainly should be bachelors. Men have all the honor, but their wives endure all the weariness."

"There must, however, be at the bottom of this weariness, some pleasure, since they so bitterly regret to take leave of it."

"Ah! *Dieu!*" said Adrienne. "Already I believe that I should regret nothing. No, I assure you, nothing whatever."

She, too, might have desired,—as Vaudrey did formerly—to leave the soirée, to be with her husband again, and she thought that Sulpice found it necessary to remain longer, since he had not definitely decided on going away.

The new salon that he entered, communicated with a smaller, circular one, hung with Japanese silk draperies, and lighted by a Venetian chandelier that cast a subdued light over the divans upon which some of the guests sat chatting. Sulpice immediately divined, as if by instinct, that Marianne was there. He went straight in that direction, and as he entered the doorway, through the opening framed by two pale blue portières, he saw in front of him, sitting side by side, the pretty girl and the Duc de Rosas to whom she had listened so attentively, almost devotedly, a little earlier; he recalled this now.

The light fell directly on Mademoiselle Kayser's shoulders and played over her fair hair. The duke was looking at her.

Vaudrey took but a single step forward.

He experienced an altogether curious and inexplicable sensation. This tête-à-tête displeased him.

At that moment, on half-turning round,—perhaps by chance—she perceived the minister and greeting him with a sweet smile, she rose and beckoned to him to approach her.

The sky-blue satin hangings, on which the light fell, seemed like a natural framework for the beautiful blonde creature.

"Your Excellency," she said, "permit me to introduce my friend, the Duc de Rosas, he is too accomplished not to appreciate eloquence and he entertains the greatest admiration for you."

Rosas had risen in his turn, and greeted the minister with a very peculiar half-inclination, not as a suitor in the presence of a powerful man, but as a nobleman greeting a man of talent.

Vaudrey sought to discover an agreeable word in the remarks of this man but he failed to do so. He had, nevertheless, just before applauded Rosas's remarks, either out of condescension or from politeness. But it seemed to him that here the duke was no longer the same man. He gave him the impression of an intruder who had thrust himself in the way that led to some possible opportunity. He nevertheless concealed all trace of the ill-humor that he himself could not define or explain, and ended by uttering a commonplace phrase in praise of the duke, but which really meant nothing.

As he was about to move away, Marianne detained him by a gesture:

"Well, your Excellency," she remarked, with a charming play of her lips as she smiled, "you see,"—and she pointed to the blue draperies of the little salon, as dainty as a boudoir—"you see that there are some women who like blue."

"Yes, Madame Marsy!—" Vaudrey answered, with an entirely misplaced irony that naturally occurred to him, as a reproach.

"So do I," said Marianne. "We have only chatted together five minutes, but I have found that time enough to discover that you and I have many tastes in common. I am greatly flattered thereby."

"And I am very happy," replied Vaudrey, who was disturbed by her direct glances that pierced him like a blade.

She had resumed her place on the divan, but Vaudrey had already forgiven her tête-à-tête with Rosas —and in truth, what had he to forgive?—This burning glance had effaced everything. He bore it away like a bright ray and still shuddered at the sensation he experienced.

He was in a hurry to leave. He now felt a sudden attack of nervousness. He was at the same moment charmed and bored. Again he resumed—amid the throng that made way for him, humbly performing its duty as a crowd—his rôle of minister, raising his head, and greeting with his official smile, but, at the bottom of his heart, really consumed by an entirely different thought. His brain was full of blue, of floating clouds, and he still heard Marianne's voice ringing in his ears with an insinuating tone, whispering: "We have many tastes in common," together with all kinds of mutual understandings which, as it were, burned like a fire in his heart.

He saw Adrienne still seated in the same place and smiling sweetly at him,—a smile of ardent devotion, but which seemed to him to be lukewarm. He leaned toward her, reached his hands out and said to De Lissac, hurriedly, as he grasped his hand: "We meet later, do we not, Guy?" Then he disappeared in the antechamber, while the servants hurried toward Madame Vaudrey, bearing her cloak, and as Vaudrey put on his overcoat, a voice called out:

"His Excellency's carriage."

"I am exhausted," said Adrienne, when she had taken her place in the carriage. "What about yourself?"

"I? not at all! I am not at all tired. It was very entertaining! One must show one's self now—"

"I know that very well," the young wife replied.

Like a child who is anxious to go to sleep, she gently rested her hood-covered head on Sulpice's shoulder. Her tiny hands sought her husband's hand, to press it beneath her cloak, as warm as a nest; and after she had closed her eyes, overcome as she was by weariness, her breathing seemed to become gradually almost as regular as in slumber, and Sulpice Vaudrey recalled once more, beneath the light of the chandeliers, that pretty blonde, with her half-bare arms and shoulders, and strange eyes, who moistened her dry lips and smiled as she swallowed her sherbet.

VI

TOC

In the pretty little Japanese salon, with its panels of sky-blue satin, framed with gilded bamboo, Marianne was seated on the divan, half-facing the duke as if to penetrate his inward thoughts, and she seemed to the Castilian as she did to Vaudrey, to be a most charming creature amid all those surroundings that might have been made expressly to match her fair beauty. Moreover, with Rosas, her freedom of manner was entirely different from that which she manifested to Sulpice, and she embraced the young man with a passionate, fervent glance.

José felt himself grow pale in the presence of this exquisite creature whose image, treasured in the depths of his heart, he had borne with him wherever his fancy had led him to travel. He gazed at her as a man looks at a woman whom he has long desired, but whom some urgent necessity has kept out of his way, and who by chance is suddenly brought near him, fate putting within our reach the dream —

She was prettier than ever, graceful and blooming, "more matured," like a fruit whose color is more tempting to the appetite. Sabine had just before very naturally brought these two together and instinctively, as if they had to exchange many confidences, they had immediately sought a retired spot away from that crowd and were seated there in that salon where Vaudrey, already half-jealous, guessed that Marianne would be.

Yes, indeed, she had many confidences to impart to that man who had suddenly entered the sphere of her life and had suddenly disappeared, remaining during several years as if dead to her. It seemed to her as they sat face to face that this flight of wasted time had made her still younger, and Rosas, notwithstanding his cold demeanor, allowed his former passion to be divined: the women one loves unmask one's secret before a man can himself explain what he feels.

She felt a profound, sincere joy. She recalled a similar conversation with José in his studio, that Oriental corner hidden in the Rue de Laval. The Japanese satin enhanced the illusion.

"Do you know that it seems to me," she said, "that I have been dreaming, and that I am not a whit older?"

"You are not altered, in fact," said Rosas. "I am mistaken—"

"Yes, I know. I have grown lovelier. That is a compliment that I am used to—Lissac has told me that already, only the other morning."

She bit her lips almost imperceptibly, as if to blame herself for her imprudence, but had she mentioned Guy's name designedly, she could not have been better satisfied with the result. Monsieur de Rosas, usually very pale, became pallid, and a slight curl of his lip, although immediately suppressed, gave an upward turn to his reddish moustache.

"Ah!" he said, "You still see Guy."

"I!—I had not spoken a single word to him until I asked him to have an invitation sent me for this soirée, and then it was merely because I knew you would be here."

"Ah!" said José again, without adding a word.

Marianne was satisfied. She knew now that the duke still loved her, since the mention of Lissac's name had made him tremble. Well! she had shrewdly understood her Rosas.

"And what have you been doing, my dear duke, for such an age?" she said.

She looked at him as she had looked at Vaudrey, with her sweet and shrewd smile, which moved him profoundly, and her glance penetrated to the inmost depths of his being.

"You know the old saying: 'I have lived.' It is great folly, perhaps, but it is the truth."

"And I wager," boldly said Marianne, "that you have never thought of me."

"Of you?"

"Of me. Of that mad Marianne, who is the maddest creature of all those you have met in your travels from the North Pole to Cambodia, but who has by no means a wicked heart, although a sufficiently unhappy one, and that has never ceased to beat a little too rapidly at certain reminiscences which you do not recall, perhaps—who knows?"

"I remember everything," replied the duke in a grave voice.

Marianne looked at him and commenced to laugh.

"Oh! how you say that, *mon Dieu!* Do you remember I used to call you Don Carlos? Well, you have just reminded me of Philip II. 'I remember everything!' B-r-r! what a funereal tone. Our reminiscences are not, however, very dramatic."

"That depends on the good or ill effects that they cause," said Rosas very seriously.

"Ah! God forgive me if I have ever willingly done you the least harm, my dear Rosas. Give me your hand. I have always loved you dearly, my friend."

She drew him gently toward her, half bending her face under the cold glance of the young man:

"Look at me closely and see if I lie."

The duke actually endeavored to read the gray-blue eyes of Marianne; but so strange a flash darted from them, that he recoiled, withdrawing his hands from the pressure of those fingers.

"Come, come!" she said, "I see that my cat-like eyes still make you afraid. Are they, then, very dreadful?"

She changed their expression to one of sweetness, humility, timidity and winsomeness.

"After all, that is something to be proud of, my dear duke. It is very flattering to make a man tremble who has killed tigers as our sportsmen kill partridges."

"You know very well why I am still sufficiently a child to tremble before you, Marianne," murmured José. "At my age, it is folly; but I am as superstitious as gamblers—or sailors, those other gamblers, who stake their lives, and I have never met you without feeling that I was about to suffer."

"To suffer from what?"

"To suffer through you," said the duke. "Do you know that if I had never met you, it is probable that I should never have seen all those countries of which I spoke just now, and that I should have been married long ago, at Madrid or at Toledo?"

"And I prevented you?—"

Rosas interrupted Marianne, saying abruptly, and smiling almost sadly:

"Ah! my dear one, if you only knew—you have prevented many things."

"If I have prevented you from being unhappy, I am delighted. Besides, it is evident that you have never had a very determined inclination for marriage, seeing that you have preferred to trot around the world."

"Like Don Quixote, eh? Do you know, moreover, since we are talking of all these things, that you have saved me from dying in the corner like an abandoned dog?"

"I?" said Marianne.

"You or your songs, as you please. Yes, in Egypt I suffered from fever something like typhus. They left me for dead, as after a battle, in the most wretched and frightful of native villages. No doctors, who might, perhaps, have cured me, not a bed, not even a mattress. My servants, believing me past hope, abandoned me—or rather, for I prefer your Parisian word—cast me adrift—there is no other expression. There I was, stretched out on a heap of damp straw—in short, on a dunghill—"

"You, Rosas?"

"In all conscience, I correctly portrayed Job there; lean, with a three months' old beard, and with the death-rattle in my throat; in the open air—don't alarm yourself, the nights were warm. In the evening the fellah-women gathered round me, while I watched the sun that tinted their cheeks with bronze—there were some pretty ones among them, I have painted them in water-colors from memory—they poured out their insults upon me in guttural tones, which I unfortunately understood, as I am an Orientalist,"—he smiled—"and in addition to those insults they threw mud at me, a fetid mass of filth. The women were charming, although they took part in it. These people did not like the *roumi*, the shivering Christian. Besides, women do not like men who have fallen. They do not like feeble creatures.—"

"Bah!—and where were the hospitals, the Sisters of Charity?"

"Are you quite sure that the Sisters of Charity are women, my dear Marianne?—In a word, I swear that I asked only one thing, as I lay on that devilish, poisonous dunghill, and that was, to end the matter in the quickest possible way, that I might be no longer thought of, when—don't know why, or, rather, I know very well—in my fever, a certain voice reached me—whence?—from far away it commenced humming,—I should proclaim it yours among a thousand—a ridiculously absurd refrain that we heard together one evening at the Variétés, at an anniversary celebration. And this Boulevard chant recurred to me there in the heart of that desert, and transported me at a single bound to Paris, and I saw you again and these fair locks that I now look at, I saw them, too, casting upon your forehead the light shadow that they do now. I heard your laugh. I actually felt that I had you beside me in one of the stage-boxes at the theatre, listening to the now forgotten singer humming the refrain that had so highly amused you, Guy and myself—"

It seemed to Marianne that the duke hesitated for a moment before pronouncing Guy's name. It was an almost imperceptible hesitation, rather felt than seen.

Rosas quickly recovered:

"On my word, you will see directly that the Boulevard lounger was hidden under your gloomy Castilian,—that refrain took such a hold on my poor wandering brain, such an entire possession, that I clung to it when the fever was at its height—I hummed it again and again, and on my honor, it banished the fever, perhaps by some homeopathic process, for at any other time, this deuced refrain would have aroused a fever in me."

"Why?—Because it was I who formerly hummed it?"

"Yes," said Rosas in a lowered tone. "Well! yes, just for that reason!—"

He drew closer to her on the divan, and she said to him, laughingly:

"How fortunate it is that Faure is singing yonder! He attracts everybody and so leaves us quite alone in this salon. It is very pleasant. Would you like to go and applaud Faure? It is some years since I heard him."

"You are very malicious, Marianne," said the duke. "Let me steal this happy, fleeting hour. I am very happy."

"You are happy?"

"Profoundly happy, and simply because I am near you, listening to you and looking at you—"

"My poor Job," she said, still laughing, "would you like me to sing you the refrain that we heard at the Variétés?"

De Rosas did not reply, but simply looked at her.

He felt as if he were surrounded with all the perfume of youth. On a console beside Marianne, stood a vase of inlaid enamel containing sprigs of white lilacs which as she leaned forward, surrounded her fair head as with an aureole of spring. Her locks were encircled with milk-white flowers and bright

green leaves, transparent and clear, like the limpid green of water; and at times these sprigs were gently shaken, dropping a white bud on Marianne's hair, that looked like a drop of milk amid a heap of ruddy gold.

Ah! how at this moment, all the poetry, all the past with its unacknowledged love swelled Rosas's heart and rushed to his lips. In this brilliantly-lighted salon, under the blaze of the lights, amid the shimmering reflections of the satin draperies, he forgot everything in his rapture at the presence of this woman, lovely to adoration, whose glance penetrated his very veins and filled him with restless thoughts.

The distant music, gentle, penetrating and languishing, some soothing air from Gounod, reached them like a gentle breeze wafted into the room.

José believed himself to be in a dream.

"Ah! if you only knew, madame," he said, becoming more passionate with each word that he spoke, as if he had been gulping down some liqueur, "if you only knew how you have travelled with me everywhere, in thought, there, carried with me like a scapular—"

"My portrait?" said Marianne. "I remember it. I was very slender then, prettier, a young girl, in fact."

"No! no! not your portrait. I tore that up in a fit of frenzy."

"Tore it up?"

"Yes, as I thought that those eyes, those lips and that brow belonged to another."

Marianne's cheeks became pallid.

"But I have taken with me something better than that portrait: I preserved you, you were always present, and pretty, so pretty—as you are now, Marianne—Look at yourself! No one could be lovelier!"

"And why," she said slowly, speaking in a deep, endearing tone, "why did you not speak to me thus, of old?"

"Ah! of old!" said the duke angrily.

She allowed her head to fall on the back of the divan; looking at this man as she well knew how, and insensibly creeping closer to him, she breathed in his ears these burning words:

"Formerly, one who was your friend was beside me, is that not so?"

"Do not speak to me of him," José said abruptly.

"On the contrary, I am determined to tell you that even if I had loved him, I should not have hesitated for a moment to leave him and follow you. But I did not love him."

"Marianne!"

"You won't believe me? I never loved him. I have never been his mistress."

"I do not ask your secret. I do not speak of him," said the duke, who had now become deadly pale.

"And I am determined to speak to you of him. Never, you understand, never was Guy de Lissac my lover. No, in spite of appearances; he has never even kissed my lips. I thought I loved him, but before yielding, I had time to discover that I did not love him! And I waited, I swear to you, expecting that you would say to me: 'I love you!'"

"I?"

"You," said Marianne, in a feeble tone. "You never guessed then?"

And she crept with an exquisitely undulating movement still closer to Rosas, who, as if drawn by some magnetic fluid, surrendered his face to this woman with the wandering eyes, half-open lips, from which a gentle sigh escaped and died away in the duke's hair.

He said nothing, but hastily seizing Marianne's hand, he drew her face close to his lips, her pink nostrils dilated as if the better to breathe the incense of love; and wild, distracted, intoxicated, he pressed his feverish, burning lips upon that fresh mouth that he felt exhaled the perfume of a flower that opens to the morning dew.

"I love you now, I loved you then!—" Marianne said to him, after that kiss that paled his cheeks.

Rosas had risen: a thunder of applause greeted the termination of a song in the other salon and the throng was pouring into the smaller salon. Marianne saw Uncle Kayser, who was arguing with Ramel, whose kindly, lean face wore an expression of weariness. She also rose, grasped the duke's hands with a nervous pressure and said as she still gazed at him:

"There is my uncle. We shall see each other again, shall we not?"

She crushed Rosas with her electric glance.

Preceding the duke, she went straight to Kayser and took his arm, leaning on it as if to show that she was not alone, that she had a natural protector, and was not, as Rosas might have supposed, a girl without any position.

Kayser was almost astonished at the eagerness of his niece.

"Let us go!" she said to him.

"What! leave? Why, there is to be a supper."

"Well! we will sup at the studio," she replied nervously. "We will discuss the morality of art."

She had now attained her end. She realized that anything she might add would cool the impression already made on the duke. She wished to leave him under the intoxication of that kiss.

"Let us go!" said Kayser, drawing himself up in an ill-humored way. "Since you wish it—what a funny idea!—Ramel," he said, extending his hand to the old journalist, "if your feelings prompt you, I should like to show you some canvases."

"I go out so rarely," said Ramel.

"Huron!" said the painter.

"Puritan!" said Marianne, also offering her hand to Denis Ramel.

Rosas looked after her and saw her disappear amongst the guests in the other salon, under the bright flood of light shed by the chandeliers; and when she was gone, it seemed to him that the little Japanese salon was positively empty and that night had fallen on it. Profound ennui at once overcame him, while Marianne, in a happy frame of mind, on returning to Kayser's studio, reviewed the incidents of that evening, recalling Vaudrey's restless smile, and seeming again to hear Rosas's confidences, while she thought: "He spoke to me of the past almost in the same terms as Lissac. Is human nature at the bottom merely commonplace, that two men of entirely different characters make almost identical confessions?" While she was recalling that passionate moment, the duke was experiencing a feeling of disappointment because of their interrupted conversation, and he reproached himself for not having followed Marianne, for having allowed her to escape without telling her—

But what had he to tell her?

He had said everything. He had entirely surrendered, had opened his soul, as transparent as crystal. And this notwithstanding that he had vowed in past days that he would keep his secret locked within him. He had smothered his love under his frigid Castilian demeanor. And now, suddenly, like a child, on the first chance meeting with that woman, he had allowed himself to be drawn into a confession that he had been rigidly withholding!

Ah! it was because he loved her, and had always loved her. There was only one woman in the whole world for him,—this one. He did not lie. Marianne's smile haunted him, wherever he was. In her glance was a poison that he had drunk, which set his blood on fire. He was hers. Except for the image of Lissac, he would most certainly have returned long since to Paris to seek Mademoiselle Kayser.

But Lissac was there. He recalled how much Guy had loved her. He had more than once made the third in their company. He had often accompanied Lissac to Marianne's door. How then had she dared to say just now that she had never been his mistress?

But how was he to believe her?

And why, after all, should she have lied? What interest had she?—

In proportion as Rosas considered the matter, he grew more angry with himself, and in the very midst of the crowd, he was seized with a violent attack of frenzy, such as at times suddenly determined him to seek absolute solitude. He was eager to escape.

In order to avoid Madame Marsy, who was perhaps seeking him, he slipped through the groups of people and reached the door without being seen, leaving without formal salutation, as the English do.

He was in the hall, putting on his overcoat, while a servant turned up its otter-fur collar, when he heard Guy say:

"You are going, my dear duke? Shall we bear each other company?"

The idea was not distasteful to Rosas. Involuntarily, perhaps, he thought that a conversation with Lissac was, in some way, a *chat* with Marianne. These two beings were coupled in his recollections and preoccupations; besides, he really liked Guy. The Parisian was the complement of the Castilian. They had so many reminiscences in common: fêtes, suppers, sorrows, Parisian sadnesses, girls who sobbed to the measure of a waltz. Then they had not seen each other for so long.

Rosas experienced a certain degree of pleasure in finding himself once more on the boulevard with Guy. It made him feel young again. Every whiff of smoke that ascended from his cigar in the fresh air, seemed to breathe so many exhalations of youth. They had formerly ground out so many paradoxes as they strolled thus arm in arm, taking their recreation through Paris.

In a very little time, and after the exchange of a few words, they had bridged the long gap of years, of travel and separation. They expressed so much in so few words. Rosas, as if invincibly attracted by the name of Marianne, was the first to pronounce it, while Guy listened with an impassive air to the duke's interrogations.

In this way they went toward the boulevard, along which the rows of gas-jets flamed like some grand

illumination.

"Paris!" said Rosas, "has a singular effect on one. It resumes its dominion over one at once on seeing it again, and it seems as if one had never left it. I have hardly unpacked my trunks, and here I am again transformed into a Parisian."

"Paris is like absinthe!" said Guy. "As soon as one uncorks the bottle, one commences to drink it again."

"Absinthe! there you are indeed, you Frenchmen, who everlastingly calumniate your country. What an idea, comparing Paris with absinthe!"

"A Parisian's idea, *parbleu!* You have not been here two days and you are already intoxicated with *Parisine*, you said so yourself. The hasheesh of the boulevard."

"Perhaps it is not *Parisine* only that has, in fact, affected my brain," said Rosas.

"No doubt, it is also the *Parisienne*. Madame Marsy is very pretty."

"Charming," said Rosas coldly.

"Less charming than Mademoiselle Kayser!"

Guy sent a whiff of smoke from his cigar floating on the night breeze, while awaiting the duke's reply; but José pursued his way beside his friend, without uttering a word, as if he were suddenly absorbed, and Lissac, who had allowed the conversation to lapse, sought to reopen it: "Then," he said suddenly, —dropping the name of Mademoiselle Kayser:—"You will be in Paris for some time, Rosas?"

"I do not in the least know."

"You will not, I hope, set out again for the East?"

"Oh! you know what a strange fellow I am. It won't do to challenge me to!"

Lissac laughed.

"I don't challenge you at all, I only ask you not to leave the fortifications hereafter. We shall gain everything. You are not a Spaniard, you are a born Parisian, as I have already told you a hundred times. If I were in your place, I would set myself up here and stick to Paris. Since it is the best place in the world, why look for another?"

"My dear Guy," interrupted the duke, who had not listened, "will you promise to answer me, with all frankness, a delicate, an absurd question, if you will, one of those questions that is not generally put, but which I am going to ask you, nevertheless, without preface, point-blank?"

"To it and to any others that you put me, my dear duke, I will answer as an honest man and a friend should."

"Have you been much in love with Mademoiselle Kayser?"

"Very much."

"And has she loved you—a little?"

"Not at all."

"That is not what she has just told me."

"Ah!" said Lissac, as he threw away his cigar. "You spoke of me, then?"

"She told me that she believed she loved you sincerely."

"That is just what I had the pleasure of telling you."

"And—Marianne?—"

"Marianne?" repeated Lissac, who perfectly understood the question from De Rosas's hesitation.

"My dear friend, when a man feels sufficiently anxious, or sufficiently weak, or sufficiently smitten, whichever you please, to stake his life on the throw of the dice, he is permitted to put one of those misplaced questions to which I have just referred. Well! you can tell me what, perhaps, none other than I would dare to ask you: Have you been Marianne's lover?"

Before replying, Guy took the arm of the duke in a friendly way, and, leaning upon it, felt that it trembled nervously. Then, touching his hand by chance, he observed that Rosas was in a burning fever.

"My dear fellow, it is the everlasting question of honor between men and of duty to a woman that you put before me. Had I been Marianne's lover, I should be bound to tell you that Marianne had never been my mistress. These falsehoods are necessary. No; I have not been Marianne's lover, but I advise you, if you do not wish to be perfectly miserable, not to seek to become so. You are one of those men who throw their hearts open as wide as a gateway. She is a calculating creature, who pursues, madly enough I admit, without consistency or constancy in her ideas, any plan that she may have in view. She might be flattered to have you as a suitor, as I was, or as a lover, as I have been assured others were. I do not affirm this, remember; but she will never be moved by your affection. She is a pure

Parisian, and is incapable of loving you as you deserve, but you could not deceive her, as they say she has been."

"Deceived?" asked Rosas, in a tone of pity that struck Lissac.

"Deceived! yes! deceit is the complementary school of love."

"Then—if I loved Marianne?" asked Rosas.

"I would advise you to tell it to her at first, and prove it afterward, and finally to catalogue it in that album whose ashes are sprinkled at the bottom of the marriage gifts."

"You speak of Mademoiselle Kayser as you would speak of a courtesan," said the duke, in a choking voice.

"Ah! I give you my word," said Lissac, "that I should speak very differently of Mademoiselle Alice Aubry, or of Mademoiselle Cora Touchard. I would say to you quite frankly: They are pretty creatures; there is no danger."

"And Marianne, on the contrary, is dangerous."

"Oh! perfectly, for you."

"And why is she not dangerous for you?"

"Why, simply, my dear duke, because I am satisfied to love her as you have hitherto done and because I had, as I told you, the good fortune not to be her lover."

"But you brought her to Madame Marsy's this evening?"

"Oh! her uncle accompanied us, but I was there."

"You offer your arm then to a woman whom, as you have just told me, you consider dangerous?"

"Not for Sabine!—and then, that is a drop of the absinthe, a little of the hasheesh of which I spoke to you. One sees only concessions in Paris, and even when one is dead, one needs a further concession, but in perpetuity. One only becomes one's self"—and Guy's jesting tone became serious,—"when a worthy fellow like you puts one a question that seems terribly like asking advice. Then one answers him, as I have just answered you, and cries out to him: 'Beware!'"

"I thank you," said Rosas, suddenly stopping short on the pavement. "You treat me like a true friend."

"And if I seem to you to be too severe," added Lissac, smiling, "charge that to the account of bitterness. A man that has loved a woman is never altogether just toward her. If he has ceased to love her, he slights her, if he still loves her, he slanders her. I have perhaps, traduced Marianne, but I have not slighted you, that is certain. Now, take advantage of this gossip. But when?"

"I don't know," replied the duke. "I will write you. I shall perhaps leave Paris!"

"What is that?"

"Just what I say."

"The deuce!" said Lissac. "Do you know that if you were to fly from the danger in question, I should be very uneasy? It would be very serious."

"That would not be a flight. At the most, a caprice," the duke replied.

They separated, less pleased with each other than they were at the commencement of their interview. Lissac felt that in some fashion or other, he had wounded Rosas even in adopting the flippant tone of the lounger, without any malice, and the Spaniard with his somewhat morose nature, retired within himself, almost gloomy, and reproached Guy for the first time for smiling or jesting on so serious a matter.

Discontented with himself, he entered his house. His servant was waiting for him. He brought him a blue envelope on a card-tray.

"A telegram for monsieur le duc."

Rosas tore it open in a mechanical way. It was from one of his London friends, Lord Lindsay, who having learned of Rosas's return, sent him a pressing invitation. If he did not hasten to Paris to welcome him, it was simply because grave political affairs demanded his presence in London.

The duke, while taking off his gloves, looked at the crumpled despatch lying under the lamp. He was, like most travellers, superstitious. Perhaps this despatch had arrived in the nick of time to prevent him from committing some act of folly.

But what folly?

He still felt Marianne's kiss on his lips, burning like ice. To-morrow,—in a few hours,—his first thought, his only thought would be to find that woman again, to experience that voluptuous impression, that dream that had penetrated his heart. A danger, Lissac had said. The feline eyes of Marianne had a dangerous ardor; but it was their charm, their strength and their adorable seductiveness, that filtered like a flame through her long, fair lashes.

He closed his eyes to picture Mademoiselle Kayser, to inhale the atmosphere, to enjoy something of the perfume surrounding her.

A danger!

Guy was perhaps right. The best love is that which is never gathered, which remains immature, like a blossom in spring that never becomes a fruit. Lord Lindsay's despatch arrived seasonably. It was a chance or a warning.

In any case, what would Rosas risk by passing a few days in London, and losing the burning of that kiss? The sea-breezes would perhaps efface it.

"I am certainly feverish," the duke thought. "It was assuredly necessary to speak to Lissac. It was also necessary to speak to her," he added, in a dissatisfied, anxious, almost angry tone.

A danger!

Lissac had acted imprudently in uttering that word, which addressed to such a man as Rosas, had something alluring about it. What irritated the duke was Guy's reply, asserting that he had not been Marianne's lover, but that Marianne had had other lovers. Others? What did Lissac know of this? A species of jealous frenzy was blended with the feverish desire that Marianne's kiss had injected into Rosas's veins. He would have liked to know the truth, to see Marianne again, to urge Guy to further confidences. And, then, he felt that he would rather not have come, not have seen her again, not have gone to Sabine's.

"Well, so be it! Lord Lindsay is right, I will go."

The following morning, Guy de Lissac found in his mail a brief note, sealed with the arms of the duke, with the motto: *Hasta la muerte*.

José wrote to him as he was leaving Paris:

> "You are perhaps right. I am a little intoxicated with *Parisine*. I am going to London to visit a friend and if I ever recount my voyages there, it will only be to the serious-minded members of the Geographical Society. There, at least, there is no 'danger.' With many thanks and until we meet again.
>
> "Your friend,
> "J. DE R——"

"Plague on it," said Lissac, who read the letter three times, "but our dear duke is badly bitten! *Ohimé!* Marianne Kayser has had a firm and sure tooth this time!—We shall see!—" he added, as he broke the seal of another letter, containing a request for a loan on the part of someone richer than himself.

VII

TOC

The soirée at Sabine Marsy's had caused Vaudrey to feel something like the enervation that follows intoxication. The next morning he awoke with his head heavy, after a night of feverish sleep, interrupted by sudden starts, wherein he saw that pretty, fair girl standing before him devouring sherbet and smiling gayly.

Every morning since he had been at the ministry, Sulpice had experienced a joyous sensation at finding himself again on his feet and rejoicing in life. He paced about his apartments, feeling a sort of physical delight, opening his window and looking out on the commonplace garden through which so many ministers had passed and which he called, as so many before him had done: *My garden*. His thoughts took him back then to that little convent garden at Grenoble. What a distance he had travelled since then! and how good it was to live!

That morning, on the contrary, the black and bare trees in the garden appeared to him to be very gloomy. He felt morose. He had been awakened early so that the despatches from the provinces might be laid before him. The information in them was quite insignificant. But then his spirit was not present. Once again he was at Sabine's, beside Marianne, so lovely in her sky-blue gown, and with her wavy locks.

If he had been free, he would have gladly sought the opportunity to see that woman again as soon as the morning commenced. He felt a kind of infantile joy in being thus perturbed and haunted. It seemed to him that this emotion made him feel younger. Formerly, on awakening, the dream of the night had followed him like some intoxication.

Formerly! but "formerly" he was not the important man, the distinguished personage of to-day.—He had not the charge of power as some others have the charge of souls. A minister has something else to do than to be under the sway of a vision. Sulpice dressed hurriedly, went down to his office, where a huge log-fire flamed behind an antique screen. He sat down in front of his large mahogany bureau, covered with papers, and on which was lying a huge black portfolio stuffed with documents bearing this title in stamped letters: *Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur*. In the centre of the bureau had been placed a leather portfolio filled with sheets of paper bearing the title: *Documents to be signed by Monsieur le Ministre*. Beside this were spread out various reports, bearing upon one corner of the sheet a printed headline: *Office of the Prefect of Police* and *Director-General of the Press*.

Vaudrey settled down in his chair with the profound satisfaction of a man who has not grown weary of an acquired possession. This huge salon with its blackened pictures, cold marbles, and large, severe-looking bookcases, presented a sober bourgeois harmony that pleased him. It was like the salon of a well-to-do notary, with its tall windows overlooking the courtyard, already full of the shadows of importunate callers and favor seekers whom the secretary-general received in a room adjoining the ministerial cabinet. The minister inhaled once more the atmosphere of his new domicile before settling down to work. Every morning it was his custom to read the reports of the Director of the Press and of the Prefect of Police before all else.

He took up the report of the Prefect. Nothing serious. A slight accident on the Vincennes line near the fortifications of Paris. A train derailed. A few injured. In the Passage de l'Opéra, the previous evening, the early speech of the Minister of the Interior upon general policy, and that of the Finance Minister, who was to reply to the rumor, falsely or prematurely announcing the conversion of the five per cents, had caused an upward movement in value. All was satisfactory, all was quiet. The new minister enjoyed public confidence. Perfect.

Sulpice was delighted and passed on to the report of the Director of the Press. Except a small number of disgruntled and irreconcilable party journals, all the French and foreign papers warmly praised and supported the newly-created ministry. The *Times* declared that the coalition perfectly met the requirements of the existing situation. The Berlin papers did not take umbrage at it, although Monsieur Vaudrey had more than once declared his militant patriotism from the tribune. "In short," the daily report concluded, "there is a concert of praise, and public opinion is delighted to have finally secured a legitimate satisfaction through the choice of a homogeneous ministry, such as has long been desired."

"What strange literature," muttered Sulpice, almost audibly, as he threw the report with the other documents.

He recalled how, on that morning when Sulpice Vaudrey sat there for the first time, the morning following Pichereau's sudden dismissal from office, the editor of this daily press bulletin, like an automaton, mechanically and indifferently laid on the table of the minister a report wherein he said in full:

"Public opinion, by the mouth of the accepted journals, has for too long a time reposed confidence in the Pichereau administration, for the ministry to be troubled about the approaching and useless interpellation announced some days ago by Monsieur Vaudrey—of Isère—."

And it was to Vaudrey, the elected successor of Pichereau, that the report was handed naturally and as was due.

"The compilers of these little chronicles are very optimistic," thought Sulpice. "After all, probably, it is the office that is responsible for this, as, doubtless, ministers do not like to know the truth. I will see, however, that I get it."

He had, this time, a burdensome morning. Prefects were arriving by the main entrance to the ministry, the vast antechambers on the left; and friends, more intimate suitors, waited on the right, elbowing the ushers, in order to have their cards handed to the secretary-general or to the minister. There were some who, in an airy sort of way, said: "Monsieur Vaudrey," in order to appear to be on familiar terms.

Sulpice felt himself attacked on both sides at once; blockaded in his office; and he despatched the petitioners with all haste, extending his hand to them, smiling, cheerfully making them promises, happy to promise them, but grieved in principle to see humbug depicted on the human face. From time to time, in the midst of his ministerial preoccupations and conversations, the disturbing smile of Marianne suddenly appeared like a flash of lightning in a storm; and though shaking his head, to give the appearance of listening and understanding, the minister was in reality far away, near a brilliant buffet and watching a silver spoon glide between two rosy lips.

In that procession, which was to be a daily one, of petitioners, of deputies urging appointments in favor of their constituents, asking the removal of mayors, the decoration of election agents, harassing the minister with recommendations and petitions which, although couched in a humble tone, always veiled a threat, Vaudrey did not often have to do with his friends. It was a wearisome succession of lukewarm friends or recognized enemies, who rallied around a successful man. This man, although a minister for so short a time, had already a vague, disquieting impression that the administration was the property of a great number of clients, always the same, frequenters of these corridors, guests in these antechambers, well known to the ushers, and who, whoever the minister might be, had the same access and the same influence with the ministry.

There were some whom the clerks saluted in a familiar way, as if they were old acquaintances: intrepid office-seekers, unmoved by any changes in ministerial combinations. Such entered Vaudrey's cabinet in a deliberate, familiar manner, and as if feeling at home. Sulpice had once heard one of them greet an usher by his first name: "Good-morning, Gustave."

The minister asked Gustave: "Who is that gentleman?" The usher replied, with a tinge of respect in his tone: "It is one of our visitors, Monsieur le Ministre, Monsieur Eugène Renaudin. We call him only Monsieur *Eugène*. We have known him a long time."

This "Monsieur Eugène" had already petitioned for a prefecture, or a sub-prefecture, or—it mattered little—whatever place the minister might choose to give him.

His claims? None: he was an office-seeker.

The minister was already overwhelmed by this vulgar procession of petitioners and intermediaries, when an usher brought him a card bearing this name: *Lucien Granet*.

In the Chamber it was thought that Granet did not like Vaudrey too well, and Sulpice vaguely scented in him a candidate for his office. The more reason, then, that he should make himself agreeable.

"What does he want?" the minister thought.

This Granet was, moreover, a typical politician; by the side of the minister of to-day, he was the inevitable minister of to-morrow, the positive reformer, the man appointed to cleanse the Augean stables, whose coming, it was said, would immediately mark the end of all abuses, great and small.

"Ah! when Granet is minister!"

The artist without a commission consoled himself with the prospect of the Granet ministry. He would decorate the monuments when Granet became minister. The actress who looked with longing eyes toward the Comédie Française, and dreamed of playing in Molière, had her hopes centered in Granet. Granet promised to every actress an engagement at the Rue de Richelieu. *I am waiting for the Granet ministry!* was the consolatory reflection, interrupted by sighs, of the licentiates in law. Meanwhile those office-seekers danced attendance on Granet, and their smile was worth to the future Excellency all the sweets of office.

Granet had thus everywhere a host of clients, women and men, sighing for his success, working to bring about his ministry, intriguing in advance for his advent, and working together for his glory.

"Ah! if Granet were in power!"

"Such abuses would not exist under a Granet ministry!"

"All will be changed when Granet becomes minister!"

"That dear Granet! that good Granet! Long live Granet!"

Vaudrey was not ignorant of the fact that for some time past, Lucien Granet had been manoeuvring for his appointment to any office whatever, the most important obtainable. He was within an ace of becoming a member of the last Ministerial Coalition. He might have been Vaudrey's colleague instead of his rival. Sulpice was as glad to have him as an opponent in the Chamber as a colleague in the ministerial council. He was, however, not an adversary to be trifled with. Granet was a power in himself.

"Well!" said the minister to Granet, who entered smiling, and with a very polite greeting, "you come then to inspect your future office? Already!—"

"I?" said Granet, who did his best to be agreeable, "God prevent me from thinking of this department. It is too well filled."

"That is very gallant, my dear Granet."

"Far from disputing your portfolio, I come, on the contrary, to give you some advice as to strengthening your already excellent position."

"Advice from you, my dear colleague, should be excellent. Let us hear it."

"My dear minister, it is about the appointment of an Under Secretary of State for the Interior. Well! I have come to urge the claims of my friend, our colleague Warcolier."

While speaking, Granet, who was seated near the bureau of the minister, with his hat on his knee, was watching Vaudrey through his eyeglass; he saw that his lips twitched slightly as he hesitated before replying.

"But I am bound to Jacquier—of l'Oise," Vaudrey said abruptly.

Granet smiled. Certainly Jacquier would be a most excellent choice. He was a cool, solid and remarkable man. But he had little influence with the Chamber, frequented society rarely, was morose and exclusive, while Warcolier was a most amiable man, an excellent speaker and one who was well-known in the Chamber. He was a fine orator. He was highly esteemed by the Granet group.

"My personal friend, too, my dear minister. You would, I assure you, displease me if you did not support Warcolier this morning at the Ministerial Council, at which the nomination of under secretaries should take place. It is this morning, isn't it?"

"Certainly, in an hour's time."

Granet left the minister, repeating with considerable emphasis, which Vaudrey could not fail to remark, that the nomination of Warcolier would be favorably viewed by the majority of the deputies. A hundred times more so than that of Jacquier—of l'Oise.

"Jacquier is a bear. They don't like bears," said Granet, tapping his thumb lightly with his eyeglass.

He left Vaudrey out of humor, and very much disgusted at finding that Warcolier had already exploited the field.

In truth, Vaudrey liked Warcolier as little as he did Granet. Warcolier took life easily. He was naturally

of a contented disposition. He liked people who were easily pleased. An Imperialist under the Empire, he was now a Republican under the Republic. Epicurean in his tastes, he was agreeable, clever and fond of enjoyment, and he approved of everything that went the way he desired. He sniffed the breeze light-heartedly and allowed it to swell his sail and his self-love. He did not like ill-tempered people, people who frowned or were discontented or gloomy. Having a good digestion, he could not understand the possibility of disordered stomachs. A free-liver, he could not realize that hungry people should ever think of better food. Everything was good; everything was right; everything was beautiful. Of an admirably tranquil disposition, he felt neither anger nor envy. Thinking himself superior to every one else, Warcolier never made comparisons, he did not even prefer himself: he worshipped himself. The world belonged to him, he trod the ground with a firm step, swinging his arms, his paunch smooth, his head erect and his shoulders thrown forward. He seemed to inhale, at every step, the odor of triumph. He was not the man to compromise with a defeated adversary.

Of Warcolier's literary efforts, people were familiar with his *History of Work and Workers* that he had formerly dedicated to His Majesty Napoléon III. in these flattering terms: "To you, sire, who have substituted for the nobility of birth, that of work, and for the pride of ancestry, that of shedding blood for one's country."

Later, in 1875, Warcolier had re-issued his *History of Work* and his dedication was anxiously awaited. It did not take him long to get over the difficulty. He dedicated his work to another sovereign: "To the People, who have substituted the nobility of work for that of birth, and that of blood shed for the country for that of blood shed by ancestors."

And that very name which was formerly read at the foot of professions of faith:—*Appeal to Honest People. The Revolution overwhelms us!* is now found at the foot of proclamations wherein this devil of a Warcolier exclaims:—*Appeal to Good Citizens. Reaction now threatens us!*

This was the man whom Granet and his friends had worked so hard to thrust into the position of Undersecretary of State of the Interior. Vaudrey reserved his opinion on this subject to be communicated to the President by and by.

The hour for the meeting of the Council drew near. Sulpice saw, through the white curtains of the window, his horses harnessed to his coupé and prancing in the courtyard, although it was but a short distance from Place Beauvau to the Élysée. He slipped the reports of the Prefect of Police and the Director of the Press into his portfolio and was about to leave, when the usher brought him another card.

"It is useless, I cannot see any one else."

"But the gentleman said that if the minister saw his name, he would most assuredly see him."

Vaudrey took the card that was extended to him on the tray:

"Jéliotte! He is right. Show him in."

He removed his hat and went straight toward the door, that was then opened to admit a pale-faced, lean man with long black whiskers that formed a sort of horsetail fringe to his face. Jéliotte was a former comrade in the law courts, an advocate in the Court of Appeal, and he entered, bowing ceremoniously to Sulpice, who with a pleased face and outstretched hands, went to welcome the old companion of his youth.

Jéliotte bowed with a certain affectation of respect, and smiled nervously.

"How happy I am to see you," Vaudrey said.

"You still address me in the old familiar way," Jéliotte answered, showing his slightly broken and yellow teeth.

"What an idea! Have I forfeited your good opinion, that I should abandon our familiar form of address?"

"Honors, then, have not changed you; well! so much the better," said Jéliotte. "You ask me how I am? Oh! always the same!—I work hard—I am out of your sight—but I applaud all your successes."

While Jéliotte was speaking of Vaudrey's successes, he sat on the edge of a chair, staring at his hat, and wagging his jaw as if he were cracking a nut between his frail teeth.

"I have been delighted at your getting into the cabinet. Delighted for your sake—"

"You ought also to be delighted on your own account, my good Jéliotte. Whatever I may hereafter be able to do—"

Jéliotte cut the minister short and said in a tone as dry as tinder:

"Oh! my dear Sulpice, believe one thing,—that I ask you nothing."

"Why?"

"Because—no, nothing. And I repeat, nothing."

"And you would be wrong if I could be friendly to you or useful."

"I have said *nothing*, and I stick to *nothing*. You will meet quite enough office-seekers in your career

—"

"Evidently!"

"Petitioners also!"

"Most assuredly!"

"Well! I am neither a petitioner nor an office-seeker nor a sycophant. I am your friend."

"And you are right, for I have great affection for you."

"I am your friend and your devoted friend. I should consider it a rascally thing to ask you for anything. A rascally thing, I say! You are in office, you are a minister, so much the better, yes, so much the better! But, at least, don't let your friends pester you, like vermin crawling before you, because you are all-powerful. I will never crawl before you, I warn you. I shall remain just what I am. You will take me just as I am or not at all. That will depend altogether upon the change of humor that the acquisition of honors may produce in you—"

"Jéliotte! we shall see, Jéliotte!"

"Well! You can take me or leave me. And as I do not wish to be confounded with the cringing valets who crowd your antechambers—"

"You crowd nothing, you will not dance attendance. Have I asked you to dance attendance?"

"No, not yet—I called simply to see if I should be received. Yes, it is merely in the nature of an experiment—it is made. It is to your honor, I admit, but I will not repeat it—I shall disappear. It is more simple. Yes, I have told you and I was determined to tell you that you will never see me, so long as you are a minister."

"Ah! Jéliotte! Jéliotte!"

"Never—not until you have fallen—For one always falls—"

"Fortunately," said Sulpice, with a laugh.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, that depends. I say: when you have fallen—then, oh! then, don't fear, I will not be the one to turn my back on you—"

"You are very kind."

"Whatever you may have said or done, you understand, while you are in power—and power intoxicates men!—I will always offer you my hand. Yes, this hand shall always be extended to you. You will find plenty of people who will turn their backs on you at that moment. Not I! I am a friend in dark days—"

"That is understood."

"I will leave you to your glory, Vaudrey. I crave pardon for not styling you: Monsieur le Ministre; I could not. It is not familiar to me. I cannot help it. I am not the friend for the hour of success, but for that of misfortune."

"And you will return?"

"When you are overthrown!—"

"Thank you!"

"That is like me! I love my friends."

"When they are down!" said Sulpice.

"That is so!" exclaimed Jéliotte.

"And is that all you had to say to me?" the minister asked.

"Is not that enough?"

"Yes! yes! *Au revoir*, Jéliotte."

"*Au revoir!* Till—you know when."

"Yes. When I feel my position threatened, I will call upon you. Don't be afraid. That time will come."

"The idiot!" said Sulpice, angrily shrugging his shoulders, when the advocate was gone.

He snatched his hat and went out hurriedly to his carriage, the messengers rising to bow to him as he passed through the antechamber.

It was hardly necessary for him to order his coachman to drive to the Élysée. The duties of each day were so well ordered in advance, and besides, the attendants at the department knew quite as well as the minister if a Council was to be held at the Élysée.

Sulpice was somewhat upset. Jéliotte's visit, following that of Granet, presented the human species in an evil aspect. He had never felt envious of any one, and it seemed to him that the whole world should be gratified at his modest bearing under success.

"For, after all, I triumph, that is certain!—That animal of a Jéliotte is not such a simpleton!—There are many who, if they were in my place, would swagger!"

So he complacently awarded himself a patent of modesty.

The carriage stopped at the foot of the steps of the Élysée. Sulpice always felt an exquisite joy in alighting from his carriage, his portfolio pressed to his side, and leaping over the carpet-covered steps of the stone staircase leading to the Council Chambers. He passed through them, as he did everywhere, between rows of spectators who respectfully bowed to him. Devoted friends extended their hands respectfully toward his overcoat. Certainly, he only knew the men by their heads, bald or crowned with locks, as the case might be. His colleagues were gathered together, awaiting him, and chatting in the salon, decorated in white and gold, the invariable salon of official apartments with the inevitable Sèvres vases with deep-blue, light-green or buff color grounds, placed upon consoles or pedestals. The portfolios appeared stuffed or empty, limp or bursting with paper bundles, under the arms of their Excellencies. Suddenly a door was opened, the ushers fell back and the President approached, looking very serious and taking his accustomed place opposite to the President of the Council with the formality of an orderly, the Minister of the Interior on the left of the President of the Republic, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the right.

Then, in turn, each minister, beginning at the right, reported the business of his department, sometimes debated in private council. Each having completed his information, bowed to his neighbor on the right, and said:

"I have finished. It is your turn, my dear colleague."

The President listened. Sulpice sometimes allowed himself to muse while seated at this green-covered table, forgetting altogether the affairs under consideration. Sometimes he recalled those green-covered tables of the Council Chambers of the Grenoble Prefecture, finding that this Ministerial Council recalled the mean impression invoked by his provincial recollections, at other times, a vein of poesy would flit across his mind, or an eloquent word would reach his ear, suggesting to him the thought that, after all, these men seated there before their open portfolios, turning over or scattering about the papers, nevertheless represented cherished France and held in their leather pouches the secrets, the destinies, aye, even the very fate of the fatherland.

And this Sulpice, overjoyed to expand at his ease in the delights of power, sitting there in his accustomed chair,—a chair which now seemed to be really his own—enjoying a sort of physical satisfaction ever new, inhaling power like the fumes of a nargileh, forgot himself, however, and suddenly felt himself recalled to the urgent reality when his colleague, the Minister of War, a spare man with a grizzled moustache, dropped an infrequent remark in which, in the laconic speech of a soldier, could be comprehended some cause of anxiety or of hope. Sulpice listened then, more moved than he was willing to have it appear, trying, in his turn, to hide all his artistic and patriotic anxieties under that firm exterior which his colleague of the Department of Foreign Affairs wore, a dull-eyed, listless face, and cheeks that might be made of pasteboard.

The business of the Council was of little importance that morning. The Keeper of the Seals, Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—a fat, puffing, apoplectic man with somewhat glassy, round eyes, proposed to the President, who listened attentively but without replying, some reform to which Vaudrey was perfectly indifferent. He did not even hear his colleague's dull speech, the latter lost himself in useless considerations, while the Minister of War looked at him, as if his eyes, loaded with grapeshot said, in military fashion: "*Sacrebleu!* get done!"

Vaudrey looked out of the window at the dark horizon of the winter sky and the gray tints of the leafless trees, and watched the little birds that chased one another among the branches. His thoughts were far, very far away from the table where the sober silence was broken by the interminable phrases of the Minister of Justice, whose words suggested the constant flow of an open spigot.

The vision of a female form at the end of the garden appeared to him, a form that, notwithstanding the cold, was clothed in the soft blue gown that Marianne wore yesterday at Sabine's. He seemed to catch that fleeting smile, the exact expression of which he sought to recall, that peculiar glance, cunning and enticing, that exquisite outline of a perfect Parisian woman. How charming she was! And how sweet that name, Marianne!

Let us see indeed, what in reality could such a woman be! Terrible, perhaps, but certainly irresistible!

Not for years had Vaudrey felt such an anxiety or allowed himself to be, as it were, carried away by such a dominating influence. Waking, he found Marianne the basis of all his thoughts, as she was during his slumber.

And so charming!

"Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur is the next to address the Council."

Vaudrey had not noticed that Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—had finished his harangue, and that after the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had just concluded his remarks. Vaudrey, therefore, needed a moment's reflection, a hasty self-examination to recognize his own personality: *Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur!* This title only called up his *ego* after a momentary reflection, a sort of simulated astonishment under the cloak of a pensive attitude. Vaudrey's colleagues did not perceive that this man seated beside them was, as it were, lost in meditation.

Sulpice, moreover, had little to say. Nothing serious. The confirmation of the favorable reports that

had been made to him. Within a week he would finish his plan of prefectorial changes. He simply required the Council to deal at once with the nomination of the Undersecretaries of State.

It was then that Vaudrey realized the extraordinary influence that Lucien Granet must possess. From the very opening of the discussion, the minister felt that his candidate, Jacquier—of l'Oise—was defeated in advance by Warcolier. Granet must have laid siege to the ministers one by one. The President was entirely in Warcolier's favor. Warcolier's amiability, tact, the extraordinary facility with which he threw overboard previous opinions, were so many claims in his favor. It was necessary to give pledges to new converts, to prove that the government was not closed against penitents.

"That is a very Christian theory," said Vaudrey, "and truly, I am neither in favor of jacobinism nor suspicion, but there is something ironical in granting this amnesty to turncoats."

"But it is decidedly politic," said Monsieur Collard—of Nantes.

"It is a premium offered to the new converts."

"Eh! eh! that is not so badly done!"

Vaudrey knew perfectly well that it was useless to insist, he must put up with Warcolier. It was his task to manage matters so that this man should not have unlimited power in the ministry.

Warcolier was elected and the President signed his appointment at the earliest possible moment.

"A nomination discounted in advance," thought Vaudrey, who again recalled Granet's polite but threatening smile.

He felt somewhat nervous and annoyed at this result. But what could be done? To divert his thoughts, he listened to his colleagues' communications. The Minister of War commenced to speak, and in a tone of irritated surprise, instead of the lofty, patriotic considerations that Vaudrey expected of him, Vaudrey heard him muttering behind his moustache about soldiers' cap-straps, shakos, gaiter-buttons, shoulder-straps, cloth and overcoats. That was all. It was the vulgar report of a shoemaker or a tailor, or of a contractor detailing the items of his account.

Sulpice was anxious for the Council to be over. The President, before the close of the session, repeated, with all the seriousness of a judge of the Court of Appeal: "Above all, messieurs, no innovations, don't try to do too well, let things alone. Don't let us trouble about business! Let us be content to live! The session is ended."

"Not about business?" said Vaudrey to himself.

He understood power in quite a different way. Longing for improvements, he did not understand how to let himself be dragged on like a cork upon a stream, by the wave of daily events. He was determined to put his ideas into force, to give life and durability to his ministry. There was no use in being a minister if he must continue the habitual go-as-you-please of current politics. In that case, the first chief of bureau one might meet would make as good a minister as he.

At the moment of leaving the Council Chamber, the Minister of War said to him, in a jocose, brusque way: "Well! my dear colleague, Warcolier's election does not seem to have pleased you? Bah! if he has changed shoulders with his gun, that only proves that he knows how to drill."

And the soldier laughed heartily behind his closely buttoned frock coat.

Vaudrey got into his carriage and returned to the ministry to breakfast.

Formerly the breakfast hour was generally the time of joyous freedom for Sulpice. He felt soothed beside Adrienne and forgot his daily struggles.

In their home on Chaussée d'Antin, he usually abandoned himself freely to lively and cheerful conversation, to allow his wife to find in him, the man of forty years, the fiancé, the young husband of former days. But here, before these exclusive domestics, the familiars of the ministry, planted around the table like so many inspectors, rather than servants, he dared not manifest himself. He scarcely spoke. He felt that he was watched and listened to. The valet who passed him the dishes watched over Monsieur le Ministre. He imagined that *his attendants* in their silent reflections compared the present minister with those that had gone before him. On one occasion, one of the domestics replied to a remark made by Adrienne: "Monsieur Pichereau, who preceded Monsieur le Ministre, and Monsieur le Comte d'Harville, who preceded Monsieur Pichereau, considered my service very proper, madame."

Adrienne accepted as well as she could the necessities of her new position. Since that was power, let power rule! She was resigned to those wastes whose luxury was apparent, since the political fortunes of her husband cast her there, like a prisoner, in that huge, commonplace, ministerial mansion, wherein none of the joys of home or of that Parisian apartment that she had furnished with such refined taste were left her. She felt half lost in those vast, cold salons of that ancient Hôtel Beauvau,—cold in spite of their stoves, and which partook at one and the same time of the provisional domicile and the furnished apartment,—with its defaced gilded panels, and here and there a crack in the ceiling, and those vulgar ornaments, those wearisome imitation Chardins with their cracked colors and those old-fashioned pictures of Roqueplan, giving to everything at once *one date*, a bygone style. With what a truly melancholy smile Adrienne greeted the friends who came to see her on her reception day, when they remarked to her: "Why, you are in a palace!"

"Yes, but I much prefer my accustomed furniture and my own house."

Sulpice, free at last from that Council and the morning receptions, as he alighted from his carriage, caused *Madame* to be informed that he had returned.

Adrienne, who was looking pretty in a tight-fitting, black velvet gown, approached him with a smile and was suddenly overcome with sadness on seeing him absorbed in thought. She dared not question him, but being somewhat anxious, she, nevertheless, inquired the cause of his frowning expression.

"You have your bad look, my good Sulpice," she smilingly said.

He then quickly explained the Warcolier business.

"Is that all? Bah!" she said, "you will have many other such annoyances."

She was smiling graciously.

"That is politics!—And then you like it—At least, confine your likes to that, Sulpice," she said, drawing near to Vaudrey.

She was about to present her forehead for his kiss, as formerly, but she drew back abruptly. A valet entered with a dignified air and ceremoniously announced that breakfast was served.

Vaudrey ate without appetite. Adrienne watched him tenderly, her eyes were kind and gentle. How nervous he was and quickly disturbed! Truly, Warcolier's appointment was not worth his giving himself the least anxiety about.

She was going to speak to him about it. Vaudrey imposed silence by a sign. The motionless domestics were listening.

Like Sulpice, Adrienne suffered the annoyance of a constant surveillance. She was hungry when she sat down to table, but her appetite had vanished. The viands were served cold, brought on plates decorated with various designs and marked with the initials of Louis Philippe, L.P., intertwined, or with the monogram of the Empire, N.; the gilt was worn off, the fillets of gold half obliterated: a service of Sèvres that had been used everywhere, in imperial dwellings, national palaces, and was at last sent to the various ministries as the remnant of the tables of banished sovereigns.

Instead of eating, Adrienne musingly looked at the decorations. It seemed to her that she was in a gloomy restaurant where the badly served dishes banished her appetite. Sulpice, sad himself, scarcely spoke and in mute preoccupation, in turn confused the shrewd, sly Granet, the intriguing Warcolier, and Marianne Kayser, whose image never left him. He was discontented with himself and excited by the persistency with which the image of this woman haunted him.

