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The Works of Guy de Maupassant

VOLUME II

MONSIEUR PARENT AND OTHER STORIES

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MONSIEUR PARENT

I

Little George was making hills of sand in one of the walks; he took it up with both his hands, made it into a pyramid, and then put a chestnut leaf on the top, and his father, sitting on an iron chair was looking at him with concentrated and affectionate attention, and saw nobody but him in that small public garden which was full of people. All along the circular road other children were occupied in the same manner, or else were indulging in childish games, while nursemaids were walking two and two, with their bright cap ribbons floating behind them, and carrying something wrapped up in lace, on their arms, and little girls in short petticoats and bare legs were talking seriously together, during the intervals of trundling their hoops.

The sun was just disappearing behind the roofs of the *Rue Saint-Lazare*, but still shed its rays obliquely on that little over-dressed crowd. The chestnut trees were lighted up with its yellow rays, and the three fountains before the lofty porch of the church, had the appearance of liquid silver.

Monsieur Parent looked at his son sitting in the dusk, he followed his slightest movements with affection, but accidentally looking up at the church clock, he saw that he was five minutes late, so he got up, took the child by the arm and shook his dress which was covered with sand, wiped his hands and led him in the direction of the *Rue Blanche*, and he walked quickly, so as not to get in after his wife, but as the child could not keep up with him, he took him up and carried him, though it made him pant when he had to walk up the steep street. He was a man of forty, turning gray already, rather stout, and had married, a few years previously, a young woman whom he dearly loved, but who now treated him with the severity and authority of an all-powerful despot. She found fault with him continually for everything that he did, or did not do, reproached him bitterly for his slightest acts, his habits, his simple pleasures, his tastes, his movements and walk, and for having a round stomach and a placid voice.

He still loved her, however, but above all he loved the child which he had had by her, and George, who was now three, had become the greatest joy, and had preoccupation of his heart. He himself had a modest private fortune, and lived without doing anything on his twenty thousand francs a year, and his wife, who had been quite portionless, was constantly angry at her husband's inactivity.

At last he reached his house, put down the child, wiped his forehead and walked upstairs, and when he got to the second floor, he rang. An old servant who had brought him up, one of those mistress-servants who are the tyrants of families, opened the door to him, and he asked her anxiously: "Has Madame come in yet?" The servant shrugged her shoulders: "When have you ever known Madame to come home at half past six, Monsieur?" And he replied with some embarrassment: "Very well; all the better; it will give me time to change my things, for I am very hot."

The servant looked at him with angry and contemptuous pity, and grumbled: "Oh! I can see that well enough, you are covered with perspiration, Monsieur. I suppose you walked quickly and carried the child, and only to have to wait until half past seven, perhaps, for Madame. I have made up my mind not to have it ready at the time. Shall get it for eight o'clock, and if you have to wait, I cannot help it; roast meat ought not to be burnt!" Monsieur Parent, however, pretended not to hear, but only said: "All right! all right. You must wash George's hands, for he has been making sand pits. I will go and change my clothes; tell the maid to give the child a good washing."

And he went into his own room, and as soon as he got in he locked the door, so as to be alone, quite alone. He was so used now to being abused and badly treated, that he never thought himself safe, except when he was locked in. He no longer ventured even to think, reflect and reason with himself, unless he had guarded himself against her looks and insinuations, by locking himself in. Having thrown himself into a chair, in order to rest for a few minutes before he put on

clean linen, he remembered that Julie was beginning to be a fresh danger in the house. She hated his wife, that was quite plain, but she hated his friend Paul Limousin still more, who had continued to be the familiar and intimate friend of the house, after having been the inseparable companion of his bachelor days, which is very rare. It was Limousin who acted as a buffer between his wife and himself, and who defended him ardently, and even severely, against her undeserved reproaches, against crying scenes, and against all the daily miseries of his existence.

But now for six months, Julie had constantly been saying things against her mistress, and repeated twenty times a day: "If I were you, Monsieur, I should not allow myself to be led by the nose like that. Well, well... There, ... everyone according to his nature." And one day, she had even ventured to be insolent to Henriette, who, however, merely said to her husband, at night: "You know, the next time she speaks to me like that, I shall turn her out of doors." But she, who feared nothing; seemed to be afraid of the old servant, and Parent attributed her mildness to her consideration for the old domestic who had brought him up, and who had closed his mother's eyes. Now, however, it was finished, matters could not go on like that much longer, and he was frightened at the idea of what was going to happen. What could he do? To get rid of Julie seemed to him to be such a formidable thing to do, that he hardly ventured to think of it, but it was just as impossible to uphold her against his wife, and before another month now, the situation would become unbearable between the two. He remained sitting there, with his arms hanging down, vaguely trying to discover some means to set matters straight, but without success, and he said to himself: "It is only lucky that I have George ... without him I should be very miserable."

Then he thought he would consult Limousin, but the recollection of the hatred that existed between his friend and the servant made him fear lest the former should advise him to turn her away, and again he was lost in doubts and unhappy uncertainty. Just then the clock struck seven, and he started up. Seven o'clock, and he had not even changed his clothes yet! Then nervous and breathless, he undressed, put on a clean shirt, and hastily finished his toilet, as if he had been expected in the next room for some event of extreme importance, went into the drawing-room, happy at having nothing to fear. He glanced at the newspaper, went and looked out of the window, and then sat down on the sofa again, when the door opened, and the boy came in, washed, brushed and smiling, and Parent took him up in his arms and kissed him passionately; then he tossed him into the air, and held him up to the ceiling, but soon sat down again, as he was tired with all his efforts, and taking George onto his knee, he made him ride a cock-horse, and the child laughed and clapped his hands, and shouted with pleasure, as his father did also, for he laughed until his big stomach shook, for it amused him almost more than it did the child.

He loved him with all the heart of a weak, resigned, ill-used man. He loved with mad bursts of affection, with caresses and with all the bashful tenderness which was hidden in him, and which had never found an outlet, even at the early period of his married life, for his wife had always shown herself cold and reserved. Just then, however, Julie came to the door, with a pale face and glistening eyes, and she said in a voice which trembled with exasperation: "It is half past seven, Monsieur." Parent gave an uneasy and resigned look at the clock and replied: "Yes, it certainly is half past seven." "Well, my dinner is quite ready, now."

Seeing the storm which was coming, he tried to turn it aside. "But did you not tell me when I came in that it would not be ready before eight?" "Eight! what are you thinking about? You surely do not mean to let the child dine at eight o'clock? It would ruin his stomach. Just suppose that he only had his mother to look after him! She cares a great deal about her child. Oh! yes, we will speak about her; she is a mother. What a pity it is that there should be any mothers like her!"

Parent thought it was time to cut short a threatened scene, and so he said: "Julie, I will not allow you to speak like that of your mistress. You understand me, do you not? Do not forget it for the future."

The old servant, who was nearly choked with surprise, turned round and went out, slamming the door so violently after her, that the lusters on the chandelier rattled, and for some seconds it sounded as if a number of little invisible bells were ringing in the drawing room.

George who was surprised at first, began to clap his hands merrily, and blowing out his cheeks, he gave a great *boum* with all the strength of his lungs, to imitate the noise of the door banging. Then his father began to tell him stories, but his mind was so preoccupied that he every moment lost the thread of his story, and the child, who could not understand him, opened his eyes wide, in astonishment.

Parent never took his eyes off the clock; he thought he could see the hands move, and he would have liked to have stopped them, until his wife's return. He was not vexed with her for being late, but he was frightened, frightened of her and of Julie, frightened at the thought of all that might happen. Ten minutes more, would suffice to bring about an irreparable catastrophe, explanations and acts of violence that he did not dare to picture to himself. The mere idea of a quarrel, of their loud voices, of insults flying through the air like bullets, the two women standing face to face, looking at each other and flinging abuse at one another, made his heart beat, and his tongue as parched as if he had been walking in the sun, and made him as limp as a rag, so limp that he no longer had the strength to lift up the child, and to dance him on his knee.

Eight o'clock struck, the door opened once more and Julie came in again. She had lost her look of exasperation, but now she put on an air of cold and determined resolution, which was still more formidable. "Monsieur," she said, "I served your mother until the day of her death, and I have attended to you from your birth until now, and I think it may be said that I am devoted to the

family." She waited for a reply, and Parent stammered: "Why yes, certainly, my good Julie." She continued: "You know quite well that I have never done anything for the sake of money, but always for your sake; that I have never deceived you nor lied to you, that you have never had to find fault with me..." "Certainly, my good Julie." "Very well, then, Monsieur, it cannot go on any longer like this. I have said nothing, and left you in your ignorance, out of respect and liking for you, but it is too much, and everyone in the neighborhood is laughing at you. Everybody knows about it, and so I must tell you also, although I do not like to repeat it. The reason why Madame comes in at any time she chooses is, that she is doing abominable things."

He seemed stupefied, and not to understand, and could only stammer out: "Hold your tongue, you know I have forbidden you ..." But she interrupted him with irresistible resolution. "No, Monsieur, I must tell you everything, now. For a long time Madame has been doing wrong with Monsieur Limousin, I have seen them kiss scores of times behind the doors. Ah! you may be sure that if Monsieur Limousin had been rich, Madame would never have married Monsieur Parent. If you remember how the marriage was brought about, you would understand the matter from beginning to end." Parent had risen, and stammered out, deadly pale: "Hold your tongue hold your tongue or ..." She went on, however: "No, I mean to tell you everything. She married you from interest, and she deceived you from the very first day. It was all settled between them beforehand. You need only reflect for a few moments to understand it, and then, as she was not satisfied with having married you, as she did not love you, she has made your life miserable, so miserable that it has almost broken my heart when I have seen it ..."

He walked up and down the room with his hands clenched, repeating: "Hold your tongue ... hold your tongue ..." for he could find nothing else to say; the old servant, however, would not yield; she seemed resolved on everything, but George, who had been at first astonished, and then frightened at those angry voices, began to utter shrill screams, and remained behind his father, and he roared with his face puckered up and his mouth open.

His son's screams exasperated Parent and filled him with rage and courage. He rushed at Julie with both arms raised, ready to strike her, and exclaiming: "Ah! you wretch! you will send the child out of his senses." He was already touching her, when she said: "Monsieur, you may beat me if you like, me who reared you, but that will not prevent your wife from deceiving you, or alter the fact that your child is not yours ..." He stopped suddenly, and let his arms fall, and he remained standing opposite to her, so overwhelmed that he could understand nothing more, and she added: "You need only look at the child to know who is its father! He is the very image of Monsieur Limousin, you need only look at his eyes and forehead, why, a blind man could not be mistaken in him...."

But he had taken her by the shoulders, and was now shaking her with all his might, while he said: "Viper ... viper! Go out the room, viper! ... go out, or I shall kill you! ... Go out! Go out! ..."

And with a desperate effort he threw her into the next room. She fell onto the table which was laid for dinner, breaking the glasses, and then, getting up, she put it between her master and herself, and while he was pursuing her, in order to take hold of her again, she flung terrible words at him: "You need only go out this evening after dinner, and come in again immediately ... and you will see! ... you will see whether I have been lying! Just try it ... and you will see." She had reached the kitchen door and escaped, but he ran after her, up the back stairs to her bedroom into which she had locked herself, and knocking at the door, he said! "You will leave my house this very instant." "You may be certain of that, Monsieur," was her reply. "In an hour's time I shall not be here any longer."

He then went slowly downstairs again, holding on to the banister, so as not to fall, and went back to the drawing-room, where little George was sitting on the floor, crying; he fell into a chair, and looked at the child with dull eyes. He understood nothing, be knew nothing more, he felt dazed, stupefied, mad, as if he had just fallen on his head, and he scarcely even remembered the dreadful things the servant had told him. Then, by degrees his reason grew clearer like muddy water, and the abominable revelation began to work in his heart.

Julie had spoken so clearly, with so much force, assurance and sincerity, that he did not doubt her good faith, but he persisted in not believing her penetration. She might have been deceived, blinded by her devotion to him, carried away by unconscious hatred for Henriette. However, in measure as he tried to reassure and to convince himself, a thousand small facts recurred to his recollection, his wife's words, Limousin's looks, a number of unobserved, almost unseen trifles, her going out late, their simultaneous absence, and even some almost insignificant, but strange gestures, which he could not understand, now assumed an extreme importance for him and established a connivance between them. Everything that had happened since his engagement, surged through his over-excited brain, in his misery, and he obstinately went through his five years of married life, trying to recollect every detail month by month, day by day, and every disquieting circumstance that he remembered stung him to the quick like a wasp's sting.

He was not thinking of George any more, who was quiet now and on the carpet, but seeing that no notice was being taken of him the boy began to cry. Then his father ran up to him, took him into his arms, and covered him with kisses. His child remained to him at any rate! What did the rest matter? He held him in his arms and pressed his lips onto his light hair, and relieved and composed, he whispered: "George, ... my little George, ... my dear little George ..." But he suddenly remembered what Julie had said! ... Yes! she had said that he was Limousin's child... Oh! It could not be possible, surely! He could not believe it, could not doubt, even for a moment, that he was his own child. It was one of those low scandals which spring from servants' brains!

And he repeated: "George ... my dear little George." The youngster was quiet again, now that his father was fondling him.

Parent felt the warmth of the little chest penetrate to his through their clothes, and it filled him with love, courage and happiness; that gentle heat soothed him, fortified him and saved him. Then he put the small, curly head away from him a little and looked at it affectionately, still repeating: "George! ... Oh! my little George! ..." But suddenly he thought, "Suppose he were to resemble Limousin, ... after all!"

There was something strange working within him, a fierce feeling, a poignant and violent sensation of cold in his whole body, in all his limbs, as if his bones had suddenly been turned to ice. Oh! if he were to resemble Limousin and he continued to look at George, who was laughing now. He looked at him with haggard, troubled eyes, and he tried to discover whether there was any likeness in his forehead, in his nose, mouth or cheeks. His thoughts wandered like they do when a person is going mad, and his child's face changed in his eyes, and assumed a strange look, and unlikely resemblances.

Julie had said: "A blind man could not be mistaken in him." There must, therefore, be something striking, an undeniable likeness! But what? The forehead? Yes, perhaps, Limousin's forehead, however, was narrower. The mouth then? But Limousin wore a beard, and how could any one verify the likeness between the fat chin of the child, and the hairy chin of that man?

Parent thought: "I cannot see anything now, I am too much upset; I could not recognize anything at present ... I must wait; I must look at him well to-morrow morning, when I am getting up." And immediately afterwards he said to himself: "But if he is like me, I shall be saved! saved!" And he crossed the drawing-room in two strides, to examine the child's face by the side of his own in the looking-glass. He had George on his arm, so that their faces might be close together, and he spoke out loud almost without knowing it. "Yes ... we have the same nose ... the same nose ... perhaps, but that is not sure ... and the same look ... But no, he has blue eyes ... Then good heavens! I shall go mad ... I cannot see anything more ... I am going mad!..."

He went away from the glass to the other end of the drawing-room, and putting the child into an easy chair, he fell into another and began to cry; and he sobbed so violently that George, who was frightened at hearing him, immediately began to scream.

The hall bell rang, and Parent gave a bound as if a bullet had gone through him. "There she is," he said ... "What shall I do? ..." And he ran and locked himself up in his room, so at any rate to have time to bathe his eyes. But in a few moments another ring at the bell made him jump again, and he remembered that Julie had left, without the housemaid knowing it, and so nobody would go to open the door. What was he to do? He went himself, and suddenly he felt brave, resolute, ready for dissimulation and the struggle. The terrible blow had matured him in a few moments, and then he wished to know the truth, he wished it with the rage of a timid man, and with the tenacity of an easy-going man, who has been exasperated.

But nevertheless he trembled! Was it fear? Yes . . . Perhaps he was still frightened of her? Does one know how much excited cowardice there often is in boldness? He went to the door with furtive steps, and stopped to listen; his heart beat furiously, and he heard nothing but the noise of that dull throbbing in his chest, and George's shrill voice, who was still crying in the drawing room. Suddenly, however, the noise of the bell over his head startled him like an explosion; then he seized the lock, turned the key and opening the door, saw his wife and Limousin standing before him on the stairs.

With an air of astonishment, which also betrayed a little irritation she said: "So you open the door now? Where is Julie?" His throat felt tight, and his breathing was labored and he tried to reply, without being able to utter a word, so she continued: "Are you dumb? I asked you where Julie is?" And then he managed to say: "She ... she ... has ... gone ..." Whereupon his wife began to get angry. "What do you mean by *gone*? Where has she gone? Why?" By degrees he regained his coolness, and he felt immense hatred for that insolent woman who was standing before him, rise up in him: "Yes, she has gone altogether ... I sent her away ..." "You have sent away Julie?... Why you must be mad." "Yes, I have sent her away because she was insolent ... and because, because she was ill-using the child." "Julie?" "Yes ... Julie." "What was she insolent about?" "About you." "About me?" "Yes, because the dinner was burnt, and you did not come in." "And she said ...?" "She said ... offensive things about you ... which I ought not ... which I could not listen to ..." "What did she say?" "It is no good repeating them." "I want to hear them." "She said it was unfortunate for a man like me to be married to a woman like you, unpunctual, careless, disorderly, a bad mother and a bad wife ..."

The young woman had gone into the anteroom followed by Limousin, who did not say a word at this unexpected position of things. She shut the door quickly, threw her cloak onto a chair, and going straight up to her husband, she stammered out: "You say? ... you say? ... that I am ...?"

He was very pale and calm and replied: "I say nothing, my dear. I am simply repeating what Julie said to me, as you wanted to know what it was, and I wish you to remark that I turned her off just on account of what she said."

She trembled with a violent longing to tear out his beard and scratch his face. In his voice and manner she felt that he was asserting his position as master, although she had nothing to say by way of reply, and she tried to assume the offensive, by saying something unpleasant: "I suppose you have had dinner?" she asked.

"No, I waited for you." She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "It is very stupid of you to wait after half past seven," she said. "You might have guessed that I was detained, that I had a good many things to do, visits and shopping."

And then suddenly, she felt that she wanted to explain how she had spent her time, and she told him in abrupt, haughty words, that having to buy some furniture in a shop a long distance off, very far off, in the *Rue de Rennes*, she had met Limousin at past seven o'clock on the *Boulevard Saint-Germain*, and that then she had gone with him to have something to eat in a restaurant, as she did not like to go to one by herself, although she was faint with hunger. That was how she had dined, with Limousin, if it could be called dining, for they had only had some soup and half a fowl, as they were in a great hurry to get back, and Parent replied simply: "Well, you were quite right. I am not finding fault with you."

Then Limousin, who had not spoken till then, and who had been half hidden behind Henriette, came forward, and put out his hand, saying: "Are you very well?" Parent took his hand, and shaking it gently, replied: "Yes, I am very well." But the young woman had felt a reproach in her husband's last words. "Finding fault! ... Why do you speak of finding fault? ... One might think that you meant to imply something." "Not at all," he replied, by way of excuse. "I simply meant, that I was not at all anxious although you were late, and that I did not find fault with you for it." She, however, took the high hand, and tried to find a pretext for a quarrel. "Although I was late? ... One might really think that it was one o'clock in the morning, and that I spent my nights away from home." "Certainly not, my dear. I said *late*, because I could find no other word. You said you should be back at half past six, and you returned at half past eight. That was surely being late! I understand it perfectly well ... I am not at all surprised ... even. But ... but ... I can hardly use any other word." "But you pronounce them, as if I had been out all night." "Oh! no, ... oh! no ..."

She saw that he would yield on every point, and she was going into her own room, when at last she noticed that George was screaming, and then she asked, with some feeling: "Whatever is the matter with the child?" "I told you, that Julie had been rather unkind to him?" "What has the wretch been doing to him?" "Oh! Nothing much. She gave him a push, and he fell down."

She wanted to see her child, and ran into the dining-room but stopped short at the sight of the table covered with spilt wine, with broken decanters and glasses and overturned salt-cellars. "Who did all that mischief?" she asked. "It was Julie who ..." But she interrupted him furiously: "That is too much, really! Julie speaks of me as if I were a shameless woman, beats my child, breaks my plates and dishes, turns my house upside down, and it appears that you think it all quite natural." "Certainly not, as I have got rid of her!" "Really ... you have got rid of her! ... But you ought to have given her in charge. In such cases, one ought to call in the Commissary of Police!" "But ... my dear ... I really could not ... there was no reason ... It would have been very difficult." She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"There, you will never be anything but a poor, wretched fellow, a man without a will, without any firmness or energy. Ah! she must have said some nice things to you, your Julie, to make you turn her off like that. I should like to have been here for a minute, only for a minute." Then she opened the drawing-room door and ran to George, took him into her arms and kissed him, and said: "Georgie, what is it, my darling, my pretty one, my treasure?" But as she was fondling him he did not speak, and she repeated: "What is the matter with you?" And he having seen, with his child's eyes, that something was wrong, replied: "Julie beat papa."

Henriette turned towards her husband, in stupefaction at first, but then an irresistible desire to laugh shone in her eyes, passed like a slight shiver over her delicate cheeks, made her upper lip curl and her nostrils dilate, and at last a clear, bright burst of mirth came from her lips, a torrent of gayety which was lively and sonorous as the song of a bird. She repeated, with little mischievous exclamations which issued from between her white teeth, and hurt Parent as much as a bite would have done: "Ha!... ha!... ha!... ha! she beat ... she beat ... my husband ... ha!... ha! ha!... How funny!... Do you hear, Limousin? Julie has beaten ... has beaten ... my ... husband ... Oh! dear oh! dear ... how very funny!"

But Parent protested: "No ... no ... it is not true, it is not true ... It was I, on the contrary, who threw her into the dining room so violently that she knocked the table over. The child did not see clearly, I beat her!" "Here, my darling." Henriette said to her boy "did Julie beat papa?" "Yes, it was Julie," he replied. But then, suddenly turning to another idea, she said, "But the child has had no dinner? You have had nothing to eat, my pet?" "No, mamma." Then she again turned furiously onto her husband. "Why, you must be mad, utterly mad! It is half past eight, and George has had no dinner!"

He excused himself as best he could, for he had nearly lost his wits by the overwhelming scene and the explanation, and felt crushed by this ruin of his life. "But, my dear, we were waiting for you, as I did not wish to dine without you. As you come home late every day, I expected you every moment."

She threw her bonnet, which she had kept on till then, into an easy chair, and in an angry voice she said: "It is really intolerable to have to do with people who can understand nothing, who can divine nothing, and do nothing by themselves. So, I suppose, if I were to come in at twelve o'clock at night, the child would have had nothing to eat? Just as if you could not have understood that, as it was after half past seven, I was prevented from coming home, that I had met with some hindrance!..."

Parent trembled, for he felt that his anger was getting the upper hand, but Limousin interposed and turning towards the young woman, he said: "My dear friend, you are altogether unjust. Parent could not guess that you would come here so late, as you never do so, and then, how would you expect him to get over the difficulty all by himself, after having sent away Julie?"

But Henriette was very angry and replied "Well, at any rate, he must get over the difficulty himself, for I will not help him. Let him settle it". And she went into her own room, quite forgetting that her child had not had anything to eat.

Then Limousin immediately set to work to help his friend. He picked up the broken glass which strewed the table and took them out. He replaced the plates, knives and forks and put the child into his high chair. While Parent went to look for the lady's maid, to wait at table; who came in great astonishment. As she had heard nothing in George's room, where she had been working. She soon however, brought in the soup, a burnt leg of mutton, and mashed potatoes.

Parent sat by the side of the child, very much upset and distressed at all that had happened. He gave the boy his dinner, and endeavored to eat something him self. But he could only swallow with an effort, as if his throat had been paralyzed. By degrees, he was seized by an insane desire of looking at Limousin who was sitting opposite to him and making bread pellets, to see whether George was like him, but he did not venture to raise his eyes for some time; at last, however, he made up his mind to do so, and gave a quick, sharp look at the face which he knew so well, although he almost fancied that he had never looked at it carefully, as it looked so different to what he had fancied. From time to time he looked at him, trying to recognize a likeness in the smallest lines of his face, in the slightest features, and then he looked at his son, under the pretext of feeding him.

Two words were sounding in his ears "His father! his father! his father!" They buzzed in his temples at every beat of his heart. Yes, that man, that tranquil man who was sitting on the other side of the table was, perhaps, the father of his son, of George, of his little George. Parent left off eating; he could not manage any more; a terrible pain, one of those attacks of pain which make men scream, roll on the ground and bite the furniture, was tearing at his entrails, and he felt inclined to take a knife and plunge it into his stomach. It would ease him and save him, and all would be over.

For could he live now? Could he get up in the morning, join in the meals, go out into the streets, go to bed at night and sleep with that idea dominating him: "Limousin is Little George's father!" No, he would not have the strength to walk a step, to dress himself, to think of anything, to speak to anybody! Every day, every hour, every moment, he should be trying to know, to guess, to discover this terrible secret. And the little boy, his dear little boy, he could not look at him any more without enduring the terrible pains of that doubt, of being tortured by it to the very marrow of his bones. He would be obliged to live there, to remain in that house, with that child whom he should love and hate! Yes, he should certainly end by hating him. What torture! Oh! If he were sure that Limousin was his father, he might, perhaps, grow calm, become accustomed to his misfortune and his pain, but not to know, was intolerable.

Not to know, to be always trying to find out, to be continually suffering, to kiss the child every moment, another man's child, to take him out for walks, to carry him, to caress him, to love him, and to think continually: "Perhaps he is not my child? Would it not be better not to see him, to abandon him,—to lose him in the streets, or to go away, far away, himself so far away that he should never hear anything more spoken about, never!"

He started when he heard the door open. His wife came. "I am hungry," she said; "are not you also, Limousin?" He hesitated a little, and then said: "Yes, I am, upon my word." And she had the leg of mutton brought in again, while Parent asked himself: "Have they had dinner? Or are they late because they have had a lovers' meeting?"

They both ate with a very good appetite. Henriette was very calm, but laughed and joked, and her husband watched her furtively. She had on a pink dressing gown trimmed with white lace, and her fair head, her white neck and her plump hands stood out from that coquettish and perfumed dress, like from a sea shell, edged with foam. What had she been doing all day with that man? Parent could see them kissing, and stammering out words of ardent love! How was it that he could not manage to know everything, to guess the whole truth, by looking at them, sitting side by side, opposite to him?

What fun they must be making of him, if he had been their dupe since the first day? Was it possible to make a fool of a man, of a worthy man, because his father had left him a little money? Why could one not see these things in people's souls, how was it that nothing revealed to upright hearts the deceits of infamous hearts, how was it that voices had the same sound for adoring as for lying, why was a false, deceptive look the same as a sincere one? And he watched them waiting to catch a gesture, a word, an intonation; then suddenly he thought: "I will surprise them this evening," and he said: "My dear, as I have dismissed Julie, I will see about getting another this very day, and I shall go out immediately to procure one by to-morrow morning, so I may not be in until late."

"Very well," she replied; "go, I shall not stir from here. Limousin will keep me company. We will wait for you." And then, turning to the maid, she said: "You had better put George to bed, and then you can clear away and go up to your own room."

Parent had got up; he was unsteady on his legs, dazed and giddy, and saying: "I shall see you

again later on," he went out, holding onto the wall, for the floor seemed to roll, like a ship. George had been carried out by his nurse, whilst Henriette and Limousin went into the drawing-room, and as soon as the door was shut, he said: "You must be mad, surely, to torment your husband as you do?" She immediately turned on him: "Ah! Do you know that I think the habit you have got into lately, of looking upon Parent as a martyr, is very unpleasant?"

Limousin threw himself into an easy-chair, and crossed his legs: "I am not setting him up as a martyr in the least, but I think that, situated as we are, it is ridiculous to defy this man as you do, from morning till night." She took a cigarette from the mantel-piece, lighted it, and replied: "But I do not defy him, quite the contrary; only, he irritates me by his stupidity ... and I treat him as he deserves." Limousin continued impatiently: "What you are doing is very foolish! However, all women are alike. Look here: he is an excellent, kind fellow, stupidly confiding and good, who never interferes with us, who does not suspect us for a moment, who leaves us quite free and undisturbed, whenever we like, and you do all you can to put him into a rage and to spoil our life."

She turned to him: "I say, you worry me. You are a coward, like all other men are! You are frightened of that poor creature!" He immediately jumped up and said, furiously: "I should like to know what he does, and why you are so set against him? Does he make you unhappy? Does he beat you? Does he deceive you and go with another woman? No, it is really too bad to make him suffer, merely because he is too kind, and to hate him merely because you are unfaithful to him." She went up to Limousin, and looking him full in the face, she said: "And you reproach me with deceiving him? You? You? What a filthy heart you must have?"

He felt rather ashamed, and tried to defend himself: "I am not reproaching you, my dear; I am only asking you to treat your husband gently, because we both of us require him to trust us. I think that you ought to see that."

They were close together; he, tall, dark, with long whiskers, and the rather vulgar manners of a good-looking man, who is very well satisfied with himself; she, small, fair and pink, a little Parisian, half shopkeeper, half one of those of easy virtue, born behind a shop, brought up at its door to entice customers by her looks, and married, accidentally, in consequence to a simple, unsophisticated man, who saw her outside the door every morning when he went out, and every evening when he came home.

"But do you not understand, you great booby," she said, "that I hate him just because he married me, because he bought me; in fact, because everything that he says and does, everything that he thinks, acts on my nerves? He exasperates me every moment by his stupidity, which you call his kindness, by his dullness, which you call his confidence, and then, above all, because he is my husband, instead of you! I feel him between us, although he does not interfere with us much. And then?... and then?... No, it is, after all, too idiotic of him not to guess anything! I wish he would at any rate be a little jealous. There are moments when I feel inclined to say to him: 'Do you not see, you stupid creature, that Paul is my lover?'"

Limousin began to laugh: "Meanwhile, it would be a good thing if you were to keep quiet, and not disturb our life." "Oh! I shall not disturb it, you may be sure! There is nothing to fear, with such a fool. No; but it is quite incomprehensible that you cannot understand how hateful he is to me, how he irritates me. You always seem to like him, and you shake hands with him cordially. Men are very surprising at times."

"One must know how to dissimulate, my dear." "It is no question of dissimulation, but of feeling. One might think that, when you men deceive another, you liked him all the more on that account, while we women hate the man from the moment that we have betrayed him." "I do not see why one should hate an excellent fellow, because one has his wife." "You do not see it?... You do not see it?... You all of you are wanting in that fineness of feeling! However, that is one of those things which one feels, and which one cannot express. And then, moreover, one ought not.... No, you would not understand; it is quite useless. You men have no delicacy of feeling."

And smiling, with the gentle contempt of a debauched woman, she put both her hands onto his shoulders and held up her lips to him, and he stooped down and clasped her closely in his arms, and their lips met. And as they stood in front of the chimney glass, another couple exactly like them, embraced behind the clock.

They heard nothing, neither the noise of the key, nor the creaking of the door, but suddenly Henriette, with a loud cry, pushed Limousin away with both her arms, and they saw Parent, who was looking at them, livid with rage, without his shoes on, and his hat over his forehead. He looked at them, one after the other, with a quick glance of his eyes without moving his head. He appeared mad, and then, without saying a word, he threw himself on Limousin; he seized him as if he were going to strangle him, and flung him into the opposite corner of the room so violently that the other lost his balance, and beating the air with his hand, cracked against the wall with his head.

But when Henriette saw that her husband was going to murder her lover, she threw herself onto Parent, seized him by the neck and digging her ten delicate and rosy fingers into his neck, she squeezed him so tightly, with all the vigor of a desperate woman, that the blood spurted out under her nails, and she bit his shoulder, as if she wished to tear it with her teeth. Parent, half-strangled and choked, loosened his hold on Limousin, in order to shake off his wife, who was hanging onto his neck; and putting his arms around her waist, he flung her also to the other end

of the drawing-room.

Then, as his passion was short-lived, like that of most good-tempered men, and his strength was soon exhausted, he remained standing between the two, panting, worn out, not knowing what to do next. His brutal fury had expended itself in that effort, like the froth of a bottle of champagne, and his unwonted energy ended in a want of breath. As soon as he could speak, however he said: "Go away ... both of you ... immediately ... go away!..."

Limousin remained motionless in his corner, against the wall, too startled to understand anything as yet, too frightened to move a finger, while Henriette, with her hands resting on a small, round table, her head bent forward, with her hair hanging down, the bodice of her dress unfastened and bosom bare, waited like a wild animal which is about to spring, and Parent went on, in a stronger voice: "Go away immediately.... Get out of the house!"

His wife, however, seeing that he had got over his first exasperation, grew bolder, drew herself up, took two steps towards him, and grown almost insolent already, she said: "Have you lost your head?... What is the matter with you?... What is the meaning of this unjustifiable violence?" But he turned towards her, and raising his fist to strike her, he stammered out: "Oh!... oh!... this is too much!... too much!... I ... heard everything! Everything!... do you understand?... Everything!... you wretch ... you wretch ... you are two wretches!... Get out of the house!... both of you!... Immediately ... or I shall kill you!... Leave the house!..."

She saw that it was all over, and that he knew everything, that she could not prove her innocence, and that she must comply, but all her impudence had returned to her, and her hatred for the man, which was exasperated now, drove her to audacity, made her feel the need of bravadoes, and of defying him, and so she said in a clear voice: "Come, Limousin, as he is going to turn me out of doors, I will go to your lodgings with you."

But Limousin did not move, and Parent, in a fresh access of rage, cried out: "Go, will you! go, you wretches!... or else!... or else!..." and he seized a chair and whirled it over his head.

Then Henriette walked quickly across the room, took her lover by the arm, dragged him from the wall to which he appeared fixed, and dragged him towards the door, saying: "Do come, my friend ... you see that the man is mad.... Do come!"

As she went out, she turned round to her husband, trying to think of something that she could do, something that she could invent to wound him to the heart as she left the house, and an idea struck her, one of those venomous, deadly ideas in which all a woman's perfidy shows itself, and she said resolutely: "I am going to take my child with me."

Parent was stupefied and stammered: "Your ... your ... child? You dare to talk of your child?... You venture ... you venture to ask for your child ... after ... after ... Oh! oh! that is too much!... Go, you horrid wretch!... Go!..." She went up to him again, almost smiling, almost avenged already, and defying him, standing close to him, and face to face, she said: "I want my child, and you have no right to keep him, because he is not yours ... do you understand?... he is not yours ... he is Limousin's." And Parent cried out in bewilderment: "You lie ... you lie you wretch!"

But she continued: "You fool! Everybody knows it, except you. I tell you, this is his father. You need only look at him, to see it...."

Parent staggered back from her, and then he suddenly turned round, took a candle and rushed into the next room; almost immediately, however, he returned, carrying little George, wrapped up in his bed clothes, and the child, who had been suddenly awakened, was crying with fright. Parent threw him into his wife's arms, and then, without saying anything more, he pushed her roughly out, towards the stairs, where Limousin was waiting, from motives of prudence.

Then he shut the door again, double-locked it, and bolted it, and he had scarcely got into the drawing-room, when he fell onto the floor at full length.

II

Parent lived alone, quite alone. During the five weeks that followed their separation, the feeling of surprise at his new life, prevented him from thinking much. He had resumed his bachelor life, his habits of lounging about, and he took his meals at a restaurant, as he had done formerly. As he had wished to avoid any scandal, he made his wife an allowance, which was settled by their lawyers. By degrees, however, the thoughts of the child began to haunt him. Often, when he was at home alone at night, he suddenly thought he heard George calling out *papa*, and his heart used to begin to beat, and he got up quickly and opened the door to see whether, by chance, the child might have returned, like dogs or pigeons do. Why should a child have less instinct than an animal?

After finding that he was mistaken, he went and sat down in his armchair again and thought of the boy, and he thought of him for hours, and whole days. It was not only a moral, but still more a physical obsession, a nervous longing to kiss him, to hold and fondle him, to take him onto his knees and dance him. He felt the child's little arms round his neck, his little mouth pressing a kiss on his beard, his soft hair tickling his cheeks, and the remembrance of all those childish ways, made him suffer like the desire for some beloved woman, who has run away, and then twenty or a hundred times a day he asked himself the question, whether he was or was not George's father, and at night, especially, he indulged in interminable speculations on the point,

and almost before he was in bed, he every night recommenced the same series of despairing arguments.

After his wife's departure, he had at first not felt the slightest doubt; certainly the child was Limousin's, but by degrees he began to waver. Henriette's words could not be of any value. She had merely braved him, and tried to drive him to desperation, and calmly weighing the *pros* and *cons*, there seemed to be every chance that she had lied, though perhaps only Limousin could tell the truth. But how was he to find it out, how could he question him or persuade him to confess the real facts?

Sometimes Parent would get up in the middle of the night, fully determined to go and see Limousin and to beg him, to offer him anything he wanted, to put an end to this intolerable misery. Then he went back to bed in despair, reflecting that her lover would also lie, no doubt! He would be even sure to lie, in order to prevent him from taking away the child, if he were really his father. What could he do, then? Absolutely nothing!

And he was sorry that he had thus suddenly brought about the crisis, that he had not taken time for reflection, that he had not waited and dissimulated for a month or two, so as to find out for himself. He ought to have pretended to suspect nothing, and have allowed them to betray themselves at their leisure. It would have been enough for him, to see the other kiss the child, to guess and to understand. A friend does not kiss a child as a father does. He should have watched them behind the doors. Why had he not thought of that? If Limousin, when left alone with George, had not at once taken him up, clasped him in his arms and kissed him passionately; if he had looked on indifferently while he was playing, without taking any notice of him, no doubt or hesitation could have been possible; in that case he would not have been the father, he would not have thought that he was, would not have felt that he was. Thus Parent would have kept the child, while he got rid of the mother, and he would have been happy, perfectly happy.

He tossed about in bed, hot and unhappy, trying to recollect Limousin's ways with the child. But he could not remember anything suspicious, not a gesture, not a look, neither word nor caress. And the child's mother took very little notice of him, and if she had had him by her lover, she would, no doubt, have loved him more.

They had, therefore, separated him from his son, from vengeance, from cruelty, to punish him for having surprised them, and he made up his mind to go the next morning and obtain the magistrate's assistance to gain possession of George, but almost as soon as he had formed that resolution, he felt assured of the contrary. From the moment that Limousin had been Henriette's lover, her adored lover, she would certainly have given herself up to him, from the very first, with that ardor of self-abandonment which makes women conceive. The cold reserve which she had always shown in her intimate relations with him, Parent, was surely also an obstacle to her having been fecundated by his embrace.

In that case he would be claiming, he would take with him, constantly keep and look after, the child of another man. He would not be able to look at him, kiss him, hear him say "Papa" without being struck and tortured by the thought, "he is not my child." He was going to condemn himself to that torture, and that wretched life every moment! No, it would be better to live alone, to grow old alone, and to die alone.

And every day and every night, these dreadful doubts and sufferings, which nothing could calm or end, recommenced. He especially dreaded the darkness of the evening, the melancholy feeling of the twilight. Then a flood of sorrow invaded his heart, a torrent of despair, which seemed to overwhelm him and drive him mad. He was as frightened of his own thoughts as men are of criminals, and he fled before them as one does from wild beasts. Above all things he feared his empty, dark, horrible dwelling, and the deserted streets, in which, here and there, a gas lamp flickers, where the isolated foot passenger whom one hears in the distance seems to be a night-prowler, and makes one walk faster or slower, according to whether he is coming towards you or following you.

And in spite of himself, and by instinct, Parent went in the direction of the broad, well-lighted, populous streets. The light and the crowd attracted him, occupied his mind and distracted his thoughts, and when he was tired of walking aimlessly about amongst the moving crowd, when he saw the foot passengers becoming more scarce, and the pavements less crowded, the fear of solitude and silence drove him into some large *café* full of drinkers and of light. He went there like flies go to a candle, and he used to sit down at one of the little round tables, and ask for a *bock*[1], which he used to drink slowly, feeling uneasy every time that a customer got up to go. He would have liked to take him by the arm, hold him back and beg him to stay a little longer, so much did he dread the time when the waiter would come up to him and say angrily: "Come, Monsieur, it is closing time!"

For every evening he stopped last. He saw them carry in the tables, turn out the gas jets one by one, except his and that at the counter. He looked unhappily at the cashier counting the money and locking it up in the drawer, and then he went, being usually pushed out by the waiters, who murmured: "Another one who has too much! One might think he had no place to sleep in."

As soon as he was alone in the dark street, he began to think of George again, and to rack his brains in trying to discover whether or not he was this child's father.

He thus became in the habit of going to the beer houses, where the continual elbowing of the

drinkers brings you in contact with a familiar and silent public, where the heavy clouds of tobacco smoke lulls disquietude, while the heavy beer dulls the mind and calms the heart. He almost lived there. He was scarcely up, before he went there to find people to occupy his looks and his thoughts, and soon, as he felt too idle to move, he took his meals there. About twelve o'clock he used to rap on the marble table, and the waiter quickly brought a plate, a glass, a table napkin, and his lunch when he had ordered it. When he had done, he slowly drank his cup of black coffee, with his eyes fixed on the decanter of brandy, which would soon procure him an hour or two of forgetfulness. First of all he dipped his lips into the cognac, as if to get the flavor of it with the tip of his tongue. Then he threw his head back and poured it into his mouth, drop by drop, and turned the strong liquor over on his palate, his gums and the mucous membrane of his cheeks, and then he swallowed it slowly, and felt it going down his throat, and into his stomach.

After every meal he thus during more than an hour, sipped three or four small glasses of brandy, which stupefied him by degrees, and then his head dropped onto his chest, he shut his eyes and went to sleep: then, having drunk it, he raised himself on the seat covered with red velvet, pulled his trousers up, and his waistcoat down, so as to cover the linen which appeared between the two, drew down his shirt sleeves and took up the newspapers again, which he had already read in the morning, and read them all through again, from beginning to end, and between four and five o'clock he went for a walk on the boulevards, to get a little fresh air, as he used to say, and then came back to the seat which had been reserved for him, and asked for his absinthe. He used to talk to the regular customers, whose acquaintance he had made. They discussed the news of the day, and political events, and that carried him on till dinner-time, and he spent the evening like he had the afternoon, until it was time to close. That was a terrible moment for him, when he was obliged to go out into the dark, into the empty room full of dreadful recollections, of horrible thoughts and of mental agony. He no longer saw any of his old friends, none of his relations, nobody who might remind him of his past life. But as his apartments were a hell to him, he took a room in a large hotel, a good room on the ground floor, so as to see the passers-by. He was no longer alone in that great building, he felt people swarming round him, he heard voices in the adjoining rooms, and when his former sufferings tormented him too much at the sight of his bed which was turned back, and of his solitary fire-place, he went out into the wide passages and walked up and down them like a sentinel, before all the closed doors, and looked sadly at the shoes standing in couples outside each, women's little boots by the side of men's thick ones, and he thought that no doubt all these people were happy, and were sleeping sweetly side by side or in each other's arms, in their warm bed.

Five years passed thus; five miserable years with no other events except from time to time a passing love affair which lasted a couple of hours at the cost of forty francs. But one day when he was taking his usual walk between the *Madeleine* and the *Rue Drouot*, he suddenly saw a lady, whose bearing struck him. A tall gentleman and a child were with her, and all three were walking in front of him. He asked himself where he had seen them before, when suddenly he recognized a movement of her hand: it was his wife, his wife with Limousin and his child, his little George.

His heart beat as if it would suffocate him, but he did not stop, for he wished to see them and he followed them. They looked like a family of the better middle class. Henriette was leaning on Paul's arm and speaking to him in a low voice and looking at him sideways occasionally. Parent saw her side face, and recognized its graceful outlines, the movements of her lips, her smile and her caressing looks, but the child chiefly took up his attention. How tall and strong he was! Parent could not see his face, but only his long, fair curls. That tall boy with bare legs, who was walking by his mother's side like a little man, was George.

He saw them suddenly, all three, as they stopped in front of a shop. Limousin had grown very gray, had aged, and was thinner; his wife, on the contrary, was as young looking as ever, and had grown stouter; George he would not have recognized, he was so different to what he had been formerly.

They went on again, and Parent followed them, then walked on quickly, passed them and then turned round, so as to meet them face to face. As he passed the child he felt a mad longing to take him into his arms and run off with him, and he knocked against him as if it were accidentally. The boy turned round and looked at the clumsy man angrily, and Parent went off hastily, struck and hurt by the look. He went off like a thief, seized by a horrible fear lest he should have been seen and recognized by his wife and her lover, and he went to his *café* without stopping, and fell breathless into his chair, and that evening he drank three absinthes.

For four months he felt the pain of that meeting in his heart. Every night he saw the three again, happy and tranquil, father, mother and child walking on the boulevard before going in to dinner, and that new vision effaced the old one. It was another matter, another hallucination now, and also a fresh pain. Little George, his little George, the child he had so much loved and so often kissed formerly, disappeared in the far distance, and he saw a new one, like a brother of the first, a little boy with bare legs, who did not know him! He suffered terribly at that thought. The child's love was dead; there was no bond between them; the child would not have held out his arms when he saw him. He had even looked at him angrily.

Then, by degrees he grew calmer, his mental torture diminished, the image that had appeared to his eyes and which haunted his nights became more indistinct and less frequent. He began once more to live nearly like everybody else, like all those idle people who drink beer off marble topped tables and wear out the seats of their trousers on the threadbare velvet of the couches.

He grew old amidst the smoke from the pipes, lost his hair under the gas lights, looked upon his

weekly bath, on his fortnightly visit to the barber's to have his hair cut, and on the purchase of a new coat or hat, as an event. When he got to his *café* in a new hat covering he used to look at himself in the glass for a long time before sitting down, and took it off and put it on again several times following, and at last asked his friend, the lady at the bar, who was watching him with interest, whether she thought it suited him.

Two or three times a year he went to the theater, and in the summer he sometimes spent his evenings at one of the open air concerts in the *Champs-Elysées*. He brought back from them some airs which ran in his head for several weeks, and which he even hummed, beating time with his foot, while he was drinking his beer, and so the years followed each other, slow, monotonous and short, because they were quite uneventful.

He did not feel them glide past him. He went on towards death without fear or agitation, sitting at a table in a *café*, and only the great glass against which he rested his head, which was every day becoming balder, reflected the ravages of time which flies and devours men, poor men.

He only very rarely now thought of the terrible drama which had wrecked his life, for twenty years had passed since that terrible evening, but the life he had led since then had worn him out, and the landlord of his café would often say to him: "You ought to pull yourself together a little, Monsieur Parent; you should get some fresh air and go into the country; I assure you that you have changed very much within the last few months." And when his customer had gone out, he used to say to the barmaid: "That poor Monsieur Parent is booked for another world; it is no good never to go out of Paris. Advise him to go out of town for a day occasionally; he has confidence in you. It is nice weather, and will do him good." And she, full of pity and good will for such a regular customer, said to Parent every day: "Come, Monsieur, make up your mind to get a little fresh air; it is so charming in the country when the weather is fine. Oh! If I could, I would spend my life there."

And she told him her dreams, the simple and poetical dreams of all the poor girls who are shut up from one year's end to the other in a shop and who see the noisy life of the streets go while they think of the calm and pleasant life in the country, of life under the trees, under the bright sun shining on the meadows, of deep woods and clear rivers, of cows lying in the grass, and of all the different flowers, blue, red, yellow, purple, lilac, pink and white, which are so pretty, so fresh, so sweet, all the wild flowers which one picks as one walks, and makes into large nosegays.

She liked to speak to him frequently of her continual, unrealized and unrealizable longing, and he, an old man without hope, was fond of listening to her, and used to go and sit near the counter to talk to Mademoiselle Zoé and to discuss the country with her. Then, by degrees he was seized by a vague desire to go just once and see whether it was really so pleasant there, as she said, outside the walls of the great city, and so one morning he said to her: "Do you know where one can get a good lunch in the neighborhood of Paris?" "Go to the Terrace at Saint-Germain; it is delightful there!"

He had been there formerly, just when he had got engaged, and so he made up his mind to go there again, and he chose a Sunday without any special reason, but merely because people generally do go out on Sundays, even when they have nothing to do all the week, and so one Sunday morning he went to Saint-Germain. It was at the beginning of July, on a very bright and hot day. Sitting by the door of the railway-carriage, he watched the trees and the strangely built little houses in the outskirts of Paris fly past. He felt low-spirited, and vexed at having yielded to that new longing, and at having broken through his usual habits. The view, which was continually changing, and always the same, wearied him. He was thirsty; he would have liked to get out at every station and sit down in the *café* which he saw outside and drink a *bock* or two, and then take the first train back to Paris. And then, the journey seemed very long to him. He used to remain sitting for whole days, as long as he had the same motionless objects before his eyes, but he found it very trying and fatiguing to remain sitting while he was being whirled along, and to see the whole country fly by, while he himself was motionless.

However, he found the Seine interesting, every time he crossed it. Under the bridge at Chatou he saw some skiffs going at great pace under the vigorous strokes of the bare-armed oarsmen, and he thought: "There are some fellows who are certainly enjoying themselves!" And then the train entered the tunnel just before you get to the station at Saint-Germain, and soon stopped at the arrival platform, where Parent got out, and walked slowly, for he already felt tired, towards the *Terrace*, with his hands behind his back, and when he got to the iron balustrade, he stopped to look at the distant horizon. The vast plain spread out before him like the sea, green, and studded with large villages, almost as populous as towns. White roads crossed it, and it was well wooded in places; the ponds at Vesinet glistened like plates of silver, and the distant ridges of Sannois and Argenteuil were covered with light, bluish mist, so that they could scarcely be distinguished. The sun bathed the whole landscape in its full, warm light, and the Seine, which twined like an endless serpent through the plain, flowed round the villages and along the slopes, and Parent inhaled the warm breeze which seemed to make his heart young again, to enliven his spirits and to vivify his blood, and said to himself: "It is very nice here."

Then he went on a few steps, and stopped again to look about him, and the utter misery of his existence seemed to be brought out into full relief, by the intense light which inundated the country. He saw his twenty years of *café*-life, dull, monotonous, heart-breaking. He might have traveled like others did, have gone amongst foreigners, to unknown countries beyond the sea, have interested himself somewhat in everything which other men are passionately devoted to, in arts and sciences, he might have enjoyed life in a thousand forms, that mysterious life which is

either charming or painful, constantly changing, always inexplicable and strange. Now, however, it was too late. He would go on drinking *bock* after *bock* until he died, without any family, without friends, without hope, without any curiosity about anything, and he was seized with a feeling of misery and a wish to run away, to hide himself in Paris, in his *café* and his befuddlement! All the thoughts, all the dreams, all the desires which are dormant in the sloth of stagnating hearts, had reawakened, being brought to life by those rays of sunlight on the plain.

He felt that if he were to remain there any longer, he should lose his head, and so he made haste to get to the *Pavillon Henri IV* for lunch, to try and forget his troubles under the influence of wine and alcohol, and at any rate to have someone to speak to.

He took a small table in one of the arbors, from which one can see all the surrounding country, ordered his lunch and asked to be served at once. Then some more people arrived and sat down at tables near him and he felt more comfortable; he was no longer alone. Three persons were lunching near him, and he had looked at them two or three times without seeing them clearly, as one looks at total strangers, but suddenly a woman's voice sent a shiver through him, which seemed to penetrate to his very marrow. "George," it had said, "will you carve the chicken?" And another replied: "Yes, Mamma."

Parent looked up, and he understood, he guessed immediately who those people were! He should certainly not have known them again. His wife had grown quite white and very stout, an old, serious, respectable lady, and she held her head forwards as she ate, for fear of spotting her dress, although she had a table napkin tucked under her chin. George had become a man; he had a slight beard, that unequal and almost colorless beard which becurls the cheeks of youths. He wore a high hat, a white waistcoat and a single eyeglass, because it looked dandified, no doubt. Parent looked at him in astonishment! Was that George, his son? No, he did not know that young man; there could be nothing in common between them. Limousin had his back to him, and was eating, with his shoulders rather bent.

Well, all three of them seemed happy and satisfied; they came and dined in the country, at well-known restaurants. They had had a calm and pleasant existence, a family existence in a warm and comfortable house, filled with all those trifles which make life agreeable, with affection, with all those tender words which people exchange continually when they love each other. They had lived thus, thanks to him, Parent, on his money, after having deceived him, robbed him, ruined him! They had condemned him, the innocent, the simple-minded, the jovial man to all the miseries of solitude, to that abominable life which he had led between the pavement and the counter, every moral torture and every physical misery! They had made him a useless being, who was lost and wretched amongst other people, a poor old man without any pleasures, or anything to look forward to, and who hoped for nothing from anyone. For him, the world was empty, because he loved nothing in the world. He might go among other nations or go about the streets, go into all the houses in Paris, open every room, but he would not find the beloved face, the face of wife or child, that he was in search of, and which smiles when it sees you, behind any door. And that idea worked upon him more than any other, the idea of a door which one opens, to see and to embrace somebody behind it.

And that was the fault of those three wretches! the fault of that worthless woman, of that infamous friend and of that tall, light-haired lad who put on insolent airs. Now, he felt as angry with the child as he did with the other two! Was he not Limousin's son? Would Limousin have kept him and loved him, otherwise would not Limousin very quickly have got rid of the mother and of the child if he had not felt sure that it was his, certainly his? Does anybody bring up other people's children? And now they were there, quite close to him, those three who had made him suffer so much.

Parent looked at them, irritated and excited at the recollection of all his sufferings and of his despair, and was especially exasperated at their placid and satisfied looks. He felt inclined to kill them, to throw his syphon of Seltzer water at them, to split open Limousin's head, which he every moment bent over his plate and raised it up again immediately. And they continued to live like that, without cares or anxiety of any kind. No! no! That was really too much, after all! He would avenge himself, he would have his revenge now, on the spot, as he had them under his hand. But how? He tried to think of some means, he pictured such dreadful things as one reads of in the newspapers occasionally, but could not hit on anything practical. And he went on drinking to excite himself, to give himself courage not to allow such an occasion to escape him, as he should certainly not meet with it again.

Suddenly an idea struck him, a terrible idea, and he left off drinking to mature it. A smile rose to his lips, and he murmured: "I have got them, I have got them. We will see; we will see." A waiter asked him: "What would you like now, Monsieur?" "Nothing. Coffee and cognac. The best." And he looked at them, as he sipped his brandy. There were too many people in the restaurant for what he wanted to do, so he would wait and follow them, for they would be sure to walk on the terrace or in the forest. When they had got a little distance off, he would join them, and then he would have his revenge, yes, he would have his revenge! It was certainly not too soon, after twenty-three years of suffering. Ah! They little guessed what was to happen to them.

They finished their luncheon slowly, and they talked in perfect security. Parent could not hear what they were saying, but he saw their calm movements, and his wife's face, especially, exasperated him. She had assumed a haughty air, the air of a stout, devout woman, of an irreproachably devout woman, sheathed in principles, iron-clad in virtue. Then they paid the bill and got up, and then he saw Limousin. He might have been taken for a retired diplomatist, for he

looked a man of great importance with his soft, white whiskers, the tips of which fell onto the facings of his coat.

They went out. George was smoking a cigar and had his hat on one side, and Parent followed them. First of all they went up and down the terrace, and calmly admired the landscape, like people who have well satisfied their hunger, and then they went into the forest, and Parent rubbed his hands and followed them at a distance, hiding himself, so as not to excite their suspicion too soon. They walked slowly, enjoying the fresh green, and the warm air. Henriette was holding Limousin's arm and walked upright at his side, like a wife who is sure, and proud of herself. George was cutting off the leaves with his stick, and occasionally jumped over the ditches by the road side, like a fiery young horse ready to gallop off through the trees.

Parent came up to them by degrees, panting rather from excitement and fatigue, for he never walked now. He soon came up to them, but he was seized by fear, an inexplicable fear, and he passed them, so as to turn round and meet them face to face. He walked on, his heart beating, for he knew that they were just behind him now, and he said to himself: "Come, now is the time. Courage! courage! Now is the moment!"

He turned round. They were all three sitting on the grass, at the foot of a huge tree, and they were still talking, and he made up his mind, and came back rapidly, and then stopping in front of them in the middle of the road, he said abruptly, in a voice broken by emotion: "It is I! Here I am! I suppose you did not expect me?" They all three looked at him carefully, for they thought that he was mad, and he continued: "One might think that you did not know me again. Just look at me! I am Parent, Henri Parent. You did not expect me, eh? You thought it was all over, and that you would never see me again. Ah! But here I am once more, you see, and now we will have an explanation."

Henriette was terrified and hid her face in her hands, murmuring: "Oh! Good Heavens!" And seeing this stranger who seemed to be threatening his mother, George sprang up, ready to seize him by the collar, while Limousin, who was thunderstruck, looked at this specter in horror, who, after panting for a few moments, continued: "So now we will have an explanation; the proper moment for it has come! Ah! you deceived me, you condemned me to the life of a convict, and you thought that I should never catch you!"

But the young man took him by the shoulders and pushed him back: "Are you mad?" he asked. "What do you want? Go on your way immediately, or I shall give you a thrashing!" But Parent replied: "What do I want? I want to tell you who these people are." George, however, was in a rage and shook him; was even going to strike him, but the other said: "Just let me go. I am your father ... There, look whether they recognize me now, the wretches!" And the alarmed young man, removed his hands, and turned to his mother, while Parent, as soon as he was released, went towards her.

"Well," he said, "tell him who I am, you! Tell him that my name is Henri Parent, that I am his father because his name is George Parent, because you are my wife, because you are all three living on my money, on the allowance of ten thousand francs which I have made you, since I drove you out of my house. Will you tell him also why I drove you out? Because I surprised you with this beggar, this wretch, your lover! Tell him what I was, an honorable man, whom you married for my money, and whom you deceived from the very first day. Tell him who you are, and who I am ..."

He stammered and panted for breath, in his rage, and the woman exclaimed in a heartrending voice: "Paul, Paul, stop him; make him be quiet; do not let him say this before my son!" Limousin had also got up, and he said in a quite low voice: "Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! Do understand what you are doing!" But Parent continued furiously: "I quite know what I am doing, and that is not all. There is one thing that I will know, something that has tormented me for twenty years." And then turning to George, who was leaning against a tree in consternation, he said: "Listen to me. When she left my house, she thought it was not enough to have deceived me, but she also wanted to drive me to despair. You were my only consolation, and she took you with her, swearing that I was not your father, but that he was your father! Was she lying? I do not know, and I have been asking myself the question for the last twenty years."

He went close up to her, tragic and terrible, and pulling away her hands with which she had covered her face, he continued: "Well, I call upon you now to tell me which of us two is the father of this young man; he or I, your husband or your lover. Come! Come! tell us." Limousin rushed at him, but Parent pushed him back, and sneering in his fury, he said: "Ah! you are brave now! You are braver than you were that day when you ran downstairs because I was going to half murder you. Very well! If she will not reply, tell me yourself. You ought to know as well as she. Tell me, are you this young fellow's father? Come! Come! Tell me!"

Then he turned to his wife again: "If you will not tell me, at any rate tell your son. He is a man, now, and he has the right to know who is his father. I do not know, and I never did know, never, never! I cannot tell you, my boy." He seemed to be losing his senses, his voice grew shrill and he worked his arms about as if he had an epileptic attack. "Come!... Give me an answer.... She does not know.... I will make a bet that she does not know ... No ... she does not know, by Jove!... She used to go to bed with both of us! Ha! ha! ha!... nobody knows ... nobody.... How can any one know such things?... You will not know, either, my boy, you will not know any more than I do.... never.... Look here.... Ask her ... you will find that she does not know.... I do not know either.... You can choose ... yes, you can choose ... him or me.... Choose.... Good evening.... It is all over....

If she makes up her mind to tell you, come and let me know, will you? I am living at the *Hôtel des Continents*.... I should be glad to know.... Good evening.... I hope you will enjoy yourselves very much...."

And he went away gesticulating, and talking to himself under the tall trees, into the empty, cool air, which was full of the smell of the sap. He did not turn round to look at them, but went straight on, walking under the stimulus of his rage, under a storm of passion, with that one fixed idea in his mind, and presently he found himself outside the station. A train was about to start and he got in. During the journey, his anger calmed down, he regained his senses and returned to Paris, astonished at his own boldness, and feeling as aching and knocked up, as if he had broken some bones, but nevertheless he went to have a *bock* at his brewery.

When she saw him come in, Mademoiselle Zoé was surprised and said: "What! back already? are you tired?" "I am tired ... very tired.... You know, when one is not used to going out.... But I have done with it. I shall not go into the country again. I had better have stopped here. For the future, I shall not stir out again."

But she could not persuade him to tell her about his little excursion, although she wanted very much to hear all about it, and for the first time in his life he got thoroughly drunk that night, and had to be carried home.

THE FATHER

I

As he lived at Batignolles and was a clerk in the Public Education Office, he took the omnibus every morning, when he went to the center of Paris, sitting opposite a girl with whom he fell in love.

She went to the shop where she was employed, at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those dark girls whose eyes are so dark that they look like spots, and whose complexion has a look like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street, and she generally had to run to catch the heavy vehicle, and sprang upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then she got inside, rather out of breath, and sitting down, she looked round her.

The first time that he saw her, François Tessier felt that her face pleased him extremely. One sometimes meets one of those women whom one longs to clasp madly in one's arms immediately, without even knowing her. That girl answered to his inward desires, to his secret hopes, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart, without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, in spite of himself, and she grew embarrassed at his looks and blushed. He saw it and tried to turn away his eyes; but he involuntarily fixed them upon her again every moment, although he tried to look in another direction, and in a few days they knew each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full, and got outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time, she had got so far as to greet him with a little smile; and although she always dropped her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid intimacy had become established between them, a daily intimacy of half an hour, and that was certainly one of the most charming half hours in his life, to him. He thought of her all the rest of the time, saw her continually during the long office hours, for he was haunted and bewitched by that floating and yet tenacious recollection which the image of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that the entire possession of that little person would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning now she shook hands with him, and he preserved the feeling of that touch, and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers, until the next day, and he almost fancied that he preserved the imprint of it, on his skin, and he anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride, all the rest of the time, while Sundays seemed to him heart-breaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him, for one Saturday, in spring, she promised to go and lunch with him at Maisons-Laffitte the next day.

II

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: "Before going, I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes, and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say."

She trembled as she hung onto his arm, and she looked down, while her cheeks were pale, but she continued: "I do not want to be deceived in you, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear ... not to do ... not to do anything ... that is at all improper ..."

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy, and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. At the bottom of his heart, he perhaps preferred that it should be so, and yet ... yet during the night he had indulged in anticipations

that sent the hot blood flowing through his veins. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious for him! And he made all a man's usual selfish calculations in love affairs.

As he did not say anything, she began to speak again in an agitated voice, and with tears in her eyes. "If you do not promise to respect me altogether, I shall return home." And so he squeezed her arm tenderly and replied: "I promise, you shall only do what you like." She appeared relieved in mind, and asked with a smile: "Do you really mean it?" And he looked into her eyes and replied: "I swear it." "Now you may take the tickets," she said.

During the journey they could hardly speak, as the carriage was full, and when they got to Maison-Laffitte they went towards the Seine. The sun, which shone full onto the river, onto the leaves and onto the turf seemed to be reflected in them in his brightness, and they went, hand in hand, along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank, and they went on brimming over with happiness, as if they were raised from the earth in their lightness of heart.

At last she said: "How foolish you must think me!"

"Why?" he asked. "To come out like this, all alone with you?" "Certainly not; it is quite natural." "No, no; it is not natural for me—because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month, and every month in the year. I live quite alone with Mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can, and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do not always succeed. But all the same, it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry."

By way of an answer he kissed her ardently on her ear that was nearest him, but she moved from him with an abrupt movement, and getting suddenly angry, she exclaimed: "Oh! Monsieur François, after what you swore to me!" And they went back to Maison-Laffitte.

They had lunch at the *Petit-Havre*, a low house, buried under four enormous poplar trees, by the side of the river. The air, the heat, the light wine, and the sensation of being so close together, made them red and silent, with a feeling of oppression, but after the coffee, they regained all their high spirits, and having crossed the Seine, they started off along the bank, towards the village of La Frette, and suddenly he asked: "What is your name?" "Louise." "Louise," he repeated, and said nothing more.

The river, which described a long curve, bathed a row of white houses in the distance, which were reflected in the water. The girl picked the daisies and made them into a great bunch, whilst he sang vigorously, as intoxicated as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left, a vine-covered slope followed the river, but suddenly François stopped motionless with astonishment: "Oh! look there!" he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a violet colored wood! A kind of great carpet stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles off. She also stood, surprised and delighted, and murmured: "Oh! how pretty!" And crossing a meadow they ran towards that curious low hill, which every year furnishes all the lilac which is drawn through Paris on the carts of the street sellers.

A narrow path went beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing, they sat down.

Swarms of flies were buzzing around them and making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the bright slopes, and from that wood of flowers, a powerful aroma was borne towards them, a breath of perfume, of that sweat of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance, and they embraced gently, then clasped each other close, lying on the grass, without the knowledge of anything except of that kiss. She had closed her eyes and held him in her arms, pressing him to her closely, without a thought, with her reason bewildered, and from head to foot in passionate expectation. And she surrendered herself altogether, without knowing that she had given herself to him. But she soon came to herself with the feeling of a great misfortune, and she began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to start, to return, and to go home immediately, and she kept saying as she walked along quickly: "Good heavens! good heavens!" He said to her: "Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here." But now her cheeks were red and her eyes hollow, and as soon as they got to the railway station in Paris, she left him, without even saying good-bye.

III

When he met her in the omnibus next day, she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: "I want to speak to you; we will get down at the Boulevard."

As soon as they were on the pavement, she said: "We must bid each other good-bye; I cannot meet you again after what has happened." "But why?" he asked. "Because I cannot; I have been culpable, and I will not be so again."

Then he implored her, tortured by desire, maddened by the wish of having her entirely, in the

absolute freedom of nights of love, but she replied firmly: "No, I cannot, I cannot." He, however, only grew all the more excited, and promised to marry her, but she said again: "No." And left him.

For a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and as he did not know her address, he thought that he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened it, she was there. She threw herself into his arms, and did not resist any longer, and for three months she was his mistress. He was beginning to grow tired of her, when she told him she was pregnant, and then he had one idea and wish: To break with her at any price. As, however, he could not do that, not knowing how to begin or what to say, full of anxiety through the fear of that child which was growing, he took a decisive step: One night he changed his lodgings, and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look for the man who had abandoned her, but threw herself at her mother's knees and confessed her misfortune, and some months after, she gave birth to a boy.

IV

Years passed, and François Tessier grew old without there having been any alteration in his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of *bureaucrates*, without hopes and without expectations. Every day he got up at the same time, went through the same streets, went through the same door, passed the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair, and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone, during the day in the midst of his colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings, and he laid by a hundred francs a month, against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the *Champs-Elysées*, to watch the elegant people, the carriages and the pretty women, and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the *Bois de Boulogne* was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the *Parc Monceau*, where the mothers and nurses, sitting on the sides of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly François Tessier started. A woman passed by, holding two children by the hand; a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she.

He walked another hundred yards, and then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting down now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she, it was certainly she, but she had the serious looks of a lady, was dressed simply, and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to go near, but the little boy raised his head, and François Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son, there could be no doubt of that. And as he looked at him, he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go, that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially harrassed him. His son! Oh! If he could only have known, have been sure? But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she had lived, and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress, and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her, and had even recognized the child, his, François Tessier's child, as his own.

He returned to the *Parc Monceau* every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, an irresistible longing, to take his son into his arms, cover him with kisses and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor, with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, longing and jealousy, and from that need of loving one's own children, which nature has implanted into all, and so at last he determined to make a despairing attempt, and going up to her, as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me." She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror, and, taking the two children by the hand she rushed away, dragging them after her, whilst he went home and wept, inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again, but he suffered, day and night, for he was a prey to his paternal love. He would gladly have died, if he could only have kissed his son, he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and after writing her some twenty letters he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination, and then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver, if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

> "Monsieur,
>
> "You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so miserable, so overcome by misery, that my only hope is in you, and therefore I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes."
>
> "I have the honor, etc."

The next day he received the reply:

"Monsieur,

"I shall expect you to-morrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock."

V

As he went up the staircase, François Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent noise in his breast, the noise as of some animal galloping, and he could only breathe with difficulty, and had to hold on to the banisters in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maidservant had opened the door, he asked "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?" "Yes. Monsieur. Kindly come in."

He was shown into the drawing-room; he was alone and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened and a man came in. He was tall, serious, and rather stout, and wore a black frock-coat, and pointed to a chair with his hand. François Tessier sat down, and then said, panting: "Monsieur ... Monsieur ... I do not know whether you know my name ... whether you know ..."

Monsieur Flamel interrupted him. "You need not tell it me, Monsieur, I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you." He spoke in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, and with the common-place stateliness of an honorable man, and François Tessier continued: "Well, Monsieur, I want to say this: I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once to kiss ... the child ..."

Monsieur Flamel got up and rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he said: "Will you bring Louis here." When she had gone out, they remained face to face, without speaking, as they had nothing more to say to one another, and waited. Then, suddenly, a little boy of ten rushed into the room, and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father, but he stopped when he saw a stranger, and Monsieur Flamel kissed him and said: "Now go and kiss that gentleman, my dear." And the child went up to him nicely, and looked at the stranger.

François Tessier had risen, he let his hat fall, and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while Monsieur Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise, but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then François, taking the child up in his arms, began to kiss him wildly all over his face, on his eyes, his cheeks, on his mouth, on his hair, and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses tried to avoid them, turned away his head and pushed away the man's face with his little hands. But suddenly, François Tessier put him down, and cried: "Good-bye! Good-bye!" And he rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

A VAGABOND

For more than a month he had been walking, seeking for work everywhere. He had left his native place, Ville-Avary, in the department of la Manche, because there was no work to be had. He was a journeyman carpenter, twenty-seven years old, a steady fellow and good workman, but for two months, he, the eldest son, had been obliged to live on his family, with nothing to do but to cross his arms in the general stoppage of work. Bread was getting scarce with them; the two sisters went out as charwomen, but earned little, and he, Jacques Randel, the strongest of them all, did nothing because he had nothing to do, and ate the others' soup.

Then he went and inquired at the town-hall, and the mayor's secretary told him that he would find work at the Labor-center, and so he started, well provided with papers and certificates, and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers and a shirt, in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

And he had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in the sun and rain, without ever reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work because he was a carpenter, but at every carpenter's shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stone sawer; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up faggots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days work occasionally, by offering himself at a shamefully low price, in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now, for a week he had found nothing, and he had no money left, and was eating a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors, on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty, and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, as the other pair had already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday, towards the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly

through the sky by the gusts of wind which whistled among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that time of the evening, and on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of thrashed out corn, like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry, with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides, so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth, he grasped his stick tightly in his hand, with a longing to strike the first passer-by whom he should meet, and who might be going home to supper, with all his force.

He looked at the sides of the road with the image of potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any, he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch, and have had a capital supper off the warm, round vegetables, which he would first of all have held burning hot, in his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot, as he had done the day before, which he picked up in a field.

For the last two days he had spoken aloud as he quickened his steps, under the influence of his thoughts. He had never thought, hitherto, as he had given all his mind, all his simple faculties, to his industrial requirements. But now, fatigue, and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open-air, lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, and that question which he was continually asked: "Why do you not remain at home?" Now, distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of his relations who had remained at home and who also had not a half-penny, filled him by degrees with rage, which had been accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which rolled beneath his bare feet, he grumbled, "How wretched! how miserable!... A set of hogs ... to let a man die of hunger ... a carpenter ... a set of hogs ... not two pence ... not two pence ... and now it is raining ... a set of hogs!..."

He was indignant at the injustice of fate, and cast the blame on men, on all men, because nature, that great, blind mother, is unjust, cruel and perfidious, and he repeated through his clenched teeth: "A set of hogs," as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And without thinking about that other injustice, which is human, and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants, and to sit down to table, in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have a right to live, now ... as they are letting me die of hunger ... and yet I only ask for work ... a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart rose to his head like terrible intoxication, and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe, and because the air is the common property of everybody, and so nobody has a right to leave me without bread!"

A fine, thick, icy cold rain was coming down and he stopped and murmured: "How miserable!... another month of walking before I get home...." He was indeed returning home then; for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town where he was known,—and he did not mind what he did,—than on the high roads, where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not going well he would turn day-laborer, be a mason's hodman, ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned tenpence a day, that would at any rate find him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket handkerchief round his neck, to prevent the cold water from running down his back and chest; but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced round him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head, and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on, and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her, without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her, she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug, I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow, and the cow looked at him, and then suddenly giving her a violent kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udders hang down below her; then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs, and he drank for a long time, squeezing her warm swollen teats which tasted of the cow stall, with both hands, and he drank as long as any milk remained in that living well. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked set a light which was shining among the trees, in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again, heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong, thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew onto the workman's face, who said: "You are not cold, inside there!" He put his hands onto her chest and under her legs to find some warmth there, and then the idea struck him, that he might pass the night against that large, warm stomach. So he found a comfortable place and laid his forehead against the great udder

which had quenched his thirst just previously, and then, as he was worn-out with fatigue, he fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other to the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and he soon went soundly to sleep again.

The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining and the sky was bright. The cow was resting, with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide nostrils of moist flesh, and said: "Good-bye, my beauty ... until next time ... you are a nice animal ... Good-bye ..." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours he walked straight on before him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot, some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, drawing a score of frightened, bleating sheep in front of him, whom an active dog kept together, so Randel got up and raising his cap, he said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back, and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass, and looking for a kind compassionate face, before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. "I have been looking for work," he said, "for the last two months and cannot find any, and I have not a half-penny in my pocket." But the semi-gentleman replied: "You should have read the notice which is stuck up at the beginning of the village: *Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.* Let me tell you I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly, I shall have you arrested."

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: "Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for at any rate I should not die of hunger." And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly, side by side, well in sight, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accouterments and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers, and to put them to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them, and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking with military steps, heavily and balancing themselves as if they were doing *the goose* steps; and then suddenly as they passed him, they appeared to have noticed him, and stopped and looked at him angrily and threateningly, and the brigadier came up to him and asked: "What are you doing here?" "I am resting," the man replied, calmly. "Where do you come from?" "If I had to tell you all the places I have been to, it would take me more than an hour." "Where are you going to?" "To Ville-Avary." "Where is that?" "In La Manche." "Is that where you belong to?" "It is." "Why did you leave it?" "To try for work."

The brigadier turned to his gendarme, and said, in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by the same trick: "They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it." And then he continued: "Have you any papers?" "Yes, I have some." "Give them to me."

Randel took his papers out of his pockets; his certificates, those poor worn-out, dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing and then having seen that they were all in order, he gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom someone cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments' further reflection, he asked him: "Have you any money on you?" "No." "None whatever?" "None." "Not even a sou?" "Not even a sou!" "How do you live then?" "On what people give me." "Then you beg?" And Randel answered resolutely: "Yes, when I can."

Then the gendarme said: "I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me." The carpenter got up and said: "Wherever you please." And placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: "Come, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains."

And they set off towards the village, whose red tiles could be seen through the leafless trees a quarter of a league off. Service was just going to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people, who immediately formed two hedges to see the criminal, who was being followed by a crowd of excited children, pass. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes, with hatred in their eyes, and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-Spahl, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of widow Malet, whom the police had been looking for, for six months.

In the hall of the municipal council, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor again, sitting on the magisterial bench, with the schoolmaster by his side. "Ah! ah!" the

magistrate exclaimed, "so here you are again, my fine fellow. I told you I should have you locked up. Well, brigadier, what is he charged with?"

"He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order."

"Show me his papers," the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them, and then said: "Search him;" so they searched him, but found nothing, and the Mayor seemed perplexed, and asked the workman:

"What were you doing on the road this morning?" "I was looking for work." "Work?... On the highroad?" "How do you expect me to find any, if I hid in the woods?"

They looked at each other, with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different, hostile species, and the magistrate continued: "I am going to have you set at liberty but do not be brought up before me again." To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country." But the magistrate replied severely: "Be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village, and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate, give me something to eat," the workman said; but the other grew indignant: "It only remains for us to feed you! Ah! ah! ah! that is rather strong!" But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then, so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The Mayor had risen, and he repeated: "Take him away immediately, or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again, and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village, the brigadier said: "Now off with you, and do not let me catch you about here again, for if I do you will know it."

Randel went off without replying, or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house, where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly in front of it, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger seized him, and almost drove him against the walls of the house, like a wild beast.

He said aloud, in a grumbling voice: "In heaven's name! they must give me some, this time." And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as nobody came he knocked louder and called out: "He! he! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing moved, he went up to the window, and pushed it open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat and cabbage escaped into the cold, outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two covers were laid on the table, and no doubt the proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice, Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimney-piece, between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all, and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat it voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fire-place, and having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots and onions until his plate was full, and having put it onto the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces, and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty, and took one of the bottles off the mantel-piece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass, than he saw it was brandy. So much the better; it was warming and would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He found it very good, certainly, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful, which he drank at two gulps. And then, almost immediately he felt quite merry and light-hearted from the effect of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness were flowing through his system.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, and dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells began to ring; Mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence which guides all beings, and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket, and the brandy bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off walking again, but instead of following the highroad, he ran across the fields towards a wood which he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, light-hearted, glad of what he had done, and so nimble that he sprang over the enclosures of the fields at a single bound and as soon as he was under the trees, he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked,

and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim and his legs as elastic as springs and he started singing the old popular song.

Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss and that soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels, like he used to do as a child, so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up and began over again. And between each time, he began to sing again:

Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

Suddenly he found himself on the edge of a deep road and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant who was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him, raised her head and said: "Was that you singing like that?" He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was at least six feet down, and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her, she exclaimed: "Oh! dear, how you frightened me!"

But he did not hear her for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been in want of everything for two months, and who is drunk; who is young, ardent and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the vigorous flesh of men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders, and without a word, threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall and they rolled over noisily, all the milk was spilt and then she screamed, but comprehending that it would be of no use to call for help in that lonely spot and seeing that he was not going to make an attempt on her life, she yielded without much difficulty, and not very angry neither, for he was a strong young fellow, but really not too rough.

When she got up, the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury and taking off one of her wooden clogs, she threw it, in her turn, at the man to break his head, if he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason for this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered, and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever done before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused, he lost the recollection of everything, and could no longer think about anything; and so he sat down at the foot of a tree, and in five minutes was fast asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake and on opening his eyes he saw two cocked hats of polished leather bending over him, and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier, jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now, he had become a jail-bird, caught by those hunters of criminals who would not let him go again.

"Now start!" the brigadier said, and they set off, It was getting evening and the autumn twilight was settling heavy and dark over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women and girls, excited with anger as if every man had been robbed and every woman violated, wished to see the wretch brought back so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the Mansion-house, where the Mayor was waiting for him, being himself avenged on this vagabond and as soon as he saw him, he cried from far:

"Ah! my fine fellow! here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was and he continued: "I said so. I said so the moment I saw him in the road."

And then with increased satisfaction:

"Oh! you blackguard! Oh! you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

USELESS BEAUTY

I

A very elegant victoria with two beautiful black horses was drawn up in front of the mansion. It was the end of June at about half past five in the afternoon, and the sun shone warm and bright

into the large courtyard.

The Countess de Mascaret came down just as her husband, who was coming home, appeared in the carriage entrance. He stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and grew rather pale. She was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking, with her long oval face, her complexion like gilt ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair; and she got into her carriage without looking at him, without even seeming to have noticed him, with such a particularly high-bred air, that the furious jealousy by which he had been devoured for so long, again gnawed at his heart. He went up to her and said: "You are going for a drive?" She merely replied disdainfully: "You see I am!" "In the Bois de Boulogne?" "Most probably." "May I come with you?" "The carriage belongs to you."

Without being surprised at the tone of voice in which she answered him, he got in and sat down by his wife's side, and said: "Bois de Boulonge." The footman jumped up by the coachman's side, and the horses as usual pawed the ground and shook their heads until they were in the street. Husband and wife sat side by side, without speaking. He was thinking how to begin a conversation, but she maintained such an obstinately hard look, that he did not venture to make the attempt. At last, however, he cunningly, accidentally as it were, touched the Countess's gloved hand with his own, but she drew her arm away with a movement which was so expressive of disgust, that he remained thoughtful, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, and he said: "Gabrielle!" "What do you want?" "I think you are looking adorable."

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen. By that time they were driving up the *Champs Elysées*, towards the *Arc de Triomphe*. That immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky, and the sun seemed to be descending onto it, showering fiery dust on it from the sky.

The stream of carriages, with the sun reflecting from the bright, plated harness and the shining lamps, caused a double current to flow towards the town and towards the wood, and the Count de Mascaret continued: "My dear Gabrielle!"

But then, unable to bear it any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice: "Oh! do leave me in peace, pray; I am not even at liberty to have my carriage to myself, now." He, however, pretended not to hear her, and continued: "You have never looked so pretty as you do to-day."

Her patience was decidedly at an end, and she replied with irrepressible anger: "You are wrong to notice it, for I swear to you, that I will never have anything to do with you in that way again." He was decidedly stupefied and agitated, and his violent nature gaining the upper hand, he exclaimed: "What do you mean by that?" in such a manner as revealed rather the brutal master, than the amorous man. But she replied in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear amidst the deafening noise of the wheels: "Ah! What do I mean by that? What do I mean by that? Now I recognize you again! Do you want me to tell everything?" "Yes." "Everything that has been on my heart, since I have been the victim of your terrible selfishness?"

He had grown red with surprise and anger, and he growled between his closed teeth: "Yes, tell me everything."

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a big, red beard, a handsome man, a nobleman, a man of the world, who passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father, and now for the first time since they had started she turned towards him, and looked him full in the face: "Ah! You will hear some disagreeable things, but you must know that I am prepared for everything, that I fear nothing, and you less than anyone, to-day."

He also was looking into her eyes, and already he was shaking with passion, and he said in a low voice: "You are mad." "No, but I will no longer be the victim of the hateful penalty of maternity, which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! I wish to live like a woman of the world, as I have a right to do, as all women have the right to do."

He suddenly grew pale again, and stammered: "I do not understand you." "Oh! yes; you understand me well enough. It is now three months since I had my last child, and as I am still very beautiful, and as, in spite of all your efforts you cannot spoil my figure, as you just now perceived, when you saw me on the outside flight of steps, you think it is time that I should become pregnant again." "But you are talking nonsense!" "No, I am not. I am thirty, and I have had seven children, and we have been married eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for ten years longer, after which you will leave off being jealous."

He seized her arm and squeezed it, saying: "I will not allow you to talk to me like that, for long." "And I shall talk to you till the end, until I have finished all I have to say to you, and if you try to prevent me, I shall raise my voice so that the two servants, who are on the box, may hear. I only allowed you to come with me for that object, for I have these witnesses who will oblige you to listen to me, and to contain yourself; so now, pay attention to what I say. I have always felt an antipathy for you, and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied, Monsieur. You married me in spite of myself; you forced my parents, who were in embarrassed circumstances, to give me to you, because you were rich, and they obliged me to marry you, in spite of my tears.

"So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I had become your companion, ready to attach myself to you, to forget your coercive and threatening proceedings, in order that I might only remember that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it might be possible for me to love you, you became jealous, you, as no man has ever been before, with the

base, ignoble jealousy of a spy, which was as degrading for you as it was for me. I had not been married eight months, when you suspected me of every perfidiousness, and you even told me so. What a disgrace! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful, and from pleasing people, from being called in drawing-rooms, and also in the newspapers, one of the most beautiful women in Paris, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me, and you hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of pregnancy, until the time when I should disgust every man. Oh! do not deny it! I did not understand it for some time, but then I guessed it. You even boasted about it to your sister, who told me of it, for she is fond of me and was disgusted at your boorish coarseness.

"Ah! Remember our struggles, doors smashed in, and locks forced! For eleven years you have condemned me to the existence of a brood mare on a studfarm. Then as soon as I was pregnant, you grew disgusted with me, and I saw nothing of you for months, and I was sent into the country, to the family mansion, among fields and meadows, to bring forth my child. And when I reappeared, fresh, pretty and indestructible, still seductive and constantly surrounded by admirers, hoping that at last I should live a little like a young rich woman who belongs to society, you were seized by jealousy again, and you recommenced to persecute me with that infamous and hateful desire from which you are suffering at this moment, by my side. And it is not desire of possessing me, for I should never have refused myself to you, but it is the wish to make me unsightly.

"Besides this, that abominable and mysterious circumstance took place, which I was a long time in penetrating (but I grew acute by dint of watching your thoughts and actions): You attached yourself to your children with all the security which they gave you while I bore them in my womb. You felt affection for them, with all your aversion for me, and in spite of your ignoble fears, which were momentarily allayed by your pleasure in seeing me grow stouter.

"Oh! How often have I noticed that joy in you! I have seen it in your eyes and guessed it. You loved your children as victories, and not because they were of your own blood. They were victories over me, over my youth, over my beauty, over my charms, over the compliments which were paid me, and over those who whispered round me, without paying them to me. And you are proud of them, you make a parade of them, you take them out for drives in your break in the Bois de Boulogne, and you give them donkey rides at Montmorency. You take them to theatrical matinees so that you may be seen in the midst of them, so that people may say: 'What a kind father,' and that it may be repeated...."

He had seized her wrist with savage brutality, and he squeezed it so violently that she was quiet, and nearly cried out with the pain, and he said to her in a whisper:

"I love my children. Do you hear? What you have just told me is disgraceful in a mother. But you belong to me; I am master ... your master ... I can exact from you what I like and when I like ... and I have the law ... on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong grip of his large, muscular hand, and she, livid with pain, tried in vain to free them from that vice which was crushing them; the agony made her pant, and the tears came into her eyes. "You see that I am the master, and the stronger," he said. And when he somewhat loosened his grasp, she asked him: "Do you think that I am a religious woman?"

He was surprised and stammered: "Yes." "Do you think that I could lie if I swore to the truth of anything to you, before an altar on which Christ's body is?" "No." "Will you go with me to some church?" "What for?" "You shall see. Will you?" "If you absolutely wish it, yes."

She raised her voice and said: "Philip!" And the coachman, bending down a little, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone towards his mistress, who went on: "Drive to St. Philip-du-Roule's." And the victoria, which had got to the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne, returned to Paris.

Husband and wife did not exchange a word during the drive, and when the carriage stopped before the church, Madame de Mascaret jumped out, and entered it, followed by the count, a few yards behind her. She went, without stopping, as far as the choir-screen, and falling on her knees at a chair, she buried her face in her hands. She prayed for a long time, and he, standing behind her, could see that she was crying. She wept noiselessly, like women do weep when they are in great, poignant grief. There was a kind of undulation in her body, which ended in a little sob, which was hidden and stifled by her fingers.

But Count de Mascaret thought that the situation was lasting too long, and he touched her on the shoulder. That contact recalled her to herself, as if she had been burnt, and getting up, she looked straight into his eyes. "This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing, whatever you may do to me. You may kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours, and one only; that I swear to you before God, who hears me here. That is the only revenge which was possible for me, in return for all your abominable tyrannies of the male, in return for the penal servitude of childbearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? That you will never know! You may suspect everyone, but you will never find out. I gave myself up to him, without love and without pleasure, only for the sake of betraying you, and he also made me a mother. Which is his child? That also you will never know. I have seven; try and find out! I intended to tell you this later, for one has not avenged oneself on a man by deceiving him, unless he knows it. You have driven me to confess it to-day. I now have finished."

She hurried through the church, towards the open door, expecting to hear behind her the quick steps of her husband whom she had defied, and to be knocked to the ground by a blow of his fist, but she heard nothing, and reached her carriage. She jumped into it at a bound, overwhelmed with anguish, and breathless with fear; so she called out to the coachman: "Home!" and the horses set off at a quick trot.

II

Countess de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner time, like a criminal sentenced to death, awaits the hour of his execution. What was he going to do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every moment she looked at the clock. Her lady's maid had come and dressed her for the evening, and had then left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and told her that dinner was ready.

"Has the Count come in?" "Yes, Madame la Comtesse; he is in the dining-room."

For a little moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time previously, foreseeing the tragedy which was being rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a smelling bottle. He rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow, and sat down. The three boys, with their tutor, Abbé Martin, were on her right, and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The Abbé said grace as usual, when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when there were guests present; then they began dinner. The Countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not at all calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the Count scrutinized, now the three boys, and now the three girls, with uncertain, unhappy looks, which traveled from one to the other. Suddenly, pushing his wine-glass from him, it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth, and at the slight noise caused by this little accident, the Countess started up from her chair, and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, almost every moment, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they did not cease to exchange looks, rapid as pistol shots.

The Abbé, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, tried to get up the conversation, and he started various subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The Countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, tried to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing else was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly, her husband said to her, bending forward: "Here, amidst your children, will you swear to me that what you told me just now, is true?"

The hatred which was fermenting in her veins, suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing towards the boys and the left towards the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice, and without any hesitation: "On the head of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth."

He got up, and throwing his table napkin onto the table with an exasperated movement, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall, and then went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: "You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be all right again, in a few days."

Then she talked with the Abbé and with Miss Smith, and had tender, pretty words for all her children; those sweet spoiling mother's ways which unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over, she went into the drawing-room with all her little following. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them for a long time, and then went alone into her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that he would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to defend her human skin, as she defended her life as a woman of the world; and in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver, which she had bought a few days previously. The hours went by, the hours struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was only heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, energetic and nervous, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually, during every moment of his life.

But the first gleams of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtains, without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, much to her stupefaction, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last, and

remained there, with her eyes open, thinking, and barely understanding it all, without being able to guess what he was going to do.

When her maid brought her tea, she at the same time gave her a letter from her husband. He told her that he was going to undertake a long journey, and in a postscript he added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

III

It was at the Opéra, between two of the acts in *Robert the Devil*. In the stalls, the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large amount of white shirt front, in which the gold and precious stones of their studs glistened, and were looking at the boxes full of ladies in low dresses, covered with diamonds and pearls, and who were expanding like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of the faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be looked at, in the midst of the music and of human voices.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra were scanning those rows of elegance, that exhibition of real or false charms, of jewels, of luxury and of pretensions which showed itself off all round the Grand-Théâtre, and one of them Roger de Salnis, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin: "Just look how beautiful Countess de Mascaret still is."

Then the older, in turn, looked through his opera glasses at a tall lady in a box opposite, who appeared to be still very young, and whose striking beauty seemed to appeal to the eyes in every corner of the house. Her pale complexion, of an ivory tint, gave her the appearance of a statue, while a small, diamond coronet glistened on her black hair like a milky way.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful." "How old do you think she is?" "Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child, and I saw her make her *debut* into society when she was quite a girl. She is ... she is ... thirty ... thirty-six." "Impossible!" "I am sure of it." "She looks twenty-five." "She has had seven children." "It is incredible." "And what is more, they are all seven alive, as she is a very good mother. I go to the house, which is a very quiet and pleasant one, occasionally, and she realizes the phenomenon of the family in the midst of the world." "How very strange! And have there never been any reports about her?" "Never." "But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes, and no. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic dramas which one suspects, which one never finds out exactly, but which one guesses pretty nearly." "What is it?" "I do not know anything about it. Mascaret leads a very fast life now, after having been a model husband. As long as he remained a good spouse, he had a shocking temper and was crabbed and easily took offense, but since he has been leading his present, rackety life, he has become quite indifferent; but one would guess that he has some trouble, a worm gnawing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

Thereupon the two friends talked philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknowable troubles, which differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, which were not perceived at first, give rise to in families, and then Roger de Salnis, who was still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera-glasses, said: "It is almost incredible that that woman has had seven children!" "Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she put a stop to her period of production in order to enter into the brilliant period of representation, which does not seem near coming to an end." "Poor women!" "Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! eleven years of pregnancy, for such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, every hope of success, every poetical ideal of a bright life, sacrificed to that abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for reproduction." "What would you have? It is only nature!"

"Yes, but I say that nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against nature, for she is continually bringing us back to an animal state. You may be sure that God has not put anything onto this earth that is clean, pretty, elegant, or accessory to our ideal, but the human brain has done it. It is we who have introduced a little grace, beauty, unknown charm and mystery into creation by singing about it, interpreting it, by admiring it as poets, idealizing it as artists, and by explaining it as learned men who make mistakes, but who find ingenious reasons, some grace and beauty, some unknown charm and mystery in the various phenomena of nature. God only created coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, and who, after a few years of bestial enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the want of power of human decrepitude. He only seems to have made them in order that they may reproduce their species in a dirty manner, and then die like ephemeral insects. I said, *reproduce their species in a dirty manner*, and I adhere to that expression. What is there, as a matter of fact, more ignoble and more repugnant than that filthy and ridiculous act of the reproduction of living beings, against which all delicate minds always have revolted, and always will revolt? Since all the organs which have been invented by this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did he not choose others that were not dirty and sullied, in order to entrust them with that sacred mission, which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by means of material food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh revives itself by means of itself, and at the same time, ideas are communicated by it. The sense of smell,

which gives the vital air to the lungs, imparts all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The ear, which enables us to communicate with our fellow men, has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, the infinite and even physical pleasure, by means of sounds! But one might say that the cynical and cunning Creator wished to prohibit man from ever ennobling and idealizing his commerce with women. Nevertheless, man has found love, which is not a bad reply to that sly Deity, and he has ornamented it so much with literary poetry, that woman often forgets the contact she is obliged to submit to. Those among us who are powerless to deceive themselves, have invented vice and refined debauchery, which is another way of laughing at God, and of paying homage, immodest homage, to beauty.

"But the normal man makes children; just a beast that is coupled with another by law.

"Look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that such a jewel, such a pearl, born to be beautiful, admired, fêted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in providing heirs for the Count de Mascaret?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh: "There is a great deal of truth in all that, but very few people would understand you."

Salnis got more and more animated. "Do you know how I picture God myself?" he said. "As am enormous creative organ, unknown to us, who scatters millions of worlds into space, just as one single fish would deposit its spawn in the sea. He creates, because it is His function as God to do so, but He does not know what He is doing, and is stupidly prolific in His work, and is ignorant of the combinations of all kinds which are produced by his scattered germs. Human thought is a lucky little local, passing accident, which was totally unforeseen and condemned to disappear with this earth, and to recommence perhaps here or elsewhere, the same or different, with fresh combinations of eternally new beginnings. We owe it to this slight accident which has happened to His intellect, that we are very uncomfortable in this world, which was not made for us, which had not been prepared to receive us, to lodge and feed us or to satisfy reflecting beings, and we owe it to Him also that we have to struggle without ceasing against what are still called the designs of Providence, when we are really refined and civilized beings."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively, as he had long known the surprising outbursts of his fancy, asked him: "Then you believe that human thought is the spontaneous product of blind, divine parturition?" "Naturally? A fortuitous function of the nerve-centers of our brain, like some unforeseen chemical action which is due to new mixtures, and which also resemble a product of electricity, caused by friction, or the unexpected proximity of some substance, which lastly resemble the phenomena caused by the infinite and fruitful fermentations of living matter.

"But, my dear fellow, the truth of this must be evident to any one who looks about him. If human thought, ordained by an omniscient Creator, had been intended to be what it has become, altogether different from mechanical thoughts and resignation, so exacting, inquiring, agitated, tormented, would the world which was created to receive the beings which we now are, have been this unpleasant little dwelling place for poor fools, this salad plot, this rocky wooded and spherical kitchen garden where your improvident Providence had destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished on the flesh of slaughtered animals, our brethren, or on raw vegetables nourished by the sun and the rain?

"But it is sufficient to reflect for a moment, in order to understand that this world was not made for such creatures as we are. Thought, which is developed by a miracle in the nerves of the cells in our brain, powerless, ignorant and confused as it is, and as it will always remain, makes all of us, who are intellectual beings, eternal and wretched exiles on earth.

"Look at this earth, as God has given it to those who inhabit it. Is it not visibly and solely made, planted and covered with forests, for the sake of animals? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, everything, and they have nothing to do but to eat, or go hunting and eat each other, according to their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceable manners; He only foresaw the death of creatures which were bent on destroying and devouring each other. Are not the quail, the pigeon and the partridge the natural prey of the hawk? the sheep, the stag and the ox that of the great flesh-eating animals, rather than meat that has been fattened to be served up to us with truffles, which have been unearthed by pigs, for our special benefit?

"As to ourselves, the more civilized, intellectual and refined we are, the more we ought to conquer and subdue that animal instinct, which represents the will of God in us. And so, in order to mitigate our lot as brutes, we have discovered and made everything, beginning with houses, then exquisite food, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, drink, stuffs, clothes, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways, and innumerable machines, besides arts and sciences, writing and poetry. Every ideal comes from us and all the amenities of life, in order to make our existence as simple reproducers, for which divine Providence solely intended us, less monotonous and less hard.

"Look at this theater. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen and unknown by Eternal destinies, comprehensible by our minds alone, a sensual and intellectual distraction, which has been invented solely by and for that discontented and restless little animal that we are.

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God intended her to live in a cave naked, or wrapped up in the skins of wild animals, but is she not better as she is? But, speaking of her, does anyone know why and how her brute of a husband, having such a companion by his side, and especially

after having been boorish enough to make her a mother seven times, has suddenly left her, to run after bad women?"

Grandin replied: "Oh! my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason. He found that always sleeping with her was becoming too expensive in the end, and from reasons of domestic economy, he has arrived at the same principles which you lay down as a philosopher."

Just then the curtain rose for the third act, and they turned round, took off their hats, and sat down.

IV

The Count and Countess Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them home from the opera, without speaking. But suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!" "What do you want?" "Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?" "What?" "The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years." "What do you want? I cannot help it." "Then tell me which of them it is!" "Never!" "Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you, and treat it like the others." "I have not the right to." "You do not see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am constantly asking myself, this question which tortures me each time I look at them. It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize, and who prevents me from loving the others." She repeated: "Then you have really suffered very much?" And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture for me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably towards me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh! I shall never forget the things that you told me, but from that day, I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our ... of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them onto my knee without asking myself: 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior towards you for six years, and even kind and complaisant; tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved, and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me...." "I have been more guilty than you think, perhaps," she replied; "but I could no longer endure that life of continual pregnancy, and I had only one means of driving you from my bed. I lied before God, and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's head, for I have never wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered: "Is that true?" "It is true." But he, in terrible grief, said with a groan: "I shall have fresh doubts that will never end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me: 'It is Jacques, or, it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove them into the courtyard of their mansion, and when it had drawn up in front of the steps, the Count got down first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm, to help her up. And then, as soon as they had reached the first floor, he said: "Can I speak to you for a few moments longer?" And she replied: "I am quite willing."

They went into a small drawing-room, while a footman in some surprise, lit the wax candles. As soon as he had left the room and they were alone, he continued: "How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have remained dumb, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now to-day, you tell me that you have been lying. For six years you have actually allowed me to believe such a thing! No, you are lying now; I do not know why, but out of pity for me, perhaps!"

She replied in a sincere and convincing manner: "If I had not done so, I should have had four more children in the last six years!" And he exclaimed: "Can a mother speak like that?" "Oh!" she replied, "I do not at all feel that I am the mother of children who have never been born. It is enough for me to be the mother of those that I have, and to love them with all my heart. I am, we are women who belong to the civilized world, Monsieur, and we are no longer, and we refuse to be, mere females who restock the earth."

She got up, but he seized her hands. "Only one word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth!" "I have just told you. I have never dishonored you."

He looked her full in the face, and how beautiful she was, with her gray eyes, like the cold sky. In her dark hair dress, on that opaque night of black hair, there shone the diamond coronet, like a milky way. Then he suddenly felt, felt by a kind of intuition, that this grand creature was not merely a being destined to perpetuate his race, but the strange and mysterious product of all our complicated desires which have been accumulating in us for centuries, but which have been turned aside from their primitive and divine object, and which have wandered after a mystic, imperfectly seen and intangible beauty. There are some women like that, who blossom only for our dreams, adorned with every poetical attribute of civilization, with that ideal luxury, coquetry and aesthetic charm which surrounds woman, that living statue who brightens our life, like sensual fevers and immaterial appetites.

Her husband remained standing before her, stupefied at that tardy and obscure discovery, confusedly hitting on the cause of his former jealousy, and understanding it all very imperfectly; and at last he said: "I believe you, for I feel at this moment that you are not lying, and formerly, I really thought that you were." She put out her hand to him: "We are friends, then?" He took her hand and kissed it, and replied: "We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Then he went out, still looking at her, and surprised that she was still so beautiful, and feeling a strange emotion arising in him, which was, perhaps, more formidable than antique and simple love.

FLY

RECOLLECTIONS OF A BOATMAN

He said to us: "I saw some very funny things and some funny girls when I was a boatman, and I have often been tempted to write a little book to be called *On the Seine*, telling all about that careless and vigorous, that merry and poor life, a life of robust and noisy enjoyment, which I led from the time I was twenty until I was thirty.

"I was a mere understrapper without a half-penny, and now I am a man who has made his money, who has spent large sums on a momentary caprice. In my heart, I had a thousand modest and unrealizable desires which gilded my existence with imaginary hopes, though now, I really do not know that any fancy would make me get out of my armchair where I am dozing. How simple and nice and good it is to live like this, between my office in Paris, and the river at Argenteuil. For ten years, the Seine was my only, my absorbing passion. Ah! that beautiful, calm, diversified and stinking river, full of mirage and filth. I think I loved it so much because it seemed to give me a sense of life. Oh! what walks I had along the grassy banks, where my friends the frogs were dreaming on the leaf of a nenuphar, and where the coquettish and delicate water lilies suddenly opened to me, behind a willow, a leaf of a Japanese album, and when the kingfisher flashed past me like a blue flame! How I loved it all, with the instinctive love of eyes which seemed to be all over my body, and with a natural and profound joy.

"Just as other men keep the recollection of sweet and tender nights, so I remember sunrises in the morning mist, floating, wandering vapors, which were as pale as death, before the sun rose, and then as its first rays glided over the meadows, lighted up with a rosy tint, which delighted the heart. And then again, I have recollections of the moon silvering the running, trembling water, with a brightness which made dreams flourish. And all this, the symbol of eternal illusions, rose up in me on that turbid water, which was carrying all the filth of Paris towards the sea.

"And then, what a merry life it was, with my companions. There were five of us, a band of grave men we are now; and as we were all poor, we had founded an inexpressible colony in a horrible eating house at Argenteuil, and which possessed only one bedroom, where I have certainly spent some of the maddest nights of my life. We cared for nothing except for amusing ourselves and rowing, for we all worshiped the oar, with one exception. I remember such singular adventures, such unlikely tricks invented by those five rascals, that no one would believe them at present. People do not live like that any longer, even on the Seine, for our mad fancies which we kept up, have died out now.

"We five only possessed one boat, which we had bought with great difficulty, and on which we laughed, as we shall never laugh again. It was a large yawl, called *The Leaf Turned Upside Down*, rather heavy, but spacious and comfortable. I shall not describe my companions to you. There was one little fellow, called *Petit Bleu*, who was very sharp; a tall man, with a savage look, gray eyes and black hair, who was nick-named *Tomahawk*, the only one who never touched an oar, as he said he should upset the boat; a slender, elegant man, who was very careful about his person, and whom we called *Only-One-Eye*, in remembrance of a recent story about Cladel, and because he wore a single eyeglass, and, lastly, I, who had been baptized Joseph Prunier. We lived together in perfect harmony, and our only regret was that we had no boatwoman, for a woman's presence is almost indispensable on a boat, because it keeps the men's wits and hearts on the alert, because it animates them, and wakes them up and she looks well walking on the green banks with a red parasol. But we did not want an ordinary boatwoman for us five, for we were not very

like the rest of the world. We wanted something unexpected, funny, ready for everything, something, in short, which it would be almost impossible to find. We had tried many without success, girls who had held the tiller, imbecile boatwomen who always preferred wine that intoxicates to water which flows and carries the yawls. We kept them for one Sunday, and then got rid of them in disgust.

"Well, one Saturday afternoon, Only-One-Eye brought us a little thin, lively, jumping, chattering girl, full of drollery, of that drollery which is the substitute for wit among the youthful male and female workpeople who have developed in the streets of Paris. She was nice looking without being pretty, the outline of a woman who had some of everything, one of those silhouettes which draftsmen draw in three strokes on the table in a café after dinner, between a glass of brandy and a cigarette. Nature is like that, sometimes.

"The first evening she surprised us, amused us, and we could not form any opinion about her, so unexpectedly had she come among us; but having fallen into this nest of men, who were all ready for any folly, she was soon mistress of the situation, and the very next day she made a conquest of each one of us. She was quite cracked, into the bargain, and must have been born with a glass of absinthe in her stomach, which her mother drank at the moment she was being delivered, and she never got sober since, for her wet nurse, so she said, recruited her strength with draughts of rum, and she never called the bottles which were standing in a line at the back of the wine merchant's shop anything but 'My holy family.'

"I do not know which of us gave her the name of *Fly*, nor why it was given her, but it suited her very well, and stuck to her, and our yawl every week carried five merry, strong young fellows on the Seine between Asnières and Maison Lafitte, who were ruled from under a parasol of colored paper, by a lively and madcap young person, who treated us like slaves whose business it was to row her about, and whom we were all very fond of.

"We were all very fond of her, for a thousand reasons first of all, but for only one, afterwards. In the stern of our boat, she was a kind of small word mill, chattering to the wind which blew on the water. She chattered ceaselessly, with that slight, continuous noise of those pieces of winged mechanism which turn in the breeze, and she thoughtlessly said the most unexpected, the funniest, the most astonishing things. In that mind, all the parts of which seemed dissimilar, like rags of all kinds and of every color, not sewn, but merely tacked together, there appeared to be as much imagination as in a fairy tale, a good deal of coarseness, indecency, impudence and of the unexpected, and as much breeziness and landscapes as in a balloon voyage.

"We put questions to her, in order to call forth answers which she had found, no one could tell where, and the one with which we teased her most frequently was: 'Why are you called Fly?' And she gave us such unlikely reasons that we left off rowing, in order to laugh. But she pleased us also as a woman; and La Toque, who never rowed, and who sat by her side at the tiller the whole day long, once replied to the usual question: 'Why are you called Fly?' 'Because she is a little Spanish fly.'

"Yes, a little buzzing, exciting fly, not the classical, poisonous, brilliant and mantled Spanish fly, but a little Spanish fly with red wings, which began to disturb the whole crew of *The Leaf Turned Upside Down*. And what stupid jokes were also made about this leaf where this fly had alighted!

"Since the arrival of Fly on our boat, Only-One-Eye had taken a leading, superior part among us, the part of a gentleman who has a wife, towards four others who have not got one, and he abused that privilege so far as to kiss Fly in our presence, when he put her on his knee after meals, and by other prerogatives, which were as humiliating as they were irritating.

"They had been isolated in the sleeping-room by means of a curtain, but I soon perceived that my companions and I had the same arguments in our minds, in our solitude: 'Why, and in virtue of what law of exception, or of what unacceptable principle, should Fly, who does not appear troubled by any prejudices, remain faithful to her lover, while wives in the best are not faithful to their husbands.'

"Our reflections were quite right, and we were soon convinced of it, and we ought only to have made them sooner, so as not to have needed to regret any lost time, for Fly deceived Only-One-Eye, with all the others of the crew of the *Leaf Turned Upside Down*, and she deceived him without making any difficulties, without any resistance, the first time any of us asked her.

"Of course, modest people will be terribly shocked! But why? What courtesan who happens to be in the fashion, but has a dozen lovers, and which of those lovers is stupid enough not to know it? Is it not the correct thing to have an evening at the house of a celebrated and marked courtesan, just as one has an evening at the *Opéra, the Théâtre Français or the Odeon*? Ten men subscribe together to keep a mistress just as they do to possess a race horse, which only one jockey mounts, and this is a correct picture of the favored lover who does not pay anything.

"From delicacy they left Fly to Only-One-Eye from Saturday night to Monday morning, and we only deceived him during the week, in Paris, from the Seine, which, for boatmen like us, was hardly deceiving him at all. The situation had this peculiarity, that the four freebooters of Fly's favors were quite aware of this partition of her among themselves, and that they spoke of it to each other, and even then, with allusions that made her laugh very much. Only-One-Eye alone seemed to know nothing, and that peculiar position gave rise to some embarrassment between him and us, and seemed to separate him from us, to isolate him, to raise a barrier across our former confidence and our former intimacy. That gave him a difficult and a rather ridiculous part

to play towards us, the part of a deceived lover, almost a husband's part.

"As he was very clever and gifted with the special faculty of not showing what he felt, we sometimes asked each other whether he did not guess anything, and he took care to let us know, in a manner that was painful for us. We were going to breakfast at Bougival, and we were rowing vigorously, when La Toque, who had, that morning, the triumphant look of a man who was satisfied, and who, sitting by the steers-woman, seemed to squeeze himself rather too close to her, in our estimation, stopped the rowing by calling out: 'Stop!'

"The four oars were drawn out of the water, and then, turning to his neighbor, he said to her: 'Why were you called Fly?' But before she could reply, the voice of Only-One-Eye, who was sitting in the bows, said dryly: 'Because she settles on all the carrion.'

"There was a dead silence, and an embarrassed pause, which was followed by an inclination to laugh, while Fly herself looked very much confused, and La Toque gave the order: 'Row on, all;' and the boat started again. The incident was closed, and light let in upon the subject, and that little adventure made no difference in our habits, but it only re-established cordiality between Only-One-Eye and us. He once more became the honored proprietor of the Fly from Saturday night until Monday morning, as his superiority over all of us had been thoroughly established by that definition, which, moreover, closed one of the questions about the word Fly. For the future we were satisfied with playing the secondary part of grateful and polite friends who profited discreetly by the week days, without any contention of any kind among ourselves.

"That answered very well for about three months, but then suddenly Fly assumed a strange attitude towards us. She was less merry, nervous, uneasy, and almost irritable, and we frequently asked her: 'What is the matter with you?' And she replied: 'Nothing; leave me alone.'

"Only-One-Eye told us what was the matter with her, one Saturday evening. We had just sat down to table in the little dining-room which our eating house keeper, Barbichon, reserved for us at his inn, and, the soup being finished, we were waiting for the fried fish, when our friend, who also appeared thoughtful, took Fly's hand and said: 'My dear comrades, I have a very grave communication to make to you, and one that may, perhaps, give rise to a prolonged discussion, but we shall have to argue between the courses. Poor Fly has announced a piece of disastrous news to me, and at the same time has asked me to tell it to you: She is pregnant, and I will only add two words. This is not the moment to abandon her, and it is forbidden to try and find out who is the father.'[2]

"At first we were stupefied, and felt as if some disaster had befallen us, and we looked at each other with the longing to accuse some one, but whom? Oh! Which of us? I have never felt as I did at that moment, the perfidy of that cruel joke of nature, which never allows a man to know for certainty whether he is the father of his child. Then, however, by degrees a sort of feeling of consolation came over us and gave us comfort, which sprung from a confused idea of joint responsibility.