In vain did Adrienne smile and seek to divert him from the thoughts that besieged him—she was herself in a melancholy mood, without knowing why, and her endeavors were but wasted; if he abandoned the train of his reflections, it was merely to express a thought in rapid tones, and he seemed momentarily to shake off his torpor; he replied to his wife's forced smile by a mechanical grimace, and immediately relapsed into his nervously silent state.

In the hours of anxious struggle, she had often seen him thus, hence she was not alarmed. If she had been in her own home, instead of occupying this strange mansion, she would have rushed to him, and seated on his knees, taken his burning head between her little hands and said: "Come now! what ails you? what is the matter? Tell me everything so that, child as I may be, I may comfort my big boy."

But there, still in the presence of those people, always in full view, she dared not. She carefully and anxiously watched Sulpice's mortified countenance. Since his entry on his ministerial functions, this was the first occasion, probably, that he had been so preoccupied.

"There is something the matter with you, is there not, my dear?"

"No—nothing—Besides—"

The minister's glance was a sufficient conclusion to his remark. Moreover, how could he, even if he had some trouble to confide, make it known before the ever watchful lackeys? Before these impassive attendants, who, though apparently obsequious, might in reality be hostile, and who looked at them with cold glances? What a distance separated them from the old-time intimacies, the cherished interchange of thought interrupted by piquant kisses and laughter, just like a young husband and wife!

In truth, Adrienne had not thought of it: Sulpice could not talk.

"You will serve the coffee at once," she said.

She made haste in order that she might take refuge in her own apartment to be alone with her husband. He, however, as if he shunned this tête-à-tête, eager as he was for solitude, quickly attributed his unpleasant humor to neuralgia or headache. Too much work or too close application of mind.

"At the Ministerial Council perhaps?" remarked Adrienne inquiringly.

"Yes, at the Council,—I must take a little fresh air—I will take a round in the Bois—The day is dry—That will do me good!"

"Will you take me?" she said gayly.

"If you wish," he replied. Then, in an almost embarrassed tone, he added:

"Perhaps it will be better for me to go alone—I have to think—to work—There is no sitting at the Chamber to-day; and the day is entirely at my own disposal."

"Just as you please," Adrienne replied, looking at Sulpice with a tender and submissive glance. "It would, however, have been so delightful and beneficial to have gone to the Bois together on such a bright day! But you and your affairs before everything, you are right; take an airing, be off, come, breathe—I shall be glad to see you return smiling cheerfully as in the sweet days."

Sulpice looked at his young wife with a fondness that almost inspired him with remorse. In her look there was so complete an expression of her love. Then her affection was so deep, and her calm like the face of a motionless lake was so manifest, and she loved him so deeply, so intelligently. And how trustful, too!

He was impelled now to beg her don her cloak and to have a fur robe put into the coupé and set out now, when the sun was gradually showing itself, like two lovers bound for a country party. At the same time he felt a desperate longing to be alone, to abandon himself to his new idea and to the image that beset him. He felt that he was leaving Adrienne for Marianne.

He did not hold to the suggestion, in fact, he repeated that it would be better if he were alone. As there would be no session of the Chamber for a whole week, he would go out with Adrienne the next day. The coachman could drive them a long distance, even to Saint-Cloud or Ville-d'Avray. They would breakfast together all alone, unknown, in the woods.

"Truly?" said Adrienne.

"Truly! I feel the necessity of avoiding so many demonstrations in my honor."

Sulpice laughed.

"I am stifled by them," he said, as he kissed Adrienne, whose face was pink with delight at the thought of that unrestrained escapade.

"How you blush!" said Sulpice, ingenuously. "What is the matter with you?"

"With me? Nothing."

She looked at him anxiously.

"You think my complexion too ruddy! I have not the Parisian tint. Only remain a minister for some time, and that will vanish. There is no dispraise in that."

She again offered her brow to him.

He left her, happy to feel himself free.

At last! For an entire day he was released from the ordinary routine of his life; from the wrangling of the assembly, the hubbub of the corridors, the gossip of the lobbies, interruptions, interrupted conversations, from all that excitement that he delighted in, but which at times left him crushed and feverish at the close of the day. He became once more master of his thoughts, of his meditation. He belonged to himself. It was almost impossible to recover his self-mastery in the stormy arena into which he was thrust, happy to be there, and where his distended nostrils inhaled, as it were, the fumes of sulphur.

At times, amid the whirlwind of politics, he suffered from a yearning for rest, a sick longing for home quiet, a desire to be free, to go between the acts, as it were, to vegetate in some corner of the earth and to resume in very truth an altogether different life from the exasperating, irritating life that he led in Paris, always, so to speak, under the lash; or, still better, to change the form of his activity, to travel, to feed his eyes on new images, the fresh verdure, or the varied scenes of unknown cities.

But the years had rolled by amid the excitement and nervous strain of political life. He lived with Adrienne in an artificial and overheated atmosphere. Happy because he was loved, that his ambitions were realized, that he charmed an assembly of men by the same power that had obtained him the adoration of this woman, yes, he was happy, very happy: to bless life, to excite envy, to arouse jealousy, to appear simply ridiculous if he complained of destiny; and nevertheless, at the bottom of his soul, discontented without knowing why, consumed by intangible, feverish instincts, ill-defined desires for Parisian curiosities, having dreamed in his youth of results very inferior to those he had realized, yet finding when he analyzed the realities that he enjoyed, that the promises of his dreams were more intoxicating than the best realizations.

Vaudrey was an ambitious man, but he was ambitious to perform valiant feats. Life had formerly seemed to him to be made up of glory, triumphal entries into cities, accompanied by the fluttering of flags and the flourish of trumpets. He pictured conquests, victories, exaltations! Theatrical magnificence! But now, more ironical, he was contented with quasi-triumphs, if his restless, anxious nature could be satisfied with what he obtained.

Adrienne loved him. He loved her profoundly.

Why had the meeting with Marianne troubled him so profoundly, then? Manifestly, Mademoiselle Kayser realized the picture of his vanished dreams, and the desires of a particular love that the passion for Adrienne, although absolute, could not satisfy. This man had a nature of peculiar ardor—or

rather, curious desires, a greedy desire to know, an itching need to approach and peep into abysses.

Sometimes it seemed to Vaudrey that he had not lived at all, and this was the fear and desire of his life: to live that Parisian life which flattered all his instincts and awoke and reanimated all his dreams. But yesterday it had appeared to him when he met this young woman who raised her eyes to him, half-veiled by her long eyelashes, that a stage-curtain had been raised, disclosing dazzling fairy scenery, and since then that scenery had been always before him. It banished, during his drive, all peace, and while the coupé threaded its way along the Faubourg Saint-Honoré toward the Arc-de-Triomphe, the minister who, but two hours before, had been plunged in state affairs, settled himself down in a corner of the carriage, his legs swaddled in a robe and his feet resting on a foot-warmer, looking at, but without observing the cold figures that walked rapidly past him, the houses lighted up by the sun's rays, and the dry pavements, and he thought of those strange eyes and those black butterflies, which seemed to him to flutter over that fair hair like swallows over a field of ripe wheat.

It pleased him to think of that woman. It was an entirely changed preoccupation, a relaxation. A curious, strangely agreeable sensation: his imagination thus playing truant, and wandering toward that vision, renewed his youth. He experienced therein the perplexities that troubled him at twenty. Love in the heart means fewer white hairs on the brow. And then, indeed, he would never, perhaps, see Mademoiselle Kayser again! He would, however, do everything to see her again at the coming soirée at the ministry, an invitation—Suddenly his thoughts abruptly turned to Ramel, whom he also wished to invite and meet again. He loved him so dearly. It was he who formerly, in the journalistic days, and at the time of the battles fought in the *Nation Française*, had called Denis "a conscience in a dress-coat."

Therefore, since he had an afternoon to spare, he would call on Ramel. He was determined to show him that he would never preserve the dignity of a minister with him.

"Rue Boursault, Batignolles," he said to the coachman, lowering one of the windows; "after that, only to the Bois!"

The coachman drove the coupé toward the right, reaching the outer boulevards by way of Monceau Park.

Vaudrey was delighted. He was going to talk open-heartedly to an old friend. Ah, Ramel! he was bent on remaining in the background, on being nothing and loving his friends only when they were in defeat, as Jéliotte had said. Well, Vaudrey would take him as his adviser. This devil of a Ramel, this savage fellow should govern the state in spite of himself.

The minister did not know Ramel's present lodging which he had occupied only a short time. He expected to find dignified poverty and a cold apartment. As soon as Denis opened the door to him, he found himself in a workman's dwelling that had been transformed by artistic taste into the small museum of a virtuoso. After having passed through a narrow corridor, and climbed a small, winding staircase, Vaudrey rang at the third floor of a little house in Rue Boursault and entered a well-kept apartment full of sunlight.

Hanging on the walls were engravings and crayons in old-fashioned frames. A very plain mahogany bookcase contained some select volumes, which, though few, were frequently perused and were swollen with markers covered with notes. The apartment was small and humble: a narrow bedroom with an iron bedstead, a dressing room, a tiny dining-room furnished with cane-seated chairs, and the well-lighted study with his portraits and his frames of the old days. But with this simplicity, as neat as a newly-shaved old man, all was orderly, and arranged and cared for with scrupulous attention.

This modest establishment, the few books, the deep peace, the oblivion found in this Batignolles lodging, in this home of clerks, poor, petty tradesmen and workmen, sufficed for Ramel. He rarely went out and then only to take a walk from which he soon returned exhausted. He had formerly worked so assiduously and had given, in and out of season, all his energy, his nerves and his body, improvising and scattering to the winds his appeals, his protests, his heart, his life, through the columns of the press. What an accumulation of pages, now destroyed or buried beneath the dust of neglected collections! How much ink spilled! And how much life-blood had been mingled with that ink!

Ramel willingly passed long hours every day at his study window, looking out on the green trees or at the high walls of a School of Design opposite, or at the end of a tricolored flag that waved from the frontal of a Primary Normal School that he took delight in watching; then at the right, in the distance, throbbing like an incessant fever, he saw the bustling life of the Saint-Lazare Station, where with every shrill whistle of the engines, he saw white columns of smoke mount skyward and vanish like breaths.

"Smoke against smoke," thought Ramel, with his pipe between his teeth. "And it would be just as well for one to struggle—a lost unity—against folly, as for a single person to desire to create as much smoke as all these locomotives together!"

Ramel appeared to be delighted to see Vaudrey, whose name the housekeeper murdered by announcing him as *Monsieur Vaugrey*. He placed a chair for him, and asked him smilingly, what he wanted "with an antediluvian journalist."

"A mastodon of the press," he said.

What had Vaudrey come for?

His visit had no other object than to enjoy again a former faithful affection, the advice he used to

obtain, and also to try to drag the headstrong Ramel into the ministry. Would not the directorship of the press tempt him?

"With it, the directing of the press!" said Denis. "It is much better to have an opposition press than one that you have under your thumb. Friendly sheets advise only foolishly."

"Why, Vaudrey, do you know," suddenly exclaimed the veteran journalist, "that you are the first among my friends who have come into power—I say the first—who has ever thought of me?"

"You cannot do me a greater pleasure than tell me so, my dear Ramel. I know nothing more contemptible than ingrates. In my opinion, to remember what one owes to people, is to be scrupulously exact; it is simply knowing orthography."

"Well! mercy! there are a devilish lot of people who don't know if the word gratitude is spelled with an *e* or an *a*. No, people are not so well skilled as that in orthography. There are not a few good little creatures to be sent back to school. All the more reason to be thankful for having learned by heart—by heart, that is the way to put it, my dear Vaudrey—your participles."

Sulpice was well acquainted with Ramel's singular wit, a little sly, but tinged with humor, like pure water into which a drop of gin has been poured, more perfumed than bitter. He knew no man more indulgent and keen-sighted than him.

"For what should I bear a grudge against people?" said the veteran. "For their stupidity? I pity them, I haven't time to dislike them; one can't do everything."

Besides, the minister felt altogether happy to be with this man no longer in vogue, but who might be likened to coins that have ceased to be current and have acquired a higher value as commemorative medals. He could unbosom himself to him: treachery was impossible. He longed to have such a stay beside him, and still urged him, but Ramel was inflexible.

"But as I have already said—if I have need of you?"

"Of me? I am too old."

"Of your advice?"

"Well! it is not necessary for me to give you my address, since you find yourself here now, or to tell you that you can depend on me, seeing you know me."

Vaudrey felt that it was useless to pursue the matter further. He was not talking with a misanthrope or a scorner, but with a learned man. He would find at hand whenever he needed it, the old, ever faithful devotedness of this white-haired man, who, with skull-cap on his head, was smoking his pipe near the window when the minister entered.

"Then, you are happy, Ramel?" said Sulpice, a little astonished, perhaps.

"Perfectly so."

"You have no ambition for anything whatever?"

"Nothing, I await philosophically the hour for the monument."

He smiled when he saw that his own familiar remark was puzzling Vaudrey.

"The monument, there, on one side: Villa Montmartre!—Oh! I am not anxious to have done with life. It is amusing enough at times. But, after all, it is necessary to admit that the comedy ends when it is finished. One fine day, I shall be found sleeping somewhere, here in my armchair, or in my bed, suddenly, or perhaps after a long illness—this would weary me, as a lingering illness is repugnant to me—and you will read in one or two journals a short paragraph announcing that the obsequies of Monsieur Denis Ramel, one-time editor of a host of democratic newspapers, a celebrated man in his day, but little known recently, will take place on such a day at such an hour. Few will attend, but I ask you to be present—that is, if there is no important sitting at the Chamber."

Old Ramel twirled his moustache with his long, lean fingers as he spoke these last words into which he infused a dash of irony. He nullified it, however, as he extended his frankly opened hand and said to Sulpice Vaudrey:

"What I have said to you is very cheerful! A thousand pardons. The more so that I do not think of doubting you for a single moment—You have always been credulous. That is your defect, and it is a capital one. In the world of business men and politicians, who are for the most part egotists, of mediocrities, or to speak plainly—I know no more picturesque term—of *dodgers*,—you move about with all the illusions and tastes of an artist. You are like the brave fellows of our army, poets of war, as it were, who hurled themselves to their destruction against regiments of engineers. Certainly, my dear minister, I shall always be delighted to give you my counsel, you whom I used to call my dear child, and if the observations of a living waif can serve you in anything, count on me. Dispose of me, and if by chance I can be useful to you, I shall feel myself amply repaid."

"Ah!" cried Sulpice, "if you only knew how much good it does me to hear the sincere thoughts of a man one can rely on! How different is their ring from that of others!"

He then allowed himself to pass by an easy transition to the confessions of his first deceptions or annoyances.

The selection that very morning, of Warcolier as Under Secretary of State in a Republican administration, a man who had played charades at Compiègne, had thrown him into a state of angry excitement.

Ramel, however, burst into laughter.

"Ah, nonsense! You will see many other such! Why, governments always do favors to their enemies when their opponents pretend to lower their colors! What good is it to serve friends? They love you."

"This does not vex you, then, old Republican?"

"I, an old soldier grown white in harness," said Ramel, whose moustache still played under his smile, "that doesn't disturb my peace in the least. I comfort myself with the thought that my dream, my *ideal*, to use a trite expression, is not touched by such absurdities, and I am persuaded that progress does not lag and that the cause of liberty gains ground, in spite of so much injustice and folly. I confess, however, that I sometimes feel the strange emotion that a man might experience on seeing, after the lapse of years, the lovely woman whom he loved to distraction at twenty, in the arms of a person whom he did not particularly respect."

Ramel had lighted his pipe, and half-hidden by the bluish wreaths of smoke, chatted away, quite happy on his side to give himself up to the revelation of the secret of his heart without the least bitterness, and like an elder brother, advised this man, who was still young and whom he had compared formerly to one of those too fine pieces of porcelain that the least shock would crack.

"Ah!" he said abruptly, "above all, my dear Vaudrey, do not fear to appear in the tribune more uncouth and assertive than you really are. In times when the word *sympathetic* becomes an insult, it is wiser to have the manners of a boor. Tact is a good thing."

"I shall never succeed in that," said Sulpice, smiling as usual.

"So much the worse! What has been wanting in my case is not to have been able to secure the title of *our antipathetic confrère*. The modest and refined people are dupes. By virtue of swelling their necks, turkeys succeed in resembling peacocks. Believe me, my dear friend, it is dangerous to have too refined a taste, even in office, even in the rank in which you are placed. One hesitates to proclaim the excessively stupid things that stir the crowd, and the blockhead who is bold enough to declare his folly creates a hellish noise with his nonsense, while a man of refinement, who is not always a squeamish man, remains in his corner unseen. Remember that more moths are caught at night with a greasy candle than with a diamond of the first water."

"You speak in paradox—" Sulpice began.

"And you think I am making paradoxes? Not in the least, I will give you—not at cost, for it has cost me dearly, but in block,—my stock of experience. Do with it what you please, and, above all, beware of *alle donne!*"

"Women?" asked the minister, with involuntary disquiet.

"Women, exactly. Encircling every minister there is a squadron of seductive women, who though perhaps more fully clothed than the flying squadron of the Medicis, is certainly not less dangerous. Women who complain that they are denied political rights, have in reality all, since they are able to rule administrations and knock ministers off, as the Du Barry did her oranges! When I speak of women, you will observe well that I do not speak of your admirable wife," said Ramel, with a respect that was most touching, coming from this honest veteran.

"While we are gossiping," he resumed, "I am going to tell you frankly what strikes me most clearly in the present conjuncture. You will gather from it what you choose. In these days, my dear Vaudrey, what is most remarkable is the facility men have for destroying their credit and wearing themselves out. Politics, especially, entails a formidable consumption. It seems that the modern being is not cut out to wear long. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that public business, whichever party wins, is always committed to men who are ill-prepared for their good fortune. I do not say this of you, who, intellectually speaking, are an exception. But men are no longer bathed in the Styx, or perhaps they show the heel too quickly. For some years, moreover, the strange phenomenon has presented itself of the provincial towns being the prey of Parisian manufacturers, who reconstruct them and demolish their picturesque antiquity, in order to garnish their boulevards and fine mansions, while Paris, on the contrary, is directed and governed by provincials, who provincialize it just as the Parisian companies parisianize the provinces. Our provincials, astonished to find themselves at the head of Parisian movement, lose their heads somewhat and rush with immoderate appetites at the delicate feast. They have the gluttony of famished children, and on the most perilous question they are simply gourmands. It is *woman* again to whom I refer. The country squires and gentlemen riders, who have grown old in their province with the love of farm-wenches, or small tradesmen professing medicine or law within their sub-prefectures, after having made verses for the female tax-gatherer, all, you understand, all are hungry to know that unknown creature: *woman*. And speedily enough the woman has drained their Excellencies. Oh! yes, even to the marrow! She robs the Opposition of its energy; the faithful to liberty, of the virility of their faith. Energetic ministers or ministers with ideas are not long before woman destroys both their strength and their ideas. Eh! *parbleu!* it is just because they do not rule Paris as one pleads a civil suit in a provincial court."

The minister listened with a somewhat anxious, sober air to these truisms, clear-cut as with a knife, expressed by the old journalist without passion, without exasperation, without anger. He was, in fact, pleased that Ramel should speak to him so candidly.

Yes, indeed, what the old "veteran,"—as Denis sometimes called himself—said, were Vaudrey's own sentiments. These sufficiently saddening observations he had himself made more than once. It was precisely to put an end to such abuses, folly, and provincialism, this hobbling spirit inculcated in a great nation, that he had assumed power, and was about to increase his efforts.

He thanked Ramel profusely and sincerely. This visit would not be his last, he would often return to this Rue Boursault where he knew that a true friend would be waiting.

"And you will be right," said Denis. "Nowhere will you find a love more profound, or hear truths more frankly spoken. You see, Vaudrey, the walls of the ministerial apartments are too thick. There, neither the noise of carriages nor the sound of street-cries is heard. I have passed a few days in a palace—in '48,—at the Tuileries, as a national guard: at the end of two hours, I heard nothing. The carpets, the curtains, stifled everything, and, believe me, a cannon might have been fired without my hearing anything more than an echo, much less could I hear the truth! Besides, people do not like to pronounce truth too loudly. They are afraid."

"I swear to you that I will listen to everything," replied Sulpice, "and I will strive to understand everything. And since I have the power—"

Denis Ramel shook his head:

"Power? Ah! you will see if that is ever taken in any but homoeopathic doses! Why, you will have against you the *bureaux*, those sacrosanct *bureaux* that have governed this country since bureaucracy has existed, and they will cram more than one Warcolier down your throat, I warn you."

"Yes, if I allow it," said Vaudrey haughtily.

"Eh! my poor friend, you have already allowed it," said the veteran.

He had risen, Vaudrey had taken his hat, and he said to the minister, leaning on his arm, with gentle familiarity, as he led him to the door:

"Power is like a kite, but there is always some rascal who holds the thread."

"Come, come," said Vaudrey, "you are a pessimist!"

"I confess that Schopenhauer is not unpleasant to me—sometimes."

Thereupon they separated, after a cordial grasp of the hand, and Denis Ramel resumed his pipe and his seat at the window corner, while the minister carried away from this interview, as if he had not already been in the habit of a frank interchange of opinions, an agreeable though perhaps anxious impression.

He felt the need of *mentally digesting* this conversation: the idea of going back, on this beautiful February day, to his official apartments did not enter his mind. He was overcome by a springtime hunger.

"To the Bois! Around the Lake!" he said to the coachman, as he re-entered his carriage.

The air was as balmy as on an afternoon in May. Vaudrey lowered the carriage window to breathe freely. This exterior boulevard that he rolled along was full of merry pedestrians. One would have thought it was a Sunday afternoon. Old people, sitting on benches, were enjoying the early sun.

Sulpice looked at them, his brain busy with Ramel's warnings. He had just called him a pessimist, but inwardly he acknowledged that the old stager, who had remained a philosopher, spoke the truth. Woman! Why had Ramel spoken to him of woman?

This half-disquieting thought speedily left Sulpice, attracted as he was by the joyous movement, the delight of the eyes which presented itself to his view.

In thus journeying to the Bois, he felt a delightful emotion of solitude and forgetfulness. He gradually recovered his self-possession and became himself once more. He drew his breath more freely in that long avenue where, at this hour of the day, few persons passed. There was no petition to listen to, no salutation to acknowledge.

Ah! how easy it would be to be happy, to sweetly enjoy the Paris that fascinated him instead of burning away his life! Just now, at the foot of the Arc de Triomphe, he had seen people dressed in blouses, sleeping like Andalusian beggars before the walls of the Alhambra. Little they cared for the fever of success! Perhaps they were wise.

An almost complete solitude reigned over the Bois. Vaudrey saw, as he glanced between the copsewood, now growing green, only a few isolated pedestrians, some English governesses in charge of scampering children, the dark green uniform of a guard or the blue blouse of a man who trimmed the trees.

The coachman drove slowly and Sulpice, enjoying the intoxication of this early sun, lowered the shade and breathed the keen air while he repeated to himself that peaceful joy was within the reach of everybody at Paris.

"But why is this wood so deserted? It is so pleasant here."

He almost reproached himself for not having brought Adrienne. She would have been so happy for this advanced spring day. She required so little to make her smile: mere crumbs of joy. She was better

than he.

He excused himself by reflecting that he would not have been able to talk to Ramel.

And then it would have been necessary to talk to Adrienne, whereas the joy of the present moment was this solitary silence, the bath of warm air taken in the complete forgetfulness of the habitual existence.

The sight of the blue, gleaming lake before him, encircled with pines, like an artificial Swiss lake, compelled him to look out of the window.

The coachman slowly drove the carriage to the left in order to make the tour of the Lake.

Vaudrey looked at the sheet of water upon which the light played, and on which two or three skiffs glided noiselessly, even the sound of their oars not reaching his ears.

At the extremity of the alley, a carriage was standing, a hackney coach whose driver was peacefully sleeping in the sunshine, with his head leaning on his right shoulder, his broad-brimmed hat, bathed in the sunshine, serving him as a shade.

It was the only carriage there, and a few paces from the border of the water, standing out in dark relief against the violet-blue of the lake, a woman stood surrounded by a group of ducks of all shades, running after morsels of brown bread while uttering their hoarse cries.

Two white swans had remained in the water and looked at her with a dignified air, at a distance.

At the first glance at this woman, Sulpice felt a strange emotion. His legs trembled and his heart was agitated.

He could not be mistaken, he certainly recognized her. Either there was an extraordinary resemblance between them, or it was Mademoiselle Kayser herself.

Marianne? Marianne on the edge of this Lake at an hour when there was no one at the Bois? Vaudrey believed neither in superstitions nor in predestination. Nevertheless, he considered the meeting extraordinary, but there is in this fantastic life a reality that brings in our path the being about whom one has just been thinking. He had frequently observed this fact. He had already descended from his carriage to go to her, taking a little pathway under the furze in order to reach the water's edge. There was no longer any doubt, it was she. Evidently he was to meet Mademoiselle Kayser some day. But how could chance will that he should desire to take that promenade to the Lake at the very hour that the young woman had driven there?

As he advanced, he thought how surprised Marianne would be. As he walked along, he looked at her.

She stood near a kind of wooden landing jutting out over the water. Over her black dress she had flung a short cloak of satin, embroidered with jet which sparkled in the sunlight. The light wind gently waved a black feather that hung from her hat, in which other feathers were entwined with a fringe of old gold bullion. Vaudrey noted every detail of this living statuette of a Parisian woman: between a little veil knotted behind her head and the lace ruching of her cloak, light, golden curls fell on her neck, and in that frame of light, this elegant woman, this silhouette standing out in full relief against the sky and the horizon line of the water, with a pencil of rays gilding her fair locks, seemed more exquisite and more the "woman" to Sulpice than in the décolleté of a ball costume.

When she heard the crushing of the sand by Sulpice's footsteps as he approached her with timid haste, she turned abruptly. Under her small black veil, drawn tightly over her face, and whose dots looked like so many patches on her face, Vaudrey at first observed Marianne's almost sickly paleness, then her suddenly joyous glance. A furtive blush mounted even to the young girl's cheek.

"You here?" she said—"you, Monsieur le Ministre?"

She had already imparted an entirely different tone to these questions. There was more abandon in the first, which seemed more like a cry, but the second betrayed a sudden politeness, perhaps a little affected.

Vaudrey replied by some commonplace remark. It was a fine day; he was tired; he wished to warm himself in this early sunshine. But she?—

"Oh! I—really I don't know why I am here. Ask the—my coachman. He has driven me where he pleased."

She spoke in a curt, irritated tone, under which either deception or grief was hidden.

She was still mechanically throwing crumbs of bread around her, which were eagerly snatched at by the many-colored ducks, white or gray, black, spotted, striped like tulips, marbled like Cordovan leather, with iridescent green or blue necks, whose tone suggested Venetian glassware, all of them hurrying, stretching their necks, opening their bills, or casting themselves at Marianne's feet, fighting, then almost choking themselves to swallow the enormous pieces of bread that were sold by a dealer close at hand.

"Ah! bless me! I did not think I should have the honor of meeting you here," she said.

"The honor?" said Vaudrey. "I, I should say the joy."

She looked straight into his eyes, frankly.

"I do not know what joy is, to-day," she said. "I come from the Continental Hotel, where I hoped to see —"

"What is that?"

"Nothing—"

"If it were nothing, you would not have frowned so."

"Oh! well! a friend—a friend whom I have again found—and who has disappeared. Just so,—abruptly—No matter, perhaps, after all! What happens, must happen. In short—and to continue my riddle, behold me feeding these ducks. God knows why! I detest the creatures. The state feeds them badly, Monsieur le Ministre, I tell you: they are famished. Well? well?" she said to a species of Indian duck, bolder than the others, who snapped at the hem of her skirt to attract attention and to demand fresh mouthfuls.

She commenced to laugh nervously, and said:

"That one isn't afraid."

She threw him a morsel that he swallowed with a greedy gulp.

"Do you know, Monsieur le Ministre, that the story of these ducks is that of the human species? There are some that have got nothing of all the bread that I have thrown them, and there are others who have gorged enough to kill them with indigestion. How would you classify that? Poor political economy."

"Oh, oh!" said Vaudrey. "You are wandering into the realms of lofty philosophy!—"

"Apropos of that, yes," said Marianne, as she pointed to the line of birds that hurried on all sides, left the water, waddled about, uttering their noisy cries. "You know that when one is sad, one philosophizes anent everything."

"And you are sad?" asked Sulpice, in a voice that certainly quivered slightly.

She threw away, without breaking it, the piece of bread that was left, brushed her gloved fingers, and, turning toward the minister, said with a smile that would make the flesh creep:

"Very sad. Oh! what would you have? The black butterflies, you know, the blue devils."

He saw her again, just as she had appeared before him yesterday, with arms and shoulders bare, lovely and seductive, and now, with her shoulders hidden under her cloak, her face half-veiled and quite pale, he thought her still more disquietingly charming. Moreover, the strangeness of the situation, the chance meeting, imparted something of mystery to their conversation and the attraction of an assignation.

Ah! how happy he felt at having desired to breathe the air of the Bois! It now seemed to him that he had only come there for her sake. Once more it appeared to him that some magnetic thought led to this deserted spot these two beings, who but yesterday had only exchanged commonplace remarks and who, in this sunbathed solitude, under these trees, in the fresh breeze of the departing winter, met again, impelled toward each other, drawn on by the same sympathy.

"Do you know what I was thinking of?" she said, smiling graciously. "Yes, of what I was thinking as I cast the brown bread to those ducks? An idyll, is it not? Well! I was thinking that if one dared—a quick plunge into such a sheet of water—very pure—quite tempting—Eh! well! it would end all."

Vaudrey did not reply. He looked at her stupidly, his glance betraying the utmost anxiety.

"Oh! fear nothing," she said. "A whim! and besides, I can swim better than the swans, there is no danger."

He had seized her hands instinctively and he experienced a singular delight in feeling the flesh of Marianne's wrists under his fingers.

"You are feverish," he said.

"I should be, at any rate."

Her voice was still harsh, as if she were distressed.

"The departure of—of that friend—has, then, caused you much suffering?"

"Suffering? No. Vexation, yes—You have built many castles of cards in your life—Come! how stupid I am!" she said bitterly. "You still build many of them. Well! there it is, you see!"

She had withdrawn her hands from Sulpice, and walked away slowly from the border of the lake, going toward the end of the path where her coachman awaited her, his eyes closed and his mouth open.

"Where are you going on leaving the Bois?" asked Vaudrey.

"I? I don't know."

He had made a movement.

"Oh! once more I tell you, don't be afraid," she said. "I want to live. Fear nothing, I will go home, *parbleu*."

"Home?"

"Or to my uncle's."

"But, really, Monsieur le Ministre," she said, "you are taking upon yourself the affairs of Monsieur Jouvenet, your Prefect of Police. I know him well, and certainly he asks fewer questions than Your Excellency."

"That, perhaps," said Vaudrey, with a smile, "is because he has less anxiety about you than I have."

"Ah! bah!" said Marianne.

She had by this time got close to her hackney coach and looked at the coachman for a moment. "Don't you think it would be very wrong to waken him?" she said. "Will you accompany me for a moment, Monsieur le Ministre?"

Vaudrey paled slightly, divining under this question a seductive prospect.

Marianne's gray eyes were never turned from him.

They walked along slowly, followed by the coupé whose lengthened shadow was projected in front of them along the yellow pathway, moving beside the lake where the swans floated with their pure white wings extended and striking the water with their feet, raising all around them a white foam, like snow falling in flakes. The blue heavens were reflected in the water. The grass, of a burnt-green, almost gray color, looked like worn velvet here and there, showing the weft and spotted with earth.

Side by side they walked, Vaudrey earnestly watching Marianne, while she gazed about her and pointed out to him the gray, winter-worn rocks, the smooth ivy, and on the horizon some hinds browsing, in the far distance, as in a desert, the bare grass as yellow as ripe wheat, around a pond, in a gloomy landscape, russet horizons against a pale sky, presenting a forlorn, mysterious and fleeting aspect.

"One would think one's self at the end of the world," said Sulpice, with lowered voice and troubled heart.

A slight laugh from Marianne was her only reply, as she pointed with the tip of her finger to an inscription on a sign:

"*To Croix-Catelan!*" she said. "That end of the world is decidedly Parisian!"

"Nevertheless, see how isolated we are to-day."

It seemed as if she had divined his thought, for she took a path that skirted a road and there, in the narrowest strip of soft, fresh soil, on which the tiny heels of her boots made imprints like kisses upon a cheek, she walked in front of him, the shadows of the small branches dappling her black dress, while Vaudrey, deeply moved, still looked at her, framed as she was by trees with moss-covered trunks and surrounded with brambles, a medley of twisted branches.

And Sulpice felt, at each step that he took, a more profound emotion. Along this russet-tinted wood, stood out here and there the bright trunks of birch-trees, and far above it, the pale blue sky; the abyss of heaven, strewn with milky clouds and throughout the course of this pathway arose like a Cybelean incense, a healthful and fresh odor that filled the lungs and infused a desire to live.

To live! and, thought Sulpice, but a moment ago this lovely, slender girl spoke of dying. He approached her gently, walking by her side, at first not speaking, then little by little returning to that thought and almost whispering in her ear—that rosy ear that stood out against the paleness of her cheek:

"Is it possible to think of anything besides the opening spring, in this wood where everything is awakening to life? Is it really true, Marianne, that you really wished to die?"

He did not feel astonished at having dared to call her by name. It seemed as if he had known her for years. He forgot everything, as if the world was nothing but a dream and that this dream presented this woman's face.

"Yes," she replied. "Upon my honor, I was weary of life, but I see that most frequently at the very moment when one despairs—"

She stopped suddenly.

"Well?" he asked, as he waited for her to continue.

"Nothing. No, nothing!"

She commenced to laugh, calling his attention to the end of the path, to a broader alley which brought them back to the edge of the lake, whose blue line they saw in the distance.

"Blue on blue," she said, pointing to the sky and the water. "You reproach me for not liking blue, Monsieur le Ministre, see! I am taking an azure bath. This horizon is superb, is it not?"

Vaudrey debated with himself if she were jesting. Why should she give him that title which here and at

such a moment, had such an out-of-place ring?

She glanced at him sidelong with a little droll expression, her pretty mouth yielding to a smile that enticed a kiss.

"We shall soon have returned to my carriage," she said. "Already!"

"That *already* pleases me," said Sulpice.

"It is true. This short promenade is nothing, but it suffices to make one forget many things."

"Does it not?" exclaimed Vaudrey.

The shadow of his coupé was still projected between them along the ochre-colored road.

"Do you come to the Bois often?" asked the minister.

"No. Why?"

"Because I shall frequently return here," he said in a trembling voice.

"Really!—Then, oh! why then, it would be love-making?" said Marianne, who pierced him with her warm, tender glances.

He wished to seize this woman's hand and print a kiss thereon, or to press his lips upon her bare neck upon which the golden honey-colored ringlets danced in the bright sunlight.

"On these clear, fine days," she said in an odd tone, emphasizing every word, "it is very likely that I shall return frequently to visit this pathway. Eh! what is that?" she said, turning around.

She was dragging a dry bramble that had fastened its thorns to the folds of her satin skirt and she stopped to shake it off.

"Stop," said Sulpice.

He desired to tread on the russet-colored bramble.

"You will tear my gown," said Marianne. "The bramble clings too tightly."

Then he stooped, gently removed the thorn, and Marianne, her bosom turned toward him and half-stooping, looked at that man—a minister—almost kneeling before her in this wood.

He cast the bramble away from him.

"There," he said.

"Thanks."

As he rose, he felt Marianne's fresh breath on his forehead. It fell on his face, as sweet as new-mown hay. He became very pale and looked at her with so penetrating an expression that she blushed slightly—from pleasure, perhaps,—and until they reached the carriage where her coachman was still sleeping, they said nothing further, fearing that they had both said too much.

At the moment when she entered her carriage, Sulpice, suddenly, with an effort at boldness, said to her, as he leaned over the door:

"I must see you again, Marianne."

"What is the use?" she said, keeping her eyes fixed on his.

"Where shall I see you?" he asked, without replying to her question.

"I do not know—at my house—"

"At your house?"

"Wait," she added abruptly, "I will write to you."

"You promise me?"

"On my word of honor. At the ministry, *Personal*, isn't that so?"

"Yes!—Ah! you are very good!" he cried, without knowing what he was saying, while Marianne's coachman whipped his horses and the carriage disappeared in the direction of Paris.

It seemed to Vaudrey, who remained standing, that little gloved fingers appeared behind the window and that he caught glimpses of a face hidden under a black, dotted veil.

The carriage disappeared in the distance.

"To the ministry!" said the minister, as he got into his carriage.

He stretched himself out as if intoxicated. He looked at all the carriages along the drive of the Bois de Boulogne, the high life was already moving toward the Lake. In calèches, old ladies in mourning appeared with pale nuns, and old men with red decorations stretched out under lap-robes. Pretty girls with pale countenances pierced with bright eyes, like fragments of coal in flour, showed themselves at the doors of the coupés, close to the muzzles of pink-nosed, well-combed, white-haired little dogs.

Vaudrey strove to find Marianne amid that throng, to see her again. She was far away.

He thought only of her, while his coupé went down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, bustling with noise and movement and flooded with light. The coachman took a side street and the carriage disappeared through an open gateway between two high posts surmounted by two lamps, in a passage leading to a huge white mansion whose slate roof was ablaze with sunlight. An infantry soldier in red trousers, with a shako on his head, mounted guard and stood motionless beside a brown-painted sentry-box that stood at the right. Above the gateways a new tricolor flag, in honor of the new ministry, waved in the sunshine.

Against the ministerial edifice were two gas fixtures bearing two huge capital letters: R.F., ready to be illuminated on important reception nights.

Two lackeys hastily opening the door, rushed up to the halted carriage and stood at its door.

"Adieu! Marianne," thought Sulpice, as he placed his foot in the antechamber of this vast mansion as cold as a tomb.

Part First Chapter VII

She was still mechanically throwing crumbs of bread around her, which were eagerly snatched at by the many-colored ducks ...

VIII

TOC

Marianne Kayser was superstitious. She believed that in the case of compromised affairs, salvation appeared at the supreme moment of playing the very last stake. She had always rebounded, for her part,—like a rubber-ball, she said—at the moment that she found herself overthrown, and more than half conquered. Fate had given some cause for her superstitious ideas. She thought herself lost, and was weary of searching, of living, in fact, when suddenly Monsieur de Rosas reached Paris from the other end of the world. That was salvation.

The duke did not prove very difficult to ensnare. He had yielded like a child in Sabine's boudoir. Marianne left that soirée with unbounded delight. She had recovered all her hopes and regained her *luck*. The next day she would again see Rosas. She passed the night in dreams. Light and gold reigned upon her life. She was radiant on awaking.

Her uncle, on seeing her, found her looking younger and superb.

"You are as beautiful as a Correggio, who though a voluptuous painter, must have been talented. You ought to pose to me for a Saint Cecilia. It would be magnificent, with a nimbus—"

"Oh! let your saint come later," said Marianne, "I haven't time."

Simon Kayser did not ask the young woman, moreover, why "she had not time." Marianne was perfectly free. Each managed his affairs in his own way. Such, in fact, was one of the favorite axioms of this painter, a man of principle.

Marianne breakfasted quickly and early, and after dressing herself, during which she studied coquettish effects while standing before her mirror, she left the house, jumped into a cab and drove to the Hôtel Continental. With proud mien and tossing her head, she asked for the duke as if he belonged to her. She was almost inclined to exclaim before all the people: "I am his mistress!"

But she suddenly turned pale upon hearing that Monsieur de Rosas had left.

"What! gone?"

Gone thus, suddenly, unceremoniously, without notice, without a word? It was not possible.

They were obliged to confirm this news to her several times at the hotel office. Monsieur le duc had that very morning ordered a coupé to take him to catch a train for Calais. It was true that he had left some baggage behind, but at the same time he notified them that they would perhaps have to forward it to him in England later.

Marianne listened in stupid astonishment. She became livid under her little veil.

"Monsieur de Rosas did not receive a telegram?"

"Yes, madame."

"Ah!"

Something serious had, perhaps, suddenly intervened in the duke's life. Nevertheless, this abrupt departure without notification, following the exciting soirée of the previous day, greatly astonished this woman who but now believed herself securely possessed of José.

"Nonsense!" she thought. "He was afraid of me—Yes, that's it!—Of course, he was afraid of me. He loves me much, too much, and distrusts himself. He has gone away."

She commenced to laugh uneasily as she got into her carriage again.

"Assuredly, that is part of my fate. That stupid Guy leaves for Italy. Rosas leaves for England. Steam was invented to admit of escape from dangerous women. I did not follow Lissac. What if I followed the duke?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and gnawed her cambric handkerchief under her veil, her head resting on the back of the coach, while the driver waited, standing on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, ignorant of the direction in which the young woman wished to go.

Marianne felt herself beaten. She was like a gambler who loses a decisive game. Evidently, Rosas only showed more clearly by the action he had taken, how much he was smitten; she measured his love by her own dismay; but what was the good of that love, if the duke escaped in a cowardly fashion?—But where could she find him? Where follow him? Where write to him?—A man who runs about as he does! A madman! Perhaps on arriving at Dover he had already re-embarked for Japan or Australia.

"Ah! the unexpected happens, it seems," thought Marianne, laughing maliciously, as she considered the ludicrousness of her failure.

"Madame, we are going—?" indifferently asked the coachman, who was tired of waiting.

"Where you please—to the Bois!"

"Very good, madame."

He looked at his huge aluminum watch, coolly remarking:

"It was a quarter of twelve when I took Madame—"

"Good! good!—to the Bois!"

The movement of the carriage, the sight of the passers-by, the sunlight playing on the fountains and the paving-stones of the Place de la Concorde fully occupied Marianne's mind, although irritating her at the same time. All the cheerfulness attending the awakening spring, delightful as it is in Paris, seemed irony to her. She felt again, but with increased bitterness, all the sentiments she experienced a few mornings previously when she called on Guy and told him of her burdensome weariness and distaste of life. Of what use was she now? She had just built so many fond dreams on hope! And all her edifices had crumbled.

"All has to be recommenced. To lead the stupid life of a needy, lost, harassed woman; no, that is too ridiculous, too sad! What then—" she said to herself, as with fixed eyes she gazed into the infinite and discovered no solution.

She was savagely annoyed at Rosas. She would have liked to tear him in pieces like the handkerchief that she shredded. Ah! if he should ever return to her after this flight!

But perhaps it was not a flight—who knows? The duke would write, would perhaps reappear.

"No," a secret voice whispered to Marianne. "The truth is that he is afraid of you! It is you, you, whom he flees from."

To renounce everything was enough to banish all patience. Yesterday, on leaving Rosas, she believed herself to be withdrawn forever from the wretched Bohemian life she had so painfully endured. To-day, she felt herself sunk deeper in its mire. Too much mire and misery at last! However, if she only had courage!

It was while looking at the great blue lake, the snowy swans, the gleaming barks, that she dreamed, as she had just told Vaudrey, of making an end of all. Madness, worse than that, stupidity! One does not kill one's self at her age; one does not make of beauty a valueless draft. In order to occupy herself, she had bought some brown bread, which she mechanically threw to the ducks, in order to draw her out of herself. It was then that Sulpice saw her.

"Assuredly," she thought, as she left the minister, "those who despair are idiots!"

In fact, it seemed that chance, as her fingers had cast mouthfuls of bread to the hungry bills, had thrown Vaudrey to her in place of Rosas.

A minister! that young man who smiled on her just now in the alleys of the Bois and drew near her with trembling breath was a minister. A minister as popular as Vaudrey was a power, and since Marianne, weary of seeking love, was pursuing an actuality quite as difficult to obtain—riches, Sulpice unquestionably was not to be despised.

"As a last resource, one might find worse," thought Marianne, as she entered her home.

She had not, moreover, hesitated long. She was not in the mood for prolonged anger. She was at an age when prompt decisions must be made on every occasion that life, with its harsh spurs, proposed a problem or furnished an opportunity. On the way between the Lake and Rue de Navarin, Marianne had formed her plan. Since she had to reply to Vaudrey, she would write him. She felt an ardent desire to avenge herself for Rosas's treatment, as if he ought to suffer therefor, as if he were about to know that Sulpice loved her.

Had she found the duke awaiting her, as she entered the house, she would have been quite capable of lashing his face with a whip, while making the lying confession:

"Ah! you here? It is too late! I love Monsieur Vaudrey."

She would, moreover, never know any but gloomy feelings arising from her poverty in that house. The thought suggested itself to her of at once inviting Vaudrey to call on her. But surrounded by the vulgar appointments of that poor, almost bare, studio, concealing her poverty under worn-out hangings, indifferent studies, old, yellowed casts covered with dust—to receive Vaudrey there would be to confess her terribly straitened condition, her necessities, her eagerness, all that repels and freezes love. In glancing around her uncle's studio, she scrutinized everything with an expression of hatred.

It smacked of dirty poverty, bourgeois ugliness. She would never dare to ask Vaudrey to sit upon that divan, which was littered with old, torn books and tobacco grains, and which, when one sat upon it, discharged a cloud of dust whose atoms danced in the sunlight.

"What are you looking at?" asked Kayser, as he followed his niece's glances about the room. "You seem to be making an inspection."

"Precisely. And I am thinking that your studio would not fetch a very high figure at Drouot's auction mart."

"Lofty and moral creations don't sell in times like these," gravely replied the old dauber. "For myself, I am not a painter of obscene subjects and lewd photography."

Marianne shrugged her shoulders and went out, coughing involuntarily. Old Kayser passed his time steeped in the odors of nicotine.

"I am lost, if Vaudrey comes here," she said to herself.

She knew well enough that caprice, the love of those who do not love, lives on luxury, intoxicating perfumes, shimmering silk, and all the mysterious surroundings of draperies which are the accompaniment of the adventure. Vaudrey would recoil before this Bohemian studio. The famous "nimbus," of which Kayser spoke, was the creature of his tobacco smoke. What was to be done, then? Receive the minister yonder in that remote apartment where, all alone,—it was true—she went to dream, dream with all the strange joys attending isolation? Draw this man to a distant corner of Paris, in the midst of the ruins of former luxury, as mean as the wretch's studio?—Eh! that was to acknowledge to Vaudrey that she was intriguing for a liaison with the single object of quitting the prison-walls of want. She realized that this man, full of illusions, believing that he had to do with perhaps a virtuous girl, or, at least, one who was not moving in her own circle, who was giving herself, but not selling herself, would shrink at the reality on finding himself face to face with an adventuress.

"Illusion is everything! He must be deceived! They are all stupid!" she mused.

But how was she to deceive this man as to her condition, how cloak her want, how cause herself to

pass for what she was not? With Rosas it would have been a simple matter. Poor, she presented herself to him in her poverty. He loved her so. She could the better mislead him. But with Vaudrey, on the contrary, she must dazzle.

"Two innocents," Marianne said to herself, "the one thirsts for virtue, the other for vice."

Should she confess everything to Sulpice as she had done to Rosas? Yes, perhaps, if she discovered no better way, but a better plan had to be found, sought, or invented. Find what? Borrow? Ask? Whom? Guy? She would not dare to do so, even supposing that Lissac was sufficiently well off. Then she wished to keep up appearances, even in Guy's eyes. Further, she had never forgiven him for running off to Italy. She never would forget it. No, no, she would ask nothing from Guy.

To whom, then, should she apply? She again found herself in the frightful extremity of those who, in that almost limitless Paris, involved in the terrible intricacies of that madly-directed machine, seek money, a loan, some help, an outstretched hand, but who find nothing, not an effort to help them in all its crowd. She was overcome with rage and hatred. Nothing! she had nothing! She would have sold herself to any person whatsoever, to have speedily obtained a few of the luxuries she required. Yes; sold herself now, to sell herself more dearly to-morrow.

Sold! Suddenly from the depths of her memory she recalled a form, confused at first, but quickly remembered vividly, of an old woman against whom she had formerly jostled, in the chance life she had led, and who, once beautiful, and still clever and rich, it was said, had been seized with a friendly desire to protect Marianne. It was a long time since the young woman had thought of Claire Dujarrier. She met her occasionally, her white locks hidden under a copious layer of golden powder, looking as yellow as sawdust. The old woman had said to her:

"Whenever you need advice or assistance, do not forget my address: Rue La Fontaine, Auteuil."

Marianne had thanked her at the time, and had forgotten all about it till now, when in the anguish of her pursuit she recalled the name and features of Claire Dujarrier as from the memories of yesterday. Claire Dujarrier, a former danseuse, whose black eyes, diamonds, wild extravagance, and love adventures were notorious formerly, had for the last two or three years buried herself in a little house, fearing that she would be assassinated; she kept her diamonds in iron-lined safes built in the wall, and had a young lover, a clerk in a novelty store, who was stronger than a market-house porter, and who from time to time assumed a high tone and before whom she stood in awe.

"Claire Dujarrier! The very thing!—Why not?" thought Marianne.

She had been introduced to the ex-danseuse by Guy de Lissac. He was considered as one of Claire's old lovers. They quarrelled when the old dame had heard one of Guy's bons mots that had become familiar at the Club:

"When I see her, I always feel a slight emotion: she recalls my youth to me!—But alas! not hers!"

Claire was well-off and perhaps miserly. Marianne instinctively felt, however, that she would get help at her hands.

Money!

"I will return her all! It is usury. Her pledge is here!"

With brazen front, Kayser's niece struck her bosom, looking at the same time at the reflection of her fine bust and pale face in the mirror.

The next day she went straight to the former danseuse's.

Claire Dujarrier lived in that long Rue La Fontaine at Auteuil which partook of the characteristics of a suburban main street and a provincial faubourg, with its summer villas, its little cottages enclosed within gloomy little gardens, railed-off flower-beds, boarding-schools for young people, and elbowing each other as in some village passage, the butcher's store, the pharmacy, the wine-dealer's shop, the baker's establishment,—a kind of little summer resort with a forlorn look in February, the kiosks and cottages half decayed, the gardens full of faded, dreary-looking leaves. Marianne looked about, seeking the little Claire house. She had visited it formerly. A policeman wandered along sadly,—as if to remind one of the town,—and on one side, a gardener passed scuffling his wooden shoes, as if to recall the village.

However, here it was that the formerly celebrated girl, who awoke storms of applause when she danced beside Cerrito at the Opéra, now lived buried in silence,—a cab going to the Villa Montmorency seemed an event in her eyes,—forgotten, her windows shut, and as a diversion looking through the shutters at the high chimneys of some factory in the neighboring Rue Gras that belched forth their ruddy or bluish fumes, or yellow like sulphuric acid, or again red like the reflection of fire.

Marianne rang several times when she arrived at the garden railing of the little house. The bells sounded as if they were coated with rust. An ancient maid-servant, astonished and morose, came to open the door.

She conducted the young woman into the salon where Claire Dujarrier sat alone, eating cakes, with her terrier on her lap.

The dog almost leaped at Marianne's throat while Claire, rising, threw herself on her neck.

"Ah! dear little one!—How pleased I am! What chance brings you?"

Marianne looked at the Dujarrier. She might still be called almost lovely, although she was a little painted and her eyes were swollen, and her cheeks withered; but she knew so perfectly well all the secrets for rejuvenating, the eyebrow preparation, the labial wash, that she was a walking pharmaceutical painting done on finely sculptured features. The statue, although burdened with fat, was still superb.

She listened to Marianne, smiled, frowned and, love-broker and advisory courtesan that she was, ended by saying to the "little one" that she had a devilish good chance and that she had arrived like March in Lent.

"It is true, it has purposely happened. Vanda, you know her well?"

"No!" answered Marianne.

"What! Vanda, whom that big viper Guy called the Walking Rain?"

"I do not remember—"

"Well! Vanda has gone to Russia, she left a month ago. She will be there all the winter and summer, and part of next winter. Her *general* requires her. He is appointed to keep an eye on the Nihilists. So she wishes to rent her house in Rue Prony. That is very natural. A charming house. Very *chic*. In admirable taste. You have the chance. And not dear."

"Too dear for me, who have nothing!"

"Little silly! You have yourself," said Claire Dujarrier. "Then you have me, I have always liked you. I will lend you the ready cash to set yourself up, you can give me bills of exchange, little documents that your minister—pest! you are going on well, you are, ministers!—that His Excellency will endorse. Vanda will not expect anything after the first quarter. Provided that her house is well-rented to someone who does not spoil it, she will be satisfied. If she should claim all, why, at a pinch I can make up the amount. But, my dear,"—and the old woman lowered her voice,—"on no account say anything to Adolphe."

"Adolphe?"

"Yes, my *husband*. You do not know him?"

She took from the table a photograph enclosed in a photograph-case of sky-blue plush, in which Marianne recognized a swaggering fellow with flat face, large hands, fierce, bushy moustache, who leaned on a cane, swelling out his huge chest in outline against a mean, gray-tinted garden ornamented with Medicis vases.

"A handsome fellow, isn't he? Quite young!—and he loves me—I adore him, too!"

The tumid eyes of Claire Dujarrier resembled lighted coals. She pressed kiss after kiss of her painted lips on the photograph and reverently laid it on the table.

Marianne almost pitied this half-senile love, the courtesan's terrifying, last love.

She was, however, too content either to trouble herself, or even to reflect upon it. She was wild with joy. It seemed to her that a sudden rift had opened before her and a gloriously sunny future pictured itself to her mind. What an inspiration it was to think of Claire Dujarrier!

She would sign everything she wished, acknowledge the sums lent, with any interest that might be demanded. Much she cared about that, indeed!—She was sure now to free herself and to *succeed*.

"You are jolly right," said the ancient danseuse. "The nest is entirely at the birds' disposal. Your minister—I don't ask his name, but I shall learn it by the bills of exchange—would treat you as a grisette if he found you at your uncle's. Whereas at Vanda's—ah! at Vanda's! you will have news to tell me. So, see this is all that is necessary. I will write to Vanda that her house is rented, and well rented. Kiss me and skip! I hear Adolphe coming. He does not care to see new faces. And then, yours is too pretty!" she added, with a peculiar significance.

She got the old servant to show Marianne out promptly, as if she felt fearful lest her *husband* should see the pretty creature. Claire Dujarrier was certainly jealous.

"It is not I that would rob her of her porter!" Marianne thought, as she walked away from Rue La Fontaine.

Evening was now darkening the gray streets. A faint bluish mist was rising over the river and spreading like breath over the quays. Marianne saw Paris in the distance, and her visit seemed like a dream to her; she closed her eyes, and a voice within her whispered confusedly the names of Rosas, Vaudrey, Vanda, Rue Prony; she pictured herself stretched at length on a reclining chair in the luxurious house of a courtesan, and she saw at her feet that man—a minister—who supplicatingly besought her favor, while in the distance a man who resembled Rosas was travelling, moving away, disappearing—

"Nonsense!" the superstitious creature said to herself, "it was one or the other! The duke or the minister! I have not made the choice."

Then looking at the confused image of herself thrown on the window of the cab, she threw a kiss at her own pale reflection, happy with the unbounded joy of a child, and cried aloud while laughing heartily:

"Bonjour, Vanda! I greet you, Mademoiselle Vanda."

PART SECOND

TOC

I

The Monceau plain is the quarter of changed fortunes and dice-throwing. An entire town given over to luxury, born in a single night, suddenly sprung into existence. The unpremeditated offspring of the aggregation of millions. Instead of the cobbler's stall, the red-bedaubed shop of the dealer in wines, the nakedness of an outer boulevard, here in this spot of earth all styles flourish: the contrast of fancy, the château throwing the English cottage in the shade; the Louis XIII. dwelling hobnobbing with the Flemish house; the salamander of Francis I. hugging the bourgeois tenement; the Gothic gateway opening for the entry of the carriages of the courtesan. A town within a town. Something novel, white, extravagant, overdone: the colossal in proximity to the attractive, the vastness of a grand American hotel casting its shadow over an Italian loggia. It partook at once of the Parisian and the Yankee. The Château de Chambord sheltering a chocolate maker, and the studio of an artist now become the salon of a rich curbstone broker.

The little Hôtel de Vanda,—*one of our charming fugitives*, as those of the chroniclers who still remember Vanda, say of her in their articles sometimes—is an elegant establishment, severe in external appearance, but of entirely modern interior arrangements, with a wealth of choice knickknacks, and is regarded as one of the most attractive houses in Rue Prony. Since the flight of the pretty courtesan, it bears the sad notice: *Residence to let*. Its fast closed shutters give it the gloomy appearance of a deserted boudoir. Complete silence succeeds feverish bustle! Vanda was a boisterous, madcap spendthrift. Through the old windows with their old-fashioned panes there often used to escape snatches of song, airs of waltzes, fragments of quadrilles. Vanda's horses pawed the ground spiritedly as they started at the fashionable hour for the Bois, through the great gateway leading to the stables. And now, for months, a corner of Rue Prony had been silent and drowsy, and weighted with the melancholy that surrounds forsaken objects.

It was here that Marianne, in carrying out her determination, entered with a high head, resolved to cast off her sombre misery or to sink, her plans defeated. The Dujarrier had greatly assisted her in taking up her abode, building her hopes on Mademoiselle Kayser's beauty as on some temporary profitable investment. As the old woman looked at her, she shook her head. Marianne had to be quick. She was pale, already weary, and her beauty, heightened by this weariness, was "in full blast," as the former bungling artiste said in her capacity of a connoisseur.

"After all," Dujarrier said to herself, "it is the favorable moment for success. One does not become a *general* except through seniority."

Marianne also experienced the same feelings as the Dujarrier. She realized that she had reached the turning-point of her life, it was like a game of baccarat that she was playing with fate. She might come out of it rich and preserved from the possibility of dying in a hospital or a hovel after having dragged her tattered skirts through the streets, or overwhelmed with debts, ruined forever, strangled by liabilities. This commercial term made her smile ironically when she thought of it. Against her she had her past, her adventurous life, almost the life of a courtesan, carried away by the current of her amorous whims; it now needed only the burden of liabilities for her to become not only completely disclassed, but ruined by Parisian life. She had given the Dujarrier receipts for all that that quasi-silent-partner had advanced her, the old lady excusing herself for the precaution she took by saying precisely:

"In that way one can hold people. Grateful acknowledgments are good; written acknowledgments are better!"

The Dujarrier considered herself witty.

Marianne had signed, moreover, all that the other had asked. She still needed, indeed, to make further outlay. And what mattered it if she plunged deeper while she was *taking a dive*, as she expressed it in her language, which was a mixture of street slang and the elegant phraseology of the salon.

"Bah! I know how to swim."

She suddenly straightened herself under this anxiety, reassured, moreover, and spurred on as she was by the Dujarrier herself, who said as she shrugged her shoulders:

"When a woman like you has a man like Vaudrey,—a minister,—she has her nest lined."

Sulpice was not the man long to resist so refined a Parisienne as Marianne. In him, the repressed ardors, the poetic ideas of a man of twenty, had become the appetites of a man of forty. This provincial, hungry for Parisianism,—very young in feelings and soul,—felt, as soon as he found himself in Marianne's company, mad with desire for a new life. The dazzling honors attending his entry into the ministry found their culmination in the burning glance of Marianne, as their eyes met.

Hardly was she installed in Rue Prony than she reminded him of his promise to call on her. He hastened to her with strange eagerness and he left her more disturbed, as if he had just taken a peep

at an unknown world. The feminine elegance of the Hôtel de Vanda had suddenly intoxicated him. Marianne played her part very calmly in producing the daily ravage that passion was making on Sulpice. She studied its rapid progress with all the sang-froid of a physician. She regulated the doses of her toxicant, the poison of her glance instilled into the veins of this man. Determined to become his mistress, she desired to fall in the guise of a woman madly in love, and not as an ordinary courtesan. With any other man than Vaudrey, she would, perhaps, have yielded more quickly. But she acted with Vaudrey as formerly she had done with Rosas. Seeing that these idealists caressed their dreams, she coquetted with platonic love, besides, she preferred to remain free for a short time, without the burden of those pleasures of which she had grown tired, and which had always caused her more disgust than delight.

Moreover, she said to herself that it was necessary in Sulpice's case to have the appearance of playing frankly, of loving truly, as in the case of Rosas. But, this time, she would not let Vaudrey escape her by flight, as the duke did. She would yield at the desired moment, certain that Sulpice would not leave her the next day.

"Rosas would be here," she said to herself self-confidently, "if he had been my lover."

After a moment of regretful preoccupation, she shrugged her shoulders and said quickly:

"Bah! *what is written is written*, as he said. If I haven't him, I have the other."

The "other" grew day by day more deeply enamored. He rushed off in hot haste to visit Marianne; his hired hack, in which he sometimes left his minister's portfolio peacefully at rest, pending his return, stood before the little door in the Avenue Prony. He was happier when he thought he had made a forward step in Marianne's affections than when he had acquired new votes from the minority in the Chamber. Ambitious projects yielded to the consuming desire that he felt toward this woman. At the ministry, during the familiar conversations at table with Adrienne and even during the hurly-burly attendant on private receptions and morning interviews, he sometimes remained silent, lost in thought, his mind wandering and, in reality, with Marianne.

Adrienne, at such times, with a sweet smile which made Sulpice shudder with remorse, would beseech him to work less, to take some recreation, and not allow himself to be so absorbed in politics.

"You are extremely pale, I assure you. You look worn out. You work too hard."

"It is due to administrative changes. There are so many documents to examine."

"I know that very well, but isn't Monsieur Warcolier there? In what way does he help you?"

"In no way," replied the minister sharply, speaking with truth.

Public affairs, in fact, absorbed him, and he found it necessary to steal the precious time to make a hasty trip to Rue Prony. A vacation, it is true, was near. In less than a month, Vaudrey would have more time at his disposal. But for more than three weeks yet, the minister would have everything to modify and change,—everything to put into a healthy shape, as Warcolier said—in the Hôtel Beauvau.

What matter! He found the time to fly incognito to the Maison de Vanda, leaving his coupé at the ministry. Marianne was always there for him when he arrived. The male domestic or the femme de chambre received him with all the deference that "domestics" show when they suspect that the visitor brings any kind of subsidy to the house. To Vaudrey, there was a sort of mystery in Mademoiselle Kayser's life. Ramel, who knew her uncle Kayser, had told him of the poverty of the painter. How then, seeing that her uncle was so shabby, could the niece be so sumptuously established?

Kayser, whom he had once met at Marianne's, had answered such a question by remarking that his niece was a *sly puss* who understood life thoroughly and would be sure to make headway. But that was all.

"I have suspected for a long time that that little head was not capable of much," the painter had added. "I considered her a light-headed creature, nothing more. Fool that I was! she is a shrewd woman, a clever woman, a true woman. I only find fault with her for one thing."

"What?" asked Vaudrey.

"Do you ask what, Monsieur le Ministre? The style of her establishment. It is flashy, tawdry, noisy, it is boudoir art. It lacks seriousness! It lacks morality! I would have in it figures that have style, character. I don't ask for saintly pictures, but moral allegories, austere art. I understand only the severe in art. I am a puritan in the matter of the brush. For that reason, I shall attain nothing in these days of *genre* and water-color painting."

And Kayser went on painting allegories, to digest his dinner, the pâté de foie gras washed down with kummel, of which he had just partaken at his niece's.

Vaudrey himself viewed those Japanese trifles, those screens, those carpets, those pedestals surmounted by terra-cotta figures presenting in their nudity the flesh tints of woman, those clock-cases above the doors, that profusion of knickknacks, of furniture, of ottomans, that soft upholstery that seemed to be made only to excuse a fall—nay, even urged to sudden temptations, to chance love, to violent caprices; and on leaving the house, where he had spoken to Marianne only in compliments a hundred times repeated, and where she had but re-echoed sarcasms full of tender, double meanings, as a woman who would undoubtedly yield, but would not offer herself, he bore away with him in his nostrils and, as it were, in his clothes, a permeating, feminine odor, which would now follow him

everywhere, and everywhere float about him in whiffs, urging him to return to that house in which a new world seemed to be opening to him.

He would not long persist in enquiring how Marianne Kayser had procured all those baubles that so highly incensed the puritan instincts of her honest uncle. He found himself urged forward with profound delight in this adventure whose mysterious features pleased him. Bah! the very fact that he found so much inexplicable in the life of this woman enticed him all the more. It seemed to him that not only had he entered upon a romantic course, but that he was himself the hero of the romance. Never, in the days when he rolled about, an unknown student, on the Parisian wave, and had lifted his thoughts toward some pale patrician girl, toward some pretty creature he had caught a glimpse of, leaning back in a dark-blue coupé, or framed in by the red velvet hangings of a proscenium box, had he more perfectly incarnated the ideal of his desire than in so charming a creature. Dreams of power, visions of love of his twentieth year, had now become tangible to him and at forty he stretched out his feverish hand toward them all.

"Could Ramel have been right?" he said to himself, "and I, only a provincial, athirst for Parisine? But what matter? Let Mademoiselle Kayser be what she will and I what I may be, it seems to me that I have never loved any one as I love this woman."

"Not even Adrienne," added a faint, trembling voice from within. But Sulpice had a ready answer to stifle it: Adrienne could not be compared with any creature in the world. Adrienne was the charm, the daily comfort of the domestic hearth. She was the wife, not the "woman." She was the darling, not the love. Vaudrey would have severed one of his arms to spare her any heavy sorrow, but he was not anxious about Adrienne. She knew nothing, she would know nothing. And what fault, moreover, had he committed hitherto? In that word *hitherto*, a host of mental reservations were involved that Sulpice would gladly have obliterated with his nails, he was ready to cry out with the same good faith,—that of the husband who deceives the wife whom he loves:

"What wrong have I done?"

One afternoon,—there was no session of the Chamber that day,—Marianne was seated in her little salon. She was warming the tips of her slippers, that furtively peeped from beneath the lace of her skirt as a little bird might protrude its beak from a nest, her right leg crossed over the other, and she appeared to be musing, her chin resting on her delicate hand.

She was weary. Justine, her recently engaged femme de chambre, who, like the silverware, was provided by the Dujarrier, came to announce with the discreet, bantering little smile of servants, that Monsieur Dachet, the upholsterer, had called twice.

"The upholsterer!"

Marianne frowned slightly.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing, that he would return to-morrow."

"You call that nothing?" said Marianne, with a short laugh.

When Justine had left the room, she went straight to a small, black, Italian cabinet inlaid with ivory, of which one drawer was locked. In opening it, the sound of gold coins rattling on the wood caused her to smile; then, with the tips of her white fingers, she spread out the louis at the bottom of the drawer, which she abruptly closed, making a wry face, and folding her arms, she returned to her seat in front of the fire, beating her right foot nervously upon the wrought-iron fender.

"The Dujarrier's money will not go much further," she thought. "It is finished."

She thought of striking a decisive blow. Up to the present time, her relations with Sulpice had floated in the regions of the sentimentalities of the novel, or of romance. The minister believed himself loved for love's sake. He saw in Marianne only an eccentric girl free from all prejudices and every duty, who disposed of her life as seemed best to her, without being under the necessity of accounting to either husband or lover. Free, she made of her liberty pleasure or passion according to her fancy. The frightful, practical questions, the daily necessities, were lost sight of by this man who was burdened with the governmental question of France. Again, he never asked himself the source of Marianne's luxury. He delighted in it without thinking of analyzing anything or of knowing anything, and this ingenuously. Mademoiselle Kayser's first word must necessarily awaken him to the situation.

She knew that Vaudrey was to come, and suddenly leaving the fire, she arrayed herself for him in a black satin peignoir lined with red surah, with lapels of velvet thrown widely apart and allowing the whiteness of her neck and chest to be seen under folds of old lace. Her fair hair fell upon her velvet collar, and surmounting this strange costume, her pale face against the background of the red-draped salon assumed the disturbing charm of an apparition.

On seeing her, Sulpice could not refrain from stopping short and looking at her in admiration. Seated there, in the centre of her salon, she was awaiting him and arranging bundles of papers in a basket with gilded feet and lined with pink satin. She extended her hand to him. It was a pale hand, as inanimate as the hand of a dead person, and she languidly asked him why he remained there stupefied without approaching her.

"I am looking," said the minister.

"You are always the most gallant of men," said Marianne, and she added:

"You are not already tired then of looking at me? Usually, caprices do not last so long."

"The affection that I have for you is not a caprice."

"What is it, then? I am curious—"

"It is a passion, Marianne, an absolute, deep, mad passion—"

"Oh! nonsense! nonsense!" said Marianne. "I know that you speak wonderfully well, I have heard you in the tribune. A declaration of love costs you no more than a ministerial declaration. But to-day, my dear minister, I am not disposed to listen to it even from you."

In these last words, there was a certain tenderness that in a measure modified the expression of weariness or sulkiness which Marianne suggested. Sulpice inferred therefrom an implied acceptance of his proffered love.

"Yes," said she abruptly; "I am very sad, frightfully sad."

"Without a cause?" asked Vaudrey.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I am not of those who allow their nerves to control them. When I am out of sorts, there is invariably a cause. Let that be understood once for all."

"And the cause?—I should be delighted to learn it, Marianne, for I swear to you that I would always bear a half of your troubles and pains."

"Thanks!—But in life there are troubles so commonplace that one could only acknowledge them to the most intimate friends."

"You have no more devoted friend than I am," replied Vaudrey, in a tone that conveyed unmistakable conviction.

She knew it positively. She could read that heart like an open page.

"When one meets friends like you, one is the more solicitous to keep them and to avoid saddening them with stupid affairs."

"But why?" asked Vaudrey, drawing close to Marianne. "What troubles you? I beseech you to tell me!"

He gazed earnestly at her eyes, seeking in the depths of their blue pupils a secret or a confession that evaded him, and with an instinctive movement he seized Marianne's hands which she abandoned to him; they were quite cold. As he bent toward her to plead with her to speak, he felt her gentle breath, inhaled the perfume of her delicate, fair skin, and saw the exquisite curves of her body outlined beneath the black folds of her satin peignoir. Marianne's knee gently pressed his own while her heavy eyelids fell like veils over the young woman's eyes, in which Vaudrey thought he observed tears.

"Marianne, I entreat you, if you have any sorrow whatever, that I can assuage, I pray you, tell me of it!"

"Eh! if it were a sorrow!—" she said, quickly withdrawing her left hand from Sulpice's warm grasp. "But it is worse: it is a financial worry, yes, financial," she said brusquely, on observing that Vaudrey's face depicted astonishment.

She seized the handful of papers that she had thrown into the work-basket, and said in a tone that was expressive of mingled wrath and disgust:

"There now, you see that? They are bills for this house: the accounts of clamorous creditors, upholsterers, locksmiths, builders and I don't know what besides!"

"What! your house?"

"You thought that I had paid for it? It is a rented one and nothing in it is paid for. I owe for all, and to a hungry pack."

She began to laugh.

"Do you imagine then that old Kayser's niece could lead this life in which you see her? Without a sou, should I possess all that you see here?—No!—I have perpetrated the folly of ordering all these things for which I am now indebted and which must be paid for at once, and now I am about to be sued. There! you were determined to urge me to confess all that—Such are my worries and they are not yours, so I ask your pardon, my dear Vaudrey: so let us talk of something else. Well! how did the Fraynais interpellation turn out?—What has taken place in the Chamber?"

"Let us speak only of you, Marianne," said the minister, who looked at the young woman with a sort of frank compassion as a friendly physician looks at a sick person.

She nervously snapped her fingers and with her feet crossed, beat the little feverish march that she had previously done.

He drew still closer to her, trying to calm her and to obtain some explanation, some information from her; and Marianne, as if she had already yielded in at once confiding her secret unreflectingly, refused

at present to accord him the full measure of her confidence. She repeated that nothing that could be a source of annoyance or sordid, ought to sadden her friends. Besides, one ought to draw the line at one's life-secret. She was entitled, in fact, to maintain silence. That Vaudrey should question her so, caused her horrible suffering.

"And you, Marianne," he said, "you torture me much more by not replying to me, to whom the least detail of your life is interesting. To me who see you preoccupied and distressed, when I wish, I swear to you, to banish all your sadness."

She turned toward him with an abrupt movement and with her gray, gold-speckled eyes flashing, she seemed to yield to a violent, sudden and almost involuntary decision and said to Sulpice:

"Then you wish to know even the wretchedness of my life? So be it! But I warn you that it is not very cheerful. For," said she, after a moment's silence,—Sulpice shuddered under her glance,—"it is better to be frank, and if you love me as you say you do, you should know me thoroughly; you can then decide what course to take. For myself, I am accustomed to deception."

Ah! although this woman were ready to tell him everything, Vaudrey felt sure that her confidence could only intensify the love that he felt. She had risen, her arms were crossed over her black gown whose red velvet trimming suggested open wounds, her ardent eyes were in strong contrast with her pale face, her lips of unusually heightened color expressed a strange sensuality that invited a kiss, while her nostrils dilated under the impulse of bitter anger—standing thus, she began to narrate her life to Vaudrey who was seated in front of her, looking up to her—as if at her knees. Her story was a sad one of a wicked childhood, ignorant youth, wasted early years, melancholy, sins, outbursts of faith, falls, returns of love, pride, virtue, restitution through repentance, scourged hopes, dead confidences, the entire heartrending existence of a woman who had left more of her heart than of the flesh of her body clinging to the nails of her calvaries:—all, though ordinary and commonplace, was so cruel in its truth that it appealed at once to Sulpice's heart, a heart bursting with pity, to that credulous man who was attracted by all that seemed to him so exquisitely painful and new about this woman.

"Perhaps I am worrying you?" she asked abruptly.

"You!" said he.

He looked at her with a tear in his eye.

Marianne's eyes gleamed with a sudden light.

"Well!" she said, "such is my life! I have loved, I have been betrayed. I have had faith in some one and I awakened one fine morning with this prospect before me: to sink in the deep mud or to do like so many others,—to take a lover and save myself through luxury, since I could not recover myself through passion. Bah! the world shows more leniency toward those who succeed than toward those who repent. All that is necessary is to succeed, and on my word—you know Monsieur de Rosas well?"

"No," stammered Vaudrey, before whose mind the duke's blond face appeared.

"You heard him the other evening!"

"I mean that I have never spoken to him. Well! what of Monsieur de Rosas?"

"Monsieur de Rosas loved me. Oh!" she said, interrupting a gesture made by Vaudrey, "wait. He said that he loved me. He is rich. Why should I not have been Rosas's mistress? Deal for deal, that was a good bargain, at least! I accept Rosas! It was to receive him that I was foolish enough to make my purchases without reckoning, without knowing. What's that for a Rosas?" she said, as she crushed the bundle of bills between her fingers.

"And—Monsieur de Rosas?" asked Vaudrey, who was quite pale.

"He?"

Marianne laughed.

"Well, he has gone—I have told you as much. He has, moreover, perhaps, done wisely. I regretted him momentarily—but, bah! I should have sent him away—yes, very quickly, just so! without even allowing him to touch the tips of my fingers."

"Rosas?" repeated the minister, looking keenly into Marianne's eyes.

"Rosas!" she again said, lowering her voice. "And do you know why I would have done that?"

"No—" answered Sulpice trembling.

"Simply because I no longer loved him, and that I loved another."

She had spoken these last words slowly and in such passionate, vibrating tones that Sulpice felt himself shudder with delight.

"Ah," he said, as he went toward her, "is that the reason? Truly, Marianne, is that the reason?"

She had not confessed whom she loved, she had spoken only by her looks. But Sulpice felt that he belonged to her, he was burning with passion, transported, insane from this avowal; his hands sought hers and drew her to him. He clasped her to his bosom, intoxicated by the pressure of this body against his own, and added in a very low tone while his fingers alternately wandered over her satiny

neck and her silky hair:

"How can I help loving you, Marianne? Is it true, really true? You love me?—Ah! what the great nobleman has not done, do you think I cannot do? You are in your own home, you understand, Marianne.—Then, as he touched the young woman's exquisite ears with his lips, he added:

"Our home—will you have it so?—Our home!—"

He felt, as she remained in his embrace with her body leaning against his, that she quivered throughout her frame; his lips wandered from her ear to her cheek and then to her lips, there they rested long in a ravishing kiss that filled him with the languishing sensation of swooning, he holding her so tightly that, with a smile, she disengaged herself, pink with her blushes, and bright-eyed, said, with an expression of peculiar delight:

"It is sealed now!"

Sulpice, even in his youthful days, had never felt so intoxicating a sensation as that which he enjoyed to-day. It was a complete abandonment of himself, a forgetfulness of everything in the presence of his absolute intoxication. All the realities of life that were ready to take possession of him on leaving this place melted before this dream: the possession of that woman. He forgot the assembly, the foyer, that human crowd that he ruled from the height of the tribune, and Adrienne, who was seated yonder at the window, awaiting him. He forgot everything. Like those who possess the singular faculty of easily receiving and losing impressions, he fancied that his horizon was limited to these walls with their silken hangings, these carpets, this feminine salon, opening on a boudoir, a retreat whence escaped the odors of flowers and perfume bottles.

Then, too, a special feeling of pride entered his heart. He felt his joy increased tenfold at the thought that he, the petty bourgeois from Grenoble, had snatched this woman from a duke and, like a great nobleman, had paid the debts that she had contracted. He raised his head proudly from an instinctive impulse of vanity. Rosas! He, the son of honest Dauphiny folks, would crush him with his liberality.

"What shall I do to silence those creditors?" he said to Marianne,—whose hands he held and whose face grazed his in a way that almost made him frantic.

"Nothing," she replied. "What you have promised me is enough. Now I feel that I am saved. Our house, you said so, we are in our own house here. If the creditors will not believe me when I tell them to have patience—"

"They will believe you," said Vaudrey. "Come, we will find the means—On my signature, any one will lend me money."

It seemed that Marianne was expecting this word *money*, coarse but eloquent, in order to tell Vaudrey that an old friend, Claire Dujarrier, was on intimate terms with a certain Adolphe Gochard, who upon the endorsement of a responsible person, would certainly advance a hundred thousand francs that he had at this moment lying idle. Gochard only needed a bill of exchange in his favor for one hundred thousand francs at three months' date, plus interest at five per cent. This Gochard was a very straightforward capitalist, who did not make it a business to lend money, but merely to oblige. It was Madame Dujarrier who had introduced him and Marianne would have already availed herself of his courtesy, if she had believed herself able to repay it at the appointed date.

"And where does this Monsieur Gochard live?" Vaudrey promptly asked.

"Oh! it would not be necessary for you to go to see him," replied Marianne. "On receipt of a bill of exchange from me, Madame Dujarrier would undertake to let me have a hundred thousand francs from hand to hand."

"A hundred thousand francs!—In three months," said Vaudrey to himself, "in a vast placer like Paris, one can find many veins of gold."

He had, besides, his personal property and land in Dauphiny. If need be, without Adrienne's even knowing it, he could mortgage his farms at Saint-Laurent-du-Pont!

"Monsieur de Rosas would not have hesitated. But in his case there would have been no merit," said Mademoiselle Kayser.

At the name of that man, coupled with the recollection of him, Sulpice felt himself spurred to a decision. Clearly the great millionaire noble would not have delayed before snatching this woman from the claws of her creditors. A hundred thousand francs, a mere trifle for the count! Well, Vaudrey would give it as the Spaniard would have done. He would find it. Within three months, he would have put everything right; he did not know how, but that mattered little.

"Have you a pen, Marianne?"

The minister had not noticed the sheet of white paper that was lying on the blotting pad of Russia leather, among the satin finished envelopes and the ivory paper-cutters.

"What are you going to do, my friend?"

She pretended to put away the green, sharkskin penholder lying near the inkstand, but drew it imperceptibly nearer to Sulpice, who with a quick movement had already seated himself in front of the secrétaire.

"A minister's signature is sufficient, I suppose?" he said with a smile.

He commenced to write.

"What did you say?—Gochard?—"

She was quite pale as she looked over Sulpice's shoulder and saw him rapidly write several lines on the paper, then she spelled:

"Adolphe Gochard—Go-go-c-h-ar-d."

"There it is!" he said, as he handed her the sheet of paper.

"I wish to know what is thereon, or I would never consent."

She took the paper between her fingers as if to tear it to pieces. Sulpice prevented her.

"No," he said, "I request you to keep it; it is the best reply you can give to those people.—Rely on me!"

"Do you wish it?" asked Marianne, with a toss of her head, speaking in a very sweet voice.

"Decidedly. It is selfish, but I wish to feel myself not a little at home here," Sulpice replied.

He seized her hands, her plump, soft, coaxing hands, and as he clasped them within his own, he carried them to his lips and kissed them, as well as her face, neck, ear and mouth, which he covered with kisses; and Marianne, still holding the satin paper that the minister had just signed, said with a laugh as she feebly defended herself:

"Come—come—have done with it! Oh! the big boy!—You will leave nothing for another time!"

He left the house, his head was swimming, and he was permeated with strong odors. He flung to the coachman an address half-way to the ministry.

"Place de la Madeleine."

He shut his eyes to picture Marianne.

As soon as she was alone, her lips curled as a smile of satisfied vanity played over them. She began by reading the lines that he had so hastily written: *I guarantee to Monsieur Adolphe Gochard a bill of exchange at three months, if he agrees to advance that amount to Mademoiselle Dujarrier who will hand it to Mademoiselle Marianne Kayser*.

"Well! the Dujarrier was right," she said; "a woman's scheming works easier than a sinapism."

Then, after a slight toss of the head and still smiling, she opened one of the drawers of the small Inaltia cabinet and slipped into it the satin paper to which the minister had affixed his signature and which she had carefully folded four times. She considered that autograph worth a thousand times more gold than the few pieces that remained scattered about the drawer, like so many waifs of luxury. Then, slowly returning to her armchair, she sank into it, clasping her two hands behind her head and gazing at the ceiling, her thoughts wandered in dreams—a crowd of little ambitious thoughts passed through her brain like drifting clouds across the sky—and while with the top of her foot she again beat her nervous march on the hem of her petticoat, her lips, the lips whose fever had been taken away by Vaudrey, still preserved the strange turn of the corners that indicated the unsatiated person who sees, however, his opportunity arrive.

She was as fully mistress of herself as Vaudrey was embarrassed and unbalanced. He seemed to hear voices laughing and singing within him and his brain was inflamed with joy. Before him opened the immense prospects of his dreams. Glorious as it was to be all-powerful, it was better to be loved. Everything whirled about within his brain, he thought he still heard Denis Ramel talking to him, and in a twinkling, Marianne's smiling face appeared, and with a kiss she interrupted the old journalist's sallies, and Sulpice saw her, too, as it were half-fainting, through the window of her fiacre, like a pastel half-hidden beneath the glass.

He was delighted to walk about for a moment when the carriage had set him down on the asphalted space that surrounds the Madeleine. The walk was beneficial. He raised his head instinctively, expanded his lungs with the air, and threw out his chest. He thought that people looked at him attentively. Some passers-by turned round to see him. He would have felt prouder to have heard them say: "That is Mademoiselle Kayser's lover!" than: "That is Monsieur Vaudrey, the minister!"

He felt a kind of annoyance on returning to Place Beauvau. He was still with Marianne. He recalled her attitudes, her smile, the tone of her voice. Public matters now fastened their collar on him, there were signatures to be subscribed, reports to be read, telegrams, routine work; in a word, vulgar professional duties were to be resumed. He did not at once go to his cabinet. Warcolier, the Under Secretary of State, received and despatched ordinary matters.

Through some strange caprice, he felt a desire to see Adrienne very soon after leaving Marianne, perhaps to know how he would feel and if "*cela se voyait*" as they say. There was also a feeling of remorse involved in this eagerness. He wished to satisfy himself that Adrienne was not suffering, and as formerly, to smile on her as if redoubled affection would, in his own eyes, obliterate his fault.

Adrienne was in her salon. Sulpice heard the sound of voices beyond the door. Some one was talking.

"Madame has a visitor?" he inquired of the domestic.

"Yes, Monsieur le Ministre—Monsieur de Lissac."

"What! Guy! what chance brings him here!" Sulpice thought.

He opened the door and entered, extending his hand to his friend.

"How lucky! it is very kind of you to come."

Guy stood, hat in hand, while Vaudrey stooped toward Adrienne to kiss her brow unceremoniously in the presence of his friend.

"Oh!" said Lissac, "I have not come to greet Your Excellency. It is your charming wife that I have called on."

"I thank you for it," said Sulpice, "my poor Adrienne does not receive many visits outside the circle of official relations."

"And she does not get very much entertainment! So I promise myself to come and pay court to her—or such court as you would wish—from time to time. Madame," said Lissac jocosely, "it is a fact that this devilish minister deserves that you should receive declarations from morning to night while he is over yonder ogling his portfolio. Such a husband as he is, is not to be found again—"

Adrienne, blushing a little, looked at Vaudrey with her usual expression of tender devotion as profound as her soul. Sulpice made an effort to smile at Lissac's pleasantries.

"No, take care, you know!" added Guy. "As Madame Vaudrey is so often alone, I shall allow myself to come here sometimes to keep her company, and I won't guarantee to you that I won't fall in love with her."

He turned respectfully toward Adrienne and added, with the correct bearing of a gentleman:

"Madame, all this is only to make him comprehend that nothing in the world, not even a rag of morocco,—is his portfolio a morocco one?—is worth the happiness of having such a wife as you. And the miserable fellow doesn't suspect it. You see, I speak of you as the Opposition journals do."

Sulpice tried to smile but he divined under Guy's jesting, a serious and truthful purpose. Perhaps Adrienne had just been allowing herself to complain of the sadness and dreariness of her life. He was hurt by it. After all, he did all that he could to gratify his wife. But a man like him was not, in fact, born to remain forever tied down. The wife of a minister must bear her part of the burden, since there must be a burden.

As if Adrienne had divined Sulpice's very thoughts, she quickly added, interrupting the jester who had somewhat confused the minister:

"Don't pay any attention to Monsieur de Lissac. I am very happy just as I am."

Vaudrey had taken her hand to clasp it between his fingers with a slightly nervous grasp. The trustful, good-natured, pure smile that Adrienne gave him, recalled the anxious, distracted expression on Marianne's lip.

"Dear wife!"

He sought to find a word, a cry, some consolation, a sort of caress, proceeding from one heart and penetrating the other. He could find none.

"Come!" said Guy. "I am going to leave you, and if you will allow me, madame, I will occasionally come here and tell you all the outside tittle-tattle."

"You will always be welcome, Monsieur de Lissac," Adrienne said, as she extended her hand to him.

Guy bowed to Madame Vaudrey in a most profoundly respectful way.

Sulpice accompanied him through the salons as far as the hall.

"Do you want me to tell you?" said Lissac. "Your wife is very weary, take care! This big mansion is not very cheerful. One must inevitably catch colds in it, and then a woman to be all alone here! A form of imprisonment! Do not neglect to wheedle the majority, my dear minister, but don't forget your wife. Come! I will not act traitorously toward you, but I warn you that if I often find your wife melancholy, as she is to-day, I will tell her that I adore her. Yes! yes! your wife is charming. I would give all the orders in the world for a lock of her hair. Adieu, Monsieur le Ministre."

"Great idiot," said Vaudrey, giving him a little friendly, gentle tap on the neck.

"Be it so, but if you do not love her well enough, I shall fall in love with her, and I forewarn you that it is much better that I should than any other. Au revoir."

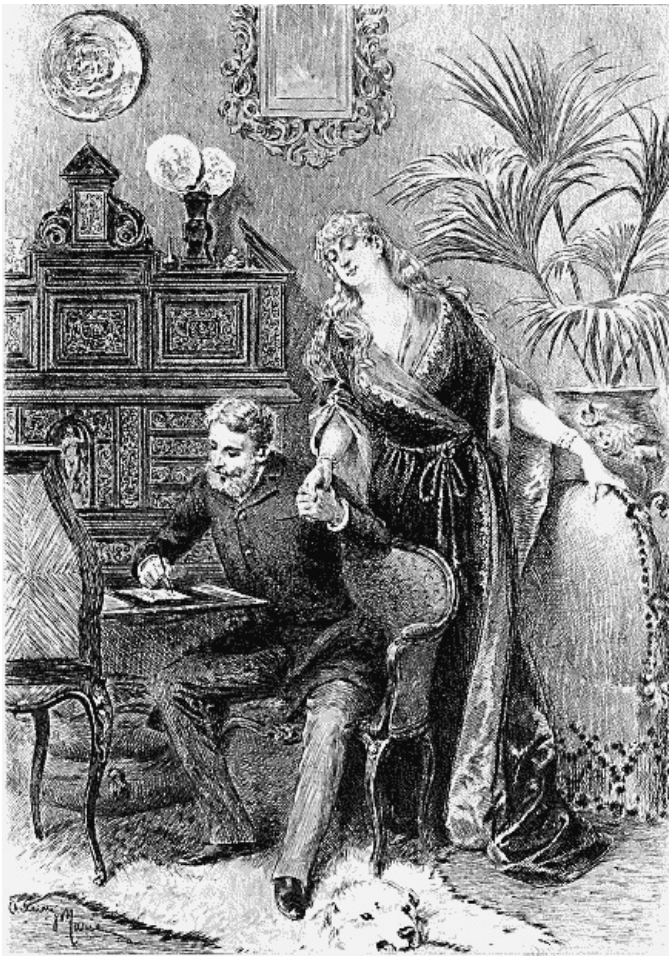
"Au revoir!" Sulpice repeated.

He tried now to force a smile and went down to his cabinet, where he found heaped-up reports awaiting his attention and he turned the pages over nervously and read them in a very bad humor.

Part Second Chapter I

She was quite pale as she looked over Sulpice's shoulder and saw him rapidly write several lines on the paper, then she spelled:

"Adolphe Gochard—Go-go-ch-a-r-d."



II

TOC

Madame Vaudrey drew no real pleasure from the commonplace receptions at the ministry, or at her Wednesday *at homes*, except when by chance, Denis Ramel permitted himself to abandon the Batignolles to call at Place Beauvau, or when Guy enlivened this dull spot by recounting the happenings of the outside world.

Adrienne felt herself terribly isolated; she knew hardly any one in Paris. Since Vaudrey had installed himself in Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, she had not had time to form acquaintances among the wives of the deputies to the Assembly, the majority of whom lived in the provinces or dwelt at Versailles for economical reasons.

Evidently the residence at the ministry had only brought her ready-made relations, depressingly inevitable visitors who resembled office-seekers or clients. These official receptions filled her with sadness. The conversation always took the same hackneyed tone, disgusting in its flattery or disquieting by reason of its allusions. People discussed coming interpellations of ministers; government majorities, projected legislation; the same phrases, as dreary as showers, fell with all the regularity of drops of rain. Even young girls, brought up in this centre of infuriated politicians, spoke of the breaking up of the majority, reports or ballots, in the same manner as shopkeepers talk of their trade.

Poor Adrienne exerted herself to acquire an interest in these matters. Since her husband's very existence was involved therein, hers should also be. She had, however, formerly dreamed of an entirely different youth and on bright, sunshiny days she reflected that yonder on the banks of the Isère, it was delightful in her sweet, little, provincial house.

Besides, she carefully concealed her melancholy. She knew that she was already reproached for being somewhat sad. A minister's wife should know how to smile. This was what Madame Marsy never failed to repeat to her as often as possible when she visited her at Place Beauvau. This woman who hardly concerned herself at all about her son, allowing him to grow up badly enough and committing all her maternal duties to the grandmother, was perpetually cheerful, notwithstanding that her life had been chequered by chance and her widowhood of sufficiently dramatic character, as was said. She endeavored to play the part of an adviser, an intimate friend to Adrienne. She frequently said to

Madame Gerson, who rarely left her, that Madame Vaudrey would be altogether charming if she had *chic*.

"Unfortunately, she is provincial; not in her element. She still smacks of Dauphiny. And then—what is the funniest thing: she knows nothing of politics."

"She does not even concern herself about it," said the pretty Madame Gerson, laughing heartily.

According to these ladies she did not take the trouble to fulfil the rôle of a minister's wife faultlessly. Ah! if only Sabine or Blanche Gerson occupied the position filled by this *petite bourgeoise* of Grenoble! Well! Paris would have seen what an Athenian Republic was.

Sabine Marsy was decidedly clever. She politely advised Adrienne, without appearing to do so, as to many matters, in such a way as to convey reproof under the guise of kindness. Madame Vaudrey would have done well, as Madame Gerson also observed, to have studied the *Code du Cérémonial* on reaching Place Beauvau.

Like Madame Marsy, Madame Gerson had gradually gained Adrienne's friendship. From an ostentatious desire to be able to tell of what happened at the ministry; to be on the first list of guests, when the minister received or gave a ball, Sabine Marsy, who had suffered from the mania of aspiring to become an artist, patronized the *intransigeant* painters and exhibited at the salon, now set her mind on playing the rôle of a political figure in Paris. Madame Gerson, *Blanche*, as Sabine called her, had a similar ambition, but simply from a desire to be in fashion.

She wished to bring herself into notice. Everything attracted her, tempted her. She belonged, body and soul, to that machine with its manifold gearing, brilliant, noisy, active, puffing like a locomotive, that is called *chic*. *Chic*, that indefinite, indefinable word, changeable and subtle like a capillary hygrometer, is a Parisian tyranny that grinds out more fashionable lives than the King of Dahomey offers as victims on his great feast days. For Blanche, everything in this most stimulated, over-excited, feverishly deranged life, was reduced to these two inevitable conclusions: what was *chic* and what was not *chic*. Not only was this the inevitable guide in reference to style, clothing, hat, gloves, costume, material, jewelry, the dress that she should wear, but also the book that should be read, the play that should be heard, the operatic score that should be strummed on the piano, the bonbon that should be presented, the opinion that one should hold, the picture one should comment upon, all was hopelessly a question of *chic*.

Madame Gerson would have preferred to be compromised in the matter of her honor rather than to be ridiculed as to her opinions or to express an idea that was not chic. The necessary result was that all this woman's conversation—and she often came to see Madame Vaudrey,—was on well-known topics; so that Adrienne knew in advance what Blanche's opinion was upon such and such a matter, and that ideas could only pass muster with Madame Gerson when they bore the stamp of chic, just as a coin, to escape suspicion of being counterfeit, must bear the stamp of the mint.

Blanche would have been heartbroken if she had not been seen in the President's salon on the occasion of a great reception at the Élysée; at the ministry, on the evening of a comedy; if she had not been in the front rank of the ladies' gallery on the day of interpellation at the Assembly; if she had not been greeted from the top of the grand stand by some minister, on Grand Prix day; if she had not been the first at the varnishing; the first at the general rehearsals, a little *chic*,—the first everywhere. Slender, delicate, but hardy as a Parisian, she dragged her exhausted husband, with her hand of fine steel, through receptions, balls, soirées, salons, talking loudly, judging everything, chattering, cackling and haranguing, delighted to mount, with head erect, the grand staircase of a minister and feel the joy of plunging her little feet into the official moquettes as if her heels had been made for state carpets; swelling with pride when she heard the usher, amid the hubbub of the reception, call loudly the name which meant the fashionable couple, a couple found at every fête:

"Monsieur and Madame Gerson!"

While the husband, fatigued, weary, left his office heavy-headed, after having eaten a hasty meal, put on his dress coat and white tie in haste, got into his carriage in haste, hurriedly accompanied his wife, left her in order to take a doze on an armchair during the height of the ball, woke in haste, returned home in haste, slept hurriedly, rose the same, dragging this indefatigable creature about with him like a convict's chain, she smiled at others, enticed others, waltzed with others, adorned herself for others, keeping for him only her weariness, her yawns, her pallor and her sick-headaches.

For these two galley-slaves of *chic*, the winter passed in this manner, as fatiguing as months of penal servitude, and they went none too soon, when the summer arrived, to breathe the sea air or enjoy the sunshine of the country, in order to restore their frames, wan, worn-out, seedy and "gruelled," as Sabine Marsy said, when she recalled her connection with the artists.

"Ah! how much better I like my home!" thought Madame Vaudrey.

Sabine and Madame Gerson, with the wives of the ministers, those of the chiefs of departments, and the regular visitors, were the most assiduous in their attentions to Adrienne, whom they considered decidedly provincial. She, stupefied, was alarmed by these Parisian bustlers, that resembled machines in running order, jabbering away as music-boxes play.

"Do they tire you?" said Guy de Lissac to her bluntly one evening, succumbing to a feeling of pity for this pensive young woman,—who was a hundred times prettier than Madame Gerson, whose beauty was so highly extolled in the journals,—this minister's wife, who voluntarily kept herself in the background with a timidity that betrayed no awkwardness, but was in every way attractive, especially

to a man about town like Guy.

"They do not tire me, they upset me," Adrienne replied.

"Ah! they are in full *go*, as it is called. An express train. But they amuse themselves so much that they have not even time to smile. When the locomotive spins along too rapidly, try to distinguish the scenery!"

Adrienne instinctively felt that under his irony this sceptic disguised a sort of sincerity. Lissac's wit pleased her. He surprised her somewhat at times, but the probably assumed raillery of the young man compensated for the insipid nonsense of the conversation to which she listened daily.

At first from mere curiosity and after from a sentiment of respectful devotion, Guy was impelled to study that delicate and sensitive nature, entirely swayed by love of Sulpice, that suffered at times a vague pressure as of some indefinable anguish at the throat, as if a vacuum—a choking vacuum—had been created about her by some air-pump.

This huge mansion seemed to her to be entirely innocent of all memories, and though peopled with phantoms, was as commonplace and vulgar as an apartment house. There were no associations save dust and cracks. These salons, built for the Maréchal de Beauvau, these walls that had listened to the sobs of Madame d'Houdetot at the death-bed of Saint-Lambert, appeared to Adrienne to exude ennui, strangling and inevitable ennui, solemn, official, absolute ennui, nothing but ennui in the very decorum of the place, and isolation in the midst of power.

She cursed her loneliness, she felt lost amid the salons of this furnished ministerial mansion, whose cold, gloomy apartments, with the chairs symmetrically arranged along the walls, she wandered through, but evidently without expecting any one: state chairs lacking occupants,—ordinary chairs, domestic chairs seem to have tongues—that never exchanged conversation. Vast, deserted rooms where the green curtains behind the glass doors of the bookcases were eternally drawn, bookcases without books, forever open, mournful as empty sepulchres.

Yes, this immense gilded dwelling with its Gobelins tapestries stifled her with its terrifying gloom, where nothing, not a single article, recalled her charming provincial home, her Grenoble house with its garden filled with lilacs where she was often wont to read while Sulpice worked upstairs, bent over his table crowded with papers, before his open window. Ah! those cherished rooms, in the humble corner of the provincial home, their happy crouching in the peaceful nest; aye, even the happy first days in Paris, in the Chaussée-d'Antin apartments, in which Adrienne at least felt herself in her own home, free in her actions and thoughts, and where she could talk aloud without feeling that an eye was constantly watching her, and ears were always strained, in fact, a perpetual espionage upon all her actions and a criticism of all her words.

She had reached a point when she asked herself if, even for Sulpice, happiness was not far removed from this life of slavery, of feverish politics, which for some time past had been visibly paling his cheeks and rendering him nervous and altogether different from of old.

"If you did not love me so much," she said with a sweet smile, "I could believe that you loved me no longer."

"What folly! you have only one rival, Adrienne."

"Ah! I know that very well, but that robs me of everything. It is politics. Come! be great, and I shall be happy or resigned, as you wish. I adore you so much! I would give you my life, so I would gladly give you my days of weariness!"

Although she was rich, she strove to introduce into her official surroundings the bourgeois and provincial orderly methods that she had been so virtuously taught. She found that her desserts vanished with frightful rapidity, that dishes scarcely touched and bottles whose contents had only been tasted, were removed to the kitchen. She commented thereon, but the somewhat contemptuous smile of her domestics was her only reply and it made her feel ashamed.

Vaudrey's predecessor, Monsieur Pichereau, was exacting, *close-fisted*. His table was meagre but there was nothing astonishing in that, Monsieur Pichereau had a delicate stomach. Well and good, but the predecessors of Monsieur Pichereau, they had given fêtes, they had! It is true that one was a count and the other a marquis. One can always tell a gentleman anywhere.

One evening, they heard one of the domestics of the ministry say to another:

"As if it were not our money that the ministers spend! It is the electors' money. They give us wages: we give them salaries. There it is!"

The domestic was discharged immediately, but these remarks, however, recurred to Adrienne's memory and filled her with dislike for the flunkeyism that surrounded her, waiting on her with cold civility, but without any attachment, like hotel waiters or girls at an inn that one will leave the next day, giving them a gratuity.

Vaudrey saw much less of these daily little wounds. He lived in an atmosphere of constant flattery, favor-begging cloaked under complimentary phrases. Had he leisure, he would have been able to calculate with mathematical exactitude how many angles the human form would describe in the process of bowing and scraping. In his department, everybody asked for something or got someone else to ask. *Promotion*, that insatiable hunger, was the greedy dream of all that little world of intriguing, underhand, begging employés, who opened up around the new minister so many

approaches, like military lines around a redoubt.

Sulpice felt himself besieged and the target for a crowd of greedy ambitions. The sub-heads of departments cast bitterly envious glances at the offices of chiefs, like hungry beggars hypnotized by the display at Chevet's. Commendatory letters rained on him. This shower of begging-missives nauseated the minister to such an extent that he endeavored to arrest the stream, ordering Warcolier, the Under Secretary of State, to be called and requesting him to reply to the deputies, to the senators, to everybody, in fact: that he had no influence to use, that the era of favoritism was over; that he, Vaudrey, understood that only merit would receive official gifts. "Merit only. You understand, Monsieur Warcolier?"

Warcolier rolled his huge eyes in astonishment; then, with the self-satisfied smile of an expressionless beau, after passing his fat hand through his long whiskers, yellow and streaked with gray, that decorated his rosy cheeks, he remarked doctorally, that Monsieur le Ministre was entering on a path that, in all conscience, he could qualify as being only dangerous. Eh! *bon Dieu!* one must do something for one's friends!—Vaudrey's accession to the Department of the Interior had given birth to many new hopes; on all grounds they must be satisfied. Vaudrey would never be forgiven for such deception.

"What deception?" asked Sulpice. "I promised reforms and I am going to carry them out, but people laugh at my reforms and ask what?—Places."

"Bless me!" replied Warcolier, "entirely logical."

"Be it so! but there are places and places. I cannot, however, retire a whole staff of employés to give place to a new one. That's precisely what they want. There is not a deputy who has not one candidate to recommend to me."

"That's very natural, Monsieur le Ministre, seeing that there is not a deputy who may not himself be a candidate."

"Still, he should be independent of his electors, but in truth, it is not the rights of those who have elected them that my colleagues defend, it is their own interests."

"Every man for himself, Monsieur le Ministre. Yesterday, even yesterday, one of my electors whose wife has just given birth to a child, wrote me, asking for a good nurse. That is like one of our colleagues, Perraud—of the Vosges.—One of his electors commissioned him to take back an umbrella with him upon his early return. The electors regard their deputies in the light of commission merchants."

"And as tobacco bureaus! Well, I wish to have more morality than that in State affairs. I like giving, but I know how to refuse," said Vaudrey.

"That will be easy enough so long as you are popular and solid in Parliament; but on the day that it is clearly proved that such and such a future minister can make himself more useful than you to the personal interests of everybody—and there are such ministers in sight—"

"Granet, yes, I know! He promises more butter than bread, to cry quits later in giving more dry crusts than fresh butter. But I don't care to deceive any one."

"As you please, Monsieur le Ministre, as you please," answered Warcolier, in a mocking and gentle tone.

Sulpice did not like this man. He was a phrase-maker. He had a vague feeling that this Warcolier who in public affected strictly severe principles was privately undermining him and that he yielded to favors in order to win support. It was enough for the minister to discourage coarse, greedy ambitions, provided that the Under Secretary of State encouraged unsavory, eager hopes by shrewd smiles and silence that assented to all that was desired. This little underhand work going on in his office was unknown to Vaudrey; he did not know that out of every refusal he gave, Warcolier secured friends; but he maintained a watchful distrust for this republican who had become so stanch a supporter of the Republic only since that form of government had triumphed. Besides, what had he to fear? The President of the Council, Monsieur Collard, of Nantes, had the unbounded confidence of the head of the State and of the Chamber; and he was Collard's intimate friend. The majority of the cabinet was compact. The perfect calm of the horizon was undisturbed by a cloud. Vaudrey could rule without fear, without excitement and give all his spare time to that woman whose piercing glance, wandering smile, palpitating nostrils, dishevelled, fair hair, kisses, fondness, cries, and tones pursued him everywhere.

Marianne, how he loved her! From day to day, how his love of her increased like a madman's! It seemed to him that he suddenly found himself in the presence of the only woman who could possibly understand him, and in the only world in which he could live; his petty bourgeois, sensual inexperience flourished in the little hôtel of the courtesan.

He had doubtless loved; often enough he had thought himself once more in love; the poor grisettes, to whom he had written in verse, as he might have sung songs to them, were gone from his thoughts, though they had occupied his heart for a short time. He had profoundly loved her who bore his name, perhaps he loved her still as warmly, as sincerely—the unfortunate man!—as of old. He sometimes recalled with tearful eye, how his whole frame trembled with love in the presence of that young girl who had given herself entirely to him, in all her trust and sincerity, in all her candor, and all her chastely-timid innocent modesty. But Adrienne's love was insipid compared with the intoxicating and appetizing voluptuousness of this woman, so adorable in her exquisite luxury, the refinements of her charm, the singular grace of her attitudes, of her mind, of her disjointed conversation which dared

everything, mocked, caressed, beginning with a pout and ending with some drollery, and challenged passion by exasperating it with refusals and mockery that changed into distracting lasciviousness.

When she extended to Vaudrey her little hand, covered with rings, and indolent and soft, he felt as if he had received an electric shock and that his marrow had been touched. This man of forty felt all the enthusiasm and distraction of a youth. It seemed to him that this was the only woman that he possibly could love, and in truth she was the only one that he could have loved as he did, with his forgetfulness of self, his outbursts of madness, the distracted sentiment of a love for which he would have braved and risked everything.

When he confessed it frankly, she had a way of answering with a questioning manner full of doubt, which conveyed the delicacy of the woman's self-love and the intentionally refined doubt of the coquette, a questioning *yes*:

"Yes?"

Simply that.

And in this *yes*, there was a world of tenderness, excitement and burning promises for Sulpice.

Then he drew her to him:

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!" he repeated in burning tones, as he thrust his head between her shoulders that emerged from her embroidered chemise, and her neck perfumed and satiny, that he covered with eager kisses.

Yes! And he would have uttered this *yes* before every one like a bravado. *Yes!* It was his delight to give himself wholly to Marianne and to tell her again and again that nothing in the whole world could take the place of this mistress who made him forget everything: politics, the home, the ambition that had been his life, and his affection for Adrienne that had been his joy.

Thanks to the Dujarrier, Marianne had paid the rent of the house, the servants and the pressing debts. Claire Dujarrier advanced the hundred thousand francs demanded by Mademoiselle Kayser, and which she had apparently—in reality she took them from her own funds—borrowed from Adolphe Gochard, her lover, who had not a sou, and in whose favor Vaudrey signed in regular legal form, a bill of exchange at three months' date *value received in cash*. The Dujarrier merely retained twenty thousand francs as her commission and handed only eighty thousand to Marianne.

"But Vaudrey's acceptance to Gochard is for one hundred thousand!"

"You are silly, my girl! What if I lose the balance? If your minister should not pay?"

"What do you mean?"

"Stranger things have happened, my little one."

Vaudrey having paid, given his name, signed this bill of exchange, felt the extreme joy arising from the base self-love of the man who pays a lovely creature and who, nevertheless, believes himself loved.

In the early days, Sulpice went to Rue Prony only during the day or at night after dinner, or on leaving a reception or the theatre. Marianne awaited him. He came stealthily, distracted with joy. There, in the closed chamber he remained with Marianne, who was full of pride at the complete subjugation of the will of this man in her embrace. She amused herself occasionally by calling him *Your Excellency*, in reading to him from some book which spun out the ceremonial necessary in applying for an interview with a minister:

"If ever I ask you for an audience, do you know how I must address myself to the secretary? Listen to this book, it is funny: 'Ordinary toilet. The etiquette for the toilet is not very strict, but it is, however, in good taste to appear dressed as for a ceremonious call. For women, the toilet should be simple and the gloves new.'"

She laughed as she rested almost naked in Sulpice's arms, and repeated, looking into his eyes:

"A simple toilet!"

"And again, listen!" she said, as she resumed the book. "'In speaking to a minister as in writing to him, one should address him as *Monseigneur* or *Your Excellency*. On reaching the door as you leave the salon, you should again bow respectfully.' That is amusing, ah! how amusing it is!—Then they respect you as much as that? Your Excellency! Monseigneur! Shall I be obliged to courtesy to you?—Your lips, give me your lips, Monseigneur! I adore you!—You are my own minister; my finance minister, my lover, my all! I do not respect you, but I love you, I love you!"

He trembled to the very roots of his hair when she spoke to him thus. He felt transports of joy in clasping her in his arms and genuine despair when he left her. Leave her! leave her there under that lamp alone, in that low bed where he had just forgotten that there existed anything else in the world besides that apartment, warm with perfumes. He would have liked to pass the whole night beside her, separating only when satiated and overwhelmed with caresses. But how could he leave Adrienne alone over there in the ministerial mansion? However trustful this young wife might be, and innocent, credulous and incapable of suspicion, if he had passed a night absent from her, she would have been terrified and warned.

He easily invented prolonged receptions and night sessions that detained him until an advanced hour.

"One would say that the evening sessions grow more frequent than formerly," Adrienne remarked gently at breakfast.

"Don't talk to me about it," replied Sulpice. "In order to reach the vacation sooner, the deputies talk twice as long."

Adrienne never opened the *Officiel*, which Vaudrey received in his private office, pretending that the sight of a newspaper too vividly recalled the fatiguing political life that absorbed him. One day, however, he allowed the journals to be brought into the salon and to lie about in Madame's room. He informed Adrienne that he was going to pass the day in Picardy, at Guise or at Vervins, where an important deputy had invited him to visit his factory. He would leave in the morning and could not return until the following day toward noon.

"What a long time!" said Adrienne.

"It is still longer for me than for you, since you remain here, in our home."

"Oh! our home! we have only one home: in Chaussée-d'Antin, or the house at Grenoble, you know."

"Dear wife!" cried Vaudrey, as he embraced her tenderly,—sincerely, perhaps.

And he left. He set out for Guise, returned in the evening and ordered the Director of the Press to send to all the journals by the Havas agency, a message which ran: *The Minister of the Interior passed the entire day yesterday at Guise, at Monsieur Delair's, the deputy from L'Aisne. He dined and slept at the house of his host. Monsieur Vaudrey is to return to Paris this morning, at eleven o'clock.*

Then he showed the news to Adrienne, and laughed as he said:

"It is surprising! one cannot take a single step without it appears in print and the entire population is informed at once!"

"Tell me everything," Adrienne replied, as she embraced him with her glance. "Are you tired? You look pale. How did you spend the day? You made a speech? Were you applauded?"

It was mainly by kisses that Vaudrey answered. What could he say to Adrienne? She knew perfectly well how similar all these gatherings were, with their official routine. Monsieur Delair had been very agreeable, but the minister had necessarily had to endure much talk, much importunity.

"The day seemed very long to me!"

"And to me also," she said.

Sulpice indeed returned from Guise, but the last train on the previous night had taken him to Rue Prony, at Marianne's. He had then found out the secret of remaining at her side undisturbed for a long time, and the telegraph, managed by the Director of the Press, enabled him to prove an alibi to Adrienne from time to time. He had taken to Marianne a huge bouquet of fresh flowers gathered in the park at Guise for Madame Vaudrey by Monsieur Delair's two daughters. That appeared to him to be quite natural.

Marianne, who was waiting for him, put the flowers in the Japanese vases and said to him as she threw her bare arms around him:

"Very good! You thought of me!—--"

The next morning Vaudrey left, more than ever enchained by the delight of her embraces. He sometimes returned on foot, to breathe the vivifying freshness of the roseate dawn, or taking a cab, he stretched himself out wearily therein, as he drove to the ministry, musing over the hours so recently passed and striving to arrest them in their flight, to enjoy again their seductive joy and to squeeze as from a delicious fruit, all their intoxicating poetry, delight and fascination.

He closed his eyes. He saw Marianne again with her eyes veiled as he kissed her, he drank in the odor of her hair that fell like a sort of fair cover over the lace pillow. It seemed that he was permeated with her perfume. He breathed the air with wide-open nostrils to inhale it again, to recover its scent and preserve it. His whole frame trembled with emotion at the recollection of that lovely form that he had left whiter than the sheet of the bed, in the dim light that filtered through the opal-shaded lamp.

Then he thought that he must forget, and invent some tale for Adrienne. Again he opened his eyes and trembled in spite of himself, as he saw, on both sides of the cab, workmen slowly trudging along the sidewalks with their hands in their pockets, their noses red, a wretched worn-out silk scarf about their necks and swinging on their arms the supply of food for the day, or again with their fingers numb with the cold, holding some journal in their hands in which they read as they marched along, the speech of "Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur," that magnificent speech not made during the night session as Sulpice had told Adrienne, but the day before yesterday, in broad day, when the majority, faithfully grouped about him, had applauded this phrase: *I, whose hours are consecrated to the amelioration of the lot of the poor and who can say with the poet,—I shall be pardoned for this feeling of vanity:*

> "What I steal from my nights, I add to my days!"

Sulpice heard again the applause that he received. He saw those devoted hands reached out to him as he descended from the tribune; he again experienced a feeling of pride, and yet he felt dissatisfied with himself now that he saw the other hands, the servile hands of the applauders, hidden by the red, cold hands of a mason who held this speech between his horny fingers.

Sulpice returned to the ministry, shaking himself as if to induce forgetfulness, busy, weary, and still,—eternally,—as if immovably fixed in an antechamber of Place Beauvau, he found the inevitable place-hunters, the hornets of ministries.