"Tomahawk, who spoke but little, formulated a beginning of reassurance by these words: 'Well, so much the worse, by Jove: *Union is Strength*, however.' At that moment a scullion brought in the fried gudgeons, but they did not fall to on them like they generally did, for they all had the same trouble on their mind, and Only-One-Eye continued: 'Under these circumstances she has had the delicacy to confess everything to me. My friends, we are all equally guilty, so let us shake hands and adopt the child.'

"That was decided upon unanimously; they raised their hands to the dish of fried fish and swore: 'We will adopt it.' Then, when she was thus suddenly saved, and delivered from the weight of the terrible anxiety that had been tormenting her for a month, this pretty, crazy, poor child of love, Fly, exclaimed: 'Oh! my friends! my friends! You have kind, good hearts ... good hearts.... Thank you, all of you!' And she shed tears for the first time before us all.

"From that time we spoke in the boat about the child, as if it were already born, and each of us took an exaggerated interest, because of our share in the matter, in the slow and regular development of our mistress's waist, and we stopped rowing in order to say: 'Fly?' 'Here I am,' she replied. 'Boy or girl?' 'Boy.' 'What will he be when he grows up?'

"Then she indulged in the most fantastic flights of fancy. They were interminable stories, astounding inventions, from the day of his birth until his final triumph. In the unsophisticated, passionate and moving fancy of this extraordinary little creature, who now lived chastely in the midst of us five, whom she called 'her five papas.' She saw him as a sailor, and told us that he would discover another America; as a general, restoring Alsace and Lorraine to France, then as an emperor, founding a dynasty of wise and generous rulers who would bestow settled welfare on our country; then as a learned man and natural philosopher, revealing, first of all, the secret of the manufacture of gold, then that of living forever; then as an aeronaut, who invented the means of soaring up to the stars, and of making the skies an immense promenade for men; the realization of the most unforeseen and magnificent dreams.

"How nice and how amusing she was, poor little girl, until the end of the summer, but the twentieth of September dissipated her dream. We had come back from breakfasting at the Maison Lafitte and were passing Saint-Germain, when she felt thirsty and asked us to stop at Pecq.

"For some time past, she had been getting very heavy, and that inconvenienced her very much.

She could not run about as she used to do, nor jump from the boat to the shore, as she had formerly done. She would try, in spite of our warnings and efforts to stop her, and she would have fallen a dozen times, had it not been that our restraining arms kept her back. On that day, she was imprudent enough to wish to land before the boat had stopped; it was one of those pieces of bravado by which athletes, who are ill or tired, sometimes kill themselves, and at the very moment when we were going to come alongside, she got up, took a spring and tried to jump onto the landing-stage. She was not strong enough, however, and only just touched the stones with her foot, struck the sharp angle with her stomach, uttered a cry and disappeared into the water.

"We all five plunged in at the same moment, and pulled out the poor, fainting woman, who was as pale as death, and was already suffering terrible pain, and we carried her as quickly as possible to the nearest inn, and sent for a medical man. For the six hours that her miscarriage lasted, she suffered the most terrible pain with the courage of a heroine, while we were grieving round her, feverish with anxiety and fear. Then she was delivered of a dead child, and for some days we were in the greatest fear for her life; at last, however, the doctor said to us one morning: 'I think her life is saved. That girl is made of steel,' and we all of us went into her room, with radiant hearts, and Only-One-Eye, as spokesman for us all, said to her: 'The danger is all over, little Fly, and we are all happy again.'

"Then, for the second time, she wept in our presence, and, with her eyes full of tears, she said, hesitatingly:

"'Oh! If you only knew, if you only knew ... what a grief it is ... what a grief it is to me ... I shall never get over it.' 'Over what, little Fly?' 'Over having killed it, for I did kill it! Oh! Without intending to! Oh! how grieved I am!...'

"She was sobbing, and we stood round, deeply touched, but without knowing what to say, and she went on: 'Have you seen it?' And we replied with one voice: 'Yes.' 'It was a boy, was it not?' 'Yes.' 'Beautiful, was it not?' We hesitated a good deal, but Petit-Bleu, who was less scrupulous than the rest of us, made up his mind to affirm it, and said: 'Very beautiful.'

"He committed a mistake, however, for she began to sob, and almost to scream with grief, and Only-One-Eye, who perhaps loved her more than the rest of us did, had a happy thought. Kissing her eyes, that were dimmed with tears, he said: 'Console yourself, little Fly, console yourself; we will make another for you.'

"Her innate sense of the ridiculous was suddenly excited, and half-convinced, and half-joking, still tearful and her heart sore with grief, she said, looking at us all: 'Do you really mean it?' And we replied all at once:

"'We really mean it.'"

THE MAD WOMAN

"I can tell you a terrible story about the Franco-Prussian war," Monsieur d'Endolin said to some friends assembled in the smoking-room of Baron de Ravot's château. "You know my house in the Faubourg de Cormeil. I was living there when the Prussians came, and I had for a neighbor a kind of a mad woman, who had lost her senses in consequence of a series of misfortunes, as at the age of seven and twenty she had lost her father, her husband and her newly born child, all in the space of a month.

"When death has once entered into a house, it almost invariably returns immediately, as if it knew the way, and the young woman, overwhelmed with grief, took to her bed and was delirious for six weeks. Then, a species of calm lassitude succeeded that violent crisis, and she remained motionless, eating next to nothing, and only moving her eyes. Every time they tried to make her get up, she screamed as if they were about to kill her, and so they ended by leaving her continually in bed, and only taking her out to wash her, to change her linen and to turn her mattress.

"An old servant remained with her, who gave her something to drink, or a little cold meat, from time to time. What passed in that despairing mind? No one ever knew, for she did not speak at all now. Was she thinking of the dead? Was she dreaming sadly, without any precise recollection of anything that had happened? Or was her memory as stagnant as water without any current? But however this may have been, for fifteen years she remained thus inert and secluded.

"The war broke out, and in the beginning of December the Germans came to Cormeil. I can remember it as if it were but yesterday. It was freezing hard enough to split the stones, and I, myself, was lying back in an armchair, being unable to move on account of the gout, when I heard their heavy and regular tread; I could see them pass, from my window.

"They defiled past interminably, with that peculiar motion of a puppet on wires, which belongs to them. Then the officers billeted their men on the inhabitants, and I had seventeen of them. My neighbor, the crazy woman, had a dozen, one of whom was the Commandant, a regular violent, surly swashbuckler.

"During the first few days everything went on as usual. The officers next door had been told that the lady was ill, and they did not trouble themselves about that in the least, but soon, that woman whom they never saw, irritated them. They asked what her illness was, and were told that she had been in bed for fifteen years, in consequence of terrible grief. No doubt they did not believe it, and thought that the poor mad creature would not leave her bed out of pride, so that she might not come near the Prussians, not speak to them, nor even see them.

"He insisted upon her receiving him, and he was shown into the room, and said to her roughly: 'I must beg you to get up, Madame, and to come downstairs so that we may all see you,' but she merely turned her vague eyes on him, without replying, and so he continued: 'I do not intend to tolerate any insolence, and if you do not get up of your own accord, I can easily find means to make you walk without any assistance.'

"But she did not give any signs of having heard him, and remained quite motionless, and then he got furious, as he took that calm silence for a mark of supreme contempt, and so he added: 'If you do not come downstairs to-morrow....' And then he left the room."

"The next day the terrified old servant wished to dress her, but the mad woman began to scream violently, and resisted with all her might. The officer ran upstairs quickly, and the servant threw herself at his feet and cried: 'She will not come down, Monsieur, she will not. Forgive her, for she is so unhappy.'

"The soldier was embarrassed, as in spite of his anger, he did not venture to order his soldiers to drag her out, but suddenly he began to laugh, and gave some orders in German, and soon a party of soldiers was seen coming out supporting a mattress as if they were carrying a wounded man. On that bed, which had not been unmade, the mad woman, who was still silent, was lying quite quietly, for she was quite indifferent to anything that went on, as long as they let her lie. Behind her, a soldier was carrying a parcel of feminine attire, and the officer said, rubbing his hands: 'We will just see whether you cannot dress yourself alone, and take a little walk.'

"And then the procession went off in the direction of the forest of Imauville; in two hours the soldiers came back alone, and nothing more was seen of the mad woman. What had they done with her? Where had they taken her to? No one knew.

"The snow was falling day and night, and enveloped the plain and the woods in a shroud of frozen foam, and the wolves came and howled at our very doors.

"The thought of that poor lost woman haunted me, and I made several applications to the Prussian authorities in order to obtain some information, and was nearly shot for doing so. When spring returned, the army of occupation withdrew, but my neighbor's house remained closed; the grass grew thick in the garden walks. The old servant had died during the winter, and nobody troubled himself any longer about the occurrence; I alone thought about it constantly. What had they done with the woman? Had she escaped through the forest? Had somebody found her, and taken her to a hospital, without being able to obtain any information from her? Nothing happened to relieve my doubts; but, by degrees, time assuaged my fears.

"Well, in the following autumn the woodcock were very plentiful, and as my gout had left me for a time, I dragged myself as far as the forest. I had already killed four or five of the long-billed birds, when I knocked over one, which fell into a ditch full of branches, and I was obliged to get into it, in order to pick it up, and I found that it had fallen close to a dead human body, and immediately the recollection of the mad woman struck me, like a blow in the chest. Many other people had perhaps died in the wood during that disastrous year, but I do not know why, yet I was sure, sure, I tell you, that I should see the head of that wretched maniac.

"And suddenly I understood, I guessed everything. They had abandoned her on that mattress in the cold, deserted wood; and, faithful to her fixed idea, she had allowed herself to perish under that thick and light counterpane of snow, without moving either arms or legs.

"Then the wolves had devoured her, and the birds had built their nests with the wool from her torn bed, and I took charge of her remains, and I only pray that our sons may never see any wars again."

THAT PIG OF A MORIN

I

"There, my friend," I said to Labarbe, "you have just repeated those five words, *that pig of a Morin*. Why on earth do I never hear Morin's name mentioned without his being called *a pig*?"

Labarbe, who is a Deputy, looked at me with eyes like an owl's, and said: "Do you mean to say that you do not know Morin's story, and you come from La Rochelle?" I was obliged to declare that I did not know Morin's story, and then Labarbe rubbed his hands, and began his recital.

"You knew Morin, did you not, and you remember his large linen-draper's shop on the *Quai de la Rochelle*?" "Yes, perfectly."

"All right, then. You must know that in 1862 or 63 Morin went to spend a fortnight in Paris for pleasure, or for his pleasures, but under the pretext of renewing his stock, and you also know what a fortnight in Paris means for a country shopkeeper: it makes his blood grow hot. The theater every evening, women's dresses rustling up against you, and continual excitement; one goes almost mad with it. One sees nothing but dancers in skin-tights, actresses in very low dresses, round legs, fat shoulders, all nearly within reach of one's hands, without daring or being able, to touch it, and one scarcely tastes some inferior dish, once or twice. And one leaves it, one's heart still all in a flutter, and one's mind still exhilarated by a sort of longing for kisses which tickles one's lips."

Morin was in that state when he took his ticket for La Rochelle by the 8:40 night express. And he was walking up and down the waiting-room at the station, when he stopped suddenly in front of a young lady who was kissing an old one. She had her veil up, and Morin murmured with delight: "By Jove, what a pretty woman!"

When she had said "Good-bye" to the old lady, she went into the waiting-room, and Morin followed her; then she went onto the platform, and Morin still followed her; then she got into an empty carriage, and he again followed her. There were very few travelers by the express, the engine whistled, and the train started. They were alone. Morin devoured her with his eyes. She appeared to be about nineteen or twenty, and was fair, tall and with bold looks. She wrapped a railway rug round her legs, and stretched herself on the seat to sleep.

Morin asked himself: "I wonder who she is?" And a thousand conjectures, a thousand projects went through his head. He said to himself: "So many adventures are told as happening on railway journeys that this may be one that is going to present itself to me. Who knows? A piece of good luck like that happens very quickly, and perhaps I need only be a little venturesome. Was it not Danton who said: *Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity*. If it was not Danton it was Mirabeau, but that does not matter. But then, I have no audacity, and that is the difficulty. Oh! If one only knew, if one could only read peoples' minds! I will bet that every day one passes by magnificent opportunities without knowing it, though a gesture would be enough to let me know that she did not ask for anything better...."

Then he imagined to himself combinations which conducted him to triumph. He pictured some chivalrous deed, or merely some slight service which he rendered her, a lively, gallant conversation which ended in ... in what do you think.

But he could find no opening; had no pretext, and he waited for some fortunate circumstance, with his heart ravaged, and his mind topsy-turvy. The night passed, and the pretty girl still slept, while Morin was meditating his own fall. The day broke and soon the first ray of sunlight appeared in the sky, a long, clear ray which shone on the face of the sleeping girl, and woke her, so she sat up, looked at the country, then at Morin and smiled. She smiled like a happy woman, with an engaging and bright look, and Morin trembled. Certainly that smile was intended for him, it was a discreet invitation, the signal which he was waiting for. That smile meant to say: "How stupid, what a ninny, what a dolt, what a donkey you are, to have sat there on your seat like a post all night.

"Just look at me, am I not charming? And you have sat like that for the whole night, when you have been alone with a pretty woman, you great simpleton!"

She was still smiling as she looked at him, she even began to laugh; and he lost his head, trying to find something suitable to say, no matter what. But he could think of nothing, nothing, and then, seized with a coward's courage, he said to himself: "So much the worse, I will risk everything," and suddenly, without the slightest warning, he went towards her, his arms extended, his lips protruding, and seizing her in his arms, he kissed her.

She sprang up with a bound, crying out: "*Help! Help!*" and screaming with horror, and then she opened the carriage door, and waved her arm out, mad with terror, and trying to jump out, while Morin, who was almost distracted, and feeling sure that she would throw herself out, held her by the skirt and stammered: "Oh! Madame!... Oh! Madame!"

The train slackened speed, and then stopped. Two guards rushed up at the young woman's frantic signals, who threw herself into their arms, stammering: "That man wanted ... wanted ... to ... to ..." And then she fainted.

They were at Mauzé station, and the gendarme on duty arrested Morin. When the victim of his brutality had regained her consciousness, she made her charge against him, and the police drew it up. The poor linen-draper did not reach home till night, with a prosecution hanging over him, for an outrage to morals in a public place.

II

At that time I was editor of the *Fanal des Charentes*, and I used to meet Morin every day at the *Café du Commerce*, and the day after his adventure he came to see me, as he did not know what

to do. I did not hide my opinion from him, but said to him: "You are no better than a pig. No decent man behaves like that."

He cried. His wife had given him a beating, and he foresaw his trade ruined, his name dragged through the mire and dishonored, his friends outraged and taking no more notice of him. In the end he excited my pity, and I sent for my colleague Rivet, a bantering, but very sensible little man, to give us his advice.

He advised me to see the Public Prosecutor, who was a friend of mine, and so I sent Morin home, and went to call on the magistrate. He told me that the young woman who had been insulted was a young lady, Mademoiselle Henriette Bonnel, who had just received her certificate as governess in Paris, and spent her holidays with her uncle and aunt, who were very respectable tradespeople in Mauzé, and what made Morin's case all the more serious was, that the uncle had lodged a complaint; for the public official had consented to let the matter drop if this complaint were withdrawn, so we must try and get him to do this.

I went back to Morin's and found him in bed, ill with excitement and distress. His wife, a tall raw-boned woman with a beard, was abusing him continually, and she showed me into the room, shouting at me: "So you have come to see that pig of a Morin. Well, there he is, the darling!" And she planted herself in front of the bed, with her hands on her hips. I told him how matters stood, and he begged me to go and see her uncle and aunt. It was a delicate mission, but I undertook it, and the poor devil never ceased repeating: "I assure you I did not even kiss her, no, not even that. I will take my oath to it!"

I replied: "It is all the same; you are nothing but a pig." And I took a thousand francs which he gave me, to employ them as I thought best, but as I did not care venturing to her uncle's house alone, I begged Rivet to go with me, which he agreed to do, on the condition that we went immediately, for he had some urgent business at La Rochelle that afternoon. So two hours later we rang at the door of a nice country house. A pretty girl came and opened the door to us, who was assuredly the young lady in question, and I said to Rivet in a low voice: "Confound it! I begin to understand Morin!"

The uncle, Monsieur Tonnelet subscribed to *The Fanal*, and a fervent political co-religionist of ours, who received us with open arms and congratulated us and wished us joy; he was delighted at having the two editors in his house and Rivet whispered to me: "I think we shall be able to arrange the matter of that *Pig of a Morin* for him."

The niece had left the room, and I introduced the delicate object. I waved the scepter of scandal before his eyes: I accentuated the inevitable depreciation which the young lady would suffer if such an affair got known, for nobody would believe in a simple kiss, and the good man seemed undecided, but he could not make up his mind about anything without his wife, who would not be in until late that evening, but suddenly he uttered an exclamation of triumph: "Look here, I have an excellent idea. I will keep you here to dine and sleep, and when my wife comes home, I hope we shall be able to arrange matters."

Rivet resisted at first, but the wish to extricate that *Pig of a Morin*, decided him, and we accepted the invitation, and so the uncle got up radiant, called his niece, and proposed that we should take a stroll in his grounds, saying: "We will leave serious matters until the morning." Rivet and he began to talk politics, while I soon found myself lagging a little behind with the girl, who was really charming! charming! and with the greatest precaution I began to speak to her about her adventure, and try to make her my ally. She did not, however, appear the least confused, and listened to me like a person who was enjoying the whole thing very much.

I said to her: "Just think, Mademoiselle, how unpleasant it will be for you. You will have to appear in Court, to encounter malicious looks, to speak before everybody, and to recount that unfortunate occurrence in the railway carriage, in public. Do you not think, between ourselves, that it would have been much better for you to have put that dirty scoundrel back into his place without calling for assistance, and merely to have changed your carriage." She began to laugh, and replied: "What you say is quite true! but what could I do? I was frightened, and when one is frightened, one does not stop to reason with oneself. As soon as I realized the situation, I was very sorry that I had called out, but then it was too late. You must also remember that the idiot threw himself upon me like a madman, without saying a word and looking like a lunatic. I did not even know what he wanted of me."

She looked me full in the face, without being nervous or intimidated, and I said to myself: "She is a funny sort of a girl, that; I can quite see how that pig Morin came to make a mistake," and I went on, jokingly: "Come, Mademoiselle, confess that he was excusable, for after all, a man cannot find himself opposite such a pretty girl as you are without feeling a legitimate desire to kiss her."

She laughed more than ever, and showed her teeth, and said: "Between the desire and the act, Monsieur, there is room for respect." It was a funny expression to use, although it was not very clear, and I asked abruptly: "Well now, supposing I were to kiss you now, what would you do?" She stopped to look at me from head to foot, and then said calmly: "Oh! you? That is quite another matter."

I knew perfectly well, by Jove, that it was not the same thing at all, as everybody in the neighborhood called me, *Handsome Labarbe*. I was thirty years old in those days, but I asked her: "And why, pray?" She shrugged her shoulders, and replied: "Well! because you are not so stupid

as he is." And then she added, looking at me shyly: "Nor so ugly, either." And before she could make a movement to avoid me, I had implanted a hearty kiss on her cheek. She sprang aside, but it was too late, and then she said: "Well, you are not very bashful, either! But don't do that sort of thing again."

I put on a humble look and said in a low voice: "Oh! Mademoiselle, as for me, if I long for one thing more than another, it is to be summoned before a magistrate for the same reason as Morin."

"Why?" she asked. And looking steadily at her, I replied: "Because you are one of the most beautiful creatures living; because it would be an honor and a glory for me to have wished to offer you violence, and because people would have said, after seeing you: Well, Labarbe has richly deserved what he has got, but he is a lucky fellow, all the same."

She began to laugh heartily again, and said: "How funny you are!" And she had not finished the word *funny*, before I had her in my arms, and was kissing her ardently wherever I could find a place, on her forehead, on her eyes, on her lips occasionally, on her cheeks, all over her head, some part of which she was obliged to leave exposed, in spite of herself, to defend others, but at last she managed to release herself, blushing and angry. "You are very unmannerly, Monsieur," she said, "and I am sorry I listened to you."

I took her hand in some confusion, and stammered out: "I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle. I have offended you; I have acted like a brute! Do not be angry with me for what I have done. If you knew ..." I vainly sought for some excuse, and in a few moments she said: "There is nothing for me to know, Monsieur." But I had found something to say, and I cried: "Mademoiselle, I love you!"

She was really surprised, and raised her eyes to look at me, and I went on: "Yes, Mademoiselle, and pray listen to me. I do not know Morin, and I do not care anything about him. It does not matter to me the least if he is committed for trial and locked up meanwhile. I saw you here last year, and I was so taken with you, that the thought of you has never left me since, and it does not matter to me whether you believe me or not. I thought you adorable, and the remembrance of you took such a hold on me that I longed to see you again, and so I made use of that fool Morin as a pretext, and here I am. Circumstances have made me exceed the due limits of respect, and I can only beg you to pardon me."

She read the truth in my looks, and was ready to smile again; then she murmured; "You humbug!" But I raised my hand, and said in a sincere voice, (and I really believe that I was sincere): "I swear to you that I am speaking the truth," and she replied quite simply: "Really?"

We were alone, quite alone, as Rivet and her uncle had disappeared in a sidewalk, and I made her a real declaration of love, while I squeezed and kissed her hands, and she listened to it as something new and agreeable, without exactly knowing how much of it she was to believe, while in the end I felt agitated, and at last really myself believed what I said: I was pale, anxious and trembling, and I gently put my arms round her waist, and spoke to her softly, whispering into the little curls over her ears. She seemed dead, so absorbed in thought was she.

Then her hand touched mine, and she pressed it, and I gently squeezed her waist with a trembling, and gradually firmer, grasp. She did not move now, and I touched her cheeks with my lips, and suddenly without seeking them, mine met hers. It was a long, long kiss, and it would have lasted longer still, if I had not heard a *hum! hum!* just behind me, at which she made her escape through the bushes, and turning round I saw Rivet coming towards me, and standing in the middle of the path, he said without even smiling: "So, that is the way in which you settle the affair of *that pig Morin*." And I replied, conceitedly: "One does what one can, my dear fellow. But what about the uncle? How have you got on with him? I will answer for the niece." "I have not been so fortunate with him," he replied.

Whereupon I took his arm, and we went indoors.

III

Dinner made me lose my head altogether. I sat beside her, and my hand continually met hers under the table cloth, my foot touched hers, and our looks encountered each other.

After dinner we took a walk by moonlight, and I whispered all the tender things I could think of, to her. I held her close to me, kissed her every moment, moistening my lips against hers, while her uncle and Rivet were disputing as they walked in front of us. They went in, and soon a messenger brought a telegram from her aunt, saying that she would not return until the next morning at seven o'clock, by the first train.

"Very well, Henriette," her uncle said, "go and show the gentlemen their rooms." She showed Rivet his first, and he whispered to me: "There was no danger of her taking us into yours first." Then she took me to my room, and as soon as she was alone with me, I took her in my arms again, and tried to excite her senses and overcome her resistance, but when she felt that she was near succumbing, she escaped out of the room, and I got between the sheets, very much put out and excited and feeling rather foolish, for I knew that I should not sleep much, and I was wondering how I could have committed such a mistake, when there was a gentle knock at my door, and on my asking who was there, a low voice replied: "I."

I dressed myself quickly, and opened the door, and she came in. "I forgot to ask you what you take in the morning," she said: "chocolate, tea or coffee?" I put my arms round her impetuously and said, devouring her with kisses: "I will take ... I will take...." But she freed herself from my arms, blew out my candle and disappeared, and left me alone in the dark, furious, trying to find some matches, and not able to do so. At last I got some and I went into the passage, feeling half mad, with my candlestick in my hand.

What was I going to do? I did not stop to reason, I only wanted to find her, and I would. I went a few steps without reflecting, but then I suddenly thought to myself. "Supposing I should go into the uncle's room, what should I say?...." And I stood still, with my head a void, and my heart beating. But in a few moments, I thought of an answer: "Of course, I shall say that I am looking for Rivet's room, to speak to him about an important matter, and I began to inspect all the doors, trying to find hers, and at last I took hold of a handle at a venture, turned it and went in ... there was Henriette, sitting on her bed and looking at me in tears. So I gently turned the key, and going up to her on tip-toe, I said: "I forgot to ask you for something to read, Mademoiselle." She struggled and resisted, but I soon opened the book I was looking for. I will not tell you its title, but it is the most wonderful of romances, the most divine of poems. And when once I had turned the first page, she let me turn over as many leaves as I liked, and I got through so many chapters that our candles were quite burnt out. Then, after thanking her, I was stealthily returning to my room, when a rough hand seized me, and a voice, it was Rivet's, whispered in my ear: 'So you have not yet quite settled that affair of Morin's?'"

At seven o'clock the next morning, she herself brought me a cup of chocolate. I have never drunk anything like it, soft, velvety, perfumed, delicious. I could scarcely take my lips away from the cup, and she had hardly left the room when Rivet came in. He seemed nervous and irritable, like a man who had not slept, and he said to me crossly: "If you go on like this, you will end by spoiling the affair of *that pig of a Morin*!"

At eight o'clock the aunt arrived. Our discussion was very short, for they withdrew their complaint, and I left five hundred francs for the poor of the town. They wanted to keep us for the day, and they arranged an excursion to go and see some ruins. Henriette made signs to me to stay, behind her parents' back, and I accepted, but Rivet was determined to go, and though I took him aside, and begged and prayed him to do this for me, he appeared quite exasperated and kept saying to me: "I have had enough of that pig Morin's affair, do you hear?"

Of course I was obliged to go also, and it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I could have gone on arranging that business as long as I lived, and when we were in the railway carriage, after shaking hands with her in silence, I said to Rivet: "You are a mere brute!" And he replied: "My dear fellow, you were beginning to excite me confoundedly."

On getting to the *Fanal* office, I saw a crowd waiting for us, and as soon as they saw us they all exclaimed: "Well, have you settled the affair of *that pig of a Morin*?" All La Rochelle was excited about it, and Rivet, who had got over his ill-humor on the journey, had great difficulty in keeping himself from laughing as he said: "Yes, we have managed it, thanks to Labarbe." And we went to Morin's.

He was sitting in an easy chair, with mustard plasters on his legs, and cold bandages on his head, nearly dead with misery. He was coughing with the short cough of a dying man, without any one knowing how he had caught it, and his wife looked at him like a tigress ready to eat him, and as soon as he saw us he trembled so violently as to make his hands and knees shake, so I said to him immediately: "It is all settled, you dirty scamp, but don't do such a thing again."

He got up, choking, took my hands and kissed them as if they had belonged to a prince, cried, nearly fainted, embraced Rivet and even kissed Madame Morin, who gave him such a push as to send him staggering back into his chair, but he never got over the blow: his mind had been too much upset. In all the country round, moreover, he was called nothing but, "that pig of a Morin," and that epithet went through him like a sword thrust every time he heard it. When a street boy called after him: "Pig!" he turned his head instinctively. His friends also overwhelmed him with horrible jokes, and used to ask him, whenever they were eating ham: "It's a bit of you?" He died two years later.

As for myself, when I was a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in 1875, I called on the new notary at Fouserre, Monsieur Bellonclе, to solicit his vote, and a tall, handsome and evidently wealthy lady received me. "You do not know me again?" she said. And I stammered out: "But ... no Madame." "Henriette Bonnel." "Ah!" And I felt myself turning pale, while she seemed perfectly at her ease, and looked at me with a smile.

As soon as she had left me alone with her husband, he took both my hands, and squeezing them as if he meant to crush them, he said: "I have been intending to go and see you for a long time, my dear sir, for my wife has very often talked to me about you. I know ... yes, I know under what painful circumstances you made her acquaintance, and I know also how perfectly you behaved, how full of delicacy, tact and devotion you showed yourself in the affair...." He hesitated, and then said in a lower tone, as if he had been saying something low and coarse.... "In the affair of that pig of a Morin."

THE WOODEN SHOES

The old priest was sputtering out the last words of his sermon over the white caps of the peasant women, and the rough or pomatumed heads of the men. The large baskets of the farmer's wives who had come from a distance to attend mass, were on the ground beside them, and the heavy heat of a July day caused them all to exhale a smell like that of cattle, or of a flock of sheep, and the cocks could be heard crowing through the large west door, which was wide open, as well as the lowing of the cows in a neighboring field.... "As God wishes. Amen!" the priest said. Then he ceased, opened a book, and, as he did every week, he began to give notice of all the small parish events for the following week. He was an old man with white hair who had been in the parish for over forty years, and from the pulpit he was in the habit of discoursing familiarly to them all, and so he went on: "I recommend Désiré Vallin, who is very ill, to your prayers, and also la Paumelle, who is not recovering from her confinement satisfactorily."

He had forgotten the rest, and so he looked for the slips of paper which were put away in a breviary, and at last he found two and continued: "I will not have the lads and the girls come into the churchyard in the evening, as they do; otherwise I shall inform the rural policeman. Monsieur Césaire Omont would like to find a respectable girl servant." He reflected for a few moments, and then added: "That is all, my brethren, and I wish that all of you may find the Divine mercy."

And he came down from the pulpit, to finish mass.

When the Malandains had returned to their cottage, which was the last in the village of La Sablière, on the road to Fourville, the father, a thin, wrinkled old peasant, sat down at the table, while his wife took the saucepan off the fire, and Adelaide, the daughter, took the glasses and plates out of the sideboard, and he said: "I think that place at Maître Omont's ought to be a good one, as he is a widower and his daughter-in-law does not like him. He is all alone and has money. I think it would be a good thing to send Adelaide there."

His wife put the black saucepan onto the table, took the lid off, and while the steam, which smelt strongly of cabbage, rose into the air she reflected, and he presently continued: "He has got some money, that is certain, but any one going there ought to be very sharp, and Adelaide is not that at all." And his wife replied: "I might go and see, all the same," and turning to her daughter, a strapping, silly looking girl with yellow hair and fat red cheeks like apples, she said: "Do you hear, you great silly? You are to go to Maître Omont's and offer yourself as his servant, and you will do whatever he tells you."

The girl began to laugh in a foolish manner, without replying, and then all the three began their dinner. In ten minutes, the father continued: "Listen to me, girl, and try not to make a mistake about what I am going to say to you ..." And slowly and minutely he laid down for her her line of conduct, anticipating the minutest details, and preparing her for the conquest of an old widower who was on unfriendly terms with his family. The mother ceased eating to listen to him, and she sat there, with her fork in her hand, looking at her husband and her daughter by turns, and following every word with concentrated and silent attention, while Adelaide remained listless, docile and stupid, with vague and wandering eyes.

As soon as their meal was over, her mother made her put her cap on, and they both started off to see Monsieur Césaire Omont. He lived in a small brick house adjoining his tenants' cottages, for he had retired, and was living by subdividing and letting his land.

He was about fifty-five years old, and was stout, jovial and rough mannered, as rich men often are. He laughed and shouted loud enough to make the walls fall down, drank brandy and cider by the glassful, and was still said to be of an amorous disposition, in spite of his age. He liked to walk about his fields with his hands behind his back, digging his wooden shoes into the fat soil, looking at the sprouting corn or the flowering colza with the eye of an amateur at his ease, who likes to see it, but does not trouble himself about it too much any longer, and they used to say of him: "There is a Mr. Merry-man, who does not get up in a good temper every day."

He received the two women, with his fat stomach against the table, as he was finishing his coffee, and turning round he said: "What do you want?"

The mother was spokeswoman. "This is our girl Adelaide, and I have come to ask you to take her as servant, as Monsieur le curé told us you wanted one." Maître Omont looked at the girl, and then he said roughly: "How old is the great she-goat?" "Twenty last Michaelmas-Day, Monsieur Omont." "That is settled, she will have fifteen francs a month and her food. I shall expect her to-morrow, to make my soup in the morning." And he dismissed the two women.

The next day Adelaide entered upon her duties, and began to work hard, without saying a word, as she was in the habit of doing at home, and at about nine o'clock, as she was scrubbing the kitchen floor, Monsieur Omont called her: "Adelaide!" She came immediately, saying: "Here I am, master." As soon as she was opposite him, with her red and neglected hands, and her troubled looks, he said: "Now just listen to me, so that there may be no mistake between us. You are my servant, but nothing else; you understand what I mean. We shall keep our shoes apart." "Yes, master." "Each in our own place, my girl, you in your kitchen; I in my dining room, and with that exception, everything will be for you just as it is for me. Is that settled?" "Yes, master." "Very well; that is all right, and now go to your work."

And she went out to attend to her duties and at midday she served up her master's dinner in the

little drawing-room with the flowered paper on the walls, and then, when the soup was on the table, she went to tell him. "Dinner is ready, master."

He went in, and sat down, looked round, unfolded his table napkin, hesitated for a moment and then in a voice of thunder he shouted: "Adelaide!" She rushed in terribly frightened, for he had shouted as if he meant to murder her. "Well, in heaven's name, where is your place?" "But, ... master ..." "I do not like to eat alone," he roared; "you will sit there, or go to the devil, if you don't choose to do so. Go and get your plate and glass."

She brought them in, feeling very frightened, and stammered: "Here I am, master," and then sat down opposite to him, and he grew jovial; clinked glasses with her, rapped the table, and told her stories to which she listened with downcast eyes, without daring to say a word, and from time to time she got up to fetch some bread, cider or plates. When she brought in the coffee she only put one cup before him, and then he grew angry again, and growled: "Well, what about yourself?" "I never take any, master." "Why not?" "Because I do not like it."

Then he burst out afresh: "I am not fond of having my coffee by myself, confound it! If you will not take it here, you can go to the devil. Go and get a cup, and make haste about it."

So she went and fetched a cup, sat down again, tasted the black liquor and made faces over it, but swallowed it to the last drop, under her master's furious looks. Then he made her also drink her first glass of brandy as an extra drop, the second as a livener and the third as a kick behind, and then he told her to go and wash up her plates and dishes, adding, that she was "a good sort of a girl."

It was the same at dinner, and then she had to play dominoes with him, after which he sent her to bed, saying that he should come upstairs soon. And she went to her room, a garret under the roof, and after saying her prayers, she undressed and got into bed, but very soon she sprung up in a fright, for a furious shout had shaken the house. "Adelaide!" She opened her door, and replied from her attic: "Here I am, master." "Where are you?" "In bed, of course, master." Then he roared out: "Will you come downstairs, in heaven's name? I do not like to sleep alone, and by G—— and if you object, you can just go at once."

Then in her terror, she replied from upstairs: "I will come, master," as she looked for her candle, and he heard her small clogs pattering down the stairs, and when she had got to the bottom steps, he seized her by the arm, and as soon as she had left her light wooden shoes by the side of her master's heavy boots, he pushed her into his room, growling out: "Quicker than that, confound it!"

And she repeated continually, without knowing what she was saying: "Here I am, here I am, master."

Six months later, when she went to see her parents one Sunday, her father looked at her curiously, and then said: "Are you not in the family way?" She remained thunderstruck, and looked at her waist, and then said: "No, I do not think so."

Then he asked her, for he wanted to know everything: "Just tell me, didn't you mix your clogs together, one night?" "Yes, I mixed them the first night, and then every other night." "Well, then you are full, you great tub!"

On hearing that, she began to sob, and stammered: "How could I know? How was I to know?" Old Malandain looked at her knowingly, and appeared very pleased, and then he asked: "What did you not know?" And amid tears she replied: "How was I to know that children were made in that way?" And when her mother came back, the man said, without any anger: "There, she is in the family way, now."

But the woman was furious, her woman's instinct revolted, and she called her daughter, who was in tears, every name she could think of, "a trollop" and "a strumpet." Then, however, the old man made her hold her tongue, and as he took up his cap to go and talk the matter over with Master Césaire Omont, he remarked: "She is actually more stupid than I thought she was; she did not even know what he was doing, the fool!"

On the next Sunday, after the sermon, the old *Curé* published the banns between Monsieur Onufre-Césaire Omont and Celesté-Adelaide Malandain.

A NORMANDY JOKE

The procession came in sight in the hollow road which was shaded by tall trees which grew on the slopes of the farms. The newly married couple came first, then the relations, then the invited guests, and lastly the poor of the neighborhood, while the village urchins, who hovered about the narrow road like flies, ran in and out of the ranks, or climbed onto the tree to see it better.

The bridegroom was a good looking young fellow, Jean Patu, the richest farmer in the

neighborhood, but he was, above all things, an ardent sportsman who seemed to lose all common sense in order to satisfy that passion, and who spent large sums on his dogs, his keepers, his ferrets and his guns. The bride, Rosalie Roussel, had been courted by all the likely young fellows in the district, for they all thought her prepossessing, and they knew that she would have a good dowry, but she had chosen Patu, partly, perhaps, because she liked him better than she did the others, but still more, like a careful Normandy girl, because he had more crown pieces.

When they went in at the white gateway of the husband's farm, forty shots resounded without their seeing those who fired, as they were hidden in the ditches, and the noise seemed to please the men, who were sprawling about heavily in their best clothes, very much; and Patu left his wife, and running up to a farm servant whom he perceived behind a tree, he seized his gun and fired a shot himself, kicking his heels about like a colt. Then they went on, beneath the apple-trees which were heavy with fruit, through the high grass and through the midst of the calves, who looked at them with their great eyes, got up slowly and remained standing, with their muzzles turned towards the wedding party.

The men became serious when they came within measurable distance of the wedding dinner. Some of them, the rich ones, had on tall, shining silk hats, which seemed altogether out of place there; others had old head-coverings with a long nap, which might have been taken for moleskin, while the humblest among them wore caps. All the women had on shawls, which they wore loose on their backs, and they held the tips ceremoniously under their arms. They were red, parti-colored, flaming shawls, and their brightness seemed to astonish the black fowls on the dung-heap, the ducks on the side of the pond, and the pigeons on the thatched roofs.

The extensive farm buildings seemed to be waiting there, at the end of that archway of apple trees, and a sort of vapor came out of the open door and windows, and an almost overwhelming smell of eatables was exhaled from the vast building, from all its openings and from all its very walls. The string of guests extended through the yard; when the foremost of them reached the house, they broke the chain and dispersed, while behind they were still coming in at the open gate. The ditches were now lined with urchins and poor curious people, and the shots did not cease, but came from every side at once, and mingled a cloud of smoke, and that smell which has the same intoxicating effects as absinthe, with the atmosphere.

The women were shaking their dresses outside the door, to get rid of the dust, were undoing their cap strings and pulling their shawls over their arms, and then they went into the house to lay them aside altogether for the time. The table was laid in the great kitchen, that would hold a hundred persons; they sat down to dinner at two o'clock and at eight o'clock they were still eating, and the men, in their shirt sleeves, with their waistcoats unbuttoned, and with red faces, were swallowing the food and drink down, as if they had been whirlpools. The cider sparkled merrily, clear and golden in the large glasses, by the side of the dark, blood-colored wine, and between every dish they made the hole, the Normandy hole, with a glass of brandy which inflamed the body, and put foolish notions into the head.

From time to time, one of the guests, being as full as a barrel, would go out for a few moments to get a mouthful of fresh air, as they said, and then return with redoubled appetite. The farmers' wives, with scarlet faces and their stays nearly bursting, did not like to follow their example, until one of them, feeling more uncomfortable than the others, went out, when all the rest followed her example, and they came back quite ready for any fun, and the rough jokes began afresh. Broad-sides of obscenities were exchanged across the table, and all about the wedding-night, until the whole arsenal of peasant wit was exhausted. For the last hundred years, the same broad jokes had served for similar occasions, and although every one knew them, they still hit the mark, and made both rows of guests roar with laughter.

At the bottom of the table four young fellows, who were neighbors, were preparing some practical jokes for the newly married couple, and they seemed to have got hold of a good one, by the way they whispered and laughed, and suddenly, one of them profiting by a moment of silence, exclaimed: "The poachers will have a good time to-night, with this moon!... I say, Jean, you will not be looking at the moon, will you?" The bridegroom turned to him quickly and replied: "Only let them come, that's all!" But the other young fellow began to laugh, and said: "I do not think you will neglect your business for them!"

The whole table was convulsed with laughter, so that the glasses shook, but the bridegroom became furious at the thought that anybody would profit by his wedding to come and poach on his land, and repeated: "I only say: Just let them come!"

Then there was a flood of talk with a double meaning which made the bride blush somewhat, although she was trembling with expectation, and when they had emptied the kegs of brandy they all went to bed; the young couple went into their own room, which was on the ground floor, as most rooms in farmhouses are. As it was very warm, they opened the window and closed the shutters. A small lamp in bad taste, a present from the bride's father, was burning on the chest of drawers, and the bed stood ready to receive the young people, who did not stand upon all the ceremony which is usual among towns-people, in their first embraces.

The young woman had already taken off her wreath and her dress, and she was in her petticoat, unlacing her boots, while Jean was finishing his cigar, and looking at her out of the corners of his eyes. It was an ardent look, more sensual than tender, for he felt more desire than love for her, and suddenly with a brusque movement, like a man who is going to set to work, he took off his coat. She had already taken off her boots, and was now pulling off her stockings, and then she

said to him: "Go and hide yourself behind the curtains while I get into bed."

He seemed as if he were going to refuse, but then with a cunning look he went and hid himself with the exception of his head. She laughed and tried to cover up his eyes, and they romped in an amorous and happy manner, without shame or embarrassment. At last he did as she asked him, and in a moment she unfastened her petticoat, which slipped down her legs, fell at her feet and lay on the ground in a circle. She left it there, stooped over it, naked with the exception of her floating chemise, and slipped into the bed, whose springs creaked beneath her weight. He immediately went up to her, without his shoes and in his trousers, and stooping over his wife he sought her lips, which she hid beneath the pillow, when a shot was heard in the distance, in the direction of the forest of Râpées, as he thought.

He raised himself anxiously and with his heart beating, and running to the window, he opened the shutters. The full moon flooded the yard with yellow light, and the reflection of the apple trees made black shadows at their feet, while in the distance the fields gleamed, covered with the ripe corn. But as he was leaning out, listening to every sound in the still night, two bare arms were put round his neck, and his wife whispered, trying to pull him back: "Do leave them alone; it has nothing to do with you. Come to bed."

He turned round, put his arms round her, and drew her towards him, feeling her warm skin through the thin material, and lifting her up in his vigorous arms, he carried her towards their couch, but just as he was laying her on the bed, which yielded beneath her weight, they heard another report, considerably nearer this time, and Jean, giving way to his tumultuous rage, swore aloud: "God, G...! Do you think I shall not go out and see what it is, because of you?... Wait, wait a few minutes!" He put on his shoes again, took down his gun, which was always hanging within reach, against the wall, and, as his wife threw herself on her knees in her terror to implore him not to go, he hastily freed himself, ran to the window and jumped into the yard.

She waited one hour, two hours, until daybreak, but her husband did not return. Then she lost her head, aroused the house, related how angry Jean was, and said that he had gone after the poachers, and immediately all the male farm-servants, even the boys, went in search of their master. They found him two leagues from the farm, tied hand and foot, half dead with rage, his gun broken, his trousers turned inside out, and with three dead hares hanging round his neck, and a placard on his chest, with these words: *Who goes on the chase, loses his place.*

And later on, when he used to tell this story of his wedding night, he generally added: "Ah! As far as a joke went, it was a good joke. They caught me in a snare, as if I had been a rabbit, the dirty brutes, and they shoved my head into a bag. But if I can only catch them some day, they had better look out for themselves!"

That is how they amuse themselves in Normandy on a wedding day.

A COCK CROWED

Madame Berthe d'Avancelles had up till that time resisted all the prayers of her despairing adorer, Baron Joseph de Croissard. He had pursued her ardently in Paris during the winter, and now he was giving fêtes and shooting parties in her honor at his Château at Carville, in Normandy.

Monsieur d'Avancelles, her husband, saw nothing and knew nothing, as usual. It was said that he lived apart from his wife on account of physical weakness, for which Madame d'Avancelles would not pardon him. He was a short, stout, bald man, with short arms, legs, neck, nose and everything else, while Madame d'Avancelles, on the contrary, was a tall, dark and determined young woman, who laughed in her husband's face with sonorous laughter, while he called her openly *Mrs. Housewife*, who looked at the broad shoulders, strong build and fair moustaches of her titled admirer, Baron Joseph de Croissard, with a certain amount of tenderness.

She had not, however, granted him anything as yet. The baron was ruining himself for her, and there was a constant round of fêting, hunting parties and new pleasures, to which he invited the neighboring nobility. All day long the hounds gave tongue in the woods, as they followed the fox or the wild boar, and every night dazzling fireworks mingled their burning plumes with the boars, while the illuminated windows of the drawing-room cast long rays of light onto the wide lawns, where shadows were moving to and fro.

It was autumn, the russet-colored season of the year, and the leaves were whirling about on the grass like flights of birds. One noticed the smell of damp earth in the air, of the naked earth, like one smells the odor of the bare skin, when a woman's dress falls off her, after a ball.

One evening, in the previous spring, during an entertainment, Madame d'Avancelles had said to Monsieur de Croissard, who was worrying her by his importunities: "If I do succumb to you, my friend, it will not be before the fall of the leaf. I have too many things to do this summer to have any time for it." He had not forgotten that bold and amusing speech, and every day he became more pressing, every day he pushed his approaches nearer—to use a military phrase—and gained a step in the heart of the fair, audacious woman, who seemed only to be resisting for form's sake.

It was the day before a large wild-boar hunt, and in the evening Madame Berthe said to the baron

with a laugh: "Baron, if you kill the brute, I shall have something to say to you." And so, at dawn he was up and out, to try and discover where the solitary animal had its lair. He accompanied his huntsmen, settled the places for the relays, and organized everything personally to insure his triumph, and when the horns gave the signal for setting out, he appeared in a closely fitting coat of scarlet and gold, with his waist drawn in tight, his chest expanded, his eyes radiant, and as fresh and strong as if he had just got out of bed. They set off, and the wild boar set off through the underwood as soon as he was dislodged, followed by the hounds in full cry, while the horses set off at a gallop through the narrow sides cut in the forest, while the carriage which followed the chase at a distance, drove noiselessly along the soft roads.

From mischief, Madame d'Avancelles kept the baron by her side, and lagging behind at a walk in an interminably long and straight drive, over which four rows of oaks hung, so as to form almost an arch, while he, trembling with love and anxiety, listened with one ear to the young woman's bantering chatter, while with the other he listened to the blast of the horns and to the cry of the hounds as they receded in the distance.

"So you do not love me any longer?" she observed. "How can you say such things?" he replied. And she continued: "But you seem to be paying more attention to the sport than to me." He groaned, and said: "Did you not order me to kill the animal myself?" And she replied gravely: "Of course I reckon upon it. You must kill it under my eyes."

Then he trembled in his saddle, spurred his horse until it reared, and, losing all patience, exclaimed: "But, by Jove, Madame, that is impossible if we remain here." Then she spoke tenderly to him, laying her hand on his arm, or stroking his horse's mane, as if from abstraction, and said with a laugh: "But you must do it ... or else ... so much the worse for you."

Just then they turned to the right, into a narrow path which was overhung by trees, and suddenly, to avoid a branch which barred their way, she leaned towards him so closely, that he felt her hair tickling his neck, and he suddenly threw his arms brutally round her, and putting his thick moustache onto her forehead, he gave her a furious kiss.

At first she did not move, and remained motionless under that mad caress; then she turned her head with a jerk, and either by accident or design her little lips met his, under their wealth of light hair, and a moment afterwards, either from confusion or remorse, she struck her horse with her riding-whip, and went off at full gallop, and they rode on like that for some time, without exchanging a look.

The noise of the hunt came nearer, the thickets seemed to tremble, and suddenly the wild boar broke through the bushes, covered with blood, and trying to shake off the hounds who had fastened onto him, and the baron, uttering a shout of triumph, exclaimed: "Let him who loves me, follow me!" And he disappeared in the copse, as if the wood had swallowed him up.

When she reached an open glade a few minutes later, he was just getting up, covered with mud, his coat torn, and his hands bloody, while the brute was lying stretched out at full length, with the baron's hunting knife driven into its shoulder up to the hilt.

The quarry was cut at night by torchlight. It was a warm and dull evening, and the wan moon threw a yellow light onto the torches which made the night misty with their resinous smoke. The hounds devoured the wild boar's stinking entrails, and snarled and fought for them, while the prickers and the gentlemen, standing in a circle round the spoil, blew their horns as loud as they could. The flourish of the hunting-horns resounded beyond the woods on that still night and was repeated by the echoes of the distant valleys, awaking the timid stags, rousing the yelping foxes, and disturbing the little rabbits in their gambols at the edge of the rides.

The frightened night-birds flew over the eager pack of hounds, while the women, who were moved by all these gentle and violent things, leaned rather heavily on the men's arms; and turned aside into the forest rides, before the hounds had finished their meal, and Madame d'Avancelles, feeling languid after that day of fatigue and tenderness, said to the baron: "Will you take a turn in the park, my friend?" And without replying, but trembling and nervous, he went with her, and immediately they kissed each other. They walked slowly under the almost leafless trees through which the moonbeams filtered, and their love, their desires, their longing for a closer embrace became so vehement, that they nearly yielded to it at the foot of a tree.

The horns were not sounding any longer, and the tired hounds were sleeping in the kennels. "Let us return," the young woman said, and they went back.

When they got to the château and before they went in, she said in a weak voice: "I am so tired that I shall go to bed, my friend." And as he opened his arms for a last kiss, she ran away, saying as a last good-bye: "No.... I am going to sleep.... Let him who loves me follow me!"

An hour later, when the whole silent château seemed dead; the baron crept stealthily out of his room, and went and scratched at her door, and as she did not reply, he tried to open it, and found that it was not locked.

She was in a reverie, resting her arms against the window ledge, and he threw himself at her knees, which he kissed madly, through the nightdress. She said nothing, but buried her delicate fingers caressingly in his hair, and suddenly, as if she had formed some great resolution, she whispered with her daring look: "I shall come back, wait for me." And stretching out her hand, she pointed with her finger to an indistinct white spot at the end of the room; it was her bed.

Then, with trembling hands and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he quickly undressed, got into the cool sheets, and stretching himself out comfortably, he almost forgot his love in the pleasure he found, tired out as he was, in the contact of the linen. She did not return, however, no doubt finding amusement in making him languish. He closed his eyes with a feeling of exquisite comfort, and reflected peaceably while waiting for what he so ardently longed for. But by degrees his limbs grew languid and his thoughts became indistinct and fleeting, until his fatigue gained the upper hand and he fell asleep.

He slept that unconquerable, heavy sleep of the worn-out hunter, and he slept until daylight; and then, as the window had remained half open, the crowing of a cock suddenly woke him, and the baron opened his eyes, and feeling a woman's body against his, finding himself, much to his surprise, in a strange bed, and remembering nothing for a moment, he stammered:

"What? Where am I? What is the matter?"

Then she, who had not been asleep at all, looking at this unkempt man, with red eyes and swollen lips, replied in the haughty tone of voice in which she occasionally spoke to her husband:

"It is nothing; it is only a cock crowing. Go and sleep again, Monsieur, it has nothing to do with you."

JULOT'S OPINION

The Duchess Huguette de Lionzac was very much infatuated with herself, but then she had a perfect right to be, and who, in her place, would not have shown a spice of conceit? There was no success which she had wished for, that she had not attained. She had received a medal for sculpture at the *Salon*, and at the *Exhibition of Excessives* she had shown a water-color which looked eccentric, even there.

She had published a collection of poems which was crowned by the French Academy, and a small volume of *Rhythmic Prose* of which the *Revue de lemain* said, "That it showed the most subtle and evanescent performance of those fugitive pieces which was sure to descend to posterity," and when she acted in private theatricals, some exclaimed:

"It is better than the *Comedié Française*," while others, who were more refined, went so far as to utter the supreme praise: "Better than the *Théâtre Libre*."

At one time, there had been a report, which had been propagated by the newspapers, that she was going to come out at the *Opéra Comique*, in a part that had been written especially for her extraordinary voice, for it appeared that Massenet would not hear of anybody else for the part.

She was the circus-rider, Miss Edith, who, under that assumed name gave that unique and never-to-be-forgotten exhibition of horsemanship, and you remember what cheers there were, and what quantities of flowers covered the arena! And you must not forget that this was before a *paying public*!

Then, it was notorious that she had carried off the lovers of several celebrated courtesans, which was not one of the smallest of her triumphs, for she had chosen as her rivals some of those terrible and hitherto unconquered women, of whom it was said:

"Oh! When she has got hold of a man, she does not let him go again. She has some secrets that attach them to her."

There was, therefore, nothing surprising in the fact that the Duchess Huguette should have been so proud of so many victories, and in such various sports; but now, for the first time, a doubt had entered her mind. In turning over the *Notules Psychologiques*[3] of her favorite novel-writer, she had just read these two sentences which disturbed her:

"If anyone wishes to excel in an art, he must have gained a living by it."

"What pleases us in a woman of the world who gives herself up to debauchery, is the contrast between what she is, and what she would like to be."

And she asked herself whether she could really have lived by those arts in which she excelled, and whether the successes that she had obtained, did not chiefly depend on her charm of a woman of the world, who wished to be what she was not. The last *whether*, especially, made her anxious. For was not it precisely that special charm which had given her an advantage over courtesans who employed secrets?

Would she have been victorious if she had been deprived of that weapon? How could she find out?

"And yet," she said to herself, "I must know, for everything depends on this point. If I can win the game without playing that card, I am sure of all my other triumphs; my mind will be easy then, whatever it may cost."

She consulted her old god-father, Viscount Hugues de Pierras, on the subject, and, after a few complimentary words, as she had begged him to be sincere, he said:

"Good heavens! my dear child, I must confess that your psychologist is not altogether wrong, nor your apprehensions either. I have, before now, left many learned mistresses for women who were not in the least learned, and who pleased me all the better on that account. But that did not prevent the mistresses I had sacrificed from being women of incomprehensible talents, in spite of their defeat. But what does that matter? It ought to be enough for you, that you conquer, without troubling yourself about the means by which you obtain your victory. I do not suppose that you have any pretensions to being a *virtuosa* in ..."

"In everything, yes. Excuse me, god-father, I have such pretensions. And what I ask of you, is the means of obtaining absolute proof that my pretensions are justified."

"Hum! Hum!" the viscount said, in some embarrassment, "I do not know of any means, my dear child, unless we get together a jury...."

"Please do not joke about it!" Huguette exclaimed. "I am perfectly serious."

"I am very serious also, I assure you, I think that a jury..."

"Composed of whom? Of men of the world, I suppose?"

"And what does this Julot do?"

"Oh! really, Duchess, you force me to speak of persons and things, which ..."

"Yes, yes, I force you to; we understand that. But tell me! Bluntly, without mincing matters, if necessary. You know that I have no objection to that sort of thing, so go on. Do not keep me in suspense like this. I am burning with curiosity. What does Julot do?"

"Very well, little volunteer, if you insist on knowing, I will tell you. Julot, generally called *Fine-Gueule*, is a trier of women."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I will explain it to you. There are a few of us old amateurs in Paris, who are too old and impatient to hunt for truffles, but who want them of such and such a flavor, exactly to our taste. Now, Julot knows our tastes, our various fancies, and he undertakes ..."