Vaudrey caused these urgent people, as well as some others, to be received by Warcolier, who asked nothing better than to make tools, to sow the seed of his clientage. Guy de Lissac and Ramel had simultaneously called Vaudrey's attention to the eagerness which Warcolier manifested in toying with popularity.

"He is not wholly devoted to you, is this gentleman who prefers every government!" said Guy.

"He will undermine you quietly!" added Ramel.

"I am satisfied of that. But I am not disturbed: I have the majority. Oh! faithful and compact."

"Woman often changes," muttered Ramel.

Guy was troubled about Vaudrey for another reason. He vaguely suspected that Sulpice was neglecting Adrienne. Political business, doubtless. Vaudrey unquestionably loved his wife, who adored him and was herself adorable. But he manifestly neglected her.

Lissac found them one day smilingly discussing a question that was greatly occupying the journalists: divorce. Apropos of a trifle, of a suit for separation that Adrienne had just read in the *Gazette Tribunaux*. It referred to an adulterous husband, a pottery dealer in Rue Paradis, Monsieur Vauthier, the lover of a singer at a rather notorious *café-concert*, named Léa Thibault. The wife had demanded a separation. Adrienne had just read the pleadings.

"Poor woman!" she said. "She must have suffered, indeed."

Sulpice did not reply.

"Do you know that if that were my case, I could never forgive you?"

"You are mad! What are you thinking of?"

"Oh! it is true, the idea that you could touch another woman, that you could kiss her as you kiss me, that would make me more than angry, horrified and disgusted. I tell you, I would never forgive you."

"Who puts all this stuff in your head? Come, I will do as I used to do," said Vaudrey. "Not another paper shall enter your house! What an idea, to read the *Gazette des Tribunaux*!"

"It is because this name: *Vauthier*, somewhat resembles your own that I was induced to read it. And then this very mournful title: *Separation de corps*. I would prefer divorce myself. A complete divorce that severs the past like a knife-cut."

"But what an idea!" repeated Sulpice, who was somewhat uneasy.

Vaudrey was delighted to hear Guy announced in the midst of this discussion. They would then change the topic. But Adrienne, who was much affected by her reading, returned to the same subject in an obstinate sort of way and Lissac commenced to laugh.

"What a joke! To speak of divorce between you two! Never fear, madame, your husband will never present to the Chamber a law in favor of divorce."

"Who knows?" Sulpice answered. "I am in favor of divorce myself, yes, absolutely."

"And I cannot understand, for my part, how a woman can belong to two living men," said Adrienne.

"You reason for yourself. But the unhappy women who suffer—and the unhappy men—The existing law, in fact, seeing that it admits separation, permits divorce, but more cruel, heartrending, and unjust. Divorce without freedom. Divorce that continues the chain."

"Sulpice is right, madame, and sooner or later, we shall certainly arrive at that frightful divorce."

"After all, what does it matter to me?" Adrienne replied.

She threw the accursed *Gazette des Tribunaux* into the waste basket with its *Suit of Vauthier vs. Vauthier*. "We are not interested, neither my husband nor I; he loves me and I love him. I am as sure of him as he is sure of me. He may demand all the laws that are possible: it would not be for selfish interest, for he would not profit by them."

"Never!" said Sulpice with a laugh, delighted to be released from the magnetic influence of Adrienne's strange excitement.

There was, however, a somewhat false ring in this laugh. Face to face with the avowed trustfulness of his wife, Sulpice experienced a slight pricking of conscience. He thought of Marianne. His passion increased tenfold, but this very increase of affection made him afraid. He hastened to find himself again at Rue Prony. The Hôtel Beauvau depressed him. It became more than ever a prison. How gladly he escaped from it!

Yes, it was a prison for him as it was for Adrienne; a prison that he fled from to seek Marianne's boudoir, to enjoy her kisses and mirth, while, at the same moment, his wife, the dear abandoned, disdained creature, sad without being cognizant of the cause of her melancholy, terrified by the emptiness of that grand ministerial mansion, that "sounded hollow," as she said, quietly and stealthily

took the official carriage that Vaudrey sent back to her from the Chamber, and had herself driven—where?—only she knew!

"You ought to make a great many calls," the minister had frequently said. "It would divert your mind and it is well to appear to know a great many persons."

But she only found pleasure in making one visit, she gave the coachman the address of the apartments on Chaussée-d'Antin, where she had lived long, happy years with Sulpice, sweet and peaceful under the clear light of the lamp. She entered this deserted apartment, now as cold as a tomb, and had the shutters opened by the concierge in order that she might see the sunlight penetrate the room and set all the motes dancing in its cheerful rays. She shut herself in and remained there happy, consoled; sitting in the armchair formerly occupied by Sulpice, she pictured him at the table at which he used to work, his inkstand before him and surrounded by his books, his cherished books! She lived again the vanished life. "Return!" she said to the dream, the humble dream she had at last recovered. She rambled about those deserted rooms that on every side reminded her of some sweet delight, here it was a kiss of chaste and eternal love, there a smile. Ah! how easy life would have been there all alone, happy for ever!

The Ministry! Power! Popularity! Fame! Authority! What were they worth?

Is all that worth one of the blessed hours in this little dwelling, where the cup of bliss would have been full if the wife could have heard the clear laugh or the faint cry of a child?

Poor Sulpice! how he was exhausting himself now in an overwhelming task! He was giving his health and life to politics, while here he only experienced peace, consoling caresses and the quieting of every excitement. On the study-table there still remained some pens and some books that were formerly in constant use.

Adrienne went away with reddened eyes from these pilgrimages, as it were, to her former happiness. She returned to her carriage and moistened her cambric pocket handkerchief with her warm breath, in order to wipe her eyes so that Sulpice might not see that she had been weeping. Then when her well-known carriage passed before the shops in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the wives of mercers or booksellers, dressmakers, young girls, all of whom enviously shook their heads, said to each other:

"The minister's wife!—Ah! she has had a glorious dream!—She is happy!"

III

TOC

Marianne was contented. Not that her ambition was completely satisfied, but after all, Sulpice in place of Rosas was worth having. Though a minister was only a passing celebrity, he was a personage. From the depths of the bog in which she lately rolled, she would never have dared to hope for so speedy a revenge.

Speedy, assuredly, but perhaps not sufficient. Her eager hunger increased with her success. Since Vaudrey was hers, she sought some means of bringing about some adventure that would give her fortune. What could be asked or exacted from Sulpice? She recalled the traditions of fantastic bargains, of extensive furnishings. She would find them. She had but to desire, since he had abandoned himself, bound hand and foot, like a child.

She knew him now, all his candor, all his weakness, for, in the presence of this blasé woman, weary of love, Vaudrey permitted himself to confide his thoughts with unreserved freedom, opening his heart and disclosing himself with a clean breast in this duel with a woman:—a duel of self-interest which he mistook for passion.

She had studied him at first and speedily ranked him, calling him:

"An innocent!"

She felt that in this house in Rue Prony, where she was really not in her own home but was installed as in a conquered territory, Sulpice was dazzled. Like a provincial, as Granet described him so often, he entered there into a new world.

Uncle Kayser frequently called to see his niece. Severe in taste, he cast long, disdainful looks at the tapestries and the artistic trifles that adorned the house. In his opinion, it was rubbish and the luxury of a decaying age. He never changed his tune, always riding the hobby-horse of an æsthetic moralist.

"It lacks severity, all this furnishing of yours," was his constantly repeated criticism to Marianne, as he sat smoking his pipe on a divan, as was his custom in his own, wretched studio.

Then, in an abrupt way, with his eye wandering over the ceiling as if he were following the flight of a chimera, he would say:

"Why! your minister must do a great deal, if all this comes from the ministry!"

Marianne interrupted him. It was no business of his to mix himself up with matters that did not concern him. Above all, he must hold his tongue. Did he forget that Vaudrey was married? The least indiscretion—

"Oh! don't alarm yourself," the painter broke in, "I am as dumb as a carp, the more so since your

escapade is not very praiseworthy!—For you have, in fact, deserted the domestic hearth—yes, you have deserted the hearth.—It is pretty here, a little like a courtesan's, perhaps, but pretty, all the same.—But you must acknowledge that it is a case of interloping. It is not the genuine home with its dignity, its virtuous severity, its—What time does your minister come? I would like to speak to him—"

"To preach morality to him?" asked Marianne, glancing at her uncle with an ironical expression.

"Not at all. I am considered to be ignorant—No, I have a plan to decorate in a uniform way, all the mayors' offices in Paris and I want to propose it to him—*The Modern Marriage*, an allegorical treatment!—*Law Imposing Duty on Love*. Something noble, full of expression, moralizing. Art that will set people thinking, for the contemplation of lofty works can alone improve the morals and the masses —You understand?"

"Perfectly. You want a commission!"

"Ah! that's a contemptible word, hold! A commission! Is a true artist commissioned? He obeys his inspiration, he follows his ideal—A commission! a commission! Ugh!—On my word, you would break the wings of faith! Little one, have you any of that double zero Kummel left, that you had the other day?"

Marianne sought to spare Sulpice the importunities of her uncle. She wished to keep the minister's entire influence for herself.

She had nothing to fear, moreover. Sulpice was hers as fully as she believed. Like so many others who have lived without living, Sulpice did not know *woman*, and Marianne was ten times a woman, woman-child, woman-lover, woman-courtesan, woman-girl, and every day and every night she appeared to her lover renewed and surprising, freshly created for passion and pleasure. Everything about her, even the frame that surrounded her beauty, the dwelling, perfumed with passionate love, distractedly captivated Sulpice. Behind the dense curtains in the dressing-room upholstered like a boudoir, with its carpet intended only for naked feet, as the reclining chair with its extra covering of Oriental silk was adapted to moments of languishing repose, Sulpice saw and contemplated the vast wardrobe with its three mirrors reflecting the huge marble washstand with its silver spigots, its silver bowl, wherein the scented water gleamed opal-like with its perfumes, the gas illuminating the brushes decorated with monograms, standing out against the white marble, the manicure sets of fine steel, the dark-veined tortoise-shell combs, the coquettish superfluity of scissors and files scattered about amongst knickknacks, inlaid enamels, and Japanese ivory ornaments, and there, stretched out and watching Marianne, who came and went before him with a smile on her face, her hair unfastened, sometimes with bare shoulders, Sulpice saw, through a half-open door in the middle of a bathroom floored with blue Delft tiles, the bath that steamed with a perfumed vapor, odorous of thyme, and the water which was about to envelop in its warm embrace that rosy form that displayed beneath the lights and under the full blaze of the gas, the nudity of her flesh beneath a transparent Surah chemise, silky upon the living silk.

Milk-white reflections seemed to play on her shoulders and Sulpice never forgot those ardent visions that followed him, clung to him, thrust themselves before his gaze and into his recollections, never leaving him, either at the Chamber, the Council Board or even when he was with Adrienne.—The young woman, seeing his absorption, hesitated to disturb his thoughts, political as they were, no doubt, while he mused upon his hours of voluptuous enjoyment, forever recalling the youthful roundness of her shoulders, and the inflections of her body, the ivory-like curve of her neck, whose white nape rested upon him, and her curls escaped from the superb arrangement of her hair, held in its place at the top by a comb thrust into this fair mass like a claw plunged into flesh.

Vaudrey must have had an active and prompt intelligence at times to forget suddenly these passionate images, when he unexpectedly found himself compelled to ascend the tribune during a discussion or to express his opinion clearly at the Ministerial Council. He increased his power, finding, perhaps, a new excitement, a new spur in the love that renewed his youth. He had never been seen more active and more stirring in the Chamber, though he was somewhat nervous. He determined to put himself in evidence at the Ministry and to prove to the phrase-monger Warcolier that he knew how to act. The President of the Council, Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—said several times to Sulpice:

"Too much zeal, my dear minister. A politician ought to be cooler."

"I shall be cooler with age!" Sulpice replied with a laugh.

From time to time he went to seek advice from Ramel, as he had promised. The little shopkeepers and laundresses of Rue Boursault hardly suspected when they saw a coupé stop at the door of the old journalist, that a minister alighted from it.

Sulpice felt amid the bustle of his life, amid the spurring and over-excited events of his existence, the need of talking with his old friend. Besides, Rue Boursault was on the way to Rue Prony. As Marianne was frequently not at home, Sulpice would spend the time before her return in chatting with Ramel.

"Well! Ramel, are you satisfied with me?"

"How could I be otherwise? You are an honest man and faithful and devoted to your ideas. I am not afraid of you, but I am of those by whom you are surrounded."

"Warcolier?"

"Warcolier and many others, of those important fellows who ask me—when they deign to speak to me

—with an insignificant air of superiority and almost of pity, the idiots: 'Well! you are no longer doing anything! When will you do something?' As if I had not done too much already, seeing that I have made them!"

Denis Ramel smiled superciliously and the minister looked with a sort of respect at this vanguard warrior, this laborer of the early morn who had never received his recompense or even claimed it.

"I should like you to resume your journal in order to announce all these truths," Vaudrey said to him.

"Do you think so? Why, a journal that would proclaim the truth to everybody would not last six months, since no one would buy it."

As Sulpice was about to go, there was a ring at Ramel's door.

"Ah! who can it be? A visit. I beg you will excuse me, my dear Vaudrey."

Denis went to open the door.

It was a man of about fifty, dressed in the garb of a poor workman, wearing a threadbare greatcoat and trousers that were well polished at the knees, who as he entered held his round, felt hat in his hand. He was thin, pale and tired-looking, with a dark, dull complexion and a voice weak rather than hoarse. He bowed timidly, repeating twice: "I earnestly ask your pardon;" and then he remained standing on the threshold, without advancing or retiring, in an embarrassed attitude, while a timid smile played beneath his black beard, already sprinkled with gray.

"Pardon—I disturb you—I will return—"

"Come in, Garnier," said Ramel.

The man entered, saluting Vaudrey, who was not known to him, and at a gesture from Denis, he took a seat on the edge of a chair, scarcely sitting down and constantly twirling his round-shaped hat between his lean fingers. From time to time, he raised his left hand to his mouth to check the sound of a dry cough which rose in his muscular throat, that might be supposed to be a prey to laryngitis.

"You ask for the truth—Listen a moment, a single moment," Ramel whispered in the ear of the minister.

Without mentioning Sulpice's name, he began to question Garnier, who grew bolder and talked and gossiped, his cheek-bones now and then heightened in color by small, pink spots.

"Well! Garnier, about the work?—Oh! you may speak before monsieur, it interests him."

The man shrugged his shoulders with a sad, somewhat bitter smile, but resigned at least. He very quietly, but without any complaint, acknowledged all that he was enduring. Work was in a bad way. It appeared that it was just the same everywhere in Europe, in fact, but indeed that doesn't provide work at the shop. The master, a kind man, in faith, had grown old, and was anxious to sell his business of an art metal worker. He had not found a purchaser, then he had simply closed his shop, being too ill to continue hard work, and the four or five workmen whom he employed found themselves thrown into the street. There it is! Happily for Garnier, he had neither wife nor child, nothing but his own carcass. One can always get one's self out of a difficulty, but the others who had households and brats! Rousselet had five. Matters were not going to be very cheerful at home. He must rely on charity or credit, he did not know what, but something to stave off that distress, real and sad distress, since it was not merited.

"Do you interest yourself in politics?" asked Vaudrey curiously, surmising that this man was possessed of strong and quick intelligence, although he looked so worn and crushed and his cough frequently interrupted his remarks.

Garnier looked at Ramel before replying, then answered in a quiet tone:

"Oh! not now! That is all over. I vote like everybody else, but I let the rest alone. I have had my reckoning."

He had said all this in a low tone without any bitterness and as if burdened with painful memories.

"It is, however, strange, all the same," added the workman, "to observe that the more things change, the more alike they are. Instead of occupying themselves over there with interpellations and seeking to overthrow or to strengthen administrations, would it not be better if they thought a little of those who are dying of hunger? for there are some, it is necessary to admit that such are not wanting! What is it to me whether Pichereau or Vaudrey be minister, when I do not know at the moment where I shall sleep when I have spent my savings, and whether the baker will give me credit now that I am without a shop?"

At the mention of Vaudrey's name, Ramel wished to make a sign to this man, but Sulpice had just seized the hand of his old friend and pressed it as if to entreat him not to interrupt the conversation. The voice that he heard, interrupted by a cough, was the voice of a workman and he did not hear such every day.

"Note well that I am not a blusterer or a disturber, isn't that so, Monsieur Ramel? I have always been content with my lot, myself—One receives and executes orders and one is satisfied. Everything goes on all right—My politics at present is my work; when I shall have broken my back to bring journalists into power—I beg your pardon, Monsieur Ramel, you know very well that it is not of you that I speak

thus—I shall be no fatter for it, I presume. I only want just to keep life and soul together, if it can be done. I suppose you could not find me a place, Monsieur Ramel? I would do anything, heavy work if need be, or bookkeeping, if it is desired. I would like bookkeeping better, although it is not my line, because the forge fire, the coal and heat, as you see, affect me there now—he touched his neck—it strangles me and hastens the end too quickly. It is true for that I am in the world."

Vaudrey felt himself stirred even to his bones by the mournful, musical voice of the consumptive, by this true misery, this poverty expressed without phrases and this claim of labor. All the questions *yonder*, as Garnier said, in the committees and sub-committees, in the tribune and in the lobbies, discussions, disputes, personal questions cloaked under the guise of the general welfare, suddenly appeared to him as petty and vain, narrow and egotistical beside the formidable question of bread which was propounded to him so quietly by this man of the people, who was not a rebel of the violent days, but the unfortunate brother, the eternal Lazarus crying, without threat, but simply, sadly: "And I?"

He would have liked, without making himself known, to give something to this sufferer, to promise him a position. He did not dare to offer it or to mention his name. The man would have refused charity and the minister, in all the personnel of bustling employés, often useless, that fill the ministry, had not a single place to give to this workman whose chest was on fire and whose throat was choking.

"I will return and we will talk about him," he said to Ramel, as he arose, indicating Garnier by a nod. "Do not tell him who I am. On my word, I should be ashamed—Poor devil!"

"Multiply him by three or four hundred thousand, and be a statesman," said Ramel.

Vaudrey bowed to the workman, who rose quickly and returned his salute with timid eagerness, and the minister went rapidly down the stairs of the little house and jumped into his carriage, making haste to get away.

He bore with him a feeling akin to remorse, and in all sincerity, for he still heard ringing in his ears, the poor consumptive's voice saying:

"What is it to me, who am suffering, whether Vaudrey or Pichereau be minister?"

On reaching Place Beauvau, he found a despatch requesting his immediate presence at the Élysée. At the Palace he received information that surprised him like a thunderbolt. Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—had just been struck down by apoplexy in the corridors of the ministry. The President of the Council was dead and the Chief of the State had turned to Vaudrey to fill the high position which, but two hours before, had been held by Monsieur Collard.

President of the Council! He, Vaudrey! Head of the Ministry! The first in his country after the supreme head? The joyful surprise that such a proposition caused him, so occupied his mind that he was unable to feel very much moved by the loss of Monsieur Collard—of Nantes—. Sulpice, moreover, had never profoundly cared for this austere advocate, although he had been much associated with him. His liking for this man who brought to the Council old-time opinions and preconceived ideas was a merely political affection. The President's offer proved to him that his own popularity, as well as his influence over parliament, had only increased since his recent entry on public life. He was then about to be in a position to assert his individuality still better. What a glorious time for Grenoble and what wry faces Granet would make!

Sulpice hastened to announce this news to Adrienne, although it would not become official until after Collard's funeral obsequies. He returned almost triumphantly to the Hôtel Beauvau. Only one thought, a sombre image, clouded his joy: it was not the memory of Collard, but the sad image of the man whom he had met at Ramel's, and who, when the *Officiel* should speak, should make the announcement, would shrug his shoulders and say ironically:

"Well! and what then?"

He had scarcely whispered these words to Adrienne: "President of the Council! I am President of the Council!" when, without being astonished at the faint, almost indifferent smile that escaped the young wife, he suddenly thought that he was under obligation to make a personal visit to the Ministry of Justice where Collard was lying dead.

He ordered himself to be driven quickly to Place Vendôme.

At every moment, carriages brought to the ministry men of grave mien, decorated with the red ribbon, who entered wearing expressions suitable to the occasion and inscribed their names in silence on the register, passing the pen from one to another just as the aspergillus is passed along in church. Everybody stood aside on noticing Vaudrey. It seemed to him that they instinctively divined that Collard being out of the way it was he who must be the man of the hour, the necessary man, the President of the Council marked out in advance, the chief of the coming *ministry*.

"Poor Collard!" thought Sulpice, as he inscribed his name on the register. "One will never be able to say: the *Collard Administration*. But it would be glorious if one day history said: the *Vaudrey Administration*."

He re-entered the Hôtel Beauvau, inflated with the idea. In the antechamber, there were more office-seekers than were usually in attendance. One of them, on seeing Vaudrey, rose and ran to him and said quickly to Sulpice, who did not stop:

"Ah! Monsieur le Ministre—What a misfortune—Monsieur Collard—If there were no eminent men like

Your Excellency to replace him!—"

Vaudrey bowed without replying.

"What is the name of that gentleman?" said he as soon as he entered his cabinet, to the usher who followed him. "I always find him, but I cannot recognize him."

"He! Monsieur le Ministre? Why, that is, *Monsieur Eugène*!"

"Ah! very good! That is right! The eternal Monsieur Eugène!"

Just then Warcolier opened the door, looking more morose than sad, and holding a letter that he crushed in his hand, while at the same time he greeted Vaudrey with a number of long phrases concerning the dreadful, unexpected, sudden, unlooked-for, crushing death—he did not select his epithets, but allowed them to flow as from an overrunning cask—the dramatic decease of Collard—of Nantes—. From time to time, Warcolier, while speaking, cast an involuntary, angry glance at the paper that he twisted in his fingers, so much so that Vaudrey, feeling puzzled, at last asked him what the letter was.

"Don't speak to me about it—" said the fat man. "An imbecile!"

"What imbecile?"

"An imbecile whom I received with some little courtesy the other morning—I who, nevertheless, go to so much trouble to make myself agreeable."

"And that is no sinecure!—Well, the imbecile in question?"

"Left furious, no doubt, because of the reception accorded him—and to me, me, the Under-Secretary of State, this is the letter that he writes, that he dares to write! Here, Monsieur le Ministre, listen! Was ever such stupidity seen? '*Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat, you have under your orders a very badly trained Undersecretary of State, who will make you many enemies, I warn you. As you are his direct superior, I permit myself to notify you of his conduct*,' etc., etc. You laugh?" said Warcolier, seeing that a smile was spreading over Vaudrey's blond-bearded face.

"Yes, it is so odd!—Your correspondent is evidently ignorant that there are only Under-Secretaries of State in the administration!—unless this innocent is but simply an insolent fellow."

"If I thought that!" said Warcolier, enraged. "No, but it is true," he said with astonishing candor, a complete overflowing of his satisfied egotism, "there are a lot of people who ask for everything and are good for nothing!—Malcontents!—I should like to know why they are malcontents!—What are they dreaming about, then? What do they want? I am asking myself ever since I came into office: What is it they want? Doesn't the present government carry out the will of the majority?—It is just like those journalists with their nagging articles!—They squall and mock! What they print is disgusting! Granted that we have demanded liberty, but that does not mean license!"

While Warcolier, entirely concerned about himself, with erect head and oratorical gesture, spoke as if in the presence of two thousand hearers, Sulpice Vaudrey again recalled, still sad and sick, the dark and sunken cheeks and the colorless ears, the poor projecting ears of the consumptive Garnier with whom he had come in contact at Ramel's.

He was anxious to be with Adrienne again, and above all, with Marianne. What would his mistress say to him when she knew of his reaching the presidency of the Council?

Adrienne had certainly received the news with little pleasure.

"If you are happy!"—was all she said, with a sigh.

It was the very expression she had used at the moment when, on the formation of the "Collard Cabinet," he had gone to her and cried out: "I am a minister!"

Adrienne was impassive.

In truth, Sulpice was beginning to think that she was too indifferent to the serious affairs of life. The delightful joys of intimacy, now, moreover, discounted, ought not to make a woman forget the public successes of her husband. Instinctively comparing this gentle, slender blonde, resigned and pensive, with Marianne, with her tawny locks and passionate nature, whom he adored more intensely each day, Vaudrey thought that a man in his position, with his ambition and merit, would have been more powerfully aided, aye, even doubled in power and success by a creature as strongly intelligent, as energetic and as fertile in resource as Mademoiselle Kayser.

He still had before him a peculiar smile of indefinable superiority expressed by his mistress when Adrienne and Marianne chanced to meet one evening at the theatre, which made him feel that his mistress was watching and analyzing his wife. The next day, Marianne with exquisite grace, but keen as a poisoned dart, said to him:

"Do you know, my dear, Madame Vaudrey is charming?"

He felt himself blush at these words hurled at him point-blank, then his cheeks grew cold. Never, till that moment, had Mademoiselle Kayser mentioned Adrienne's name.

"You like blondes, I see!" said Marianne. "I am almost inclined to be jealous!"

"Will you do me a great favor?" then interrupted Sulpice. "Never let us speak of her. Let us speak of ourselves."

"Yes," continued the perfidious Marianne in a patronizing tone, as if she had not heard him, "she is certainly charming! A trifle—just a trifle—bourgeoise—But charming! Decidedly charming!"

Knowing Vaudrey well, she understood what a keen weapon she was plunging straight into him. A little *bourgeoise*! This conclusion rendered by the Parisienne with a smile now haunted Sulpice, who was annoyed at himself and he sought to discover in his wife, the dear creature whom he had so tenderly loved, whom he still loved, some self-satisfying excuse for his passion and adultery.

"Bah!" he thought. "Is it adultery? There is no adultery save for the wife. The husband's faithlessness is called a caprice, an adventure, a craving or madness of the senses. Only the wife is adulterous."

In all candor, what sin had he committed? Was Adrienne less loved? He would have sacrificed his life for her. He overwhelmed her with presents, created surprises for her that she received without emotion, and simply said in a doleful tone:

"How good you are, my dear!"

He was ruining neither her nor his children! Ah! if he but had children! Why had not Adrienne had children? A woman should be a mother. It is maternity that in the marriage estate justifies a man in abandoning his freedom and a woman her shame.

A mother! And was Marianne a mother?

No, but Marianne was Marianne. Marianne was not created for the domestic fireside and the cradle. Her statuesque and seductively lovely limbs only craved for the writhings of pleasure, not the pangs of maternity. Adrienne, on the contrary, was the wife, and the childless wife soon took another name: the friend. No, he robbed her of nothing, Adrienne lost none of his affection, none of his fortune. The money squandered at Rue Prony, Vaudrey had acquired; it was the savings of the honest people of Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, the parents, the *old folks*, that he threw—as in smelting—into the crucible of the girl's mansion.

Adrienne expressed no desire that was not fulfilled, and Sulpice who was, moreover, confident and lulled by her quietude, felt no remorse. He did not enquire if his passion for Marianne would endure. He flung himself upon this love as upon some prey; nor was desire the only influence that now attached him to this woman, he was drawn to her also by the admiration that he felt for her boldness of thought, her singular opinions, her careless expressions, her devilish spirit; her appetizing and voluptuous attractions surprised and ensnared him—

What a counselor and ally such a woman would be!

Well and good! When Vaudrey informed her that he was about to become first minister, to preside over the Council, to show his power—this was his eternal watchword—Marianne immediately comprehended the new situation and what increase of influence in the country such a fortunate event would give him.

He observed with pleasure that something like a joyful beam gleamed in Mademoiselle Kayser's gray eyes.

She also doubtless thought that it was desirable to take advantage of the occasion, to seize and cling to the opportunity.

"Then it is official?" she asked.

"Not yet. But it is certain."

What could Marianne hope for? Again, she had no well-defined object; but she watched her opportunity, and since Vaudrey's power was enlarged, well, she was to profit by it. Claire Dujarrier, who had already served her so well, could be useful to her again and advise her advantageously. That will be seen.

"Are you desirous of attending Collard's funeral?" Vaudrey asked Marianne.

She laughed as she asked:

"Why! what do you think that would be to me?"

"It will be very fine. All the authorities, the magistrates, the Institute, the garrison of Paris will be present."

"Then you think it is amusing to see soldiers file past? I am not at all curious! You will describe it all to me and that will be quite sufficient for me."

Vaudrey walked at the head of the cortége that accompanied through Place Vendôme and Rue de la Paix, black with the crowd, the funeral procession of Collard—of Nantes—to the Madeleine. Troops of the line in parade uniforms lined the route. From time to time was heard the muffled roll of drums shrouded in crêpe. The funeral car was immense and was crowded with wreaths. As with bowed head he accompanied the funeral procession of his colleague, almost his friend,—but, bah! friendship of committees and sub-committees!—Sulpice was sufficiently an artist to be somewhat impressed with the contrast afforded by the display of official pomp crowning the rather obscure life of the Nantes advocate. He had ever obtrusively before him, as if haunted by the spectre of the Poor Man before

Don Juan, the lean face of Garnier and the white moustache of Ramel. Which of the two had better served his cause, Ramel vanquished or Collard—of Nantes—dying in the full blaze of success?

He pondered over this during the whole of the ceremony. He thought of it while the notes of the organ swelled forth, while the blue flames of the burning incense danced, and while the butts of the soldiers' muskets sounded from time to time on the flagstones, as the men stood around the bier and followed the orders of the officer who commanded them.

On leaving the ceremony, Granet approached Sulpice while gently stroking his waxed moustache, and said in an ironical tone:

"Do you know that it is suggested that a statue be raised in Collard's honor?"

"Really?"

"Yes, because he is considered to have shown a great example."

"What?"

"He is one of those rare cases of ministers dying in office. Imitate him, my dear minister,—to the latest possible moment."

Sulpice made an effort to smile at Granet's pleasantry. This cunning fellow decidedly displeased him; but there was nothing to take offence at, it was mere diplomatic pleasantry expressed politely.

Before returning to the ministry, Vaudrey had himself driven to Rue Prony. Jean, the domestic, told him that Madame had gone out; she had been under the necessity of going to her uncle's. After all, Sulpice thought this was a very simple matter; but he was determined to see Marianne, so he ordered his carriage to be driven to the artist's studio. Uncle Kayser opened the door, bewildered at receiving a call from the minister and, at the same time, showing that he was somewhat uneasy, coughing very violently, as if choked with emotion, or perhaps as a signal to some one.

"Is Mademoiselle Kayser here?" asked Sulpice.

"Yes—Ah! how odd it is—Chance wills that just now one of our friends—a connoisseur of pictures—"

Vaudrey had already thrust open the door of the studio and he perceived, sitting near Marianne and holding his hat in his hand, a young man with pale complexion and reddish beard, whom Mademoiselle Kayser, rising quickly and without any appearance of surprise, eagerly presented to him:

"Monsieur José de Rosas!"

In the simple manner in which she had pronounced this name, she had infused so triumphant an expression, such manifest ostentation, that Vaudrey felt himself suddenly wounded, struck to the heart.

He recalled everything that Marianne had said to him about this man.

He greeted Rosas with somewhat frigid politeness and from the tone in which Marianne began to speak to him, he at once realized that she had some interest in allowing the Spaniard to surmise nothing. She unduly emphasized the title by which she addressed him, repeating a little too frequently: "Monsieur le Ministre."—Whenever Vaudrey sought to catch her glance she looked away in a strange fashion and managed to avoid carrying on any formal conversation with Sulpice. On the contrary, she addressed Rosas affably, asking what he had done in London, what he had become and what he brought back new.

"Nothing," José answered with a peculiar expression that displeased Vaudrey. "Nothing but the conviction that one lives only in Paris surrounded by persons whom one vainly seeks to avoid and toward whom one always returns—in spite of one's self, at times."

Vaudrey observed the almost proud, triumphant expression that flashed in Marianne's eyes. He vaguely realized an indirect confession expressed in that trite remark made by Rosas. The Spaniard's voice trembled slightly as he spoke.

Marianne smiled as she listened.

"You have taken a new journey, monsieur?" asked Sulpice, uncertain what bearing to assume.

"Oh! just a temporary absence! A trip to London—"

"Have you returned long?"

"Only this morning."

His first call was at Simon Kayser's house, where perhaps, he expected to see Marianne. And the proof—

Vaudrey instinctively thought that it was a very hasty matter to call so soon on Uncle Kayser. This man's first visit was not to the painter's studio, but in reality to the woman who—Sulpice still heard Marianne declare that—who would not become his mistress. There was something strange in that. Eh! *parbleu!* it was perhaps Monsieur de Rosas who had sent for Marianne.

She endeavored to make it clear that only chance was responsible for bringing them together here,

but Sulpice doubted, he was uneasy and angry.

He felt almost determined to declare, if it were only by a word, the prize of possession, the conquest of this woman, whom he felt that Rosas was about to contend with him for.

She surmised everything and interrupted Sulpice even before he could have spoken and, with a sort of false respect, displayed before Rosas the friendship which Monsieur le Ministre desired to show her and of which she was proud.

"By the way, my dear minister, as to your appointment as President of the Council?"

Vaudrey knit his brows.

"That is so! I ask your pardon. I am betraying a state secret. Monsieur de Rosas will not abuse it. Isn't that so, Monsieur le Duc?"

Rosas bowed; Vaudrey was growing impatient.

"Madame Vaudrey will, of course, be delighted at this appointment, Monsieur le Ministre?" continued Marianne.

She smiled at Sulpice who was greatly astonished to hear Adrienne's name mentioned there; then, turning to Rosas, she charmingly depicted a quasi-idyllic sketch of the affection of Monsieur le Ministre for Madame Vaudrey. A model household. There was nothing surprising in that, moreover. "Monsieur le Ministre" was so amiable—yes, truly amiable, without any flattery,—and Madame Vaudrey so charming!

Sulpice, who was very nervous and had become slightly pale, endeavored to discover the meaning of this riddle. He asked himself what Marianne was thinking about, what she meant to say or dissimulate.

Monsieur de Rosas sat motionless on his chair, very cool, looking calmly on without speaking a word.

He seemed to await an opportunity to leave the studio, and since Vaudrey had arrived he had only spoken a few brief phrases in strict propriety.

Marianne, all smiles and happy, with beaming eyes, interrogated Vaudrey and sought to provide a subject of conversation for the unexpected interview of these two men. Was there a great crowd at Collard's funeral? Who had sung at the ceremony? Vaudrey answered these questions rapidly, like a man absorbed in other thoughts.

After a moment's interval, Monsieur de Rosas arose and bowed to Marianne with gentlemanly formality.

"Are you going, my dear duke?"

"Yes, I have seen you again. You are getting along well. I am satisfied."

"You will come again, at any rate? My uncle has some new compositions to show you."

"Oh! great ideas," began Kayser. "Things that will make famous frescoes!—For a palace—or the Pantheon!—either one!"

He had looked alternately at the duke and Vaudrey.

Rosas bowed to the minister and withdrew without replying, followed by Kayser and Marianne who, on reaching the threshold of the salon, seized his hand and pressed it nervously within her own soft one and said quickly:

"You will return, oh! I beg you! Ah! it is too bad to have run away! You will come back!"

She was at once entreating and commanding him. Rosas did not reply, but she felt in the trembling of his hand, as he pressed her own, in his brilliant glance, that she would see him again. And since he had returned to Paris alone, weary of being absent from her, perhaps, seeing that he had hastened back after having desired to free himself from her, did it not seem this time that he was wholly captivated?

All this was expressed by a pressure of the fingers, a glance, a sigh.

Rosas went rapidly away, like one distracted. Marianne, who motioned to Uncle Kayser to disappear, reappeared in the studio, entirely self-possessed.

Vaudrey had risen from the divan on which he had been sitting and he was standing, waiting.

"I believed that I understood that you had dismissed Monsieur de Rosas?"

"I might have told you that I did so, since it is true."

"You smiled at him, nevertheless, just now."

"Yes."

"A man who begged you to be his mistress!"

"And whom I rejected, yes!"

She looked at Sulpice with her winsome, sidelong glance, curling her lovely pink lips that he had kissed so many times.

"Then you love that man?"

"I! not at all, only it is flattering to me to have him return like that, just like some penitent little boy."

"I do not understand—"

"*Parbleu!* you are not a woman, that is all that that proves!—It is irritating to our self-love to see people too promptly accept the dismissal one gives them. What! Don't they suffer? Don't they say anything? Don't they complain? Monsieur de Rosas comes back to me, that proves that he was hurt, and I triumph. Now, do you understand?"

"And—that joy that I observed is—?"

"It is because Monsieur de Rosas is in Paris."

"And you don't love him? You don't love him?" asked Vaudrey, clasping Marianne's hands in his.

She laughed and said:

"I do not love him in the least."

"And you love me?"

"Yes, you, I love you!"

"Marianne, you know that it would be very wicked and wrong to lie! It is not necessary to love me at all if you must cease to love me!"

"In other words, one should never lend money unless one is obliged to lend one's whole fortune."

He felt extremely dissatisfied with Marianne's ironical remark. She looked at him with an odd expression which was all the more disquieting and intoxicating.

"Let us speak no more about that, shall we?" she said. "I repeat to you that I am satisfied at having seen Monsieur de Rosas again, because it affords my self-love its revenge. Now, whether he comes back or not, it matters little to me. He has made the *amende honorable*. That is the principal thing, and you, my dear, must not be jealous; I find Othello's rôle tiresome; oh! yes, tiresome!—The more so, because you have no right to treat me as a Desdemona. The Code does not permit it."

"You want to remind me again, then, that I am married? A moment ago, you stabbed me by pin-thrusts."

"In speaking of your household? Say then with knife-thrusts."

"Why did you mention my wife before Monsieur de Rosas?"

"Why," said Marianne, "you do not understand anything. It was for your sake, for you alone, in order to explain the presence in Marianne's house, of a minister who is considered to lead a puritan life. Nothing could be more simple!—Would you have me tell him that you neglect your wife and that you are my lover? Perhaps you would have liked that better!"

"Yes, perhaps," said Vaudrey passionately.

"Vain fellow!" the pretty girl said as she placed upon his mouth her little hand which he kept upon his lips. "Then you would like me to parade our secrets everywhere and to publicly announce our happiness?"

"I should like," he said, as he removed his lips from the soft palm of her hand, "that all the world should know that you are mine, mine only—only mine, are you not?—That man?"

His eyes entreated her and lost their fire.

Marianne shrugged her shoulders.

"Let Monsieur de Rosas alone in tranquillity and let us return to my house, *our house*," she said, with a tender expression in her eyes.

"You do not love him?"

"No."

"And you love me?"

"I have told you so."

"You love me? You love me?"

"I love you!—Ah!" she said, "how unhappy you would be, nevertheless, if I told you aloud some day in one of the lobbies of the Assembly what you ask me to repeat here in a whisper."

"I should prefer that to losing you and to knowing that you did not love me."

"He is telling the truth, however, the great fool!" cried Marianne, laughing.

"The real, sincere, profound truth!"

He drew her to him, seated on the vulgar divan where Simon Kayser was wont to display his paradoxes, and encircling her waist with both arms he felt her yielding form beneath her satin gown, and wished her to bend her fair face to his lips that were craving a kiss.

Marianne took his face between her soft hands, and looking at him with an odd smile, tender and ironical at once, at this big simpleton who was completely dominated by her mocking tenderness, she said:

"You are just the same Sulpice!"—as she spoke, she bent over him engagingly, and laughed merrily while he kissed her.

IV

TOC

José de Rosas thought himself much more the master of himself than he actually was.

This energetic man, firm as a very fine steel blade, had hoped to find that in living at a distance from Marianne, he might forget her or at least strengthen himself against her influence. He found on his return that he was, however, more seduced by her than before, his heart was wholly filled and gnawed by the distracting image of the pretty girl. He had borne away with him to London, as everywhere in fact, the puzzling smile, the sparkling glance of this woman's gray eyes that ceaselessly appeared to him at his bedside, and beside him, like some phantom.

The phantom of a living creature whose kiss still burned his lips like a live coal. A phantom that he could clasp in his arms, carry away and possess. All the virgin sentiments of this man whose life had been the half-savage one of a trapper, a savant or a wanderer, turned toward Marianne as to an incarnated hope, a living, palpitating chimera.

José felt certain that if he returned to Paris it was all over with him, and that he was giving his life to that woman. But he returned. His fight against himself over, the first visit he made, once again, was to the den where he knew well that he could discover Marianne's whereabouts. He went to her as he might walk to a gulf. Under his cold demeanor of a Castilian of former days, he was intensely passionate and would neither reflect nor resist. He had experienced that delightful sensation of impulse when, upon the rapids at the other end of the globe, the river carried into a whirlpool his almost engulfed boat. He would doubtless have been stupefied had he found Marianne installed in a fashionable little mansion. She promised herself to explain that to him when she next saw him while informing him, there and then, that she had taken up her abode there. A mere whim: Mademoiselle Vanda having gone away, the idea had attracted her of sleeping within a courtesan's curtains. "I will tell him that this transient luxury recalls my former follies when I made him believe that I was spending an inheritance from my grandmother."

She had, indeed, already lied to him, for the money she had formerly squandered had been provided by De Lissac, but even then it was necessary—for the duke was in expectancy—to conceal its source from Rosas, hence the story of the inheritance that never existed. But she at once thoroughly realized that the surroundings which were favorable to the progress of the duke's love were not the bedroom and the dressing-room of Mademoiselle Vanda. What difference would Rosas have found between her and the fashionable courtesans whom he had loved, or rather, enriched, in passing? He would not believe this new lie this time.

All that luxury might seduce Sulpice Vaudrey; it would have disgusted José. What satisfied the appetite of the little, successful bourgeois would nauseate the gentleman.

As soon as Rosas returned to her, happy and stupefied at the same time, extravagantly happy in his joy, her plan of campaign was at once arranged. She did not wish to receive him in the vulgar hôtel, where the clubmen had wiped their feet upon the carpets. She entreated him, since he wished to see her again, to see her at her "own house," yes, really, at her own house, in that little, unknown room, in Rue Cuvier, far from the noise of Paris and near the Botanical Garden, a kind of hidden cell into which no one entered.

"No one but me," she said.

The order had been given to Uncle Kayser in advance: in case Rosas should reappear, Simon was to at once inform his niece and prevent the duke from discovering Marianne's new address. And this had been done.

The duke was then going to see Mademoiselle Kayser only at Rue Cuvier, after having rediscovered her at Uncle Simon's.

He felt in advance a kind of gratitude to this woman who thus abandoned the secret of her soul to him; giving him to understand that it was there that she passed her days, buried in her recollections, dreaming of her departed years, of that which had been, of that which might be, a living death.

Marianne had shrewdly divined the case. For this great soul, mystery added a new sentiment to the feelings that Rosas experienced. The first time that he found himself in that little abode where Simon Kayser's niece awaited him, he was deeply moved, as if he had penetrated into the pure chamber of a young girl. There, yonder, in that distant quarter, he found a peaceful retreat for one wounded by life,

thirsting for solitude and passing there secret hours in the midst of loved books; in fact, the discreet dwelling of a poor teacher who had collected some choice *bibelots* that she had found by chance. Rosas there felt himself surrounded by perfect virtue, amid the salvage of a happier past. Marianne thus became what he imagined her to be, superior to her lot, living an intellectual life, consoling herself for the mortification of existence and the hideous experiences of life by poet's dreams, in building for herself in Paris itself a sort of Thebais, where she was finally free and mistress of herself and where, when she was sad, she was not compelled to wear a mask or a false smile, and was free from all pretended gaiety. And she was so often sad!

She had occasionally mentioned to Rosas the assumed name under which she lived at that place.

"Mademoiselle Robert!"

He had manifested surprise thereat.

"Yes, I do not wish them to know anything of me, not even my name. You should understand the necessity that certain minds have for repose and forgetfulness. Did not one of your sovereigns take his repose lying in his coffin? Well! I envy him and when I have pushed the bolt of my little room in Rue Cuvier, I tremble with delight, just as if I felt my heart beating in a coffin. Do not tell any one. They would desire to know and see. People are so curious and so stupid!"

Marianne now seemed to be still more strange and seductive to Rosas. All this romantic conduct, commonplace as it was, with which she surrounded herself, exalted her in the estimation of the duke. She became in that little chamber where she was simply Mademoiselle Robert, a hundred times more charming and attractive to him than any problem: a veritable Parisian sphinx.

She was not his mistress. He loved her too deeply, with a holy, respectful passion, to take her hastily, as by chance, and Marianne was too skilful to risk any imprudent act, well-knowing that if she yielded too quickly, it would not be a woman who would fall into the duke's arms, but an idol that descended from its pedestal.

In the silence of the old house in the deserted quarter, they held conversations in the course of which Rosas freely abandoned himself, and through which she gained every day a more intimate knowledge of the character of that man who was so different from those who hitherto had sought her for pleasure.

Thus, the very respect that he instinctively felt for her, impelled her to love him.

She had not been accustomed to such treatment. Every masculine look that since her puberty she had felt riveted upon her, clearly expressed even before the lips spoke: "You are beautiful. You please me. Will you?" Rosas, at least, said: "I love you," before: "I desire you."

Tainted in the body which she had given, offered, abandoned, sold, she felt that she was respected by him even in that body, and although she considered him silly, she thought him superior to all others, or at least different, and that was a sufficient motive for loving him.

One day she said to him in a peculiar tone and with her distracting smile:

"Do you know, my dear José, there is one thing I should not have believed? You are bashful!"

He turned slightly pale.

"Sincere love is always bashful and clumsy. By that it may be known."

"Perhaps!" said Marianne.

Their conversations, however, only concerned love, so that Rosas might speak of his passion or of his reminiscences.

She once asked him if he would despise a woman if she became his mistress.

"No!" he said, with a smile, "it is only a Frenchman who would despise the woman who surrendered herself. Other nations treat love more seriously. They do not consider the gift of one's self in the light of a fall."

Marianne looked at him full in the face with a strange expression.

"What, then, if I love you well enough to become your mistress?"

"I should still esteem you enough to become your husband!"

She felt her color change.

Was it a sport on the part of Monsieur de Rosas? Why had he spoken to her thus? Had he reflected upon what he had just said?

José added in a very gentle tone:

"Will you permit me to ask you a question, Marianne?"

"You may ask me anything. I will frankly answer all your questions."

"What was Monsieur Sulpice Vaudrey doing at your uncle's the other day? Was he there to see you?"

Marianne smiled.

"Why, the minister simply came to talk of business matters. I hardly see him except for Uncle Kayser, who is soliciting an official commission,—you heard him—"

"Does Monsieur Vaudrey pay his addresses to you?"

"Necessarily. Oh! but only out of pure French gallantry. Mere politeness. He loves his wife and he knows very well that I don't love any one."

"No one?" asked Rosas.

"I do not love any one yet," repeated Marianne, opening her gray eyes with a wide stare under the Spaniard's anxious glance.

From that day, her mind was possessed of a new idea that imperiously directed it. When Rosas had returned to her, she had only regarded him as a possible lover, rich and agreeable. The mistress of a minister, she would become the mistress of a duke. A millionaire duke. The change would be profitable, assuming that she could not retain both. Her calculations were speedily made. She would only make Rosas pay more dearly for the resistance he had offered before surrendering himself.

But now, abruptly and without her having thought of it, he had, with the incautiousness of a soldier who discloses his attack and lays himself open to a bully who tries to provoke him, the duke showed her the extent of his violent passion by a single phrase that feverishly agitated her.

His mistress! Why his mistress, since he had shown her that perhaps?—

"Idiot that I am!" thought Marianne. "Suppose I play my cards for marriage?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It will cost no more!"

Married! Duchess! and Duchesse de Rosas! At first she laughed. Duchess! I am asking a little from you! The mistress of Pierre Méran, the artist's drudge, the wretch who abducted her and debauched her, adding his depravity to hers, and who died of consumption while quite young, after having plunged this girl into vice, this Marianne Kayser, born and moulded for vice: she a duchess!

"It would be too funny, my dear!" she thought.

Never had Vaudrey, whom she saw that evening at Rue Prony, seemed so provincial, or, as she said, so *Sulpice*. Besides, he was gloomy and unable to express himself clearly at first, but finally he brought himself to acknowledge that he was embarrassed about providing for the bill of exchange—she understood—

"No, I do not know!"

"The bill of exchange in favor of Monsieur Gochard!"

"Ah! that is so. Well! if you cannot pay it, my dear, I will advise—I will seek—"

There was nothing to seek. Vaudrey would evidently get himself out of the affair—but the document matured at an unfortunate time. He did not dare to mortgage La Saulière, his farm at Saint-Laurent-du-Pont. He had reflected that Adrienne might learn all about it. And then—

Marianne broke in upon his confidences.

"Don't speak to me about these money matters, my friend, you know that sort of thing disgusts me!—"

"I understand you and ask your pardon."

They were to see each other again the next day, as parliament was to take a rest.

"What joy! Not to be away from you for the whole of the day!" remarked Vaudrey.

"Well then, till to-morrow!"

She felt intense pleasure in being alone again, wrapped in her sheets, with the light of the lamp that ordinarily shone upon her hours of love with Sulpice, still burning, and to be free to dream of her Spanish grandee who had said, plainly, with the trembling of passion on his lips: "I should esteem you enough to become your husband!"

She passed the night in reverie.

Vaudrey, in spite of the joy of the morrow,—a long tête-à-tête with his mistress,—thought with increasing vexation of the approaching maturity of his bill of exchange; within two months he would have to pay the hundred thousand francs which he had undertaken to pay Marianne's creditor.

"It is astonishing how quickly time passes!"

At breakfast the following day, Adrienne saw that her husband was more than usually preoccupied.

"Are political affairs going badly?"

"No—on the contrary—"

"Then why are you melancholy?"

"I am a little fatigued."

"Then," said Madame Vaudrey, "you will scold me."

"Why?"

"I have led Madame Gerson to hope—You know whom I mean, Madame Marsy's friend,—I have almost promised her that you would accept an invitation to dine at her house."

For a moment Vaudrey was put out.

Another evening taken! Hours of delight stolen from Marianne!

"I have done wrong?" asked Adrienne, as she rested her pretty but somewhat sad face on her husband's bosom. "I did it because it is so great a pleasure to me to spend an entire evening with you, even at another's house. Remember you have so many official dinners, banquets and invitations that you attend alone. When the minister's wife is invited with him, it is a fête-day for the poor, little forsaken thing. I do not have much of you, it is true, but I see you, I hear you talking and I am happy. Do not chide me for having said that we would go to Madame Gerson's. The more so, because she is a charming woman. Ah! when she speaks of you! 'So great a minister!' Don't you know what she calls you?—'A Colbert!'"

Vaudrey could not restrain a smile.

"Come, after that, one cannot refuse her invitation. It is the *Monseigneur* of the beggar," said he, kissing Adrienne's brow. "And when do we dine at Madame Gerson's?"

"On Monday next; I shall have at least one delightful evening to see you," said the young wife sweetly.

The minister entered his cabinet. Almost immediately after, a messenger handed him a card: *Molina, Banker*.

"How strange it is!" thought Sulpice. "I had him in mind."

In the course of his troublesome reflections concerning the Gochard paper, Vaudrey persistently thought of that fat, powerful man who laughed and harangued in a loud voice in the greenroom of the ballet, as he patted with his fat fingers the delicate chin of Marie Launay.

Why! if he were willing, this Molina—Molina the Tumbler!—for him it is a mere bagatelle, a hundred thousand francs!

Salomon Molina entered the minister's cabinet just as he made his way into the foyer of the Opéra, with swelling chest, tilted chin and stomach thrust forward.

"Monsieur le Ministre," he said in a clear voice, as he spread himself out in the armchair that Vaudrey pointed out to him, "I notify you that you have my maiden visit!—I am still in a state of innocency! On my honor, this is the first time I have set my foot within a minister's office!"

He manifested his independence—born of his colossal influence—by his satisfied and successful air. The former Marseillaise clothes-dealer, in his youth pouncing upon the sailors of the port and Maltese and Levantine seamen, to palm off on them a second-hand coat or trousers, as the wardrobe dealers of the Temple hook the passer-by, Salomon Molina, who had paraded his rags and his hopes on the Canebière, dreaming at the back of his dark shop of the triumphs, the pleasures, the revels and the indigestions that money affords, had, moreover, always preserved the bitterness of those wretched days and his red, Jewish lip expressed the gall of his painful experiences.

His first word as he entered Vaudrey's cabinet, asserting the virginity of his efforts at solicitation, betrayed his bitterness.

Now, triumphant, powerful, delighted, feasted and fat, his massive form, his gross flesh and his money were in evidence all over Paris. His huge paunch, shaking with laughter, filled the stage-boxes at the theatres. He expanded his broad shoulders as he reclined in the calèche that deposited him on race-days at the entrance of the weighing-enclosure. He held by the neck, as it were, everything of the Parisian quarry that yelps and bounds about money, issues of stock, and the food of public fortune: bankers, stock-brokers, and jobbers, financial, political and exchange editors, wretches running after a hundred sous, statesmen in a fair way to fortune; and he distributed to this little crowd, just as he would throw food into a kennel, the discounts and clippings of his ventures, taking malicious pleasure, the insolent delight of a fortunate upstart, in feigning at the moment when loans were issued, sickness that had no existence, in order to have the right of keeping his chamber, of hearing persons of exalted names ringing at his door and dancing attendance upon him,—powerful, influential and illustrious persons,—him, the second-hand dealer and chafferer from Marseilles.

It was then that he tasted the joy of supreme power, that delight which titillated even his marrow, and after having rested all day, the prey of a convenient neuralgia, he experienced the unlimited pleasure of force overcoming mind, the blow of a fist crushing a weakling, as with a white cravat he appeared in some salon, in the greenroom of the ballet, or in the dressing-room of a *première*, saying with the mocking smile of triumph and the assurance attending a gorged appetite:

"I was sick to-day, I suffered from neuralgia! The Minister of Finance called on me!—Baron Nathan came to get information from me!"

Among all the pleasures experienced by this man, he valued feminine virtue occasionally purchased

with gold as little in comparison with the virgin souls, honor and virtue that he often succeeded in humiliating, in bending before him like a reed, and snuffing out with his irony, whenever necessity placed at his mercy any of those puritanical beings who had passed sometimes with haughty brow before the millions of this man of money. It was then that the clothes-dealer took his revenge in all its hideousness. There was no pity to be expected from this fat, smiling and easy-going man. His fat fingers strangled more certainly than the lean hands of a usurer. Molina never pardoned.

Ah! if this fellow went to see the minister, most assuredly he wanted a favor from him.

But what?

It was extraordinary, but before Vaudrey, Molina who could hold his own among rascals, found himself ill at ease. There was in the frank look of this *ninny*, as Molina the *Tumbler* had one evening called him while talking politics, such direct honesty that the banker, accustomed as he was to dealings with sharks and intriguers, did not quite know how to open the question, nevertheless a very important matter was in hand.

"A rich plum," thought Molina.

A matter of railways, a concession to be gained. A matter of private interest, disguised under the swelling terms of the public welfare, the national needs. Millions were to be gained. Molina was charged with the duty of sounding the President of the Council and the Minister of Public Works. Two honest men. The *dodge*, as the *Tumbler* said, was to make them swallow the affair under the guise of patriotism. A strategical railroad. The means of rapid locomotion in case of mobilization. With such high-sounding words, *strategy*, *frontier*, *safety*, they could carry a good many points.

Unfortunately, Vaudrey was rather skittish on these particular questions, besides he was informed on the matter. He felt his flesh creep while Molina was speaking. Just before, on seeing the banker's card, the idea of the money of which the fat man was one of the incarnations, had suddenly dawned upon him as a hope. Who knows? By Molina's aid, he might, perhaps, free himself from anxiety about the Gochard bill of exchange!—But from the minister's first words, although the banker could not get to the point, intimidated as he was by Sulpice's honest look, it was clear that Vaudrey surmised some repugnant suggestions in the hesitating words of this man.

What! Molina hesitating? He did not go straight to the point, squarely, according to his custom, Molina the illustrious *Tumbler*? Eh! no! the intentionally cold bearing of the minister decidedly discomposed him. Vaudrey's glance never wandered from his for a moment. When the promoter pronounced the word Bourse, a disdainful curl played upon Sulpice's lips, but not a word escaped him. Molina heard his own voice break the silence of the ministerial cabinet and he felt himself entangled. He came to propose a combination, a bonus, and he did not suspect that Vaudrey would refuse to have a hand in it. And here, this devilish minister appeared not to understand, did not understand, perhaps, or else he understood too well. Molina was not accustomed to such hard-of-hearing people. With his fat hand, he had dropped into the hands of senators and ministers of the former régime, a sum for which the only receipt given was a smile. He was accustomed to the style of conversation carried on by hints and ended between intelligent people by a *shake of the hand*, that in which some bits of paper rested: bank-notes or paid-up shares. And this Vaudrey knew nothing! So he felt himself obliged to explain himself clearly, to stoop to dotting every *i*, at the risk of being shown out of doors.

Molina was too shrewd to run this risk. He would return at another time, seeing that the minister turned a deaf ear, but *pécaïre*! he sweat huge drops in seeking roundabout phrases, this man who never minced his words and habitually called things by their proper names. Was the like ever seen! A pettifogger from Grenoble to *floor* Salomon Molina!