"Capital! Capital!"

MADEMOISELLE

He had been registered under the names of Jean Marie Mathieu Valot, but he was never called anything but *Mademoiselle*. He was the idiot of the district, but not one of those wretched, ragged idiots who live on public charity. He lived comfortably on a small income which his mother had left him, and which his guardian paid him regularly, and so he was rather envied than pitied. And then, he was not one of those idiots with wild looks, and the manners of an animal, for he was by no means an unpleasing object, with his half-open lips and smiling eyes, and especially in his constant make-up in female dress. For he dressed like a girl, and showed by that, how little he objected to being called *Mademoiselle*.

And why should he not like the nickname which his mother had given him affectionately, when he was a mere child, and so delicate and weak, with such a fair complexion, a poor little diminutive lad, that he was not as tall as many girls of the same age? It was in pure love that, in his earlier years, his mother whispered that tender *Mademoiselle* to him, while his old grandmother used to say jokingly:

"The fact is, that as for the *tip-cat* he has got, it is really not worth mentioning in a Christian. No offense to God in saying so." And his grandfather who was equally fond of a joke, used to add: "I only hope he will not lose it, as he grows bigger, like tadpoles do their tails!"

And they treated him as if he had really been a girl and coddled him, the more so as they were very prosperous, and did not require a man to keep things together.

When his mother and grandparents were dead, *Mademoiselle* was almost as happy with his paternal uncle, an unmarried man, who had carefully attended the idiot, and who had grown more and more attached to him by dint of looking after him; and the worthy man continued to call Jean Marie Mathieu Valot, *Mademoiselle*.

He was called so in all the country round as well, not with the slightest intention of hurting his feelings, but, on the contrary, because all thought they would please the poor gentle creature who harmed nobody.

The very street boys meant no harm by it, accustomed as they were to call the tall idiot in a frock and cap, so; but it would have struck them as very extraordinary, and would have led them to in rude fun, if they had seen him dressed like a boy.

Mademoiselle, however, took care of that, for his dress was as dear to him as his nickname. He delighted in wearing it, and, in fact, cared for nothing else, and what gave it a particular zest was, that he knew that he was not a girl, and that he was living in disguise. And this was evident,

by the exaggerated feminine bearing and walk he put on, as if to show that it was not natural to him. His enormous, carefully frilled cap was adorned with large variegated ribbons. His petticoat, with numerous flounces, was distended behind by many hoops. He walked with short steps, and with exaggerated swaying of the hips, while his folded arms and crossed hands were distorted into pretensions of comical coquetry.

On such occasions, if anybody wished to make friends with him, it was necessary to say:

"Ah! *Mademoiselle*, what a nice girl you make."

That put him into a good humor, and he used to reply, much pleased:

"Don't I? But people can see I only do it for a joke."

But, nevertheless, when they were dancing at village festivals in the neighborhood, he would always be invited to dance as *Mademoiselle*, and would never ask any of the girls to dance with him; and one evening when somebody asked him the reason for this, he opened his eyes wide, laughed as if the man had said something very stupid, and replied:

"I cannot ask the girls because I am not dressed like a lad. Just look at my dress, you fool!"

As his interrogator was a judicious man, he said to him:

"Then dress like one, *Mademoiselle*."

He thought for a moment, and then said with a cunning look:

"But if I dress like a lad, I shall no longer be a girl; but then, I am a girl;" and he shrugged his shoulders as he said it.

But the remark seemed to make him think.

For some time afterwards, when he met the same person, he asked him abruptly:

"If I dress like a lad, will you still call me *Mademoiselle*?"

"Of course, I shall," the other replied. "You will always be called so."

The idiot appeared delighted, for there was no doubt that he thought more of his nickname than he did of his dress, and the next day he made his appearance in the village square without his petticoats and dressed as a man. He had taken a pair of trousers, a coat and a hat, from his guardian's clothes-press, and this created quite a revolution in the neighborhood, for the people, who had been in the habit of smiling at him kindly when he was dressed as a woman, looked at him in astonishment and almost in fear, while the indulgent could not help laughing, and visibly making fun of him.

The involuntary hostility of some, and the too evident ridicule of others, the disagreeable surprise of all, were too palpable for him not to see it, and to be hurt by it, and it was still worse when a street urchin said to him in a jeering voice, as he danced round him:

"Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*, you wear trousers! Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*!"

And it grew worse and worse, when a whole band of these vagabonds were on his heels, hooting and yelling after him, as if he had been somebody in a masquerading dress, during the carnival.

It was quite certain that the unfortunate creature looked much more as if he were in a disguise now than he had done formerly. By dint of living like a girl, and by even exaggerating the feminine walk and manners, he had totally lost all masculine looks and ways. His smooth face, his long flax like hair, required a cap with ribbons, and became a caricature under the high chimney-pot hat of the old doctor, his grandson.

Mademoiselle's shoulders, and especially her swelling stern danced about wildly in this old fashioned coat and wide trousers. And nothing was as funny as the contrast between his quiet dress and slow trotting pace, the winning way he combed his head, and the conceited movements of his hands, with which he fanned himself, like a silly girl.

Soon the older lads and the girls, the old women, men of ripe age and even the Judicial Councilor joined the little brats, and hooted *Mademoiselle*, while the astonished idiot ran away, and rushed into the house with terror. There he took his poor head between both hands, and tried to comprehend the matter. Why were they angry with him? For it was quite evident that they were angry with him. What wrong had he done, and whom had he injured, by dressing as a boy? Was he not a boy, after all? For the first time in his life, he felt a horror for his nickname, for had he not been insulted through it? But immediately he was seized with a horrible doubt.

"Suppose that, after all, I was a girl?"

He would have liked to ask his guardian about it but he did not want to, for he somehow felt, although only obscurely, that he, worthy man, might not tell him the truth, out of kindness. And, besides, he preferred to find out for himself, without asking anyone.

All his idiot's cunning, which had been lying latent up till then, because he never had any occasion to make use of it, now came out and urged him to a solitary and dark action.

The next day he dressed himself as a girl again, and made his appearance as if he had perfectly

forgotten his escapade of the day before, but the people, especially the street boys, had not forgotten it. They looked at him sideways, and, even the best of them, could not help smiling, while the little blackguards ran after him and said:

"Oh! oh! *Mademoiselle*, you had on a pair of breeches!"

But he pretended to hear, moreover, to guess to whom they were alluding. He seemed as happy, and glad to look about him as he usually did, with half open lips and smiling eyes. As usual, he wore an enormous cap with variegated ribbons, and large petticoats as usual, he walked with short, mincing steps, swaying and wriggling his hips and crupper, and he gesticulated like a coquette, and licked his lips, when they called him *Mademoiselle*, while in his head, he would have liked too have jumped at the throat of those who called him so.

Days and months passed, and by degrees these about him forgot all about his strange escapade, but he had never left off thinking about it, nor trying to find out, for which he was ever on the alert—how he could find out what were his qualities as a boy, and how could he assert them victoriously. Really innocent, he had reached the age of twenty without knowing anything about it, or without ever having any natural impulse to discover it, but being tenacious of purpose, curious and dissembling, he asked no questions, but observed all that was said and done.

Often at their village dances, he had heard young fellows boasting about girls whom they had seduced, and praising such and such a young fellow, and often, also, after a dance, he saw the couples go away together, with their arms round each other's waists. They had no suspicions of him, and he listened and watched, until, at last, he discovered what was going on.

And, then, one night, when dancing was over, and the couples were going away with their arms round each other's waists, a terrible screaming was heard at the corner of the woods through which those going to the next village, had to pass. It was Josephine, pretty Josephine, for she was brave as well, and when her screams were heard, they ran to her assistance, and they arrived only just in time to rescue her, half strangled from *Mademoiselle's* clutches.

The idiot had watched her, and had thrown himself upon her in order to treat her as the other young fellows did the girls, but she resisted him so stoutly that he took her by the throat and squeezed with all his might until she could not breathe, and was nearly dead.

In rescuing Josephine from him, they had thrown him on the ground, but he jumped up again immediately, foaming at the mouth and slobbering, and exclaimed:

"I am not a girl any longer, I am a young man, I am a young man, I tell you."

And he proudly essayed to convince them that it was so, but the evidence that he could adduce was very slight.

THE MOUNTEBANKS

Compardin, the clever manage of the *Eden Réunis Théâtre*, as the theater critics invariably called him, was reckoning on a great success, and he had invested his last franc in the affair, without thinking of the morrow, or of the bad luck which had been pursuing him so inexorably for months past. For a whole week, the walls, the kiosks, shopfronts, and even the trees, had been placarded with flaming posters, and from one end of Paris to the other carriages were to be seen which were covered with fancy sketches of Chéret, that represented two strong, well-built men who looked like ancient athletes. The younger of them, who was standing with his arms folded, had the vacant smile of an itinerant mountebank on his face, and the other, who was dressed in what was supposed to be the costume of a Mexican trapper, held a revolver in his hand. There were large type advertisements in all the papers, that the Montefiores would appear without fail at the *Eden Réunis*, the next Monday.

Nothing else was talked about, for the puff and humbug attracted people. The Montefiores, like fashionable knicknacks, succeeded that whimsical jade, Rose Péché, who had gone off the preceding autumn, between the third and fourth acts of the burlesque, *Ousca Iscar*, in order to make a study of love in company of a young fellow of seventeen, who had just entered the university. The novelty and difficulty of their performance, revived and agitated the curiosity of the public, for there seemed to be an implied threat of death, or, at any rate, of wounds and of blood in it, and it seemed as if they defied danger with absolute indifference. And that always pleased women; it holds them and masters them, and they grow pale with emotion and cruel enjoyment. Consequently, all the seats in the large theater were let almost immediately, and were soon taken for several days in advance. And stout Compardin losing his glass of absinthe over a game of dominoes, was in high spirits, and saw the future through rosy glasses, and exclaimed in a loud voice: "I think I have turned up trumps, by George!"

The Countess Regina de Villégby was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, languidly fanning herself. She had only received three or four intimate friends that day, Saint Mars Montalvin, Tom Sheffield, and his cousin, Madame de Rhouel, a Creole, who laughed as incessantly as a bird

sings. It was growing dusk, and the distant rumbling of the carriages in the Avenue of the Champs-Elysées sounded like some somnolent rhythm. There was a delicate perfume of flowers; the lamps had not been brought in yet, and chatting and laughing filled the room with a confused noise.

"Would you pour out the tea?" the Countess said, suddenly, touching Saint Mars' fingers, who was beginning an amorous conversation in a low voice, with her fan. And while he slowly filled the little china cup, he continued: "Are the Montefiores as good as the lying newspapers make out?"

Then Tom Sheffield and the others all joined in.

They had never seen anything like it, they declared; it was most exciting, and made one shiver unpleasantly, like when the *espada* comes to close quarters with the infuriated brute at a bull fight.

Countess Regina listened in silence, and nibbled the petals of a tea rose.

"How I should like to see them!" giddy Madame de Rhouel exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, cousin," the Countess said, in the solemn tones of a preacher, "a respectable woman dare not let herself be seen in improper places."

They all agreeing with her, nevertheless, Madame de Villégby was present at the Montefiores' performance two days later, dressed all in black, and wearing a thick veil, at the back of a stage box.

And that woman was as cold as a steel buckler, and had married as soon as she left the convent in which she had been to school, without any affection or even liking for her husband, whom the most skeptical respected as a saint, and who had a look of virgin purity on her calm face as she went down the steps of the Madeleine on Sundays, after high mass.

Countess Regina stretched herself nervously, grew pale, and trembled like the strings of a violin, on which an artist had been playing some wild symphony, and inhaled the nasty smell of the sawdust, as if it had been the perfume of a bouquet of unknown flowers, and clenched her hands, and gazed eagerly at the two mountebanks, whom the public applauded rapturously at every feat. And contemptuously and haughtily she compared those two men, who were as vigorous as wild animals that have grown up in the open air, with the rickety limbs, which look so awkward in the dress of an English groom, that had tried to inflame her heart.

Count de Villégby had gone back to the country, to prepare for his election as Councilor-General, and the very evening that he started, Regina again took the stage box at the *Eden Réunis*. Consumed by sensual ardor as if by some love philter, she scribbled a few words on a piece of paper—the eternal formula that women write on such occasions:

"A carriage will be waiting for you at the stage door after the performance—An unknown woman who adores you."

And then she gave it to a box opener, who handed it to the Montefiore who was the champion pistol shot.

Oh! that interminable waiting in a malodorous cab, the overwhelming emotion, and the nausea of disgust, the fear, the desire of waking the coachman who was nodding on the box, of giving him her address, and telling him to drive her home. But she remained with her face against the window, mechanically looking at the dark passage, that was illuminated by a gas lamp, at the "actors' entrance," through which men were continually hurrying, who talked in a loud voice, and chewed the end of a cigar which had gone out. She remained as if she were glued to the cushions, and tapped impatiently on the bottom of the cab with her heels.

When the actor who thought it was a joke, made his appearance, she could hardly utter a word, for evil pleasure is as intoxicating as adulterated liquor, so face to face with this immediate surrender, and this unconstrained immodesty, he at first thought that he had to do with a street walker.

Regina felt various sensations, and a morbid pleasure throughout her whole person. She pressed close to him, and raised her veil to show how young, beautiful, and desirable she was. They did not speak a word, like wrestlers before a combat. She was eager to be locked up with him, to give herself to him, and, at last, to know that moral uncleanness, of which, she was, of course, ignorant, as a chaste wife; and when they left the room in the hotel together, where they had spent hours like amorous deer, the man dragged himself along, and almost groped his way like a blind man, while Regina was smiling, though nevertheless, she retained her serene candor of an unsullied virgin, like she did almost always on Sundays, after mass.

Then she took the second. He was very sentimental, and his head was full of romance. He thought the unknown woman, who merely used him as her plaything, really loved him, and he was not satisfied with furtive meetings. He questioned her, besought her, and the Countess made fun of him. Then she chose the two Mountebanks in turn. They did not know it, for she had forbidden them ever to talk about her to each other, under the penalty of never seeing her again,

and one night the younger of them said with humble tenderness, as he knelt at her feet:

"How kind you are, to love and to want me! I thought that such happiness only existed in novels, and that ladies of rank only made fun of poor strolling Mountebanks, like us!"

Regina knitted her golden brows.

"Do not be angry," he continued, "because I followed you and found out where you lived, and your real name, and that you are a countess, and rich, very rich."

"You fool!" she exclaimed, trembling with anger. "People would make you believe things, as easily as they would a child!"

She had had enough of him; he knew her name, and might compromise her. The Count might possibly come back from the country before the elections, and then, the Mountebank began to love her. She no longer had any feeling, any desire for those two lovers, whom a fillip from her rosy fingers could bend to her will. It was time to go on to the next chapter, and to seek for fresh pleasures elsewhere.

"Listen to me," she said to the champion shot, the next night. "I would rather not hide anything from you. I like your comrade; I have given myself to him, and I do not want to have anything more to do with you."

"My comrade!" he repeated.

"Well, what then? The change amuses me!"

He uttered a furious cry, and rushed at Regina with clenched fists. She thought he was going to kill her, and closed her eyes, but he had not the courage to hurt that delicate body, which he had so often covered with caresses, and in despair, and hanging his head, he said hoarsely:

"Very well, we shall not meet again, since it is your wish."

The house at the *Eden Réunis* was as full as an over-filled basket The violins were playing a soft and delightful waltz of Gungl's, which the reports of a revolver accentuated.

The Montefiores were standing opposite to one another, like in Chéret's picture, and about a dozen yards apart, and an electric light was thrown on to the youngest, who was leaning against a large white target, and very slowly the other traced his living outline with bullet after bullet. He aimed with prodigious skill, and the black dots showed on the cardboard, and marked the shape of his body. The applause drowned the orchestra, and increased continually, when suddenly a shrill cry of horror resounded from one end of the hall to the other. The women fainted, the violins stopped, and the spectators jostled each other. At the ninth ball, the younger brother had fallen to the ground, an inert mass, with a gaping wound in his forehead. His brother did not move, and there was a look of madness on his face, while the Countess de Villégby leaned on the ledge of her box, and fanned herself calmly, as implacable as any cruel goddess of ancient mythology.

The next day, between four and five, when she was surrounded by her usual friends in her little, warm, Japanese drawing room, it was strange to hear in what a languid and indifferent voice she exclaimed:

"They say that an accident happened to one of those famous clowns, the Monta ... the Monti ... what is his name, Tom?"

"The Montefiores, Madame!"

And then they began to talk about the sale at Angéle Velours, who was going to buy the former follies, at the hotel Drouot, before marrying Prince Storbeck.

THE SEQUEL TO A DIVORCE

Certainly, although he had been engaged in the most extraordinary, most unlikely, most extravagant and funniest cases, and had won legal games without a trump in his hand, although he had worked out the obscure law of divorce, as if it had been a Californian gold mine Maitre[4] Garrulier the celebrated, the only Garrulier, could not check a movement of surprise, nor a disheartening shake of the head, nor a smile when the Countess de Baudémont explained her affairs to him for the first time.

He had just opened his correspondence, and his long hands, on which he bestowed the greatest attention, buried themselves in a heap of female letters, and one might have thought oneself in the confessional of a fashionable preacher, so impregnated was the atmosphere with delicate perfumes.

Immediately, even before she had said a word, with the sharp glance of a practiced man of the world, that look which made beautiful Madame de Serpenoise say: "He strips your heart bare!" The lawyer had classed her in the third category. Those who suffer came into his first category, those who love, into the second, and those who are bored, into the third, and she belonged to the

latter.

She was a pretty windmill, whose sails turned and flew round, and fretted the blue sky with a delicious shiver of joy, as it were. The brain of a bird, in which four correct and healthy ideas could not exist side by side, and in which all dreams and every kind of folly are engulfed, like a great crevice.

Incapable of hurting a fly, emotional, charitable, with a feeling of tenderness for the street girl who sold bunches of violets for a penny, for a cab horse, which a driver was ill using, for a melancholy pauper's funeral, when the body, without friends or relations to follow it, was being conveyed to the common grave, doing anything that might afford five minutes' amusement, not caring if she made men miserable for the rest of their days, and taking pleasure in kindling passions which consumed men's whole being, looking upon life as too short to be anything else than one uninterrupted round of gaiety and enjoyment, she thought that people might find plenty of time for being serious and reasonable in the evening of life, when they are at the bottom of the hill, and their looking glass showed them a wrinkled face, surrounded with white hair.

A thoroughbred Parisian, whom one would follow to the end of the world like a poodle; a woman whom one adores with the head, the heart and the senses until one is nearly driven mad, as soon as one has inhaled the delicate perfume that emanates from her dress and hair, or touched her skin, and heard her laugh; a woman for whom one would fight a duel and risk one's life without a thought; for whom a man would remove mountains, and sell his soul to the devil several times over, if the devil were still in the habit of frequenting the places of bad repute on this earth.

She had perhaps come to see this Garrulier, whom she had so often heard mentioned at five o'clock tea, near, so as to be able to describe him to her female friends subsequently in droll phrases, to imitate his gestures and the unctuous inflections of his voice, perhaps, in order to experience some new sensation, or, perhaps, for the sake of dressing like a woman who was going to try for a divorce; and, certainly, the whole effect was perfect. She wore a splendid cloak embroidered with jet, which gave an almost serious effect to her golden hair, to her small slightly turned up nose, with its quivering nostrils, and to her long eyes, full of enigmas and fun; and a dark stuff dress, which was fastened at the neck by a sapphire and a diamond pin.

The barrister did not interrupt her, but allowed her to get excited and to chatter, to enumerate her causes for complaint against poor Count de Baudémont, who certainly had no suspicion of his wife's escapade, who would have been very much surprised if any one had told him of it at that moment, when he was taking his fencing lesson at the club.

When she had quite finished, he said coolly, as if he were throwing a pail of water on some burning straw.

"But, Madame, there is not the slightest pretext for a divorce in anything that you have told me, here...the judges would ask me whether I took the Law Courts for a theater, and intended to make fun of them."

And seeing how disheartened she was, and that she looked like a child whose favorite toy had been broken, and, also, because she was so pretty, that he would have liked to kiss her hands in his devotion, and as she seemed to be witty, and very amusing, and as, moreover, he had no objection to such visits being prolonged, when papers had to be looked over, while sitting close together, Maitre Garrulier appeared to be considering, and, taking his chin in his hand, he said:

"However, I will think it over...there is sure to be some dark spot that can be made out worse.... Write to me, and come and see me again..."

In the course of her visits, that black spot had increased so much, and Madame de Baudémont had followed her lawyer's advice so punctually, and had played on the various cords so skillfully, a few months later, that after a lawsuit, which is still spoken of in the Courts of Justice, and during the course of which, the President had to take off his spectacles, and to use his pocket-handkerchief noisily, the divorce was pronounced in favor of the Countess Marie Anne Nicole Bournet de Baudémont, *née* de Tanchart de Peothus.

The Count, who was nonplussed at such an adventure, which was turning out so seriously, first of all, flew into a terrible rage, and nearly rushed off to the lawyer's office, and threatened to cut off his knavish ears for him, but when his access of fury was over, and thinking better of it, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"All the better for her, if it amuses her!"

Then he bought Baron Silberstein's yacht, and with some friends, got up a cruise, to Ceylon and India.

Marie-Anne began by triumphing, and felt as happy as a schoolgirl going home for the holidays, who feels the bridle on her neck, committed every possible folly, and soon, tired, satiated, and disgusted, she began to yawn, cried and found out that she had sacrificed her happiness, like a millionaire who had gone mad, and who threw his banknotes and shares into the river, and that she was nothing more than a disabled waif and stray. Consequently, she now married again, as the solitude of her home made her morose from morning till night; and then, besides, a woman requires a mansion when she goes into society, to race meetings, or to the theater.

And so, while she became a marchioness, and pronounced her second "Yes," before a very few

friends, at the office of the mayor of the English urban district, and malicious ones in the Faurbourg were making fun of the whole affair, and affirming this and that, whether rightly or wrongly, and compromising the present husband to the former one, even declaring that he had partially been the cause of the former divorce, Monsieur de Baudémont was wandering over the four quarters of the globe trying to overcome his homesickness, and to deaden his longing for love, which had taken possession of his heart and of his body, like a slow poison.

He traveled through the most out of the way places, and the most lovely countries, and spent months and months at sea, and plunged into every kind of dissipation and debauchery. But neither the supple backs nor the luxurious gestures of the *bayaderés*, nor the large, passive eyes of the Creoles, nor flirtations with English *missives* with hair the color of new cider, nor nights of waking dreams, when he saw new constellations in the sky, nor dangers during which a man thinks it is all over with him, and mutters a few words of prayer in spite of himself, when the waves are so high, and the sky so black, nothing was able to make him forget that little Parisian woman who smelled so delicious that she might have been taken for a bouquet of rare flowers; who was so coaxing, so curious, so funny; who never had the same caprice, the same smile, or the same look twice, and who, at bottom, was worth more than many others, than the saints and the sinless.

He thought of her constantly, during long hours of sleeplessness. He carried her portrait about with him in the pocket of his pea-jacket; a charming portrait in which she was smiling, and showing her white teeth between her half-open lips, and while her gentle eyes, with their magnetic look, had a happy, frank expression, and in which, from the mere reflection of her hair, one could see that she was fair among the fair.

And he used to kiss that portrait of the woman who had been his wife as if he wished to efface it, and would look at it for hours, and then throw himself down on the netting, and sob like a child as he looked at the infinite expanse before him, and seemed to see in their lost happiness the joys of their perished affections, and the divine remembrance of their love in the monotonous waste of green waters. And he tried to accuse himself for all that had occurred, and not to be angry with her, to think that his grievances were imaginary, and to adore her in spite of everything and always.

And that he roamed about the world, tossed to and fro, suffering, and hoping, he knew not what. He ventured into the greatest dangers, and sought for death just as a man seeks for his mistress, and death passed close to him without touching him, and was perhaps amused at his grief and misery.

For he was as wretched as a stone-breaker, as one of those poor devils who work and nearly break their backs over the hard flints the whole day long, under the scorching sun or the cold rain, and Marie-Anne herself was not happy, for she was pining for the past, and remembered their former love.

At last, however, he returned to France, changed, tamed by exposure, sun, and rain, and transformed as if by some witch's filter.

Nobody would have recognized the elegant and effeminate clubman in this species of corsair, with broad shoulders, a skin the color of blister, with very red lips, and who rolled a little in his walk; who seemed to be stifled in his black dress-coat, but who still retained his distinguished manners, the bearing of a nobleman of the last century, who, when he was ruined, fitted out a privateer, and fell upon the English wherever he met them, from St. Malo to Calcutta. And wherever he showed himself his friends exclaimed:

"Why! Is that you? I should never have known you again!"

He was very nearly starting off again immediately. He even telegraphed orders to Havre to get the steam-yacht ready for sea again directly, when he heard that Marie-Anne had married again.

He saw her in the distance, at the *Théâtre Français* one Tuesday, and when he noticed how pretty, how fair, how desirable she was, and looking so melancholy, with all the appearance of an unhappy soul that regrets something, his determination grew weaker, and he delayed his departure from week to week, and waited, without knowing why, until, at last, worn out with the struggle, watching her wherever she went, more in love with her than he had ever been before, he wrote her long, mad, ardent letters in which his passion overflowed like a stream of lava.

He altered his handwriting, as he remembered her restless brain and her many whims. He sent her the flowers which he knew she liked best, and told her that she was his life, that he was dying of waiting for her, of longing for her, for her, his idol.

At last, very much puzzled and surprised, guessing—who knows?—from the instinctive beating of her heart, and her general emotion, that it must be he this time, he whose soul she had tortured with such cold cruelty, and knowing that she could make amends for the past and bring back their former love, she replied to him, and granted him the meeting that he asked for. She fell into his arms, and they both sobbed with joy and ecstasy. Their kisses were those which lips only give when they have lost each other and found each other again at last, when they meet and exhaust themselves in each other's looks, thirsting for tenderness, love and enjoyment.

Last week Count de Baudémont carried off Marie-Anne quietly and coolly, just like one resumes possession of one's house on returning from a journey, and drives out the intruders. And when *Maitre* Garrulier was told of this unheard-of scandal, he rubbed his hands—his long, delicate hands of a sensual prelate—and exclaimed:

"That is absolutely logical, and I should like to be in their place."

THE MAN WITH THE DOGS

His wife, even when talking to him, always called him Monsieur Bistaud, but in all the country round, within a radius of ten leagues in France and Belgium, he was known as *cet homme aux chiens*[5]. It was not a very valuable reputation, however, and "That man with the dogs" became a sort of pariah.

In Thierache they are not very fond of the custom-house officers, for everybody, high or low, profits by smuggling; thanks to which many articles, and especially coffee, gunpowder and tobacco are to be had cheap. It may here be stated that on that wooded, broken country, where the meadows are surrounded by brushwood, and the lanes are dark and narrow, smuggling is chiefly carried on by means of sporting dogs, who are broken in to become smuggling dogs. Scarcely an evening passes without some of them being seen, loaded with contraband, trotting silently along, pushing their noses through a hole in a hedge, with furtive and uneasy looks, and sniffing the air to scent the custom-house officers and their dogs. These dogs also are specially trained, and are very ferocious, and easily rip up their unfortunate congeners, who become the game instead of hunting for it.

Now, nobody was capable of imparting this unnatural education to them so well as "the man with his dogs," whose business consisted in breaking in dogs for the custom-house authorities, and everybody looked upon it as a dirty business, a business which could only be performed by a man without any proper feeling.

"He is a men's robber," the women said, "to take honest dogs into nurse, and to make a lot of Judas's out of them."

While the boys shouted insulting verses behind his back, the men and the women abused him, but no one ventured to do it to his face, for he was not very patient, and was always accompanied by one of his huge dogs, and that served to make him respected.

Certainly, without that bodyguard, he would have had a bad time of it, especially at the hands of the smugglers, who had a deadly hatred for him. By himself, and in spite of his quarrelsome looks, he did not appear very formidable, for he was short and thin, his back was round, his legs were bandy, and his arms were as long and as thin as spiders' legs, and he could easily have been knocked down by a back-handed blow or a kick. But then, he had those confounded dogs which interfered with the bravest smugglers. How could they risk even a thrust when he had those huge brutes, with their fierce and bloodshot eyes, and their square heads, whose jaws were like a vise, with enormous white teeth, that were as sharp as daggers, and whose huge molars crunched up beef-bones to a pulp with them? They were wonderfully broken in, were always by him, obeyed him by signs, and were taught, not only to worry the smugglers' dogs, but also to fly at the throats of the smugglers themselves.

The consequence was that both he and his dogs were left alone, and people were satisfied in calling them names and sending them all to Coventry. No peasant ever set foot in his cottage, although Bistaud's wife kept a small shop and was a handsome woman, and the only persons who went there were the custom-house officers. The others took their revenge on them all by saying that the man with the dogs sold his wife to the custom-house officers, like he did his dogs.

"He keeps her for them, as well as his dogs," they said jeeringly. "You can see that he is a born cuckold with his yellow beard and eyebrows, which stick up like a pair of horns."

His hair was certainly red, or rather yellow, his thick eyebrows were turned up in two points on his temples, and he used to twirl them mechanically as if they had been a pair of moustaches. And certainly, with his hair like that, and with his long beard and shaggy eyebrows, with his sallow face, blinking eyes, and dull looks, with his dogged mouth, thin lips, and his miserable, deformed body, he was not a pleasing object.

But he assuredly was not a complaisant cuckold, and those who have said that of him had never seen him at home. On the contrary, he was always jealous, and kept as sharp a lookout on his wife as he did on his dogs, and if he had broken her in at all, it was to be as faithful to him as they were.

She was a handsome, and what they call in the country, a fine body of a woman; tall, well-built, with a full bust and broad breech, and she certainly made more than one excise man squint at her, but it was no use for them to come and sniff round her too closely, or else there would have been blows. At least, that is what the custom-house officers said when anybody joked with them and said to them: "That does not matter, no doubt, you and she have hunted for your fleas together."

It was no use for them to defend Madame Bistaud's fierce virtue; nobody believed them, and the only answer they got was: "You are hiding your game, and are ashamed of going to seduce a woman who belongs to such a wretched creature."

And, certainly, nobody would have believed that such a buxom woman, who looked as if her crupper were as warm as her looks, and who assuredly must have liked to be well attended to, could be satisfied with such a puny husband; with such an ugly, weak, red-headed fellow, who smelled of his own hair and of the mustiness of the carrion which he gave to his hounds.

But they did not know that "the man with the dogs" had some years before given her, once for all, a lesson in fidelity, and that for a mere trifle, and that for a venial sin! He had surprised her for allowing herself to be kissed by some gallant; that was all! He had not taken any notice, but when the man was gone he brought two of his hounds into the room, and said:

"If you do not want them to tear your inside out as they would a rabbit's, go down on your knees so that I may thrash you!"

She obeyed in terror, and "the man with the dogs" had beaten her with a whip until his arm dropped with fatigue. And she did not venture to scream, although she was bleeding under the blows of the thong, which tore her dress, and cut into the flesh; all she dared to do was to utter low, hoarse groans; for while beating her, he kept on saying:

"Don't make a noise, by ——; don't make a noise, or I will let the dogs fly at your stern."

From that time she had been faithful to Bistaud, though she had naturally not told anyone the reason for it, nor for her hatred either, not even Bistaud himself, who thought that she was subdued for all time, and who always found her very submissive and respectful. But for six years she had nourished her hatred in her heart, feeding it on silent hopes and promises of revenge. And it was that flame of hope and that longing for revenge which made her so coquettish with the custom-house officers, for she hoped to find a possible avenger among her inflammable admirers.

At last she came across the right man. He was a splendid sub-officer of the customs, built like a Hercules, with fists like a butcher's, and who had long leased four of his ferocious dogs from her husband.

As soon as they had grown accustomed to their new master, and especially after they had tasted flesh of the smugglers' dogs, they had, by degrees, become detached from their former master, who had reared them. No doubt they still recognized him a little, and would not have sprung at his throat as if he had been a perfect stranger, but still, they did not hesitate between his voice and that of their new master, and they obeyed the latter only.

Although the woman had often noticed this, she had not hitherto been able to make much use of the circumstance. A custom-house officer, as a rule, only keeps one dog, and this fellow always had half-a-dozen, at least, in training, without reckoning a personal guard which he kept for himself and which was the fiercest of all. Consequently, any duel between some lover assisted by only one dog, and the dog-breaker defended by his pack, was impossible.

But on that occasion, the chances were more equal. Just then he had only five dogs in the kennel, and two of them were quite young, though certainly old *Bourreau*[6] counted for several, but after all, they could risk a battle against him and the other three, with the two couples of the custom-house officer, and they must profit by the occasion.

And one fine evening, as the brigadier of the custom-house officers was alone in the shop with Bistaud's wife and was squeezing her waist, she said to him abruptly:

"Do you really want to have something to do with me, *Môssieu*[7] Fernand?"

He kissed her on the lips as he replied: "Do I really want to? I would give my stripes for it; so you see...."

"Very well," she replied, "do as I tell you, and upon my word, as an honest woman, I will be your commodity to do what you like with."

And laying a stress on that word *commodity*, which in that part of the country means mistress, she whispered hotly into his ear:

"A commodity who knows her business, I can tell you, for my beast of a husband has trained me up in such a way that I am now absolutely disgusted with him."

Fernand, who was much excited, promised her everything that she wished, and feverishly, malignantly, she told him how shamefully her husband had treated her a short time before, how her fair skin had been cut, told him her hatred and thirst for revenge; and the brigadier acquiesced, and that same evening he came to the cottage accompanied by his four hounds, with their spiked collars on.

"What are you going to do with them?" "the man with the dogs" asked.

"I have come to see whether you did not rob me when you sold them to me," the brigadier replied.

"What do you mean by 'robbed you'?"

"Well, robbed! I have been told that they could not tackle a dog like your *Bourreau*, and that many smugglers have dogs who are as good as he is."

"Impossible."

"Well, in case any of them should have one, I should like to see how the dogs that you sold me could tackle them."

The woman laughed an evil laugh, and her husband grew suspicious, when he saw that the brigadier replied to it by a wink. But his suspicions came too late. The *breaker* had no time to go to the kennel to let out his pack, for *Bourreau* had been seized by the custom-house officer's four dogs. At the same time the woman locked the door, and already her husband was lying motionless on the floor, while *Bourreau* could not go to his assistance, as he had enough to do to defend himself against the furious attack of the other dogs, who were almost tearing him to pieces, in spite of his strength and courage. Five minutes later two of the attacking hounds were totally disabled with the bowels protruding, but *Bourreau* himself was dying, with his throat gaping.

Then the woman and the custom-house officer kissed each other before the breaker whom they bound firmly, while the two dogs of the custom-house officer, that were still on their legs, were panting for breath, and the other three were wallowing in their own blood, and while the amorous couple were carrying on all sorts of capers, who were still further excited by the rage of the dog-breaker, who was forced to look at them, and who shouted in his despair:

"You wretches! You shall pay for this!" And the woman's only reply was, to say: "Cuckold! Cuckold! Cuckold!"

When she was tired of larking, her hatred was not yet satisfied, and she said to the brigadier:

"Fernand, go to the kennels and shoot the five other brutes; otherwise he will make them kill me to-morrow. Off you go, old fellow!"

The brigadier obeyed, and immediately five shots were heard in the darkness. It did not take long, but that short time had been enough for "the man with the dogs" to show what he could do. While he was tied, the two dogs of the custom-house officer had gradually recognized him, and came and fondled him, and as soon as he was alone with his wife, as she was insulting him, he said, in his usual voice of command to the dogs:

"At her, Flanbard! At her, Garou!" And the two dogs sprang at the wretched woman, and one seized her by the throat, while the other caught her by the side.

When the brigadier came back, she was dying on the ground in a pool of blood, and "the man with the dogs" said with a laugh: "There, you see, that is the way I break in my dogs!"

The custom-house officer rushed out in horror, followed by his hounds who licked his hands as they ran, and made them quite red.

The next morning "the man with the dogs" was found still bound, but chuckling, in his hovel that was turned into a slaughter-house.

They were both arrested and tried, when "the man with the dogs" was acquitted, and the brigadier sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The matter gave much food for talk in the district, and is, indeed, still talked about, for "the man with the dogs" returned there, and is more celebrated than ever under his nickname, but his celebrity is not of a bad kind, for he is now just as much respected and liked as he was despised and hated formerly. He is still, as a matter of fact, "the man with the dogs," as he is rightly called, for he has not his equal as a dog-breaker for leagues around, but now he no longer breaks in mastiffs, as he has given up teaching honest dogs to "act the part of Judas," as he says, for those dirty custom-house officers, and now he only devotes himself to dogs to be used for smuggling, and he is worth listening to when he says:

"You may depend upon it, that I know how to punish such commodities as she was, where they have sinned!"

THE CLOWN

The hawkers' cottage stood at the end of the Esplanade, on the little promontory where the jetty is, where all the winds, all the rain, and all the spray met. The hut, both walls and roof, was built of old planks, more or less covered with tar, whose chinks were stopped with oakum, and dry wreckage was heaped up against it. In the middle of the room an iron pot stood on two bricks, and served as a stove, when they had any coal, but as there was no chimney, it filled the room, which was ventilated only by a low door, with smoke, and there the whole crew lived, eighteen men and one woman. Some had undergone various terms of imprisonment, and nobody knew what the others were, but though they were all, more or less, suffering from some physical defect and were nearly old men, they were still all strong enough for hauling. For the "Chamber of Commerce" tolerated them there, and allowed them that hovel to live in, on condition that they should be ready to haul, by day and by night.

For every vessel they hauled, each got a penny by day and two-pence by night, but that was not certain, on account of the competition of retired sailors, fishermen's wives, laborers who had nothing to do, but who were all stronger than those half-starved wretches in the hut.

And yet they lived there, those eighteen men and one woman. Were they happy? Certainly not. Hopeless? Not that, either; for they occasionally got a little besides their scanty pay, and then they stole occasionally, fish, lumps of coal, things without any value to those who lost them, but of great value to the poor, beggarly thieves.

The eighteen kept the woman, and there was no jealousy on her account. She had no special favorite among them.

She was a fat woman of about forty, chubby faced and puffy, and of whom Daddy La Bretagne, who was one of the eighteen, used to say: "She does us honor."

If she had had a favorite among them, Daddy La Bretagne would certainly have had the greatest right to that privilege, for although he was one of the most crippled among them, as he was partially paralyzed in his legs, he showed himself skillful and strong-armed as any of them, and in spite of his infirmities, he always managed to secure a good place in the row of haulers. None of them knew as well as he did how to inspire visitors with pity during the season, and to make them put their hands into the pockets, and he was a past master at cadging, so that among those empty stomachs and penniless rascals he had windfalls of victuals and coppers more frequently than fell to his share. But he did not make use of them in order to monopolize their common mistress.

"I am just," he used to say. "Let each of us have his spoonful in turn, and no more, when we are all eating out of the same dish."

With the coal he picked up, he used to make a good fire for the whole band under the iron pot, in which he cooked whatever he brought home with him, without any complaining about it, for he used to say:

"It gives you a good fire in which to warm yourselves, for nothing, and the smell of my stew into the bargain."

As for his money, he spent in drink with the trollop, and afterwards, what was left of it, with the other eighteen.

"You see," he used to say, "I am just, and more than just. I give her up to you, because it is your right."

The consequence was that they all liked Daddy La Bretagne, so that he gloried in it, and said proudly:

"What a pity that we are living under the Republic! These fellows would think nothing of making me king."

And one day, when he said this, his trollop replied: "The king is here, old fellow!" And at the same time she presented a new comrade to them, who was no less ragged or wretched looking than the eighteen, but quite young by the size of him. He was a tall, thin fellow of about forty, and without a white streak in his long hair. He was dressed only in a pair of trousers and a shirt, which he wore outside them, like a blouse, and the trollop said:

"Here, Daddy La Bretagne, you have two knitted vests on, so just give him one."

"Why should I?" the hauler asked.

"Because I choose you to," the woman replied. "I have been living with you set of old men for a long time, so now I want to have a young one; there he is, so you must give him a vest, and keep him here, or I shall throw you up. You may take it or leave it, as you like. Do you understand me?"

The eighteen looked at each other open-mouthed, and good Daddy La Bretagne scratched his head, and then said:

"What she asks is quite right, and we must give way," he replied.

Then they explained themselves, and came to an understanding. The poor devil did not come like a conqueror, for he was a wretched clown who had just been released from prison, where he had undergone three years' hard labor for an attempted outrage on a girl, but, with one exception, the best fellow in the world, so the people declared.

"And something nice for me," the trollop added, "for I can assure you that I mean him to reward me for anything I may do for him."

From that time the household of eighteen persons consisted of nineteen, and at first all went well. The clown was very humble, and tried not to be burdensome to them. Fed, clothed and supplied with tobacco, he tried not to be too exacting in the other matter, and if needful, he would have hauled like the others, but the woman would not allow it.

"You shall not fatigue yourself, my little man," she said. "You must reserve yourself entirely for me."

And he did as she wished.

And soon, the eighteen, who had never been jealous of each other, grew jealous of the favored lover. Some tried to pick a quarrel with him. He resisted. The best fellow in the world, no doubt, but he was not going to be taken for a mussel shut up in its shell, for all that. Let them call him as lazy as a priest if they liked; he did not mind that, but when they put hairs into his coffee, armsful of rushes among his wreckage, and filth into his soup, they had better look out!

"None of that, all the lot of you, or you will see what I can do," he used to say.

They repeated the practical jokes, however, and he thrashed them. He did not try to find out who the culprits were, but attacked the first one he met, so much the worse for him. With a kick from his wooden clog (it was his specialty) he smashed their noses into a pulp, and having thus acquired the knowledge of his strength, and urged on by his trollop, he soon became a tyrant. The eighteen felt that they were slaves, and their former paradise where concord and perfect equality had reigned, became a hell, and that state of things could not last.

"Ah!" Daddy La Bretagne growled, "if only I were twenty years younger I would nearly kill him! I have my Breton's hot head still, but my confounded legs are no good any longer."

And he boldly challenged the clown to a duel, in which the latter was to have his legs tied, and then both of them were to sit on the ground and hack at each other with knives.

"Such a duel would be perfectly fair!" he replied, kicking him in the side with one of his clogs, and the woman burst out laughing, and said:

"At any rate, you cannot compete with him on equal terms as regards myself, so do not worry yourself about it."

Daddy La Bretagne was lying in his corner and spitting blood, and none of the rest spoke. What could the others do, when he, the blustering of them all, had been served so? The jade had been right when she had brought in the intruder, and said:

"The king is here, old fellow."

Only, she ought to have remembered that, after all, she alone kept her subjects in check, and as Daddy La Bretagne said, by a right object. With her to console them, they would no doubt have borne anything, but she was foolish enough to cut down their food, and not to fill their common dish as full as it used to be. She wanted to keep everything for her lover, and that raised the exasperation of the eighteen to its height, and so one night when she and the clown were asleep, among all these fasting men, the eighteen threw themselves upon them. They wrapped the despot's arms and legs up in tarpaulin, and in the presence of the woman, who was firmly bound, they flogged him till he was black and blue.

"Yes," old Bretagne said to me, himself, "yes, Monsieur, that was our revenge. The king was guillotined in 1793, and so we guillotined our king also."

And he concluded with a sneer, and said: "Ah! We wished to be just, and as it was not his head that had made him our king, so, by Jove, we settled him."

BABETTE

I was not very fond of going to inspect that asylum for old, infirm men, officially, as I was obliged to go over it in company of the superintendent, who was talkative, and a statistician. But then, the grandson of the foundress accompanied us, who was evidently pleased at that minute inspection, and he was a charming man, and the owner of a large forest, where he had given me permission to shoot, and I was, of course, obliged to pretend to be interested in his grandmother's philanthropic work. So with a smile on my lips I endured the superintendent's interminable discourse, punctuating it here and there, as best I could, by a:

"Ah! really! ... Very strange, indeed! ... I should never have believed it! ..."

I was absolutely ignorant of the matter to which I replied thus, for my thoughts were lulled to repose by the constant humming of our loquacious guide. I was only vaguely conscious that no doubt the persons and things would have appeared worthy of attention to me if I had been there alone as an idler, for in that case, I should certainly have asked the superintendent:

"Who is this Babette, whose name appears so constantly in the complaints of so many of the inmates?"

Quite a dozen men and women had spoken to us about her, now to complain of her, now to praise her; and especially the women, as soon as they saw the superintendent, cried out:

"M'sieur, Babette has again been ..."

"There! that will do, that will do!" he interrupted them, his gentle voice suddenly becoming harsh.

At other times he would amicably question some old man with a happy countenance, and say:

"Well, my friend! I suppose you are very happy here?"

Many replied with fervent expressions of gratitude, with which Babette's name was frequently mingled, and when he heard them speak so, the superintendent put on an ecstatic air; looking up to heaven with clasped hands, he said, slowly shaking his head: "Ah! Babette is a very precious woman, very precious!"

Yes, it would certainly interest one to know who that creature was, but not under present circumstances, and so, rather than to undergo any more of this, I made up my mind to remain in ignorance of who Babette was, for I could pretty well guess what she would be like. I pictured her to myself as a flower that had sprung up in a corner of these dull courtyards, like a ray of sun shining through the sepulchral gloom of these dismal passages.

I pictured her so clearly to myself that I did not even feel any wish to know her, but yet she was dear to me, because of the happy expression which they all put on when they spoke of her, and I was angry with the old women who spoke against her. One thing certainly puzzled me, and that was, that the superintendent was among those who went into ecstasies over her, and this made me strongly disinclined to question him about her, though I had no other reason for this feeling.

But all this passed through my mind in rather a confused manner, and without my taking the trouble to fix or to formulate any ideas and sensations, for I continued to dream, rather than to think effectively, and it is very probable that, when my visit was over, I should not have remembered much about it, not even with regard to Babette, if I had not been suddenly awakened by the sight of her in the person, and been quite upset by the difference that there was between my fancy and the reality.

We had just crossed a small back yard, and had gone into a very dark passage, when a door suddenly opened at the other end of it, and an unexpected apparition appeared through another door, and we could indistinctly see that it was the figure of a woman. At the same moment, the superintendent called out in a furious voice:

"Babette! Babette!"

He had mechanically quickened his pace, and almost ran, and we followed him, and he quickly opened the door through which the apparition had vanished, and which led on to a staircase, and he again called out, and a burst of stifled laughter was the only reply. I looked over the balusters, and saw a woman down below, who was looking at us fixedly.

She was an old woman; there could be no doubt of that, from her wrinkled face and her few straggling gray locks which appeared under her cap. But one did not think of that when one saw her eyes, which were wonderfully youthful, for then, one saw nothing but them. They were profound eyes, of a deep, almost violet blue; the eyes of a child.

Suddenly the superintendent called out to her: "You have been with *la Friezê* again!"

The old woman did not reply, but shook with laughter, as she had done just before, and then she ran off, giving the superintendent a look, which said as plainly as words could have done: "Do you think I care a fig for you?"

Those insulting words were clearly written in her face, and at the same time I noticed that the old woman's eyes had utterly changed, for during that short moment of bravado the childish eyes had become the eyes of a monkey, of some ferocious, obstinate baboon.

That time, in spite of any dislike to question him further, I could not help saying to him: "That is Babette, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replied, growing rather red, as if he guessed that I understood the old woman's insulting looks.

"Is she the woman who is so precious?" I added, with a touch of irony, which made him grow altogether crimson.

"That is she," he said, walking on quickly, so as to escape my further questions.

But I was egged on by curiosity, and I made a direct appeal to our host's complaisance. "I should like to see this *Friezê*," I said. "Who is *Friezê*?"

He turned round and said: "Oh! nothing, nothing, he is not at all interesting. What is the good of seeing him? It is not worth while."

And he ran downstairs, two at a time. He who was usually so delicate, and so very careful to explain everything, was now in a hurry to get finished, and our visit was cut short.

The next day I had to leave that part of the country, without hearing anything more about Babette, but I came back about four months later, when the shooting season began. I had not forgotten her during that time, for nobody could ever forget her eyes, and so I was very glad to have as my traveling companion on my three hours' diligence journey from the station to my friend's house, a man who talked to me about her all the time.

He was a young magistrate whom I had already met, and who had much interested me by his wit and his close manner of observing things, and by his singularly refined casuistry, and, above all, by the contrast between his professional severity, and his tolerant philosophy.

But he never appeared so attractive to me as he did on that day, when he told me the history of

that mysterious Babette.

He had inquired into it, and had applied all his faculties as an examining magistrate to it, for, like me, his visit to the asylum had roused his curiosity. This is what he had learned and what he told me.

When she was ten years old, Babette had been violated by her own father, and at thirteen she had been sent to the house of correction for vagabondage and debauchery. From the time she was twenty until she was forty she had been a servant in the neighborhood, frequently changing her situation, and being nearly everywhere her employer's mistress, and she had ruined several families without getting any money herself, or without gaining any definite position. A shopkeeper had committed suicide on her account, and a respectable young fellow had turned thief and incendiary, and had finished at the hulks.

She had been married twice, and had twice been left a widow, and for ten years, until she was fifty, she had been the only commodity in the district, for pleasure, to which five villages came to amuse themselves on holidays.

"She was very pretty, I suppose?"

"No; she never was that. It seems she was short, thin, with no bust or hips, at her best, I am told, and nobody can remember that she was pretty, even when she was young."

"Then how can you explain ...?"

"How?" the magistrate exclaimed. "Well! what about the eyes? You could not have looked at them?"

"Yes, yes, you are right," I replied. "Those eyes explain many things, certainly. They are the eyes of an innocent child."

"Ah!" he exclaimed again, enthusiastically, "Cleopatra, Diana of Poiters, Ninon de L'Enclos, all the queens of love who were adored when they were growing old, must have had eyes like hers. A woman who has such eyes can never grow old. But if Babette lives to be a hundred, she will always be loved as she has been, and as she is."

"As she is! Bah! By whom, pray?"

"By all the old men in the asylum, by all those who have preserved a fiber that can be touched, a corner of their heart that can be inflamed, or the least spark of desire left."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. And the superintendent loves her more than any of them do."

"Impossible!"

"I would stake my head on it."

"Well, after all, it is possible, and even probable; it is even certain. I now remember ..."

And again I saw the insulting, ferocious, familiar look which she had given the superintendent.

"And who is *la Friezê*?" I asked the magistrate "I suppose you know that also?"

"He is a retired butcher, who had both his legs frozen in the war of 1870, and whom she is very fond of. No doubt he is a cripple, with two wooden legs, but still a vigorous man enough, in spite of his fifty-three years. The loins of a Hercules and the face of a satyr. The superintendent is quite jealous of him!"

I thought the matter over again, and it seemed very probable to me. "Does she love *la Friezê*?"

"Yes; he is the chosen lover."

When we arrived at the host's house a short time afterwards, we were surprised to find everybody in a terrible state of excitement. A crime had been committed in the asylum; the gendarmes were there and our host was with them, so we instantly joined them. *La Friezê* had murdered the superintendent, and they gave us the details, which were horrible. The former butcher had hidden behind a door, and catching hold of the other, had rolled onto the ground with him and bitten him in the throat, tearing out his carotid, from which the blood spurted into the murderer's face.

I saw him, *la Friezê*. His fat face, which had been badly washed, was still blood-stained; he had a low forehead, square jaws, pointed ears, sticking out from his head, and flat nostrils, like the muzzle of some wild animal; but above all, I saw Babette.

She was smiling, and at that moment, her eyes had not their monkey-like and ferocious expression, but they were pleading and tender, with all of their sweetest childlike candor.

"You know," my host said to me in a low voice, "that the poor woman has fallen into senile imbecility, and that is the cause of her looks, which are so strange, considering the terrible sight she has seen.

"Do you think so?" the magistrate said. "You must remember that she is not yet sixty, and I do not

think that it is a case of senile imbecility, but that she is quite conscious of the crime that has been committed."

"Then why should she smile?"

"Because she is pleased at what she has done."

"Oh! no; you are really too subtle!"

The magistrate suddenly turned to Babette, and, looking at her steadily, he said:

"I suppose you know what has happened, and why this crime was committed?"

She left off smiling, and her pretty, childlike eyes became her abominable monkey's eyes again, and then the answer was, suddenly to pull up her petticoats and to show us the lower part of her person. Yes, the magistrate had been quite right. That old woman had been a Cleopatra, a Diana, a Ninon de L'Enclos, and the rest of her body had remained like a child's, even more than her eyes. We were thunderstruck at the sight.

"Pigs! Pigs!" *la Friezê* shouted to us. "You also wanted to have something to do with her!"

And I saw that actually the magistrate's face was pale and contracted, and that his hands and lips trembled like those of a man caught in the act of doing wrong.

SYMPATHY

He was going up the *Rue des Martyrs* in a melancholy frame of mind, and in a melancholy frame of mind she also was going up the *Rue des Martyrs*. He was already old, nearly sixty, with a bald head under his seedy, tall hat, a gray beard, half buried in a high shirt collar, with dull eyes, an unpleasant mouth and yellow teeth.

She was past forty, with thin hair over her pads, and with a false plait; her linen was doubtful in color, and she had evidently bought her unfashionable dress at a *reach-me-down shop*. He was thin, while she was chubby. He had been handsome, proud, ardent, full of self-confidence, certain of his future, and seeming to hold in his hands all the trumps with which to win the game on the green table of Parisian life, while she had been pretty, sought after, fast, and in a fair way to have horses and carriages, and to win the first prize on the turf of gallantry, among the favorites of fortune.

At times, in his dark moments, he remembered the time when he had come to Paris from the country, with a volume of poetry and plays in his portmanteau, feeling a supreme contempt for all the writers who were then in vogue, and sure of supplanting them. She often, when she awoke in the morning to another day's unhappiness, remembered that happy time when she had been launched onto the world, when she already saw that she was more sought after than Marie G. or Sophie N. or any other woman of that class, who had been her companions in vice, and whose lovers she had stolen from them.

He had had a splendid start. Not, indeed, as a poet and dramatist, as he had hoped at first, but thanks to a series of scandalous stories which had made a sensation on the boulevards, so that after an action for damages and several duels, he had become *our witty and brilliant colleague who, etc., etc.*

She had had her moments of extraordinary good luck, though she certainly did not eclipse Marie P. or Camille L., whom men compared to Zenobia or Ninon de l'Enclos, but still enough to cause her to be talked about in the newspapers, and to cause a resolution at certain *tables-d'hòtes* at Montmarte. But one fine day, the newspaper in which *our brilliant and witty colleague who* ... used to write, became defunct, having been killed by a much more cynical rival, thanks to the much more venomous pen of a much more brilliant and witty colleague who .... Then, the insults of the latter having become pure and simple mud-pelting, his style soon became worn out, to the disgust of the public, and the celebrated *Mr. What's his name* had great difficulty in getting onto some obscure paper, where he was transformed into the obscure penny-a-liner *Machin*.

Now, one evening the quasi-rival of Marie X. and Camille L. had fallen ill, and consequently into pecuniary difficulties, and the prostitute *No-matter-who* was now on the lookout for a dinner, and would have been only too happy to get it at some *table-d'hòte* at Montmarte. Machin had had a return of ambition with regard to his poetry and his dramas, but then, his verses of former days had lost their freshness, and his youthful dramas appeared to him to be childish. He would have to write others, and, by Jove! he felt himself capably of doing it, for he had plenty of ideas and plans in his head, and he could easily demolish many successful writers if he chose to try! But then, the difficulty was, how to set about it, and to find the necessary leisure and time for thought. He had his daily bread to gain, and something besides: his coffee, his game of cards and other little requirements; and the incessant writing article upon article barely sufficed for that, and so days and years went by, and Machin was Machin still.