"It made me warm," said the money-maker, on leaving the cabinet, "but, deuce take it! I'll have my revenge. One is not a minister always. You shall pay me dearly, my little fellow, for that uncomfortable little time."

Vaudrey had thoroughly understood the matter, but he did not intend to allow it to be seen that he did. That was a simpler way. He had not had to dismiss the buyer of consciences; he had enjoyed his embarrassment and that was sufficient.

"What, however, if I had spoken to him of money before he had shown his hand! If I had accepted from him—!" he said to himself.

He shuddered at the thought as he had previously done while Molina was talking to him. A single imprudence, a single confidence might easily have placed him under the hand of this fat man. He must, however, find some solution. The days were rolling away and the bills signed for Marianne would in a very short time reach maturity.

"When I think that this Molina could in one day enable me to gain three times this sum."

Salomon had just told him: "To forestall the news on the Bourse is sometimes worth gold ingots!" A *forestaller*! As well say the revelation of a State secret, base speculation, almost treachery! And yet on hearing these words that covered up an insult, he had not even rung for the messenger to show Molina out, but had striven to comprehend nothing!

As the result of this conversation, he felt uncomfortable. The man had left an odor of pollution, as it were, behind him.

Vaudrey must needs be soon reassured respecting the Gochard paper. In visiting Marianne, he

observed that his mistress was a shrewd woman. She informed him immediately that Claire Dujarrier whom she had seen, would secure a renewal from Gochard, who was unknown to Vaudrey, from three months to three months until the expiration of six months in consideration of an additional twenty thousand francs for each period of ninety days.

"I did not understand that at first," Marianne began by remarking.

"Oh!" said Sulpice, "I understand perfectly, it is absolute usury. But time is ready money, and in six months it will be easier for me to pay one hundred and forty thousand francs than a hundred thousand to-day. I have plans."

"What?"

"Very difficult to explain, but quite clear in my mind! The important part is not to have the date of maturity on the first of June, but on the first of December."

"Then nothing is more simple. Madame Dujarrier will arrange it."

"Is Madame Dujarrier a providence then?"

"Almost," said Marianne coldly.

Sulpice was intoxicated with joy, realizing that he had before him all the necessary time in which to free himself from his embarrassment, when Marianne should have returned him his first acceptance for one hundred thousand francs against a new one for one hundred and forty thousand. He breathed again. From the twenty-sixth of April to the first of December, he had nearly seven months in which to free himself. He repeated the calculation that he had formerly made when he said: "I have ample time!"

He reëntered the Hôtel Beauvau in a cheerful mood, Adrienne was delighted. She feared to see him return nervous and dejected.

"Then you will be brilliant presently at Madame Gerson's."

"Stop! that's so. It is this evening in fact!—"

He had forgotten it.

Marianne, too, was not free. She was going, she said, to Auteuil for that bill of exchange. Vaudrey did not therefore, regret the soirée. His going to Madame Gerson's was now a matter of indifference to him.

"As for me, I am so happy, oh! so happy!" said Adrienne, clapping her little hands like a child.

In undressing, Vaudrey fortunately found this document which he had folded in four and left in his waistcoat pocket:

> "On the first of June next, I will pay to the order of Monsieur Adolphe Gochard of No. 9, Rue Albouy, the sum of One Hundred Thousand Francs, value received in cash.
>
> "SULPICE VAUDREY,
> "Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, 37."

He turned pale on reading it. If Adrienne had seen it!—

He burned the paper at a candle.

"I am imprudent," he said to himself. "Poor Adrienne! I should not like to cause her any distress."

She was overjoyed as she made the journey in the ministerial carriage from Place Beauvau to the Gersons' mansion. At last she had a rapid, stolen moment in which she could recover the old-time joy of happy solitude, full of the exquisite agitation of former days.

"Do you recall the time when you took me away like this, on the evening of our marriage?" she whispered to him, as the carriage was driven off at a gallop.

He took her hands and pressed them.

"You still love me, don't you, Sulpice?—You believe too, that I love you more than all the world?"

"Yes, I believe it!"

"You would kill me if I deceived you?—I, ah, if you deceived me, I do not know what I should do.—Although I think that you are here, that I hold you, that I love you, you may still belong to another woman—"

"Again! you have already said that. Are you mad?" said Sulpice. "See! we have reached our destination."

Madame Gerson had brilliantly illuminated her house in Rue de Boulogne with lights, filled it with flowers, and spread carpets everywhere to receive the President of the Council. The house was too small to accommodate the guests, who were about to be stifled therein. She packed them into her dining-room. For the soirée which was to follow, she had sounded the roll-call of her friends. She was bent on founding a new salon, on showing Madame Marsy that she was not alone to be the rival of Madame Evan.

Madame Gerson was not on friendly terms with Sabine Marsy. People were ignorant as to the cause. Adrienne, who was not familiar with the history of such little broils, was very much surprised to learn of this fact.

"She claims that we take away all her *personnel*," said Madame Gerson. "It is not my fault if people enjoy themselves at our house. I hope that you will find pleasure here, Monsieur le Président."

Vaudrey bowed. "Madame Gerson could not doubt it."

The guests sat down to dinner. Madame Gerson beamed with joy beside the minister. Guy de Lissac, Warcolier, some senators and some deputies were of the dinner party. Monsieur and Madame Gerson never spoke of them by their names but: *Monsieur le Sénateur, Monsieur le Député!* They lubricated their throats with these titles, just as bourgeois who come in contact with highnesses swell out in addressing a prince as *Monseigneur*, absolutely as if they were addressing themselves.

Sulpice felt in the midst of this circle in which everything was sacrificed to *chic*, as he invariably did, the painful sensation of a man who is continually on show. He never dined out without running against the same menu, the same fanfare, and the same conversation.

Monsieur Gerson endeavored to draw the President of the Council into political conversation. He wished to know Vaudrey's opinion as to the one-man ballet. Sulpice smiled.

"Thanks!" he said. "We have just been dealing with that. I prefer truffles, they are more savory."

Through the flowers, Adrienne could see her husband who was seated opposite to her beside Madame Gerson. She conversed but little with Guy de Lissac, who was sitting on her right, although the formalities of the occasion would have suggested that Monsieur le Senator Crépeau and Monsieur de Prangins, the deputy, should have been so placed. Madame Gerson, however, had remarked with a smile, that Madame Vaudrey would not feel annoyed at having Monsieur de Lissac for her neighbor. "I have often met Monsieur de Lissac at the ministry; he is received noticeably well there."

Not knowing any one among the guests, Adrienne was, in fact, charmed to have Guy next to her. He was decidedly pleasing to her with his sallies, his skepticism which, as she thought, covered more belief than he wished to disclose. For a long time, he had felt himself entirely captivated by her cheerful modesty and the grace of her exquisite purity. She was so vastly different from all the other women whom he had known. How the devil could Vaudrey bring himself to neglect so perfect a creature, who was more attractive in her fascinating virtue than all the damsels to be met with in society, among the demi-monde, or those of a still lower grade? For Vaudrey remained indifferent to Adrienne; and this was a further and manifest blow. A specialist in matters of observation like Guy was not to be deceived therein. Madame Vaudrey had not yet complained, but she was already suffering. Was it merely politics, or was it some woman who was taking her husband from Adrienne? Guy did not know, but he would know. The pretty Madame Vaudrey interested him.

"If that idiot Sulpice were not my friend, I would make love to her. Besides," he said to himself, as he looked at Adrienne's lovely, limpid eyes, "I should fail; there are some lakes whose tranquillity cannot be disturbed."

Adrienne, pleased to have him beside her, enquired of him the names of the guests. On the left of Madame Gerson sat a little, broad-backed man, with black hair pasted over his temples, long leg-of-mutton whiskers decorating his bright-colored cheeks, and a keen eye: he was Monsieur Jouvenet, formerly an advocate; to-day Prefect of Police.

Senator Crépeau sat further away. He was a fat manufacturer, who talked about alimentary products and politics. In the *Analytical Table of the Accounts of the Sittings of the Senate*, his name shone brilliantly, with the following as his record: "CRÉPEAU, of L'Ain, Life Senator—Apologizes for his absence—8 January—. Apologizes for his absence—20 February—. Member of a commission—*Journal Officiel*, p. 1441. Apologizes for not being able to take part in the labors of the commission—4 March —. Apologizes for his absence—20 March—. Asks for leave of absence—5 April—." Such were his services during the ordinary work of that year. Monsieur Crépeau—of L'Ain—had earned the right to take a rest.

"He eats very heartily," said Lissac. "His appetite is better than his eloquence."

Next to Crépeau was another legislator, Henri de Prangins, a publicist, an old, wrinkled, stooping, dissatisfied grumbler.

"Ah! that is Monsieur de Prangins," said Adrienne, "I have heard much about him."

"He is a typical character," Lissac said, with a smile. "You know Granet, *the gentleman who will become a minister*; well, Prangins is the gentleman who would be a minister, but who never will be! Moreover, he is five hundred times more remarkable than a hundred others who have been in office ten times, for what reason cannot be said."

For nearly half a century Prangins, the old political wheel-horse, had plotted and jockeyed in politics, set up and overthrown ministries, piled up review articles on newspaper articles, contradiction on contradiction, page on page, spoiled cartloads of paper in his vocation of daily or fortnightly howler, and withal he was applauded, rich and popular, famous and surrounded by flatterers, knife-and-fork companions, without friends but not wanting clients, as he had made and spoiled reputations, ministers, governments, and although he well knew the vanity and nothingness of power, he aspired to secure that vain booty, oft alleging, with bitter enviousness of authority and impatient of tyranny,

that to enjoy popularity uninterruptedly was not worth a quarter of an hour of power, approaching with greedy eagerness the desired lot, yet seeing it inevitably, eternally, relentlessly escape and recede from him, plucked from his grasp as it were, like a shred of flesh from the jaw of a Molossian. And now, in his unquenchable lust of power, amid the monuments of combination and deception he had created, this man was weary, disgusted and irritated,—believing himself vanquished and smothering the anger of defeat in the luxurious isolation of his wealth. He was neither officially influential nor liked. Feared he was, probably, and envied because of his good fortune, recognized, too, as a *force*, but only as acting in the whirlwind of his ideas and struggling in the emptiness of his dreams. After having immolated everything, youth, family, friendship, love, to this chimera: power, he found himself old, worn-out, broken by his combats, face to face with the folly of his hopes and the worthlessness of his will. Never had his nervous hand been able to grasp in its transition, the fragment of morocco of a portfolio and now that his parchment-like fingers were old and feeble, they would never cling to that shred of power! And now this Prangins avenged himself for the contempt or the injustice of his colleagues and the folly of circumstances, by criticism, defiance, mockery, denial and by loudly expressing his opinion:

"The defect of every government is that it will try to play new airs on an old violin! Your violin is cracked, Monsieur Vaudrey! I do not reproach you for that, you did not make it!"

Vaudrey laughed at the sally, but Warcolier felt that he was choking. How could the minister allow his policy to be thus attacked at table? Ah! how Warcolier would have clinched the argument of this Prangins.

Madame Gerson was delighted. The dinner was served sumptuously and went off without a hitch. The *maître d'hôtel* directed the service admirably. The soirée that was to follow it would be magnificent. The journals would most certainly report it. Gerson had invited one reporter in spite of his dislike of journalists. Ah! those gossipers and foolish fellows, they never forgot to describe the toilettes worn by "the pretty Madame Gerson" at *first nights*, at the Élysée or at Charity Bazaars. Occasionally, her husband pretended to be angered by the successes of his wife:

"Those journalists! Just imagine, those journalists! They speak about my wife just as they would about an actress! 'The lovely Madame Gerson wore a gown of *crêpe de Chine*!' The lovely Madame Gerson! What has my wife's beauty or her toilette to do with them?"

In truth, however, he felt flattered. He was only sincerely annoyed when people respected the devilish wall of private life, the cement of which he would have stripped off himself, in order to show his wife's beauty. To be quoted in the paper, why! that is *chic*.

Adrienne felt a little stunned by the noise of the conversation which increased in proportion as the dinner advanced. She was also very much astonished and not a little grieved when Madame Gerson abruptly spoke in a loud voice before all the guests concerning Madame Marsy, at whose house it was, in fact, that she made the acquaintance of Vaudrey. Madame Gerson showed her pretty teeth in a very charming manner as she tore her old friend Sabine to pieces, as it were. In a tenderly indulgent tone which was the more terrible, she repeated the tales that were formerly current: the affecting death of Philippe Marsy, the painter of *Charity*, and a particular escapade in which Sabine was involved with Émile Cordier, one of the leaders of the *intransigeante* school of painters.

"What! you did not know that?" said the pretty Madame Gerson in astonishment.

Adrienne knew nothing. She was delighted moreover to know nothing. She heard this former friend relate how Sabine had, at one time, exhibited at the Salon. Oh! mere students' daubs, horrid things! Still-life subjects that might have passed for buried ones, and yet, perhaps, Cordier retouched them.

"I thought that Madame Gerson was on the best of terms with Madame Marsy," whispered Adrienne to Lissac, who replied:

"They have been on better! They perhaps will be so again. That is of very little importance. Women revile each other and associate at the same time."

Adrienne decided that she would not listen. She knew Sabine Marsy only slightly; she was not interested as a friend; but this little execution, gracefully carried out here by a woman who recently did the honors at the Salon of Boulevard Malesherbes seemed to her as cowardly as treachery. This, then, was society! And how right was her choice in preferring solitude!

Then, in order that she might not hear the slander that was greeted with applause by those very persons who but yesterday besieged Madame Marsy's buffet, and who would run to-morrow to pay court to that woman, she conversed with Lissac. She frankly told him what she suffered at Place Beauvau. She spoke of Sulpice, as Sulpice was loved by her beyond all else in the world.

"Fancy! I do not see him, hardly ever! The other week he passed two days at Laon, where an exposition was held at which he was present."

"An exposition at Laon?" asked Lissac, astonished. "What exposition?"

"I do not know. I know nothing myself. Perhaps it is wrong of me not to keep myself informed of passing events, but all that wearies me. I detest politics and journals—I am told quite enough about them. Politics! that which takes my husband from me! My uncle, Doctor Reboux, often said to me: 'Never marry a doctor; he is only half a husband.' Vaudrey is like a doctor. Always absent, with his everlasting night-sessions."

"Night-sessions?" asked Lissac.

"Yes, at the Chamber—continually—"

Guy determined to betray nothing of his astonishment; but he knew now as surely as if he had learned everything, why Sulpice neglected Adrienne. The fool! some girl from the Opéra! some office-seeker who was skilfully entangling His Excellency! That appertained to his functions then? He was exasperated at Vaudrey and alternately looked at him and at Adrienne. So perfect a woman! Ravishing. What an exquisite profile, so delicate and with such a straight nose and a delightful mouth! Was Vaudrey mad then?

The guests rose from the table, and, as usual, the men went into the smoking-room, leaving the salon half-empty. Madame Gerson profited thereby to continue distilling her little slanders about Sabine, which she did while laughing heartily. In the smoking-room the men chatted away beneath the cloud that rose from their *londrès*. The clarion tones of Warcolier rung out above all the other voices.

Guy, seated in a corner on a divan, was still thinking of Adrienne, of those *night-sessions*, of those expositions, of those agricultural competitions invented by Sulpice, and caught but snatches of the conversation, jests, and nonsensical stories which were made at the cost of the colleagues of the Chamber and political friends:

"You know how Badiche learned at the last election that he was not elected?"

"No, how?"

"He returned to his house, anxious as to the result of the ballot. And he heard, what do you think? His children, a little boy and a little girl, who on receipt of the telegram that papa was waiting for and that mamma in her feverish expectation had opened, had already composed a song to the air of *The Young Man Poisoned*:

Résultat très négatif,
Ballottage positif!
Badiche est ballo—
Bâté,
Est ballotté!
Oui, Badiche est ballotté;
C'est papa qu'est ballotté!

Happy precocity! genuine frightful gamins!"

"*Du Gavarni*!"

"Apropos, on what majority do you count, Monsieur le Président?"

"One hundred and thirty-nine."

"That is a large one."

"I! my dear fellow,"—it was old Prangins speaking to Senator Crépeau,—"I do not count myself as likely to be included in the next ministry, no! I do not delude myself, but I shall be in the second—or rather in the third—no, in the fourth—yes, in the fourth ministry—Assuredly!"

An asthmatic cough, the cough of an old man, interrupted his remarks.

Guy heard Warcolier, as he held a small glass of kirsch in his hand, say with a laugh:

"I have a way of holding my electors in leash. Not only when I visit them do I address them as *my friend, my brave*, which flatters them, but from time to time, I write them autograph letters. They look upon that like ready money. Some of them, the good fellows, are flattered: 'He has written to me, he is not proud!' Others, the suspicious fellows, are reassured: 'Now—I have his signature, I have him!' And there you are!"

They laughed heartily.

"How they laugh *afterward*," thought Lissac, "at the electors whose shoes they would blacken *beforehand*."

"The course that I have followed is very simple," said another. "I desired to become sub-prefect so as to become a prefect and a prefect to become a deputy, and a deputy so as to reach a receiver-generalship. The salaries assured, why, there's the crowning of a career."

"Why, that fellow *plays the whole gamut*," again thought Guy, "but he is frank!"

"I read very little," now replied Crépeau to Warcolier—"I do not much care for pure literature—we politicians, we need substantial reading that will teach us to think."

"I believe you!—" murmured this Parisian Guy, still smoking and listening. "Go to school, my good man!"

The conversation thus intermingled and confused, horrified and irritated this *blasé* by its gravity and selfishness. He summed up an entire character in a single phrase and shook his head as he very shrewdly remarked: "Suppose *Universal Suffrage* were listening?"

Lissac did not take any part in these conversations. It was his delight to observe. He drew amusement from all these wearisome commonplaces, according to his custom as a curious spectator.

He was about, however, to rise and approach Vaudrey, who was instinctively coming toward him, when the Prefect of Police, Monsieur Jouvenet, without noticing it, placed himself between the minister and his friend.

Jouvenet spoke in a low tone to Vaudrey, smiling at the same time very peculiarly and passing his fingers through his whiskers. Whatever discretion the prefect employed, Guy was near enough to him to hear the name of Marianne Kayser, which surprised him.

Marianne! what question of Marianne could there be between these two men?

Lissac observed that Vaudrey suddenly became very pale.

He drew still nearer, pretending to finish a cup of coffee while standing. Then he heard these words very distinctly:

"A reporter saw you leave her house the other evening!"

Guy moved away very quickly. He felt a sort of sudden bewilderment, as if the few words spoken by the Prefect of Police were the natural result of his conversation with Adrienne, an immediate response thereto.

"It would be astonishing if Marianne—" thought Lissac.

Besides, he would know soon. He would merely question Vaudrey.

As soon as Jouvenet, always polite, grave and impassive, had left "Monsieur le Ministre" in a state of visible nervousness, almost of anxiety, he entered upon his plan.

"You know Mademoiselle Kayser intimately then?" he asked Vaudrey, who, taken aback, looked at him for a moment without replying and endeavored to grasp Lissac's purpose.

"Am I imprudent?" further asked Guy.

"No, but who has told you—?"

"Nothing, your Prefect of Police only spoke a little too loud. He seemed to me to understand."

Vaudrey's hand rapidly seized Lissac's wrist.

"Hush! be silent!"

"Very well! Good!" said Lissac to himself. "Poor little Adrienne."

"I will tell you all about that later. Oh! nothing is more simple! It isn't what you think!"

"I am sure of that!" answered Lissac, with a smile.

In a mechanical way, and as if to evade his friend, Sulpice left the smoking-room for the salon, tritely observing:

"We must rejoin the ladies—the cigar kills conversation—"

He felt uncomfortable. It was the first time that Jouvenet had informed him that there are agents for learning the movements of ministers. The Prefect of Police, in a chance conversation at the Opéra with the editor-in-chief of a very Parisian journal, had suppressed a rumor which stated that a minister hailing from Grenoble set propriety at defiance in his visits to Rue Prony. It would have been as well to print Vaudrey's name.

Hitherto he had been able to enjoy his passion for Marianne without scandal and secretly. His mysterious intrigue was now known to the police, to everybody, to a reporter who had stumbled against him on leaving a supper-party at the house of a courtesan in the neighborhood.

The minister was bitterly annoyed. The very flattering applause that the women bestowed upon him when he returned to the salon could not dissipate his ill-humor. He tried to chat and respond to the affected remarks of Madame Gerson and to the smiles of the women; but he was embarrassed and nervous. Adrienne thought he looked ill.

Everything was spoken of in the light but pretentious, easy tone of the conversation of those second-rate salons where neither ideas nor men are made, where, on the contrary, they are accepted, ready-made and *en bloc*. On every question, the picture in vogue, the favorite book, the man of the hour, they expressed themselves by the same stereotyped, expected word, borrowed from the ceaseless repetition of current polemics. Nothing was new. The conversation was as well worn as an old farthing. Adrienne was pained to see a man of Vaudrey's intelligence compelled to listen to these truisms and wondered if he would presently reproach her for having brought him into the suffocating void of this Parisian establishment where all was superficial, glittering and *chic*.

She was in a hurry to get away. She saw that Sulpice was growing weary, and took advantage of the first opportunity to whisper to him:

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes, let us go!" he said.

He sought Lissac and repeated to him that he would have something to say to him, and Guy bowed to the Minister and Madame Vaudrey, who left too early to please the Gersons.

Adrienne, out of heart and discouraged by commonplace gossip and slander, was eager to be again with her husband, to tell him that nothing could compensate her for the deep joy of the tête-à-tête, their evenings passed together as of old—he remembered them well,—when he read to her from the works of much-loved poets.

"Poetry!" said Vaudrey. "Will you be quiet! The Gersons would find me as antiquated as Ramel. It is old-fashioned."

"I am no longer surprised," added the young wife, "at being so little fashionable. Morally speaking, those hot-houses of platitudes stifle one. Never fear, Sulpice, I shall not be the one to ever again drag you into salons. Are you tired? Are you weary?"

"No, I was thinking of something else," replied Vaudrey, who really was thinking of Marianne.

Madame Vaudrey had not left Madame Gerson's salon before that pretty little Parisian whispered imprudently enough in the ear of a female friend:

"Our ministers' wives are always from Carpentras, Pont-à-Mousson, or Moulins; don't you think so?"

"And what would you have!" said Lissac, who on this evening heard everything that he ought not to hear, "it is as good as being from the *Moulin-Rouge*!"

Madame Gerson smiled, thought the expression charming, very apt, very happy, but again reflected that Lissac was exceedingly considerate toward Adrienne and that Madame Vaudrey was a little too indulgent toward Monsieur de Lissac.

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Since the moment when it had entered her mind that she might find something more than a lover in Monsieur de Rosas, Marianne had been sorely puzzled. She was playing a strong hand. Between the minister and the duke she must make a choice.

She did not care seriously for Vaudrey. In fact she found that he was ridiculously unreserved. "He is a simple fellow!" she said to Claire Dujarrier. But she had sufficient *amour-propre* to retain him, and she felt assured that Sulpice was weak enough to obey her in everything: such an individual was not to be disdained. As to Rosas, she felt a sentiment which certainly was not love, but rather a feeling of astonishment, a peculiar affection. Rosas held her in respect, and she was flattered by his timid bearing, as he had in his veins the blood of heroes. He spoke almost entirely of his love, which, however, he never proposed to her to test, and this platonic course, which in Vaudrey's case she would have considered *simple*, appeared to her to be "good form" in the great nobleman's case. The duke raised her in her own eyes.

He had never repeated that word, doubtless spoken by him at random: marriage, and Marianne was too discreet and shrewd to appear to have specially noticed it. She did not even allude to it. She waited patiently. With the lapse of time, she thought, Rosas would be the more surely in her grasp. Meantime it was necessary to live and as she was bent on maintaining her household, she kept Vaudrey, whom she might need at any moment.

Her part was to carry on these two intrigues simultaneously, leading Rosas to believe that the minister was her friend only, nothing more, the patron of Uncle Kayser, and making Vaudrey think that since she had dismissed the duke he had become resigned and would "suppress his sighs." She could have sworn, in all sincerity, that José was not her lover.

To mislead Vaudrey was not a very difficult task. Sulpice was literally blinded by this love.—For a moment, he had been aroused by Jouvenet's intimation that his secret was known to others. For a while he seemed to have kept himself away from Marianne; but after taking new precautions, he returned trembling with ardent passion to Mademoiselle Vanda's hôtel, where his mistress's kiss, a little languid, awaited him.

Months passed thus, the entire summer, the vacation of the Chamber, the dull season in Paris. Adrienne set out for Dauphiny, where Vaudrey was to preside over the Conseil-Général, and she felt a childish delight on finding herself once more in the old house at Grenoble, where she had formerly been so happy! Yet even beneath this roof, within these walls, the mute witnesses of his virtuous love, especially when alone, Vaudrey thought of Marianne, he had but one idea, that of seeing her again, of clasping her in his arms, and he wrote her passionate letters each day, which she hardly glanced over and with a shrug of her shoulders burned as of no importance.

In the depths of his province he grew weary of the continual bustle of fêtes, receptions held in his honor, addresses delivered by him, ceremonies over which he had to preside, deputations received, statues inaugurated. Statues! always statues! In the lesser towns, at Allevard or Marestel, he was dragged from the *mairie* to the *Grande Place*, between rows of firemen, in noisy processions, whose accompanying brass instruments split his ears, under pink-striped tents, draped with tricolor flags, before interminable files of gymnastic societies, glee clubs, corporate bodies, associations, Friends of Peace, or Friends of War societies! Then wandering harangues; commonplace remarks, spun out;

addresses, sprinkled with Latin by professors of rhetoric; declarations of political faith by eloquent municipal councillors, all delighted to grab at a minister when the opportunity offered. How many such harangues Vaudrey heard! More than in the Chamber. More thickly they came, more compressed, more severe than in the Chamber. What advice, political considerations and remonstrances winding up with demands for offices! What cantatas that begged for subsidies! Everywhere demands: demands for subsidies, demands for grants, demands for help, demands for decorations! Nothing but harass, enervation, lassitude, deafening clamor. They wished to kill him with their shouts: *Vive Vaudrey!*

The Prefect and the Commandant General of the division were constantly on guard about Vaudrey, who was dragged about in torture between these two coat-embroidered officers. From the lips of the prefect, Vaudrey heard the same commonplace utterances: progress, the future, the fusion of parties and interests, the greatness of the department, the cotton trade and the tanneries, the glory of the minister who—of the minister whom—of the glorious child of the country—of the eagle of Dauphiny. *Vive Vaudrey! Vive Vaudrey!* The general, at least, varied his effects. He grumbled and wrung his hands, and on the day of the inauguration of the statue of a certain Monsieur Valbonnans, a former deputy and celebrated glove manufacturer,—also the glory of the country,—Vaudrey heard the soldier murmur from morning till night, with a movement of his jaw that made his imperial jerk: "*I love bronze! I love bronze!*" with a persistency that stupefied the minister.

This was, perhaps, the only recollection of a cheerful nature that Vaudrey retained of his trips in Isère. This eternal murmuring of the general: *I love bronze! I love bronze!* had awakened him, and he gayly asked himself what devilish sort of appetite that soldier had who continually repeated his phrase in a ravenous tone. Seated beside him on the platform, while the glee-club sung an elegy in honor of the late Monsieur Valbonnans, which was composed for the occasion by an amateur of the town:

> Monsieur Valbonnans' praise let's chant, yes, chant!
> His gloves the best, as all must grant,
> The best extant!

while the flourish of trumpets took up the refrain and the firemen unveiled, amid loud acclamations, the statue of Monsieur Valbonnans, which bore these words on the pedestal: *To the Inventor, the Patriot, the Merchant*; while, too, the prefect still poured in Vaudrey's left ear his inexhaustible observations: the glove trade, the glory of Isère; the progress, the interest, the greatness of the department, the minister who—the minister whom—(*Vive Vaudrey!*) Sulpice still heard, even amid the acclamations, the mechanical rumbling of the general's voice, repeating, reasserting, rehearsing: "*I love bronze! I love bronze!*"

On the evening of the banquet, the minister at length obtained an explanation of this extraordinary affection. The general rose, grasping his glass as if he would shiver it, and while the *parfait* overflowed on to the plates, he cried in a hoarse voice, as if he were at the head of his division:

"I love bronze—I love bronze—because it serves for the erection of statues and the casting of cannon. I love bronze because its voice wins battles, the artillery being to-day the superior branch, although the cavalry is the most chivalrous! I love bronze because it is the image of the heart of the soldier, and I should like to see in our country an army of men of bronze who—whom—"

He became confused and muddled, and rolled his white eyes about in his purpled face and to close his observations brandished his glass as if it had been his sword, and amid a frenzy of applause from the guests, he valiantly howled: "I love bronze! I love bronze!"

Vaudrey could scarcely prevent himself from laughing hysterically, in spite of his ministerial dignity, and when he returned to Grenoble, his carriage full of the flowers that they had showered on him, he could only answer to Adrienne, who asked him if he had spoken well, if it had been a fine affair, by throwing his bouquets on the floor and saying:

"I have laughed heartily, but I am crushed, stupefied! What a headache!"

And Sulpice wrote all that to Marianne, and innocent that he was, told her: "Ah! all those applauding voices are not worth a single word from you! When shall I see you, Marianne, dear heart?"

"At the latest possible date!" *the dear heart* said.

She regarded the close of summer and the beginning of autumn with extreme vexation, for it would bring with it the parliamentary session and Vaudrey, and inflict on her the presence of her lover.

Sulpice provided her liberally with all that her luxurious appetites demanded, and it was for good reasons that she decided not to break with him, although for a long time she had sacrificed this man in her inclinations. "Ah! when I shall be able to bounce him!" she said, expressing herself like a courtesan. She could not, she would not accept anything from Rosas. On that side, the game was too fine to be compromised. She could with impunity accept the position of mistress of Vaudrey, but with José she must appear to preserve, as it were, an aureole of modesty, of virginal charms, that she did not possess.

In fact, the Spaniard's mind became singularly crystallized, and she turned this result to good account: in proportion as he associated himself with the real Marianne, he created a fictitious Marianne, ideal, kind, *spirituelle*, perhaps ignorant, but subtile and corrupted in mind, who amused and disconcerted him at one and the same time. He had left the Continental Hotel, and rented a house on Avenue Montaigne, Champs-Élysées, where he sometimes entertained Marianne as he might have

done a princess. At such times she gossiped while smoking Turkish tobacco. Her Parisian grace, her champagne-like effervescent manner, seduced and charmed this serious, pale traveller, whose very smile was tinged with melancholy.

He completely adored this woman and no longer made an effort to resist. He entirely forgot that it was through Guy that he had known her. It seemed to him that he had himself discovered her, and besides, she had never loved Guy. No, certainly not. She was frank enough to acknowledge everything. Then she denied that Lissac ever—Then what! If it should be true? But no! no! Marianne denied it. He blindly believed in Marianne.

All the conflicting, frantic arguments that men make when they are about to commit some foolish action were at war in José's brain. The more so as he did not attempt to analyze his feelings. He passed, near this pretty woman whose finger-tips he hardly dared kiss, the most delicious summer of his life. Once, however, on going out with Marianne in the Champs-Élysées, he had met the old Dujarrier with the swollen eyelids and the yellow hair that he had known formerly. One of his friends, the Marquis Vergano, had committed suicide at twenty for this woman who was old enough to be his mother. The Dujarrier had stopped and greeted Marianne, but as she remarked herself, a thousand bows and scrapes were thrown away, for Rosas had hardly noticed her with a glacial look.

"Why do you return that woman's salutation?" he at once asked Marianne.

"I need her. She has done me services."

"That is surprising! I thought her incapable of doing anything but harm."

He did not dream of Mademoiselle Kayser's coming in contact with courtesans. In the tiny, virtuous room in Rue Cuvier, Rosas thought that Marianne was in her true surroundings. She would frequently sit at the piano—one of the few pieces of furniture contained in this apartment,—and play for Rosas Oriental melodies that would transport him far away in thought, to the open desert, by the slow lulling of David's *Caravane*, then abruptly change to that familiar air, that rondeau of the Variétés that he hummed yonder, on his dunghill, forsaken—

> "Voyez-vous, là-bas,
> Cette maison blanche—"

"I love that music-hall air!" she said.

He now no longer meditated resuming travel, or quitting Paris. Mademoiselle Kayser's hold on him grew more certain every day. The suspicion of odd mystery that enveloped this girl intensified his passion.

He sometimes asked her what her uncle was doing.

"He? Why, he has obtained, thanks to Monsieur Vaudrey, the decoration of a hydropathic establishment, *Les Thermes des Batignolles*. He has commenced the cartoon for a fresco: *Massage Moralizing the People*. We shall see that in his studio."

"Do you know," Marianne continued, "what I would like to see?"

"What, then?"

"Spain, your own country. Where were you born, Rosas?"

"At Toledo. I own the family château there."

"With portraits and armor?"

"Yes, with portraits and armor."

"Well, I would like to go to Toledo, to see that château. It must be magnificent."

"It is gloomy, simply gloomy. A fortress on a rock. Gray stone, a red rock, scorched by the sun. Huge halls half Moorish in style. Walls as thick as those of a prison. Steel knights, standing with lance in hand as in *Eviradnus*! Old portraits of stern ancestors cramped in their doublets, or Duchesses de Rosas, with pale faces, sad countenances, buried in their collars whose *guipures* have been limned by Velasquez or Claude Coëllo. Immense cold rooms where the visitors' footfalls echo as over empty tombs. A splendor that savors of the vault. You would die of ennui at the end of two hours and of cold at the end of eight days."

"Die of cold in Spain?"

"There is a cold of the soul," the duke replied with a significant smile. "That I have travelled so much, is probably due to my desire to escape from that place! But you at Toledo, at Fuentecarral,—that is the name of my castle,—a Parisian like you! It would be cruel. As well shut up a humming-bird in a bear-pit. No! thank God, I have other nooks in Spain that will shelter us, my dear sparrow of the boulevards! Under the Andalusian jasmines, beneath the oleanders of Cordova or Seville, under the fountains whose basins are decorated with azulejos, and in which sultanas bathe, my jasmins could never sufficiently exhale their perfume, my fountains could never murmur harmoniously enough to furnish you a joyous welcome—when you go—if you go—But Toledo! My terrible castle Fuentecarral! It is in vain that I am impenitently romantic, I would not take you there for anything in the world. It would be as if ice fell on your shoulders. Fuentecarral? Ugh!—that smacks of death."

While he spoke, Marianne looked at him with kindling eyes and in thought roamed through those sweet-scented gardens, and she craved to see herself in that tomblike fortress Fuentecarral, passing in front of the pale female ancestors of Rosas, aghast at the *froufrou* of the *Parisian woman*.

José thought Marianne's burning glance was an expression of her love. Ah! how completely the last six months in Paris had riveted him to this woman, who was the mistress of another! One day,—Vaudrey had just left Marianne at the *rond-point* of the Champs-Élysées,—the duke seeing her enter his house, said abruptly to her:

"I was about to write you, Marianne."

"Why, my dear duke?"

"To ask an appointment."

"You are always welcome, my friend, at our little retreat."

He made her sit down, seized both her hands, and looked at her earnestly as he said:

"Swear to me that you have never been Lissac's mistress!"

She did not even quiver, but was as calm as if she had long awaited this question.

She boldly met José's glance and said:

"Does one ask such a question of the woman one loves?"

"Suppose that I ask this question of the Duchesse de Rosas!" said the Spaniard, with quivering lip.

She became as pale as he.

"I do not understand—" she said.

The duke remained silent for a moment; then his entire soul passed into his voice:

"I have no family, Marianne. I am entirely my own master, and I love you. If you swear to me that you have not been Guy's mistress—"

"Nobody has the right to say that he has even touched my lips," replied Marianne firmly. "Only one man, he who took me, an innocent girl, and left me heart-broken, disgusted, believing I should never again love, before I met you. He is dead."

"I know," said Rosas, "you confided that to me formerly.—A widow save in name, I offer you, yes, I! my name, my love, my whole life—will you take them?"

"Eh! you know perfectly well that I love you!" she exclaimed, as she frantically gave him the burning and penetrating kiss that had never left his lips since the soirée at Sabine's.

"Then, no one—no one?" José repeated.

"No one!"

"On honor?"

"On honor!"

"Oh! how I love you!" he said, distractedly, all his passion shattering his coldness of manner, as the sun melts the snow. "If you but knew how jealous and crazed I am about you!—I desire you, I adore you, and I condemn myself to remain glacial before you, beneath your glance that fires my blood—I love you, and the recollection of Guy hindered me from telling you that all that is mine belongs to you —I am a ferocious creature, you know, capable of mad outbursts, senseless anger, and unreasoning flight—Yes, I have wished to escape from you again. Well! no, I remain with you; I love you, I love you! —You shall be my wife, do you hear? My wife!—Ah! what a moment of bliss! I have loved you for years! Have you not seen it, Marianne?"

"I have seen it and I loved you! I also have kept silence! I saw plainly that you believed that I had given myself to another—No, no, I am yours, nothing but yours! All my love, all myself, take it; I have kept it for you; for I hate the past, more than that, I do not know that it exists—It is despised, obliterated, it is nothing! But you, ah! you, you are my life!"

She left José's, her youth renewed, haughty, intoxicated with delight. She walked along alone, in the paths of the Champs-Élysées, the rusty leaves falling in showers at the breath of the already cold wind, her heels ringing on the damp asphalt. She marched straight ahead, her thoughts afire from her intoxicating emotions. It seemed that Paris belonged to her.

That evening, she was to go to the theatre. It was arranged that Vaudrey should wait for her at the entrance with a hired carriage and take her to Rue Prony. She wrote to him that she could not leave the house. A slight headache. Uncle Kayser undertook to have the letter taken by a commissionaire.

"Unless you would rather have me go to the ministry!"

"Are you mad?" Marianne said.

"That is true, it would be immoral."

She wished to have the evening to herself, quite alone, so that she could let her dreams take flight.

Dreams? Nonsense! On the contrary, it was a dazzling reality: a fortune, a title, a positive escape from want and the mire. What a revenge!

"It is enough to drive one mad!"

Sudden fears seized her; the terror of the too successful gambler. What if everything crumbled like a house of cards! She wished that she were several weeks older.

"Time passes so quickly, and yet one has a desire to spur it on."

Now in the solitude of her house she felt weary. She could neither read nor think, and became feverish. She regretted that she had written to Vaudrey. She wished to go to the theatre. A new operetta would be a diversion, and why should she not go? She had the ticket for her box. She could at once inform Vaudrey that her headache had vanished.

"And then he bores me!—Especially now."

Matters, however, must not be abruptly changed. Suppose Rosas should take a sudden fancy to fly off again! Besides, she had mutual interests with the minister, there was an account to be settled.

"The Gochard paper?—Bah! he will pay it. More-ever, I am not involved in that."

Suddenly she thought that she would act foolishly if she did not go where she pleased. Sulpice might think what he pleased. She got her maid to dress her hair.

"Madame is going to the theatre?"

"Yes, Justine. To the Renaissance!"

She was greatly amused at the theatre, and was radiant with pleasure. She was the object of many glances, and felt delighted at being alone. One of the characters in the operetta was a duchess whose adventures afforded the audience much diversion. She abandoned herself to her dreams, her thoughts wandering far from the theatre, the footlights and the actors, to the distant orange groves yonder.

During an entr'acte some one knocked at the door of her box. She turned around in surprise. It was Jouvenet, the Prefect of Police, who came to greet her in a very gallant fashion. The prefect—he had gained at the palais in former days, the title of *L'Avocat Pathelin*,—with insinuating and wheedling manners, hastened to pay his meed of respect to Marianne when he met her. There was no necessity to stand on ceremony with him. He knew all her secrets. Such a man, more-ever, must be treated prudently, as he can make himself useful. Never had Jouvenet spoken to her of Vaudrey, he was too politic in matters of state. But as a man who knows that everything in this world is transient, he skilfully maintained his place in the ranks, considering that a Prefect of Police might not be at all unlikely to succeed a President of the Council.

Marianne permitted him to talk, accepted all his gallantries as she might have done bonbons, and with a woman's wit kept him at a distance without wounding his vanity.

Jouvenet with the simple purpose of showing her that he was well-informed, asked her, stroking his whiskers as he did so, if she often saw the Duc de Rosas. What a charming man the duke was! And while the young woman watched him as if to guess his thoughts, he smiled at her.

The prefect, not wishing to appear too persistent, changed the conversation with the remark:

"Ah! there is one of our old friends ogling you!"

"An old friend?"

It was in fact Guy de Lissac who was standing at the balcony training his glass upon the box.

Marianne had only very occasionally met Lissac, but for some time she had suspected him of being secretly hostile to her. Guy bore her a grudge for having taken Sulpice away from Adrienne. He pitied Madame Vaudrey and perhaps his deep compassion was blended with another sentiment in which tenderness had taken the place of a more modified interest. He was irritated against the blind husband because he could not see the perfect charms of that delicate soul, so timid and at the same time so devoted. Although he had not felt justified in showing his annoyance to Vaudrey, he had manifested his dislike to Marianne under cover of his jesting manner, and she had been exceedingly piqued thereby. Wherefore did this man who could not understand her, interfere, and why did he add to the injuries of old the mockery of to-day?

"After all, perhaps it is through jealousy," she thought. "The dolt!"

Guy did not cease to look at her through his glass.

"Does that displease you?" Jouvenet asked.

"Not at all. What is that to me?"

"This Lissac was much in love with you!"

"Ah! Monsieur le Préfet!" Marianne observed sharply. "I know that your office inclines you to be somewhat inquisitive, but it would be polite of you to allow my past to sleep in your dockets. They are famous shrouds!"

Jouvenet bit his lips and in turn brought his glass to bear on Lissac.

"See," he said, "he makes a great deal of the cross of the Christ of Portugal! It is in very bad taste! I thought he was a shrewder man!"

"The order of Christ is then in bad odor?"

"On the contrary; but as it is like the Legion of Honor in color, he is prohibited from wearing it in his buttonhole without displaying the small gold cross—And I see only the red there—"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Préfet, there is one."

"Oh! my glass is a wretched one!—But even so, I do not believe Monsieur de Lissac is authorized by the Grand Chancellor to wear his decoration. That is easily ascertained!—I will nevertheless not fail to insert in the *Officiel* to-morrow a note relative to the illegality of wearing certain foreign decorations —"

"Is this note directed against Lissac?"

"Not at all. But he reminds me of a step that I have wished to take for a long time: the enforcement of the law."

The entr'acte was over. Jouvenet withdrew, repeating all kinds of remarks with double meanings that veiled declarations of love; that if the occasion arose, he would place himself entirely at her service, and that some day she might be very glad to meet him—

"I thank you, Monsieur le Préfet, and I will avail myself of your kindness," replied Marianne, out of courtesy.

Something suggested to her that Guy would pay his respects to her during the next entr'acte, were it only to jest about Jouvenet's visit, seeing that he was regarded as a compromising acquaintance, and she was not wrong.

Behind his monocle, his keen, mocking glance seemed like a taunting smile.

"Well," he said, in a somewhat abrupt tone, as he sat near Marianne, "I congratulate you, my dear friend."

"Why?" she answered with surprise.

"On the great news, *parbleu!* Your marriage."

She turned slightly pale.

"How do you know?—"

"I have seen the duke. He called on me."

"On you? What for?"

"Can't you make a little guess—a very little guess—"

"To ask you if I had been your mistress? Lissac, you are very silly."

"Yes, my dear Marianne, prepare yourself somewhat for the position of a duchess. A gentleman, to whom you have sworn that I have never been your lover, could not doubt your word!—José asked me nothing. He simply stated his determination to see what I would say, or gather from my looks what I thought of it."

"And you said?"

"What I had to say to him: I congratulated him!"

Marianne raised her gray eyes to Lissac's face.

"Congratulate?" she said slowly.

"The woman he marries is pretty enough, I think?"

"Ah! my dear, a truce to insolent trifles!—what is it that has possessed you for some time past?"

"Nothing, but something has possessed you—or some one."

"Rosas?"

"No, Vaudrey!"

"I will restore him to you. Oh! oh! you are surprisingly interested in Vaudrey. Vaudrey or his wife?" she remarked.

She smiled with her wicked expression.

"Duchess," said Lissac, "accustom yourself to respect virtuous women!"

"Is it to talk of such pleasant trifles that you have gained access to my box?"

"No, it is to ask you for some special information."

"What?"

"Is it true, is it really true that you are about to wed Rosas?" he asked in an almost cordial tone.

"Why not?" she replied, as she raised her head.

"Because—I am going to be frank—I have always regarded you as an absolutely straightforward woman, a woman of honor—You once claimed so to be. Mad, fantastic, you often are; charming, always; but dishonest, never. To take Rosas's love, even his fortune, would be natural enough, but to take his name would be a very questionable act and a skilful one, but lacking in frankness."

"That is to say that I may devour him like a courtesan, but not marry him as a—"

"As a young girl, no, you cannot do that. And you put me—I am bound to tell you so and I take advantage of the intermission to do so—in a delicate position. If I declared the truth to Rosas, I act toward you as a rascal. If I keep silent to my friend, my true friend, I act almost like a knave."

"Did Rosas ask you to speak to me?"

"No, but there is a voice within me that pricks me to speech and tells me that if I allow you to marry the duke, I am committing myself to a questionable affair—Do you know what he asked me?—To be his witness."

If Marianne had been in a laughing mood, she would have laughed heartily.

"It is absurd," she said. "You did not consent?"

"Yes, indeed, I have consented. Because I really hoped that you would relieve me from such an undesirable duty, a little too questionable."

"You would like?—What would you like?"

"I wish—no, I would have you not marry Monsieur de Rosas."

Marianne shrugged her shoulders.

She clearly felt the threat conveyed in Lissac's words, but she desired to show from the first that she disdained them. What right, after all, had this casual acquaintance to mix himself up in her life affairs? Because, one day, she had been charitable enough to give him her youth and her body! The duty of friendship! The rights of friendship! To protect Vaudrey! To defend Rosas! Words, tiresome words!

"And what if I wish to marry him, myself?—Would you prevent it?"

"Yes, if I could!" he said firmly. "It is time that to the freemasonry of women we should oppose the freemasonry of men."

"You are cruelly cowardly enough when you are alone, what would you be then when you are together?" said Marianne, with a malignant expression. "In fact," said she, after a moment's pause, "what would you have? What? Decide!—Will you send my letters to the duke?"

"That is one way," said Lissac, calmly. "It is a *woman's* way, that!"

"You have my letters still?"

"Preciously preserved."

He had not contemplated such a threat, but she quickly scented a danger therein.

"Suppose I should ask the return of those letters, perhaps you would restore them to me?"

"Probably," he said.

"Suppose I asked you to bring them to me, you know, in that little out of the way room of which I spoke to you one day?"

She had leaned gently toward Lissac and her elbows grazed the knees of her former lover.

"I would wear, that day, one of those otter-trimmed toques that you have not forgotten."

She saw that he trembled, as if he were moved by some unsatisfied desire for her. She felt reassured.

"Nonsense!" she said with a smiling face. "You are not so bad as you pretend to be."

The manager tapped the customary three blows behind the curtain, and the orchestra began the prelude to the third act.

"Adieu for a brief period, my enemy!" said Marianne, extending her hand.

He hesitated to take that hand. At length, taking it in his own, he said:

"Leave me Rosas!"

"Fie! jealous one! Don't I leave Vaudrey to you?"

She laughed, while Lissac went away dissatisfied.

"I will have my letters, at all risks," thought Marianne when he had disappeared. "It is more prudent."

That night she slept badly, and the following morning rose in a very ill-humor. Her face expressed

fatigue, her eyes were encircled with dark rings and burned feverishly, but withal, her beauty was heightened. All the morning she debated as to the course she should take, and finally decided to write to Guy, when Sulpice Vaudrey arrived, and beaming with delight, informed Marianne that he had the entire day to spend with her.

"I learned through Jouvenet this morning that you were able to go to the theatre. Naughty one, to steal an evening from me. But I have all to-day, at least."

And he sat down in the salon like a man spreading himself out in his own house. Marianne was meditating some scheme to get rid of him when the chamber-maid entered, presenting a note on a tray.

"What is that?"

"A messenger, madame, has brought this letter."

Marianne read the paper hurriedly.

Vaudrey observed that she blushed slightly.

"Is the messenger still there, Justine?"

"No, madame, he is gone. He said that there was no reply."

Marianne quickly tore in small pieces the note she had just read.

"Some annoyance?" asked Vaudrey.

"Yes, exactly."

"May I know?"

"No, it does not interest you. A family affair."

"Ah! your uncle?" asked Vaudrey, smiling.

"My uncle, yes!"

"He has asked that he be permitted to exhibit at the Trocadero the cartoons that he has finished: *The Artist's Mission*, *Hydropathy the Civilizer*, I don't know what in fact, a series of symbolical compositions—"

"With the *mirliton* device underneath?—Yes, I know," said Marianne.

She snapped her fingers in her impatience.

The letter that she had torn up had been written by Rosas, and received by Uncle Kayser at his studio, whence he had forwarded it to his niece. The duke informed Marianne that he would wait for her at five o'clock at Avenue Montaigne. He had something to say to her. He had passed the entire night reflecting and dreaming. She remembered her own wild dreams. Had Rosas then caught her thought floating like an atom on the night wind?

At five o'clock! She would be punctual. But how escape Vaudrey? She could not now feign sickness since she had received him! Moreover, he would instal himself near her and bombard her with his attentions. Was there any possible pretext, any way of getting out now? Her lover had the devoted, radiant look of a loved man who relied on enjoying a long interview with his mistress. He looked at her with a tender glance.

"The fool—The sticker!" thought Marianne. "He will not leave!"

The best course was to go out. She would lose him on the way.

"What time have you, my dear minister?"

"One o'clock!"

"Then I have time!" she said.

Vaudrey seemed surprised. Marianne unceremoniously informed him, in fact, that she had some calls to make, to secure some purchases.

"How disagreeable!"

"Yes, for me!"

"I beg your pardon," said Sulpice, correcting himself.

She sent for a coupé and damp and keen as the weather was, she substituted for the glorious day of snug, intimate joy that Vaudrey had promised himself, a succession of weary hours passed in the draught caused by badly-fitting windows, while making a series of trips hither and thither, Marianne meantime cudgelling her brains to find a way to leave her lover on the way, or at least to notify Rosas.

But above all to notify Lissac! It was Lissac whom she was determined to see. Yes, absolutely, and at once. The more she considered the matter, the more dangerous it appeared to her.

Sulpice had not given her a moment of freedom at her house, in which to write a few lines. He might

have questioned her and that would be imprudent.

"I wish, however, to tell Guy to expect me!—Where? Rue Cuvier? He would not go there!—No, at his house!"

On the way she found the means.

Vaudrey evidently was at liberty for the day and, master of his time, he would not leave her. This he repeated at every turn of the wheel. She ordered the driver to take her to *The Louvre*.

"I have purchases to make!"

Sulpice could not accompany her, so he waited for her at the entrance on Place du Palais-Royal, nestled in a corner of the carriage, the blinds of which were lowered in order that he might not be seen. He felt very cold.

Marianne slowly crossed between the stalls on the ground floor, hardly looking at the counters bearing the Japanese goods, the gloves and the artificial flowers. She ascended a winding iron stairway draped with tapestries, her tiny feet sinking into the moquette that covered the steps, and entered a noiseless salon where men and women were silently sitting before three tables, writing or reading, just as in the *drawing-room* of a hotel. At a large round table, old ladies and young girls sat looking at the pictures in *Illustration*, the caricatures in the *Journal Amusant*, and the sketches in *La Vie Parisienne*. Others, at the second table, were reading the daily papers, some of which were rolled about their holders like a flag around its staff, or the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Further on, at a red-covered table furnished with leather-bound blotters and round, glass inkstands in which the ink danced with a purple reflection, people were writing, seated on chairs covered in worn, garnet-colored velvet, with mahogany frames. This gloomy apartment was brightened by broad-leaved green plants, and was lighted from the roof by means of a flat skylight.

Marianne walked direct to the table on which the paper was symmetrically arranged in a stationery rack, and quickly seating herself, she laid her muff down, half-raised her little veil, and beat a tattoo with her tiny hand on the little black leather blotter before her, then taking off her gloves, she took at random some sheets of paper and some envelopes bearing the address of the establishment on the corners. As she looked around for a pen, Marianne could not refrain from smiling, she thought of that poor Sulpice down there, waiting in the carriage and probably shivering in the draughts issuing from the disjointed doors. And he a minister!

"Such is adultery in Paris!" she said to herself, happy to make him suffer.

She did not hurry. She was amused by her surroundings. A uniformed man promenaded the salon, watching the stationery in the cases and replacing it as it was used. If required, he sold stamps to any one present. A letter-box was attached near the tall chimney, bearing the hours of collection.

Beside Marianne, elbow to elbow, and before her, were principally women, some writing with feverish haste, others hesitatingly, and amongst them were two girls opposite her, who as they finished their letters chuckled in a low tone and passed them one to the other, say-to each other, as they chewed their plaid penholders:

"It is somewhat cold, eh! He will say: *Eh, well, it is true then!*"

The two pretty, cheerful girls before her were doubtless breaking in this way some liaison, amusing themselves by sending an unexpected blow to some poor fellow, and enjoying themselves by spoiling paper; the one writing, the other reading over her companion's shoulder and giving vent to merry laughter under her Hungarian toque, a huge Quaker-collar almost covering her shoulders and her little jacket with its large steel buttons.

This feminine head-gear made Marianne think of Guy. Her eyes, catlike in expression, gleamed maliciously.

She took some paper and essayed to frame some tempting, tender phrases, something nebulous and exciting, but she could not.

"What I would like to write him is that he is a wretch and that I hate him!" she thought.

Then she stopped and looked about her, altogether forgetting Vaudrey.

The contrast between that silent reading-room and the many-colored crowd in that Oriental bazaar, whose murmurs reached her ears like the roaring of a distant sea, and of which she could see only the corner clearly defined by the framework of the doors, amused Marianne, who with a smile on her lips, enjoyed the mischievous delight of fooling a President of the Council.

"At least that avenges me for the cowardice that the *other* forced me to commit!"

Then mechanically regarding the crowd that flowed through these *docks*, that contained everything that could please or disgust a whole world at once, the crowd, the clerks, the carpets, the linen, the crowding, the heaping,—all seemed strange and comic to her, novel and not Parisian, but American and up-to-date.

"Oh! decidedly up-to-date!—And so convenient!" she said, as she heard the young girls laugh when they finished their love-letters.

Then she began to write, having surely found the expressions she sought. She sent Rosas a letter of

apology: she would be at his house to-morrow at the same hour. To-day, her uncle took up her day, compelling her to go to see his paintings, to visit the Louvre, to buy draperies for an Oriental scene that he intended to paint. If Rosas did not receive the letter in time, it mattered little! To Lissac,—and this was the main consideration,—she intimated that she would call on him the next morning at ten o'clock.

"Rendezvous box!" she said, as she slipped her two letters into the letter-box. "This extreme comfort is very ironical."

She smiled as she thought how long it would take to count the number of the little hands, some trembling, some bold, that had slipped into the rectilinear mouth of the letter-box some little missive that was either the foretaste or the postscript of adultery.

Then she went downstairs and rejoined Vaudrey, who was impatiently tapping the floor of the carriage with his foot.

"I was a long time there, I ask your pardon," said Marianne.

"At any rate, I hope you have bought something that suited you?" asked Vaudrey, who seemed to have caught a cold.

"Nothing at all. There is nothing in that store!"

Vaudrey was alarmed. Were they to visit one after the other all the fancy goods stores?

Marianne took pity on him.

"Let us return, shall we?" she asked.

She called to the coachman: "Rue Prony!" while Sulpice, whom she unwillingly took with her, though he wearily yawned, seized her hand and said as he sneezed:

"Ah! how kind you are!"

The next day, Marianne rang the bell of Lissac's house in Rue d'Aumale, a little before the appointed hour.

"Punctual as a creditor!" she thought.

She reached Guy's, ready for anything. She was very pale and charming in her light costume, and she entered as one would go into a fray with head high. She would not leave the place until she had recovered her letters.

It was only for those scraps of paper that she again, as it were, bound and tied herself to her past; she wished to cut herself away from it and to tear them to pieces with her teeth. But what if Guy should refuse to give them up to her? That could not be possible, although he was sincerely attached to Rosas. Still, between gratitude to a woman and duty to a friend, a man might hesitate, when he is a corrupted Parisian like Lissac.

"His affection for José will not carry him to the length of forgetting all that I have given him of myself!" Marianne thought.

Then shrugging her shoulders:

"After all, these men have such a freemasonry between them, as *he* said!—And they speak of our fraternity, we women!—It is nothing compared with theirs!"

Guy did not show any displeasure on hearing Mademoiselle Kayser announced. He was waiting for her. As Marianne could not feel free so long as he held the proof of her imprudence, some day or other she must inevitably seek him to supplicate or threaten him. The letter received overnight had apprised him that that moment had arrived.