She also longed for former years, and surely it could not be so very hard to find a lover to start her on her career once more, for many of her female friends, who were not nearly so nice as she was, had unearthed one, so why should not she be equally fortunate? But there, her youth had

gone and she had lost all her chances; other women had their fancy men, and she had to take them on, every day at reduced prices, so that she was reduced from taking up with any man she met, and so day after day and months and years passed, and the prostitute *No-matter-who* had remained the prostitute *No-matter-who*.

Often, in a fit of despondency, he used to say to himself, thinking of some one who had succeeded in life: "But, after all, I am cleverer than that fellow." And she always said to herself, when she got up to her miserable, daily round, when she thought of such and such a woman, who was now settled in life: "In what respect is that woman better than I am?"

And Machin, who was nearly sixty, and whose head was bald under his shabby tall hat, and whose gray beard was half-buried in a high shirt collar, who had dull eyes, an unpleasant mouth and yellow teeth, was mad with his fellow men, while the prostitute *No-matter-who*, with thin hair over her pads, and with a false plait, with her linen of a doubtful color, and with her unfashionable dress, which she had evidently bought at a *reach-me-down* shop, was enraged with society.

Ah! Those miserable, dark hours, and the wretched awakenings! And that evening he was more than usually wretched, as he had just lost all his pay for the next month, that miserable screw which he earned so hardly by almost editing the newspaper, for three hundred francs a month, in a brothel.

And that evening she was in a state of semi-stupidity, as she had had too many glasses of beer which a charitable female friend had given her, and was almost afraid to go back to her room, as her landlord had told her in the morning that unless she paid the fortnight's back rent that she owed at the rate of a franc a day, he would turn her out of doors and keep her things.

And this was the reason why they were both going up the *Rue des Martyrs* in a melancholy frame of mind. There was scarcely a soul in the muddy streets; it was getting dark, and beginning to rain, and the drains smelled horribly.

He passed her, and in a mechanical voice she said: "Will you not come home with me, you handsome dark man?" "I have no money," he replied. But she ran after him, and catching hold of his arm, she said: "Only a franc; that is having it for nothing." And he turned round, looked at her, and seeing that she must have been pretty, and that she was still stout (and he was fond of fat women), he said: "Where do you live? Near here?" "In the *Rue Lepic*." "Why! So do I." "Then that is all right, eh? Come along, old fellow."

He felt in his pockets and pulled out all the money he found there, which amounted to thirteen sous, and said: "That is all I have, upon my honor!" "All right," she said; "come along."

And they continued their melancholy walk along the *Rue des Martyrs*, side by side now, but without speaking, and without guessing that their two existences harmonized and corresponded with each other, and that by huddling up together, they would be merely accomplishing the acme of their twin destinies.

THE DEBT

"Pst! Pst! Come with me, you handsome, dark fellow. I am very nice, as you will see. Do come up. At any rate you will be able to warm yourself, for I have a capital fire at home."

But nothing enticed the foot-passengers, neither being called a handsome, dark fellow, which she applied quite impartially to old or fat men also, nor the promise of pleasure which was emphasized by a caressing ogle and smile, nor even the promise of a good fire, which was so attractive in the bitter December wind. And tall Fanny continued her useless walk, and the night advanced and foot-passengers grew scarcer. In another hour the streets would be absolutely deserted, and unless she could manage to pick up some belated drunken man, she would be obliged to return home alone.

And yet, tall Fanny was a beautiful woman! With her head like a *Bacchante*, and her body like a goddess, in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years, she deserved something better than this miserable pavement, where she could not even pick up the five francs which she wanted for the requirements of the next day. But there! In this infernal Paris, in this swarming crowd of competitors who all jostled each other, courtesans, like artists, did not attain to eminence until their later years. In that they resembled precious stones, as the most valuable of them are those that have been set the oftenest.

And that was why tall Fanny, who was later to become one of the richest and most brilliant stars of Parisian gallantry, was walking about the streets on this bitter December night, without a half-penny in her pocket, in spite of her head like a Bacchante, and her body like a goddess, and in all the full splendor of her twenty-three years.

However, it was too late now to hope to meet anybody; there was not a single foot passenger about; the street was decidedly empty, dull and lifeless. Nothing was to be heard, except the whistling of sudden gusts of wind, and nothing was to be seen, except the flickering gas lights, which looked like dying butterflies. Well! The only thing was to return home alone.

But suddenly, tall Fanny saw a human form standing on the pavement at the next crossing, and whoever it was, seemed to be hesitating and uncertain which way to go. The figure, which was very small and slight, was wrapped in a long cloak, which reached almost to the ground.

"Perhaps he is a hunchback," the girl said to herself. "They like tall women!" And she walked quickly towards him, from habit, already saying: "*Pst! Pst!* Come home with me, you handsome, dark fellow!" What luck! The man did not go away, but came towards Fanny, although somewhat timidly, while she went to meet him, repeating her wheedling words, so as to reassure him. She went all the quicker, as she saw that he was staggering with the zig-zag walk of a drunken man, and she thought to herself: "When once they sit down, there is no possibility of getting these beggars up again, and they want to go to sleep just where they are. I only hope I shall get to him before he tumbles down."

Luckily she reached him, just in time to catch him in her arms, but as soon as she had done so, she almost let him fall, in her astonishment. It was neither a drunken man nor a hunchback, but a child of twelve or thirteen in an overcoat, who was crying, and who said in a weak voice: "I beg your pardon, madame, I beg your pardon. If you only knew how hungry and cold I am! I beg your pardon! Oh! I am so cold."

"Poor child!" she said, putting her arms around him and kissing him. And she carried him off, with a full, but happy heart, and while he continued to sob, she said to him mechanically: "Don't be frightened, my little man. You will see how nice I can be! And then, you can warm yourself; I have a capital fire." But the fire was out; the room, however, was warm, and the child said, as soon as they got in: "Oh! How comfortable it is here! It is a great deal better than in the streets, I can tell you! And I have been living in the streets for six days." He began to cry again, and added: "I beg your pardon, madame. I have eaten nothing for two days."

Tall Fanny opened her cupboard, which had glass doors. The middle shelf held all her linen, and on the upper one there was a box of Albert biscuits, a drop of brandy at the bottom of a bottle, and a few small lumps of sugar in a cup. With that, and some water out of the bottle, she concocted a sort of broth, which he swallowed ravenously, and when he had done, he wished to tell his story, which he did, yawning all the time.

His grandfather, (the only one of his relations whom he had ever known,) who had been painter and decorator at Soisson, had died about a month before; but before his death he had said to him: "When I am gone, little man, you will find a letter to my brother, who is in business in Paris, among my papers. You must take it to him, and he will be certain to take care of you. However, in any case you must go to Paris, for you have an aptitude for painting, and only there can you hope to become an artist."

When the old man was dead (he died in the hospital), the child started, dressed in an old coat of his grandfather's and with thirty francs, which was all that the old man had left behind him in his pocket. But when he got to Paris, there was nobody of the name at the address mentioned on the letter. The dead man's brother had left there six months before, and nobody knew where he had gone to, and so the child was alone, and for a few days he managed to exist on what he had over, after paying for his journey. After he had spent his last franc, he had wandered about the streets, as he had no money with which to pay for a bed, buying his bread by the half-penny-worth, until for the last forty-eight hours, he had been without anything, absolutely without anything.

He told her all this while he was half asleep, amidst sobs and yawns, so that the girl did not venture to ask him any more questions, in spite of her curiosity, but, on the contrary, cut him short, and undressed him while she listened, and only interrupted him to kiss him, and to say to him: "There, there, my poor child! You shall tell me the rest to-morrow. You cannot go on now, so go to bed and have a good sleep." And as soon as he had finished, she put him to bed, where he immediately fell into a profound sleep. Then she undressed herself quickly, got into bed by his side, so she might keep him warm, and went to sleep, crying to herself, without exactly knowing why.

The next day they breakfasted and dined together at a common eating house, on money that she had borrowed, and when it was dark, she said to the child: "Wait for me here; I will come for you at closing time." She came back sooner, however about ten o'clock. She had twelve francs, which she gave him, telling him that she had *earned them*, and she continued, with a laugh: "I feel that I shall make some more. I am in luck this evening, and you have brought it me. Do not be impatient, but have some milk-posset while you are waiting for me."

She kissed him before she went, and the kind girl felt real maternal happiness as she went out. An hour later, however, she was *run in* by the police for having been found in a prohibited place, and off she went, game for *St. Lazare*[8].

And the child, who was turned out by the proprietor at closing time, and then driven from the furnished lodgings the next morning, where they told him that *Tall Fanny was in quod*, began his wretched vagabond life in the streets again, with only the twelve francs to depend on.

Fifteen years afterwards the newspapers announced one morning that the famous Fanny Clairet, the celebrated *horizontal*, whose caprices had caused a revolution in high life, that queen of frail beauties for whom three men had committed suicide, and so many others had ruined themselves,

that incomparable living statue, who had attracted all Paris to the theater where she impersonated Venus in her transparent skin tights, made of woven air and knitted nothing had been shut up in a lunatic asylum. She had been seized suddenly; it was an attack of general paralysis, and as her debts were enormous, when her estate had been liquidated, she would have to end her days at *La Salpêtrière*.

"No, certainly not!" François Guerland, the painter, said to himself, when he read the notice of it in the papers. "No, the great Fanny shall certainly not end like that." For it was certainly she; there could be no doubt about it. For a long time after she had shown him that act of charity, which he could never forget, the child had tried to see his benefactress again. But Paris is a very mysterious place, and he himself had had many adventures before he grew up to be a man, and, eventually, almost somebody! But he only found her in the distance; he had recognized her at the theater, on the stage, or as she was getting into her carriage, which was fit for a princess. And how could he approach her then? Could he remind her of the time when her price was five francs? No, assuredly not; and so he had followed her, thanked her, and blessed her, from a distance.

But now the time had come for him to pay his debt, and he paid it. Although tolerably well known as a painter with a future in store for him, he was not rich. But what did that matter? He mortgaged that future which people prophesied for him, and gave himself over, bound hand and foot, to a picture dealer. Then he had the poor woman taken to an excellent asylum, where she could have not only every care, but every necessary comfort and even luxury. Alas! however, general paralysis never forgives. Sometimes it releases its prey, like the cruel cat releases the mouse, for a brief moment, only to lay hold of it again later, more fiercely than ever. Fanny had that period of abatement in her symptoms, and one morning the physician was able to say to the young man: "You are anxious to remove her? Very well! But you will soon have to bring her back, for the cure is only apparent, and her present state will only endure for a month, at most, and then, only if the patient is kept free from every excitement and excess!"

"And without that precaution?" Guerland asked him. "Then," the doctor replied; "the final crisis will be all the nearer; that is all. But whether it would be nearer or more remote, it will not be the less fatal." "You are sure of that?" "Absolutely sure."

François Guerland took tall Fanny out of the asylum, installed her in splendid apartments, and went to live with her there. She had grown old, bloated, with white hair, and sometimes wandered in her mind, and she did not recognize in him the poor little lad on whom she had taken pity in the days gone by, nor did he remind her of the circumstance. He allowed her to believe that she was adored by a rich young man, who was passionately devoted to her. He was young, ardent, and caressing. Never had a mistress such a lover, and for three weeks, before she relapsed into the horrors of madness, which were happily soon terminated by her death, she intoxicated herself with the ecstasy of his kisses, and thus bade farewell to conscient life in an apotheosis of love.

The other day, at dessert, after an artists' dinner, they were speaking of François Guerland, whose last picture at the *Salon* had been so deservedly praised. "Ah! yes," one of them said, with a contemptuous voice and look. "That handsome fellow Guerland!" And another, accentuating the insinuation, added boldly: "Yes, that is exactly it! That handsome, too handsome fellow Guerland, the man who allows himself to be kept by women."

AN ARTIST

"Bah! Monsieur," the old mountebank said to me; "it is a matter of exercise and habit, that is all! Of course, one requires to be a little gifted that way, and not to be butter-fingered, but what is chiefly necessary is patience and daily practice for long, long years."

His modesty surprised me all the more, because of all those performers who are generally infatuated with their own skill, he was the most wonderfully clever one that I had ever met. Certainly, I had frequently seen him, and everybody had seen him in some circus or other, or even in traveling shows, performing the trick that consists of putting a man or a woman with extended arms against a wooden target, and in throwing knives between their fingers and round their head, from a distance. There is nothing very extraordinary in it, after all, when one knows *the tricks of the trade*, and that the knives are not the least sharp, and stick into the wood at some distance from the flesh. It is the rapidity of the throws, the glitter of the blades, the curve which the handles make towards their living aim, which give an air of danger to an exhibition that has become common-place, and only requires very middling skill.

But here there was no trick and no deception, and no dust thrown into the eyes. It was done in good earnest and in all sincerity. The knives were as sharp as razors, and the old mountebank planted them close to the flesh, exactly in the angle between the fingers, and surrounded the head with a perfect halo of knives, and the neck with a collar, from which nobody could have extricated himself without cutting his carotid artery, while to increase the difficulty, the old fellow went through the performance without seeing, his whole face being covered with a close mask of thick oil-cloth.

Naturally, like other great artists, he was not understood by the crowd, who confounded him with vulgar tricksters, and his mask only appeared to them a trick the more, and a very common trick into the bargain. "He must think us very stupid," they said. "How could he possibly aim without having his eyes open?" And they thought there must be imperceptible holes in the oil-cloth, a sort of lattice work concealed in the material. It was useless for him to allow the public to examine the mask for themselves before the exhibition began. It was all very well that they could not discover any trick, but they were only all the more convinced that they were being tricked. Did not the people know that they ought to be tricked?

I had recognized a great artist in the old mountebank, and I was quite sure that he was altogether incapable of any trickery, and I told him so, while expressing my admiration to him; and he had been touched, both by my admiration, and above all by the justice I had done him. Thus we became good friends, and he explained to me, very modestly, the real trick which the crowd cannot understand, the eternal trick compromised in these simple words: "To be gifted by nature, and to practice every day for long, long years."

He had been especially struck by the certainty which expressed, that any trickery must become impossible to him. "Yes," he said to me; "quite impossible! Impossible to a degree which you cannot imagine. If I were to tell you! But where would be the use?"

His face clouded over, and his eyes filled with tears, but I did not venture to force myself into his confidence. My looks, however, were no doubt not so discreet as my silence, and begged him to speak, and so he responded to their mute appeal. "After all," he said: "why should I not tell you about it? You will understand me." And he added, with a look of sudden ferocity: "She understood it at any rate!" "Who?" I asked. "My unfaithful wife," he replied. "Ah! Monsieur, what an abominable creature she was, if you only knew! Yes, she understood it too well, too well, and that is why I hate her so; even more on that account, than for having deceived me. For that is a natural fault, is it not, and may be pardoned? But the other thing was a crime, a horrible crime."

The woman who stood against the wooden target every night with her arms stretched out and her fingers extended, and whom the old mountebank fitted with gloves and with a halo formed of his knives which were as sharp as razors, and which he planted close to her, was his wife. She might have been a woman of forty, and must have been fairly pretty, but with perverse prettiness, an impudent mouth, a mouth that was at the same time sensual and bad, with the lower lip too thick for the thin, dry upper lip.

I had several times noticed that every time he planted a knife in the board, she uttered a laugh, so low as scarcely to be heard, but which was very significant when one heard it, for it was a hard and very mocking laugh, but I had always attributed that sort of reply to an artifice which the occasion required. It was intended, I thought, to accentuate the danger she incurred and the contempt that she felt for it, thanks to the sureness of the thrower's hands, and so I was very surprised when the mountebank said to me:

"Have you observed her laugh, I say? Her evil laugh which makes fun of me, and her cowardly laugh, which defies me? Yes, cowardly, because she knows nothing can happen to her, nothing, in spite of all she deserves, in spite of all that I ought to do to her, in spite of all that I want to do to her." "What do you want to do?" "Confound it! Cannot you guess? I want ... to kill her," "To kill her, because she has ..." "Because she has deceived me? No, no, not that, I tell you again. I have forgiven her for that, a long time ago, and I am too much accustomed to it! But the worst of it is, that the first time I forgave her, when I told her that all the same, I might some day have my revenge by cutting her throat, if I chose, without seeming to do it on purpose, as if it were an accident, mere awkwardness." "Oh! So you said that to her?" "Of course I did, and I meant it. I thought I might be able to do it, for you see I had the perfect right to do so. It was so simple, so easy, so tempting! Just think! A mistake of less than half an inch, and her skin would be cut at the neck where the jugular vein is, and the jugular would be severed. My knives cut very well! And when once the jugular is cut ... good-by. The blood would spurt out, and one, two, three red jets, and all would be over; she would be dead, and I should have had my revenge!"

"That is true, certainly, horribly true!" "And without any risk to me, eh? An accident, that is all; bad luck, one of those mistakes which happen every day in our business. What could they accuse me of? Whoever would think of accusing me, even? Homicide through imprudence, that would be all! They would even pity me, rather than accuse me. 'My wife! My poor wife!' I should say, sobbing. 'My wife, who is so necessary to me, who is half the bread-winner, who takes part in my performance!' You must acknowledge that I should be pitied!"

"Certainly; there is not the least doubt about that." "And you must allow that such a revenge would be a very nice revenge, the best possible revenge, which I could have with assured impunity?" "Evidently that is so." "Very well! But when I told her so, just as I have told you, and better still; threatening her, as I was mad with rage, and ready to do the deed that I had dreamt of, on the spot; what do you think she said?" "That you were a good fellow, and would certainly not have the atrocious courage to ..."

"Tut! tut! tut! I am not such a good fellow as you think. I am not frightened of blood, and that I have proved already, though it would be useless to tell you how and where. But I had no necessity to prove it to her, for she knows that I am capable of a good many things; even of crime; especially of a crime." "And she was not frightened?" "No. She merely replied that I could not do what I said; you understand." "That I could not do it!" "Why not?" "Ah! Monsieur, so you do not understand? Why do you not? Have I not explained to you by what constant, long, daily

practice I have learnt to plant my knives without seeing what I am doing?" "Yes, well, what then?" "Well! Cannot you understand what she has understood with such terrible results, that now my hand would no longer obey me, if I wished to make a mistake as I threw?" "Is it possible?" "Nothing is truer, I am sorry to say. For I really have wished to have my revenge, which I have dreamt of, and which I thought so easy. Exasperated by that bad woman's insolence and confidence in her own safety, I have several times made up my mind to kill her, and have exerted all my energy and all my skill, to make my knives fly aside when I threw them to make a border round her neck. I tried with all my might to make them deviate half an inch, just enough to cut her throat. I wanted to, and I have never succeeded, never. And always the horrible laugh makes fun of me, always, always."

And with a deluge of tears, with something like a roar of unsatiated and muzzled rage, he ground his teeth as he wound up: "She knows me, the jade; she is in the secret of my work, of my patience, of my trick, routine, whatever you may call it! She lives in my innermost being, and sees into it more closely than you do, or than I do myself. She knows what a faultless machine I have become, the machine of which she makes fun, the machine which is too well wound up, the machine which cannot get out of order, and she knows that I *cannot* make a mistake."

MADEMOISELLE FIFI

The Major, Graf von Farlsberg, the Prussian commandant, was reading his newspaper, lying back in a great armchair, with his booted feet on the beautiful marble fire-place, where his spurs had made two holes, which grew deeper every day, during the three months that he had been in the château of Urville.

A cup of coffee was smoking on a small, inlaid table, which was stained with liquors, burnt by cigars, notched by the pen-knife of the victorious officer, who occasionally would stop while sharpening a pencil, to jot down figures, or to make a drawing on it, just as it took his fancy.

When he had read his letters and the German newspapers, which his baggage-master had brought him, he got up, and after throwing three or four enormous pieces of green wood on to the fire, for those gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park in order to keep themselves warm, he went to the window. The rain was descending in torrents, a regular Normandy rain, which looked as if it were being poured out by some furious hand, a slanting rain, which was as thick as a curtain, and which formed a kind of wall with oblique stripes, and which deluged everything, a regular rain, such as one frequently experiences in the neighborhood of Rouen, which is the watering-pot of France.

For a long time the officer looked at the sodden turf, and at the swollen Andelle beyond it, which was overflowing its banks; and he was drumming a waltz from the Rhine on the window-panes, with his fingers, when a noise made him turn round; it was his second in command, Captain Baron von Kelweinstein.

The major was a giant, with broad shoulders, and a long, fair-like beard, which hung like a cloth on his chest. His whole, solemn person suggested the idea of a military peacock, a peacock who was carrying his tail spread out on to his breast. He had cold, gentle, blue eyes, and the scar from a sword-cut, which he had received in the war with Austria; he was said to be an honorable man, as well as a brave officer.

The captain, a short, red-faced man, who was tightly girthed in at the waist, had his red hair cropped quite close to his head, and in certain lights he almost looked as if he had been rubbed over with phosphorus. He had lost two front teeth one night, though he could not quite remember how, and this made him speak so that he could not always be understood, and he had a bald patch on the top of his head, which made him look rather like a monk, with a fringe of curly, bright, golden hair round the circle of bare skin.

The commandant shook hands with him, and drank his cup of coffee (the sixth that morning), at a draught, while he listened to his subordinate's report of what had occurred; and then they both went to the window, and declared that it was a very unpleasant outlook. The major, who was a quiet man, with a wife at home, could accommodate himself to everything; but the captain, who was rather fast, who was in the habit of frequenting low resorts, and who was much given to women, was mad at having been shut up for three months in the compulsory chastity of that wretched hole.

There was a knock at the door, and when the commandant said: "*Come in*," one of their automatic soldiers appeared, and by his mere presence announced that breakfast was ready. In the dining-room, they met three other officers of lower rank: a lieutenant, Otto von Grossling, and two sub-lieutenants, Fritz Scheunebarg, and Baron von Eyrick, a very short, fair-haired man, who was proud and brutal towards men, harsh towards prisoners, and as violent as a rifle.

Since he had been in France, his comrades had called him nothing but Mademoiselle Fifi. They had given him that nickname on account of his dandified style and small waist, which looked as if he wore stays, of his pale face, on which his budding moustache scarcely showed, and on account of the habit he had acquired of employing the French expression, *fi, fi donc*, which he pronounced with a slight whistle, when he wished to express his sovereign contempt for persons

or things.

The dining-room of the château was a magnificent long room, whose fine old mirrors, that were cracked by pistol bullets, and whose Flemish tapestry, which was cut to ribbons, and hanging in rags in places, from sword-cuts, told too well what Mademoiselle Fifi's occupation was during his spare time.

There were three family portraits on the walls: a steel-clad knight, a cardinal, and a judge, who were all smoking long porcelain pipes, which had been inserted into holes in the canvas, while a lady in a long, pointed waist proudly exhibited an enormous moustache, drawn with a piece of charcoal. The officers ate their breakfast almost in silence in that mutilated room, which looked dull in the rain, and melancholy under its vanquished appearance, although its old, oak floor had become as solid as the stone floor of a public house.

When they had finished eating, and were smoking and drinking they began, as usual, to talk about the dull life they were leading. The bottles of brandy and of liquors passed from hand to hand, and all sat back in their chairs and took repeated sips from their glasses, scarcely removing the long, bent stems, which terminated in china bowls, that were painted in a manner to delight a Hottentot, from their mouths.

As soon as their glasses were empty, they filled them again, with a gesture of resigned weariness, but Mademoiselle Fifi emptied his every minute, and a soldier immediately gave him another. They were enveloped in a thick cloud of strong tobacco smoke, and they seemed to be sunk in a state of drowsy, stupid intoxication, in that dull state of drunkenness of men who have nothing to do, when suddenly, the baron sat up, and said: "By heavens! This cannot go on; we must think of something to do." And on hearing this, lieutenant Otto and sub-lieutenant Fritz, who pre-eminently possessed the grave, heavy German countenance, said: "What, captain?"

He thought for a few moments, and then replied: "What? Well, we must get up some entertainment, if the commandant will allow us." "What sort of an entertainment, captain?" the major asked, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "I will arrange all that, commandant," the Baron said. "I will send *Le Devoir* to Rouen, who will bring us some ladies. I know where they can be found. We will have supper here, as all the materials are at hand, and, at least, we shall have a jolly evening."

Graf von Farlsberg shrugged his shoulders with a smile: "You must surely be mad, my friend."

But all the other officers got up, ran round their chief, and said: "Let the captain have his own way, commandant; it is terribly dull here." And the major ended by yielding. "Very well," he replied, and the baron immediately sent for *Le Devoir*. He was an old non-commissioned officer, who had never been seen to smile, but who carried out all the orders of his superiors to the letter, no matter what they might be. He stood there, with an impassive face, while he received the baron's instructions, and then went out, and five minutes later a large wagon belonging to the military train, covered with a miller's till, galloped off as fast as four horses could take it, under the pouring rain, and the officers all seemed to awaken from their lethargy, their looks brightened, and they began to talk.

Although it was raining as hard as ever, the major declared that it was not so dull, and Lieutenant von Grossling said with conviction, that the sky was clearing up, while Mademoiselle Fifi did not seem to be able to keep in his place. He got up, and sat down again, and his bright eyes seemed to be looking for something to destroy. Suddenly, looking at the lady with the moustache, the young fellow pulled out his revolver, and said: "You shall not see it." And without leaving his seat he aimed, and with two successive bullets cut out both the eyes of the portrait.

"Let us make a mine!" he then exclaimed, and the conversation was suddenly interrupted, as if they had found some fresh and powerful subject of interest. The mine was his invention, his method of destruction, and his favorite amusement.

When he left the château, the lawful owner, Count Fernand d'Amoys d'Uville, had not had time to carry away or to hide anything, except the plate, which had been stowed away in a hole made in one of the walls, so that, as he was very rich and had good taste, the large drawing-room, which opened into the dining-room, had looked like the gallery in a museum, before his precipitate flight.

Expensive oil-paintings, water colors, and drawings hung against the walls, while on the tables, on the hanging shelves, and in elegant glass cupboards, there were a thousand knick-knacks; small vases, statuettes, groups in Dresden china, and grotesque Chinese figures, old ivory, and Venetian glass, which filled the large room with their precious and fantastical array.

Scarcely anything was left now; not that the things had been stolen, for the major would not have allowed that, but Mademoiselle Fifi *would have a mine*, and on that occasion all the officers thoroughly enjoyed themselves for five minutes. The little marquis went into the drawing-room to get what he wanted, and he brought back a small, delicate china teapot, which he filled with gunpowder, and carefully introduced a piece of German tinder into it, through the spout. Then he lighted it, and took this infernal machine into the next room; but he came back immediately, and shut the door. The Germans all stood expectantly, their faces full of childish, smiling curiosity, and as soon as the explosion had shaken the château, they all rushed in at once.

Mademoiselle Fifi, who got in first, clapped his hands in delight at the sight of a terra-cotta

Venus, whose head had been blown off, and each picked up pieces of porcelain, and wondered at the strange shape of the fragments, while the major was looking with a paternal eye at the large drawing-room, which had been wrecked in such a Neronic fashion, and which was strewn with the fragments of works of art. He went out first, and said, with a smile: "He managed that very well!"

But there was such a cloud of smoke in the dining-room, mingled with the tobacco smoke, that they could not breathe, so the commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had gone into the room for a glass of cognac, went up to it.

The moist air blew into the room, and brought a sort of moist dust with it, which powdered their beards. They looked at the tall trees, which were dripping with the rain, at the broad valley, which was covered with mist, and at the church spire in the distance, which rose up like a gray point in the beating rain.

The bells had not rung since their arrival. That was the only resistance which the invaders had met with in the neighborhood. The parish priest had not refused to take in and to feed the Prussian soldiers; he had several times even drunk a bottle of beer or claret with the hostile commandant, who often employed him as a benevolent intermediary; but it was no use to ask him for a single stroke of the bells; he would sooner have allowed himself to be shot. That was his way of protesting against the invasion, a peaceful and silent protest, the only one, he said, which was suitable to a priest, who was a man of mildness and not of blood; and everyone, for twenty-five miles around, praised Abbé Chantavoine's firmness and heroism, in venturing to proclaim the public morning by the obstinate silence of his church bells.

The whole village grew enthusiastic over his resistance, and was ready to back up their pastor and to risk anything, as they looked upon that silent protest as the safeguard of the national honor. It seemed to the peasants that thus they had deserved better of their country than Belfort and Strassburg, that they had set an equally valuable example, and that the name of their little village would become immortalized by that; but with that exception, they refused their Prussian conquerors nothing.

The commandant and his officers laughed among themselves at that inoffensive courage, and as the people in the whole country round showed themselves obliging and compliant towards them, they willingly tolerated their silent patriotism. Only little Baron Wilhelm would have liked to have forced them to ring the bells. He was very angry at his superior's politic compliance with the priest's scruples, and every day he begged the commandant to allow him to sound "ding-dong, ding-dong," just once, only just once, just by way of a joke. And he asked it like a wheedling woman, in the tender voice of some mistress who wishes to obtain something, but the commandant would not yield, and to console *herself*, Mademoiselle Fifi made *a mine* in the château.

The five men stood there together for some minutes, drawing in the moist air, and at last, Lieutenant Fritz said, with a laugh: "The ladies will certainly not have fine weather for their drive." Then they separated, each to his own duties, while the captain had plenty to do in seeing about the dinner.

When they met again, as it was growing dark, they began to laugh at seeing each other as dandified and smart as on the day of a grand review. The commandant's hair did not look so gray as it was in the morning, and the captain had shaved, and had only kept his moustache on, which made him look as if he had a streak of fire under his nose.

In spite of the rain, they left the window open, and one of them went to listen from time to time, and at a quarter past six the baron said he heard a rumbling in the distance. They all rushed down, and soon the wagon drove up at a gallop with its four horses, which were splashed up to their backs, steaming and panting, and five women got out at the bottom of the steps, five handsome girls whom a comrade of the captain, to whom *Le Devoir* had taken his card, had selected with care.

They had not required much pressing, as they were sure of being well paid, for they had got to know the Prussians in the three months during which they had had to do with them, and so they resigned themselves to the men as they did the state of affairs. "It is a part of our business, so it must be done," they said as they drove along; no doubt to allay some slight, secret scruples of conscience.

They went into the dining-room immediately, which looked still more dismal in its dilapidated state, when it was lighted up; while the table, covered with choice dishes, the beautiful china and glass, and the plate, which had been found in the hole in the wall where its owner had hidden it, gave the look of a bandit's inn, where they were supping after committing a robbery, to the place. The captain was radiant, and took hold of the women as if he were familiar with them; appraising them, kissing them, sniffing them, valuing them for what they were worth as *ladies of pleasure*; and when the three young men wanted to appropriate one each, he opposed them authoritatively, reserving to himself the right to apportion them justly, according to their several ranks, so as not to wound the hierarchy. Therefore, so as to avoid all discussion, jarring, and suspicion of partiality, he placed them all in a line according to height, and addressing the tallest, he said in a voice of command:

"What is your name?" "Pamela," she replied, raising her voice. And then he said: "Number one, called Pamela, is adjudged to the commandant." Then, having kissed Blondina, the second, as a

sign of proprietorship, he proffered stout Amanda to Lieutenant Otto, Eva, *the Tomato*, to Sub-Lieutenant Fritz, and Rachel, the shortest of them all, a very young, dark girl, with eyes as black as ink, a Jewess, whose snub nose confirmed the rule which allots hooked noses to all her race, to the youngest officer, frail Count Wilhelm d'Eyrick.

They were all pretty and plump, without any distinctive features, and all were very much alike in look and person, from their daily practice of love, and their life in common in houses of public accommodation.

The three younger men wished to carry off their women immediately, under the pretext of finding them brushes and soap; but the captain wisely opposed this, for he said they were quite fit to sit down to dinner, and that those who went up would wish for a change when they came down, and so would disturb the other couples, and his experience in such matters carried the day. There were only many kisses; expectant kisses.

Suddenly Rachel choked, and began to cough until the tears came into her eyes, while smoke came through her nostrils. Under pretense of kissing her, the count had blown a whiff of tobacco into her mouth. She did not fly into a rage, and did not say a word, but she looked at her possessor with latent hatred in her dark eyes.

They sat down to dinner. The commandant seemed delighted; he made Pamela sit on his right, and Blondina on his left, and said, as he unfolded his table napkin: "That was a delightful idea of yours, Captain."

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, who were as polite as if they had been with fashionable ladies, rather intimidated their neighbors, but Baron von Kelweinstein gave the reins to all his vicious propensities, beamed, made obscene remarks, and seemed on fire with his crown of red hair. He paid them compliments in French from the other side of the Rhine, and sputtered out gallant remarks, only fit for a low pot-house, from between his two broken teeth.

They did not understand him, however, and their intelligence did not seem to be awakened until he uttered nasty words and broad expressions, which were mangled by his accent. Then all began to laugh at once, like mad women, and fell against each other, repeating the words, which the baron then began to say all wrong, in order that he might have the pleasure of hearing them say dirty things. They gave him as much of that stuff as he wanted, for they were drunk after the first bottle of wine, and, becoming themselves once more, and opening the door to their usual habits, they kissed the moustaches on the right and left of them, pinched their arms, uttered furious cries, drank out of every glass, and sang French couplets, and bits of German songs, which they had picked up in their daily intercourse with the enemy.

Soon the men themselves, intoxicated by that female flesh which was displayed to their sight and touch, grew very amorous, shouted and broke the plates and dishes, while the soldiers behind them waited on them stolidly. The commandant was the only one who put any restraint upon himself.

Mademoiselle Fifi had taken Rachel onto his knees, and, getting excited, at one moment kissed the little black curls on her neck, inhaling the pleasant warmth of her body, and all the savor of her person, through the slight space there was between her dress and her skin, and at another he pinched her furiously through the material, and made her scream, for he was seized by a species of ferocity, and tormented by his desire, to hurt her. He often held her close to him, as if to make her part of himself, and put his lips in a long kiss on the Jewess's rosy mouth, until she lost her breath; and at last he bit her until a stream of blood ran down her chin and onto her bodice.

For the second time, she looked him full in the face, and as she bathed the wound, she said: "You will have to pay for that!" But he merely laughed a hard laugh, and said: "I will pay."

At dessert, champagne was served, and the commandant rose, and in the same voice in which he would have drunk to the health of the Empress Augusta, he drank: "To our ladies!" And a series of toasts began, toasts worthy of the lowest soldiers and of drunkards, mingled with obscene jokes, which were made still more brutal by their ignorance of the language. They got up, one after another, trying to say something witty, forcing themselves to be funny, and the women, who were so drunk that they almost fell off their chairs, with vacant looks and clammy tongues, applauded madly each time.

The captain, who no doubt wished to impart an appearance of gallantry to the orgy, raised his glass again, and said: "To our victories over hearts!" And thereupon Lieutenant Otto, who was a species of bear from the Black Forest, jumped up, inflamed and saturated with drink, and suddenly seized by an excess of alcoholic patriotism, he cried: "To our victories over France!"

Drunk as they were, the women were silent, and Rachel turned round with a shudder, and said: "Look here, I know some Frenchmen, in whose presence you would not dare to say that." But the little count, still holding her on his knee, began to laugh, for the wine had made him very merry, and said: "Ha! ha! ha! I have never met any of them, myself. As soon as we show ourselves, they run away!" The girl, who was in a terrible rage, shouted into his face: "You are lying, you dirty scoundrel!"

For a moment, he looked at her steadily with his bright eyes upon her, like he had looked at the portrait before he destroyed it with revolver bullets, and then he began to laugh: "Ah! yes, talk about them, my dear! Should we be here now, if they were brave?" And getting excited, he

exclaimed: "We are the masters! France belongs to us!" She jumped off his knees with a bound, and threw herself into her chair, while he rose, held out his glass over the table, and repeated: "France and the French, the woods, the fields, and the houses of France belong to us!"

The others, who were quite drunk, and who were suddenly seized by military enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of brutes, seized their glasses, and shouting: "Long live Prussia!" they emptied them at a draught.

The girls did not protest, for they were reduced to silence, and were afraid. Even Rachel did not say a word, as she had no reply to make, and then, the little marquis put his champagne glass, which had just been refilled, onto the head of the Jewess, and exclaimed: "All the women in France belong to us, also!"

At that, she got up so quickly that the glass upset and poured the amber-colored wine onto her black hair as if to baptize her, and broke into a hundred fragments, as it fell onto the floor. With trembling lips, she defied the looks of the officer who was still laughing, and she stammered out, in a voice choked with rage: "That ... that ... that ... is not true for you shall certainly not have any French women."

He sat down again, so as to laugh at his ease, and trying ineffectually to speak in the Parisian accent, he said: "That is good, very good! Then, what did you come here for, my dear?" She was thunderstruck, and made no reply for a moment, for in her agitation she did not understand him at first; but as soon as she grasped his meaning, she said to him indignantly and vehemently: "I! I! I am not a woman; I am only a strumpet, and that is all that Prussians want."

Almost before she had finished, he slapped her full in the face; but as he was raising his hand again, as if he would strike her, she, almost mad with passion, took up a small dessert knife with a silver blade from the table, and stabbed him in the neck, just above the breast bone. Something that he was going to say was cut short in his throat, and he sat there, with his mouth half open, and a terrible look in his eyes.

All the officers shouted in horror, and leaped up tumultuously; but throwing her chair between Lieutenant Otto's legs, who fell down at full length, she ran to the window, opened it before they could seize her, and jumped out into the night and pouring rain.

In two minutes, Mademoiselle Fifi was dead, and Fritz and Otto drew their swords and wanted to kill the women, who threw themselves at their feet and clung to their knees. With some difficulty the major stopped the slaughter, and had the four terrified girls locked up in a room under the care of two soldiers, and then he organized the pursuit of the fugitive, as carefully as if they were about to engage in a skirmish, feeling quite sure that she would be caught.

The table, which had been cleared immediately, now served as a bed on which to lay him out, and the four officers stood at the windows, rigid and sobered, with the stern faces of soldiers on duty, and tried to pierce through the darkness of the night, amid the steady torrent of rain. Suddenly, a shot was heard, and then another, a long way off; and for four hours they heard from time to time near or distant reports and rallying cries, strange words uttered as a call, in guttural voices.

In the morning they all returned. Two soldiers had been killed, and three others wounded by their comrades in the ardor of that chase, and in the confusion of such a nocturnal pursuit, but they had not caught Rachel.

Then the inhabitants of the district were terrorized, the houses were turned topsy-turvy, the country was scoured and beaten up, over and over again, but the Jewess did not seem to have left a single trace of her passage behind her.

When the general was told of it, he gave orders to hush up the affair, so as not to set a bad example to the army, but he severely censured the commandant, who in turned punished his inferiors. The general had said: "One does not go to war in order to amuse oneself, and to caress prostitutes." And Graf von Farlsberg, in his exasperation, made up his mind to have his revenge on the district, but as he required a pretext for showing severity, he sent for the priest, and ordered him to have the bell tolled at the funeral of Baron von Eyrick.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest showed himself humble and most respectful, and when Mademoiselle Fifi's body left the Château d'Ville on its way to the cemetery, carried by soldiers, preceded, surrounded, and followed by soldiers, who marched with loaded rifles, for the first time, the bell sounded its funereal knell in a lively manner, as if a friendly hand were caressing it. At night it sounded again, and the next day, and every day; it rang as much as any one could desire. Sometimes even, it would start at night, and sound gently through the darkness, seized by strange joy, awakened, one could not tell why. All the peasants in the neighborhood declared that it was bewitched, and nobody, except the priest and the sacristan would now go near the church tower, and they went because a poor girl was living there in grief and solitude, and secretly nourished by those two men.

She remained there until the German troops departed, and then one evening the priest borrowed the baker's cart, and himself drove his prisoner to Rouen. When they got there, he embraced her, and she quickly went back on foot to the establishment from which she had come, where the proprietress, who thought that she was dead, was very glad to see her.

A short time afterwards, a patriot who had no prejudices, and who liked her because of her bold deed, and who afterwards loved her for herself, married her, and made a lady of her, who was

quite as good as many others.

THE STORY OF A FARM-GIRL

PART I

As the weather was very fine, the people on the farm had dined more speedily than usual, and had returned to the fields.

The female servant, Rose, remained alone in the large kitchen, where the fire on the hearth was dying out, under the large boiler of hot water. From time to time she took some water out of it, and slowly washed her plates and dishes, stopping occasionally to look at the two streaks of light which the sun threw onto the long table through the window, and which showed the defects in the glass.

Three venturesome hens were picking up the crumbs under the chairs, while the smell of the poultry yard, and the warmth from the cow-stall came in through the half-open door, and a cock was heard crowing in the distance.

When she had finished her work, wiped down the table, dusted the mantel-piece, and put the plates onto the high dresser, close to the wooden clock, with its enormous *tic-tac*, she drew a long breath, as she felt rather oppressed, without exactly knowing why. She looked at the black clay walls, the rafters that were blackened with smoke, from which spiders' webs were hanging, amid pickled herrings and strings of onions, and then she sat down, rather overcome by the stale emanations which the floor, onto which so many things had been continually spilt, gave out. With this, there was mingled the pungent smell of the pans of milk, which were set out to raise the cream in the adjoining dairy.

She wanted to sew, as usual, but she did not feel strong enough for it, and so she went to get a mouthful of fresh air at the door, which seemed to do her good.

The fowls were lying on the smoking dung-hill; some of them were scratching with one claw in search of worms, while the cock stood up proudly among them. Every moment he selected one of them, and walked round her with a slight cluck of amorous invitation. The hen got up in a careless way as she received his attentions, and only supported herself on her legs and spread out her wings; then she shook her feathers to shake out the dust, and stretched herself out on the dung-hill again, while he crowed, in sign of triumph, and the cocks in all the neighboring farmyards replied to him, as if they were uttering amorous challenges from farm to farm.

The girl looked at them without thinking, and then she raised her eyes and was almost dazzled at the sight of the apple-trees in blossom, which looked almost like powdered heads. But just then, a colt, full of life and friskiness, galloped past her. Twice he jumped over the ditches, and then stopped suddenly, as if surprised at being alone.

She also felt inclined to run; she felt inclined to move and to stretch her limbs, and to repose in the warm, breathless air. She took a few undecided steps, and closed her eyes, for she was seized with a feeling of animal comfort; and then she went to look for the eggs in the hen loft. There were thirteen of them, which she took in and put into the store-room; but the smell from the kitchen incommoded her again, and she went out to sit on the grass for a time.

The farmyard, which was surrounded by trees, seemed to be asleep. The tall grass, among which the tall yellow dandelions rose up like streaks of yellow light, was of a vivid green, fresh spring green. The apple-trees threw their shade all round them, and the thatched houses, on which the blue and yellow iris flowers with their swordlike leaves grew, smoked as if the moisture of the stables and barns were coming through the straw.

The girl went to the shed where the carts and traps were kept. Close to it, in a ditch, there was a large patch of violets, whose scent was perceptible all round, while beyond it, the open country could be seen where the corn was growing, with clumps of trees in the distance, and groups of laborers here and there, who looked as small as dolls, and white horses like toys, who were pulling a child's cart, driven by a man as tall as one's finger.

She took up a bundle of straw, and threw it into the ditch and sat down upon it; then, not feeling comfortable, she undid it, spread it out and lay down upon it at full length, on her back, with both arms under her head, and her legs stretched out.

Gradually her eyes closed, and she was falling into a state of delightful languor. She was, in fact, almost asleep, when she felt two hands on her bosom, and then she sprang up at a bound. It was Jacques, one of the farm laborers, a tall fellow from Picardy, who had been making love to her for a long time. He had been looking after the sheep, and seeing her lying down in the shade, he had come stealthily, and holding his breath, with glistening eyes, and bits of straw in his hair.

He tried to kiss her, but she gave him a smack in the face, for she was as strong as he, and he was shrewd enough to beg her pardon; so they sat down side by side and talked amicably. They spoke about the favorable weather, of their master, who was a good fellow, then of their neighbors, of all the people in the country round, of themselves, of their village, of their youthful

days, of their recollections, of their relations, who had left them for a long time, and it might be for ever. She grew sad as she thought of it, while he, with one fixed idea in his head, rubbed against her with a kind of a shiver, overcome by desire.

"I have not seen my mother for a long time," she said. "It is very hard to be separated like that." And she directed her looks into the distance, towards the village in the North, which she had left.

Suddenly, however, he seized her by the neck and kissed her again; but she struck him so violently in the face with her clenched fist, that his nose began to bleed, and he got up and laid his head against the stem of a tree. When she saw that, she was sorry, and going up to him, she said: "Have I hurt you?" He, however, only laughed. "No, it was a mere nothing;" only, she had hit him right on the middle of the nose. "What a devil!" he said, and he looked at her with admiration, for she had inspired him with a feeling of respect and of a very different kind of admiration, which was the beginning of real love for that tall, strong wench.

When the bleeding had stopped, he proposed a walk, as he was afraid of his neighbor's heavy hand, if they remained side by side like that much longer; but she took his arm of her own accord, in the avenue, as if they had been out for an evening walk, and said: "It is not nice of you to despise me like that, Jacques." He protested, however. No, he did not despise her. He was in love with her, that was all. "So you really want to marry me?" she asked.

He hesitated, and then looked at her aside, while she looked straight ahead of her. She had fat, red cheeks, a full, protuberant bust under her muslin dress, thick, red lips, and her neck, which was almost bare, was covered with small beads of perspiration. He felt a fresh access of desire, and putting his lips to her ear, he murmured: "Yes, of course I do."

Then she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed for such a long time that they both of them lost their breath. From that moment the eternal story of love began between them. They plagued one another in corners; they met in the moonlight under a haystack, and gave each other bruises on the legs with their heavy nailed boots. By degrees, however, Jacques seemed to grow tired of her; he avoided her; scarcely spoke to her, and did not try any longer to meet her alone, which made her sad and anxious; and soon she found that she was pregnant.

At first, she was in a state of consternation, but then she got angry, and her rage increased every day, because she could not meet him, as he avoided her most carefully. At last, one night when everyone in the farmhouse was asleep, she went out noiselessly in her petticoat, with bare feet, crossed the yard and opened the door of the stable, where Jacques was lying in a large box of straw, over his horses. He pretended to snore when he heard her coming, but she knelt down by his side and shook him until he sat up.

"What do you want?" he then asked her. And she, with clenched teeth, and trembling with anger, replied: "I want ... I want you to marry me, as you promised." But he only laughed, and replied: "Oh! If a man were to marry all the girls with whom he has made a slip, he would have more than enough to do."

Then she seized him by the throat, threw him onto his back, so that he could not disengage himself from her, and half strangling him, she shouted into his face: "I am in the family way! Do you hear? I am in the family way?"

He gasped for breath, as he was nearly choked, and so they remained, both of them, motionless and without speaking, in the dark silence, which was only broken by the noise that a horse made as he pulled the hay out of the manger, and then slowly chewed it.

When Jacques found that she was the stronger, he stammered out: "Very well, I will marry you, as that is the case." But she did not believe his promises. "It must be at once," she said. "You must have the banns put up." "At once," he replied. "Swear solemnly that you will." He hesitated for a few moments, and then said: "I swear it, by heaven."

Then she released her grasp, and went away, without another word.

She had no chance of speaking to him for several days, and as the stable was now always locked at night, she was afraid to make any noise, for fear of creating a scandal. One morning, however, she saw another man come in at dinner-time, and so she said: "Has Jacques left?" "Yes," the man replied; "I have got his place."

This made her tremble so violently that she could not take the saucepan off the fire; and later when they were all at work, she went up into her room and cried, burying her head in her bolster, so that she might not be heard. During the day, however, she tried to obtain some information without exciting any suspicions, but she was so overwhelmed by the thoughts of her misfortune, that she fancied that all the people whom she asked, laughed maliciously. All she learned, however, was, that he had left the neighborhood altogether.

PART II

Then a cloud of constant misery began for her. She worked mechanically, without thinking of what she was doing, with one fixed idea in her head: "Suppose people were to know."

This continual feeling made her so incapable of reasoning, that she did not even try to think of any means of avoiding the disgrace that she knew must ensue, which was irreparable, and drawing nearer every day, and which was as sure as death itself. She got up every morning long

before the others, and persistently tried to look at her figure in a piece of broken looking-glass at which she did her hair, as she was very anxious to know whether anybody would notice a change in her, and during the day she stopped working every few minutes to look at herself from top to toe, to see whether the size of her stomach did not make her apron look too short.

The months went on, and she scarcely spoke now, and when she was asked a question, she did not appear to understand, but she had a frightened look, with haggard eyes and trembling hands, which made her master say to her occasionally: "My poor girl, how stupid you have grown lately."

In church, she hid behind a pillar, and no longer ventured to go to confession, as she feared to face the priest, to whom she attributed superhuman powers, which enabled him to read people's consciences; and at meal times, the looks of her fellow servants almost made her faint with mental agony, and she was always fancying that she had been found out by the cowherd, a precocious and cunning little lad, whose bright eyes seemed always to be watching her.

One morning the postman brought her a letter, and as she had never received one in her life before, she was so upset by it that she was obliged to sit down. Perhaps it was from him? But as she could not read, she sat anxious and trembling, with that piece of paper covered with ink in her hand; after a time, however, she put it into her pocket, as she did not venture to confide her secret to anyone. She often stopped in her work to look at those lines written at regular intervals, and which terminated in a signature, imagining vaguely that she would suddenly discover their meaning, until at last, as she felt half mad with impatience and anxiety, she went to the schoolmaster, who told her to sit down, and read to her, as follows:

> MY DEAR DAUGHTER: I write to tell you that I am very ill. Our neighbor, Monsieur Dentu, begs you to come, if you can. For your affectionate mother,
>
> CESAIRE DENTU,
> DEPUTY MAYOR.

She did not say a word, and went away, but as soon as she was alone, her legs gave way, and she fell down by the roadside, and remained there till night.

When she got back, she told the farmer her trouble, who allowed her to go home for as long as she wanted, and promised to have her work done by a char-woman, and to take her back when she returned.

Her mother died soon after she got there, and the next day Rose gave birth to a seven months' child, a miserable little skeleton, thin enough to make anybody shudder, and which seemed to be suffering continually, to judge from the painful manner in which it moved its poor little hands about, which were as thin as a crab's legs, but it lived, for all that. She said that she was married, but that she could not saddle herself with the child, so she left it with some neighbors, who promised to take great care of it, and she went back to the farm.

But then, in her heart, which had been wounded so long, there arose something like brightness, an unknown love for that frail little creature which she had left behind her, but there was fresh suffering in that very love, suffering which she felt every hour and every minute, because she was parted from her child. What pained her most, however, was a mad longing to kiss it, to press it in her arms, to feel the warmth of its little body against her skin. She could not sleep at night; she thought of it the whole day long, and in the evening, when her work was done, she used to sit in front of the fire and look at it intently, like people do whose thoughts are far away.

They began to talk about her, and to tease her about her lover. They asked her whether he was tall, handsome and rich. When was the wedding to be, and the christening? And often she ran away, to cry by herself, for these questions seemed to hurt her, like the prick of a pin, and in order to forget their jokes, she began to work still more energetically, and still thinking of her child, she sought for the means of saving up money for it, and determined to work so that her master would be obliged to raise her wages.

Then, by degrees, she almost monopolized the work, and persuaded him to get rid of one servant girl, who had become useless since she had taken to working like two; she economized in the bread, oil and candles, in the corn, which they gave to the fowls too extravagantly, and in the fodder for the horses and cattle, which was rather wasted. She was as miserly about her master's money, as if it had been her own, and by dint of making good bargains, of getting high prices for all their produce, and by baffling the peasants' tricks when they offered anything for sale, he at last entrusted her with buying and selling everything, with the direction of all the laborers, and with the quantity of provisions necessary for the household, so that in a short time she became indispensable to him. She kept such a strict eye on everything about her, that under her direction the farm prospered wonderfully, and for five miles round people talked of "Master Vallin's servant," and the farmer himself said everywhere: "That girl is worth more than her weight in gold."

But time passed by, and her wages remained the same. Her hard work was accepted as something that was due from every good servant, and as a mere token of her good-will; and she began to think rather bitterly, that if the farmer could put fifty or a hundred crowns extra into the bank every month, thanks to her, she was still only earning her two hundred francs a year, neither more nor less, and so she made up her mind to ask for an increase of wages. She went to see the schoolmaster three times about it, but when she got there, she spoke about something else. She felt a kind of modesty in asking for money, as if it was something disgraceful; but at

last, one day, when the farmer was having breakfast by himself in the kitchen, she said to him, with some embarrassment, that she wished to speak to him particularly. He raised his head in surprise, with both his hands on the table, holding his knife, with its point in the air, in one, and a piece of bread in the other, and he looked fixedly at the girl, who felt uncomfortable under his gaze, but asked for a week's holiday, so that she might get away, as she was not very well. He acceded to her request immediately, and then added, in some embarrassment, himself:

"When you come back, I shall have something to say to you, myself."

PART III

The child was nearly eight months old, and she did not know it again. It had grown rosy and chubby all over like a little bundle of living fat. She threw herself onto it as if it had been some prey, and kissed it so violently that it began to scream with terror, and then she began to cry herself, because it did not know her, and stretched out its arms to its nurse, as soon as it saw her. But the next day, it began to get used to her, and laughed when it saw her, and she took it into the fields and ran about excitedly with it, and sat down under the shade of the trees, and then, for the first time in her life, she opened her heart to somebody, and told him her troubles, how hard her work was, her anxieties and her hopes, and she quite tired the child with the violence of her caresses.

She took the greatest pleasure in handling it, in washing and dressing it, for it seemed to her that all this was the confirmation of her maternity, and she would look at it, almost feeling surprised that it was hers, and she used to say to herself in a low voice, as she danced it in her arms: "It is my baby, it is my baby."

She cried all the way home as she returned to the farm, and had scarcely got in, before her master called her into his room, and she went, feeling astonished and nervous, without knowing why.

"Sit down there," he said. She sat down, and for some moments they remained side by side, in some embarrassment, with their arms hanging at their sides, as if they did not know what to do with them, and looking each other in the face, after the manner of peasants.

The farmer, a stout, jovial, obstinate man of forty-five, who had lost two wives, evidently felt embarrassed, which was very unusual with him, but at last he made up his mind, and began to speak vaguely, hesitating a little, and looking out of the window as he talked. "How is it, Rose," he said, "that you have never thought of settling in life?" She grew as pale as death, and seeing that she gave him no answer, he went on: "You are a good, steady, active and economical girl, and a wife like you would make a man's fortune."

She did not move, but looked frightened; she did not even try to comprehend his meaning, for her thoughts were in a whirl, as if at the approach of some great danger; so after waiting for a few seconds, he went on: "You see, a farm without a mistress can never succeed, even with a servant like you are." Then he stopped, for he did not know what else to say, and Rose looked at him with the air of a person who thinks that he is face to face with a murderer, and ready to flee at the slightest movement he may make; but after waiting for about five minutes, he asked her: "Well, will it suit you?" "Will what suit me, master?" And he said, quickly: "Why, to marry me, by Jove!"

She jumped up, but fell back onto her chair as if she had been struck, and there she remained motionless, like a person who is overwhelmed by some great misfortune, but at last the farmer grew impatient, and said: "Come, what more do you want?" She looked at him almost in terror; then suddenly the tears came into her eyes, and she said twice, in a choking voice: "I cannot, I cannot!" "Why not?" he asked. "Come, don't be silly; I will give you until to-morrow to think it over."

And he hurried out of the room, very glad to have got the matter, which had troubled him a good deal, over; for he had no doubt that she would the next morning accept a proposal which she could never have expected, and which would be a capital bargain for him, as he thus bound a woman to himself who would certainly bring him more than if she had the best dowry in the district.

Neither could there be any scruples about an unequal match between them, for in the country everyone is very nearly equal; the farmer works just like his laborers do, who frequently become masters in their turn, and the female servants constantly become the mistresses of the establishments, without its making any change in their lives or habits.

Rose did not go to bed that night. She threw herself, dressed as she was, onto her bed, and she had not even the strength to cry left in her, she was so thoroughly dumbfounded. She remained quite inert, scarcely knowing that she had a body, and without being at all able to collect her thoughts, though at moments she remembered some of what had happened, and then she was frightened at the idea of what might happen. Her terror increased, and every time the great kitchen clock struck the hour she broke into a perspiration from grief. She lost her head, and had the nightmare; her candle went out, and then she began to imagine that someone had thrown a spell over her, like country people so often fancy, and she felt a mad inclination to run away, to escape and to flee before her misfortune, like a ship scuds before the wind.

An owl hooted, and she shivered, sat up, put her hands to her face, into her hair, and all over her

body, and then she went downstairs, as if she were walking in her sleep. When she got into the yard, she stooped down, so as not to be seen by any prowling scamp, for the moon, which was setting, shed a bright light over the fields. Instead of opening the gate, she scrambled over the fence, and as soon as she was outside, she started off. She went on straight before her, with a quick, elastic trot, and from time to time, she unconsciously uttered a piercing cry. Her long shadow accompanied her, and now and then some night bird flew over her head, while the dogs in the farmyards barked, as they heard her pass; one even jumped over the ditch and followed her and tried to bite her, but she turned round at it, and gave such a terrible yell, that the frightened animal ran back and cowered in silence in its kennel.

The stars grew dim, and the birds began to twitter; day was breaking. The girl was worn out and panting, and when the sun rose in the purple sky, she stopped, for her swollen feet refused to go any further; but she saw a pond in the distance, a large pond whose stagnant water looked like blood under the reflection of this new day, and she limped on with short steps and with her hand on her heart, in order to dip both her legs in it. She sat down on a tuft of grass, took off her heavy shoes, which were full of dust, pulled off her stockings and plunged her legs into the still water, from which bubbles were rising here and there.

A feeling of delicious coolness pervaded her from head to foot, and suddenly, while she was looking fixedly at the deep pool, she was seized with giddiness, and with a mad longing to throw herself into it. All her sufferings would be over in there; over for ever. She no longer thought of her child; she only wanted peace, complete rest, and to sleep for ever, and she got up with raised arms and took two steps forward. She was in the water up to her thighs, and she was just about to throw herself in, when sharp, pricking pains in her ankles made her jump back, and she uttered a cry of despair, for, from her knees to the tips of her feet, long, black leeches were sucking in her life blood, and were swelling, as they adhered to her flesh. She did not dare to touch them, and screamed with horror, so that her cries of despair attracted a peasant, who was driving along at some distance, to the spot. He pulled off the leeches one by one, applied herbs to the wounds, and drove the girl to her master's farm, in his gig.

She was in bed for a fortnight, and as she was sitting outside the door on the first morning that she got up, the farmer suddenly came and planted himself before her. "Well," he said, "I suppose the affair is settled, isn't it?" She did not reply at first, and then, as he remained standing and looking at her intently with his piercing eyes, she said with difficulty: "No, master, I cannot." But he immediately flew into a rage.

"You cannot, girl; you cannot? I should just like to know the reason why?" She began to cry, and repeated: "I cannot." He looked at her and then exclaimed, angrily: "Then, I suppose you have a lover?" "Perhaps that is it," she replied, trembling with shame.

The man got as red as a poppy, and stammered out in a rage: "Ah! So you confess it, you slut! And pray, who is the fellow? Some penniless, half-starved rag-a-muffin, without a roof to his head, I suppose? Who is it, I say?" And as she gave him no answer, he continued: "Ah! So you will not tell me. Then I will tell you; it is Jean Bauda?" "No, not he," she exclaimed. "Then it is Pierre Martin?" "Oh, no, master."

And he angrily mentioned all the young fellows in the neighborhood, while she denied that he had hit upon the right one, and every moment wiped her eyes with the corner of her big blue apron. But he still tried to find it out, with his brutish obstinacy, and, as it were, scratched her heart to discover her secret, just like a terrier scratches at a hole, to try and get at the animal which he scents in it. Suddenly, however, the man shouted: "By George! It is Jacques, the man who was here last year. They used to say that you were always talking together, and that you thought about getting married."

Rose was choking, and she grew scarlet, while her tears suddenly stopped, and dried up on her cheeks, like drops of water on hot iron, and she exclaimed: "No, it is not he, it is not he!" "Is that really a fact?" the cunning peasant, who partly guessed the truth, asked; and she replied, hastily: "I will swear it; I will swear it to you...." She tried to think of something by which to swear, as she did not venture to invoke sacred things, but he interrupted her: "At any rate, he used to follow you into every corner, and devoured you with his eyes at meal times. Did you ever give him your promise, eh?"

This time she looked her master straight in the face. "No, never, never; I will solemnly swear to you, that if he were to come to-day and ask me to marry him, I would have nothing to do with him." She spoke with such an air of sincerity that the farmer hesitated, and then he continued, as if speaking to himself: "What, then? You have not had *a misfortune*, as they call it, or it would have been known, and as it has no consequences, no girl would refuse her master on that account. There must be something at the bottom of it, however."

She could say nothing; she had not the strength to speak, and he asked her again: "You will not?" "I cannot, master," she said, with a sigh, and he turned on his heel.

She thought she had got rid of him altogether, and spent the rest of the day almost tranquilly, but as worn out as if she had been turning the threshing machine all day, instead of the old white horse, and she went to bed as soon as she could, and fell asleep immediately. In the middle of the night, however, two hands touching the bed, woke her. She trembled with fear, but she immediately recognized the farmer's voice, when he said to her: "Don't be frightened, Rose; I have come to speak to you." She was surprised at first, but when he tried to take liberties with

her, she understood what he wanted, and began to tremble violently, as she felt quite alone in the darkness, still heavy from sleep, and quite unprotected, by the side of that man, who stood near her. She certainly did not consent, but she resisted carelessly, herself struggling against that instinct which is always strong in simple natures, and very imperfectly protected, by the undecided will of inert and feeble natures. She turned her head now to the wall, and now towards the room, in order to avoid the attentions which the farmer tried to press on her, and her body writhed a little under the coverlet, as she was weakened by the fatigue of the struggle, while he became brutal, intoxicated by desire.

They lived together as man and wife, and one morning he said to her: "I have put up our banns, and we will get married next month."

She did not reply, for what could she say? She did not resist, for what could she do?

PART IV

She married him. She felt as if she were in a pit with inaccessible edges, from which she could never get out, and all kinds of misfortunes remained hanging over her head, like huge rocks, which would fall on the first occasion. Her husband gave her the impression of a man whom she had stolen, and who would find it out some day or other. And then she thought of her child, who was the cause of her misfortunes, but who was also the cause of all her happiness on earth, and whom she went to see twice a year, though she came back more unhappy each time. But she gradually grew accustomed to her life, her fears were allayed, her heart was at rest, and she lived with an easier mind, though still with some vague fear floating in her mind, and so years went on, and the child was six. She was almost happy now, when suddenly the farmer's temper grew very bad.

For two or three years he seemed to have been nursing some secret anxiety, to be trouble by some care, some mental disturbance, which was gradually increasing. He remained at table a long time after dinner, with his head in his hands, sad and devoured by sorrow. He always spoke hastily, sometimes even brutally, and it even seemed as if he bore a grudge against his wife, for at times he answered her roughly, almost angrily.

One day, when a neighbor's boy came for some eggs, and she spoke very crossly to him, as she was very busy, her husband suddenly came in, and said to her in his unpleasant voice: "If that were your own child you would not treat him so." She was hurt, and did not reply, and then she went back into the house, with all her grief awakened afresh, and at dinner, the farmer neither spoke to her, nor looked at her, and he seemed to hate her, to despise her, to know something about the affair at last. In consequence, she lost her head, and did not venture to remain alone with him after the meal was over, but she left the room and hastened to the church.

It was getting dusk; the narrow nave was in total darkness, but she heard footsteps in the choir, for the sacristan was preparing the tabernacle lamp for the night. That spot of trembling light, which was lost in the darkness of the arches, looked to Rose like her last hope, and with her eyes fixed on it, she fell on her knees. The chain rattled as the little lamp swung up into the air, and almost immediately the small bell rang out the *Angelus* through the increasing mist. She went up to him, as he was going out.

"Is Monsieur le Curé at home?" she asked. "Of course he is; this is his dinner-time." She trembled as she rang the bell of the parsonage. The priest was just sitting down to dinner, and he made her sit down also. "Yes, yes, I know all about it; your husband has mentioned the matter to me that brings you here." The poor woman nearly fainted, and the priest continued: "What do you want, my child?" And he hastily swallowed several spoonfuls of soup, some of which dropped onto his greasy cassock. But Rose did not venture to say anything more, and she got up to go, but the priest said: "Courage...."

And she went out, and returned to the farm, without knowing what she was doing. The farmer was waiting for her, as the laborers had gone away during her absence, and she fell heavily at his feet, and shedding a flood of tears, she said to him: "What have you got against me?"

He began to shout and to swear: "What have I got against you? That I have no children by ——! When a man takes a wife, he does not want to be left alone with her until the end of his days. That is what I have against you. When a cow has no calves, she is not worth anything, and when a woman has no children, she is also not worth anything."

She began to cry, and said: "It is not my fault! It is not my fault!" He grew rather more gentle when he heard that, and added: "I do not say that it is, but it is very annoying, all the same."

PART V

From that day forward, she had only one thought; to have a child, another child; she confided her wish to everybody, and in consequence of this, a neighbor told her of an infallible method. This was, to make her husband a glass of water with a pinch of ashes in it, every evening. The farmer consented to try it, but without success; so they said to each other: "Perhaps there are some secret ways?" And they tried to find out. They were told of a shepherd who lived ten leagues off, and so Vallin one day drove off to consult him. The shepherd gave him a loaf on which he had made some marks; it was kneaded up with herbs, and both of them were to eat a piece of it before and after their mutual caresses: but they ate the whole loaf without obtaining any results

from it.

Next, a schoolmaster unveiled mysteries, and processes of love which were unknown in the country, but, infallible, so he declared; but none of them had the desired effect. Then the priest advised them to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at Fécamp. Rose went with the crowd and prostrated herself in the abbey, and mingling her prayers with the coarse wishes of the peasants around her, she prayed that she might be fruitful a second time; but it was in vain, and then she thought that she was being punished for her first fault, and she was seized by terrible grief. She was wasting away with sorrow; her husband was also aging prematurely, and was wearing himself out in useless hopes.

Then war broke out between them; he called her names and beat her. They quarreled all day long, and when they were in bed together at night he flung insults and obscenities at her, panting with rage, until one night, not being able to think of any means of making her suffer more, he ordered her to get up and go and stand out of doors in the rain, until daylight. As she did not obey him, he seized her by the neck, and began to strike her in the face with his fists, but she said nothing, and did not move. In his exasperation he knelt on her stomach, and with clenched teeth, and mad with rage, he began to beat her. Then in her despair she rebelled, and flinging him against the wall with a furious gesture, she sat up, and in an altered voice, she hissed: "I have had a child, I have had one! I had it by Jacques; you know Jacques well. He promised to marry me, but he left this neighborhood without keeping his word."

The man was thunderstruck, and could hardly speak, but at last he stammered out: "What are you saying? What are you saying?" Then she began to sob, and amidst her tears she said: "That was the reason why I did not want to marry you. I could never tell you, for you would have left me without any bread for my child. You have never had any children, so you cannot understand, you cannot understand!"

He said again, mechanically, with increasing surprise: "You have a child? You have a child?" "You had me by force, as I suppose you know? I did not want to marry you," she said, still sobbing.

Then he got up, lit the candle, and began to walk up and down, with his arms behind him. She was cowering on the bed and crying, and suddenly he stopped in front of her, and said: "Then it is my fault that you have no children?" She gave him no answer, and he began to walk up and down again, and then, stopping again, he continued: "How old is your child?" "Just six," she whispered. "Why did you not tell me about it?" he asked. "How could I?" she replied, with a sigh.

He remained standing, motionless. "Come, get up," he said. She got up, with some difficulty, and then, when she was standing on the floor, he suddenly began to laugh, with his hearty laugh of his good days, and seeing how surprised she was, he added: "Very well, we will go and fetch the child, as you and I can have none together."

She was so scared that, if she had the strength, she would assuredly have run away, but the farmer rubbed his hands and said: "I wanted to adopt one, and now we have found one. I asked the Curé about an orphan, some time ago."

Then, still laughing, he kissed his weeping and agitated wife on both cheeks, and shouted out, as if she could not hear him: "Come along, mother, we will go and see whether there is any soup left; I should not mind a plateful."

She put on her petticoat, and they went down stairs; and while she was kneeling in front of the fire-place, and lighting the fire under the saucepan, he continued to walk up and down the kitchen in long strides, and said:

"Well, I am really glad at this: I am not saying it for form's sake, but I am glad, I am really very glad."

MAMMA STIRLING

Tall, slim, looking almost naked under her transparent dress of gauze, which fell in straight folds as far as the gold bracelets on her slender wrists, with languor in her rich voice, and something undulating and feline in the rhythmical swing of her wrist and hips. Tatia Caroly was singing one of those sweet Creole songs which call up some far distant fairy-like country, and unknown caresses, for which the lips remain always thirsting.

Footit, the clown, was leaning against the piano with a blackened face, and with his mouth that looked like a red gash from a saber cut, and his wide open eyes, he expressed feelings of the most extravagant emotion, while some niggers squatted on the ground, and accompanied the orchestra by strumming on some yellow, empty gourds.

But what made the woman and the children in the pantomime of the "New Circus" laugh most, was the incessant quarrel between an enormous Danish hound and a poor old supernumerary, who was blackened like a negro minstrel, and dressed like a Mulatto woman. The dog was always annoying him, followed him, snapped at his legs, and at his old wig, with his sharp teeth, and tore his coat and his silk pocket-handkerchief, whenever he could get hold of it, to pieces. And the man used positively to allow himself to be molested and bitten, played his part with dull

resignation, with mechanical unconsciousness of a man who has come down in the world, and who gains his livelihood as best he can, and who has already endured worse things than that.

And when half turning round to the two club men, with whom she had just been dining at the *Café Anglais*, as she used her large fan of black feathers, in a pretty, supple pose, with the light falling on to the nape of her fair neck, Noele de Fréjus exclaimed: "Wherever did they unearth that horrible, grotesque figure?"

Lord Shelley, who was a pillar of the circuses, and who knew the performances, the length of time the acrobats had been performing, and the private history of all of them, whether clowns or circus riders, replied: "Do not you recognize him, my dear?" "That lump of soot?... Are you having a joke with me?"

"He certainly has very much changed, poor fellow, and not to his advantage...Nevertheless James Stirling was a model of manly beauty and elegance, and he led such an extravagant life that all sorts of stories were rife about him, and many people declared that he was some high-class adventurer...At any rate he thought no more of danger than he did of smoking a good cigar.

"Do you not remember him at the Hippodrome, when he stood on the bare back of a horse, and drove five other tandem fashion at full gallop and without making a mistake, but checking them, or urging them on with his thin, muscular hands, just as he pleased. And he seemed to be riveted on to the horse, and kept on it, as if he had been held on by invisible hands."

"Yes, I remember him...James Stirling," she said. "The circus rider, James Stirling, on whose account that tall girl Caro, who was also a circus rider, gave that old stager Blanche Taupin a cut right and left across the face with her riding-whip, because she had tried to get him from her...But what can have happened to him, to have brought him down to such a position?"

Horrible, hairy monkeys, grimacing under their red and blue masks, had invaded the arena, and with their hair hanging down on to their bare shoulders, looking very funny with their long tails, their gray skin tights and their velvet breeches, these female dancers twisted, jumped, hopped and drew their lascivious and voluptuous circle more closely round *Chocolat*, who shook the red skirts of his coat, rolled his eyes, and showed his large, white teeth in a foolish smile, as if he were the prey of irresistible desire, and yet terribly afraid of what might happen, and Lord Shelley taking some grapes out of a basket that Noele de Fréjus offered him, said: "It is not a very cheerful story, but then true stories rarely are. At the time when he was still unknown, and when he used to have to tighten his belt more frequently than he got enough to eat and drink, James Stirling followed the destinies of a circus which traveled with its vans from fair to fair and from place to place, and fell in love with a gipsy columbine, who also formed part of this wandering, half starved company.

"She was not twenty, and astonished the others by her rash boldness, her absolute contempt for danger and obstacles, and her strange and adroit strength. She charmed them also by a magic philter which came from her hair, which was darker that a starless night, from her large, black, coaxing, velvety eyes, that were concealed by the fringe of such long lashes that they curled upwards, from her scented skin, that was as soft as rice paper, and every touch of which was a suggestive and tempting caress, from her firm, full, smiling, childlike mouth, which uttered nothing but laughter, jokes, and love songs, and gave promise of kisses.

"She rode bare-backed horses, without bit or bridle, stretched herself out on their backs, as if on a bed, and mingled her disheveled hair with their manes, swaying her supple body to their most impetuous movements, and at other times standing almost on their shoulders or on the crupper, while she juggled with looking-glasses, brass balls, knives that flashed as they twirled rapidly round in the smoky light of the paraffin lamps that were fastened to the tent poles.

"Her name was *Sacha*, that pretty Slavonic name which has such a sweet and strange sound, and she gave herself to him entirely, because he was handsome, strong, and spoke to women very gently, like one talks to quite little children, who are so easily frightened, and made to cry, and it was on her account that in a quarrel in Holland he knocked down an Italian wild beast tamer, by a blow between the two eyes.

"They adored each other so, that they never thought of their poverty, but redoubled their caresses when they had nothing to eat, not even an unripe apple stolen from an orchard, nor a lump of bread which they had begged on the road, of some charitable soul. And they embraced each other more ardently still, when they were obliged to stop for the night in the open country, and shivered in the old, badly-closed vans, and had to be very sparing with the wood, and could not illuminate the snow with those large bivouac fires, whose smoke rises in such fantastic, spiral curls, and whose flames look like a spot of blood, at a distance, seen through the mist.

"It was one of those Bohemian quasi-matrimonial arrangements, which are often more enduring than ours, and in which a man and a woman do not part for a mere caprice, a dream, or a piece of folly.

"But by-and-bye she was no longer good for anything, and had to give up appearing on the program, for she was in the family way. James Stirling worked for both, and thought that he should die of grief when she was brought to bed, and after three days of intense suffering, died with her hand in his.

"And now, all alone, crushed by grief, so ill that at times he thought his heart had stopped, the

circus rider lived for the child which the dead woman had left him as a legacy. He bought a goat, so that it might have pure milk, and brought it up with such infinite, deep, womanly tenderness, that the child called him 'Mamma,' and in the circus they nick-named him: *Mamma Stirling*.

"The boy was like his mother, and one might have said that he had brought James luck, for he had made his mark, was receiving a good income, and appeared in every performance. Well-made and agile, and profiting by the lessons which he received at the circus, little Stirling was soon fit to appear on the posters, and the night when he made his first appearance at Franconi's, old Tom Pears, the clown, who understood such matters better than most, exclaimed: 'My boy, you will make your way, if you don't break your neck first!' 'I will take care of that, Monsieur Pears,' the lad replied, with a careless shrug of the shoulder.

"He was extremely daring, and when he threw himself from one trapeze to the other, in a bold flight through the air, one might almost have fancied in the silvery electric light, that he was some fabulous bird with folded wings, and he executed all his feats with unequalled, natural grace, without seeming to make an effort, but he unbraced his limbs of steel, and condensed all his strength in one supreme, mad leap. His chest, under its pearl-gray tights, hardly rose, and there was not a drop of perspiration on his forehead, among the light curls which framed it, like a golden halo.

"He had an almost disdainful manner of smiling at the public, as if he had been working like an artist, who loves his profession, and who is amused at danger, rather than like an acrobat who is paid to amuse people after dinner; and during his most difficult feats he often uttered a shrill cry, like that of some wild beast which defies the sportsman, as it falls on its prey. But that sportsman is always on the alert, and he is the *Invisible*, which closes the brightest eyes, and the most youthful lips for ever.

"And in spite of oneself, one was excited by it, and could have wished, from a superstitious instinct, that he would not continually have that defiant cry, which seemed to give him pleasure, on his lips. James Stirling watched over him like the mother of an actress does, who knows that she is in some corner, and fears dangerous connections, in which the strongest are entangled and ruined, and they lived together in a boarding-house near the *Arc de Triumph*.

"It was a very simple apartment, with immense posters of every color and in every language pinned to the wall, on which the name of Stirling appeared in large, striking letters; photographs with inscriptions, and tinsel wreaths, though there were two of real laurel, that were covered with dust, and were gradually falling to pieces.

"One night, the young fellow for the first time did not come home, and only returned in time for rehearsal, tired, with blue rims under his eyes, his lips cracked with feverish heat, and with pale cheeks, but with such a look of happiness, and such a peculiar light in his eyes, that *Mamma Stirling* felt as if he had been stabbed, and had not the strength to find fault with him; and emboldened, radiant, longing to give vent to the mad joy which filled his whole being, to express his sensations, and recount his happiness, like a lad talking to his elder brother, he told James Stirling his love intrigue from beginning to end, and how much in love he was with the light-haired girl who had clasped him in her arms, and initiated him into the pleasures of the flesh.

"It had been coming for some time, he said. She went to every performance, and always occupied the same box. She used to send him letters by the boxopener, letters which smelt like bunches of violets, and always smiled at him when he came into the ring to bow to the public, amidst the applause and recalls, and it was that smile, those red, half-open lips, which seemed to promise so many caresses and delicious words, that had attracted him like some strange, fragrant fruit. Sometimes she came with gentlemen in evening dress, and with gardenias in their button-holes, who seemed to bore her terribly, if not to disgust her. And he was happy, although he had never yet spoken to her, that she had not that smile for them which she had for him, and that she appeared dull and sad, like somebody who is homesick, or who has got a great longing for something.

"On other evenings, she used to be quite alone, with black pearls in the lobes of her small ears, that were like pink shells, and got up and left her box as soon as he had finished his performance on the trapeze ... while the evening before she carried him off almost forcibly in her carriage, without even giving him time to get rid of his tights, and the india-rubber armlets that he wore on his wrists. Oh! that return to the cold, in the semi-obscurity, through which the trembling light of the street lamps shone, that warm, exciting clasp of her arms round him, which imprisoned him, and by degrees drew him close to that warm body, whose slightest throb and shiver he felt, as if she had been clothed in impalpable gauze, and whose odor mounted to his head like fumes of whisky, an odor in which there was something of everything, of the animal, of the woman, of spices, of flowers, and something that he did not yet know.

"And they were despotic, imperious, divine kisses, when she put her lips to his and kept them there, as if to make him dream of an eternity of bliss, sucking in his breath, hurting his lips, intoxicating, overwhelming him with delight, exhausting him, while she held his head in both her hands, as if in a vice. And the carriage rolled on at a quick trot, through the silence of the snow, and they did not even hear the noise of the wheels, which buried themselves in that white carpet, as if it had been cotton-wool. Suddenly, however, tired and exhausted she leant against him with closed eyes and moist lips, and then they talked at random, like people who are not quite themselves, and who have uncorked too many bottles of champagne on a benefit night.

"She questioned him, and laughed at his theatrical slang, wrapped her otter-skin rug round his legs, and murmured: 'Come close to me, darling; at any rate, you are not cold, I hope?' When they reached her pretty little house, with old tapestry and delicate colored plush hangings, they found supper waiting for them, and she amused herself by attending to him herself, with the manners of a saucy waitress... And then there were kisses, constant, insatiable, maddening kisses, and the lad exclaimed, with glistening eyes, at the thoughts of future meetings: 'If you only knew how pretty she is! And then, it is nicer than anything else in the world to obey her, to do whatever she wants, and to allow oneself to be loved as she wishes!'

"*Mamma Stirling* was very uneasy, but resigned himself to the inevitable, and seeing how infatuated the boy was, he took care not to be too sharp with him, or to keep too tight a hand upon the reins. The woman who had debauched the lad was a fast woman, and nothing else, and after all, the old stager preferred that to one of those excitable women who are as dangerous for a man as the plague, whereas a girl of that sort can be taken and left again, and one does not risk one's heart at the same time as one does one's skin, for a man knows what they are worth. He was mistaken, however. Nelly d'Argine, she is married to a Yankee, now, and has gone to New York with him, was one of those vicious women whom a man can only wish his worst enemy to have, and she had merely taken a fancy to the young fellow because she was bored to death, and because her senses were roused like the embers which break out again, when a fire is nearly out.

"Unfortunately, he had taken the matter seriously, and was very jealous, and as suspicious as a deer, and had never imagined that this love affair could come to an end, and proud, with his hot gipsy blood, he wished to be the only lover, the only master who paid, and who could not be shown the door, like a troublesome and importunate parasite.

"Stirling had saved some money, by dint of a hard struggle, and had invested it in the Funds against a rainy day, when he should be too old to work, and to gain a livelihood, and when he saw how madly in love his son was, and how obstinate in his lamentable folly, he gave him all his savings and deprived himself of his stout and gin, so that the boy might have money to give to his mistress, and might continue to be happy, and not have any cares, and so between them, they kept Nelly.

"Stirling's debts accumulated, and he mortgaged his salary for years in advance to the usurers who haunt circuses as if they were gambling hells, who are on the watch for passions, poverty and disappointments, who keep plenty of ready stamped bill paper in their pockets, as well as money, which they haggle over, coin by coin. But in spite of all this, the lad sang, made a show, and amused himself, and used to say to him, as he kissed him on both cheeks: 'How kind you are, in spite of everything!'

"In a month's time, as he was becoming too exacting, he followed her, questioned her and worried her with perpetual scenes, Nelly found that she had had enough of her gymnast; he was a toy which she had done with and worn out, and which was now only in her way, and only worth throwing into the gutter. She was satiated with him, and became once more the tranquil woman whom nothing can move, and who baits her ground quite calmly, in order to find a husband and to make a fresh start. And so she turned the young fellow out of doors, as if he had been some beggar soliciting alms. He did not complain, however, and did not say anything to *Mamma Stirling*, but worked as he had done in the past, and mastered himself with superhuman energy, so as to hide the grief that was gnawing at his heart and killing him, and the disenchantment with everything that was making him sick of life.

"Some time afterwards, when there was to be a special display for the officers, seeing Nelly d'Argine there in a box surrounded by her usual admirers, appearing indifferent to everything that was going on, and not even apparently noticing that he was performing, and was being heartily applauded, he threw his trapeze forward as far as he could, at the end of his performance, and exerting all his strength, and certain that he should fall beyond the protecting net, he flung himself furiously into space.

"A cry of horror resounded from one end of the house to the other, when he was picked up disfigured, and with nearly every bone in his body broken. The unfortunate young fellow was no longer breathing, his chest was crushed in, and blood-stained froth was issuing from his lips, and Nelly d'Argine made haste to leave the house with her friends, saying in a very vexed voice:

"'It is very disgusting to come in the hopes of being amused, and to witness an accident!'

"And *Mamma Stirling*, who was ruined and in utter despair, and who cared for nothing more in this world, after that took to drinking, used to get constantly drunk, and rolled from public-house to public-house, and bar to bar, and as the worst glass of vitrol still cost a penny, he became reduced to undertaking the part which you have seen, to dabble in the water, to blacken himself, and to allow himself to be bitten.

"Ah! What a wretched thing life is for those who are kind, and who have too much heart!"

LILIE LALA

"When I saw her for the first time," Louis d'Arandel said, with the look of a man who was

dreaming and trying to recollect something, "I thought of some slow and yet passionate music that I once heard, though I do not remember who was the composer, where there was a fair-haired woman, whose hair was so silky, so golden, and so vibrating, that her lover had it cut off after her death, and had the strings of the magic bow of a violin made out of it, which afterwards emitted such superhuman complaints and love melodies that they made its hearers love until death.

"In her eyes there lay the mystery of deep waters, and one was lost in them, drowned in them like in fathomless depths, and at the corners of her mouth there lurked that despotic and merciless smile of those women who do not fear that they may be conquered, who rule over men like cruel queens, whose hearts remain as virgin as those of the strictest Carmelite nuns, amidst a flood of lewdness.

"I have seen her angelic head, the bands of her hair, that looked like plates of gold, her tall, graceful figure, her white, slender, childish hands, in stained glass windows in churches. She suggested pictures of the Annunciation, where the Archangel Gabriel descends with ultra-marine colored wings, and Mary is sitting at her spinning-wheel and spinning, while uttering pious prayers, and looks like the tall sister of the white lilies that are growing beside her and the roses.

"When she went through the acacia alley, she appeared on some First Night in the stage box at one of the theaters, nearly always alone, and apparently feeling life a great burden, and angry because she could not change the eternal, dull round of human enjoyment, nobody would have believed that she went in for a fast life, and that in the annals of gallantry she was catalogued under the strange name of *Lilie Lala*, and that no man could rub against her without being irretrievably caught, and spending his last half-penny on her.

"But with all that, Lilie had the voice of a schoolgirl, of some little innocent creature who still uses a skipping-rope and wears short dresses, and had that clear, innocent laugh which reminds people of wedding bells. Sometimes, for fun, I would kneel down before her, like before the statue of a saint, and clasping my hands as if in prayer, I used to say: '*Sancta Lilie, ora pro nobis!*'

"One evening, at Biarritz, when the sky had the dull glare of intense heat and the sea was of a sinister, inky black, and was swelling and rolling enormous phosphorescent waves onto the beach at *Port-Vieux*, Lilie, who was listless and strange, and was making holes in the sand with the heels of her boots, suddenly exclaimed in one of those longings for confidence which women sometimes feel, and for which they are sorry as soon as their story is done:

"'Ah! My dear fellow, I do not deserve to be canonized, and my life is rather a subject for a drama than a chapter from the Gospels or the Golden Legend. As long as I can remember anything, I can remember seeing myself wrapped in lace, being carried by a woman, and continually being made a fuss with, like children are who have been waited for for a long time, and who are spoiled more than others.

"'Those kisses were so nice, that I still seem to feel their sweetness, and I preserve the remembrance of them in a little place in my heart, like one preserves some lucky talisman in a reliquary. I still seem to remember an indistinct landscape lost in the mist, outlines of trees which frightened me as they creaked and groaned in the wind, and ponds on which swans were sailing. And when I look in the glass for a long time, merely for the sake of seeing myself, it seems to me as if I recognized the woman who formerly used to kiss me most frequently, and speak to me in a more loving voice than anyone else did. But what happened afterwards?

"'Was I carried off, or sold to some strolling circus owner by a dishonest servant? I do not know; I have never been able to find out; but I remember that my whole childhood was spent in a circus which traveled from fair to fair, and from place to place, with files of vans, processions of animals, and noisy music.

"'I was as tiny as an insect, and they taught me difficult tricks, to dance on the tight-rope and to perform on the slack-rope.... I was beaten as if I had been a bit of plaster, and I more frequently had a piece of dry bread to gnaw, than a slice of meat. But I remember that one day I slipped under one of the vans, and stole a basin of soup as my share, which one of the clowns was carefully making for his three learned dogs.

"'I had neither friends nor relations; I was employed on the dirtiest jobs, like the lowest stable-help, and I was tattooed with bruises and scars. Of the whole company, however, the one who beat me the most, who was the least sparing of his thumps, and who continually made me suffer, as if it gave him pleasure, was the manager and proprietor, a kind of old, vicious brute, whom everybody feared like the plague, a miser who was continually complaining of the receipts, who hid away the crown pieces in his mattress, invested his money in the funds, and cut down the salary of everybody, as far as he could.

"'His name was Rapha Ginestous. Any other child, but myself, would have succumbed to such constant martyrdom, but I grew up, and the more I grew, the prettier and more desirable I became, so that when I was fifteen, men were already beginning to write love letters to me, and to throw bouquets to me in the arena. I felt also that all the men in the company were watching me, and were coveting me as their prey; that their lustful looks rested on my pink tights, and followed the graceful outlines of my body when I was posing on the rope that stretched from one end of the circus to the other, or jumped through the paper hoops at full gallop.

"'They were no longer the same, and spoke to me in a totally different tone of voice.... They tried

to come into my dressing-room when I was changing my dress, and Rapha Ginestous seemed to have lost his head, and his heart throbbed audibly when he came near me. Yes, he had the audacity to propose bargains to me which covered my cheeks and forehead with blushes, and which filled me with disgust, and as I felt a fierce hatred for him, and detested him with all my soul and all my strength, as I wished to make him suffer the tortures which he had inflicted upon me, a hundred fold, I used him as the target at which I was constantly aiming.

"'Instinctively, I employed every cunning perfidy, every artful coquetry, every lie, every artifice which upsets the strongest and most skeptical, and places them at our mercy, like submissive animals. He loved me, he really loved me, that lascivious goat, who had never seen anything in a woman except a soft palliasse, and an instrument of convenience and of forgetfulness. He loved me like old men do love, with frenzy, with degrading transports, and with the prostration of his will and of his strength.... I held him like in a leash, and did whatever I liked with him.

"'I was much more manageress than he was manager, and the poor wretch wasted away in vain hopes and in useless transports; he had not even touched the tips of my fingers, and was reduced to bestowing his caresses on my columbine shoes, my tights, and my wigs. And I care not *that* for it, you understand! Not the slightest familiarity, and he began to grow thin over it, fell ill, and almost became idiotic. And while he implored me, and promised to marry me, with his eyes full of tears, I shouted with laughter; I reminded him of how he had beaten, abused, and humiliated me, and had often made me wish for death. And as soon as he left me, he emptied bottles of gin and whisky, and got so abominably drunk that he rolled under the table, in order to drown his sorrow and forget his desire.

"'He covered me with jewels, and tried everything he could to tempt me to become his wife, and in spite of my inexperience in life, he consulted me with regard to everything he undertook, and one evening, after I had stroked his face with my hand, I persuaded him without any difficulty, to make his will, by which he left me all his savings, and the circus and everything belonging to it.

"'It was in the middle of winter, near Moscow; it snowed continually, and one almost burned oneself at the stoves in trying to keep warm. Rapha Ginestous had had supper brought into the largest van, which was his, after the performance, and for hours we ate and drank. I was very nice towards him, and filled his glass every moment; I even sat on his knee and kissed him. And all his love, and the fumes of the alcohol of the wine mounted to his head, and gradually made him so helplessly intoxicated, that he fell from his chair inert, and as if he had been struck by lightning, without opening his eyes or saying a word.

"'The rest of the troupe were asleep, and the lights were out in all the little windows, and not a sound was to be heard, while the snow continued to fall in large flakes. So having put out the petroleum lamp, I opened the door, and taking the drunkard by the feet, as if he had been a bale of goods, I threw him out into that white shroud.

"'The next morning the stiff and convulsed body of Rapha Ginestous was picked up, and as everybody knew his inveterate drinking habits, no one thought of instituting an inquiry, or of accusing me of a crime, and thus I was avenged, and had a yearly income of nearly fifteen thousand francs. What, after all, is the good of being honest, and of pardoning our enemies, as the Gospel bids us?'

"And now," Louis d'Arandal said in conclusion, "suppose we go and have a cocktail or two at the Casino, for I do not think that I have ever talked so much in my life before."

MADAME TELLIER'S ESTABLISHMENT

PART I

They used to go there every evening at about eleven o'clock, just like they went to the *café*. Six or eight of them used to meet there; they were always the same set, not fast men, but respectable tradesmen, and young men, in government or some other employ, and they used to drink their Chartreuse, and tease the girls, or else they would talk seriously with *Madame*, whom everybody respected, and then they used to go home at twelve o'clock. The younger men would sometimes stay the night.

It was a small, comfortable house, at the corner of a street behind Saint Etienne's church, and from the windows one could see the docks, full of ships which were being unloaded, and the old, gray chapel, dedicated to the Virgin, on the hill.

Madame, who came of a respectable family of peasant proprietors in the department of the Eure, had taken up that profession, just as she would have become a milliner or dressmaker. The prejudice against prostitution, which is so violent and deeply rooted in large towns, does not exist in the country places in Normandy. The peasant says:

"It is a paying business," and he sends his daughter to keep a harem of fast girls, just as he would send her to keep a girls' school.

She had inherited the house from an old uncle, to whom it had belonged. *Monsieur* and *Madame*,

who had formerly been inn-keepers near Yvetot, had immediately sold their house, as they thought that the business at Fécamp was more profitable, and they arrived one fine morning to assume the direction of the enterprise, which was declining on account of the absence of the proprietors, who were good people enough in their way, and who soon made themselves liked by their staff and their neighbors.

Monsieur died of apoplexy two years later, for as his new profession kept him in idleness and without any exercise, he had grown excessively stout, and his health had suffered. Since she had been a widow, all the frequenters of the establishment had wanted her; but people said that personally she was quite virtuous, and even the girls in the house could not discover anything against her. She was tall, stout and affable, and her complexion, which had become pale in the dimness of her house, the shutters of which were scarcely ever opened, shone as if it had been varnished. She had a fringe of curly, false hair, which gave her a juvenile look, that contrasted strongly with the ripeness of her figure. She was always smiling and cheerful, and was fond of a joke, but there was a shade of reserve about her, which her new occupation had not quite made her lose. Coarse words always shocked her, and when any young fellow who had been badly brought up, called her establishment by its right name, she was angry and disgusted.

In a word, she had a refined mind, and although she treated her women as friends, yet she very frequently used to say that "she and they were not made of the same stuff."

Sometimes during the week, she would hire a carriage and take some of her girls into the country, where they used to enjoy themselves on the grass by the side of the little river. They were like a lot of girls let out from a school, and used to run races, and play childish games. They had a cold dinner on the grass, and drank cider, and went home at night with a delicious feeling of fatigue, and in the carriage they kissed *Madame* as their kind mother, who was full of goodness and complaisance.

The house had two entrances. At the corner there was a sort of low *café*, which sailors and the lower orders frequented at night, and she had two girls whose special duty it was to attend to that part of the business. With the assistance of the waiter, whose name was Frederic, and who was a short, light-haired, beardless fellow, as strong as a horse, they set the half bottles of wine and the jugs of beer on the shaky marble tables, and then, sitting astride on the customer's knees, they urged them to drink.

The three other girls (there were only five of them), formed a kind of aristocracy, and were reserved for the company on the first floor, unless they were wanted downstairs, and there was nobody on the first floor. The saloon of Jupiter, where the tradesmen used to meet, was papered in blue, and embellished with a large drawing representing Leda stretched out under the swan. That room was reached by a winding staircase, which ended at a narrow door opening onto the street, and above it, all night long a little lamp burned, behind wire bars, such as one still sees in some towns, at the foot of some shrine of a saint.

The house, which was old and damp, rather smelled of mildew. At times there was an odor of Eau de Cologne in the passages, or a half open door downstairs admitted the noise of the common men sitting and drinking downstairs, to the first floor, much to the disgust of the gentlemen who were there. *Madame*, who was familiar with those of her customers with whom she was on friendly terms, did not leave the saloon, and took much interest in what was going on in the town, and they regularly told her all the news. Her serious conversation was a change from the ceaseless chatter of the three women; it was a rest from the obscene jokes of those stout individuals who every evening indulged in the common-place debauchery of drinking a glass of liquor in company with prostitutes.

The names of the girls on the first floor were Fernande, Raphaele, and Rosa, the *Jade*. As the staff was limited, *Madame* had endeavored that each member of it should be a pattern, an epitome of the feminine type, so that every customer might find as nearly as possible, the realization of his ideal. Fernande represented the handsome blonde; she was very tall, rather fat, and lazy; a country girl, who could not get rid of her freckles, and whose short, light, almost colorless, tow-like hair, which was like combed-out flax, barely covered her head.

Raphaele, who came from Marseilles, played the indispensable part of the handsome Jewess, and was thin, with high cheek bones, which were covered with rouge, and her black hair, which was always covered with pomatum, curled onto her forehead. Her eyes would have been handsome, if the right one had not had a speck in it. Her Roman nose came down over a square jaw, where two false upper teeth contrasted strangely with the bad color of the rest.

Rosa, *the Jade*, was a little roll of fat, nearly all stomach, with very short legs, and from morning till night she sang songs, which were alternately indecent or sentimental, in a harsh voice, told silly, interminable tales, and only stopped talking in order to eat, and left off eating in order to talk; she was never still, and was active as a squirrel, in spite of her fat, and of her short legs; and her laugh, which was a torrent of shrill cries, resounded here and there, ceaselessly, in a bedroom, in the loft, in the *café*, everywhere, and about nothing.

The two women on the ground floor, Louise, who was nick-named *la Cocotte*, and Flora, whom they called *Balançiore*, because she limped a little, the former always dressed as Liberty, with a tri-colored sash, and the other as a Spanish woman, with a string of copper coins which jingled at every step she took, in her carrotty hair, looked like cooks dressed up for the carnival. They were like all other women of the lower orders, neither uglier nor better looking than they usually are.

They looked just like servants at an inn, and they were generally called the two pumps.

A jealous peace, which was, however, very rarely disturbed, reigned among these five women, thanks to *Madame's* conciliatory wisdom, and to her constant good humor, and the establishment, which was the only one of the kind in the little town, was very much frequented. *Madame* had succeeded in giving it such a respectable appearance, she was so amiable and obliging to everybody, her good heart was so well-known, that she was treated with a certain amount of consideration. The regular customers spent money on her, and were delighted when she was especially friendly towards them, and when they met during the day, they would say: "Until this evening, you know where," just like men say: "At the *café*, after dinner." In a word, Madame Tellier's house was somewhere to go to, and they very rarely missed their daily meetings there.

One evening, towards the end of May, the first arrival, Monsieur Poulin, who was a timber merchant, and had been mayor, found the door shut. The little lantern behind the grating was not alight; there was not a sound in the house; everything seemed dead. He knocked, gently at first, but then more loudly, but nobody answered the door. Then he went slowly up the street, and when he got to the market place, he met Monsieur Duvert, the gun maker, who was going to the same place, so they went back together, but did not meet with any better success. But suddenly they heard a loud noise close to them, and on going round the house, they saw a number of English and French sailors, who were hammering at the closed shutters of the *café* with their fists.

The two tradesmen immediately made their escape, for fear of being compromised, but a low *pst* stopped them; it was Monsieur Tournevau, the fish curer, who had recognized them, and was trying to attract their attention. They told him what had happened, and he was all the more vexed at it, as he, a married man, and father of a family, only went there on Saturdays, *securítatis causa*, as he said, alluding to a measure of sanitary policy, which his friend Doctor Borde had advised him to observe. That was his regular evening, and now he should be deprived of it for the whole week.

The three men went as far as the quay together, and on the way they met young Monsieur Philippe, the banker's son, who frequented the place regularly, and Monsieur Pinipesse, the collector, and they all returned to the *Rue aux Juifs* together, to make a last attempt. But the exasperated sailors were besieging the house, throwing stones at the shutters, and shouting, and the five first floor customers went away as quickly as possible, and walked aimlessly about the streets.

Presently they met Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and then Monsieur Vasse, the Judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, and they took a long walk, going to the pier first of all, where they sat down in a row on the granite parapet, and watched the rising tide, and when the promenaders had sat there for some time, Monsieur Tournevau said:

"This is not very amusing!"

"Decidedly not," Monsieur Pinipesse replied, and they started off to walk again.

After going through the street on the top of the hill, they returned over the wooden bridge which crosses the Retenue, passed close to the railway, and came out again onto the market place, when suddenly a quarrel arose between Monsieur Pinipesse, the collector, and Monsieur Tournevau, about an edible fungus which one of them declared he had found in the neighborhood.

As they were out of temper already from annoyance, they would very probably have come to blows, if the others had not interfered. Monsieur Pinipesse went off furious, and soon another altercation arose between the ex-major, Monsieur Poulin, and Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, on the subject of the tax collector's salary, and the profits which he might make. Insulting remarks were freely passing between them, when a torrent of formidable cries were heard, and the body of sailors, who were tired of waiting so long outside a closed house, came into the square. They were walking arm-in-arm, two and two, and formed a long procession, and were shouting furiously. The landsmen went and hid themselves under a gateway, and the yelling crew disappeared in the direction of the abbey. For a long time they still heard the noise, which diminished like a storm in the distance, and then silence was restored, and Monsieur Poulin and Monsieur Dupuis, who were enraged with each other, went in different directions, without wishing each other good-bye.

The other four set off again, and instinctively went in the direction of Madame Tellier's establishment, which was still closed, silent, impenetrable. A quiet, but obstinate, drunken man was knocking at the door of the café, and then stopped and called Frederic, the waiter, in a low voice, but finding that he got no answer, he sat down on the doorstep, and waited the course of events.

The others were just going to retire, when the noisy band of sailors reappeared at the end of the street. The French sailors were shouting the *Marseillaise*, and the Englishmen, *Rule Britannia*. There was a general lurching against the wall, and then the drunken brutes went on their way towards the quay, where a fight broke out between the two nations, in the course of which an Englishman had his arm broken, and a Frenchman his nose split.

The drunken man, who had stopped outside the door, was crying by that time, like drunken men

and children cry, when they are vexed, and the others went away. By degrees, calm was restored in the noisy town; here and there, at moments, the distant sound of voices could be heard, and then died away in the distance.

One man, only, was still wandering about, Monsieur Tournevau, the fish curer, who was vexed at having to wait until the next Saturday, and he hoped for something to turn up, he did not know what; but he was exasperated at the police for thus allowing an establishment of such public utility, which they had under their control, to be thus closed.

He went back to it, and examined the walls, and trying to find out the reason, and on the shutter he saw a notice stuck up, so he struck a wax vesta, and read the following in a large, uneven hand; "Closed on account of the Confirmation."

Then he went away, as he saw it was useless to remain, and left the drunken man lying on the pavement fast asleep, outside that inhospitable door.

The next day, all the regular customers, one after the other, found some reason for going through the street with a bundle of papers under their arm, to keep them in countenance, and with a furtive glance they all read that mysterious notice:

Closed on account of the Confirmation.

PART II

Madame had a brother, who was a carpenter in their native place, Virville, in the department of Eure. When *Madame* had still kept the inn at Yvetot, she had stood god-mother to that brother's daughter, who had received the name of Constance, Constance Rivet; she herself being a Rivet on her father's side. The carpenter, who knew that his sister was in a good position, did not lose sight of her, although they did not meet often, for they were both kept at home by their occupations, and lived a long way from each other. But as the girl was twelve years old, and going to be confirmed, he seized that opportunity for writing to his sister, and asking her to come and be present at the ceremony. Their old parents were dead, and as she could not well refuse, she accepted the invitation. Her brother, whose name was Joseph, hoped that by dint of showing his sister attentions, she might be induced to make her will in the girl's favor, as she had no children of her own.

His sister's occupation did not trouble his scruples in the least, and, besides, nobody knew anything about it at Virville. When they spoke of her, they only said: "Madame Tellier is living at Fécamp," which might mean that she was living on her own private income. It was quite twenty leagues from Fécamp to Virville, and for a peasant, twenty leagues on land are more than is crossing the ocean to an educated person. The people at Virville had never been further than Rouen, and nothing attracted the people from Fécamp to a village of five hundred houses, in the middle of a plain, and situated in another department, and, at any rate, nothing was known about her business.

But the Confirmation was coming on, and *Madame* was in great embarrassment. She had no under mistress, and did not at all care to leave her house, even for a day, for all the rivalries between the girls upstairs and those downstairs, would infallibly break out; no doubt Frederic would get drunk, and when he was in that state he would knock anybody down for a mere word. At last, however, she made up her mind to take them all with her, with the exception of the man, to whom she gave a holiday, until the next day but one.

When she asked her brother, he made no objection, but undertook to put them all up for a night, and so on Saturday morning, the eight o'clock express carried off *Madame* and her companions in a second-class carriage. As far as Beuzeille, they were alone, and chattered like magpies, but at that station a couple got in. The man, an old peasant, dressed in a blue blouse with a folding collar, wide sleeves, tight at the wrist, and ornamented with white embroidery, wore an old high hat with long nap, held an enormous green umbrella in one hand, and a large basket in the other, from which the heads of three frightened ducks protruded. The woman, who sat stiffly in her rustic finery, had a face like a fowl, and with a nose that was as pointed as a bill. She sat down opposite her husband and did not stir, as she was startled at finding herself in such smart company.

There was certainly an array of striking colors in the carriage. *Madame* was dressed in blue silk from head to foot, and had on over her dress a dazzling red shawl of imitation French cashmere. Fernande was panting in a Scottish plaid dress, whose bodice, which her companions had laced as tight as they could, had forced up her falling bosom into a double dome, that was continually heaving up and down, and which seemed liquid beneath the material. Raphaele, with a bonnet covered with feathers, so that it looked like a nest full of birds, had on a lilac dress with gold spots on it, and there was something Oriental about it that suited her Jewish face. Rosa, *the Jade*, had on a pink petticoat with large flounces, and looked like a very fat child, an obese dwarf; while the two pumps looked as if they had cut their dresses out of old, flowered curtains, dating from the Restoration.

As soon as they were no longer alone in the compartment, the ladies put on staid looks, and began to talk of subjects which might give the others a high opinion of them. But at Bolbec a gentleman with light whiskers, with a gold chain, and wearing two or three rings, got in, and put several parcels wrapped in oil cloth into the net over his head. He looked inclined for a joke, and

a good-natured fellow.

"Are you ladies changing your quarters?" he said, and that question embarrassed them all considerably. *Madame*, however, quickly recovered her composure, and said sharply, to avenge the honor of her corps:

"I think you might try and be polite!"

He excused himself, and said: "I beg your pardon, I ought to have said your nunnery."

As *Madame* could not think of a retort, or perhaps as she thought herself justified sufficiently, she gave him a dignified bow, and pinched in her lips.

Then the gentleman, who was sitting between Rose *the Jade* and the old peasant, began to wink knowingly at the ducks, whose heads were sticking out of the basket, and when he felt that he had fixed the attention of his public, he began to tickle them under their bills, and spoke funnily to them, to make the company smile.

"We have left our little pond, quack! quack! to make the acquaintance of the little spit, qu-ack! qu-ack!"

The unfortunate creatures turned their necks away, to avoid his caresses, and made desperate efforts to get out of their wicker prison, and then, suddenly, all at once, uttered the most lamentable quacks of distress. The women exploded with laughter. They leaned forward and pushed each other, so as to see better; they were very much interested in the ducks, and the gentleman redoubled his airs, his wits, and his teasing.

Rosa joined in, and leaning over her neighbor's legs, she kissed the three animals on the head, and immediately all the girls wanted to kiss them in turn, and the gentleman took them onto his knees, made them jump up and down and pinched them. The two peasants, who were even in greater consternation than their poultry, rolled their eyes as if they were possessed, without venturing to move, and their old wrinkled faces had not a smile nor a movement.

Then the gentleman, who was a commercial traveler, offered the ladies braces by way of a joke, and taking up one of his packages, he opened it. It was a trick, for the parcel contained garters. There were blue silk, pink silk, red silk, violet silk, mauve silk garters, and the buckles were made of two gilt metal Cupids, embracing each other. The girls uttered exclamations of delight and looked at them with that gravity which is natural to a woman when she is hankering after a bargain. They consulted one another by their looks or in a whisper, and replied in the same manner, and *Madame* was longingly handling a pair of orange garters that were broader and more imposing looking than the rest; really fit for the mistress of such an establishment.

The gentleman waited, for he was nourishing an idea.

"Come, my kittens," he said, "you must try them on."

There was a torrent of exclamations, and they squeezed their petticoats between their legs, as if they thought he was going to ravish them, but he quietly waited his time, and said: "Well, if you will not, I shall pack them up again."

And he added cunningly: "I offer any pair they like, to those who will try them on."

But they would not, and sat up very straight, and looked dignified.

But the two pumps looked so distressed that he renewed the offer to them, and Flora especially visibly hesitated, and he possessed her: "Come, my dear, a little courage! Just look at that lilac pair; it will suit your dress admirably ..."

That decided her, and pulling up her dress she showed a thick leg fit for a milk-maid, in a badly-fitting, coarse stocking. The commercial traveler stooped down and fastened the garter below the knee first of all and then above it; and he tickled the girl gently, which made her scream and jump. When he had done, he gave her the lilac pair, and asked: "Who next?"

"I! I!" they all shouted at once, and he began on Rosa *the Jade*, who uncovered a shapeless, round thing without any ankle, a regular "sausage of a leg," as Raphaele used to say.

The commercial traveler complimented Fernande, and grew quite enthusiastic over her powerful columns.

The thin tibias of the handsome Jewess met less success, and Louise Cocote, by way of a joke, put her petticoats over his head, so that *Madame* was obliged to interfere to check such unseemly behavior.

Lastly, *Madame* herself put out her leg, a handsome, muscular, Norman leg, and in his surprise and pleasure, the commercial traveler gallantly took off his hat to salute that master calf, like a true French cavalier.

The two peasants, who were speechless from surprise, looked aside, out of the corners of their eyes, and they looked so exactly like fowls that the man with the light whiskers, when he sat up, said *co—co—ri—co*, under their very noses, and that gave rise to another storm of amusement.

The old people got out at Motteville, with their basket, their ducks, and their umbrella, and they heard the woman say to her husband, as they went away:

"They are bad women, who are off to that cursed place Paris."

The funny commercial traveler himself got out at Rouen, after behaving so coarsely, that *Madame* was obliged sharply to put him into his right place, and she added, as a moral: "This will teach us not to talk to the first comer."

At Oissel they changed trains, and at a little station further on, Monsieur Joseph Rivet was waiting for them with a large cart and a number of chairs in it, which was drawn by a white horse.

The carpenter politely kissed all the ladies, and then helped them into his conveyance.

Three of them sat on three chairs at the back, Raphaele, *Madame* and her brother on the three chairs in front, and Rosa, who had no seat, settled herself as comfortably as she could on tall Fernande's knees, and then they set off.

But the horse's jerky trot shook the cart so terribly that the chairs began to dance, and threw the travelers into the air, to the right and to the left, as if they had been dancing puppets, which made them make horrible grimaces and screams, which, however, were cut short by another jolt of the cart.

They clung onto the sides of the vehicle, their bonnets fell onto their backs, their noses on their shoulders, and the white horse went on stretching out his head, and holding out his tail quite straight, a little, hairless rat's tail, with which he whisked his buttocks from time to time.

Joseph Rivet, with one leg on the shafts and the other bent under him, held out the reins with his elbows very high, and he kept uttering a kind of chuckling sound, which made the horse prick up its ears and go faster.

The green country extended on either side of the road, and here and there the colza in flower presented a waving expanse of yellow, from which there arose a strong, wholesome, sweet and penetrating smell, which the wind carried to some distance.

The cornflowers showed their little blue heads among the rye, and the women wanted to pick them, but Monsieur Rivet refused to stop.