He had just finished dressing when she entered. His suède gloves were laid out flat on a little table beside his hat, his stick and a small antique cloisonné vase into which were thrown the many-colored rosettes of his foreign decorations, some of them red, amid which a little gold cross glistened like some brilliant beetle settled on a deep-hued rose.

"I wager that you are going out!" Marianne remarked abruptly. "Clearly, you did not expect me!—Haven't you received my letter?"

"My dear Marianne," he replied, as he slowly finished adjusting the knot of his cravat, "that is the very remark you made when you condescended to reappear at my house after a lapse of some years. You have too modest a way of announcing yourself; I assure you that, for my part, I always expect you—and that with impatience. But to-day, more than on any other occasion, because of your charming note."

She knew Guy well enough to perceive that his exquisite politeness only concealed a warlike irony. She did not reply, but stood smiling in front of the fireplace and warmed her toes at the light flames that leapt about the logs.

"You are exceedingly polite," she said at last. "On honor, I like you very much—you laugh? I say very much—Yes, in spite—In no case, have you had aught to complain of me."

She half turned, resting her left hand on the edge of the velvet-covered mantel, and cast a furtive,

gentle glance at Lissac that recalled a multitude of happy incidents.

"I have never complained," said the young man, "and I have frequently expressed my thanks!"

Marianne laughed at the discreet manner so ceremoniously adopted by Lissac.

"You are silly, come!—We have a great liking for each other, and it is in the name of that affection that I come to ask a service."

"You have only to speak, my dear Marianne," Lissac answered, as if he had not noticed the intimacy her words expressed.

He affected a cold politeness; Marianne replied to him with apparent renewed tenderness. She looked at him for some time as if she hesitated and feared, her glance penetrating Lissac's, and begging with a tearful petition that wished to kindle a flame in his eyes.

"What I have to say to you will take some time. I am afraid—"

"Of what?" he asked.

"I don't know. You are in a hurry? I interfere with you, perhaps!"

"Not the least in the world. I breakfast at the Club, take a turn in the Bois, and drop in at the *Mirlitons* to see the opening. You see that I should be entitled to very little merit in sacrificing to you a perfectly wasted day."

"Is the present Exposition of the *Mirlitons* well spoken of?" asked Marianne, indifferently.

"Very. It is a collection of things that are to be sold for the benefit of a deceased artist. Would you like to go there at four o'clock?"

"No, thanks!—And I repeat, my dear Guy, that I will not hinder you, you know, if I have been indiscreet in giving you an appointment!—"

She seemed to be mechanically toying with the silk rosettes in the little vase; she picked them up and let them drop from her fingers like grains.

"These are yours?" she asked.—"Come near that I may put them on!"

She went to Guy, smilingly, and resting her body against his for its entire length, she paused for a moment while she held the lapel of his jacket, and from head to foot she gazed at him with a look that seemed to impregnate him with odor and turned him pale.

"What an idea, Marianne! I do not wear these ribbons now."

"A childish one. I remember that I was the first to place in this buttonhole some foreign decoration that Monsieur de Rosas brought you—"

She pronounced this name boldly, as if she would bring on the battle.

"That suits you well," she continued. "Orders on your coat are like diamonds in our ears—they are of no use, but they are pretty."

She had passed a red rosette through the buttonhole, and lowering his head, Guy saw her fair brow, her blond locks within reach of his lips. They exhaled a perfume—the odor of hay, that he liked so well—and those woman's fingers on his breast, the fingers of the woman whom he had mocked the previous night at the theatre, caused him a disturbing sensation. He gently disengaged himself, while Marianne repeated: "That suits you well—" Then her hand fell on his and she pressed his fingers in her burning and soft palm and said, as she half lowered her head toward him:

"Do you know why I have come? You know that I am silly. Well, naughty one, the other evening in that box when you punished me with your irony, all my love for you returned!—Ah! how foolish we are, we women! Tell me, Guy, do you recall the glorious days we have spent? Those recollections retain their place in the heart! Has the idea of living again as in the past never occurred to you? It was so sweet!"

Lissac laughed a little nervously and trembled slightly, trying to joke but feeling himself suddenly weakening in the presence of this woman whose wrath or contemptuous smile he preferred.

He recognized all the vanished perfumes. The sensation of trembling delight that years had borne away now returned to him. The silent pressure of the hands recalled nights of distraction. He half shut his eyes, a sudden madness overcame him, although he was sufficiently calm to say to himself that she had an end in view, this woman's coming to him, loveless, to speak of love to him, herself unmoved by the senses, to awaken vanished feelings, to offer herself with the irresistible skill of desire: a dead passion born of caprice.

"Nevertheless, it is you who left me, satiated after taking from me all that you were capable of loving," she said. "Do you know one thing, however, Guy? There is more than one woman in a woman. There are as many as she possesses of passions or joys, and the Marianne of to-day is so different from the one who was your mistress formerly!—You would never leave me, if you were my lover now!"

She tempted this man whose curiosity was aroused, accustomed as he was to casual and easy love adventures. He foresaw danger, but there within reach of his lips were experienced kisses, an ardent supplicant, a proffered delight, full of burning promise. In a sort of anger, he seized the woman who recalled all the past joys, uttered the well-known cries, and who suddenly, as in a nervous attack,

deliriously plucked the covering from her bosom, and bared with the boldness of beauty that knows itself to be irresistible, her white arms, her brilliant, untrammeled breasts, the sparkling splendor of her flesh, with her golden hair unfastened, as she used to appear lying on a pillow of fair silk, almost faint and between her kisses, that were as fierce as bites, uttering: "I love you—you—I adore you—" And the lovely, imperious girl again became, almost without a word having been exchanged, the submissive woman carried away by lascivious ardor; and Guy, confused and speechless, no longer reasoning, was unable to say whether Marianne belonged to him, or he to the mistress of former days, become the mistress of to-day.

He held her clasped to him, his hand raising her pale, languishing face about which her fair hair fell loosely; to him she looked like one asleep, her pink nostrils still dilating with a spasmodic movement, and it seemed to him that he had just suffered from the perturbing contact of a courtesan in the depths of some luxurious den.

It was an immediate reawakening, enervating but furious. She had given herself impulsively. He recovered himself similarly. The sudden contact of two bodies resulted in the immediate recoil of two beings.

With more bitter shame, he had had similar morose awakenings after a dissipated night, his heart, his brave heart thumping against the passionate form, often lean and sallow, of some satiated girl, fearfully weary.

What cowardice! Was it Vaudrey's mistress or the future wife of Rosas who had clung to his lips?

He felt disgusted at heart.

Yet she was adorable, this still young and lovely Marianne.

With cruel perspicacity, he already foresaw that he would be guilty of cowardly conduct in yielding to this sudden weakness, and ashamed of himself he disengaged himself from her hysterical embrace, while Marianne squatted on his bed, throwing back her hair from her face, still smiling as she looked at him and asked:

"Well—what? What is the matter with you, then?"

She rose slowly, slipping upon the carpet while he went to the window to look mechanically into the yard. Between these two creatures but a moment before clasped together, a sudden icy coldness sprung up as if each had divined that the hour was about to sound, terrible as a knell, when their affairs must be settled. The kisses of love are to be paid for.

Standing before the mirror, half undressed, Marianne was arranging her hair. Her white shoulders, her still heaving and oppressed bosom were still exposed within the border of her fine chemisette. She felt her wrists, instinctively examining her bracelets, and looked toward the bed in an absent sort of way as if to see if some charm had not slipped from them.

"Guy," she said abruptly, but in a tone which she tried to make endearing, "promise me that you will not refuse what I am about to ask you."

"I promise."

They now quite naturally substituted for the "thou" of affectionate address, the more formal "you," secretly realizing that after the intertwining of their bodies, their real individualities independent of all surprises or sensual appetite, would find themselves face to face.

"I could wish that our affection—and it is profound, is it not, Guy?—dated only from the moment that we have just passed."

"I do not regret the past," he said.

"Nor I! Yet I would like to efface it—yes, by a single stroke!"

She held between her white fingers some rebellious little locks of hair that had come out, which she had rolled and twisted, and casting them into the clear flame, she said:

"See! to burn it like that!—*Pft!*—"

"Burn it?" Lissac repeated.

He had left the window, returned to Marianne and smiling in his turn, he said:

"Why burn it?—Because it is tiresome or because it is dangerous?"

"Both!" she replied.

She paused for a moment before continuing, drew up over her arms the lace of her chemisette, then half bending her head, and looking at Guy like a creditor of love she said:

"You still have my letters, my dear?"

"Your letters?"

"Those of the old days?"

"That is so," he said. "The past."

He understood everything now.

"You came to ask me to return them?"

"I have been, you must admit, very considerate, not to have claimed them—before!"

"You have been—generous!" answered Lissac, with a gracious smile.

He opened his secrétaire, one of the drawers of which contained little packages folded and tied with bands of silk ribbon, that slept the sleep of forgotten things.

"There are your letters, my dear Marianne! But you have nothing to fear; they have never left this spot."

The eyes of the young woman sparkled with a joyous light. Slowly as if afraid that Guy would not give them to her, she extended her bare arm toward the packet of letters and snatched it suddenly.

"My letters!"

"It is an entire romance," said Lissac.

"Less the epilogue!" she said, still enveloping him with her intense look.

She placed the packet on the velvet-covered mantelpiece and hastily finished dressing. Then taking between her fingers those little letters in their old-fashioned envelopes bearing her monogram, and that still bore traces of a woman's perfume, she looked at them for a moment and said to Lissac:

"You have read them occasionally?"

"I know them by heart!"

"My poor letters!—I was quite sincere, you know, when I wrote you them!—They must be very artless! Yours, that I have burned, were too clever. I remember that one day you wrote me from Holland: 'I pass my life among chefs-d'oeuvre, but my mind is far away from them. I have Rembrandt and Ruysdaël; but the smallest millet seed would be more to my liking: millet is *fair!*' Well, that was very pretty, but much too refined. True love has no wit.—All this is to convey to you that literature will not lose much by the disappearance of my disconnected scrawls."

She suddenly threw the packet into the fire and watched the letters as they lightly curled, at first spotted with fair patches, and enveloped in light smoke, then bursting into flame that cast its rosy reflection on Marianne's face. Little by little all disappeared save a patch of black powder on the logs, that danced like a mourning veil fluttering in the wind and immediately disappeared up the chimney: —the dust of dead love, the ashes of oaths, all black like mourning crêpe.

Marianne watched the burning of the letters, bending her forehead, while a strange smile played on her lips, and an expression as of triumphant joy gleamed in her eyes.

When the work was done, she raised her head and turned toward Guy and in a quivering voice, she said proudly and insolently:

"*Requiescat!* See how everything ends! It is a long time since lovers who have ceased to love invented cremation! Nothing is new under the sun!"

She was no longer the same woman. A moment before she manifested a sort of endearing humility, but now she was ironically boastful, looking at Lissac with the air of one triumphing over a dupe. He bit his lips slightly, rubbing his hands together, while examining her sidelong, without affectation. Marianne's ironical smile told him all that she now had to say.

It was not the first time that he had been a witness to such a transformation of the feminine countenance before and after the return of letters. Guy for some time had ceased to be astonished at anything in connection with women.

"Now, my dear," said Marianne, "I hope that you will do me the kindness of allowing me to go on in my own way in life, and that I shall not have the annoyance of finding you again in the way of my purpose."

"I confess," Lissac replied, "that I should be the worst of ingrates if I did not forget many things in consideration of what I owe you, both in the present and in the past. Your burned letters still shed their fragrance!"

Marianne touched the half-consumed logs with the tip of her foot and the débris of the paper fluttered around her shoe like little black butterflies.

"I wish I could have destroyed the past as I have made those letters flame! It weighs on me, it chokes me! You do not imagine, perhaps," she said, "that I have forgiven you for your flight and all that followed it?—If, for a moment, I almost stumbled in the mire, the fault was yours, for I loved you and you abandoned me, as a man forsakes a strumpet.—So, you see, my dear, a woman never forgets it, and I would have cried out long before, if I had felt myself free, free as I am now that those letters are burned, the poor letters of a stupid mistress, confiding in her lover who is overcome with weariness, and who is only thinking of deserting her, while she is still intoxicated in yielding to him—and because I adored you—yes, truly—because I was your mistress, do you arrogate to yourself the right of preventing me from marrying as I wish, and of drawing myself out of the bog into which, perhaps, by your selfishness, I have fallen? Ah, my dear fellow, really I am somewhat surprised at you, I swear!—I

said nothing because of those scraps of paper, that you would have been cowardly enough, I assert, to show Rosas and every line of which told how foolish I had been to love you."

"Monsieur de Rosas would never have seen them!" said Lissac severely.

She did not seem to hear him.

"But now, what? Thank God," she continued, "there is nothing, and you have delivered those letters to me that you ought never to have returned. And I have paid you for them, paid for them with new caresses and a last prostitution! Well! that ends it, doesn't it? There is nothing more between us, nothing, nothing, nothing!—And these two beings, who exchanged here their loveless kisses, the kisses of a debauchee and a courtesan, will never recognize each other again, I hope—you hear, never recognize each other again—when they meet in life. Moreover, I will take care to avoid meetings!"

Guy said nothing.

He twirled his moustache slightly and continued to look at Marianne sideways without replying.

This indifference, though doubtless assumed, nevertheless annoyed the young woman.

"Go, find Monsieur de Rosas now!" she said. "Tell him that you have been my lover, he will not believe you."

"I am satisfied of that," Lissac replied very calmly.

She realized a threat in his very calmness. But what had she to fear now?

She fastened her ironical glance on Lissac, the better to defy him, and to enjoy his defeat.

With extended hands, he noiselessly tapped his fingers together, the gesture of a person who waits, sure of himself and displaying a mocking silence.

"Then adieu!" she said abruptly. "I hope that we shall never see each other again!"

"How can you help it?" said Lissac, smiling. "In Paris!"

He sat down on a chair, while Marianne stood, putting on her gloves.

"On my word, my dear Marianne, for a clever woman you are outrageously sanguine."

"I?"

"And credulous! You credit me with the simplicity of the Age of Gold, then?—Is it possible?—Do you think a corrupted Parisian like myself would allow himself to be trifled with like a schoolboy by a woman as extremely seductive as I confess you are? But, my dear friend, the first rule in such matters is only to completely disarm one's self when it is duly proved that peace has been definitely signed and that a return to offensive tactics is not to be feared. You have shown your little pink claws too nimbly, Marianne. Too quickly and too soon. In one of those drawers, there are still one or two letters left, I was about to say, that belong to the series of letters that are slumbering: exquisite, perfumed, eloquent, written in that pretty, fine and firm writing that you have just thrown into the fire, and those letters I would only have given you on your continuing to act fairly. They were my reserve. It is an elementary rule never to use all one's powder at a single shot, and one never burns *en bloc* such delicate autographs. They are too valuable! Tell me, will you disdain to recognize me when you meet me, Miss Marianne?"

She remained motionless, pale and as if frozen.

"Then you have kept?—" she said.

"A postscriptum, if you like, yes."

"Are you lying now, or did you lie in giving me the packet that has been burned?"

"I did not tell you that the packet was complete, and what I now tell you is the simple truth! I regret it, but you have compelled me to keep my batteries, in too quickly unmasking your own."

Marianne pulled off her gloves in anger.

"If you do not give me everything here that belongs to me, you are a coward; you hear, a coward, Monsieur de Lissac!"

"Oh! your insults are of as little importance as your kisses! but they are less agreeable!"

She clearly saw that she had thrown off the mask too soon, and that Lissac would not now allow himself to be snared by her caresses or disarmed by her threats. The game was lost.

Lost, or merely compromised?

She looked about her with an expression of powerless rage, like a very graceful wild beast enclosed in a cage. Her letters, her last letters must be here, in one of those pieces of furniture whose drawers she might open with her nails. She threw her gloves on the floor and mechanically tore into shreds—as she always did when in a rage—between her nervous fingers, her fine cambric handkerchief reduced to rags.

"Be very careful what you are doing, Guy," she said at last, casting a malicious look at him, "I have

purchased these letters from you, for I hate you, I repeat it, and these letters you owe to me as you would owe money promised to a wench. If you do not give them to me, I will have them, notwithstanding."

"Really?"

"I promise you I will."

"And suppose I have burned them?"

"You lie, you have them here, you have kept them. You have behaved toward me like a thief."

"Nonsense, Marianne," said Lissac coldly, "on my faith, I see I have done well to preserve some weapon against you. You are certainly very dangerous!"

"More than you imagine," she replied.

He moved slightly backward, seeing that she wished to pass him to reach the door.

"You will not give me back my letters?" she asked in a harsh and menacing tone as she stood on the threshold of the room.

Guy stooped without heeding her and picked up the gloves that were lying on the carpet and handed them to the young woman:

"This is your property, I think?"

This was said with insolently refined politeness.

Marianne took the gloves, and as a last insult, like a blow on the cheek, she threw them at Guy's face, who turned aside and the gloves fell on the bed where just before these two hatreds had come together in kisses of passion.

"Miserable coward!" said Marianne, surveying Lissac from head to foot with an expression of scorn, while he stood still, his monocle dangling at the end of a fine cord on his breast, near the buttonhole of his jacket that bore the red rosette; his face was pale but wore a sly expression.

That silk rosette looked there like a vermilion note stamped on a dark ground, and it seemed to pierce like a luminous drill into Marianne's eyes; and with her head erect, pallid face and trembling lip she passed before the domestic who hastened to open the door and went downstairs, repeating to herself with all the distracted fury of a fixed idea:

"To be avenged! To be avenged! Oh! to be avenged!"

She jumped into a cab.

"Well?"—said the coachman, looking with blinking eyes at this pale-faced, distraught-looking woman.

She remained there as if seeking an idea, a purpose.

"Where shall we go?" repeated the driver.

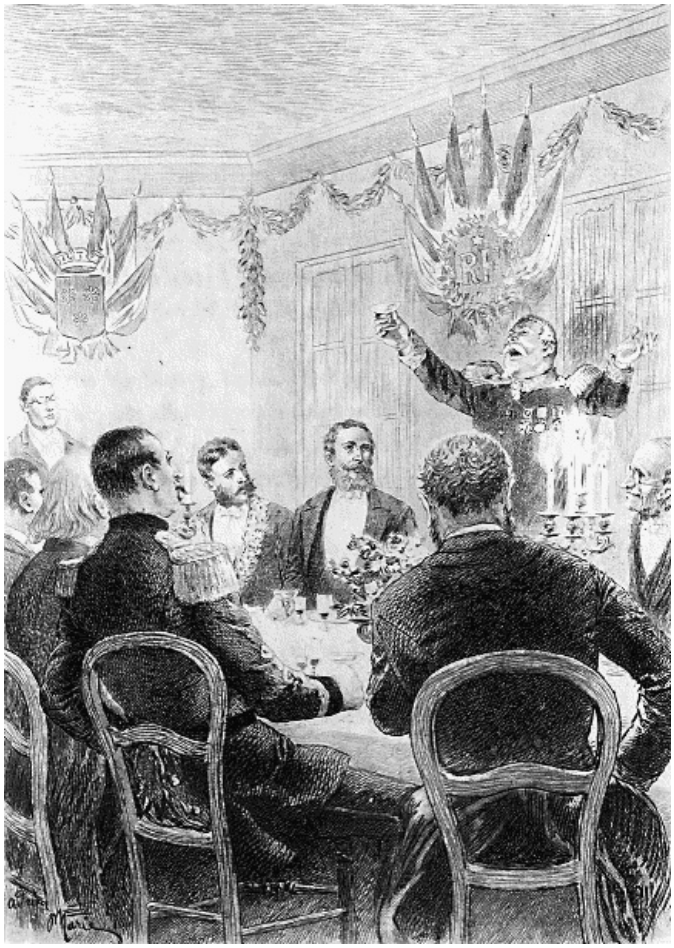
Suddenly Marianne's face trembled with a joyous expression and she abruptly said:

"To the Prefecture of Police!"

Part Second Chapter V

The general rose, grasping his glass as if he would shiver it, and while the parfait *overflowed on to the plates, he cried in a hoarse voice, as if he were at the head of his division:*

"I love bronze—I love bronze—...."



VI

TOC

There was a crowd at the *Mirlitons* Exposition.

A file of waiting carriages lined the kerbstone the whole length of Place Vendôme. Beneath the arch and within the portal, groups of fashionable persons elbowed each other on entering or leaving, and exchanged friendly polite greetings; the women quizzing the new hats, little hoods of plush or large *Rembranesque* hats in which the delicate Parisian faces were lost as under the roof of a cabriolet. The liveried lackeys perfunctorily glanced at the cards of admission that the holders hardly took the trouble to present. One was seated at a table mechanically handing out catalogues. Through the open door of the Club's Theatre could be seen gold frames suspended from the walls, terra cottas and marbles on their pedestals, and around the pictures and sculptures a dense crowd, masses of black hats inclined toward the paintings, side by side with pretty feminine heads crowned with Gainsborough hats adorned with plumes. It was impossible to see at close quarters the pieces offered for the sale that was for that day the engrossing topic of conversation of *All Paris*.

"A veritable salon in miniature!" said Guy aloud to an art critic who was taking notes. "But to examine it comfortably one should be quite alone. For an hour past I have been trying to get a look at the Meissonier, but have not been able to do so. It is stifling here. I will return another time."

He quickly grasped the hand that held the pencil, and which was extended to him, and tried to make a passage through the crowd to the exit. Pushed and pushing, he smiled and apologized for his inability to disengage his arms that were held by the crowd as if in a vise, in order to salute the friends he recognized. At length he reached, giving vent to a grunt of satisfaction, the hall where visitors were sitting on divans, chatting, either less eager to view the pictures or satisfied in their desires. There, Guy instinctively looked at a mirror and examined the knot of his cravat. He did not notice that a gentleman with a closely buttoned frock-coat, on seeing him, quietly rose from the divan on which he had been sitting, and approached him, mechanically pulling the skirts of his coat meanwhile, so as to smooth the creases.

He simply touched Monsieur de Lissac's shoulder with the tip of his finger.

Guy turned round, expecting to recognize a friend.

"You are surely Monsieur de Lissac?" said the man in the frock-coat, with the refined manners of a gentleman.

"Yes!" said Lissac, somewhat astonished at the coldness of his manner.

"Be good enough to accompany me, monsieur, I am a Commissioner of the Judiciary Delegations!"

Lissac thought he misunderstood him.

"I confess that I don't quite understand you," he began, with a rather significant smile.

"I am a Commissioner of Police," the other replied, "and I am ordered to arrest you."

He suddenly exposed his insignia like the end of a sash, and by a very polite gesture, with an amiable and engaging manner, pointed to the way out by the side of the archway of the hôtel.

"I have two of my men yonder, monsieur, but you will not place me under the necessity of—"

"What is this, monsieur?" said Lissac. "I frankly confess that I understand nothing of this enigma. I hope you will explain it to me."

All this was said in a conversational tone, *mezzo voce*, and accompanied with smiles. No one could have guessed what these two men were saying to each other. Only, Guy was very pale and his somewhat haughty glance around him seemed to indicate that he was seeking some support or witness.

He uttered a slight exclamation of satisfaction on perceiving the journalist to whom he had just before spoken a few words before a little canvas by Meissonier.

"My dear Brévans," he said in a loud voice, "here is an unpublished item for your journal. This gentleman has laid his hand on my collar."

With a sly look he indicated the Commissioner of Police, who did not budge.

"What! my dear fellow?"

"They have arrested me, that is all," said Lissac.

"Monsieur," the Commissioner quickly interrupted in a low voice, "no commotion, please. For my sake —and for yours."

He lightly touched Lissac's buttonhole with the end of his finger, as if to intimate that there was the explanation of his arrest, and Guy suddenly became very red and stamped his foot.

"Idiot that I am!—I am at your orders, monsieur," he said, making a sign to the Commissioner to pass out.

He again saluted the stupefied journalist, and the Commissioner bowing to him, out of politeness or prudence, Guy passed before him, angrily twirling his mustache.

Besides Brévans, nobody in all that crowd suspected that a man had just been arrested in the midst of the Exposition. Unless the journalist had hawked the news from group to group, it would not have been suspected.

Lissac found at the door of the Club on Place Vendôme a hired carriage which had come up as soon as the driver saw the Commissioner. Two agents, having the appearance of good, peaceable bourgeois, were walking about, chatting together on the sidewalk, as if on duty. The Commissioner said to one of them:

"I have no further need of you, Crabot will do."

Crabot, a little man with the profile of a weasel, slowly mounted the box beside the coachman, and the Commissioner of Police took his seat next to Lissac, who had nervously plucked the rosette of the Portuguese Order of Christ from his buttonhole.

"What!" he said. "Really, then, it is for this? Because I wear this ribbon without having paid five or six louis into the Chancellery?—I have always intended to do so, but, believe me, I have not had the time. But a fiscal question does not warrant publicly insulting—"

"I do not know if it is for that," interrupted the Commissioner; "but it is evident that a recent note in the *Officiel* points directly to the illegal wearing of foreign decorations. You do not read the *Officiel*, Monsieur de Lissac."

Guy shrugged his shoulders as if he considered the matter perfectly ridiculous. It seemed to him that behind the alleged pretext there was some secret cause, something like a feminine intrigue. He vaguely recalled that he had seen Marianne one evening at Madame de Marsy's smile at the Prefect of Police, that Jouvenet who flirted so agreeably with that pretty girl in a corner of the salon. And then, too, at the theatre, in Marianne's box, the prefect found his way. At the first moment, the idea that Marianne had a hand in this arrest took possession of his mind. He saw her standing before him at his house, posing her little nervous, fidgety hand on his breast at the very spot occupied by this rosette; again he saw her smiling mysteriously, accompanying it with a caress which seemed to suggest the desire to end in a scratch.

Was it really true that Marianne was sufficiently audacious to have brought about this coup de théâtre? No, there was some error. The stupid zeal of some subordinate officer was manifested in this outrage. Some cowardly charge had perhaps been made against him at the prefecture. Every man who crosses a street has so many enemies that look at him as he passes as if they would spy on him! There are so many undeclared hatreds crawling in the rotten depths of this Parisian bog! One fine morning one feels one's self stung in the heel. It is nothing: only some anonymous gossip; some unknown person taking revenge!

At the prefecture, they would doubtless inform Guy as to the cause of the attack: in questioning him,

he would himself certainly be permitted to interrogate. He was stunned on arriving at the clerk's office to find that they took his description, just as they would that of a common offender, a night-walker or a rascal. He wished to enter a protest and became annoyed. He flew into a rage for a moment, then he reflected that there was nothing to be done but to submit to the bites of the iron teeth of the police routine in which he was suddenly entangled. They searched his pockets and he felt their vile hands graze his skin. He experienced a strongly rebellious sentiment and notwithstanding his present enforced calm, from time to time he demanded to see the Prefect of Police, the Chief of the Municipal Police, the *Juge d'Instruction*, he did not know whom, but at least some one who was responsible.

"You have my card, send my card to Monsieur Jouvenet; he knows me!"

They made no reply.

The Commissioner who had arrested him was not there. Guy found himself in the presence of what were as pieces of human machinery, working silently, without noise of wheels, and caring for his protests no more than they did for the wind that blew through the corridors.

"See, on my honor, I am not a rascal!" he said. "What have I done? I have stupidly passed this bit of red ribbon into my buttonhole. Well! that is an offence, it is not a crime! People are not arrested for that! I will pay the fine, if fine there is! You are not going to keep me here with thieves?"

In that jail, he endeavored to preserve his appearance as a fashionable elegant and an ironical man of the world, treating his misadventure in a spirit of haughty disdain; but his overstrained nerves led him to act with a sort of cold fury that gave him the desire to openly oppose, as in a duel, his many adversaries.

"I beg you to remain calm," one of these men repeated to him from time to time in a passionless way.

"Oh! that is easy enough for you to say," cried Lissac. "I ask you once more, where is Monsieur Jouvenet?—I wish to see Monsieur Jouvenet!"

"Monsieur le Prefect cannot be seen in this way," was the reply. "Moreover, you haven't to see any one; you have only to wait."

"Wait for what?"

They led Guy de Lissac through the passages to the door of a new cell, which they opened before him.

"Then," he said, as he tried to force a troubled smile, "I am a prisoner? Quite seriously? As in melodrama? This is high comedy!"

He asked if he would soon be examined, at least. They didn't know. They hardly replied to him. Could he write, at any rate? Notify any one? Protest? What should he do? He heard from the lips of a keeper who had the appearance of a very honest man, the information, crushing as a verdict: "You are in close confinement, as it is called!"

In close confinement? Were they mocking him? In secret, he, Lissac? Evidently, they wanted to make fun; it was absurd, it was unlikely, such things only happened in operettas. He would heartily relish it at the Café Riche presently, when he went to dine. *In close confinement?* He was no longer annoyed at the jest, so amusing had it become. For an old Parisian like him, it was a facetious romance and almost amusing.

"A climax!"

Evening passed and night came. They brought Lissac a meal, and the *jest*, as he called it, in no way came to an end. He did not close his eyes for the whole night. He was stifled, and grew angry within the narrow cage in which they had locked him. All sorts of wild projects of revenge passed through his brain. He would send his seconds to Monsieur Jouvenet, he would protest in the papers. He would have public opinion in his favor.

Then his scepticism came to his aid, and shrugging his shoulders, he said:

"Bah! public opinion! It will ridicule me, that's all! It will accuse me of desiring to make a stir, to cut off my dog's tail. To-day, Alcibiades would thus cut off his, but the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would bring an action against him."

He waited for the next morning with the feverish anxiety of those who cannot sleep. Certainly he would be examined at the first moment. They did so in the case of the vagabonds gathered in during the night and dumped into the *lions' den*. The whole day passed without Lissac's seeing any other faces than those of his turnkeys, and these men were almost mutes. Then his irritation was renewed. He turned his useless anger against himself, as he could not insult the walls.

Night came round, and spite of himself, he slept for a short time on the wretched prison pallet. He began to find the facetious affair too prolonged and too gloomy. They took him just in time, the second day after his arrest, before a kind of magistrate or police judge, who, after having reminded him that the law was clear in respect of the wearing of foreign orders, announced that the matter was settled by a decree of *nolle prosequi*.

"That is to say," said Lissac, in anger, "that two nights passed in close confinement is regarded as ample punishment? If I am guilty of a crime, I deserve much more than that. But, if only a mere peccadillo is attributable to me, I consider it too much; and I swear to you that I intend, in my turn, to

summon to justice for illegal arrest—"

"Keep quiet," curtly interrupted the magistrate. "That is the best thing you can do!"

Lissac, meantime, felt a sort of physical delight in leaving those cold passages and that stone dwelling.

The fresh breeze of a gray November day appeared to him to be as gentle as in spring. It seemed that he had lived in that den for weeks. He flung himself into a carriage, had himself driven home, and was received by his concierge with stupefied amazement.

"You, monsieur?" he said. "Already!"

This *already* was pregnant with suggestiveness, and puzzled Lissac. The rumor had, in fact, spread throughout the quarter, and probably the porter had helped it along—that Guy had been arrested for complicity in some political intrigue, though of what nature was unknown. Nevertheless, the previous evening, the agents of police had come to the apartments in Rue d'Aumale and had searched everything, moved, tried and probed everything. Evidently they were in quest of papers.

"Papers?" cried Lissac. "Her letter, *parbleu!*"

He was no longer in doubt. The delicate, dreaded hand of Marianne was at the bottom of all that. She had made some bargain with Monsieur Jouvenet, as between a woman and a debauchee! The Prefect of Police was not the loser: Marianne Kayser had the wherewithal to satisfy him.

"The miserable wench!" Lissac repeated as he went up to his apartment.

He rang and his servant appeared, looking as bewildered as the porter.

The apartment was still topsy-turvy. The valet de chambre had not dared to put the things in order, as if there reigned, amid the scattered packages and the yawning drawers, the majesty of the official seal.

They had examined everything, forced locks and removed packets of letters.

The small Italian cabinet, that contained Marianne's letter, had had its drawers turned over, like pockets turned inside out. Marianne's letter to Lissac, the scrap of paper which the police hunted, without knowing whose will they were obeying, that confession of a crazy mistress to a lover who was smitten to his very bones, was no longer there.

"Ah! I will see Vaudrey! I will see him and tell him!" said Lissac aloud.

"Will monsieur breakfast?"

"Yes, as quickly as possible. Two eggs and tea, I am in a hurry."

He was anxious to rush off to the ministry. Was the Chamber sitting to-day? No. He would perhaps then find Sulpice at his first call. The messengers knew him.

He speedily hastened to Place Bréda, looking for a carriage. On the way, he stumbled against a man who came down on the same side, smoking a cigar.

"Oh! Monsieur de Lissac!"

Guy instinctively stepped back one pace; he recognized Uncle Kayser. Then, suddenly, his anger, which up to that time he had been able to restrain, burst forth, and in a few words energetic and rapid, he told Simon, who remained bewildered and somewhat pale, as if one had tried to force a quarrel on him, what he thought of Marianne's infamy.

The uncle said nothing, regretted that he had met Lissac, and contented himself with stammering from time to time:

"She has done that?—What! she has done that?—Ah! the rogue."

"And what do you say about it, you, Simon Kayser?"

"I?—What do I say about it?—Why—"

Little by little he recovered his sang-froid, looking at matters from the lofty heights of his artist's philosophy.

"It is rather too strong. What do you want?—It is not even moral, but it has *character!* And in art, after the moral idea comes *character!* Ah! bless me! character, that is something!—Otherwise, I disapprove. It is brutal, vulgar, that lack of ideal. I defy you to symbolize that. *Love Avenging Itself Against Love —Jealousy Calling the Police to Its Aid in Order to Triumph over Dead Love!* It is old, it lacks originality, it smacks of Prud'hon!—The Correggio of the décolleté!—It is like Tassaert, it is of the sprightly kind!—I would never paint so, that is what I say about it!"

Guy had no reply for this imperturbable moralist and he regretted that he had lost time in speaking to him. But his uncontrollable rage choked him. Enough remained however to show all his feelings to Vaudrey.

The minister was not in his cabinet. A messenger asked Lissac if he would speak to Monsieur Warcolier, the Under Secretary of State.

"I, I," then said a man who rose from the chair in which he had been sitting in the antechamber, "I

should be glad to see Monsieur Warcolier—Monsieur Eugène, you know."

"Very well, Monsieur Eugène, I will announce you." Lissac explained that his visit was not official, he called on a personal matter.

"Is the minister in his apartments?"

"Yes, monsieur, but to-day, you know—"

What was going on to-day, then? Lissac had not noticed, in fact, that a marquee with red stripes was being erected at the entrance to the hôtel, and that upholsterers were bringing in wagons benches covered with red velvet with which they were blocking the peristyle. There was a reception at the ministry.

"That will not prevent Monsieur Vaudrey from seeing me," he said.

One of the messengers opened the doors in front of him and conducted him to the floor above, where Monsieur le Ministre was then resting near the fire and glancing over the papers after breakfast.

He appeared pleased but a little astonished at seeing Lissac.

"Eh! my dear Guy, what a good idea!—Have you arrived already for the soirée? You received your invitation?"

"No," answered Lissac, "I have received nothing, or if the invitation arrived, the agents of Monsieur Jouvenet have taken it away with many other things."

"The agents! what agents?" asked the minister.

He had risen to receive Guy and remained standing in front of the fireplace looking at his friend, who questioned him with his glance to discover if Vaudrey could really be in ignorance as to such a matter.

"Ah, so! but," said Lissac with trembling voice and in a tone of angry bitterness, "do you not know then, what takes place in Paris?"

"What is happening?" asked Sulpice, who had turned slightly pale.

"They arrest men for nothing, and keep them in close confinement for two days in order to have time to search their correspondence for a document that compromises certain persons. It is very proper, no doubt; but that smacks too much of romanticism and the Bridge of Sighs. It is very old-fashioned and worn-out. I would not answer for your long employing such methods of government."

"Come, are you mad? What does it all signify?" asked the minister, in astonishment.

He appeared as if he really did not understand. It was clear that he did not know what Guy meant.

"Don't you read the papers, then?" Lissac asked him.

"I read the reports of the Director of the Press."

"Well, if those reports have not informed you of my arrest in the heart of the Exposition des Mirlitons, on Wednesday, they have told you nothing!—"

"Arrested! you?"

"By the agents of Monsieur Jouvenet, your Prefect of Police, to gratify your mistress, Mademoiselle Kayser!"

"Ah! my dear Guy!" said the minister, whose cheek became flushed in spots. "I should be glad if you—"

He paused for a phrase to express clearly and briefly that he required Lissac to be silent, but could not frame one. He received, as it were, a sudden and violent blow on the head. Beyond question, he did not know a word of all that Lissac had informed him. And yet this was the gossip of Paris for two days! Either naming in full, or in indicating him sufficiently clearly, the newspapers had related the adventure on their front page. Moreover, much attention had been attracted to an article in a journal with which Lucien Granet was intimately connected, wherein, in well-turned but perfidious phrases, a certain Alkibiades—Lissac had guessed that this name was applied to him—had been arrested by the orders of the archon Sulpicios at the instance of a certain Basilea, one of the most charming hetaires of the republic of Perikles. Under this Greco-Parisian disguise it was easy for everyone to discover the true names and to see behind the masks the faces intended.

At the very moment that Lissac called to ask the minister for an explanation of the acts of the Prefect Jouvenet, Madame Vaudrey was opening a copy of a journal in which these names travestied by some Hellenist of the boulevard were underlined in red pencil. The article entitled *The Mistress of an Archon*, had been specially sent to her under a cover bearing the address in a woman's handwriting, Sabine Marsy or Madame Gerson! Some friend. One always has such.

It was of Adrienne that Vaudrey thought while Lissac was giving vent to his ironical, blunt complaint. Was Guy mad to speak of Marianne aloud in this way, and in this place, a few feet away from his wife, who could hear everything? Yes, Lissac was over-excited, furious and apparently crazy. He did not lower his tone, in spite of the sudden terror expressed by Vaudrey, who seized his hand and said to him eagerly: "Why, keep quiet! Suppose some one is listening?"

He felt himself, moreover, impelled by a violent rage. If what Guy told him were correct, Marianne

had made use of him and of the title of mistress that she ought to have concealed. She had played it in order to compel Jouvenet to commit an outrage.

"Nonsense!" said Lissac, sneeringly. "Are you innocent enough to believe that she has seduced the Prefect of Police by simply telling him that she was your mistress? You don't know her. She only did this in becoming his!"

Sulpice had become livid, and he looked at Lissac with a sudden expression of hatred, as if this man had been his enemy. Guy had directly attacked his vanity and his heart with a knife-thrust, as it were, without sparing either his self-love or his passion.

"Ah! yes," said Lissac, "I know very well that that annoys you, but it is so! I knew this young lady before you did. Let her commit all the follies that she chooses with others and throw me overboard at a pinch, as she did three days ago, all is for the best. She is playing her rôle. I am only an imbecile and I am punished for it, and it is well; but, in order to attack me, to secure a very tiny paper, which put her very nicely at my mercy, that she should commit a foolish and brutal outrage against you who answer for the personnel of your administration, I cannot forgive. She thought then that I would make use of this note against her? She takes me for a rascal? If I wished to commit an act of treachery, could I not go this very moment, even without the weapon that Jouvenet's agents have taken from me, straight to her Rosas?"

"Rosas?" asked Sulpice, whose countenance contorted, and who feverishly twisted his blond beard.

"Eh! *parbleu*, yes, Rosas! On my honor, one would take you for the Minister of the Interior of the Moon! Rosas, who perhaps is her lover, but will be her husband if she wishes it! and she does!"

Poor Sulpice looked at Lissac with a terrified expression which might have been comic, did it not in its depth portray a genuine sorrow. He was oblivious to everything now, where he was, if Guy spoke too loudly, or if Adrienne could hear. He was only conscious of a terrible strain of his mind. This sudden revelation lacerated him—as if his back received the blows of a whip. He wished to know all. He questioned Lissac, forcing him into a corner, and making him hesitate, for he now feared that he would say too much, and limited himself to demanding Jouvenet's punishment.

"As to Marianne, one would see to that after," he said.

Ah! yes, certainly, Jouvenet should be punished! How? Vaudrey could not say, but from this moment the Prefect of Police was condemned. Guy's arrest, which was an act of brutal aggression, was tantamount to a dismissal signed by the Prefect himself. And Marianne! she then made a sport of Sulpice and took him for a child or a ninny!

"Not at all. For a man who loves, that is enough," replied Lissac.

Vaudrey had flung himself into an armchair, striking his fist upon the little table, covered with the journals that he had scarcely opened, and absent-mindedly pushing the chair back, the better to give way to his excessively violent threats, after the manner of weak natures.

"Do you want my advice?" Lissac abruptly asked him. "You have only what you deserve, ah! yes, that is just it! I tell you the sober truth. A wife like yours should never be forsaken for a creature like Marianne!"

"I love Adrienne sincerely!" replied Vaudrey eagerly.

"And you deceive her entirely. That is foolish. You deserve that Mademoiselle Kayser should have ridiculed, deceived and ruined you irretrievably, and that your name should never be uttered again. When one has the opportunity to possess a wife like yours, one adores her on bended knees, you understand me, and one doesn't destroy her true happiness to divert it in favor of the crowd. And what pleasure! Jouvenet has had the same dose at a less cost!"

"You abuse the rights of friendship, somewhat," said Sulpice, rising suddenly. "I do what pleases me, as it pleases me, and I owe no account to any one, I think!"

He stopped suddenly. His feet were, as it were, nailed to the floor and his mouth closed. He seized Guy's hand and felt his flesh creep, as he saw Adrienne standing pale, and supporting herself against the doorpost, as if she had not the strength to proceed, her eyes wide open, like those of a sick person.

Assuredly, beyond all possible doubt, she had heard everything.

She was there! she heard!

She said nothing, but moved a step forward, upheld by a terrible effort.

Her look was that of a whipped child, of a poor creature terrified and in despair, and expressed not anger but entire collapse. She was so wan, so sad-looking, that neither Lissac nor Vaudrey dared speak. A chill silence fell upon these three persons.

While Adrienne approached the table upon which the journals were piled, Guy was the first to force a smile to throw her off the scent; Adrienne stopped him with a gesture that was intended to express that to undeceive her, that is to say, to deceive her afresh, would be a still more cowardly act. She took from among the journals that which she had just been reading without at first quite understanding it, the one that had been sent to her, underlined as with a venomous nail, and showing to Vaudrey the article that spoke of Sulpicios and Basilea, she said gently in a feeble voice, crushed by this crumbling of her hopes:

"That is known then, that affair!"

Then she sunk exhausted into the armchair in which Sulpice had been sitting, and her breast heaved with a violent sob that tore it as if it would rend it.

Sulpice looked at Lissac who was standing half-inclined, as in the presence of a misfortune. He instinctively seized the minister by the shoulder and gently forced him toward Adrienne, saying to him in a whisper, in ill-assured tones:

"Kiss her then! One pardons when one loves!"

With a supplicating cry, Vaudrey threw himself on his knees before Adrienne, while Lissac hastily opened the door and left, feeling indeed that he could not say a word and that Vaudrey only could obtain Vaudrey's pardon.

"I, in my anger," he said, "he, in his jealousy, have allowed ourselves to get into a passion. It is stupid. One should speak lower."

He went away, much dissatisfied with himself and but little less with Vaudrey. Again he considered this man foolish, adored as he was by such a wife, whom he deceived. He was not sure that at the bottom of his own heart he did not feel a sentiment of love toward Adrienne. Ah! if he had been loved by such a creature, he would have been capable of great things!—He would have arranged and utilized his life instead of spoiling it. In place of vulgar love, he would have kept this unique love intact from the altar to the tomb!

Pale and tottering, and a child once more under her sorrow, as he had just seen her, she was so adorably lovely that he had received an entirely new impression, one of almost jealousy against Sulpice, and therefore, brusquely overcoming this strange, unseemly emotion, he had himself thrust Vaudrey toward his wife and had departed hastily, as if he felt that he must hurry away and never see them again. But as he left, on the contrary, he saw her again with her sad, wretched, suffering look and the young wife's sorrowful voice went with him, repeating in a tone of broken-hearted grief:

"That is known then!"

"Ah! that miserable fellow, Vaudrey!" thought Guy.

In going out, he had to wait a moment in the antechamber, to admit of the passage of some vases of flowers, green shrubs and variegated foliage plants that were being brought in to decorate the salons. A fête! And this evening! In the arrival of those flowers for decoration, at the moment when chance, clumsily or wickedly, so suddenly revealed that crushing news, Guy saw so much irony that he could not forbear looking at them for a moment, almost insulting in their beauty and their hothouse bloom.

Would Adrienne have the courage or strength to undertake the reception of the evening, within a few hours? Guy was annoyed at having come.

"I could well have waited and kept my anger to myself. The unhappy woman would have known nothing."

"Bah!" he added. "She is kind, she adores Sulpice, it is only a passing storm. She will forgive!"

He promised himself, moreover, to return in the evening, to excuse himself to Adrienne, to comfort her if he could.

"There is some merit, after all, in that," he thought again. "On my word! I believe I love her and yet I am angry with that animal Vaudrey for not loving her enough."

She will forgive!—Lissac knew courtesans but he did not know this woman, energetic as she was under her frail appearance, a child, a little provincial lost in the life of Paris, lost and, as it were, absorbed in the hubbub of political circles, smitten with her husband, who comprehended in her eyes every seduction and superiority, having given herself entirely and wishing to wholly possess the elect being who possessed her, in whom she trusted and to whom she gave herself, body and soul, with all her confidence, her innocence and her modesty. He did not know what such a sensitive, nervously frail nature could feel on the first terrible impulses, full of enthusiasm under her exterior coldness, of resolution concealed under her timid manners, capable of madness, distracted in spite of her reason and calm; this candor of thought, of education, and associations that made her, with all her irresistible attractiveness, the virtuous woman with all her charm.

Adrienne had at first read the journal that had been sent to her without understanding anything about it. Alkibiades, Basilea, the mistress of the Archon, what signified that to her? What did it mean? Then suddenly her thought rested on the name of Sulpice, travestied in the Greek of parody, Sulpicios. Was it of her husband that they intended to speak? She immediately felt a bitter anguish at heart, but it was a matter only of allowing one's self to be impressed by a journalistic pleasantry, as contemptible as an anonymous letter! She would think no more about it. She must concentrate her thoughts on the evening's reception. There was to be an official repast, followed by a soirée. She had nothing to concern herself about in regard to the menu; Chevet undertook that. For the ministerial dinners there was a fixed price as in restaurants. Hosts and guests live *au cabaret*, they dine at so much a head. Adrienne endeavored to occupy herself with the musical soirée, with the programmes that they brought her, with the names of comedians and female singers, printed on vellum, and with those bouquets with which the vases of her little salon were decorated. Ah! well, yes, in spite of the feverish activity, she could think only of that article in the journal, that miserable article, every line of which flamed before her eyes just as when one has looked too long at a fire. She had been seized with the

temptation there and then to openly ask Sulpice what these veiled illusions meant.

"I hope, indeed," she thought, with her contempt of all lying, "that he will not charge me with suspecting him. No, certainly, I do not suspect him."

She went to the little cabinet where Sulpice sometimes read or worked after breakfast, and there, as if she had thrown herself upon an open knife, she suddenly heard those sinister words which pierced her very flesh like pointed blades.

They were speaking of another woman. Lissac said in a loud tone: Your mistress! and Vaudrey allowed it to be said!—

A mistress! what mistress? Marianne Kayser! Oh, that woman of whom Sulpice had so often spoken in an indifferent manner, that pretty creature, so often seen, seductive, wonderfully beautiful, terrifyingly beautiful, it was she! Your mistress! Sulpice had a mistress! He lied, he deceived. He? She was betrayed! Was it possible? If it were possible? But it was true! Eh! *parbleu*, yes, it was true—And this, then, was why they had sent her this horrible article! She knew now.

She had been tempted to enter the room suddenly, to throw herself between these men and interrupt their conversation. She had not the strength. And then, what Lissac said had the effect of consoling her!—Guy's reproaches to Sulpice were such as she would have liked to cast at him, if she could have found speech now. But not a word could she frame. She was stunned, dumb and like a crushed being. She knew only one thing, that she suffered horribly, as she had never before suffered.

At first she allowed Vaudrey, who knelt at her feet, as Lissac had told him on going away, to take her hand that hung listlessly down. Then she gently withdrew it as if she felt herself seized by an instinctive sense of outraged modesty.

Vaudrey tried to speak. At first only confused words, silly excuses, clumsy falsehoods, cruelly absurd phrases—*caprices*, *nothing serious*, *whim*, *madness*—so many avowals, so many insults, came to his lips. But then, before the silence of Adrienne, he could say nothing more, he was speechless, overwhelmed, and sought a hand that was refused.

"Will you never forgive me?" he asked at last, not knowing too well what he said.

"Never!" she said coldly.

She rose and with as much sudden energy as but a moment before she had felt of weakness, she crossed the room.

"Are you going away?" stammered Sulpice.

"Yes, I must be alone—Ah! quite alone," she said, with a sort of gesture of disgust as she saw her husband approach her.

He stopped and said, as if by chance:

"You know that—this evening—"

"Yes, yes," she replied, "do not be anxious about anything! I am still the minister's wife, if I am Madame Vaudrey no longer."

He tried in vain to reply.

Adrienne had already disappeared.

"There is the end of my happiness!" Sulpice stammered as he suddenly confronted an unknown situation dark as an abyss. "Ah! how wretched I am! Very wretched! whose fault is it?"

He plunged gladly into the work of examining the bundles of reports from the prefects, feverishly inspecting them to deafen and blind his conscience, and seized at every moment with a desire to make an appeal to Adrienne or to go and insult Marianne. Oh! especially to tell Marianne that she had betrayed him, that she was a wretch, that she was the mistress of Rosas, the mistress of Jouvenet, a strumpet like any other strumpet, yes, a strumpet!

Amid all the disturbance of that day of harsh misfortune, perhaps he thought more of the Marianne that he had lost than of the Adrienne that he had outraged; while the wife questioned with herself if it were really she coming and going, automatically trying on her ball costume, abandoning her head to the hair-dresser, feeling that in two hours she would be condemned to smile on the minister's guests, the senators and the deputies and play the part of a spectre, marching in the land of dreams, in a nightmare that choked her, fastened on her throat and heart and prompted her to cry and weep, all her poor nerves intensely strained and sick, subdued by the energy of a tortured person, imposing on herself the task of not appearing to suffer and—a still more atrocious thing—of not even suffering in reality and waiting, yes, waiting to sob.

In the evening, everything blazed on the façade of the ministry. The rows of gas-jets suggested that a public fête was being held in the Hôtel Beauvau. The naming capital letters R.F. were boldly outlined against the dark sky, the three colors of the flags looked bright in the ruddy light of the gas. Carriages rolled over the sanded courtyard, giving up at the carpeted entrance to the hôtel the invited guests dressed in correct style, the women wrapped in ample cloaks with gold fringe or trimmed with fur, and all poured into the antechamber, brushing against the *Gardes de Paris* in white breeches, with grounded arms, forming a row and standing out like Caryatides against the shining, large leaved

green flowers on which their white helmets shone by the light of the lustres. In the dressing-room, the clothing was piled up, tied together in haste; the antechamber was quickly crossed, the women in passing casting rapid glances at the immense mirrors; a servant asked the names of the guests and repeated them to an usher, whose loud voice penetrated these salons that for many years had heard so many different names, of all parties, under all régimes, and proclaimed them in the usual commonplace manner, while murdering the most celebrated of them. Upon the threshold of the salon, filled with fashionable people and flooded with intense light, stood the minister, who had been receiving, greeting, bowing, ever since the opening of the soirée, to those who arrived, some of whom he did not know; crowding behind him, correctly dressed, stood his secretaries, the members of his cabinet appropriating their shares of the greetings extended to the Excellency, and at his side stood Madame Vaudrey, pale and smiling as the creatures of the other world; she also bowed and from time to time extended her gloved hand mechanically; pale she looked in her décolleté gown of white satin, clasped at the shoulders with two pearl clasps, a bouquet of natural roses in her corsage, and standing there like a melancholy spectre on the very threshold of the festive salons.

When she perceived Guy enter, she greeted him with a sad smile, and Vaudrey eagerly offered his hand to him as if he relied greatly on him to arrange matters.

Adrienne's repressed grief had pained Lissac. While to the other guests she appeared to be only somewhat fatigued, to him the open wound and sorrow were visible. He plunged into the crowd. Beneath the streaming light the diamonds on the women's shoulders gleamed like the lustres' crystals. Within a frame of gobelins and Beauvais tapestry taken from the repository, was an improvised scene that looked like a green and pink nest of camellias, dracænas and palms. The bright toilettes of the women already seated before this scenic effect presented a wealth of pale blue, white or pink silk, mother-of-pearl shoulders, diamonds, and bows of pink or feather headdresses. Guy recognized Madame Marsy in the front row, robed in a very low-cut, sea-green satin robe with a bouquet of flowers at the tip of the shoulder, who while fanning herself looked with haughty impertinence at the pretty Madame Gerson, her former friend. Madame Evan was numerously surrounded, she was the most charming of all the stylish set and the woman whom all the others tried to copy.

Behind this species of female flower-bed the black coated ranks crowded, their sombre hue relieved here and there by the uniform of some French officer or foreign military attaché. There was a profusion of orders, crosses and strange old faces, with red ribbons at the neck, deputies evidently in dress, youthful attachés of the ministry or embassy, correct in bearing and officious, their crush-hats under their arms and holding the satin programme of the *musicale soirée* in their hands, some numbers of which were about to be rendered. Under the ceilings that were dappled with painted clouds, surrounded by brilliant lights and a wealth of flowers, this crowd presented at once an aspect of luxury and oddity, with its living antitheses of old parliamentarians and tyros of the Assembly.

Intermingled with strains of music, were whisperings and the confused noise of conversations.

Guy watched with curiosity, as a man who has seen much and compares, all this gathering of guests. From time to time he greeted some one of his acquaintance, but this was a rare occurrence. He was delighted to see Ramel whom he had often met at Adrienne's *Wednesdays*, and whom he liked. He appeared to him to be fatigued and sick.

"I am not very well, in fact," said Ramel. "I have only come because I had something serious to say to Vaudrey."

"What then?" asked Lissac.

"Oh! nothing! some advice to give him as to the course to be followed. There is decidedly much underhand work going on about the President."

"Who is it?"

"Most of them are here!"

"His guests?"

"You know very well that when one invites all one's friends, one finds that three-quarters of one's enemies will be present."

"At least," said Lissac.

He continued to traverse the salons, always returning instinctively toward the door at which Adrienne stood, with pale face and wandering look, and scarcely hearing, poor woman, the unfamiliar names that the usher uttered at equal intervals, like a speaking machine.

"Monsieur Durosoi!—Monsieur and Madame Bréchet!—Monsieur the Minister of Public Works!—Monsieur the Prefect of the Aube!—Monsieur the Count de Grigny!—Monsieur Henri de Prangins!—Monsieur the General d'Herbecourt!—Monsieur the Doctor Vilandry!—Monsieur and Madame Tochard!"

She had vowed that she would be strong, and allow nothing to be seen of the despair that was wringing her heart. She compelled herself to smile. In nightmares and hours of feverish unrest, she had suffered the same vague, morbid feeling that she now experienced. All that passed about her seemed to be unreal. These white-cravatted men, these gaily-dressed women, the file of guests saluting her at the same spot in the salon, with the same expression of assumed respect and trite politeness, appeared to her but a succession of phantoms. Neither a name nor an association did she

attach to those countenances that beamed on her with an official smile or gravely assumed a correct seriousness. She felt weary, overwhelmed and heavy-headed at the sight of this continued procession of strangers on whom it was incumbent that she should smile and to whom she must bow out of politeness, in virtue of that duty of state which she wished to fulfil to the last degree, poor soul!

The distant music of Fahrbach's polkas or Strauss's waltzes seemed like an added accompaniment that mocked the sadness of her unwholesome dream.

"And yet, in all that crowd of women who salute her, there are some who are jealous of her! Many envy her!" thought Guy, who was looking on.

Adrienne did not look at Vaudrey. She was afraid that if her eyes met her husband's fixed on her own, she would lose her sang-froid and suddenly burst into sobs, there before the guests. That would have been ridiculous. This blonde, so feebly gentle, isolated herself, therefore, with surprising determination and seemed to see nothing save her own thought, the unique thought: "Be strong. You shall weep at your ease when you are alone, far away from these people, far away from this crowd, alone with yourself, entirely alone, entirely alone!"

Vaudrey was very pale, but carried away, in spite of himself, by the joy which he felt in receiving all the illustrious and powerful men of the state, foreign ambassadors, the Presidents of the Senate and the Chamber, the ministers, his colleagues, deputies, wealthy financiers, renowned publicists, in fact, everything that counts and has a name in Paris,—this minister, happy to see the crowd running to him, at his house, bowing, paying homage to him, for a moment forgot the crushing events of that day, the sudden thunderbolt falling on him and perhaps, as he had said, crushing his hearthstone.

He no longer thought of anything but what he saw: salutations, bowed heads, inclinations that succeeded each other with the regularity of a clock, that succession of homages to the little Grenoble advocate, now become Prime Minister.

Oblivious of everything else, he had lost the recollection of his mistress, and he suddenly grew pale and looked instinctively with terror at Adrienne, who was as pale as a corpse.—A visitor had just been announced by the usher, in his metallic voice, and the name that he cried mechanically, as he had uttered all the others, echoed there like an insult.

Guy de Lissac shook through his entire frame, as he too heard it.

"Monsieur Simon Kayser and Mademoiselle Kayser!"—cried the usher.

Still another name rang out from that clarion voice:

"Monsieur le Duc de Rosas!"

Neither Vaudrey nor Adrienne heard this name. Sulpice felt urged to rush toward Marianne to entreat her to leave. It is true, he had invited her. In spite of Jouvenet who knew all, and in spite of so many others who suspected the truth, she desired to be present at that fête at the ministry and to show herself to all. Vaudrey had warned her, however. He had written to her a few hours before, entreating her, nay, almost commanding, her, not to come, and she was there. She entered, advancing with head erect, leaning on the arm of her uncle, his white cravat hidden by his artist's beard and on his lips a disdainful smile.

Adrienne asked herself whether she was really dreaming now. Approaching her, she saw, crossing the salon with a queenly step, that lovely, insolent creature, trailing a long black satin skirt, her superb bosom imprisoned in a corsage trimmed with jet, and crossed, as it were, with a blood-red stripe formed by a cordon of roses. Marianne's fawn-colored head seemed to imperiously defy from afar the pale woman who stood with her two hands falling at her side as if overwhelmed.

The vision, for vision it was, approached like one of the nightmares that haunt people's dreams. Adrienne's first glance encountered the direct gaze of Marianne's gray eyes. Behind Mademoiselle Kayser came De Rosas, his ruddy Castilian face that was ordinarily pensive beamed to-day, but Madame Vaudrey did not perceive him. She saw only this woman, the woman who was approaching her, in her own house, insolently, impudently, to defy her after having outraged her, to insult her after having deceived her!

Adrienne felt a violent wrath rising within her and suddenly her entire being seemed longing to bound toward Marianne, to drive her out after casting her name in her teeth.

Instinctively she looked around her with the wild glance of a wretched woman who no longer knows what to do, as if seeking for some assistance or advice.

Vaudrey's wan pallor and Lissac's supplicating gesture appealed to her and at once restored her to herself. It was true! she had no right to cause a scandal. She was within the walls of the ministry, in a common salon into which this girl had almost a right to enter, just like so many others lost in the crowd of guests. For Adrienne, it was not merely a question of personal vanity or honor that was at stake, but also Vaudrey's reputation. She felt herself *in view*, ah! what a word:—in view, that it to say, she was like an actress to whom neither a false step nor a false note is permitted; compelled to smile while death was at her heart, to parade while her entrails were torn with grief, forced to feign and to wear a mask in the presence of all who were there, and to lie to all the invited guests, indifferent and inimical, as Ramel said, and who were looking about ready at any moment to sneer and to hiss.

She recovered, by an effort that swelled her heart, strength to show nothing of the feeling of indignant rebellion that was stifling her.

She closed her eyes.

Marianne Kayser passed onward, losing herself with Simon and De Rosas in the human furrow that opened before her and immediately closed upon her, and followed by a murmur of admiration.

Adrienne had not however seen the pale, insolent countenance of the young woman so closely approach her suffering and disconsolate face. Above all, she had not seen the jealous, rapid glance that flashed unconsciously in Vaudrey's eyes when he saw José de Rosas triumphantly following the imperious Marianne. Ah! that look of sorrowful anger would have penetrated like a red-hot iron into Adrienne's soul. That glance that Guy caught a glimpse of told eloquently of wounded love and bruised vanity on the part of that man who, placed here between these two women, his mistress and the other, suffered less from the sorrow caused to Adrienne than from Marianne's treason in deserting him for this Spaniard.

Lissac was exasperated. He felt prompted to rush between Marianne and Rosas and say to him:

"You are mad to accompany this woman! Mad and ridiculous! She is deceiving you as she has deceived Vaudrey, as she has deceived me, and as she will deceive everybody."

He purposely placed himself in Mademoiselle Kayser's way. She had appeared scarcely to recognize him and had brushed against him without apparent emotion, but with a disdainful pout. Her arm had sought that of Rosas, as if she now were sure of her duke.

Guy too, felt that he could not cause a scene at the ball, for this would have brought a scandal on Vaudrey. He had just before repeated to Adrienne: "Courage." This was now his own watchword, and yet he sought out Jouvenet to whisper to the Prefect of Police what he thought of his conduct. Jouvenet had come and gone. Granet, as if he had divined Lissac's preoccupation, looked at him sneeringly as he whispered to the fat Molina who was seated near him:

"Alkibiades!"

The soirée, moreover, was terribly wearisome to Lissac. He wandered from group to group to find some one with whom to exchange ideas but he hardly found anyone besides Denis Ramel. The same political commonplaces retailed everywhere, at Madame Gerson's or at Madame Marsy's, as in the corridors of the Chamber, were re-decocted and reproduced in the corners of the salon of the Ministry, and around the besieged buffet attacked by the most ferocious gluttony. *Interpellation*, *Majority*, *New Cabinet*, *Homogeneous*, *Ministry of the Elections*, *Ballot*, *One Man Ballot*. Guy went, weary of the conflict, to the room in which the concert was given and listened to some operatic piece, or watched between the heads, the hidden profile of some female singer or an actor and heard the bursts of laughter that greeted the new monologue *The Telephone*, rendered in a clear voice with the coolness of an English clown, by a gentleman in a dress coat: *See! I am Monsieur Durand—you know, Durand—of Meaux?—Exactly—A woman deceives me—How did I learn it?—By the telephone. My friend Durand—Durand—of Etampes—We are not related—Emile Durand said to me: Durand, why haven't you a telephone?—It is true, I hadn't one—Durand—the other Durand—Durand—of Etampes—has one—Then*—And Lissac, somewhat listless, left this corner of the salon and stumbled against a group of men who surrounded an old gentleman much decorated, wearing the *grand cordon rouge* crosswise, a yellow ribbon at his neck, who, with the gravity of an English statesman, said, thrusting his tongue slightly forward to secure his false teeth from falling:

"I like monologues less than chansonnettes!—I, who address you, have taken lessons from Levassor."

"Levassor, Your Excellency?" answered in chorus a lot of little bald-headed young men—diplomats.

"Levassor," replied the old gentleman who was the very celebrated ambassador of a great foreign power. "Oh! I was famous in the song: *The Englishman Who Was Seasick*!"

While the little young men smiled, approved and loudly applauded, the old ambassador to whom the interests of a people were entrusted, hummed in a low tone, amid the noise of the reception:

> "Aoh! aoh! Je suis *mélède*,
> Bien *mélède*! Très *mélède*!"

Guy de Lissac shrugged his shoulders. He had heard a great deal of this man. This diplomat of the chansonnette evoked his pity. Where was he then? At Paris or at Brives-la-Gaillarde? At a ball at the Hôtel Beauvau or in some provincial sub-prefecture?

Just before, he had heard Warcolier utter this epic expression:

"If I were minister, I would give fireworks. They are warlike and inoffensive at the same time!"

The voice of a young man with a Russian accent who talked politics in a corner, pleased him:

"I am," he said aloud, "from a singular country: the Baltic provinces, where society is governed by deputies who, by birth, have the right to make laws, and I consider politics so tiresome, fatiguing and full of disgust and weariness as an occupation, that one ought to consider one's self most fortunate that there are people condemned to take hold of this rancid pie, while others pass their lives in thinking, reading, talking and loving."

"That is good," thought Lissac. "There is one, at least, who is not so stupid. It is true, perhaps because I think just the same."

Nevertheless, he went and listened, mixing with the crowd, haphazard. His preoccupation was not

there. In reality, he thought only of Adrienne. How the poor woman must suffer!

With a feeling of physical and moral overthrow, she had left the threshold of the salon, where she had been standing since the commencement of the soirée. She was mixing with the crowd in her desire to forget her sorrows amid the deafening of the music, the songs, the laughter, and the murmur of the human billows that filled her salons. She had taken her place in front of the little improvised theatre, beside all those ladies who dissected her toilette, scanned her pallid face, analyzed and examined her piece by piece, body and soul. But there, seated near the stage, exactly in front of her, exposing, as in a stall, her blonde beauty, and radiant as a Titian, was that Marianne whose gleaming white shoulders appeared above her black satin corsage. Again she saw her, as but a little while before, unavoidable, haughty and bold, smiling with insolence.

At every minute she was attracted by a movement of a head, or fan, or a laugh from this pretty creature, who leaned toward Sabine Marsy, then raised her brow and showed, in all the brilliancy of fatal beauty, her black corsage, striped with those fine red roses. And now Adrienne's anger, the grief that she had trampled under for some hours, increased from moment to moment, heightened and stung by the sight of this creature, by all kinds of bitter thoughts and by visions of treason and baffled love. She felt that she was becoming literally mad at the thought that, upon those red and painted lips, Sulpice had rested his, that his hands had stroked those shoulders, unwound that hair, that this woman's body had been folded in his arms. Ah! it was enough to make her rise and cry out to that creature: "You are a wretch. Get you gone! Get you gone, I say!"

And if she did so?

Why not? Had they the right to scorn her thus in public because she owned an official title and position? Was not this vulgar salon of a furnished mansion *her* salon then?

Now it seemed to her that they were whispering about her; that they were sneering behind their fans, and that all these women knew her secret and her history.

Why should they not know them? All Paris must have read that mocking, offensive and singular article: *The Mistress of an Archon*! All these people had, perhaps, learned it by heart. There were people here who frequented the salons and who probably kept the article in their pockets.

Yes, that would be to commit a folly, to brave everything and to destroy all!

Sulpice, then, did not know her; he believed her to be insignificant because she was gentle, resigned to everything because she was devoted to his love and his glory?—Ah! devoted even to the point of killing herself, devoted to the extent of dying, or living poor, working with her own hands, if only he loved her, if only he never lied to her!

"And here was his mistress!"

His mistress! His mistress!

She repeated this name with increasing rage, reiterating it, inwardly digesting it, as if it were something terribly bitter. His mistress, that lovely, insolent creature! Yes, very lovely, but manifestly terrible and capable of driving a feeble being like Vaudrey to commit every folly, nay, worse, infamy.

"And it is such women that are loved! Ah! Idiots! idiots that we are!"

The first part of the concert was terminating. Happily, too, for Adrienne was choking. The minister must, as a matter of politeness, express his thanks to the cantatrices from the Opéra, and to the actresses from the Comédie Française, the artistes whose names appeared on the programme. Vaudrey was obliged to pass the rows of chairs in order to reach the little salon behind the stage, which served as a foyer. Adrienne saw him coming to her side, and looking very pale, though he made an effort to smile. He was uncomfortable and anxious. In passing before Marianne, he tried to look aside, but Mademoiselle Kayser stopped him in spite of himself, by slightly extending her foot and smiling at him, when he turned toward her, with a prolonged, interested and strange expression.

Adrienne felt that she was about to faint. She took a few tottering steps out of the salon, then she stopped as if her head were swimming. Some one was on hand to support her. She felt that a hand was holding her arm, she heard some one whisper in her ear:

"It is too much, is it not?"

She recognized Lissac's voice.

Guy looked at her for a moment, quite prepared for this great increase of suffering.

"Take me away," she murmured. "I can bear no more!—I can bear no more!"

She was longing to escape from all that noise, that atmosphere that lacked air, and from Marianne's look and smile that pierced her. She went, as if by chance, instinctively guiding Lissac, led by him to a little, salon far from the reception rooms, and which was reserved for her and protected by a door guarded by an usher. It might have been thought that she expected this solitude would be necessary to her as an escape from the fright of that reception, to which her overstrained and sick nerves made her a prey.

In passing, Lissac had whispered to Ramel, who was at his elbow:

"Tell Sulpice that Madame Vaudrey is ill!"

"Ill?"

"You see that she is!"

When Adrienne was within the little salon hung with garnet silk draperies, in which the candelabras and sconces were lighted, she sank into an armchair, entirely exhausted and overwhelmed by the fearful resistance she had made to her feelings. She remained there motionless, her eye fixed, her face pale, and both hands resting on the arms of her chair, abstractedly looking at the pattern of the carpet.

Guy stood near, biting his lips as he thought of the madman Vaudrey and that wretched Marianne.

"She at least obeys her instincts! But he!"

"Ah! it is too much; yes, it is too much!" repeated Adrienne, as if Lissac were again repeating that phrase.

It seemed to her that she had been thrust into some cowardly situation; that she had been subjected to a shower of filth! It was hideous, repugnant. She now saw, in the depths of her life, events that she had never before seen; her vision had suddenly become clear. Dark details she could now explain. Vaudrey's falsehoods were suddenly manifested.

"He lied! Ah! how he had lied!"

She recalled his anxiety to hide the journals from her, his oft-repeated suggestions, his precautions, the increasing number of his night-sessions that made him pale. Pale from debauchery! And she pitied him! She begged him not to kill himself for the politics that was eating his life. Again she saw on the lips of her *Wednesday's* guests the furtive smiles that were hidden behind muffs when she spoke of those nocturnal sessions of the Chamber, which were only nights passed in Marianne's bed! How those Parisians must have laughed at her and ridiculed the credulity of the woman who believes herself loved, but who is deceived and mocked at! Madame Gerson, Sabine! How overjoyed they must have been when, in their salons, they referred to the little, stupid Provincial who was ignorant of these tricks!

She felt ridiculed and tortured, more tortured than baffled, for her vanity was nothing in comparison with her love, her poor, artless and trusting love!

"Sulpice, I should never have believed—Never!—"

Why had they left Grenoble, their little house on the banks of the Isère? They loved each other there, it was Paris that had snatched him away! Paris! She hated it now. She hated that reputation that had carried Vaudrey into office, the politics that had robbed her of a kind and loving husband,—for he had loved her, she was sure of that,—and which had made him the lover of a courtesan, the liar and coward that he was!

"Do you see?" she said to Lissac suddenly. "I detest these walls!"

She pointed to the gilded ceilings with an angry gesture.

"Since I entered here, my life has come to a close!—It is that, that which has taken him from me!—Ah! this society, this politics, these meannesses, this life exposed to every one and everything, to temptation and to fall, I am entirely sick of, I am disgusted with. Let me be snatched from it, let me be taken away! Everywhere here, one might say, there is an atmosphere of lying!"

"Do you hear? She laughs, she is happy! She! And I, ah! I!"

She had risen to her feet, suddenly recovering all her energy, as if stirred by the air of a Hungarian dance, whose strains dimly reached them from the distant, warm salons, where Marianne was disporting her beauty—

"Ah! I hate this hôtel, the noise and the women!" said Adrienne. "This horde ranged about the buffet, this salon turned into a restaurant, the false salutations, the commonplace protestations,—this society, all this society, I detest it!—I will have no more of it!—It seems to me that it all is mocking me, and that its smiles are only for that courtesan!—But if I had driven her out?—Who brought her?"

"Her uncle and Monsieur de Rosas!"

"Monsieur de Rosas?"

"Who marries her!"

Adrienne nervously uttered a loud, harsh laugh, as painful as if it were caused by a spasm.

"Who marries her! Then these creatures are married?—Ah! they are married—They are honored, too, are they not? And because they are more easy of approach, they are thought more beautiful and more agreeable than those who are merely honest wives? Ah! it is too silly!—Rosas! I took him for a man of sense!—If I were to tell him myself that she is my husband's mistress, what would the duke answer?"

"He would not believe you, and you would not do that, madame!" said Lissac.

"Why?"

"Because it would be an act of cowardice, and because you are the best, the noblest of women!"

Instinctively he drew near her, lowering his voice, embracing with his glance that fine, charming beauty, that grief heightened by a burning brilliancy.

She raised her fine, clear eyes to Lissac, whose look troubled her, and said:

"And how have these served me?—Kindness, trickery!—Trickery, chastity!—Ask all these men! All of them will go to Mademoiselle Kayser and not to me!"

"To you, madame," murmured Guy, "all that there is of devotion and earnestness, yes, all of the tenderest and the truest will go to you as respectful homage."

"Respect?—Yes, respect to us!—And with it goes the home! But to her! Ah! to her, love! And what if I wish to be loved myself?"

"Loved by him!" said Lissac in a low tone, as if he did not know what he said; and his hands instinctively sought Adrienne's. They trembled.

A woman's perfume and something like the keen odor of flowers assailed his nostrils. He had never felt the impulse of burning compassion which at a sign from this saint, would have driven him to attempt the impossible, to affront the noisy throng yonder.

"Loved by him, yes, by him!" answered Adrienne, with the mournful shake of the head of one who sees her joy vanish in the distance like a sinking bark.

She had been so happy! She had thought herself so dearly loved! Ah! those many cowardly lies uttered by Sulpice!

"Do not speak to me of him!" she suddenly said. "I hate him, too!—I do more than that! I despise him! I never wish to see him again!—never. You hear! never!"

"What will you do?" Lissac asked.

"I know nothing about it!—I wish to leave! Now, I have no more parading to make in this ball, I think, I have no longer to receive the guests whose insulting smiles were like blows! I will go, go!"

"Adrienne!"

"Will go at once!"

She felt no astonishment at hearing the name Adrienne spoken suddenly and unreflectingly by Guy de Lissac.

She looked at him with a glance that reached his soul, not knowing what she said:

"Leave now! While the ball is in progress. To leave solitude to him, suddenly—here! And that woman, if he wishes her, and if the other who is marrying her will yield her to him!"

She was carried away, her mind wandered, as if unbalanced by her grief, all her efforts at self-control ending in a relaxation of her strained nerves.

"I will leave!—I do not wish to see him again!"

"Leave to-night?"

"For Grenoble—I don't know where!—But to fly from him; ah! yes; to escape from him! Take me away, Monsieur de Lissac!" she said distractedly, as she seized his hand. "I should go mad here!"

She had unconsciously taken refuge, as it were, in the arms of the man who loved her, and Lissac felt the exquisite grace of the body abandoned to him, without the woman's reflecting upon it, without loving him, lost—

It is quite certain that in her nervous, heart-broken condition, Adrienne was not considering whether his affection for her sprung from friendship or from love.

For a moment this master skeptic, Guy, felt that he was committing the greatest folly of his life.

The young woman did not understand; nevertheless, even without love, he clearly felt that this chasteness and grace, all that there was exquisitely seductive about her, belonged to him—if he dared —

"You are feverish, Adrienne," he said, as he took her hands as he would a child's.

"I am choking here!—I wish to leave!—take me away!"

"Nonsense," said Lissac. "What are you thinking about? They are calling for you, yonder."

"It is because they call for me that I wish to escape. Don't you see that I abhor all those people; that I detest them as much as I despise them? Take me away!"

Lissac had become very pale. He tried to smile at Adrienne—the heroic smile of a wounded man undergoing amputation—and he whispered:

"Don't you know very well, madame, that you would not have taken two steps in the street, on my arm, before you would become a lost woman?"

"Well," she said, "what of that, since it is they who are loved!—"

"No, madame," Guy replied, "I love you. I may say so, because you are a virtuous woman, and I have no right to take you away, do you understand? because I love you."

He, too, had summoned all his strength to impart to his confession, which he would have expressed with ardor, the cold tone of a phrase.

But that was enough. Adrienne recoiled before this avowal.

He loved her. He told her so!

It is true, she could not leave the mansion on his arm.

She rested her glance on Lissac and extended her hand to him, saying, as she felt suddenly recalled to herself:

"You are an honest man!"

"According to my moods," said Guy, with a sad smile.

The door of the little salon opened, and Ramel entered.

"I have called in a doctor," he said.

"For me?" asked Adrienne. "Thanks! I am quite strong!"

Then boldly going to Ramel:

"Will you have the goodness to take me to Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, Monsieur Ramel?"

"Why?"

"Because I will not remain one hour longer in a house where my husband has the right to receive his mistress!—Monsieur de Lissac refuses to accompany me. Your arm, Ramel!"

"Madame," Ramel answered gently, "I knew that Monsieur de Lissac was a man of intelligence. It seems to me that he is a man of heart. You should remain here for your own sake, for your name's sake, for your husband's. It is your duty. As to Mademoiselle Kayser, you can return to the salons, for she has just left with Monsieur de Rosas."

Adrienne remained for a moment with her sad eyes fixed on Ramel; then shaking her head:

"You knew it also? Everybody knew it then, except me?"

"Well!" said Ramel, a good-natured smile playing in his white mustache, "now it is necessary to forget."

"Never!" replied Adrienne.

Then proudly drawing herself up, she took Denis's arm and without even glancing in her mirror, she went off toward the salons.

"Your bouquet, madame," said Lissac, who was still pale and his voice trembled.

"True!" said Adrienne.

She fastened her bouquet of drooping roses to her corsage and without daring to look at Lissac again, she re-entered, leaning on Ramel's arm.

Left alone in the salon, Guy remained a moment to shake his head.

"Poor, dear creature!" he said. "If I had been young enough not to understand the position in which her madness placed me, or base enough to profit by it, what a pretty little preface to a great folly she was about to commit this evening! Well! this attack of morality will perhaps count in my favor some day."

He stooped down and picked up a rose that had fallen from Adrienne's bouquet to the carpet.

He smiled as he took up the flower and looked at it.

"One learns at any age!" he thought, as he put the flower in his coat. "That, at least, is a love souvenir that they will not send the police to rob me of."

VII

TOC

On rising the following morning, after a feverish night, Sulpice realized a feeling of absolute moral destruction. It seemed to him that he had lost a dear being. In that huge, silent hôtel one would have thought that a corpse was lying. He did not dare to present himself to Adrienne. He could not tell what to say to her. He went downstairs slowly, crossing the salons that were still decorated with the now fading flowers, to reach his cabinet. The carpet was littered with the broken leaves of dracænas and petals that had fallen from the azaleas, and presented the gloomy, forsaken aspect peculiar to the morrow of a fête. The furniture, stripped of its coverings, offered the faded tint of old maids at their rising. With heavy head, he sat at his desk and looked at the piled-up documents with a vague

expression. Always the eternal pile of despatches, optimistic reports, and banal summaries of the daily press. Nothing new, nothing interesting, all was going well. This tired world had no history.

The minister still remained there, absorbed as after an unhealthy insomnia, when Warcolier entered, ever serious, with his splendid, redundant phrases and his usual attitude of a pedantic rhetor. He came to inform the minister that a matter of importance, perhaps of a troublesome nature, loomed on the horizon. Granet was preparing an interpellation. Oh! upon a matter without any real importance. An affair of a procession that had taken place at Tarbes, accompanied by some little disturbance. It was only a pretext, but it was sufficient, perhaps, to rally a majority around the *minister of to-morrow*. Old Henri de Prangins, with his eye on a portfolio, and always thirsting for power, was keeping Granet company: the man who would never be a minister with the man who was sure to be.

"Well, what has this to do with me?" asked Vaudrey indifferently.

Granet! Prangins! He was thinking of a very different matter. Adrienne knew all and Marianne deceived him. She was to marry Rosas.

The very serious Warcolier manifested much surprise at the little energy displayed by Monsieur le Ministre. He expected to see him bound, in order to rebound, as he said, believing himself witty. Was Vaudrey himself giving up the game? Was Granet then sure of the game? He surmised it and had already taken the necessary measures in that direction. But surely if Granet were the rising sun, Vaudrey was himself abandoning his character of the setting sun. He was not setting, he was falling. A sovereign contempt for this man entered Warcolier's lofty soul, Warcolier the friend of success.

"Then you do not understand, Monsieur le Président?"

Vaudrey drew himself up with a sudden movement that was frequent with him. He struck the table on which his open portfolio rested, and said:

"I understand that Granet wants that portfolio! Well, be it so! I set little store by it, but he does not have it yet!"

"That is something like it! It is worthy of a brave man to show a resolute front to his enemies! It is in battle that talent is retempered, as formerly in the Styx were tempered—"

"I know," said Sulpice.

Warcolier's intelligent smile was not understood by the minister.

Sulpice, who was in despair over his shattered domestic joys, had no wish to enter on a struggle except to bring about a reaction on himself. To hold his own against Granet, was to divert his own present sadness.

"All right," he said to Warcolier. "Let Granet interpellate us when he pleases—In eight days, to-morrow, yes, to-day even, I am ready!"

"Interpellate *us*!" thought Warcolier. "You should say, interpellate *you*."

He had already got out of the scrape himself.

Vaudrey debated with himself as to whether he would try to see Adrienne. No? What should he say to her? It would be better to let a little time shed its balm upon the wound. Then, too, if he wished to bar the way to Granet, he had not too much time before him. The shrewd person should act promptly.

"I shall see him on the Budget Committee!" thought Vaudrey.

He found it necessary now to force an interest in the struggle which a few months before would have found him eagerly panting to enter on. The honeymoon of his love of power had passed. He had too keenly felt, one after another, the discouragements of the office that he sought in order to *do good*, to reform, to act, in the pursuit of which he found himself, from the first moment, clashing with routine, old-fashioned ideas, petty ambitions, the general welfare, all the brood of selfish interests. It had been his to dream a sort of Chimera bearing the country toward Progress on outstretched wings: he found himself entangled in the musty mechanism of a worn-out and rancid-smelling engine, that dragged the State as a broken-winded horse might have done. Then, little by little, weariness and disgust had penetrated the heart of this visionary who desired to live, to assert himself in putting an end to so many abuses, and whom his colleagues, his chiefs of division, his chief of service, the chief of the State himself cautiously advised: "Make no innovations! Let things go! That has gone on so for so long! What is the use of changing? It will still do very well!"

Ah! it was to throw off the shackles and to try the impossible! Vaudrey found himself hemmed in between his dearest hopes and the most disheartening realities. He was asked for offices, not reforms. The men charged with the fate of the country were not straggling after progress, they were looking after their own interests, their landed and shopkeeping interests. He felt nauseated by all this. He held those deputies in contempt who besieged his cabinet and filled his antechamber in order to beg, claim and demand. All of them sought something, and they were almost strangled by the solicitations of their own constituents. They appeared to Sulpice to be rather the commissionaires of universal suffrage than the servants. This abasement before the manipulators of the votes made Vaudrey indignant. He felt that France was becoming by degrees a vast market for favors, a nation in which everyone asked office from those who to keep their own promised everything, and the thought filled him with terror. The ministers, wedded to their positions, became the mere servants of the deputies, while the latter obeyed the orders of their constituents. All was kept within a vast network of office-

seeking and trafficking. And with it all, a hatred of genuine talent, bitter selfishness and the crushing narrowness of ideas!

Vaudrey recalled a story that had been told him, how during the Empire, the Emperor, terrified, feeling himself isolated, asked and searched for a man, and how a certain little bell in the Tuileries was especially provided to warn the chamberlains of the entry into the château of a new face, of the visit of a stranger, in order that the camarilla, warned by the particular ring, would have time to place themselves on their guard, and to send the newcomer to the right about if he might become an aid to the master and a danger to the servants. Well! Sulpice did not hear that invisible and secret bell, but he guessed its presence, he divined its presence around him, warning the interested, always ready to chase away the stranger; he felt that its secret thread was everywhere thrown around the powerful, the mighty of four days or a quarter of a century and that, so long as influence existed in the world, there would be courtiers and that these courtiers, eager for a crumb, would prevent the stranger, that is to say, truth, from reaching the light, fearing that this stranger might play the part of the lion and chase the flies away from the honeycomb.

Thus, how much nausea and contempt he felt for that transient power which in spite of himself was rendered useless! A power that placed him at the mercy of the bawling of a colleague or an enemy, and even at the mercy of that all-powerful master so readily dissatisfied: everybody. He had seen, at too close quarters, the vile intrigues, the depressing chafferings, the grinding of that political kitchen in which so many people,—this Warcolier with his voluble rhetoric, this Granet with his conceited smile of superiority,—were hungering to hold the handle of the saucepan. He recalled a remark that Denis Ramel had often repeated to him: "What is the use of putting one's self out in order to bask in the sunshine? The best are in the shade."

He was seized with lawful indignation against his own ambitions, against the lack of energy that prevented him from sweeping away all obstacles,—men, and routine,—and he recalled with afflicting bitterness his entry on public life, in the blaze of divine light, and his dreams, his poor noble dreams! "A great minister! I will be a great minister!"

"Ah! yes, indeed! one is a minister, that is all! And that is enough! It is often too much! We shall see indeed what he will do, that Granet who ought to do so much!"

Vaudrey laughed nervously.

"What he will do? Nothing! Nothing! Still nothing! That is very easy! To do anything, one should be a great man and not a politician captivated with the idea of reaching the summit of power. Ah! *parbleu!* to be a great man! 'That is the question.'"

He grew very excited over the proud rebellion of his old faith and shattered hopes against the negative success he had obtained. Besides, there was no reason for giving up the struggle. There was a council to be held at the Élysée. He went there, but at this moment of disgust, disgust of everything and himself, this palace like all the rest, seemed to him to be gloomy and mean. An usher in black coat and white cravat, wearing a chain around his neck, wandered up and down the antechamber, according to custom, his shoes covered with the dust from the carpet trodden upon by so many people, either applicants or functionaries. The gaslight burning in broad day as in the offices in London was reflected on the cold walls that shone like marble. Doors ornamented with gilt nails and round, ivory knobs and without locks, were noiselessly swinging to and fro. Wearied office-seekers with tired countenances were spread out upon the garnet-colored velvet chairs, which were like those of a middle-class, furnished house.

From time to time, the tiresome silence was broken by the sound of near or distant electric bells. Vaudrey, who arrived before his colleagues, studiously contemplated the surroundings ironically. An estafette, a gendarme, arrived with a telegram; the usher signed a receipt for it. That was all the life that animated this silent palace. A man with a military air, tall, handsome and in tightly-buttoned frock-coat, passed and saluted the President of the Council; then, Jouvenet, the Prefect of Police, looking like a notary's senior clerk, his abundant black hair plastered on his head, a large, black portfolio under his arm, approached the minister and bowed. Vaudrey, having Lissac in mind, returned his salutation coldly.

"I will speak to you presently, Monsieur le Préfet."

"Good! Monsieur le Ministre!"

In spite of the foot-soldier and the Parisian guard on duty at the door of the palace, all that now seemed to Vaudrey to lack official solemnity, and resembled rather a temporary and melancholy occupation.

"Bah! And if I should never set my foot in this place again," he thought, as he remembered Granet's interpellation, "what would it matter to me?"

He was informed first at the Council and then at the Chamber, that Granet would not introduce his question until the next day. Vaudrey had the desired time to prepare himself. In the Budget Committee, where he met Granet, the *minister of to-morrow* asked him an inopportune question concerning the expenses of the administration. Vaudrey was angered and felt inclined to treat it as a personal question. It now only remained for his adversaries to begin to suspect him! To appear so was even now too much. Sulpice took Granet up promptly, the latter assured him that "his colleague and friend, the President of the Council," had entirely misconstrued the meaning of his words.

"Well and good!" said Vaudrey.

He was not sorry that the interpellation was not to take place at once. Before to-morrow, he would have placed his batteries. And then he would think of quieting Adrienne, of regaining her, perhaps. On returning to the ministry, he caused some inquiries to be made as to whether Madame were not sick. Madame had gone out. She had gone out as if she were making a pilgrimage to a cemetery, to the apartment in Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, whereon might have been written: *Here lies*. It was like the tomb of her happiness.

She would not see Sulpice again. In the evening, however, she consented to speak to him.

Her poor, gentle face was extremely pale, and as if distorted by some violent pain.

"You will find some excuse," she said, "for announcing that I am ill. I am leaving for Grenoble. I have written to my uncle, the Doctor expects me, and all that now remains to me is a place in his house."

"Adrienne!" murmured Sulpice.

She closed her eyes, for this suppliant voice doubtless caused her a new grief, but neither gesture nor word escaped her. She was like a walking automaton. Even her eyes expressed neither reproach nor anger, they seemed dim.

There was something of death in her aspect.

After a few moments, she said: "I hope that my resolve will not work any prejudice to your political position. In that direction I will still do my duty to the full extent of my strength. But people will not trouble themselves to inquire whether I am at Grenoble or Paris. They trouble themselves very little about me."

By a gesture, he sought to retain her. She had already entered her room, and Vaudrey felt that between this woman and him there stood something like a wall. He had now only to love Marianne.

To love Marianne, ah! yes, the unhappy man, he still loved her. When he thought of Marianne, it was more in wrath, when he thought of Adrienne, it was more in pity; but, certainly, his wife's determination to leave Paris caused him less emotion than the thought that his mistress was to wed Rosas.

That very evening he went to Marianne's.

They told him that Madame was at the theatre. Where? With whom? Neither Jean nor Justine knew.

Vaudrey despised himself for jealously questioning the servants who, when together, would burst with laughter in speaking of him.

"Oh! miserable fool!" he said to himself. "There was only one woman who loved you:—Adrienne!"

Nevertheless, he recalled Marianne in the hours of past love, and the recollection of her kisses and sobs still made his flesh creep. The tawny tints that played in her hair as it strayed unfastened over the pillow, the endearing caresses of her bare arms, he wished to see and feel again. He calculated in his ferocious egotism that Adrienne's wrath would afford him more complete liberty for a time, and that he would have Marianne more to himself, if she were willing.

He had written to Mademoiselle Kayser, but his letter had remained unanswered. He thought that he would go to Mademoiselle Vanda's house the next day, after the Chamber was up. Very late, he added, since the sitting would be prolonged. Long and decisive, as the fate of his ministry was at stake.

Granet's interpellation did not make him unusually uneasy. He had acquainted himself in the morning with a résumé of the journals. Public opinion seemed favorable to the Vaudrey ministry, *except in the case of some insufferable radical organs, and with which he need not in anyway concern himself*, read the report. Vaudrey did not remember that it was in almost these very terms that the daily résumé of the press expressed itself on the eve of Pichereau's fall, to the Minister of the Interior, in speaking of Pichereau's cabinet.

"I shall have a majority of sixty votes," he said to himself. "Everything will be carried—save honor!"

He thought of Adrienne as he thus wished.

The session of the Chamber was to furnish him the most cruel deception. Granet had most skilfully prepared his plan of attack. Vaudrey's ministry was threatened on all sides by lines of approach laid out without Sulpice's knowledge. Granet had promised, here and there, new situations, or had undertaken to confirm the old. He came to the assault of the ministry with a compact battalion of clients entirely devoted to his fortunes, which were their own. They did not reproach Vaudrey too strongly with anything, unless it was that these impatient ones considered that he had given away all that he had to give, prefectures, sub-prefectures, councillors' appointments, crosses of the Legion of Honor, and especially for having lasted too long. Vaudrey would fall less because he had forfeited esteem than because others were impatient to succeed him. Granet was tired of being only the *minister of to-morrow*, he wished to have his day. He had just affirmed his policy, he asserted that the whole country, weary of Vaudrey's compromises, demanded a more homogeneous ministry. Homogeneity! Nothing could be said against such a word. Granet favored the policy of homogeneity. This vocable comprehended his entire programme. The Vaudrey Cabinet lacked homogeneity! The President of the Republic decidedly ought to form a homogeneous cabinet.

"Granet is then homogeneous?" said Sulpice, with a forced laugh, as he sat on the ministerial bench while Lucien Granet was speaking from the tribune, his right hand thrust into his frock-coat.

The *bon mot* uttered by the President of the Council, although spoken loudly enough, did not enliven any one, neither his colleagues who felt themselves threatened nor his usual *claqueurs* who felt themselves vanquished. Navarrot, the ministerial claqueur, was already applauding Granet most enthusiastically. *Monsieur le Ministre* felt himself about to become an ex-minister. He vaguely felt as if he were in the vacuum of an air-pump.

The order of the day of distrust, smoothed over by Granet with the formulas of perfidious politeness—castor-oil in orange-juice, as Sulpice himself called it, trying to pluck up courage and wit in the face of misfortune,—that order of the day that the Vaudrey Cabinet would not accept, was adopted by a considerable majority: one hundred and twenty-two votes.

For Sulpice, it was a crushing defeat.

"One hundred and twenty-two deputies," he said, still speaking in a loud voice in the corridors, "to whom I have refused the appointment of some mayor or the removal of some rural guard!"

Warcolier, ever dignified, remarked in his usual style, that this manner of defending himself probably lacked some of that nobility which becomes a defeat bravely endured.

Vaudrey had only one course open, to send in his resignation. He was beaten, thoroughly beaten. He returned to the Hôtel Beauvau and after preparing his letter he took it himself to the President at the Élysée.

The President accepted it without betraying any feeling, as an employé at the registry office receives any deed of declaration. Two or three commonplace expressions of regret, a diplomatic shake of the hand, expressive of official sympathy, that was all. Vaudrey returned to the ministry and ordered his servants to prepare everything for leaving the ministerial mansion.

"When is that to be, Monsieur le Ministre?"

"To-morrow," answered Vaudrey, to whom the title seemed ironical and grated on his nerves.

He caused himself to be announced to Adrienne.

Adrienne, weary looking, was seated before a small desk writing, and beneath her fair hair, her face still looked as white as that of a corpse.

"There is some news," Vaudrey said to her abruptly. "I am no longer minister!"

"Ah!" she said.

Not a tremor, not a word of consolation. Three days previously, she would have leaped to his neck and said: "How happy we shall be! I have you back; I have found you again! What joy!"

Again, she would have tried to console him had he been suffering.

Now, she remained passive, frozen, indifferent to that news.

"We shall leave the Hôtel Beauvau!" said Sulpice.

"I am already preparing to leave," she replied. "My trunks are packed."

"Will you do me the kindness of leaving here with me and of going back to Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin with me?—After that, you can set out at once for Grenoble. But let us have no sign of scandal. The world must be considered."

She had listened to him coldly, unmoved by his trembling voice.

"That is proper," she said ironically. "The world must be thought of. I will wait then before leaving."

He was stupefied to find so much coldness and so unswerving a determination in this woman, as gentle as a child—my *wife-child*, he so frequently said to her of old. In her presence he felt ill at ease, discontented, hesitating whether he should throw himself at her feet and wring pardon from her, or fly from her and be with Marianne, perhaps forever. But no, it was Adrienne, his poor, his dear Adrienne that he would keep and love! Ah! if she pardoned him! If he had dared to kneel at her feet, to plead and to weep! But this living corpse froze him, he was afraid of her, of that gentle and devoted creature.

He went downstairs again, saying to himself that he would take a hurried dinner and then go to Rue Prony.

He was, however, obliged to occupy himself in despatching the last current business. He must hand over his official duties to his successor. There was a mocking expression in these words: *his successor!*

"After all, he will have one also!"

He still had unexpected heartbreakings to experience. People to whom he had promised appointments and decorations came, almost breathless, suddenly stirred by the news, to entreat him to sign the nominations and to prepare the decrees while he was *still* minister. The ravens were about the corpse. *Monsieur Eugène*, still bowing low, although not quite so low as heretofore, endeavored to dismember Vaudrey the Minister. He wanted a little piece, only one piece! A sub-prefecture of the third class!

He had already been informed at the Élysée that Granet was to be his successor. *Parbleu!* he expected

it! But the realization of his fears annoyed him. And who would Granet keep for his Secretary of State? Warcolier, yes Warcolier, with the promise of giving him the first vacant portfolio.

"How correct was Ramel's judgment?" thought Sulpice.

Vaudrey, with a sort of rage urging him, immediately set himself about a task as mournful as a funeral: packing up. It now seemed to him that he had just suffered a total overthrow. Books and papers were being packed in baskets. Before he was certain of his fall, he thought it was delightful to escape from so much daily bother, but now he felt as if he were being discrowned and ruined. Ruin! It truly threatened him indeed and held him by the throat. He had realized on many pieces of property within the past year for Marianne!

Adrienne, on the contrary, left this great cold hôtel of Place Beauvau, as if she were leaving a prison, with a comforting sense of deliverance. A bad dream was ended. She could lay down her official mask, weep at ease, complain at will, fly to that Dauphiny where her youth was left. She would leave to-morrow. Doctor Reboux awaited her in ignorance.

After having given his first orders and arranged his most important documents, Sulpice went out to walk to Marianne's. At first he wandered along mechanically without realizing that he was going toward the quays, almost fearing the interview with his mistress, now that he was only a defeated man. He had nearly reached the Seine before he was aware of it. He looked at his watch.

Eleven o'clock.

Marianne had been awaiting him for some time.

He now followed, with the slow march of persons oppressed with a sense of weariness, these deserted quays, that terrace on the bank of the river, whose balustrades permitted glimpses of the silhouettes of slender trees. He met no one. Upon the Place de la Concorde, still wet with the scarce dried rain of this November night, as mild as an evening in spring, permeated by a warm mist, he looked for a moment at the Palace of the Corps Législatif, gloomy-looking and outlining its roofs against the misty sky, whose gleams fell on the horizon with a bluish tint, while upon the broad sidewalks, the jets of gas magnified the reddened reflections with their own ruddy hues. Along the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées there were only two immense parallel rows of gas-lamps and here and there, moving, luminous points that looked like glow-worms. Vaudrey mechanically stopped a moment to contemplate the scene.

That did not interest him, but something within him controlled him. He continued to walk unwittingly in the direction of Parc Monceau. The solitude of the Champs-Élysées pleased him. While passing before an important club with its windows lighted, he instinctively shuddered. Through the lace-like branches of the trees, he looked at the green shades, the lustres, the unpolished sconces, with the backgrounds of red and gold hangings, and the great, gold frames, and he imagined that they were discussing the causes of his defeat and the success of Granet.

"They are speaking of me, in there! They are talking about my fall! He is fallen! Fallen! Beaten!—They are laughing, they are making jokes! There are some there who yesterday were asking me for places."

He continued on his way without quickening his pace; the deserted café concerts, as melancholy-looking as empty stages, the wreaths of suspended pearl-like lamps illuminated during the summer months but now colorless, seemed ironical amid the clumps of bare trees as gloomy as cemetery yews, exhaling a sinister, forsaken spirit as if this solitude were full of extinct songs, defunct graces, phantoms, and last year's mirth. And Vaudrey felt a strangely delicious sensation even in his bitterness at this impression of solitude, as if he might have been lost, forgotten forever, in the very emptiness of this silent corner.

Going on, he passed before the Élysée.

A *sergent de ville* who was slowly pacing up and down in front of an empty sentry-box, his two hands ensconced in the sleeves of his coat, the hood of which he had turned up, cast a sidelong glance at him, almost suspiciously, as if wondering what a prowler could want to do there, at such an hour.

"He does not know whom he has looked at," he said. "And yesterday, only yesterday, he would have saluted me subserviently!"

The windows of the Élysée facing the street were still lighted up and Vaudrey thought that shadows were moving behind the white curtains.

"The President has not yet retired! He has probably received Granet! And Warcolier!—Warcolier!"

Before the large door opening on Faubourg Saint-Honoré, four lamps were burning over the head of a Parisian guard on duty, with his musket on his shoulder, the light shining on the leather of his shako. Some weary-looking guardians of the peace were chatting together. At the end of the court before the perron, a small, red carpet was laid upon the steps and in front of the marquee faint lights gleamed. Vaudrey recalled that joyous morning when he entered there, arriving and descending from his carriage with his portfolio under his arm.

He hurried his steps and found himself on Place Beauvau. His glance was attracted by the grille, the hôtel, the grand court at the end of the avenue. Sulpice experienced a feeling of sudden anger as he passed in front of the Ministry of the Interior whose high grille, now closed, he had many times passed through, leaning back in his coupé. He pictured himself entering there, where he would never again return except as a place-seeker like those eternal beggars who blocked its antechambers. He still

heard the cry of the lackey when the coachman crushed the sand of the courtyard under the wheels of the carriage: "Monsieur le Ministre's carriage!"—He went upstairs, the lackeys saluted him, the coupé rolled off toward the Bois.

Now, here in that vulgar mansion another was displaying himself, seated on the same seats, eating at the same table, sleeping in the same bed and giving his orders to the same servants. He experienced a strange sensation, as of a theft, of some undue influence, of suffering an ejectment by a stranger from some personal property, and this Granet, the man sent there as he had been, by a vote, seemed to him to be a smart fellow, a filibuster and an intruder.

"How one becomes accustomed to thinking one's self at home everywhere!" thought Vaudrey.

He partially forgot the keen wound given to his self-love by the time that he found himself close to Parc Monceau approaching Rue Prony. In Marianne's windows the lights were shining. To see that woman and hold her again in his arms, overjoyed, that happiness would console him for all his mortifications. Marianne's love was worth a hundred times more than the delights of power.

Marianne Kayser was evidently waiting for Sulpice. She received him in her little, brilliantly-lighted salon, superb amid these lights, in a red satin robe de chambre that lent a strange seductiveness to her bare arms and neck which shone with a pale and pearly lustre beneath the light.

Vaudrey felt infinitely moved, almost painfully though deliciously stirred, as he always did when in the presence of this lovely creature.

She extended her hand to him, saying in a singular tone that astonished him:

"*Bonjour, vous!*"

"Well!" she said at once, pointing to a journal which was lying on the carpet, "is there anything new?"

"Yes," he said. "But what is that to me? I don't think of that when I am near you!"

"Oh! besides, my dear," Marianne continued, "your darling sin has not been to think of two things at one time! I don't understand anything of politics, it bothers me. I have been advised, however, that you have been thrashed by that Granet!"

"Thrashed, yes," said Sulpice, laughing, "you use peculiar phrases!—"

"Topical ones. I am of the times! But it appears that one must read the journals to learn about you. I am going to tell you some news however, before it appears in print."

"That interests me?"

"Perhaps, but it most assuredly interests me!"

"Important news?" asked Sulpice.

"Important or great, as you will!"

He nibbled his blond moustache nervously.

Guy had not deceived him.

"Then I think I know your news, my dear Marianne!"

"Tell me!" she said, as she stretched herself on a divan, her arms crossed, looking ravishingly lovely in her red gown.

He sought some forcible phrase that would crush her, but he could find none. His only desire was to take that fair face in his hands and to fasten his lips thereon.

Marianne smiled maliciously.

"It is true then," Vaudrey exclaimed, "that you love Monsieur de Rosas?"

"There, you are well-informed! It is strange! Perhaps that is because you are no longer a minister!"

"You love Rosas?"

"Yes, and I am marrying him. I have the honor to announce to you my marriage to Monsieur le Duc José de Rosas, Marquis de Fuentecarral. It surprises me, but it is so!—I have known days when I have not had six sous to take the omnibus, and now I am to be a duchess! This does not seem to please you? Are you selfish, then?"

Stretched on her divan, her neck and arms sparkling under the light of the sconces, she appeared to make sport of Vaudrey's stupefaction as he looked at her almost with fright.

"Now, my dear," she said curtly, but politely, as she toyed with a ring on her finger, "this is why I desired to see you to-day. It is to tell you that if you care to remain friendly on terms that forbid sensual enjoyment, which is not objectionable in putting a lock on the past, you may visit the Duchesse de Rosas just as you have Mademoiselle Kayser. But if you are bent on finding in the Duchesse de Rosas the good-natured girl that I have been toward you, and you are quite capable of it, for you are a sentimental fellow, then it will be useless to even appear to have ever known each other. I am turning the key on my life. *Crac! Bonsoir*, Sulpice!"

The unhappy man! He had cherished the thought of still visiting his mistress, but he found there an unlooked-for being, a new creature, who was unmistakably determined, in spite of her cunning charm, and she spoke to him in stupefying, ironical language.

"You would have me go mad, Marianne?"

"Why! what an idea! The phrase is decidedly romantic.—You should dispense with the blue in love as well as the exaggeration in politics."

"Marianne," Vaudrey said abruptly, "do you know that for your sake I have destroyed my home and mortally wounded my wife?"

"Well," she replied, "did I ask you to do so? I pleased you, you pleased me; that was quite enough. I desire no one's death and if you have allowed everything to be known, it is because you have acted indiscreetly or stupidly! But I who do not wish to mortally wound," she emphasized these words with a smile—"my husband, I expect him to suspect nothing, know nothing, and as you are incapable of possessing enough intelligence not to play Antony with him, let us stop here. Adieu, then, my dear Vaudrey!"

She extended her hand to him, that soft hand that imparted an electrical influence when he touched it.

"Well, what!—You are pouting?"

"I love you," he replied distractedly. "I love you, you hear, and I wish to keep you!"

"Ah! no, no! no roughness," she said with a laugh, as he, taking a seat near her, tried to draw her to him in his arms.

"To keep you, although belonging to another," whispered Vaudrey slowly.

"For whom do you take me?" said Marianne, proudly drawing herself up. "If I have a husband, I require that he be respected. A man who gives his name to a woman is clearly entitled to be dealt with truthfully!"

"Then," stammered Sulpice, "what?—Must we never see each other again?"

"We shall recognize each other."

"You drive me away?"

"As a lover!"

"Ah! stay," said Vaudrey, as, pale with anger, he walked across the room, "you are a miserable woman, a courtesan, you understand, a courtesan!—Guy has told me everything! You gave yourself to Jouvenet to avenge yourself on Lissac, you made a tool of me and you are making a sport of Rosas who is marrying you!—What have I not done for you!—I have ruined myself! yes, ruined myself!"

"My dear," interrupted Marianne, "see the difference between a gentleman like Monsieur de Rosas and a little bourgeois like yourself. The duke might have ruined himself for me but he would never have reproached me. One never speaks of money to a woman. You are a very honest, domestic man and you were born to worship your wife! You should stick to her! You are not made of the stuff of a true-born lover. What you have just told me is the remark of a loon!"

"Ah! if I had only known you!"

"Or anything! But I am better than you, you see. I was better advised than you. The bill of exchange that you owe to the Dujarrier or to Gochard,—whichever you like—it inconveniences you, I know!"

"Yes," said Vaudrey, "but—"

"You would not, I think, desire me to pay it with the duke's money, that Monsieur de Rosas should pay your debts?"

"Marianne," cried Sulpice, livid with rage.

"Bless me! you speak to me of money? You chant your ruin to me! The *De Profundis* of your money-box, should I know that? I question with myself as to what it means!—However, knowing you to be financially embarrassed, I have myself found you help—Yes, I told someone who understands how to extricate business men, that you were embarrassed!"

"I?"

"There is nothing to blush about. I told Molina the *Tumbler*—You know him?"

Did he know him! At that very moment he saw the ruddy gold moon that represented the banker's face amid all the expanse of his shining flesh. He trembled as if in the face of temptation.

"Molina is a man of means," said Marianne. "If you need money, you can have it there! And now, once more, leave me to my new life! The past is as if it had never been!—*Bonjour, Bonsoir!*—and adieu, go! —Give me your hand!"

She smiled so strangely, half lying on the divan, and stretched out her white hand, which he covered with kisses, murmuring:

"Well, yes, adieu! Yes, adieu!—But once more—once!—this evening—I love you so dearly!—Will you?"

She quietly reached out her bare arm toward a silk bell-rope that she jerked suddenly and Vaudrey rose enraged and humiliated.

"Show Monsieur Vaudrey out," Marianne said to Justine, as she appeared at the door. "Then you may go to bed, my girl!"

Vaudrey left this woman's house in a fit of frenzy. She had just treated him who had paid for the divan on which she was reclining as a genuine duchess might have treated a man who had been insolently disrespectful toward her. He was almost inclined to laugh at it.

"It is well done! well done for you! Ah! the dolt! To trust a wanton! To trust Warcolier! To trust everybody! To trust everybody except Adrienne!—"

He, mechanically and without thought, resumed the way to Place Beauvau, forgetting that the ministerial home was no longer his. The porter—who knows? might not have opened the gate to him. The lackeys would have driven him off as the girl had done whom he had paid, yes, paid, paid! For she was a harlot, nothing more!

Gradually, the thought of that debt swelled by successive bills of exchange, and almost forgotten during the recent days of feverish excitement, took possession of his mind, he remembered that it must be discharged on the first day of December, in five days, and the thought troubled him like an impending danger. The prospect had often, during the last few weeks, made him anxious. He saw the months pass, the days flit with extraordinary rapidity, and the maturity, the inevitable due date draw near with the mathematical regularity of a clock. So long as months were ahead he felt no anxiety. Like gamblers he counted on chance. Besides, he still had some farms in Dauphiny. In short, a word to his notary and he could speedily get out of danger. Then, too, the date of payment was far away. He calculated that by economy as to his personal income and his official salary he could meet the bill to Gochard, whose very name sometimes made him laugh. But Marianne's exactions, unforeseen outlays, the eternal *leakage* of Parisian life had quite prevented saving, and had dissipated in a thousand little streams the money that he wished to pay out in a lump in December. He soon grew alarmed by degrees at the approach of the maturity of the debt. He had written to his notary at Grenoble, and this old friend had replied that the farms of Saint-Laurent-du-Pont, mortgaged and cut up one after another, now represented only a ridiculous value, but that after all, Vaudrey had nothing to be concerned about, seeing that Madame Vaudrey's fortune was intact.

Adrienne's fortune! That then was all that remained to Vaudrey, and that might be his salvation. A fortune that was not very considerable, but still solid and creditable. But even if he were strangled by debt, dunned and driven into a corner, could he pay the debts he had contracted for his mistress by means of his wife's fortune? He was disgusted at the thought. It was impossible.

Vaudrey felt his head turn under the humiliation of his double defeat, the loss of parliamentary confidence, and Marianne's insulting laugh, and urged by the anxiety he felt about the obligation to be met in eight days, in his bewilderment he thought of writing to Gochard of Rue des Marais, to ask for time. This Gochard must be a half-usurer. Certain of being paid, some day, he would perhaps be delighted to renew the bill of exchange in inordinately swelling the amount. The letter was written and Vaudrey mailed it himself the following morning.

That very evening Adrienne was to leave. He endeavored to dissuade her from her plan. She did not even reply to him. She stood looking at a crystal vase on the chimney-piece in which were some winter roses, Christmas roses, fresh and milk-white, that had been sent as a souvenir from yonder Dauphiny. Her glance rested fixedly on that fair bouquet that seemed like a bursting cloud of whiteness.

"Then," said Vaudrey, "it is settled—quite settled—you are going?"

"I am."

"In three hours?"

"In three hours!"

"I know where those roses were gathered," said Sulpice tenderly. "It was at the foot of the window where we leaned elbow to elbow and dreamed."

"Yes," Adrienne answered, in a broken voice whose sound was like that which might have been given out by the vase had it been struck and shattered. "We had lovely dreams! The reality has indeed belied them!"

"Adrienne!" he murmured.

She made no reply.

He tried to approach her, feeling ashamed as he thought that he had similarly wished to approach Marianne.

She instinctively drew back.

"You remember," she said coldly, "that one day when we were speaking about divorce, I told you that there was a very simple way of divorce? It was never to see each other again, never, to be nothing more to each other from the day on which confidence should die?—You have deceived me, it is done. I am a stranger to you! If I were a mother, I should have duties to fulfil. I would not have failed therein. I would have endured everything for a son!—Nothing is left to me. I have not even the joy of caressing a child that would have consoled me. I am your widow while you yet live. Well, be it so. You have

willed it, there, then, is divorce!"

For the third time since Adrienne had learned everything, he tried to stammer the word *pardon*. He felt it was useless. This sensitive being had withdrawn within herself and wrapped herself, as with a cloak, in all her outraged chastity. He could only humiliate himself without softening her. All Adrienne's deceived trustfulness and insulted love strengthened her in her determination never to forgive.

She would go.

Vaudrey in despair returned to his study, where the books that had been sent from the ministry were piled upon the carpet in all the confusion attending an entry into occupation. The servant at once brought him his lamp and handed him a package of cards in envelopes,—cards of condolence as for a death—and a large card, saying: "That gentleman is here!"

"Molina!" said Vaudrey, becoming very pale. "Show him in!"

The fat Salomon entered puffing and smiling, and spread himself out on an armchair as he said to the former minister:

"Well, how goes it?—Not too badly crushed, eh?—Bah! what is it after all to quit office?—Only a means for returning to it, sometimes!"

"All the same," he said with his cackling laugh that sounded like the jingling of a money-bag, "there are too many changes of ministers! They change them like shirts! It puts me out. I get used to one Excellency and he is put aside! So it is settled, henceforth I will not say Excellency save to the usher or an office-boy!"

He accompanied his clumsy jests with a loud laugh, then, changing his tone:

"Come, that is not all. I came to speak of business to you."

He looked Vaudrey full in the face with his piercing glance, took from his pocketbook a printed sheet and said in a precise tone:

"Here is an opportunity where your title of former minister will serve you better than that of minister. So much is being said of Algeria, its mines and its fibre. Well, read that!"

Vaudrey took the paper. It was the prospectus, very skilfully drawn, of a company established to introduce gas into Algeria, almost as far as the Sahara. They promised the subscribers wonders and miracles: acres upon acres of land as a bonus. There was a fortune to be made. Meantime, they would issue six thousand shares of five hundred francs. It was three millions they were asking from the public. A mere trifle.

"They might ask ten," said Molina, smiling. "They would give it!"

"And you wish me to subscribe to your Algerian gas?" asked Vaudrey.

The fat Molina burst out into loud laughter this time.

"I? I simply wish to give you the opportunity to make a fortune!"

"How?"