Then sometimes a whole field appeared to be covered with blood, so thickly were the poppies growing, and the cart, which looked as if it were filled with flowers of more brilliant hue, drove on through the fields colored with wild flowers, and disappeared behind the trees of a farm, only to reappear and to go on again through the yellow or green standing crops, which were studded with red or blue.

One o'clock struck as they drove up to the carpenter's door. They were tired out, and pale with hunger, as they had eaten nothing since they left home, and Madame Rivet ran out, and made them alight, one after another, and kissed them as soon as they were on the ground, and she seemed as if she would never tire of kissing her sister-in-law, whom she apparently wanted to monopolize. They had lunch in the workshop, which had been cleared out for the next day's dinner.

A capital omelette, followed by boiled chitterlings, and washed down by good, sharp cider, made them all feel comfortable.

Rivet had taken a glass so that he might hob-nob with them, and his wife cooked, waited on them, brought in the dishes, took them out, and asked all of them in a whisper whether they had everything they wanted. A number of boards standing against the walls, and heaps of shavings that had been swept into the corners, gave out a smell of planed wood, or carpentering, that resinous odor which penetrates the lungs.

They wanted to see the little girl, but she had gone to church, and would not be back until evening, so they all went out for a stroll in the country.

It was a small village, through which the high road passed. Ten or a dozen houses on either side of the single street, were inhabited by the butcher, the grocer, the carpenter, the inn-keeper, the shoemaker and the baker.

The church was at the end of the street, and was surrounded by a small churchyard, and four enormous lime-trees, which stood just outside the porch, shaded it completely. It was built of flint, in no particular style, and had a slated steeple. When you got past it, you were in the open country again, which was broken here and there by clumps of trees which hid the homestead.

Rivet had given his arm to his sister, out of politeness, although he was in his working clothes, and was walking with her majestically. His wife, who was overwhelmed by Raphaele's gold-striped dress, was walking between her and Fernande, and round-about Rosa was trotting behind with Louise Cocote and Flora, the see-saw, who was limping along, quite tired out.

The inhabitants came to their doors, the children left off playing, and a window curtain would be raised, so as to show a muslin cap, while an old woman with a crutch, and who was almost blind, crossed herself as if it were a religious procession, and they all looked for a long time after those handsome ladies from the town, who had come so far to be present at the confirmation of Joseph Rivet's little girl, and the carpenter rose very much in the public estimation.

As they passed the church, they heard some children singing; little shrill voices were singing a

hymn, but *Madame* would not let them go in, for fear of disturbing the little cherubs.

After a walk, during which Joseph Rivet enumerated the principal landed proprietors, spoke about the yield of the land, and productiveness of the cows and sheep, he took his herd of women home and installed them in his house, and as it was very small, they had put them into the rooms, two and two.

Just for once, Rivet would sleep in the workshop on the shavings; his wife was going to share her bed with her sister-in-law, and Fernande and Raphaele were to sleep together in the next room. Louise and Flora were put into the kitchen, where they had a mattress on the floor, and Rosa had a little dark cupboard at the top of the stairs to herself, close to the loft, where the candidate for confirmation was to sleep.

When the girl came in, she was overwhelmed with kisses; all the women wished to caress her, with that need of tender expansion, that habit of professional wheedling, which had made them kiss the ducks in the railway carriage.

They all of them took her onto their laps, stroked her soft, light hair, and pressed her in their arms with vehement and spontaneous outbursts of affection, and the child, who was very good and religious, bore it all patiently.

As the day had been a fatiguing one for every body, they all went to bed soon after dinner. The whole village was wrapped in that perfect stillness of the country, which is almost like a religious silence, and the girls, who were accustomed to the noisy evenings of their establishment, felt rather impressed by the perfect repose of the sleeping village, and they shivered, not with cold, but with those little shivers of solitude which come over uneasy and troubled hearts.

As soon as they were in bed, two and two together, they clasped each other in their arms, as if to protect themselves against this feeling of the calm and profound slumber of the earth. But Rosa *the Jade*, who was alone in her little dark cupboard, felt a vague and painful emotion come over her.

She was tossing about in bed, unable to get to sleep, when she heard the faint sobs of a crying child close to her head through the partition. She was frightened, and called out, and was answered by a weak voice, broken by sobs. It was the little girl, who was always used to sleeping in her mother's room, and who was frightened in her small attic.

Rosa was delighted, got up softly so as not to awaken anyone, and went and fetched the child. She took her into her warm bed, kissed her and pressed her to her bosom, cossetted her, lavished exaggerated manifestations of tenderness on her, and at last grew calmer herself and went to sleep. And till morning, the candidate for confirmation slept with her head on the prostitute's naked bosom.

At five o'clock, the little church bell ringing the *Angelus*, woke the women up, who usually slept the whole morning long.

The peasants were up already, and the women went busily from house to house, carefully bringing short, starched, muslin dresses in band—boxes, or very long wax tapers, with a bow of silk fringed with gold in the middle, and with dents in the wax for the fingers.

The sun was already high in the blue sky, which still had a rosy tint towards the horizon, like a faint trace of dawn, remaining. Families of fowls were walking about outside houses, and here and there a black cock, with a glistening breast, raised his head, which was crowned by his red comb, flapped his wings, and uttered his shrill crow, which the other cocks repeated.

Vehicles of all sorts came from neighboring parishes, and discharged tall, Norman women, in dark dresses, with neck—handkerchiefs crossed over the bosom, which were fastened with silver brooches, a hundred years old.

The men had put on their blouses over their new frock—coats, or over their old dress—coats of green cloth, the two tails of which hung down below their blouses. When the horses were in the stable, there was a double line of rustic conveyances along the road; carts, cabriolets, tilburies, char—a—bancs, traps of every shape and age, resting on their shafts, or else with them in the air.

The carpenter's house was as busy as a beehive. The ladies, in dressing—jackets and petticoats, with their hanging down, thin, short hair, which looked as if it were faded and worn by use, were busy dressing the child, who was standing motionless on a table, while Madame Tellier was directing the movements of her battalion. They washed her, did her hair, dressed her, and with the help of a number of pins, they arranged the folds of her dress, and took in the waist, which was too large.

Then, when she was ready, she was told to sit down and not to move, and the women hurried off to get ready themselves.

The church bell began to ring again, and its tinkle was lost in the air, like a feeble voice which is soon drowned in space. The candidates came out of the houses, and went towards the parochial building which contained the two—school and the mansion house—and which stood quite at one end of the village, while the church was situated at the other.

The parents, in their very best clothes, followed their children, with awkward looks, and those clumsy movements of the body, which is always bent at work.

The little girls disappeared in a cloud of muslin, which looked like whipped cream, while the lads, who looked like embryo waiters in a *café*, and whose heads shone with pomatum, walked with their legs apart, so as not to get any dust or dirt onto their black trousers.

It was something for the family to be proud of, when a large number of relations, who had come from a distance, surrounded the child, and, consequently, the carpenter's triumph was complete.

Madame Tellier's regiment, with its mistress at its head, followed Constance; her father gave his arm to his sister, her mother walked by the side of Raphaele, Fernande, with Rosa and the two pumps together, and thus they walked majestically through the village, like a general's staff in full uniform, while the effect on the village was startling.

At the school, the girls arranged themselves under the Sister of Mercy, and the boys under the schoolmaster, and they started off, singing a hymn as they went. The boys led the way, in two files, between the two rows of vehicles, from which the horses had been taken out, and the girls followed in the same order; and as all the people in the village had given the town ladies the precedence out of politeness, they came immediately behind the girls, and lengthened the double line of the procession still more, three on the right and three on the left, while their dresses were as striking as a bouquet in fireworks.

When they went into the church, the congregation grew quite excited. They pressed against each other, they turned round, they jostled one another in order to see, and some of the devout ones spoke almost aloud, as they were so astonished at the sight of those ladies whose dresses were more trimmed than the priest's chasuble.

The Mayor offered them his pew, the first one on the right, close to the choir, and Madame Tellier sat there with her sister-in-law, Fernande and Raphaele, Rosa *the Jade*, and the two pumps occupied the second seat, in company with the carpenter.

The choir was full of kneeling children, the girls on one side, and the boys on the other, and the long wax tapers which they held looked like lances, pointing in all directions, and three men were standing in front of the lectern, singing as loud as they could.

They prolonged the syllables of the sonorous Latin indefinitely, holding onto *Amens* with interminable *a—a's*, while the serpent of the organ kept up its monotorious, long drawn out notes, which that longthroated, copper instrument uttered.

A child's shrill voice took up the reply, and from time to time a priest sitting in a stall and wearing a biretta, got up, muttered something, and sat down again, while the three singers continued, with their eyes fixed on the big book of plain song lying open before them on the outstretched wings of an eagle, mounted on a pivot.

Then silence ensued, and so the service went on, and towards the end of it, Rosa, with her head in both her hands, suddenly thought of her mother and her village church on a similar occasion. She almost fancied that that day had returned, when she was so small, and almost hidden in her white dress, and she began to cry.

First of all, she wept silently, and the tears dropped slowly from her eyes, but her emotion increased with her recollections, and she began to sob. She took out her pocket-handkerchief, wiped her eyes, and held it to her mouth, so as not to scream, but it was useless.

A sort of rattle escaped her throat, and she was answered by two other profound, heart-breaking sobs; for her two neighbors, Louise and Flora, who were kneeling near her, overcome by similar recollections, were sobbing by her side, amidst a flood of tears, and as they are contagious, *Madame* soon in turn found that her eyes were wet, and on turning to her sister-in-law, she saw that all the occupants of her seat were also crying.

Soon, throughout the church, here and there, a wife, a mother, a sister, seized by the strange sympathy of poignant emotion, and agitated by those handsome ladies on their knees, who were shaken by their sobs, was moistening her cambric pocket-handkerchief, and pressing her beating heart with her left hand.

Just as the sparks from an engine will set fire to dry grass, so the tears of Rosa and of her companions infected the whole congregation in a moment. Men, women, old men, and lads in new blouses were soon all sobbing, and something superhuman seemed to be hovering over their heads; a spirit, the powerful breath of an invisible and all-powerful being.

Suddenly a species of madness seemed to pervade the church, the noise of a crowd in a state of frenzy, a tempest of sobs and stifled cries. It passed through them like gusts of wind which bow the trees in a forest, and the priest, paralyzed by emotion, stammered out incoherent prayers, without finding words, prayers of the soul, when it soars towards heaven.

The people behind him, gradually grew calmer. The cantors, in all the dignity of their white surplices, went on in somewhat uncertain voices, and the serpent itself seemed hoarse, as if the instrument had been weeping; the priest, however, raised his hand, as a sign for them to be still, and went and stood on the chancel steps, when everybody was silent, immediately.

After a few remarks on what had just taken place, which he attributed to a miracle, he continued, turning to the seats where the carpenter's guests were sitting:

"I especially thank you, my dear sisters, who have come from such a distance, and whose

presence among us, whose evident faith and ardent piety have set such a salutary example to all. You have edified my parish; your emotion has warmed all hearts; without you, this great day would not, perhaps, have had this really divine character. It is sufficient, at times, that there should be one chosen to keep in the flock, to make the whole flock blessed."

His voice failed him again, from emotion, and he said no more, but concluded the service.

Then they all left the church as quickly as possible, and the children themselves were restless, as they were tired with such a prolonged tension of the mind. Besides that, they were hungry, and by degrees they all left the churchyard, to see about dinner.

There was a crowd outside, a noisy crowd, a babel of loud voices, where the shrill Norman accent was discernible. The villagers formed two ranks, and when the children appeared, each family seized its own.

The whole houseful of women caught hold of Constance, surrounded her and kissed her, and Rosa was especially demonstrative. At last she took hold of one hand, while Madame Tellier held the other, and Raphaele and Fernande held up her long muslin petticoat, so that it might not drag in the dust; Louise and Flora brought up the rear with Madame Rivet, and the child, who was very silent and thoughtful, set off home, in the midst of this guard of honor.

The dinner was served in the workshop, on long boards supported by trestles, and through the open door they could see all the enjoyment that was going on. Everywhere they were feasting, and through every window were to be seen tables surrounded by people in their Sunday best, and a cheerful noise was heard in every house, while the men were sitting in their shirt-sleeves, drinking cider, glass after glass.

In the carpenter's house, their gaiety maintained somewhat of an air of reserve, which was the consequence of the emotion of the girls in the morning, and Rivet was the only one who was in a good cue, and he was drinking to excess. Madame Tellier was looking at the clock every moment, for, in order not to lose two days following, they ought to take the 3:55 train, which would bring them to Fécamp by dark.

The carpenter tried very hard to distract her attention, so as to keep his guests until the next day, but he did not succeed, for she never joked when there was business to be done, and as soon as they had had their coffee she ordered her girls to make haste and get ready, and then, turning to her brother, she said:

"You must have the horse put in immediately," and she herself went to finish her last preparations.

When she came down again, her sister-in-law was waiting to speak to her about the child, and a long conversation took place, in which, however, nothing was settled. The carpenter's wife finished, and pretended to be very much moved, and Madame Tellier, who was holding the girl on her knees, would not pledge herself to anything definite, but merely gave vague promises ... she would not forget her, there was plenty of time, and then, they should meet again.

But the conveyance did not come to the door, and the women did not come downstairs. Upstairs, they even heard loud laughter, falls, little screams, and much clapping of hands, and so, while the carpenter's wife went to the stable to see whether the cart was ready, Madame went upstairs.

Rivet, who was very drunk, and half undressed, was vainly trying to violate Rosa, who was half choking with laughter. The two pumps were holding him by the arms and trying to calm him, as they were shocked at such a scene after that morning's ceremony; but Raphaele and Fernande were urging him on, writhing and holding their sides with laughter, and they uttered shrill cries at every useless attempt that the drunken fellow made.

The man was furious, his face was red, he was all unbuttoned, and he was trying to shake off the two women who were clinging to him, while he was pulling Rosa's petticoat with all his might.

But *Madame*, who was very indignant, went up to her brother, seized him by the shoulders, and threw him out of the room with such violence that he fell against a wall in the passage, and a minute afterwards they heard him pumping water onto his head in the yard, and when he came back with the cart, he was already quite appeased.

They started off in the same way as they had come the day before, and the little white horse started off with his quick, dancing trot. Under the hot sun, their fun, which had been checked during dinner, broke out again. The girls now were amused at the jolts which the wagon gave, pushed their neighbors' chairs, and burst out laughing every moment, for they were in the vein for it, after Rivet's vain attempt.

There was a haze over the country, the roads were glaring, and dazzled their eyes, and the wheels raised up two trails of dust, which followed the cart for a long time along the high road, and presently Fernande, who was fond of music, asked Rosa to sing something, and she boldly struck up the *Gros Curé de Meudon*, but *Madame* made her stop immediately, as she thought it a song which was very unsuitable for such a day, and she added:

"Sing us something of Béranger's." And so, after a moment's hesitation, she began Béranger's song, *The Grandmother*, in her worn-out voice, and all the girls, and even *Madame* herself, joined in the chorus:

"How I regret
My dimpled arms,
My well-made legs,
And my vanished charms."

"That is first rate," Rivet declared, carried away by the rhythm, and they shouted the refrain to every verse, while Rivet beat time on the shafts with his foot, and on the horse's back with the reins, who, as if he himself were carried away by the rhythm, broke into a wild gallop, and threw all the women in a heap, one on the top of the other, onto the bottom of the conveyance.

They got up, laughing as if they were mad, and the song went on, shouted at the top of their voices, beneath the burning sky, among the ripening grain, to the rapid gallop of the little horse, who set off every time the refrain was sung, and galloped a hundred yards, to their great delight, while occasionally a stone breaker by the roadside sat up and looked at the wild and shouting female load through his wire spectacles.

When they got out at the station, the carpenter said:

"I am sorry you are going; we might have had some fun together." But *Madame* replied very sensibly: "Everything has its right time, and we cannot always be enjoying ourselves." And then he had a sudden inspiration:

"Look here, I will come and see you at Fécamp next month." And he gave a knowing look, with a bright and roguish eye.

"Come," *Madame* said, "you must be sensible; you may come if you like, but you are not to be up to any of your tricks."

He did not reply, and as they heard the whistle of the train, he immediately began to kiss them all. When it came to Rosa's turn, he tried to get to her mouth, which she, however, smiling with her lips closed, turned away from him each time by a rapid movement of her head to one side. He held her in his arms, but he could not attain his object, as his large whip, which he was holding in his hand and waving behind the girl's back in desperation, interfered with his efforts.

"Passengers for Rouen, take your seats, please!" a guard cried, and they got in. There was a slight whistle, followed by a loud whistle, from the engine, which noisily puffed out its first jet of steam, while the wheels began to turn a little, with a visible effort, and Rivet left the station and went to the gate by the side of the line to get another look at Rosa, and as the carriage full of human merchandise passed him, he began to crack his whip and to jump, while he sang at the top of his voice:

"How I regret
My dimpled arms,
My well-made legs,
And my vanished charms."

And then he watched a white pocket-handkerchief, which somebody was waving, as it disappeared in the distance.

PART III

They slept the peaceful sleep of a quiet conscience, until they got to Rouen, and when they returned to the house, refreshed and rested, *Madame* could not help saying:

"It was all very well, but I was already longing to get home."

They hurried over their supper, and then, when they had put on their usual light evening costume, waited for their usual customers, and the little colored lamp outside the door told the passers-by that the flock had returned to the fold, and in a moment the news spread, nobody knew how or by whom.

Monsieur Philippe, the banker's son, even carried his forgetfulness so far, as to send a special messenger to Monsieur Tournevau, who was in the boson of his family.

The fish-curer used every Sunday to have several cousins to dinner, and they were having coffee, when a man came in with a letter in his hand. Monsieur Tournevau was much excited, he opened the envelope and grew pale; it only contained these words in pencil:

"The cargo of cod has been found; the ship has come into port; good business for you. Come immediately."

He felt in his pockets, gave the messenger two-pence, and suddenly blushing to his ears, he said: "I must go out." He handed his wife the laconic and mysterious note, rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he asked her to bring him his hat and overcoat immediately. As soon as he was in the street, he began to run, and the way seemed to him to be twice as long as usual, in consequence of his impatience.

Madame Tellier's establishment had put on quite a holiday look. On the ground floor, a number of sailors were making a deafening noise, and Louise and Flora drank with one and the other, so as to merit their name of the two Pumps more than ever. They were being called for everywhere at

once; already they were not quite adequate to their business, and the night bid fair to be a very jolly one for them.

The upstairs room was full by nine o'clock. Monsieur Vasse, the Judge of the Tribunal of Commerce, *Madame's* usual, but Platonic wooer, was talking to her in a corner, in a low voice, and they were both smiling, as if they were about to come to an understanding.

Monsieur Poulin, the ex-mayor, was holding Rosa on his knees; and she, with her nose close to his, was running her hands through the old gentleman's white whiskers.

Tall Fernande, who was lying on the sofa, had both her feet on Monsieur Pinipesse, the tax-collector's stomach, and her back on young Monsieur Philippe's waistcoat; her right arm was round his neck, while she held a cigarette in her left.

Raphaele appeared to be discussing matters with Monsieur Dupuis, the insurance agent, and she finished by saying: "Yes, my dear, I will."

Just then, the door opened suddenly, and Monsieur Tournevau came in, who was greeted with enthusiastic cries of: "Long live Tournevau!" And Raphaele, who was still twirling round, went and threw herself into his arms. He seized her in a vigorous embrace, and without saying a word, lifting her up as if she had been a feather, he went through the room, opened the door at the other end and disappeared.

Rosa was chatting to the ex-mayor, kissing him every moment, and pulling both his whiskers at the same time in order to keep his head straight.

Fernande and *Madame* remained with the four men, and Monsieur Philippe exclaimed: "I will pay for some champagne; get three bottles, Madame Tellier." And Fernande gave him a hug, and whispered to him: "Play us a waltz, will you?" So he rose and sat down at the old piano in the corner, and managed to get a hoarse waltz out of the entrails of the instrument.

The tall girl put her arms round the tax-collector, *Madame* asked Monsieur Vasse to take her in his arms, and the two couples turned round, kissing as they danced. Monsieur Vasse, who had formerly danced in good society, waltzed with such elegance, that *Madame* was quite captivated.

Frederic brought the champagne; the first cork popped, and Monsieur Philippe played the introduction to a quadrille, through which the four dancers walked in society fashion, decorously, with propriety, deportment, bows and curtsies, and then they began to drink.

Monsieur Philippe next struck up a lively polka, and Monsieur Tournevau started off with the handsome Jewess, whom he held up in the air, without letting her feet touch the ground. Monsieur Pinipesse and Monsieur Vasse had started off with renewed vigor, and from time to time one or other couple would stop to toss off a long glass of sparkling wine, and that dance was threatening to become never-ending, when Rosa opened the door.

"I want to dance," she exclaimed. And she caught hold of Monsieur Dupuis, who was sitting idle on the couch, and the dance began again.

But the bottles were empty. "I will pay for one," Monsieur said. "So will I," Monsieur Vasse declared. "And I will do the same," Monsieur Dupuis remarked.

They all began to clap their hands, and it soon became a regular ball, and from time to time, Louise and Flora ran upstairs quickly, had a few turns, while their customers downstairs grew impatient, and then they returned regretfully to the *café*. At midnight they were still dancing.

Madame shut her eyes to what was going on and she had long private talks in corners with Monsieur Vasse, as if to settle the last details of something that had already been settled.

At last, at one o'clock, the two married men, Monsieur Tournevau and Monsieur Pinipesse declared that they were going home, and wanted to pay. Nothing was charged for except the champagne, and that only cost six francs a bottle, instead of ten, which was the usual price, and when they expressed their surprise at such generosity, *Madame*, who was beaming, said to them:

"We don't have a holiday every day."

THE BANDMASTER'S SISTER

"What a joke!" the bandmaster said, twirling his moustache with the foolish smile of a good-looking man, who dangles after women's petticoats, in order that he may get on all the quicker.

His comrades' equivocal allusions puzzled him, though they flattered him like applause, and he stealthily looked in the large mirrors at the new lyres embroidered in gold on the collar of his tunic. They fascinated him by their glitter, and half intoxicated by the doubtful champagne that he had drunk during dinner, and by the glasses of chartreuse and of Bavarian beer which he had imbibed afterwards, and excited by the songs, he was indulging in his usual dreams of success.

He saw himself on the platform of a public garden, standing before his musicians in a flood of light, and he fancied already that he could hear the whispers of women, and feel the caress of

their look upon him.

He would be invited even into the drawing-rooms of the *Faubourg Saint Germain*, which was so difficult of access. With his handsome, pale face, and his wonderful manner of playing Chopin's music, he would penetrate every where, and perhaps some romantic heiress would fall in love with him, and consent to forget that he was only a poor musician, the son of small shopkeepers, who were still in trade at Bayeux.

Lieutenant Varache, who was stirring the punch, shrugged his shoulders, and continued in a bantering voice:

"Yes, Monsieur Parisel, they are sure to ask you whether you have just joined the regiment, or whether you have a mistress ..."

"What do I know?"

"But they say that you have, and that her eyes grow so bright when she speaks to you, that a man would forfeit three months' pay for a glance of them, by Jove!"

Another traced her likeness in a few words, and described her as if she had been some knick-knack for sale at an auction. Her hair came low on her forehead like a golden net, her skin was dazzlingly white, while her bright eyes threw out glances that were like those flashes of summer lightning which dart across the sky on a calm night in June.

Her delicate figure, and she did not look very strong, recalled a plant that has grown too rapidly. She was a droll creature, on the whole, who at times looked as if she had made a mistake in the door, who buried herself in the shade, hid herself, and did not surrender either her heart or her body, and only left the impression of a statue on the bed in which she slept, who appeared delighted with the ignoble business she carried on, and who allured men, and surpassed the common streetwalkers in shamelessness.

Parisel, however, was not listening to them any longer.

He was terribly vexed at meeting with such a common-place adventure at the first start, and to come across that girl on his road, who would make him loose, and soil him with unclean love. She would lower him, and bring him down to the level of rollicking troopers, who are welcome guests in houses of bad character.

"Well," one of them said suddenly, "suppose we go and finish the night at that establishment; it will be far jollier, and the chief will not be obliged to cudgel his brains to remember the name of the girl he loves!"

The officers pushed open the door of the saloon, where a servant was lighting the chandelier, and Marchessy called out in a loud voice, and amidst bursts of laughter:

"Here, Lucie! We have brought your sweetheart to you!"

She came in first, slowly, and wrapped in a transparent muslin dressing-gown, and stopped, as if the beating of her heart were choking her. The bandmaster did not move or say a word; he resembled a duellist, who sees his adversary advancing towards him and taking aim at him, and who is waiting for death.

Great drops of perspiration rolled down his face, and all the blood had left it, while the woman looked at him, and did not appear to recognize him, although her eyes wore a look of triumphant pleasure, and when he started back, and turned his head away, she said to him, in a mocking voice:

"What, my dear, are you not going to kiss me, after a whole year? ... I must have altered very much, very much indeed ... Do not my mouth, and this mark by the side of my ear, bring something to your mind?"

And Varache, who had just lit a cigar, muttered: "Are you going to act a play until to-morrow?"

Then Lucie threw herself on to a sofa, and with her chin in her hands, and in the posture of a chimera on the look out for the pleasures she wishes, continued gravely:

"We lived at the end of a quiet street behind the cathedral, a street in which pots of carnations stood on the window ledges, through which the seminarists went twice a day, as if it had been a procession, and where I was bored to death. Our parents' shop was cold and dark; my mother thought of nothing but of going to all the services, and of attending the *novenas*, while my father bent over the counter. There was nobody to pet me, to advise me, or to teach me what life really was, and besides that, I had the instinctive feeling that they cared for nobody in this world but my brother.

"The first kiss that touched my lips nearly sent me mad, and I had not the force to resist or to say *no*. I did not even ask the man who seduced me to marry me, to promise me what men do promise girls. We met in a booth at the fair, and I used to go to meet him every evening in a meadow bordered by poplar trees. He had a situation as clerk or collector, I believe, and when he was sent to another town, I was already three months in the family way. My people soon found it

out, and forced me to acknowledge everything, and they locked me up like a prisoner who wished to escape from jail.

"My brother was home for his holidays—do you remember now, Monsieur Parisel? He had just been appointed second head clerk, was reckoning on still further speedy advancement, and was bursting with pride. He was harder and more inexorable than the two old people towards me, poor forsaken girl as I was, although they had never left their home. He spoke about his future, which would be compromised, of the disgrace which would fall on all the family, went into a rage, arid pitied neither my tears nor my prayers, and treated me with the cruelty of a hangman.

"And they sent me a long way off, like a servant who has committed a theft, and condemned me to be confined at a farm in a village, where the peasants treated me harshly. The child died, but the mother lived through everything.

"One does not have good luck very frequently, confound it, and the only thing that I could do was to return evil, to strike at the coward whom I hated, to dishonor and to lower his name, to stick to the fellow who strutted about in his uniform, and who had won the game, from garrison to garrison, as if I had been vermin. That is why I, of my own accord, came to this house, where one belongs to everybody, and have become almost more vicious than any of the other girls, and why I have told you this unentertaining story.

"I say, you fellows, who will pay ten francs for the bandmaster's sister? Upon my honor, you will not regret your money!"

His comrades got Parisel out of the house. He resisted for a week, but then sold everything he had, borrowed the money to pay Lucie's debts, and tried in vain to free himself from that weight, and to get her expelled from the town, but she always returned. She was as implacable towards him as a gerfalcon that is devouring its prey, and as the adventure had got wind, and was even talked about at the soldiers' mess, and as the scandal increased every day, the colonel forced the bandmaster to resign.

When Lucie heard the news, she looked vexed, and, said spitefully:

"I had hoped that he would have blown his brains out!"

FALSE ALARM

"I have a perfect horror of pianos," Frémecourt said, "of those hateful boxes that fill up a drawing-room, and which have not even the soft sound and the queer shape of the mahogany or veneered spinets, to which our grandmothers sighed out exquisite, long-forgotten ballads, and allowed their fingers to run over the keys, while around them there floated a delicate odor of powder and muslin, and some little *Abbé* or other turned over the leaves, and was continually making mistakes, as he was looking at the patches close to the lips on the white skin of the player instead of at the music.

"I wish there were a tax upon them, or that some evening, during a riot, the people would make huge bonfires of them, which would illuminate the whole town. They simply exasperate me, and affect my nerves, and make me think of the tortures those poor girls must suffer, who are condemned not to stir for hours, but to keep on constantly strumming away at the chromatic scales and monotonous arpeggios, and to have no other object in life except to win a prize at the *Conservatoire*.

"Their incoherent music suggests to me the sufferings of those who are ill, abandoned, wounded, as it proceeds from every floor of every house, and irritates you, nearly drives you mad, and makes you break out into ironical fits of laughter.

"And yet when that madcap Lâlie Spring honored me with her love, as I never can refuse anything to a woman who smells of fresh scent, and who has a large store of promises in her looks, and who puts out her red, smiling lips immediately, as if she were going to offer you handsel money, I bought a piano, so that she might strum upon it to her heart's content. I got it, however, on the hire-purchase system, and paid so much a month, like *grisettes*[9] do for their furniture.

"At that time, I had the apartments I had so long dreamed of: warm, elegant, light, well-arranged, with two entrances, and an incomparable porter's wife; she had been canteen-keeper in a Zouave regiment, and knew everything and understood everything at a wink.

"It was the kind of apartment from which a woman has not the courage to escape, so as to avoid temptation, but becomes weak, and rolls herself up on the soft, eider down cushions like a cat, and so is appeased, and in spite of herself, thinks of sin at the sight of the low, wide couch, which is so suitable for caresses, of the heavy curtains, which quite deaden the sound of voices and of laughter, and of the flowers that scent the air, and whose smell lingers on the folds of the hangings.

"They were rooms in which a woman forgets time, where she begins by accepting a cup of tea and nibbling a sweet cake, and abandons her fingers timidly and with regret to other fingers

which tremble, and are hot, and so by degrees she loses her head and succumbs.

"I do not know whether the piano brought us ill luck, but Lâlie had not even time to learn four songs before she disappeared like the wind, just as she had come, *flick-flack*, good-night, good-bye; perhaps from spite, because she had found letters from other women on my table, perhaps to renew her advertisement, as she was not one of those to hang onto one man and become a fixture.

"I had not been in love with her, certainly, but yet it always has some effect on a man; it breaks a spring when a woman leaves you, and you think that you must start again, risk it, and go in for forbidden sport in which one is exposed to knocks, common sport that one has been through a hundred times before, and which provides you with nothing to show for it.

"Nothing is more unpleasant than to lend your apartments to a friend, to have to say to yourself that someone is going to disturb the mysterious intimacy which really exists between the actual owner and his furniture, the soul of those past kisses which floats in the air; that the room whose tints you connect with some recollection, some dream, some sweet vision, and whose colors you have tried to make harmonize with certain fair-haired, pink-skinned girls, is going to become a common-place lodging, like the rooms in an ordinary lodging house, which are suitable to hidden crime and to evanescent love affairs.

"However, poor Stanis had begged me so urgently to do him that service; he was so very much in love with Madame de Fréjus, and among the characters in the play there was a brute of a husband who was terribly jealous and suspicious; one of those Othellos who have always a flea in their ear, and come back unexpectedly from shooting or the club, who pick up pieces of torn paper, listen at doors, smell out meetings with the nose of a detective, and seem to have been sent into the world only to be cuckolds, but who know better than most how to lay a snare, and to play a nasty trick—that when I went to Venice, I consented to let him have my room.

"I will leave you to guess whether they made up for lost time, although, after all, it is no business of yours. My journey, however, which was only to have lasted a few weeks—just long enough to benefit by the change of air, to rid my brain of the image of my last mistress, and perhaps to find another among that strange mixture of society which one meets there, a medley of American, Slav, Viennese and Italian women, who instill a little artificial life into that old city, which is asleep amidst the melancholy silence of the lagoons—was prolonged, and Stanis was as much at home in my rooms as he was in his own.

"Madame Piquignolles, the retired canteen-keeper, took great interest in this adventure, watched over their little love affair, and, as she used to say, she was on guard as soon as they arrived one after the other, the marchioness covered with a thick veil, and slipping in as quickly as possible, always uneasy, and afraid that Monsieur de Fréjus might be following her, and Stanis with the assured and satisfied look of an amorous husband, who is going to meet his little wife after having been away from home for a few days.

"Well, one day during one of those calm moments when his beloved one, fresh from her bath, and impregnated with the coolness of the water, was pressing close to her lover, reclining in his arms, and smiling at him with half closed eyes, at one of those moments when people do not speak, but continue their dream, the sentinel, without even asking leave, suddenly burst into the room, for worthy Madame Piquignolles was in a terrible fright.

"A few minutes before, a well-dressed gentleman, followed by two others of seedy appearance, but who looked very strong, and fit to knock anybody down, had questioned her in a rough manner, and cross-questioned her, and tried to turn her inside out, as she said, asking her whether Monsieur de Fréjus lived on the first floor, without giving her any explanation, and when she declared that there was nobody occupying the apartments then, as her lodger was not in France, Monsieur de Fréjus—for it could certainly be nobody but he—had burst out into an evil laugh, and said: 'Very well; I shall go and fetch the Police Commissary of the district, and he will make you let us in!'

"And as quickly as possible, while she was telling her story, now in a low, and then in a shrill voice, the woman picked up the marchioness' dress, cloak, lace-edged drawers, silk petticoat, and little varnished shoes, pulled her out of bed, without giving her time to let her know what she was doing, or to moan, or to have a fit of hysterics, and carried her off, as if she had been a doll, with all her pretty toggery, to a large, empty cupboard in the dining room, that was concealed by Flemish tapestry. 'You are a man... Try to get out of the mess,' she said to Stanis as she shut the door; 'I will be answerable for Madame.' And the enormous woman, who was out of breath by hurrying upstairs as she had done, and whose kind, large red face was dripping with perspiration, while her ample bosom shook beneath her loose jacket, took Madame de Fréjus onto her knees as if she had been a baby, whose nurse was trying to quiet her.

"She felt the poor little culprit's heart beating as if it were going to burst, while shivers ran over her skin, which was so soft and delicate that the porter's wife was afraid that she would hurt it with her coarse hands. She was struck with wonder at the cambric chemise, which a gust of wind would have carried off as if it had been a pigeon's feather, and by the delicate odor of that scarce flower which filled the narrow cupboard, and which rose up in the darkness from that supple body, that was impregnated with the warmth of the bed.

"She would have liked to be there, in that profaned room, and to tell them in a loud voice—with her hands upon her lips like at the time when she used to serve brandy to her comrades at *Daddy*

l'Arb's—that they had no common sense, that they were none of them good for much, neither the Police Commissary, the husband nor the subordinates, to come and torment a pretty young thing, who was having a little bit of fun, like that. It was a nice job, to get over the wall in that way, to be absent from the second call of names, especially when they were all of the same sort, and were glad of five francs an hour! She had certainly done quite right to get out sometimes and to have a sweetheart, and she was a charming little thing, and that she would say, if she were called before the Court as a witness!

"And she took Madame de Fréjus in her arms to quiet her, and repeated the same thing a dozen times, whispered pretty things to her, and interrupted her occasionally to listen whether they were not searching all the nooks and corners of the apartment. 'Come, come,' she said, 4 do not distress yourself. Be calm, my dear...It hurts me to hear you cry like that.... There will be no mischief done, I will vouch for it.'

"The marchioness, who was nearly fainting, and who was prostrate with terror, could only sob out: 'Good heavens! Good heavens!'

"She scarcely seemed to be conscious of anything; her head seemed vacant, her ears buzzed, and she felt benumbed, like one does when one goes to sleep in the snow.

"Oh! Only to forget everything, as her love dream was over, to go out quickly, like those little rose-colored tapers at Nice, on Shrove Tuesday evening.

"Oh! Not to awake any more, as the to-morrow would come in, black and sad, because a whole array of barristers, ushers, solicitors and judges would be against her, and disturb her usual quietude, would torment her, cover her with mud, as her delicious, amorous adventure—her first —which had been so carefully enveloped in mystery, and had been kept so secret behind closed shutters and thick veils, would become an everyday episode of adultery, which would get wind, and be discussed from door to door; the lilac had faded, and she was obliged to bid farewell to happiness, as if to an old friend who was going far, very far away, never to return!

"Suddenly, however, she started and sat up, with her neck stretched out and her eyes fixed, while the excanteen-keeper, who was trembling with emotion, put her hands to her left ear, which was her best, like a speaking trumpet, and tried to hear the cries which succeeded each other from room to room, amidst a noise of opening and shutting of doors.

"'Ah! upon my word, I am not blind....It is Monsieur de Tavernay who is applying again, and making all that noise....Don't you hear, *Mame Piquignolles, Mame Piquignolles!* Saved, saved!' And she dashed out of the cupboard like an unwieldy mass, with her cap all on one side, an anxious look and heavy legs.

"Tavernay was still quite pale, and in a panting voice he cried out to them: 'Nothing serious, only that fool Frémecourt, who lent me the rooms, has forgotten to pay for his piano for the last five months, a hundred francs a month....You understand ...they came to claim it, and as we did not reply ...why, they fetched the Police Commissary, and so, in the name of the law....

"'A nice fright to give one!' Madame Piquignolles said, throwing herself onto a chair. 'Confound the nasty piano!'

"It may be useless to add, that the marchioness has quite renounced *trifles*, as our forefathers used to say, and would deserve a prize for virtue, if the Academy would only show itself rather more gallant towards pretty women, who take crossroads in order to become virtuous.

"Emotions like that cure people of running risks of that kind!"

WIFE AND MISTRESS

It was not only her long, silky curls, which covered her small, fairy-like head, like a golden halo, nor her beautiful complexion, nor her mouth, which was like some delicate shell, nor was it her supreme innocence, which was shown by her sudden blushes, and by her somewhat awkward movements, nor was it her ingenious questions which had assailed and conquered George d'Harderme's heart. He had a peculiar temper, and any appearance of a yoke frightened him and put him to flight immediately, and his unstable heart was ready to yield to any temptation, and he was incapable of any lasting attachment, while a succession of women had left no more traces on it than on the seashore, which is constantly being swept by the waves.

It was not the dream of a life of affection, of peace, the want of loving and of being loved, which a fast man so often feels between thirty and forty. His insurmountable lassitude of that circle of pleasure in which he has turned, like a horse in a circus, the voids in his existence which the marriage of his bachelor friends cause, and which in his selfishness he looks upon as desertion, and whom he, nevertheless, envies, which had at last induced him to listen to the prayers and advice of his old mother, and to marry Mademoiselle Suzanne de Gouvres; but the vision that he had had when he saw her playing with quite little children, covering them with kisses, and looking at them with ecstacy in her limpid eyes, and in hearing her talk of the pleasures and the anguish that they must feel who are mothers in the fullest sense of the word-the vision of a happy home where a man feels that he is living again in others of that house, which is full of laughter

and of song, and seems as if it were full of birds.

As a matter of fact, he loved children, like some men love animals, and he was interested in them, as in some delightful spectacle, and they attracted him.

He was very gentle, kind and thoughtful with them, invented games for them, took them on his knees, was never tired of listening to their chatter, or of watching the development of their instincts, of their intellect, and of their little, delicate souls.

He used to go and sit in the Parc Monceau, and in the squares, to watch them playing and romping and prattling round him, and one day, as a joke, somebody, a jealous mistress, or some friends in joke, had sent him a splendid wet nurse's cap, with long, pink ribbons.

At first, he was under the influence of the charm that springs from the beginning of an intimacy, from the first kisses, and devoted himself altogether to that amorous education which revealed a new life to him, as it were, and enchanted him.

He thought of nothing except of increasing the ardent love that his wife bestowed on him, and lived in a state of perpetual adoration. Suzanne's feelings, the metamorphosis of that virginal heart, which was beginning to glow with love, and which vibrated, her passion, her modesty, her sensations, were all delicious surprises to him.

He felt that feverish pleasure of a traveler who has discovered some marvelous Eden, and loses his head over it, and, at times, with a long affectionate and proud look at her, which grew even warmer on looking into Suzanne's limpid, blue eyes, he would put his arms round her waist, and pressing her to him so strongly that it hurt the young woman, he exclaimed:

"Oh! I am quite sure that nowhere on earth are there two people who love each other as we do, and who are as happy as you and I are, my darling!"

Months of uninterrupted possession and enchantment succeeded each other without George altering, and without any lassitude mingling with the ardor of their love, or the fire of their affection dying out.

Then, however, suddenly he ceased to be happy, and, in spite of all his efforts to hide his invincible lowness of spirits, he became another man, restless, being irritated at nothing, morose, and bored at everything and everywhere; whimsical, and never knowing what he wanted.

But there was certainly something that was now poisoning that affection which had formerly been his delight, which was coming more and more between him and his wife every day, and which was giving him a distaste for home.

By degrees, that vague suffering assumed a definite shape in his heart, got implanted and fixed there, like a nail. He had not attained his object, and he felt the weight of chains, understood that he could never get used to such an existence, that he could not love a woman who seemed incapable of becoming a mother, who lowered herself to the part of a lawful mistress, and who was not faithful to him.

Alas! To awake from such a dream, to say to himself that he was reduced to envying the good fortune of others, that he should never cover a little, curly, smiling head with kisses, where some striking likeness, some undecided gleams of growing intellect fill a man with joy, but that he would be obliged to take the remainder of his journey in solitude, heart-broken, with nothing but old age around him; that no branch would again spring from the family tree, and that on his death-bed he should not have that last consolation of pressing his dear ones, for whom he struggled and made so many sacrifices, in his failing arms, and who were sobbing with grief, but that soon he should be the prey of indifferent and greedy heirs, who were discounting his approaching death like some valuable security!

George had not told Suzanne the feelings which were tormenting him, and took care that she should not see his state of unhappiness, and he did not worry her with trying questions, that only end in some violent and distressing scene.

But she was too much of a woman, and she loved her husband too much, not to guess what was making him so gloomy, and was imperiling their love.

And every month there came a fresh disappointment, and hope was again deferred. She, however, persisted in believing that their wish would be granted, and grew ill with this painful waiting, and refused to believe that she should never be a mother.

She would have looked upon it as a humiliation either to consult a medical man, or to make a pilgrimage to some shrine, like so many women did, in their despair, and her proud, loyal and loving nature at last rebelled against that hostility, which showed itself in the angry outbursts, the painful silence, and the haughty coldness of the man who could, however, have done anything he liked with her, by a little kindness.

With death in her soul, she had a presentiment of the way of the cross, which is an end of love, of all the bitterness, which sooner or later would end in terrible quarrels, and in words which would put an impassable barrier between them.

At last, one evening, when George d'Hardermes had lost his temper, had wounded her by equivocal words and bad jokes, Suzanne, who was very pale, and who was clutching the arms of

her easy chair convulsively, interrupted him with the accents of farewell in her melancholy face:

"As you do not love me any more, why not tell me so, at once, instead of wounding me like this by small, traitorous blows, and, above all, why continue to live together?...You want your liberty, and I will give it to you; you have your fortune, and I have mine. Let us separate without a scandal and without a lawsuit, so that, at least, a little friendship may survive our love...I shall leave Paris and go and live in the country with my mother.... God is my witness, however, that I still love you, my poor George, as much as ever, and that I shall remain your wife, whether I am with you, or separated from you!"

George hesitated for a few moments before replying, with an uneasy, sad look on his face, and then said, turning away his head:

"Yes, perhaps it will be best for both of us!"

They voluntarily broke their marriage contract, as she had heroically volunteered to do. She kept her resolution, exiled herself, buried herself in obscurity, accepted the trial with calm fortitude, and was as resigned as only faithful and devoted souls can be.

They wrote to each other, and she deluded herself, pursued the chimera that George would return to her, would call her back to his side, would escape from his former associates, would understand of what deep love he had voluntarily deprived himself, and would love her again as he had formerly loved her; and she resisted all the entreaties and the advice of her friends, to cut such a false position short, and to institute a suit for divorce against her husband, as the issue would be certain.

He, at the end of a few months of solitude, of evanescent love affairs, when to beguile his loneliness, a man passes from the arms of one woman to those of another, had set up a new home, and had tied himself to a woman whom he had accidentally met at a party of friends, and who had managed to please him and to amuse him.

His deserted wife was naturally not left in ignorance of the fact, and, stifling her jealousy and her grief, she put on a smile, and thought that it would be the same with this one as it had been with all his other ephemeral mistresses, whom her husband had successively got rid of.

Was not that, after all, the best thing to bring about the issue which she longed and hoped for? Would not that doubtful passion, that close intimacy certainly make Monsieur d'Hardermes compare the woman he possessed with the woman he had formerly had, and cause him to invoke that lost paradise and that heart full of forgiveness, of love and of goodness, which had not forgotten him, but which would respond to his first appeal?

And that confidence of hers in a happier future, which neither all the proofs of that connection, in which Monsieur d'Hardermes was becoming more and more involved, and which her friends so kindly furnished her with, nor the disdainful silence with which he treated all her gentle, indulgent letters could shake, had something touching, angelic in it, and reminded those who knew her well, of certain passages in the *Lives of the Saints*.

At length, however, the sympathy of those who had so often tried to save the young woman, to cure her, and to open her eyes, became exhausted, and, left to herself, Suzanne proudly continued her dream, and absorbed herself in it.

Two interminable years had passed since she had lived with Monsieur d'Hardermes, and since he had put that hateful mistress in her place. She had lost all trace of them, knew nothing about him, and, in spite of everything, did not despair of seeing him again, and regaining her hold over him, who could tell when, or by what miracle, but surely before those eyes which he had so loved were tired of shedding tears, and her fair hair, which he had so often covered with kisses, had grown white.

And the arrival of the postman every morning and evening, made her start and shiver with nervousness.

One day, however, when she was going to Paris, Madame d'Hardermes found herself alone in the ladies' carriage, into which she had got in a hurry, with a peasant woman in her Sunday best, who had a child with pretty pink cheeks and rosy lips, and which was like the dimpled cherubs that one sees in pictures of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, on her lap.

The nurse said affectionate words to the child in a coaxing voice, wrapped it up in the folds of her large cloak, sometimes gave it a noisy, hearty kiss, and it beat the air with little hands, and crowed and laughed with those pretty, attractive babyish movements, that Suzanne could not help exclaiming: "Oh! the pretty little thing!" and taking it into her arms.

At first the child was surprised at the strange face, and for a moment, seemed as if it were going to cry; but it became reassured immediately, smiled at the stranger who looked at it so kindly, inhaled the delicate scent of the iris in the bodice of her dress, with dilated nostrils, and cuddled up against her.

The two women began to talk, and, without knowing why, Madame d'Hardermes questioned the nurse, asked her where she came from, and where she was taking the little thing to.

The other, rather flattered that Suzanne admired the child and took an interest in it, replied, somewhat vaingloriously, that she lived at *Bois-le-Roy*, and that her husband was a wagoner.

The child had been entrusted to their care by some people in Paris, who appeared very happy, and extremely well off. And the nurse added in a drawling voice:

"Perhaps, Madame, you know my master and mistress, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

Suzanne started with surprise and grief, and grew as pale as if all her blood were streaming from some wound, and thinking that she had not heard correctly, with a fixed look and trembling lips, she said, slowly, as if every word hurt her throat:

"You said, Monsieur and Madame d'Hardermes?"

"Yes; do you know them?"

"I, yes...formerly...but it is a long time ago."

She could scarcely speak, and was as pale as death; she hardly knew what she was saying, with her eyes on this pretty child, which George must be so fond of.

She saw him, as if in a window which had suddenly been lifted up, where everything had been dark before, with their arms round each other, and radiant with happiness, with that fair head, that divine dawn, the living, smiling proof of their love, between them.

They would never leave each other; they were already almost as good as married, and were robbing her of the name which she had defended and guarded as a sacred deposit.

She would never succeed in breaking such bonds. It was a shipwreck where nothing could survive, and where the waves did not even drift some shapeless waif and stray ashore.

And great tears rolled down her cheeks, one by one, and wet her veil.

The train stopped at the station, and the nurse scarcely liked to ask Suzanne for the child, who was holding it against her heaving bosom, and kissing it as if she intended to smother it, and she said:

"I suppose the baby reminds you of one you have lost, my poor, dear lady, but the loss can be repaired at your age, surely; a second is as good as a first, and if one does not do oneself justice..."

Madame d'Hardermes gave her back the child, and hurried out straight ahead of her, like a hunted animal, and threw herself into the first cab that she saw...

She sued for a divorce, and obtained it.

MAD[10]

PART I

For days and days, nights and nights, I had dreamt of that first kiss, which was to consecrate our engagement, and I knew not on what spot I should put my lips, that were madly thirsting for her beauty and her youth. Not on her forehead, that was accustomed to family caresses, nor on her light hair, which mercenary hands had dressed, nor on her eyes, whose turned up lashes looked like little wings, because that would have made me think of the farewell caress which closes the eyelids of some dead woman whom one has adored, nor her lovely mouth, which I will not, which I must not possess until that divine moment when Elaine will at last belong to me altogether and for always, but on that delicious little dimple which comes in one of her cheeks when she is happy, when she smiles, and which excited me as much as her voice did with languorous softness, on that evening when our flirtation began, at the Souverette's.

Our parents had gone away, and were walking slowly under the chestnut trees in the garden, and had left us alone together for a few minutes. I went up to her and took both her hands into mine, which were trembling, and gently drawing her close to me, I whispered:

"How happy I am, Elaine, and how I love you!" and I kissed her almost timidly, on the dimple. She trembled, as if from the pain of a burn, blushed deeply and with an affectionate look, she said: "I love you also, Jacques, and I am very happy!"

That embarrassment, that sudden emotion which revealed the perfect spotlessness of a pure mind, the instinctive recoil of virginity, that childlike innocence, that blush of modesty, delighted me above everything as a presage of happiness. It seemed to me as if I were unworthy of her; I was almost ashamed of bringing her, and of putting into her small, saint-like hands the remains of a damaged heart, that had been polluted by debauchery, that miserable thing which had served as a toy for unworthy mistresses, which was intoxicated with lies, and felt as if it would die of bitterness and disgust....

PART II

How quickly she has become accustomed to me, how suddenly she has turned into a woman and

become metamorphosed; already she no longer is at all like the artless girl, the sensitive child, to whom I did not know what to say, and whose sudden questions disconcerted me!

She is coquettish, and there is seduction in her attitudes, in her gestures, in her laugh and in her touch. One might think that she was trying her power over me, and that she guesses that I no longer have any will of my own. She does with me whatever she likes, and I am quite incapable of resisting the beautiful charm that emanates from her, and I feel carried away by her caressing hands, and so happy that I am at times frightened at the excess of my own felicity.

My life now passes amidst the most delicious of punishments, those afternoons and evenings that we spend together, those unconstrained moments when, sitting on the sofa together, she rests her head on my shoulder, holds my hands and half shuts her beautiful eyes while we settle what our future life shall be, when I *cover* her with kisses and inhale the odor of all those little hairs that are as fine as silk and are like a halo round her imperial brow, excite me, unsettle me, kill me, and yet I feel inclined to shed tears, when the time comes for us to part, and I really only exist when I am with Elaine.

I can scarcely sleep; I see her rise up in the darkness, delicate, fair and pink, so supple, so elegant with her small waist and tiny hands and feet, her graceful head and that look of mockery and of coaxing which lies in her smile, that brightness of dawn which illuminates her looks, that when I think that she is going to become my wife, I feel inclined to sing, and to shout out my amorous folly into the silence of the night.

Elaine also seems to be at the end of her strength, has grown languid and nervous; she would like to wipe out the fortnight that we still have to wait, and so little does she hide her longing, that one of her uncles, Colonel d'Orthez, said after dinner the other evening: "By Jove, my children, one would take you for two soldiers who are looking forward to their furlough!"

PART III

I do not know what I felt, or whence those fears came which so suddenly assailed me, and took possession of my whole being like a flight of poisoned arrows. The nearer the day approached that I am so ardently longing for, on which Elaine would take my name and belong to me, the more anxious, nervous and tormented by the uncertainty of the morrow, I feel.

I love, and I am passionately loved, and few couples start on the unknown journey of a totally new life and enter into matrimony with such hopes, and the same assurance of happiness, as we two.

I have such faith in the girl I am going to marry, and have made her such vows of love, that I should certainly kill myself without a moment's hesitation if anything were to happen to separate us, to force us to a correct but irremediable rupture, or if Elaine were seized by some illness which carried her off quickly; and yet I hesitate, I am afraid, for I know that many others have made shipwreck, lost their love on the way, disenchanted their wives and have themselves been disenchanted in those first essays of possession, during that first night of tenderness and of intimacy.

What does Elaine expect in her vague innocence, which has been lessened by the half confidences of married friends, by semi-avowals, by all the kisses of this sort of apprenticeship which is a court of love; what does she possess, what does she hope for? Will her refined, delicate, vibrating nature bend to the painful submission of the initial embrace; will she not rebel against that ardent attack that wounds and pains? Oh! to have to say to oneself that it must come to that, to lower the most ideal of affections, to think that one is risking one's whole future happiness at such a hazardous game, that the merest trifle might make a woman completely ridiculous or hopeful, and make an idolized woman laugh or cry!

I do not know a more desirable, prettier or more attractive being in the whole world than Elaine; I am worn out by feverish love, I thirst for her lips and I wish every particle of her being to belong to me; I love her ardently, but I would willingly give half that I possess to have got through this ordeal, to be a week older, *and still happy*!...

PART IV

My mother-in-law took me aside yesterday, while they were dancing, and with tears in her eyes, she said in a tremulous voice:

"You are going to possess the most precious object that we possess here, and what we love best.... I beg you to always spare the slightest unhappiness, and to be kind and gentle towards her.... I count on your uprightness and affection to guide her and protect her in this dangerous life in Paris."... And then, giving way to her feelings more and more, she added: "I do not think that you suppose that I have tried to instruct her in her new duties or to disturb her charming innocence, which has been my work; when two persons worship each other like you two do, a girl learns what she is ignorant of, so quickly and so well!"

I very nearly burst out laughing in her face, for such a theatrical phrase appeared to me both ridiculous and doubtful. So that respectable woman had always been a passive, pliable, inert object, who never had one moment of vibration, of tender emotion in her husband's arms, and I understood why, as I wasted at the clubs, he escaped from her as soon as possible and made other connections which cost him dear, but in which he found at least some appearance of love.

Oh! to call that supreme bliss of possession, which makes human beings divine and which transports them far from everything, that despotic pain of virginity, which guesses, which waits, which longs for those mysterious, unknown, brief sufferings that contain the germs of future pleasure, the only happiness of which one never tires, a duty!

And that piece of advice, at the last moment, which was as common-place and natural, and which I ought to have expected, enervated me, and, in spite of myself, plunged me into a state of perplexity, from which I could not extricate myself. I remembered those absurd stories which we hear among friends, after a good dinner. What would be that last trial of our love for her and for me, and could that love which then was my whole life, come out of the ordeal lessened or increased tenfold? And when I looked at the couch on which Elaine, my adored Elaine, was sitting, with her head half-hidden behind the feathers of her fan, she whispered in a rather vexed voice:

"How cross you look, my dear Jacques? Is the fact of your getting married the cause of it? And you have such a mocking look on your face. If the thought of it terrifies you too much, there is still time to say no!"

And delighted, bewitched by her caressing looks, I said in a low voice, almost into her small ear:

"I adore you; and these last moments that still separate us from each other, seem centuries to me, my dear Elaine!"