"That is one scheme. I will bring you four, five, ten of them! I have another, the Luxemburg coal. A deposit equal to that of Charleroi. You have only to allow me to print in the list of directors: Monsieur Sulpice Vaudrey, former President of the Council."

Vaudrey looked the fat man squarely in the face.

"Besides you will be in good company!" said the banker as he read over the names of deputies, senators, statesmen, coupled with those of financiers.

Sulpice knew most of them.

He despised nearly all of them. It was such that Molina styled *good company!*

"And those mines, are you certain they will produce what you promise?"

"Ah!" said Salomon, "that is the engineers' matter! Here is the report of a mining engineer who is perhaps straining after effect and doing a little puffing up! But one must go with the times! He who ventures nothing, has nothing. In war, one risks one's skin; in business, one risks one's money. That is war."

Vaudrey debated with himself whether he should tear the prospectus in pieces and throw them in the face of the fat man.

"My dear Vaudrey," said the *Tumbler*, "you have a vein that is entirely your own. A former minister remains always a former minister. Well, such a title as that is turned to account. It is quoted, like any other commodity. You are not rich, that fact proves your honesty, although in America, and we are Americanizing ourselves devilishly much, that would only be the measure of your stupidity. You can become rich, I have the means of making myself agreeable to you and you have the opportunity of becoming useful to us."

"In a word, you buy my name?"

"I hire it from you! Very dearly," said Molina, still laughing.

"Certainly," said Vaudrey, "you did not understand me on the first occasion that you called on me to speak about money, and when I questioned with myself whether I should ask you not to call again."

Molina interrupted him abruptly by rising. He felt that an insult was about to be uttered. He parried it by anticipating it.

"Stupidity!" he said. "Here is the prospectus. There are the names of the directors. You will consider. It has never injured any one to take advantage of his position. The puritans, in an age of trickery, are idiots; I say so. What I propose to you surprises you. To place your name beside that of Monsieur Pichereau or Monsieur Numa de Baranville! It is as simple as saying good-day. Perhaps you think then that you will be the only one? They all do it, all those who are extravagant and shrewd. It is a matter of coquetting in these days over a hundred-sou piece! Come, I will wager that Monsieur Montyon would not mince matters—especially if he had transferable paper in circulation!"

"You know that?" said Vaudrey, turning pale.

"Ah! I know many others in like condition! Come, no false modesty! It is a matter of business only! I tell you again, I have many other cases. All this is in order to have the pleasure of offering you certificates for attendance fees. I will open a credit for you of two hundred thousand francs, if you wish. We will arrange matters afterwards."

"I will leave you these declarations of faith!" added Molina, showing the prospectus of the gas undertaking. "Fear nothing! It is not more untruthful than the others! It is unnecessary to show me out. *A la revista!*"

He disappeared abruptly, Vaudrey hearing the floor of the hall creak under this man's hippopotamus feet, and the unhappy Sulpice who had spun so many, such glorious and grand dreams, dreams of liberty, freedom and virtue, civic regeneration, reconstructed national morals and character, the sacredness of the hearth and the education of the conscience; this Vaudrey, bruised by life, overthrown by his vices, was there under the soft light of his lamp, looking with staring eye, as a being who wishes to die contemplates the edge of an abyss, looking at that printed paper soliciting subscriptions, beating the big drum of the *promoter* in order to entrap the vast and ever-credulous horde.

His name! To put his name there! The name of Vaudrey that he had dreamed of reading at the foot of so many noble, eternal and reforming laws, to inscribe it upon that paper beneath so many cunning names, jugglers, habitual drainers of the public cash-box. To fall to that! To do that!

To lend himself?

To sell himself!

And why not sell himself? Who would discharge this bill of exchange? The Gochard paper! The debt of the past! The price of the nights spent with Marianne! The hundred thousand francs for that girl's kisses!

Sulpice felt in the weakness increased by a growing fever, that his self-possession was leaving him. All his ideas clashed confusedly. Amid the chaos, only one clear idea remained; a hundred and sixty thousand francs had to be found. Where were they to be found? Yes, where? Through Molina, who offered him two hundred thousand! This open credit seemed to him like an opened-up placer in which he had only to dig with his nails. The cunning and thick voice of the Hebrew banker echoed in Sulpice's ears: "They all do it!" It was not so difficult to give his name, or to *hire* it, as Salomon said. Who the devil would notice it at a time when indifference passes over scandals as the sea covers the putrid substances on the shore and washes them with its very scum?

"They all do it!"

No, despite the irony of the handler of money, there are some consciences that refuse to yield: and then, what then?—Vaudrey had desired virtue of a different kind and other morals! Ah! how he had suffered the poison to penetrate him; even to his bones! How Marianne had deformed and moulded him at her fancy, and he still thought of her only with unsatisfied longings for her kisses and ardor! Ah! women! Woman! Yes, indeed, yes, woman was the great source of moral weakness and inactivity. She used politics in her own way, in destroying politicians. If he had only left office with head erect and not dragging the chain-shot of debt! But that bill of exchange! Who would pay that?

"Eh! Molina, *parbleu!* Molina! Molina!"

He was right, too, that triumphant Jew with his insolent good humor. It is an absurd thing, after all, to be prudish and to thrust away the dish that is offered you. To be rich is, in fact, quite as good as to be powerful! Money remains! That is the only real thing in the world! It would be a fine sight to see a man refuse the opportunity to make a fortune, and to refuse it—why? For a silly, conscientious scruple. And after all, business was the very life of modern society. This Molina, circulating his money, was as useful as many others who circulate ideas.

"His Algerian gas is a work of civilization just like any other!"

Urged by the necessity of escaping from that debt that strangled him like a running noose, Sulpice gradually arrived at argumentative sophistries, which were but capitulations to his own probity, cowardly arrangements with his own conscience. His name? Well, he would turn it into money since it

was worth a gold ingot! The journalist who sells his thought, the artist who sells his marble, the writer who sells his experiences and his recollections, equally sell their names and for money, the flesh of their flesh. Like a living answer and a remorse, he saw the lean face and white moustache of Ramel, who was seated at the window, breathing the warm rays of the sun, in the little room on Rue Boursault, but he answered, speaking aloud:

"Well, what?—Ramel is a saint, a hero!—But I am no saint. I am a man and I will live!"

Somewhat angered, he took the prospectus that Molina had left him and rereading it again and again, he relapsed into a sitting posture and with haggard eyes scanned the loud-swelling lines of that commercial announcement, seeking therein some pretext for accepting. For he would accept, that was done. Nothing more was to be said, his conscience yielded. He was inclined to laugh.

"Still another victim caught and floored by Molina the *Tumbler!*"

He remained there, terrified at the prospect of the quasi-association he had determined on and by his complicity with a jobber of questionable business.

With his eye fixed upon this solicitation for capital, wherein were the words which would formerly have repelled him: *joint stock company*, *capital stock*, *public subscription*, *subscription certificate*, and at the head of which he was about to inscribe his name as one of the directors, at the foot of a capitulation, as it were, Sulpice had not seen, standing in the doorway of his half-lighted study, a woman in travelling costume, who stopped for a moment to look at the unfortunate, dejected man within the shade of the lamp which made him look more bald than he was, then advanced gently toward him, coughing slightly—for she did not dare to call him by his name or touch him with her gloved hand—to warn him that she was there.

Vaudrey turned round abruptly, instinctively pushing aside Molina's prospectus, as if he already felt some shame in holding it in his hands.

He flushed as he recognized Adrienne.

The young woman's reserved attitude showed absolute firmness. She came to say adieu, she was about to leave.

He had not even the energy to keep her. He was afraid of an unbending reply that would have been an outrage.

"Do you intend to become associated with Molina?" Adrienne asked in a clear voice, as she looked at Sulpice, who had risen.

"What! Molina?" he stammered.

"Yes, oh! he understands business. On leaving, he called on me. He thought that I had still sufficient influence over you to urge you, as he says, to make your fortune. He told me that you were in want of money, and after having been sharp enough to try the husband, he offered me, as you might give a commission to a courtesan, I do not know what emerald ornament, if I would advise you to accept his proposals!—That gentleman does not know the people with whom he is dealing!"

"Wretch!" said Vaudrey. "He did that?"

"And I thanked him," Adrienne replied calmly. "I did not know that you had debts and that, in order to pay them, you had come so near accepting the patronage of such a man. He told me so and he rendered me and you a service."

"Me?"

Vaudrey snatched up the prospectus of the Algerian gas and angrily tore it in pieces.

"We shall probably not see each other again," said Adrienne, in a firm voice that contrasted strangely with her gentle grace; "but I shall never forget that I bear your name and that being mine, I will ever honor it."

She handed Sulpice a document.

"Here is a power of attorney to Monsieur Beauvais, my notary. All that you need of my dowry to free yourself from liabilities is yours. I do not wish to know why you have incurred debts, I am anxious only to know that you have paid them, and my signature provides you with the means to do so."

Dejected, his heart burning, and his sobs rising, Sulpice uttered a loud cry as he rushed toward her:

"Adrienne!"

She withdrew her hand slowly while he was trying to seize it.

"You have nothing to thank me for," she said. "I am a partner, saving, as I best can, the honor of the house. That association is better than Molina's."

"Adieu," she added bitterly.

"Are you going—? Going away?" asked Sulpice, trying to give to his entreaty something like an echo of the love of the former days.

"Whose fault is it?" replied the young woman, in a voice as chilly as steel.

She was no longer the Adrienne of old, the little timid provincial with blushing cheek and trembling gesture. Sorrow, the most terrible of disillusions, had hardened and, as it were, petrified her. Vaudrey felt that to ask forgiveness would be in vain. Time only could soften that poor woman, obstinately unbending in her grief. He needed but to observe her attitude and cutting tones to fully realize that.

"It is quite understood," she continued, treating this question of her happiness as if she were cutting deep into her flesh and severing the tenderest fibres of her being, but without trembling,—"it is quite understood, is it not, that we shall make no scene or scandal? We are separated neither judicially nor even in appearance. We live apart by mutual consent, far from each other, without anything being known by outsiders of this definitive rupture."

"Adrienne!" Sulpice repeated, "it is impossible, you will not leave!"

"Oh!" she said. "I gave myself and I have taken myself back. Your entreaties will not now alter my determination. I am eager to leave Paris. It seems to me that I have regained myself and that I escape from falsity, lies, and infamy, and from a swarm of insects that crawl over my body!—I bid you farewell, and farewell it is!"

"Well, let it be so!" exclaimed Vaudrey. "Go! But if it is a stranger who leaves me, I will accept nothing from her. Here is the authority. Will you take it back?"

"I? No, I will not take it back! If you desire me to be worthy of the name that you have given me, keep it honored, at least, in the sight of the world, since to betray a woman, to mock and insult her, is not dishonoring. I alone have the right to save you from shame. Do not deny me the privilege that I claim. I do not desire that the man who has been my husband should descend to the questionable intrigues of a Molina. You have outraged me enough, do not impose this last insult on me!"

"For the last time, adieu!"

She went out, and he allowed her to disappear, overwhelmed by this living mourning of a faith. She fled and he allowed her to descend the stairway, followed by her femme de chambre. She entered the carriage that was waiting for her below, in Rue Chaussée-d'Antin, but he had not the courage, hopeless as he was, to follow the carriage whose rumbling he heard above the noise of the street as it rolled away more quickly and more heavily than the others, and it seemed to him that its wheels had crushed his bosom.

"Ah! what a wretch I have been!" he said as he struck his knee with his closed fist. "How unhappy I am! Adrienne!"

He rose abruptly, as if moved by a spring, and bounded toward a window which he threw wide open to admit the cold wind of this November evening, and tried to distinguish among the many carriages that rolled through the brownish mud, with their lighted lamps shining like so many eyes, to discover, to imagine the carriage that was bearing Adrienne away. He believed that he recognized it in a vehicle that was threading its way, loaded with trunks, almost out of sight yonder.

He leaned upon the window-sill, and like a shipwrecked sailor who sees a receding ship, he called out, with a loud cry lost in the tempest of that bustling and busy street:

"Adrienne! Adrienne!"

No reply! The carriage had disappeared in the distance, in the fog.

For a moment, Sulpice remained there crushed but drawn by the noise of the street, as if by some whirlpool in the deep sea. Had he been thrown out and been dashed upon the pavements, he would have been happy. Only a void seemed about him, and before him that black hollow in which moved confusedly only strangers who in no way formed part of his life.

This isolation terrified him. At last, he went downstairs in haste, threw himself into a carriage and had himself driven to the railway, intending to see Adrienne again.

"Quickly! quickly! at your best speed!"

The driver whipped up his horses and the carriage-windows clattered with the noise of old iron.

Vaudrey arrived too late. The train had left twenty minutes before. He had reflected too long at his window.

"Besides," he said to himself sadly, "she would not have forgiven me! She will never forget!"

Buried in the corner of the coach that took her away, and closing her eyes, recalling all her past life, so cruelly ironical to-day, Adrienne, disturbed by the noise and rolling of the train that increased her feverish condition, felt her heart swell, and poor, broken creature that she was, called all her strength to her aid to refrain from weeping, from crying out in her grief. She was taking away, back to the country, the half-withered Christmas roses received from Grenoble, and in the morbid confusion of the ideas that clashed in her poor brain, she saw once more Lissac's blanched face and heard Guy tell her again: "It is because you are a virtuous woman that I love you!"

"A virtuous woman! Does he know how to love as well as the others?" she murmured, as she thought of Vaudrey whom she would never see again, and whom she no longer loved.

"See! I am a widow now, and a widow who will never love anyone, and who will never marry again."

VIII

TOC

Alone in Paris now, a body without a soul, distracted, and the prey of ennui, with sad and bitter regret for his wasted life, repeating to himself that Adrienne, far away from him, would never forgive, and was doubtless, at this moment, saying and saying again to herself in her solitude at Grenoble, that these politicians, at least, owed her divorce, Vaudrey, not knowing what to do after a weary day of troubled rest, mechanically entered the Opéra House to distract his eyes if not his mind.

They were rendering *Aida* that evening, and a débutante had been announced as a star.

Sulpice Vaudrey, since Adrienne's departure,—already two weeks!—had wandered about Paris like a damned soul when he did not attend the Chamber, where he experienced the discomforts and the weakness of a fallen man. Weary, disgusted and melancholy, Vaudrey took his seat in the theatre to kill an evening.

There was what was called in the language of a Paris editor, a *swell house*. In front of the stage there was literally a shower of diamonds and the boxes were gaily adorned. The *fauteuils* were occupied by Parisian glories and foreign celebrities. Not a stall in the amphitheatre without its *celebrity*. Chance had placed in this All-Paris gathering, Madame Sabine Marsy and Madame Gerson, the two friends who detested each other. The pretty little Madame Gerson occupied and filled with her prattle, the box of the Prefect of Police—No. 30, in which Monsieur Jouvenet showed his churchwarden's profile. She was talking aloud about her salon, her receptions, her acquaintances. She was eclipsing Madame Marsy with her triumphs. At the back of the box, Monsieur Gerson was sleeping, overcome by fatigue. Madame Gerson laughed on observing Sulpice in the orchestra-stalls.

"See! there is Monsieur Vaudrey! He still looks a little *beaten!*" she said.

And she told her friends, crowded in the box, leaning over her and looking at the pretty, plump bosom of this little, well-made brunette, how Vaudrey was to dine at her house on the very evening when he fell from power.

"Of course, he did not come!" she said. "I remember what Madame Marsy advised me, one day,—she has passed through that in her time: one should think of the invitations to dinner before dismissing a ministry! Oh! it is tiresome; think of it!—One invites the Secretary of the President of the Council to dinner. He is named on the card. He comes. It is all over; he is no longer Secretary of the President, the President of the Council is no longer President, there is no longer a President, perhaps not even a Council; one should be certain of one's titles and rank before accepting an invitation to dinner!"

She laughed heartily and loud, and Madame Marsy, who was half dethroned, fanned herself nervously in her box, or levelled her glass at some one in the audience, affecting a little disdainful manner toward her fair neighbor. A friendship turned to acid.

Vaudrey, looking fatigued and abstracted, sat in his stall during the entr'acte. He looked unconsciously about the theatre and still felt surprised at not receiving salutations and bows, as formerly. He felt that he was becoming a waif. Bah! he consoled himself with the thought that the human race is thus constructed: everything is in success, he gets most who offers most. Why then trouble about it?

His eyes followed the movement of his glass and one after another he saw Madame Marsy, Jouvenet, Madame Gerson, so many living and exceedingly taunting recollections, when suddenly Sulpice trembled, shaken by a keener and almost angry feeling as his glance was directed to a box against the dark-red of which two faces were boldly outlined: those of Rosas and Marianne.

He was excited and unpleasantly piqued.

There before him he saw, between two large pillars, bearing gigantic, gilded masts that seemed to mock at him, the woman whom he had adored and the sight of whom still tore his heart. Pale and dressed in a white gown, she was leaning toward Rosas in a most adorable attitude, with her fair hair half-falling on her white shoulders—those shoulders that he still saw trembling under his kisses, those shoulders on which he might have pressed his burning lips and his teeth.

That livid beauty, strangely adorable, with her hair and ears dazzling with jewels, stood clearly out against the background of the box in which, like an enormous Cyclopean eye, appeared the round, ground glass let into the door, forming a nimbus of light around Marianne's brow. Paler than her, with a sickly but smiling countenance, Rosas showed his bloodless, pale, Spanish face beside that of Marianne, as tragic looking as a portrait by Coello. His tired-looking, pensive, thin face was resting on his hand, which through the opera-glass looked a transparent hand of wax, on which an enormous emerald ring flashed under the gaslight. Monsieur de Rosas did not move.

She, on the contrary, at times inclined toward him, bringing her mouth close to the Castilian's ear, standing out against his reddish beard as if detached therefrom, and she whispered to Rosas words that Vaudrey surmised, and which caused a spark of feverish delight to lighten up José's sad eyes. As she leaned back tilting her chair, her satin corsage below the bust was hidden from Sulpice by the edge of the box and he saw only her face, neck and white shoulders, and she seemed to him to be quite naked, the lines of her serpentine body sharply marked by the red line of the velvet border. And with his greedy glance he continued to trace the curves of that exquisite torso, the back that he had pressed, all the being moulded by voluptuousness, that had been his.

This was the vanishing of his last dream! This love gone, this deception driven into his heart like a knife, his last faith mocked at, insulted, and branded with its true name, *folly*, he felt as if a yawning chasm had been opened in him. Life was over! He was old now and he had wasted, yes, wasted his happiness in playing at youth. He had believed himself loved! Loved! Imbecile that he was!

He felt himself urged by a strong temptation to go to that box and open its door and cry out to that man who had not yet given his name to that woman:

"You do not know her! She is debauchery and falsehood itself!"

It seemed to Vaudrey that at times a bearded face, surmounting a white cravat, appeared behind Rosas and Marianne: the haughty face of Uncle Simon.

While the throng of Egyptians filed on the stage, Sulpice endeavored to turn away his thoughts and remove his glances from that group that attracted him. He still, however, looked at it, in spite of himself, and voluntarily wounded his own heart.

Marianne did not seem to have even noticed him.

The curtain fell and he wandered into the wings, less to be there than to escape that irritating sight. In breathing that atmosphere of a theatre, he experienced a strange sensation that pained and consoled him at the same time. The scene-shifters were rolling back the illuminating apparatus pierced with light, and dragged to the rear the huge white sphinxes and the immense canvas on which the palm-trees were outlined upon a blue sky. Sulpice felt the cruelly ironical sensation of finding himself, disheartened and defeated, once more on the very boards where he had entered the first time, smiling, swelling with joy, saluting and saluted and hearing on every side the same murmur, sweet as a May zephyr:

"Monsieur le Ministre."

It was the same scene, the same dress-coats upon the same luminous boards, the same electric rays that fell around him in the hour of his accession, creating the same vulgar aureole. Some firemen crossed the stage slowly and with a wearied expression made their examinations; some water-carriers were sprinkling the parquet, while others were brushing away the dust. And as if these common duties interested Sulpice, he looked on with a vacant expression, as if his thoughts had taken wing.

Suddenly, in the centre of a group, with his hat on, escorted by bending men, whose lips expressed flattery, Sulpice recognized Lucien Granet, who in the dazzling triumph of his new kingdom, crossed and recrossed the stage, distributing here and there patronizing bows.

The coarse Molina accompanied the new minister, laughing in a loud tone like the sound of a well-filled cash-box suddenly shaken.

Vaudrey felt just as if he had received a blow full in the chest.

He recalled his own meeting as a successful man with Pichereau the beaten one, on these very boards and almost in the same place, and in order to avoid having to endure the friendly ironical hand-shake that Pichereau was approaching him to give—the hand-shake formerly given to Pichereau—he quickly hid himself behind a wing, receiving as he did so, a blow, accompanied with a: *Pardon, monsieur*, from a workman who was pushing along a piece of scenery, and a: *What a clumsy fellow!* from a little danseuse, the tip of whose pink slipper he had unwittingly grazed with his heel.

He turned to the danseuse to apologize, when he perceived a young girl, all in pink, whose blue eyes looked frightened and her cheeks reddened when she recognized Vaudrey. It was Marie Launay, whom he had seen in the greenroom the previous year, who had not yet scored a *success*, while he was *retired*.

"Oh! I did not recognize you," she said. "I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Ministre!"

He wished to make some reply; but this title used by the young girl, ignorant of the political change, grated on his heart like the scratching of a nail and he saw on the other side of the stage, reaching the house by the communicating door, Lucien Granet, surrounded by his staff, and followed by the eternal cortége of powerful ones, among whom Warcolier was talking loudly, and Molina the Tumbler was recognizable by his enormous paunch and loud laugh.

"Perhaps Madame Marsy has asked that this Granet be presented to her," thought Vaudrey as he mockingly recalled how Guy de Lissac ran after him there in order to conduct him to the fashionable woman's box.

How long it was since then!

Sabine Marsy was dethroned. And he!—

He felt a friendly tap on the shoulder as he was moving away, and turning around he saw Warcolier who, having seen him in the distance, doubtless came to him to enjoy the simple pleasure of treating him patronizingly, he who had so long called him *Monsieur le Ministre*.

"Well, my dear Vaudrey, what is the news?" said Warcolier, bearing his head high and smiling with a silly, but an aggressively benign expression, with the superior tone of satisfied fools.

"Nothing!" said Sulpice. "I think Verdi's music is superb!"

"Oh! a little Wagnerian," Warcolier replied, repeating what he had heard. "But what of politics?"

"Ah! politics concerns you now!"

"Well! why," Warcolier replied, "that goes on well. There is a little relaxation! a ministry more—more —"

"More homogeneous!" said Vaudrey, in a slightly mocking tone.

"Exactly. And, after all, the duty of every good citizen is to defend the government under which we live."

Ah! assuredly, Vaudrey considered that his former Secretary of State, now become the vassal of Granet, displayed a rather ridiculous assurance. He smiled as if he would have laughed in his face and turned his back upon him.

Warcolier was not annoyed, for he felt certain that he had angered the former minister, and he was delighted. It was a kick from an ass. The witticism of a fool.

Vaudrey regained his place, much dissatisfied at having come and furious at this pretentious imbecile, when, on leaving the wings, he ran against Lissac who was entering a sort of hall where Louis sat writing the names of the entrances on the sheet.

Guy flushed slightly on seeing him.

"In order to see you, one has to meet you here," said Sulpice. "Why have you not called on me? Is it because I am no longer a minister?"

"That would be a reason for seeing me more frequently," said Lissac. "But it is not that. What do you want me to tell you? You know my sentiments. I don't care to become a bore, as it is called, or a ceaseless prater of morality, which is the same thing. Besides, morality to me is something like the Montyon prize to a harlot! Then, too, I am keeping in my corner and I shall stick to it hereafter closer than ever. I have put the brake on. I am getting old, and I shall bury myself in some suburb and look after my rheumatism."

In Lissac's tone there was an unexpected melancholy.

"Then you will not call on me again?"

"What is the use of worrying you?—Reflect for yourself, my good man! You don't need me to emphasize your blunders. By the way, you know, our mad mistress?—She is in the theatre."

"I have seen her!" said Vaudrey, turning very pale.

"She is not yet a duchess, but that will be patched up in four days. If one were only a rascal, how one could punish the hussy! But what is the use? And this devilish Rosas, who is mad enough over her to tie himself to her and to overlook everything he ought to know, would be capable of marrying her all the same! Much good may it do him!"

"But, tell me," continued Lissac, whose cutting tone suddenly became serious, "have you read the paper?"

"No! What is there in it?"

They were then in the corridor of the Opéra, and heard the prelude to the curtain-raising. Guy took the *Soir* from his pocket and handed it to Vaudrey:

"Here, see!—That poor Ramel!—You were very fond of him, were you not?"

"Ramel!"

Vaudrey had no need to read. He knew everything as soon as Guy showed him the paper and mentioned Denis's name in a mournful tone.

Dead!—He died peacefully in his armchair near the window, as if falling asleep.—"The death is announced," so read the paragraph, "of one of the oldest members of the Parisian press, Monsieur Denis Ramel, who was formerly a celebrated man and for a long time directed the *Nation Française*, once an important journal, now no longer in existence."—Not a word beyond the brief details of his death. No word of praise or regret, merely the commonplace statement of a fact. Vaudrey thought it was a trifling notice for a man who had held so large a place in the public eye.

"What do you think of it?" he said to Lissac. "People are ungrateful."

"Why, what would you have? Why didn't he write operettas?"

They parted after exchanging almost an ordinary grasp of the hand, though, perhaps, somewhat sad. Sulpice wished to cast a last look at Rosas's box. Marianne was standing, her outline clearly defined against the brightly-lighted background of the box. She was holding a saucer in her hand, eating an ice. He saw her once more as she stood near the buffet at Madame Marsy's, stirring her sherbet, a silver-gilt spoon smoothly gliding over her tongue. He closed his eyes, and with a nervous start quickly descended the grand stairway, where he found himself alone.

In order to forget Marianne, he turned his thoughts to Ramel.

Denis had been suffering for a long time. He smiled as he felt the hour of his departure draw near. He wished to disappear without stir, and in a civil way as he said, without attracting attention, *à*

l'Anglaise. Poor man! his wish was accomplished.

Vaudrey threw himself into a carriage and was driven to Batignolles. On the way he thought of the eternal antitheses of Parisian life: the news of the death of a friend communicated to him at the Opéra while a waltz-tune was being played!

And thinking to himself:

"*From the Opéra to the Opéra!* That, moreover, is the history of my ministry—and that of the Granet administration, probably!"

The portress at Rue Boursault led him to Denis Ramel's apartment. Lying on his bed with a kindly smile on his face, the old journalist seemed as if asleep. The cold majesty of death gave a look of power to his face. One might almost believe at times, from the scintillating light placed near his bony brow, that its rigid muscles moved.

Denis Ramel! the sure guide of his youth and his counsellor through life! He recalled his entry on public life, his arrival in Paris, the first articles brought into the old editorial rooms of the *Nation Française*! If for a moment he had been one of the heads of the State, it was due to the man stretched out before him now!

He gently stooped over the corpse and pressed a farewell kiss on the dead man's brow.

As he turned round, he saw a man whom he had not at first seen and who had risen.

The man was very pale and greeted him with a timid air.

Vaudrey recognized Garnier, the man whom he had seen previously at Ramel's, a cough-racked, patient, dying man.

The consumptive had nevertheless outlived the old man.

"It is good of you to have come, monsieur," said the workman. "He loved you dearly."

"He died suddenly then?"

"Yes, and quite alone, while reading a book. He was found thus. They thought he was sleeping. It is all over, he is to be buried to-morrow. Will you come, monsieur?—I did not know who you were when—you know—I said—In fact, it is kind—let us say no more about it—I beg your pardon—There will be a vast gathering at Denis Ramel's funeral, if there are present only a quarter of those whom he has obliged."

Vaudrey was heartbroken the next day. Behind Ramel's coffin, not a person followed. Himself, Garnier, and one or two old women from the house on Rue Boursault, who did not go all the way to the cemetery of Saint-Ouen because it was too far, were all that were present. At the grave Sulpice Vaudrey stood alone with the grave-digger and the workman Garnier. They buried Ramel in a newly-opened part close to the foot of a railway embankment.

For years Ramel had been forgotten, had even forgotten himself, he had let ambitious men pass beyond him, ingrates succeed and selfish men get to the top! He no longer existed! And those very men who had entreated him and called him *dear master* in the old days, soliciting and flattering him, now no longer knew his name. Had he disappeared, or did he still live, that forerunner, a sort of Japanese idol, an ancient, a useless being who had known neither how to make his fortune nor his position, while building up that of others? Nobody knew or cared. Occasionally when circumstances called for it, they laughed at this romantic figure in politics, living like a porter, poor, lost, and buried under a mass of unknown individuals, after having made ministers and unmade governments. Yet, at the news of his death, not one of those who were indebted to him for everything, not a single politician who was well in the saddle, and for whom he had held the stirrup, not a comedian of the Chambers or the theatre who had pleaded with him, urged and flattered him, was to be found there to pay the most ordinary respects of memory to the man who had disappeared. That fateful solitude, added to a keen winter's wind, appeared to Sulpice to be a cruel abandonment and an act of cowardice. Two men followed the cortége of that maker of men!

"Follow journalism and you make the fame of others," said Vaudrey, shaking his head.

"After all," answered Garnier, "there are dupes in every trade, and they are necessarily the most honest."

When this man, who had been a minister, left the grave above which the whistling trains passed, a freezing rain was falling and he passed out of the cemetery in the company of the poor devil who coughed so sadly within the collar of his overcoat that was tightly drawn up over his comforter.

Before leaving him, Vaudrey, with a feeling of timidity, desired to ask him if work was at least fairly good.

"Thanks!" replied Garnier. "I have found a situation—And then—" he shook his head as he pointed out behind the black trees and the white graves, the spot where they had lowered Ramel—"One has always a place when all is over, and that perhaps is the best of all!"

He bowed and Vaudrey left in a gloomy mood. It seemed to him that his life was crumbling away, that he was sowing, shred by shred, his flesh on the road. The black hangings of Ramel's coffin—and he smiled sadly at this new irony—recalled to him the bills of the upholsterers that he still owed for the

furnishing of that fête at the ministry on the last day of his power and his happiness. The official decorations of Belloir and the Gobelins were not sufficient for him. He had desired more modern decorations. He gave the coachman the upholsterer's address, Boulevard des Capucins. He hardly dared to enter and say: "I have come to pay the account of the furnishing supplied at the ministry!" It still seemed like a funeral bill he was paying. This upholsterer's account, paid for forgotten display, seemed to him a sort of mortuary transaction.

When he paid the upholsterer, the latter seemed to wear a cunning smile.

On finding himself again outside, he felt a sensation of relief; being cold, he was inclined to walk with a view to warming his chill blood.

On hearing his name spoken by some one, he turned round and perceived before him his compatriot Jéliotte, the friend of his childhood, the comrade, who, with a smile, cordially extended his hands toward him.

"I told you that you would always find me when I should not appear before you as a courtier! Well, then, here I am," said Jéliotte. "Now you may see me as much as you please!"

"Ah!" said Vaudrey.

Jéliotte took his arm.

"Probably you are going to the Chamber?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Well, I will accompany you!—Ah, since you are no longer minister, my dear friend, and that one does not appear to be a flatterer or a seeker of patronage, one can speak to you—You have faults enough!—You are too confident, too moderate—It is necessary to have a firm hand—And then that could not last. Those situations are all very fine but they are too easily destroyed!—They are like glass, my old friend!—A place is wanted for everybody, is it not?—Bah! must I tell you?—Why, you are happier! I like you better as it is!"

Vaudrey felt strongly inclined to shake off this pretentious ninny who was clinging to his arm.

"That is like me!" continued Jéliotte. "I like my friends better when they are down! What would you have? It is my generous nature. By the way, do you know that the reason I have not seen you before is because I have not been in Paris! I have returned from Isère!"

"Ah!" said Vaudrey, thinking of Adrienne.

"Well, you know, I have still some good news for you. If you have had enough of politics, you can retire at the approaching election!"

"How?" asked Sulpice.

"Why, Thibaudier is stirring up Grenoble. He has got the whole city with him. He is very much liked and is a model mayor. He is a very *mère*—mother—that mayor!—Jéliotte laughed heartily, believing that he was funny.—If there is a list balloted for, and there certainly will be, Thibaudier will head the list. If they had maintained the *scrutin d'arrondissement*, he would have been capable of passing muster, all the same!"

"Against me?"

"Against you. Thibaudier is very popular!—And as firm as a rock!—He thinks you moderate, too moderate, as everybody else does!"

"He?—He was a member of the Plebiscite Committee under the Empire!"

"Exactly! He is an extreme Republican, just as he was an extreme Bonapartist. Oh! Thibaudier is a man, there is no concession with him. Never! He is always the same. He will beat you. Moreover, in Isère, they want a homogeneous representation—"

"Again!" said Vaudrey, who felt that he was pursued by this word.

After all, what did Thibaudier matter to him, or the deputation, the election or politics? Denis Ramel had sounded its depths in his grave in the cemetery of Saint-Ouen.

"Let us drop Thibaudier. By the way," said Jéliotte, "I saw your wife at Grenoble."

Vaudrey grew pale.

He again repeated: "Ah!"

"She is greatly changed. She doesn't leave the house of her uncle, the doctor, nor does she receive any one."

"Is she sick, then?"

"Yes, slightly."

"And you are separated, then?"

"No," replied Sulpice.

Jéliotte smiled.

"Ah! joker, I understand!—Your wife was too strict!—Bless me, a provincial! Bah! that will come right! And if it doesn't, why, you will be free, that's all! But, say, then, if you are not re-elected, you will rejoin her at Grenoble. Oh! your clients will return to you. You are highly esteemed as an advocate, but as a minister, I ought to say—"

"I shall be re-elected," said Vaudrey, in a decisive tone, so as to cut short Jéliotte's interminable phrases.

He was exceedingly unnerved. This man's stupidity would exasperate him. He would never come across any but subjects of irritation or disheartenment. He felt inclined to seek a quarrel with some one. He would have liked to wrench Marianne's wrist with his fingers.

As he entered the hall leading to the assembly, he unwittingly stumbled against a gentleman who was walking rapidly and without saluting him, although he thought that he recognized him.

"Yet I know him!"

He had not gone three steps before he perfectly recalled this eternal lobbyist, always bending before him and clinging to the armchairs of the antechambers, like an oyster to a rock, and whom the messengers, accustomed to his soliciting, bowing and scraping for years past, called *Monsieur Eugène* —out of courtesy.

It was too much! And, in truth, this strange fellow's impoliteness was ill-timed.

Sulpice suddenly turned round, approached Renaudin, and said to him sharply:

"You bowed more obsequiously to me a short time since, monsieur! It seems to me that you were in the ministerial antechambers every morning!"

He expected a haughty reply from Renaudin, and that this man would have compensated him for the others.

Monsieur Eugène smiled as he answered:

"Why, I am still there, monsieur!"

Vaudrey looked at him with a stupefied air, then in an outburst of anger, as if he conveyed in the reply that he hurled at this contemptible fellow, all the projects of his future revenge upon the fools, the knaves, the dull valets and the ungrateful horde, he said, boldly:

"Well, you will salute me again, for I shall return there."

He turned on his heels away from this worthless fellow, and entered the Chamber.

He heard an outburst of bravos; a perfect tempest of enthusiasm reached him. He looked on and bit his lips.

Lucien Granet was in the tribune, and the majority were applauding him.

IX

TOC

Marianne Kayser had the good taste, and perhaps the good sense not to desire a solemnized marriage. It mattered little to her if she entered her duchy surreptitiously, provided she was sovereign there. She would have time later to assume a lofty air under her ducal coronet; meanwhile, she would act with humility while wearing the wreath of orange blossoms. She had discharged Jean and Justine with considerable presents, thinking it undesirable to keep any longer about her people who knew Vaudrey. She had advised Justine to marry Jean.

"Marriage is amusing!" she had said.

"Madame is very kind," answered Justine, "but she sees, herself, that it is better to wait sometimes. There is no hurry, one does not know what may happen."

The future duchess showed that she was but little flattered by the girl's reflections. It was scarcely worth while not to put on airs even with servants, to meet such fools who become over-familiar with you immediately. So, in future, she would strive to be not such a kind-hearted girl. She would keep servants at a distance. They would see. Meanwhile, she was delighted to have made a clean sweep in the house, she could now lie to Rosas as much as she pleased.

Besides, the duke, who was madly in love and whose desire was daily whetted by Marianne, would have been capable, as Lissac said, of accepting everything and forgetting all, so that he might clasp the woman in his arms. She held him entirely in her grasp, under the domination of her intoxicating seductiveness, skilfully granting by a kiss that kindled the blood in José's veins the promise of more ardent caresses. In this very exercise, she assumed a passionate tenderness like a courtesan accustomed to easy defeat who resists her very disposition so that she may not be too soon vanquished. She had ungovernable impulses that carried her toward Rosas as to an unknown pleasure.

The ivory-like pallor of this red-haired man with sunken eyes and trembling lips, almost cold when she sought them under his tawny moustache, pleased her. She sometimes said to him that under his gentle manner he had the appearance of a tiger. "Or of a cat, and that pleases me, for I am myself of that nature. Ah! how I love you!" She felt herself tremble with fear of that being whom she felt that she had conquered and who was entirely hers, but she was strangely troubled in divining some of his secret thoughts.

She was in a hurry to have the marriage concluded. Secretly if it were desired, but legally and positively. She dreaded José's reawakening, as it were. She did not know how, perhaps an anonymous letter, a chance meeting with Guy, an explanation, who knows?

"Although, after all," she thought, "I have been foolish to trouble myself about this Guy. Word threats, that's all!"

The duke had treated her as a virtuous girl, requiring her to declare that she had never loved any but him, or that, at least, no living person had the right to say that he had possessed her. She had sworn all that he desired, saying to Uncle Kayser: "Oaths like that are like political promises, they bind one to nothing!"

The uncle began to entertain an extravagant admiration for his "little Marianne." There is a woman, sure enough! Wonderful elegance! She had promised to have a studio built for him, in which he could, instead of painting, take his ease, stretched on a divan, smoking his pipe, and pass his days in floating to the ceiling his theories of high and moral art! An ideal picture!

He also was in favor of prompt action in respect to the marriage. As little noise as possible. The least hitch and all was lost. What a pity!

"Do you wish me to tell you? It seems to me that you are walking to the mayor's office on eggs!"

"Be easy," Marianne replied, laughing heartily, "there will be none broken."

The marriage was celebrated. At last! as Kayser said. It was a formality rather than a ceremony. Marianne, ravishingly beautiful, was exultant at realizing her dream. Her pale complexion took on tints of the bloom of the azalea pierced by the rays of the sun. Never had Rosas seen her so lovely. How stupidly he had acted formerly in yielding to appearances and flying from her, instead of telling her that he loved her. He had lost whole years of love that he would never recover, even in the blissful fever of this union. Those joys, formerly disdained, were, alas! never to be restored.

Ah! how he would love her now, adore her and keep her with him as his living delight! They would travel; in three days they would set out for Italy. The baggage already filled the house in the Avenue Montaigne, their nuptial mansion. Marianne would take away all the souvenirs that she had preserved in the grisette's little room at Rue Cuvier, where Rosas had so often seen her and where he had said to her: "I love you!"

"People took their pénates," she said, "but I take my fetishes!"

Rosas was wild with joy. The possession of this woman, sought after as mistress, but more intensely ardent than a mistress, with her outbursts of tears and kisses, threw him into ecstasies and possessed him with distracting joy. Something within him whispered, as in the days of early manhood, at the ecstatic hour of sunrise. Already he wished to be on the way to Italy with Marianne, far from the mire and mists of Paris.

"These rain-soaked sidewalks on which the gaslight is reflected seem gloomy to me," he said. "Let us seek the blue skies, Marianne, the orange groves of Nice, the stars of Naples."

She smiled.

"The *blue* again!" she thought. "They all desire it, then?"

She desired to remain a few days longer in Paris, delighted to proclaim her new name in its streets, its Bois and its theatres, where she had been known in her sadness, displaying her desperate melancholy. It seemed to her that, in her present triumph, she crushed both men and things. What was Naples to her? She had not miserably dragged her disillusions and her angers along the Chiaja. Florence might take her for a duchess, as well as any other, but Paris, every corner of which was familiar to her, and where every scene had been, as it were, a frame for her follies, her hopes, her failures, her heartbreaks, her deceptions, all her sorrows of an ambitious woman, which had made her the daring woman that she was,—those boulevards, those paths about the Lake, those proscenium boxes at the theatre, she would see them in her triumph, as she had seen them in her untrammelled follies or in the moments of her ruin and abandonment.

"Two days more! One day more," she said. "After the first representation at the Variétés, we will leave, are you willing?"

"Ah! you Parisienne! Hungry Parisienne!" José replied.

She looked at him with her gray eyes sparkling, and smiling.

"The Variétés?—Don't you know the old rondel?—The one you hummed when you were sick, you know?—It seems to me that I can hear it yet:

> Do you see yonder
> That white house,

Where every Sunday
Under the sweet lilacs—"

Uncle Kayser, ever prudent, advised a speedy departure. He feared he scarcely knew what. He feared everything, "like Abner, and feared only that." Every morning he dreaded seeing some indiscreet articles in the papers respecting the Duke and the Duchesse de Rosas.

"These journalists disregard, without scruple, the wall of private life! It is a moral wall, however!"

At last, they would leave in two days, so it was determined. Rosas had wished to see Guy again for the last time. At Rue d'Aumale they informed him that Monsieur de Lissac was travelling. The shutters of the apartment were not, however, closed. The duke had for a moment been tempted to insist on entering; then he withdrew and returned home without analyzing too closely the feeling of annoyance that came over him. The weather was splendid and dry. He returned on foot to Avenue Montaigne, where he expected to find Marianne superintending her trunks.

On entering the house, the doors of which were open, as at the hour of packing and removing, giving the whole house the appearance of neglect and flight, he was astonished to hear a man's voice, which was neither that of Simon Kayser nor that of the valet, and evidently answering in a violent tone the equally evident angry voice of Marianne.

He did not know this voice, and the noise of a bell-rope hastily pulled, in a fit of manifest anger, made him quicken his steps, as if he instinctively felt that the duchess was in danger.

In the shadow of a dull December evening, the house, with its disordered appearance that resembled a sacking, assumed a sinister aspect. José suddenly felt a sentiment of anguish.

He quickly reached the salon, where Marianne was in a robe de chambre of black satin, and was standing near the chimney with an expression of anger in her eyes, holding the bell-rope, whose iron chain had struck against the wall.

Before her stood a young man with a heavy moustache, his hat tilted over his ear, whom Monsieur de Rosas did not know.

His manner was insolent and he looked thick-set in his black, close-buttoned frock-coat. His style was vulgar, and, with his hands in his pockets, he appeared both low and threatening.

Marianne rang for a servant. She was flushed with rage. She became livid on seeing José.

"What is the matter, then?" asked Rosas coldly, as he stepped between the duchess and the man.

The man looked at him, took off his hat, and in a loud voice that was itself odoriferous, said:

"You are Monsieur le Duc de Rosas, doubtless?"

"Yes," said José, "and may I know—?"

"Nothing! it is nothing!" cried Marianne, running hastily to José and taking his hands as if she desired to drag him away.

"How, nothing?" the man then said, as he took a seat, holding his hat in his hand and placing his fist on his left hip, in the attitude of a fencing-master posing for an elegant effect. "To treat a gentleman as you have just treated me; you call that nothing?"

He turned to Rosas and said, as he saluted him with the airs of a *sub. off.* on the stage:

"Adolphe Gochard! You do not know me, Monsieur le duc?"

"No," said José.

"What do you want?—"

"Ah! pardon me," said Gochard, as he interrupted Marianne. "You rang, you wished to have the presence of the servants. You threatened to have me pitched out of the door by the shoulders. Since you have called, they shall hear me."

The servants, hurrying to the spot, now appeared in the indistinct shadow of the doorway.

"Be off!" cried Marianne.

"Why?" asked the duke severely, and astonished.

"Because madame prefers that I should only tell you what I have to say to you," said Gochard. "Ah! you claimed that I wanted to extort blackmail. I, an old brigadier, extort blackmail? Well, so let it be! Let us sing our little song!"

"Monsieur," said the duke, who had become pallid and whose clenched teeth showed beneath his red beard, "I do not know what Madame la Duchesse de Rosas has said to you, or what you have dared to say to her, but you will leave this place instanter!"

"Is that so?" said the man, as he shrugged his shoulders, which were like those of a suburban bully.

"Just so!"

"That would surprise me!" said Gochard. "But, *saperlipopette*, you are not very polite in your set!"

"Not very polite with boors! You are in my house!"

"Oh! you can't teach me where I am!" said the Dujarrier's lover, with a wink of his eye. "But, madame has been perching at my cost for a long time at Rue Prony and it is upon my signature, yes, my own signature, if you please, that she has obtained the means of renting the Hôtel Vanda. She has not so much to be impudent about!"

"Your signature?—The Hôtel Vanda?"

The duke looked at Marianne, who, as white as a corpse, instead of becoming indignant, entreated and tried to lead her husband away from this man, as if they were in the presence of grave danger.

"Ah! bless me!" cried José, "you will explain to me—!"

"That is very easy!—I was in want of money. The Dujarrier furnished me with a little for that affair. She is too niggardly. I ask madame for some. She assumes a haughty tone, and, instead of comprehending that I come as a friend, she threatens to have me put out of doors. Blackmail! I?—I?—What nonsense!"

A friend! This man dared to say before her who bore the name of Duchesse de Rosas that he came to her as an intimate. This alcoholic braggart had assisted Marianne in sub-renting, he knew not what hôtel, from a wanton!—Rue Prony!—Vanda!—What was there in common between these names and that of the duchess? And the Dujarrier, that Dujarrier whose manner of living was known to the Castilian, how had she become associated with Marianne's life?

Ah! since he had commenced, this Gochard would make an end of it. He would tell everything! Even if he did not wish it, he would speak now. Rosas, frightened himself, and terrified at the prospect of some unknown baseness and doubtful transaction, felt Marianne's hand tremble in his, and by degrees, as Gochard proceeded, the duke realized that Marianne wished to get away and it was he who now retained her; holding the young woman's wrist tightly within his fingers, he forcibly prevented her from escaping, insisting that she should listen and hear everything.

"Ah! if you think that I am afraid of speaking," said Gochard, "you will soon see!"

And then with a sort of swaggering air like that of a fencing-master or tippler, searching for some droll expressions, cowardly avenging himself by jests ejected like so many streams of tobacco, against this woman who had just insulted him, who spoke of blackmail and the police, and of thrusting the miserable fellow out of doors, he told everything that he knew; Marianne's neediness, her weariness, her loves, the Dujarrier connection, the renting of the Hôtel Vanda, the Vaudrey paper and its renewals, his own foolishness as a too artless and tender, good sort of fellow, relying on Claire Dujarrier's word, and not reserving to himself so much per cent in the affair!

Rosas listened open-mouthed, his ears tingling and his blood rushing to his temples, while he sunk his fingers into Marianne's arms, she, meanwhile, glaring at Gochard.

When he had finished, she disengaged herself from Rosas's clutch by an extreme effort, and ran to the rascal and spat in his face.

He lifted his hand to her and said:

"Ah! but!—"

"Begone!" said the duke. "You wish to be paid?"

"The money is not all. I demand respect!" replied Gochard, as he wiped his cheek.

He placed his card on the mantelpiece.

"Adolphe Gochard! there is my address. Besides, Madame knows it. With the pistol, the sabre, or the espadon, as you please! I am afraid of no one."

"You will be paid, you have been told, you shall be paid!" cried Marianne, absolutely crazy and ready to tear him with her nails. "Be off! ruffian! begone, thief!"

"Fiddle-faddle!" replied Adolphe, as he replaced his hat on the side of his bald head. "I have said what I have to say. I do not like to be made a fool of!"

He disappeared, waddling away like a strolling player uncertain of his exit.

Rosas did not even see him go.

He had seized Marianne by both hands and was dragging her toward the window, through which the daylight still entered, and convulsed with rage he penetrated her eyes with his glance, his face looking still more pallid, in contrast with his red beard.

She was terrified. She believed herself at the point of death. She felt that he was going to kill her.

She suddenly fell on her knees.

He still looked at her, leaning over her with the appearance of a madman.

"Vaudrey?—Vaudrey? The man whom I saw at your uncle's?—The man whom I have elbowed with you?—Vaudrey?—This man was your lover, then?"

She was so alarmed that she did not reply.

"You have lied to me, then? But, tell me, wretched woman, have you not lied to me?"

"I loved you and I desired you!" said Marianne.

"Nonsense!" said Rosas, in a strident, deep-chested voice. "You wanted what that rascal wanted: money! You should have asked me for it! I would have given you everything, all my fortune, all! But not my name! Not my name!"

He roughly repelled her.

She remained on her knees. Her hands hung down and rested on the carpet. She looked at it stupefied, hardly distinguishing its rose pattern.

She was certain that she was about to die. José's sudden anger had the fitfulness of a wild beast's. He crushed her with a terrible glance from his bloodshot eyes.

Then he began to laugh hysterically, like a young girl.

"Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!—In a wanton's house yonder in Rue Prony, at Vanda's! Vanda's! At Vanda's, in a harlot's bed, she gave herself, sold herself!—A Rosas, for she is a Rosas! A Duchesse de Rosas now! Idiot! Idiot that I am!"

Marianne would have spoken, entreated, but fear froze her, coming over her flesh and through her veins. She realized that an implacable resolution possessed this trusting man. She found a master this time.

"José!" said Marianne softly, in a timid voice.

He drew himself up as if the mention of this name were an insult.

"Come!" he said calmly, "so let it be. What is done, is done. So much the worse for the fools! But listen carefully."

This little, pale, blond man seemed, in the growing darkness, like a portrait of former days stepped forth from its frame.

His hand of steel again seized Marianne's wrists.

"You are called the Duchesse de Rosas?—You were ambitious for that name, you eagerly desired and struggled hard for that title, did you not? Well, I will not, at least, suffer you to drag it like so many others into intruders' salons, under ironical glances, before mocking smiles and lorgnettes, in view of the papers, and into the gossip of the Paris whose gutter-odor tempts you so strongly that you have not yet been able to leave it. *Parbleu!* you have another lover in it, I wager!—Vaudrey!—Or Lissac and many others!—Is it as I say?"

"I swear to you—"

"Ah! you have lied to me, do not swear! We are about to leave. Not for Italy. It is good for those who love each other. You do not know Fuentecarral?—You are about to make its acquaintance. It is your château now. Yours, yours, since you are a Rosas!"

He again broke into laughter, such as a judge might indulge in who should mock at a condemned man.

"We are about to leave for Toledo. You asked me, one day, about the castle in which I was born. It is a prison, simply a prison. It is habitable nevertheless. But when one enters it, one rarely leaves it. The device that you will bear is not very cheerful, but it is eloquent, you know it: *Hasta la muerte!*—"Until death!"—What do you say about it?—We shall be at Toledo in three days. There are Duchesses de Rosas who will look on you, as you pass, over their plaited collars, and as there were neither adulteresses nor courtesans among them, they will probably ask what the Parisian is doing among them. Well, I will answer them myself, that she is there to live out her life, you understand, there, face to face with me, as you have *desired*, as you said, and no one will have the right to sneer before the Duc de Rosas, who will see no one. Oh! yes, I know that I belong to another period! I am ridiculous, romantic!—I am just that!—You have awakened the half-Arab that lurks in the Castilian. So much the worse for you if you have made me remember that I am a Rosas!"

She remained there, thunderstruck, hearing the duke come and go, his heels ringing in spite of the muffling of the carpet, like the heels of an armed man.

At times, when he passed quite close to her, his attenuated shadow was cast at full length over her and she was filled with terror.

She experienced a feeling of fear, as if she were before an open tomb, or that a puff of damp air chilled her face, or that she was suddenly enveloped by the odor of a cellar. She shuddered and wished to plead with him, murmuring:

"Pity!—Pardon!—"

"Madame la duchesse," Rosas replied coldly, "I am one of those who may be deceived, no one is beyond the reach of treason; but I am not one of those who pardon. I have been extremely foolish, ridiculous, credulous! So much the worse for me! So much the worse for you! Rosas you are, Rosas you will be! I have been your victim, eh? Exactly, that is admitted: you shall be mine! Nothing could be juster, I think! I wish no scandal resulting from a lawsuit or the notoriety of one or more duels. I

should become ridiculous in the eyes of others. But in my own and your eyes, I do not propose to be! I did not desire to be your lover, I have hardly been your husband. Now I am your companion forever. *Hasta la muerte!* For me, the cold of an Escurial has no terror. I am accustomed to it. If it makes you quake, whose fault is it? You willed it. A double suicide! We leave this evening!"

"This evening!" repeated Rosas, terribly, while Marianne, terrified, felt stifled under the crushing weight of that name: *Duchesse de Rosas!*

Simon Kayser came to dine. He was deeply moved when he learned that the housekeeping was upset.

What! the devilish duke knew all then?

And he has taken the matter up in a dramatic fashion?

"Folly!"

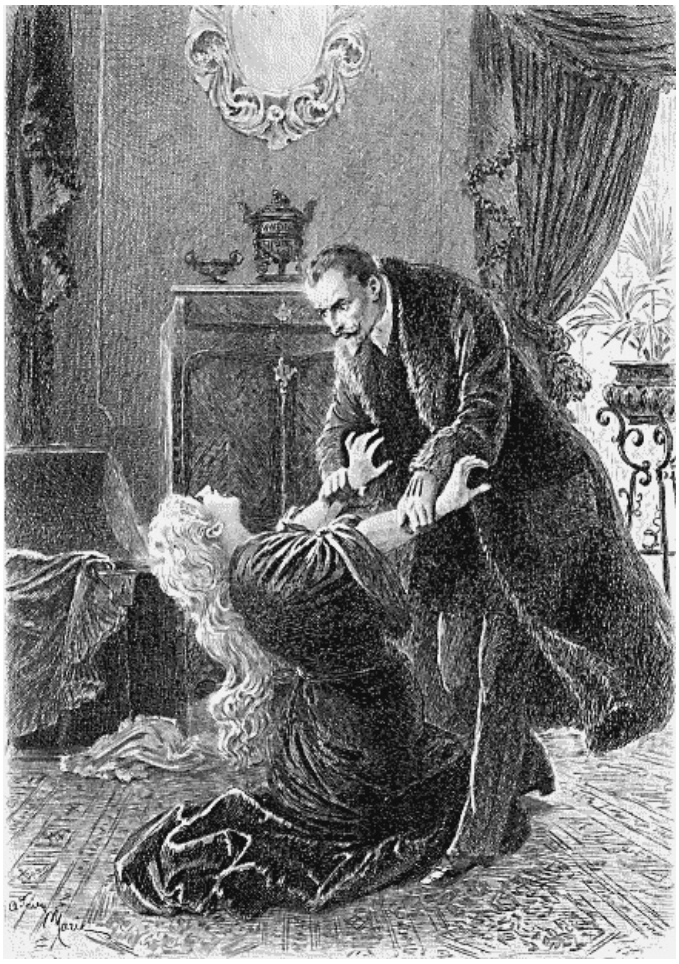
"It is a serious matter, all the same!" said the uncle, after debating with himself as to where he should dine. "He will break her heart as he said, immured yonder within his four walls!—Ah! it was hardly worth while to handle her affairs so cleverly for a Gochard to come on the scenes and spoil everything, the rascal! For myself, I pity the little Marianne!—Her plan of battle was excellently arranged, well disposed and admirably put together! It was superb! And it failed!—Come, it amounts to this in everything: it is said that the pursuit of a great art is to ply the trade of a dupe! Destiny lacks morality! We should perhaps be happier, both, if she were simply a *cocotte* and I engaged in photography!—But!" the brave fellow added: "one has lofty ideas, as-pi-ra-tions, or one has not!—One cannot remake one's self when one is an artist!"

PARIS, 1880-1881.

Part Second Chapter IX

This little, pale, blond man seemed, in the growing darkness, like a portrait of former days stepped forth from its frame.

His hand of steel again seized Marianne's wrists.



List of Illustrations

TOC

Transcriber's Note: Illustrations have been moved to appropriate positions. These page numbers are the original locations.

Transcriber's Note: The following apparent misprints have been corrected for this electronic edition:

wrote Monsieur J.-J. Weiss in the Journal des Débats	*from*	Debats
The President awaited at the Élysée	*from*	Elysée
above all, my dear Vaudrey, do not fear to appear	*from*	Vaudrey, "do not fear
He shut his eyes to picture Marianne.	*from*	"He shut his eyes
asserting the virginity of his efforts	*from*	assertting
There was a council to be held at the Élysée	*from*	Elysée
he took it himself to the President at the Élysée.	*from*	Elysée
He had already been informed at the Élysée	*from*	Elysée
Along the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées	*from*	Champs-Elysées
The solitude of the Champs-Élysées pleased him.	*from*	Champs-Elysées
he had been sitting in the antechamber	*from*	ante-chamber
the corridors of the Opéra house	*from*	Opera
the wings of the Opéra!	*from*	Opera
the knickknacks so much in vogue	*from*	knick-knacks

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