PART V

There were tiresome ceremonies yesterday, and to-day, which I went through almost mechanically.

First, there is the yes before the mayor at the civil ceremony,[11] like some everyday response in church, which one is in a hurry to get over, and which has almost the suggestion of an imperious law, to which one is bound to submit, and of a state of bondage, which will, perhaps, be very irksome, since the whole of existence is made up of chances.

And then the service in church, with the decorated altar, the voices of the choir, the solemn music of the organ, the unctuous address of the old priest who marks his periods, who seemed quite proud of having prepared Elaine for confirmation, and then the procession to the vestry, the shaking hands, and the greetings of people whom you scarcely see, and whom you do, or do not recognize.

Under the long tulle veil, which almost covered her, with the symbolical orange flowers on her bright, light hair, in her white dress, with her downcast eyes and her graceful figure, Elaine looked to me like a *Psyche*, whose innocent heart was vowed to love. I felt how vain and artificial all this form was, how little this show counted before this *Kiss*, the triumphant, revealing, maddening Kiss, which rivets the flesh of the wife to the lips and all the flesh of the husband, which turns the Immaculate youth of the virgin into a woman, and consecrates it to tender caresses, to dreams and to future ecstacies, through the sufferings of a rape.

PART VI

Elaine loves me, as much as I adore her.

She left her parental abode, as if she was going to some festivity, without turning round toward all that she had left behind her in the way of affection and recollection, and without even a farewell tear, which the first kiss effaces, on her long turned-up lashes.

She looked like a bird which had escaped from its cage, and does not know where to settle, which beats its wings in the intoxication of the light, and which warbles incessantly. She repeated the same words, as if she had been rather intoxicated, and her laugh sounded like the cooing of a pigeon, and looking into my eyes, with her eyes full of languor, and her arms round my neck like a bracelet, and with her burning cheek against mine, she suddenly exclaimed:

"I say, my darling, would you not give ten years of your life to have already got to the end of the journey?"

And that passionate question so disconcerted me, that I did not know what to reply, and my brain reeled, as if I had been at the edge of a precipice. Did she already know what her mother had not told her? Had she already learned what she ought to have been ignorant of? And had that heart, which I used to compare to *the Vessel of Election*, of which the litanies of Our Lady speak, already been damaged?

Oh! white veils, that hide the blushes, the half-closed eyes and the trembling lips of some *Psyche*, oh! little hands which you raised in an attitude of prayer toward the lighted and decorated altar, oh! innocent and charming questions, which delighted me to the depths of my being, and which seemed to me to be an absolute promise of happiness, were you nothing but a lie, and a wonderfully well acted piece of trickery?

But was I not wrong, and an idiot, to allow such thoughts to take possession of me, and to poison my deep, absorbing love, which was now my only law and my only object, by odious and foolish suggestions? What an abject and miserable nature I must have, for such a simple, affectionate,

natural question to disturb me so, when I ought immediately to have replied to Elaine's question, with all my heart that belonged to hear:

"Yes, ten or twenty years, because you are my happiness, my desire, my love!"

PART VII

I did not choose to wait until she woke up, I sprang from the bed, where Elaine was still sleeping, with her disheveled hair lying on the lace-edged pillows. Her complexion was almost transparent, her lips were half open, as if she were dreaming, and she seemed so overcome with sleep, that I felt much emotion when I looked at her.

I drank four glasses of mild champagne, one after the other, as quickly as I could, but it did not quench my thirst. I was feverish and would have given anything in the world for something to interest me suddenly and have absorbed me and lifted me out of that slough in which my heart and my brain were being engulfed, as if in a quicksand. I did not venture to avow to myself what was making me so dejected, what was torturing me and driving me mad with grief, or to scrutinize the muddy bottom of my present thoughts sincerely and courageously, to question myself and to pull myself together.

It would have been so odious, so infamous, to harbor such suspicions unjustly, to accuse that adorable creature who was not yet twenty, whom I loved, and *who seemed to love me*, without having certain proofs, that I felt that I was blushing at the idea that I had any doubt of her innocence. Ah! Why did I marry?

I had a sufficient income to enable me to live as I liked, to pay beautiful women who pleased me, whom I chanced to meet, and who amused me, and who sometimes gave me unexpected proofs of affection, but I had never allowed myself to be caught altogether, and in order to keep my heart warm, I had some romantic and sentimental friendships with women in society, some of those delightful flirtations which have an appearance of love, which fill up the idleness of a useless life with a number of unexpected sensations, with small duties and vague subtle pleasures!

And was I now going to be like one of those ships which an unskillful turn of the helm runs ashore as it is leaving the harbor? What terrible trials were awaiting me, what sorrows and what struggles?

A chaffing friend said to me one night in joke at the club, when I had just broken one of those banks, which form an epoch in a player's life:

"If I were in your place, Jacques, I should distrust such runs of luck as that, for one always has to pay for them sooner or later!"

Sooner or later!

I half opened the bedroom door gently. Elaine was in one of those heavy sleeps that follow intoxication. Who could tell whether, when she opened her eyes and called me, surprised at not finding herself in my arms, her whole being would not become languid, and suddenly sink into a state of prostration? I wanted to reason with myself, and bring myself face to face with those cursed suggestions, as one does with a skittish horse before some object that frightens it, and to evoke the recollection of every hour, every minute of that first night of love, and to extract the secret from her....

Elaine's looks and radiant smile were overflowing with happiness, and she had the air of a conqueror who is proud of his triumph, for she was now a *woman* already, and we had *at least been alone* in this modernized country house, which had been redecorated and smartened up to serve as the frame for our affection! She hardly seemed to know what she was saying or doing, and ran from room to room in her light morning dress of mauve crape, without exactly knowing where to sit, and almost dazzled by the light of the lamps that had large shades in the shape of rose leaves over them.

There was no embarrassment, no hesitation, no shamefaced looks, no recoiling from the arms that were stretched out to her, or from the lips that begged; none of those delightful little pieces of awkwardness which show a virgin soul free from all perversion, in her manner of sitting on my knees, or putting her bare arms round my neck, and of offering me the back of her neck and her lips to kiss, but she laughed nervously, and her supple form trembled when I kissed her passionately on various places, and she said things to me that were suitable for being whispered on the pillows, while a strange languor overshadowed her eyes, and dilated her nostrils.

And suddenly with a mocking gesture, which seemed to bid defiance to the supper that was laid on a small table, cold meat of various kinds, plates of fruit and of cakes, the ice pail, from which the neck of a bottle of champagne protruded, she said merrily:

"I am not at all hungry, dear; let us have supper later! what do you say?"

She half turned round to the large bed, which seemed to be quite ready for us, and which looked white in the shadow of the recess in which it stood, with its two white, untouched, almost solemn pillows. She was not smiling any more; there was a bluish gleam in her eyes, like that of burning alcohol, and I lost my head. Elaine did not try to escape, and did not utter a complaint.

Oh! that night of torture and delight, that night which ought never to have ended!

I determined that I would be as patient as a policeman who is trying to discover the traces of a crime, that I would investigate the past of this girl, about which I knew nothing, as I should be sure to discover some proof, some important reminiscence, some servant who had been her accomplice.

And yet I adored her, my pretty, my divine Elaine, and I would consent no matter to what if only she were what I dreamt her, what I wished her to be, if only this nightmare would go and no longer rise up between her and me.

When she woke up, she spoke to me in her coaxing voice.... Oh! her kisses, again her kisses, always her kisses, in spite of everything!

Oh! to have believed blindly, to have believed on my knees that she was not lying, that she was not making a mockery of my tenderness, and that she had never belonged, and never would belong, to any one but me!

PART VIII

I wished that I could have transformed myself into one of those crafty, unctuous priests, to whom women confess their most secret faults, to whom they entrust their souls and frequently ask for advice, and that Elaine would have come and knelt at the grating of the confessional, where I should press her closely with questions, and gradually extract sincere confidences from her.

As soon as I am by the side of a young or old woman now, I try to give our conversation a ticklish turn; I forget all reserve and I try to make her talk of those jokes which nettle, those words of double meaning which excite, and to lead her up to the only subject that interests and holds me, to find out what she feels in her body as well as in her heart, on that night, when for the first time, she has to undergo the nuptial ordeal. Some do not appear to understand me, blush, leave me as if I were some unpleasant, ill-mannered person, and had offended them; as if I had tried to force open the precious casket in which they keep their sweetest recollections.

Others, on the other hand, understand me only too well, scent something equivocal and ridiculous, though they do not exactly know what, make me go on, and finally get out of the difficulty by some subtle piece of impertinence, and a burst of chaffing laughter.

Two or three at most, and they were those pretty little upstarts who talk at random, and brag about their vice, and whom one could soon not leave a leg to stand upon, were one to take the trouble, have related their impressions to me with ironical complaisance, and I found nothing in what they told me that reassured me, nor could I discover anything serious, true or moving in it.

That supreme initiation amused them as much as if it had been a scene from a comedy; the small amount of affection that they felt for the man with whom their existence had been associated grew less and evaporated altogether—and they remembered nothing about it except its ridiculous and hateful side, and described it as a sort of pantomime in which they played a bad part. But these did not love and were not adored like Elaine was. They married either from interest, or that they might not remain old maids, that they might have more liberty and escape from troublesome guardianship.

Foolish dolls, without either heart or head, they had neither that almost diseased nervosity, nor that requirement for affection, nor that instinct of love which I discovered in my wife's nature, and which attracted me, at the same time that it terrified me.

Besides, who could convince me of my errors? Who could dissipate that darkness in which I was lost? What miracle could restore *all* my belief in her again?

PART IX

Elaine felt that I was hiding something from her, that I was unhappy, that, as it were, some threatening obstacle had risen up between her and me, that some insupportable suspicion was oppressing me, torturing me and keeping me from her arms, was poisoning and disturbing that affection in which I had hoped to find fresh youth, absolute happiness, my dream of dreams.

She never spoke to me about it, however, but seemed to recoil from a definite explanation, which might make shipwreck of her love. She surrounded me with endearing attentions, and appeared to be trying to make my life so pleasant to me, that nothing in the world could draw me from it! And she would certainly cure me, if this madness of mine, were not, alas! like those wounds which are constantly reopening, and which no balm can heal.

But, at times, I lived again, I imagined that her caresses had exorcised me, that I was saved, that doubt was no longer gnawing at my heart, that I was going to adore her again, like I used to adore her. I used to throw myself at her knees and put my lips on her little hands which she abandoned to me, I looked at her lovely, limpid eyes as if they had been a piece of a blue sky that appeared amidst black storm clouds, and I whispered, with something like a sob in my throat:

"You love me, do you not, with all your heart; you love me as much as I love you; tell me so again, my dear love; tell me that, and nothing but that!"

And she used to reply eagerly, with a smile of joy on her lips:

"Do you not know it? Do you not see every moment that I love you, that you have taken entire possession of me, and that I only live for you and by you?"

And her kisses gave me new life, and intoxicated me, like when one returns from a long journey and had been in peril and is despaired of ever seeing some beloved object again, and one meets with a sort of frenzied embrace, and forgets everything in that divine feeling that one is going to die of happiness....

PART X

But these were only ephemeral clear spots in our sky, and the cries which accompanied them only grew more bitter and terrible. I knew that Elaine was growing more and more uneasy at the apparent strangeness of my character, that she suffered from it and that it affected her nerves, that the existence to which I was condemning her in spite of myself, that all this immoderate love of mine, followed by fits of inexplicable coldness and of low spirits, disconcerted her, so that she was no longer the same, and kept away from me. She could not hide her grief, and was continually worrying me with questions of affectionate pity. She repeated the same things over and over again, with hateful persistence. She had vexed me, without knowing it! Was I already tired of my married life, and did I regret my lost liberty? Had I any private troubles which I had not told her of; heavy debts which I did not know how to pay; was it family matters or some former connection with a woman that I had broken off suddenly, and that now threatened to create a scandal? Was I being worried by anonymous letters? What was it, in a word; what was it?

My denials only exasperated her, so that she sulked in silence, while her brain worked and her heart grew hard towards me; but could I, as a matter of fact, tell her of my suspicions which were filling my life with gloom and annihilating me? Would it not be odious and vile to accuse her of such a fall, without any proofs or any clue, and would she ever forget such an insult?

I almost envied those unfortunate wretches who had the right to be jealous, who had to fight against a woman's coquettes and light behavior, and who had to defend their honor that was threatened by some poacher on the preserves of love. They had a target to aim at; they knew their enemies and knew what they were doing, while I was wounding in a land of terrible mirages, was struggling in the midst of vague suppositions, and was causing my own troubles and was enraged with her past, which was, I felt sure, as white and pure as any bridal veil.

Ah! It would be better to blow my brains out, I thought to myself, than to prolong such a situation! I had had enough of it. I scarcely lived, and I wished to know all that Elaine had done before we became engaged. I wanted to know whether I was the first or the second, and I determined to know it, even if I had to sacrifice years of my life in inquiry, and to lower myself to compromising words and acts, and to every species of artifice and to spend everything that I possessed!

She might believe whatever she liked, for after all, I should only laugh at it. We might have been so happy, and there were so many who envied me, and who would gladly have consented to take my place!

PART XI

I no longer knew where I was going, but was like a train going at full speed through a dense fog, and which in vain disturbs the perfect silence of the sleeping country with its puffing and shrill whistles; when the driver cannot distinguish the changing lights of the discs, nor the signals, and when soon some terrible crash will send the train off the rails, and the carriages will become a heap of ruins.

I was afraid of going mad, and at times I asked myself whether any of my family had shown any signs of mental aberration, and had been locked up in a lunatic asylum, and whether the life of constant fast pleasures, of turning night into day and of frequent violent emotions, that I had led for years, had not at last affected my brain. If I had believed in anything, and in the science of the occult, which haunts so many restless brains, I should have imagined that some enemy was bewitching me and laying invisible snares for me, that he was suggesting those actions which were quite unworthy of the frank, upright and well-bred man that I was, and was trying to destroy the happiness of which she and I had dreamt.

For a whole week I devoted myself to that hateful business of playing the spy, and to those inquiries which were killing me. I had succeeded in discovering the lady's maid who had been in Elaine's service before we were married, and whom she loved as if she had been her foster sister, who used to accompany her whenever she went out, when she went to visit the poor and when she went for a walk, who used to wake her every morning, do her hair and dress her. She was young and rather pretty, and one saw that Paris had improved her and given her a polish, and that she knew her difficult business from end to end.

I had found out, however, that her virtue was only apparent, especially since she had changed employers; that she was fond of going to the public balls, and that she divided her favors between a man who came from her part of the country, and who was a sergeant in a dragoon regiment, and a footman, and that she spent all her money on horse races and on dress. I felt sure that I should be able to make her talk and get the truth out of her, either by money or cunning, and so I

asked her to meet me early one morning in a quiet square.

She listened to me first of all in astonishment, without replying yes or no, as if she did not understand what I was aiming at, or with what object I was asking her all these questions about her former mistress; but when I offered her a few hundred francs to loosen her tongue, as I was impatient to get the matter over and pretended to know that she had managed interviews for Elaine with her lovers, that they were known and being followed, that she was in the habit of frequenting quiet bachelors' quarters, from which she returned late, the sly little wench frowned angrily, shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed:

"What pigs some men are to have such ideas, and cause such an excellent person as Mademoiselle Elaine any unhappiness. Look here, you disgust me with your banknotes and your dirty stories, and I don't choose to say what you ought to wear on your head!"

She turned her back on me and hurried off, and her insolence, that indignant reply which she had given me, rejoiced me to the depths of my heart, like soothing balm that lulls the pain.

I should have liked to have called her back, and told her that it was all a joke, that I was devotedly in love with my wife, that I was always on the watch to hear her praised, but she was already out of sight, and I felt that I was ridiculous and mean, that I had lowered myself by what I had done, and I swore that I would profit by such a humiliating lesson, and for the future show myself to Elaine as the trusting and ardent husband that she deserved, and I thought myself cured, altogether cured....

And yet, I was again the prey to the same bad thoughts, to the same doubts, and persuaded that that girl had lied to me just like all other women lie when they are on the defensive, that she made fun of me, that perhaps *some one* had foreseen this scene and had told her what to say and made sure of her silence, just as her complicity had been gained. Thus I shall always knock up against some barrier, and struggle in this wretched darkness, and this mire from which I cannot extricate myself!

PART XII

Nobody knew anything. Neither the Superior of the Convent where she had been brought up until she was sixteen, nor the servants who had waited on her, nor the governesses who had finished her education, could remember that Elaine had been difficult to check or teach, or that she had had any other ideas than those of her age. She had certainly shown no precocious coquetry and disquieting instincts; she had had no equivocal cousinly relationships, when if the bridle is left on their neck at all, and one of them has learned at school what love is, the two big children yield to the fatal law of sex, and begin the inevitable eclogue of Daphne and Chole over again.

However, Oh! I felt it too much for it to be nothing but a chimera and a mirage, it was no *virgin* who threw her arms round my neck so lovingly, and who returned my first kisses so *deliciously*, who was attracted by my society, who gave no signs of surprise and uttered no complaint, who appeared to forget everything when in my society. No, no, a thousand times no, that could not have been a pure woman.

I ought to have cast off that intoxication which was bewitching me, and to have rushed out of the room where such a lie was being consummated; I ought to have profited by her moments of amiable weakness, while she was incapable of collecting her thoughts, when she would with tears have confessed an old fault, for which the unhappy girl had not, perhaps, been altogether responsible. Perhaps by my entreaties, or even perhaps by violence, in terror at my furious looks, when my features would have been distorted by rage, and my hands clenched in spite of myself in a gesture of menace and of murder, I might have forced her to open her heart, to show me its defilement, and to tell me this sad love episode.

How do I know whether her disconsolateness might not have moved me to pity, whether I should not have wept with her at the heavy cross that we both of us had to bear, whether I should not have forgiven her and opened my arms wide, so that she might have thrown herself into them like into a peaceful refuge?

Would not any man, or vicious collegian on the lookout for innocent girls, have perceived her nervousness, her vice? Would he not have hypnotized her, as it were, by amorous touches, by skillful caresses and reduced her to the absolute passiveness of an animal, who had been taken unawares, without any care for the morrow, or what the consequences of such a fault might be?

Or was I completely her dupe and the dupe of a villain? Had she loved, and did she still love the man who had first possessed her, who had been her first lover? Who could tell me, or come to my aid? Who could give me the proofs, the real, undeniable proofs, either that I was an infamous wretch to suspect Elaine, whom I ought to have worshiped with my eyes shut, or that she was guilty, that she had lied, and that I had the right to cast her out of my life and to treat her like a worthless woman!

PART XIII

If I had married when I was quite young, before I had wallowed in the mire of Paris, from which one can never afterwards free oneself, for heart and body both retain indelible marks of it, if I had not been the plaything of a score of mistresses, who disgusted me with belief in any woman,

if I had not been weaned from supreme illusions, and surfeited with everything to the marrow, should I have these abominable ideas?

I waited almost until I was beginning to decline in life, before I took the right path and sought refuge in port; before going to what is pure and virtuous, and before listening to the continual advice of those who love me, I passed too suddenly from those lies, from those ephemeral enjoyments, from that satiety which depraves us, from vice in which one tries to acquire renewed strength and vigor, and to discover some new and unknown sensation, to the pure sentimentalities of an engagement, to the unspeakable delights of a life that was common to two, to that kind of amorous first communion which ought to constitute married life.

If, instead of getting involved in an engagement and forming any resolution so quickly, as I had been afraid that somebody else would be beforehand with me and to rob me of Elaine's heart, or of relapsing into my former habits, if instead of lacking moral strength and character enough, in case I might have had to wait, if I had backed out without entering into any engagement and without having bound my life to that of the adorable girl whom chance had thrown in my way, it would surely have been far better if I had waited, prepared myself, questioned myself, and accustomed myself to that metamorphosis; if I had purified myself and forgotten the past, like in those retreats which precede the solemn ceremony, when pious souls pronounce their indissoluble vows?

The reaction had been too sudden and violent for such a convalescent as I was. I worked myself up, and pictured to myself something so white, so virginal, so paradisical, such complete ignorance, such unconquerable modesty and such delicious awkwardness, that Elaine's gayety, her unconstraint, her fearlessness, and her passionate kisses bewildered me, roused my suspicions and filled me with anguish.

And yet I know how all, or nearly all, girls are educated in these days, and that the ignorant, simple ones only exist on the stage, and I know also that they hear and learn too many things both at home and in society, not to have the intuition of the results of love.

Elaine loves me with all her heart, for she has told me so time after time, and she repeats it to me more ardently than ever when I take her into my arms and appear happy. She must have seen that her beauty had, in a manner, converted me; that in order to possess her I had renounced many seductions and a long life of enjoyment; and, perhaps, she would no longer please me if she was *too much of the little girl*, and that she would appear ridiculous to me if she showed her fears by any entreaty, and gesture, or any sigh.

As the people in the South say, she would have acted the brave woman, and boasted, so that no complaint might betray her, and have imparted the wild tenderness of a jealous heart to her kisses, and have attempted a struggle, which would certainly have been useless, against those recollections of mine, with which she thought I must be filled, in spite of myself.

I accused myself, so that I might no longer accuse her. I studied my malady; I knew quite well that I was wrong, and I wished to be wrong, I measured the stupidity and the disgrace of such suspicions, and, nevertheless, in spite of everything, they assailed me again, watched me traitorously and I was carried away and devoured by them.

Ah! Was there in the whole world, even among the most wretched beggars that were dying of starvation, whom nature squeezes in a vice, as it were, or among the victims of love, anybody who could say that he was more wretched than I?

PART XIV

This morning Count de Saulnac, who was lunching here, told us a terrible story of a rape, for which a man is to be tried in a few days.

A charming girl of eighteen grew languid, and became so pale and morose, her cheeks were so wax-like, her eyes so sunken and she had altogether such a look of anemia, that her parents grew uneasy and took her to a doctor who lived near them. He examined her carefully, said vaguely what was the matter with her, spoke of an illness that required assiduous care and attention, and advised the worthy couple to bring the poor girl to him every day for a month.

As they were not well off enough to keep a servant, and each had their work to attend to, the husband as an employee in a public office and his wife as cashier in a milliner's shop, and did not dream of any evil, and were further reassured by the charitable, unctuous and austere looks of the doctor, they allowed their daughter to go and consult him by herself.

The old man made much of her, tried to make her get over her shyness, adroitly made her tell him all about her usual life, took a long time in sounding her chest, helped her to dress and undress, in a very paternal way, gave her a potion and was so thoughtful and caressing, that the poor girl blushed and felt quite uncomfortable at it all. He soon saw that he should obtain nothing from her innocence, but that she would resist his slightest attempts at improper familiarity, and as he was extremely taken with the delicate and amusing girl, and with her charming person, the wretch sent her to sleep with a few magnetic passes, and outraged her.

She awoke without being conscious of what had happened, and only felt rather more listless than usual, like she used to do when there was thunder in the air. From that time, the doctor put longer intervals between her visits, and soon, after having prescribed insignificant remedies for

her, he told her that she was quite cured, and that there was no occasion for her to come and see him any more. Two months passed, and the girl, who at first had seemed much better and more lively, relapsed into a state of prostration which had so alarmed them, dragged herself about more than she walked, and seemed to be succumbing under some heavy burden.

As they had not paid the old doctor's bill, and as they were afraid that he would ask them for it if they went to see him again, her father took the girl to Beaujon, and they thought that he should have gone mad with despair and shame when one of the house-surgeons, without mincing his words, told them in a chaffing manner, that she was in the family way.

In the family way! What did he mean by that? And by whom?

They were small, thoroughly respectable and upright shopkeepers, and this made them cruel. They tormented the poor girl, to make her acknowledge her fault and tell them the name of her seducer. It was of no use for her to bemoan herself, to throw herself at their feet, to tear her hair in desperation, and to swear that no man in the world had ever touched her lips; in vain, did she exclaim indignantly that it was impossible that such a dreadful thing could be; that the man had made a mistake or was joking with them. In vain, did she try to calm them, and to soften them by her entreaties; they turned away their heads, and had only one reply to make:

"His name, his name!"

When she saw that her figure was altering, she was at length undeceived, and became like an imprisoned animal, did not speak and cowered motionless in the darkest corners, and did not even rebel at the blows, which marked her pale, passive face. She carefully thought over every minute in the past few months, and did her utmost to fill up the voids in her memory, and at last she guessed who the guilty person was.

Then, in despair, she scribbled on a scrap of paper:

"I swear to you, my dear parents, that I have nothing to reproach myself with. The old doctor treated me so strangely, that I often felt inclined to run out of the consulting room. One day he put me to sleep, and perhaps it was he who...."

And not having the courage to finish the lamentable sentence, she went and drowned herself, and the parents had the doctor, who had forgotten all about that old story, arrested, and in his examination he confessed the crime....

With an evil look on her face, such as I have never seen before, and with vibrating nostrils, Elaine exclaimed in a hard voice:

"To think that such a monster was not sent to the guillotine!"

Can she also have suffered the same thing?

PART XV

But unless Elaine was a monster of wickedness, unless she had no heart and knew how to lie and to deceive as well as a girl whose only pleasure consists in making all those who are captivated by her beauty, play the laughable part of dupes, unless that mask of youth concealed a most polluted soul, if there had been any unhappy episode in her life, if she had endured the horrors of violation, and gone through all the horrors of desolation, fear and shame, would not something visible, something disgusting, attacks of low spirits, and of gloom, and disgust with everything have remained, which would have shown the progress of some mysterious malady, the gradual weakening of the brain and the enlargement of an incurable wound?

She would have cried occasionally, would have been lost in thought and become confused when spoken to, she would scarcely have taken any interest in anything that happened, either at home or elsewhere. Kisses would have become torture to her, and would have only excited a fever of revolt in her inanimate being.

I fancy that I can see such a victim of inexorable Destiny, as if she were a consumptive woman whose days are numbered, and who knows it. She smiles feebly when any one tries to get her out of her torpor, to amuse her and to instill a little hope into her soul. She does not speak, but remains sitting silently at a window for whole days together, and one might think that her large, dreamy eyes are looking at strange sights in the depths of the sky, and see a long, attractive road there. But Elaine, on the contrary, thought of nothing but of amusing herself, of enjoying life and of laughing, and added all the tricks of a girl who has just left school, to her seductive grace of a young woman. She carried men away with her; she was most seductive, and loving seemed to be her creation. She thought of nothing but of little coquettish acts that made her more adorable, and of tender innuendos that triumph over everything, that bring men to their knees and tempt them.

It was thus that I formerly dreamt of the woman who was to be my wife, and this was the manner in which I looked on life in common; and now this perpetual joy irritates me like a challenge, like some piece of insolent boasting, and those lips that seek mine, and which offer themselves so alluringly and coaxingly to me, make me sad and torture me, as if they breathed nothing but a Lie.

Ah! If she had been the lover of another man before marriage, if she had belonged to some one

else besides me, it could only have been from love, without altogether knowing what she wanted or what she was doing! And, now, because she had acquired a name by marriage, because she had accidentally extricated herself from that false step and thought she had won the game, now that she fancied that I had not perceived anything, that I adored her and possessed her absolutely!

How wretched I was! Should I never be able to escape from that night which was growing darker and darker, which was imprisoning me, driving me mad and raising an increasing and impenetrable barrier between Elaine and me. Would not she, in the end, be the stronger, she whom I loved so dearly, would not she envelope me in so much love, that at last I should again find the happiness that I had lost, as if it were a calm, sunlit haven, and thus forget this horrible nightmare when I fell on my knees before her beauty, with a contrite heart and pricked by remorse, and happy to give myself to her for ever, altogether and more passionately than at the divine period of our betrothal.

PART XVI

Even the sight of our bedroom became painful to me. I was frightened of it; I was uncomfortable there, and felt a kind of repulsion in going there. It seemed to me as if Elaine were repeating a part that someone else had taught her, and I almost hoped that in a moment of forgetfulness she would allow her secret to escape her, and pronounce some name that was not mine, and I used to keep awake, with my ears on the alert, in the hope that she might betray herself in her sleep and murmur some revealing word, as she recalled the past, and my temples throbbed and my whole body trembled with excitement.

But when this was over and I saw her sleeping peacefully as a little girl who was tired with playing, with parted lips and disheveled hair, and measured the full extent of the stupidity of my hatred and the sacrilegious madness of my jealousy, my heart softened and I fell into such a state of profound and absolute distress that I thought I should have died of it, and large drops of cold perspiration ran down my cheeks and tears fell from my eyes, and I got up, so that my sobs might not disturb her rest and wake her.

As this could not continue, however, I told her one day that I felt so exhausted and ill that I should prefer to sleep in my own room. She appeared to believe me and merely said:

"As you please, my dear!" but her blue eyes suddenly assumed such an anxious, such a grieved look, that I turned my head aside, so as not to see them....

PART XVII

I was again in the old house, *and without her*, in the old house where Elaine used to spend all her holidays, in the room whose shutters had not been opened since our departure, seven months ago.

Why did I go there, where the calm of the country, the silence of the solitude and my recollections, irritated me and recalled my trouble, where I suffered even more than I did in Paris, and where I thought of Elaine every moment I seemed to see her and to hear her, in a species of hallucination.

What did her letters that I had taken out of her writing table, which she had used as a girl, what did her ball cards which were stuck round her looking glass, in which she used to admire herself formerly, what did her dresses, her dressing gowns, and the dusty furniture whose repose my trembling hands violated, tell me? Nothing, and always nothing.

At table, I used to speak with the worthy couple who had never left the mansion and who appeared to look upon themselves as its second masters, with the apparent good nature of a man who was in love with his wife and who wished only to speak about her, who took an interest in the smallest detail of her childhood and youth, with all the jovial familiarity which encourages peasants to talk, and when a few glasses of white wine had loosened their tongues they would talk about her, whom they loved as if she had been their child, and at other times I used to question the farmers, when they came to settle their accounts.

Had Elaine the bridle on her neck like so many girls had; did she like the country, were the peasants fond of her, and did she show any preference for one or the other? Were many people invited for the shooting, and did she visit much with the other ladies in the neighborhood?

And they drank with their elbows resting on the table in front of me, uttered her praises in a voice as monotonous as a spinning wheel, lost themselves in endless, senseless chatter which made me yawn in spite of myself, and told me her girlish tricks which certainly did not disclose what was haunting me, the traces of that first love, that perilous flirtation, that foolish escapade in which Elaine might have been seduced.

Old and young men and women, spoke of her with something like devotion, and all said how kind and charitable she was, and as merry as a bird on a bright day; they said she pitied their wretchedness and their troubles, and was still the young girl in spite of her long dresses, and fearing nothing, while even the animals loved her.

She was almost always alone, and was never troubled with any companions; she seemed to shun

the house, hide herself in the park when the bell announced some unexpected visits, and when one of her aunts, Madame de Pleissac, said to her one day:

"Do you think that you will ever find a husband with your stand-offish manners?"

She replied with a burst of laughter:

"Oh! Very well, then, Auntie, I shall do without one!"

She had never given a hand to spiteful chatter or to slander, and had not flirted with the best looking young man in the neighborhood, any more than she had with the officers who stayed at the *château* during the maneuver, or the neighbors, who came to see her parents. And some of them even old men, whom years of work had bent like vine-stalks and had tanned like the leather bottles which are used by caravans in the East, used to say with tears in their dim eyes:

"Ah! When you married our young lady, we all said that there would not be a happier man in the whole world than you!"

Ought I to have believed them? Were they not simple, frank souls, who were ignorant of wiles and of lies, who had no interest in deceiving me, who had lived near Elaine while she was growing up and becoming a woman, and who had been familiar with her?

Could I be the only one who doubted Elaine, the only one who accused her and suspected her, I who loved her so madly, I, whose only hope, only desire, only happiness she was? May heaven guide me on this bad road on which I have lost my way, where I am calling for help and where my misery is increasing every day, and grant me the infinite pleasure of being able to enjoy her caresses without any ill feeling, and to be able to love her, as she loves me. And if I must expiate my old faults, and this infamous doubt which I am ashamed of not being immediately able to cast from me, if I must pay for my unmerited happiness with usury, I hope that I may be given to death as a prey, only provided that I might belong to her, idolize her, believe in her kisses, believe in her beauty and in her love, for one hour, for even a few moments!

PART XVIII

To-day I suddenly remembered a funny evening which I spent when I was a bachelor, at Madame d'Ecoussens, where all of us, some with secret and insurmountable agony, and others with absolute indifference, went into one of the small rooms where a female professor of palmistry, who was then in vogue, and whose name I have forgotten, had installed herself.

When it came to my turn to sit opposite to her, as if I had been going to make my confession, she took my hands into her long, slender fingers, felt them, squeezed them and triturated them, as if they had been a lump of wax, which she was about to model into shape.

Severely dressed in black, with a pensive face, thin lips and almost copper-colored eyes and neither young nor old, this woman had something commanding, imperious, disturbing about her, and I must confess that my heart beat more violently than usual while she looked at the lines in my left hand through a strong magnifying glass, where the mysterious characters of some satanic conjuring look appear, and form a capital M.

She was interesting, occasionally discovered fragments of my past and gave mysterious hints, as if her looks were following the strange roads of Destiny in those unequal, confused curves. She told me in brief words that I should have and had had some opportunities, that I was wasting my physical, more than my moral strength in all kinds of love affairs that did not last long, and that the day when I really loved, or when, to use her expression, I was fairly caught, would be to me the prelude of intense sufferings, a real way of the Cross and of an illness of which I should never be cured. Then, as she examined my line of life, that which surrounds the thick part of the thumb, the lady in black suddenly grew gloomy, frowned and appeared to hesitate to go on to the end and continue my horoscope, and said very quickly:

"Your line of life is magnificent, monsieur; you will live to be sixty at least, but take care not to spend it too freely or to use it immoderately; beware of strong emotions and of any passional crisis, for I remark a gap there in the full vigor of your age, and that gap, that incurable malady which I mentioned to you, in the line of your heart...."

I mastered myself, in order not to smile, and took my leave of her, but everything that she foretold has been realized, and I dare not look at that sinister gap which she saw in my line of life, *for that gap can only mean madness*!

Madness, my poor, dear adored Elaine!

PART XIX

I became as bad and spiteful as if the spirit of hatred had possession of me, and envied those whose life was too happy, and who had no cares to trouble them. I could not conceal my pleasure when one of those domestic dramas occurred, in which hearts bleed and are broken, in which odious treachery and bitter sufferings are brought to light.

Divorce proceedings with their miserable episodes, with the wranglings of the lawyers and all the unhappiness that they revealed and which exposed the vanity of dreams, the tricks of women, the

lowness of some minds, the foul animal that sits and slumbers in most hearts, attracted me like a delightful play, a piece which rivets one from the first to the last act. I listened greedily to passionate letters, those mad prayers whose secrets some lawyer violates and which he reads aloud in a mocking tone, and which he gives pell-mell to the bench and to the public, who have come to be amused or excited and to stare at the victims of love.

I followed those romances of adultery which were unfolded chapter by chapter, in their brutal reality, of things that had actually occurred, and for the first time I forgot my own unhappiness in them. Sometimes the husband and wife were there, as if they wished to defy each other, to meet in some last encounter, and pale and feverish they watched each other, devoured each other with their eyes, hiding their grief and their misery. Sometimes again, the lover or the mistress were there and tore their gloves in their rage, wishing to rush at the bar to defend their love, to bring forward accusations in their turn, and would tell the advocate that he was lying, and would threaten him and revile him with all their indignant nature. Friends, however, would restrain them, would whisper something to them in a low voice, press their hands like after a funeral, and try to appease them.

It seemed to me, as if I were looking at a heap of ruins, or breathing in the odor of an ambulance, in which dying men were groaning, and that those unhappy people were assuaging my trouble somewhat, and taking their share of it.

I used to read the advertisements in the Agony Columns in the newspapers, where the same exalted phrases used to recur, where I read the same despairing *adieux*, earnest requests for a meeting, echoes of past affection, and vain vows; and all this relieved me, vaguely appeased me, and made me think less about myself, that hateful, incurable *I* which I longed to destroy!

PART XX

As the heat was very oppressive, and there was not a breath of wind, after dinner she wanted to go for a drive in the *Bois de Boulogne* and we drove in the victoria towards the bridge at Suresne.

It was getting late, and the dark drives looked like deserted labyrinths, and cool retreats where one would have liked to have stopped late, where the very rustle of the leaves seems to whisper amorous temptations, and there was seduction in the softness of the air and in the infinite music of the silence.

Occasionally, lights were to be seen among the trees, and the crescent of the new moon shone like a half-opened gold bracelet in the serene sky, and the green sward, the copses and the small lakes, which gave an uncertain reflection of the surrounding objects, came into sight suddenly, out of the shade, and the intoxicating smell of the hay and of the flower beds rose from the earth as if from a sachet.

We did not speak, but the jolts of the carriage occasionally brought us quite close together, and as if I were being attracted by some irresistible force, I turned to Elaine and saw that her eyes were filled with tears, and that she was very pale, and my whole body trembled when I looked at her. Suddenly, as if she could not bear this state of affairs any longer, she threw her arms round my neck, and with her lips almost touching mine, she said:

"Why do you not love me any longer? Why do you make me so unhappy? What have I done to you, Jacques?"

She was at my mercy, she was undergoing the influence of the charm of one of those moonlight nights which unbrace women's nerves, make them languid, and leave them without a will and without strength, and I thought that she was going to tell me everything and to confess everything to me, and I had to master myself, not to kiss her on her sweet coaxing lips, but I only replied coldly:

"Do you not know, Elaine?... Did you not think that sooner or later I should discover everything that you have been trying to hide from me?"

She sat up in terror, and repeated as if she were in a profound stupor:

"What have I been trying to hide from you?"

I had said too much, and was bound to go on to the end and to finish, even though I repented of it ever afterwards, and amidst the noise of the carriage I said in a hoarse voice:

"Is it not your fault if I have become estranged from you, shall not I be the only one to be unhappy, I who loved you so dearly, who believed in you, and whom you have deceived, and condemned to take another man's mistress?"

Elaine closed my mouth with my fingers, and panting, with dilated eyes and with such a pale face that I thought she was going to faint, she said hoarsely:

"Be quiet, be quiet, you are frightening me,... frightening me as if you were a madman...."

Those words froze me, and I shivered as if some phantoms were appearing among the trees and showing me the place that had been marked out for me by Destiny, and I felt inclined to jump from the carriage and to run to the river, which was calling to me yonder in a maternal voice, and inviting me to an eternal sleep, eternal repose, but Elaine called out to the coachman:

"We will go home, Firmin; drive as fast as you can!"

We did not exchange another word, and during the whole drive Elaine sobbed convulsively, though she tried to hide the sound with her pocket handkerchief, and I understood that it was all finished *and that I had killed our love*....

PART XXI

Yes, all was finished and stupidly finished, without the decisive explanation, in which I should find strength to escape from a hateful yoke, and to repudiate the woman who had allured me with false caresses, and who no longer ought to bear my name.

It was either that, or else, who knows, the happiness, the peace, the love which was not troubled by any evil afterthoughts, that absolute love that I dreamt of between Elaine and myself when I asked for her hand, and which I was still continually dreaming of with the despair of a condemned soul far from Paradise, and from which I was suffering, and which would kill me.

She prevented me from speaking; with her trembling hand she checked that flow of frenzied words which were about to come from my pained heart, those terrible accusations which an imperious, resistless force incited me to utter, and those terrified words which escaped from her pale lips, froze me again, and penetrated to my marrow as if they had been some piercing wind.

In spite of it all, I was in full possession of my reason, I was not in a passion, and I could not have looked like a fool.

What could she have seen unusual in my eyes that frightened her, what inflections were there in my voice for such an idea suddenly to arise in her brain? Suppose she had not make a mistake, suppose I no longer knew what I was saying nor what I was doing, and really had that terrible malady that she had mentioned, and which I cannot repeat!

It seems to me now as if I could see myself in a mirror of anguish, altogether changed, as if my head were a complete void at times and became something sonorous, and then was struck violent, prolonged blows from a heavy clapper, as if it had been a bell, which fills it with tumultuous deafening vibrations, from a kind of loud tocsin and from monotonous peals, that were succeeded by the silence of the grave.

And the voice of recollection, a voice which tells me Elaine's mysterious history, which speaks to me only of her, which recalls that initial night, that strange night of happiness and of grief, when I doubted her fidelity, when I doubted her heart as well as I did herself, passes slowly through this silence all at once, like the voice of distant music.

Alas! Suppose she had not made a mistake!

PART XXII

I must be an object of hatred to her, and I left home without writing her a line, without trying to see her, without wishing her good-bye. She may pity me or she may hate me, but she certainly does not love me any longer, and I have myself buried that love, for which I would formerly have given my whole life. As she is young and pretty, however, Elaine will soon console herself for these passing troubles with some soul that is the shadow of her own, and will replace me, if she has not done that already, and will seek happiness in adultery.

What are she and her lover plotting? What will they try to do to prevent me from interfering with them? What snares will they set for me so that I may go and end my miserable life in some dungeon, from which there is no release?

But that is impossible; it can never be; Elaine belongs to me altogether and forever; she is my property, my chattel, my happiness. I adore her, I want her all to myself, *even though she be guilty*, and I will never leave her again for a moment, I will still stick to her petticoats, I will roll at her feet, and ask her pardon, for I thirst for her kisses and her love.

To-night in a few hours, I shall be with her, I shall go into *our* room and lie in *our* bed, and I will cover the cheeks of my fair-haired darling with such kisses, that she will no longer think me mad, and if she cries out, if she defends herself and spurns me, I shall kill her; I have made up my mind to that.

I know that I shall strike her with the Arab knife that is on one of the console-tables, in our room among other knick-knacks. I see the spot where I shall plunge in the sharp blade, into the nape of her neck, which is covered with little soft pale golden curls, that are the same color as the hair of her head. It attracted me so at one time, during the chaste period of our engagement, that I used to wish to bite it, as if it had been some fruit. I shall do it some day in the country, when she is bathed in a ray of sunlight, which makes her look dazzling in her pink muslin dress, some day on a towing-path, when the nightingales are singing, and the dragonflies, with their reflections of blue and silver are flying about.

There, there, I shall skillfully plunge it in up to the hilt, like those who know how to kill....

PART XXIII

And after I had killed her, what then?

As the judges would not be able to explain such an extraordinary crime to themselves, they would of course say that I was mad, medical men would examine me and would immediately agree that I ought at once to be kept under supervision, taken care of and placed in a lunatic asylum.

And for years, perhaps, because I was strong, and because such a vigorous animal would survive the calamity intact, although my intellect might give way, I should remain a prey to these chimeras, carry that fixed idea of her lies, her impurity and her shame about with me, that would be my one recollection, and I should suffer unceasingly.

I am writing all this perfectly coolly and in full possession of my reason; I have perfect prescience of what my resolve entails, and of this blind rush towards death. I feel that my very minutes are numbered, and that I no longer have anything in my skull, in which some fire, though I do not quite know what it is, is burning, except a few particles of what used to be my brain.

Just as a short time ago, I should certainly have murdered Elaine, if she had been with me, when invisible hands seemed to be pushing me towards her, inaudible voices ordered me to commit that murder, it is surely most probable that I shall have another crisis, and will there be any awakening from that?

Ah! It will be a thousand times better, since Destiny has left me a half-open door, to escape from life before it is too late, before the free, sane, strong man that I am at present, becomes the most pitiable, the most destructive, the most dangerous of human wrecks!

May all these notes of my misery fall into Elaine's hands some day, may she read them to the end, pity and absolve me, and for a long time mourn for me!

(Here ends Jacques' Journal.)

AN UNFORTUNATE LIKENESS

During one of those sudden changes of the electric light, which at one time throws rays of exquisite pale pink, at another a liquid gold, as if it had been filtered through the light hair of a woman, and at another, rays of a bluish hue with strange tints, such as the sky assumes at twilight, in which the women with their bare shoulders looked like living flowers—it was on the night of the first of January at Montonirail's, the refined painter of great undulating *poses* figures, of brilliant dresses, of Parisian prettiness—that tall Pescarelle, whom some called *Pussy*, though I do not know why, suddenly said in a low voice:

"Well, people were not altogether mistaken, in fact, were only half wrong when they coupled my name with that of pretty Lucy Plonelle. She had captivated my heart, just as a bird-catcher on a frosty morning catches an imprudent wren on a limed twig, and she might have done whatever she liked with me.

"I was under the charm of her enigmatical and mocking smile, where her teeth had a cruel look between her red lips, and glistened as if they were ready to bite and to heighten the pleasure of the most delightful, the most voluptuous kiss, by pain.

"I loved everything in her, her feline suppleness, her slow looks, which seemed to glide from her half-closed lids, full of promises and temptation, her somewhat extreme elegance, and her hands, her long, delicate, white hands, with blue veins, like the bloodless hands of a female saint in a stained glass window, and her slender fingers, on which only the large drops of blood of a ruby glittered.

"I would have given her all my remaining youth and vigor to have laid my burning hands onto the nape of her cool round neck, and to feel that bright, silky, golden mane enveloping me and caressing my skin. I was never tired of hearing her disdainful, petulant voice, those vibrations which sounded as if they proceeded from clear glass, and that music, which at times, became hoarse, harsh and fierce, like the loud, sonorous calls of the Valkyries.

"Oh! Good heavens! to be her lover, to be her chattel, to belong to her, to devote one's whole existence to her, to spend one's last half-penny and to go under in misery, only to have the glory, the happiness of possessing the splendid beauty, the sweetness of her kisses, the pink, and the white of her demon-like soul all to myself, were it only for a few months!

"It makes you laugh, I know, to think that I should have been caught like that, I who give such good, prudent advice to my friends, who fear love as I do those quicksands and shoals which appear at low tide and in which one is swallowed up and disappears!

"But who can answer for himself, who can defend himself against such a danger, against the magnetic attraction that comes from such a woman? Nevertheless, I got cured, and perfectly cured, and that, quite accidentally, and this is how the enchantment, which was apparently so infrangible, was broken.

"On the first night of a play, I was sitting in the stalls close to Lucy, whose mother had accompanied her, as usual, and they occupied the front of a box, side by side. From some

insurmountable attraction, I never ceased looking at the woman whom I loved with all the force of my being. I feasted my eyes on her beauty, I saw nobody except her in the theater, and did not listen to the piece that was being performed on the stage.

"Suddenly, however, I felt as if I had received a blow from a dagger in my heart, and I had an insane hallucination. Lucy had moved and her pretty head was in profile, in the same attitude and with the same lines as her mother. I do not know what shadow, or what play of light had hardened and altered the color of her delicate features and destroyed their ideal prettiness, but the more I looked at them both, the one who was young, and the one who was old, the greater that distressing resemblance became.

"I saw Lucy growing older and older, striving against those accumulating years which bring wrinkles in the face, produce a double chin and crow's feet, and spoil the mouth. *They almost looked like twins.*

"I suffered so that I almost thought I should have gone mad, and, in spite of myself, instead of shaking off this feeling and make my escape out of the theater, far away into the noise and life on the boulevards, I persisted in looking at the other, at the old one, in scanning her over, in judging her, in dissecting her with my eyes; I got excited over her flabby cheeks, over those ridiculous dimples, that were half-filled up, over that treble chin, that hair which must have been dyed, those eyes which had no more brightness in them, and that nose which was a caricature of Lucy's beautiful, attractive little nose.

"I had the prescience of the future. I loved her, and I should love her more and more every day, that little sorceress who had so despotically and so quickly conquered me. I should not allow any participation or any intrigue from the day she gave herself to me, and when once we had been so intimately connected, who could tell whether, just as I was defending myself against it most, the legitimate termination—marriage—might not come?

"Why not give one's name to a woman whom one loves, and of whom one is sure? The reason was, that I should be tied to a disfigured, ugly creature with whom I should not venture to be seen in public, as my friends would leer at her with laughter in their eyes, and with pity in their hearts for the man who was accompanying those remains."

"And so, as soon as the curtain had fallen, without saying good-day or good-evening, I had myself driven to the *Moulin Rouge*, and there I picked up the first woman I came across, and remained in her company until late next day."

"Well," Florise d'Anglet exclaimed, "I shall never take Mamma to the theater with me again, for men are really getting too mad!"

THE NEW SENSATION

That little Madame d'Ormonde certainly had the devil in her, but above all, a fantastic, baffling brain, through which the most unheard of caprices passed, in which ideas danced and jostled each other, like those pieces of different colored glass in a kaleidoscope, which form such strange figures when they have been shaken, in which *Parisine* was fermenting to such an extent—you know, *Parisine*, the analysis of which Roqueplan lately gave—that the most learned members of *The Institute* would have wasted his science and his wisdom if he had tried to follow her slips and her subterfuges.

That was, very likely, the reason why she attracted, retained and infatuated even those who had paid their debt to implacable love, who thought that they were strong and free from those passions under the influence of which men lose their heads, and that they were beyond the reach of woman's perfidious snares. Or, perhaps, it was her small, soft, delicate, white hands, which always smelled of some subtle, delicious perfume, and whose small fingers men kissed almost with devotion, almost with absolute pleasure. Or, was it her silky, golden hair, her large, blue eyes, full of enigmas, of curiosity, of desire, her changeable mouth, which was quite small and infantine at one moment, when she was pouting, and smiling and as open as a rose that is unfolding in the sun, when she opened it in a laugh, and showed her pearly teeth, so that it became a target for kisses? Who will ever be able to explain that kind of magic and sorcery which some *Chosen Women* exercise over all men, that despotic authority, against which nobody would think of rebelling?

Among the numerous men who had entreated her, who were anxiously waiting for that wonderful moment when her heart would beat, when his mocking companion would grow tired and abandon herself to the pleasure of loving and of being loved, would become intoxicated with the honey of caresses, and would no longer refuse her lips to kisses, like some restive animal that fears the yoke, none had so made up his mind to win the game, and to pursue this deceptive siege, as much as Xavier de Fontrailles. He marched straight for his object with a patient energy and a strength of will which no checks could weaken, and with the ardent fervor of a believer who has started on a long pilgrimage, and who supports all the suffering of the long journey with the fixed

and consoling idea that one day he will be able to throw himself on his knees at the shrine where he wishes to worship, and to listen to the divine words which will be a Paradise to him.

He gave way to Madame d'Ormonde's slightest whims, and did all he could never to bore her, never to hurt her feelings, but really to become a friend whom she could not do without, and of whom, in the end, a woman grows more jealous than she does of her husband, and to whom she confesses everything, her daily worries and her dreams of the future.

She would very likely have suffered and wept, and have felt a great void in her existence if they had separated for ever, if he had disappeared, and she would not have hesitated to defend him, even at the risk of compromising herself, and of passing as his mistress, if any one had attacked him in her presence, and sometimes she used to say with a sudden laughing sadness in her voice:

"If I were really capable of loving for five minutes consecutively, I should love you."

And when they were walking in the *Bois de Boulogne*, while the Victoria was waiting near Armenonville, during their afternoon talks when, as he used to say, they were hanging over the abyss until they both grew giddy, and spoke of love madly and ceaselessly—returning to the subject constantly, and impregnating themselves with it—Madame d'Ormonde would occasionally produce one of her favorite theories. Yes, she certainly understood possession of the beloved object, that touch of madness which seizes you from head to foot, which makes your blood hot, and which makes you forget everything else in a man's embraces, in that supreme pleasure which overwhelms you, and which rivets two beings together for ever, by the heart and by the brain. But only at some unexpected moment, in a strange place, with a touch of something novel about it, which one would remember all one's life, something amusing and almost maddening, which one had been in search of for a long time, and which imparted a flavor of curry, as it were, into the common-place flavor of immorality.

And Xavier de Fontrailles did all he could to discover such a place, but failed successively in a bachelor's lodgings with silk tapestry, like a boudoir of the seventeenth century, in a villa hidden like a nest among trees and rose bushes, with a Japanese house furnished in an extraordinary fashion and very expensively, with latticed windows from which one could see the sea, in an old melancholy palace, from which one could see the Grand Canal, in rooms, in hotels, in queer quarters, in private rooms, in restaurants, and in small country houses in the recesses of woods.

Madame d'Ormonde went on her way without turning her head, but Xavier, alas! became more and more amorous, as amorous as an overgrown schoolboy who has never hitherto had any conversation with a woman, and who is amorous enough to pick up the flowers that fall from her bodice, and to be lost and unhappy as soon as he does not see her, or hear her soft, cooing voice, and see her smile....

One evening, however, he had gone with her to the fair at Saint Cloud, and went into three shows, deafened by the noise of the organs, the whistling of the machinery of the round-abouts, and the hubbub of the crowd that came and went among the booths that were illuminated by paraffin lamps. As they were passing in front of a somnambulist's van, Monsieur de Fontrailles stopped and said to Madame d'Ormonde:

"Would you like to have our fortune told?"

It was a very fine specimen of its kind, and had, no doubt, been far and wide. Placards and portraits, bordered by advertisements, hung above the shaky steps, and the small windows with their closed shutters, were almost hidden by boxes of sweet basil and mignonette, while an old, bald parrot, with her feathers all ruffled, was asleep just outside.

The fortune teller was sitting on a chair, quietly knitting a stocking, and on their approach she got up, went up to Madame d'Ormonde and said in an unctuous voice:

"I reveal the present, the past and the future, and even the name of the future husband or wife, and of deceased relations, as well as my client's present and future circumstances. I have performed before crowned heads. The Emperor of Brazil came to me, with the illustrious poet, Victor Hugo.... My charge is five francs for telling your fortune from the cards or by your hand, and twenty francs for the whole lot.... Would you like the lot, Madame?"

Madame d'Ormonde gave vent to a burst of sonorous laughter, like a street girl, who is amusing herself, but they went in and Monsieur de Fontrailles opened the glass door which was covered by a heavy red curtain. When they got in, the young woman uttered an exclamation of surprise. The interior of the van was full of roses, arranged in the most charming manner as if for a lovers' meeting. On a table covered with a damask cloth, and which was surrounded by piles of cushions, a supper was waiting for chance comers, and at the other end, concealed by heavy hangings, one could see a large, wide bed, one of those beds which give rise to sinister suggestions!

Xavier had shut the door again, and Madame d'Ormonde looked at him in a strange manner, with rather flushed cheeks, palpitating nostrils, and a look in her eyes, such as he had never seen in them before, and in a very low voice, while his heart beat violently, and he whispered into her ear:

"Well, does the decoration please you this time?"

She replied by holding up her lips to him, and then filled two glasses with extra dry champagne, which was as pale as the skin of a fair woman, and said almost as if she had already been rather

drunk:

"I am decidedly worth a big stake!"

It was in this fashion that Madame d'Ormonde, for the first and last time, deceived her husband; and it was at the fair at Saint Cloud, in a somnambulist's van.

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[1] Glass of Bavarian beer

[2] *La recherche de la paternité est interdite.* A celebrated clause in the Code Napoleon, whereby a man cannot be made chargeable for a bastard.—TRANSLATOR.

[3] Psychological Notes.

[4] Title given to advocates in France.—TRANSLATOR.

[5] That man with the dogs.

[6] Executioner, hangman.

[7] Vulgar for Monsieur.

[8] Prison in Paris.

[9] Work-girl, a name applied to those whose virtue is not too rigorous.—TRANSLATOR.

[10] This manuscript was found among the papers of Viscount Jacques de X—— who committed suicide a few years ago, in his room in an hotel at Piombières.—R.M.

[11] Civil marriages are obligatory in France, though usually followed by the religious rite.—TRANSLATOR.

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