Title: The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume VIII

Author: Guy de Maupassant

Release date: July 14, 2007 [eBook #22069]
Most recently updated: January 18, 2009

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Sankar Viswanathan, and the
Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

The Works of Guy de Maupassant

VOLUME VIII

PIERRE ET JEAN

AND OTHER STORIES

ILLUSTRATED

NATIONAL LIBRARY COMPANY

NEW YORK

CONTENTS

OF "THE NOVEL"

[1]

I do not intend in these pages to put in a plea for this little novel. On the contrary, the ideas I shall try to set forth will rather involve a criticism of the class of psychological analysis which I have undertaken in *Pierre et Jean*. I propose to treat of novels in general.

I am not the only writer who finds himself taken to task in the same terms each time he brings out a new book. Among many laudatory phrases, I invariably meet with this observation, penned by the same critics: "The greatest fault of this book is that it is not, strictly speaking, a novel."

The same form might be adopted in reply:

"The greatest fault of the writer who does me the honor to review me is that he is not a critic."

For what are, in fact, the essential characteristics of a critic?

It is necessary that, without preconceived notions, prejudices of "School," or partisanship for any class of artists, he should appreciate, distinguish, and explain the most antagonistic tendencies and the most dissimilar temperaments, recognizing and accepting the most varied efforts of art.

Now the Critic who, after reading *Manon Lescaut*, *Paul and Virginia*, *Don Quixote*, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, *Werther*, *Elective Affinities* (*Wahlverwandschaften*), *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Émile*, *Candide*, *Cinq-Mars*, *René*, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, *Mauprat*, *Le Père Goriot*, *La Cousine Bette*, [2] *Colomba*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Salammbo*, *Madame Bovary*, *Adolphe*, *M. de Camors*, *l'Assommoir*, *Sapho*, etc., still can be so bold as to write "This or that is, or is not, a novel," seems to me to be gifted with a perspicacity strangely akin to incompetence. Such a critic commonly understands by a novel a more or less improbable narrative of adventure, elaborated after the fashion of a piece for the stage, in three acts, of which the first contains the exposition, the second the action, and the third the catastrophe or *dénouement*.

And this method of construction is perfectly admissible, but on condition that all others are accepted on equal terms.

Are there any rules for the making of a novel, which, if we neglect, the tale must be called by another name? If *Don Quixote* is a novel, then is *Le Rouge et le Noir* a novel? If *Monte Christo* is a novel, is *l'Assommoir*? Can any conclusive comparison be drawn between Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, *The Three Mousqueteers*, by Dumas, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, *M. de Camors* by Octave Feuillet, and *Germinal*, by Zola? Which of them all is The Novel? What are these famous rules? Where did they originate? Who laid them down? And in virtue of what principle, of whose authority, and of what reasoning?

And yet, as it would appear, these critics know in some positive and indisputable way what constitutes a novel, and what distinguishes it from other tales which are not novels. What this amounts to is that without being producers themselves they are enrolled under a School, and

that, like the writers of novels, they reject all work which is conceived and executed outside the pale of their esthetics. An intelligent critic ought, on the contrary, to seek out everything which least resembles the novels already written, and urge young authors as much as possible to try fresh paths. [3]

All writers, Victor Hugo as much as M. Zola, have insistently claimed the absolute and incontrovertible right to compose—that is to say, to imagine or observe—in accordance with their individual conception of originality, and that is a special manner of thinking, seeing, understanding, and judging. Now the critic who assumes that "the novel" can be defined in conformity with the ideas he has based on the novels he prefers, and that certain immutable rules of construction can be laid down, will always find himself at war with the artistic temperament of a writer who introduces a new manner of work. A critic really worthy of the name ought to be an analyst, devoid of preferences or passions; like an expert in pictures, he should simply estimate the artistic value of the object of art submitted to him. His intelligence, open to everything, must so far supersede his individuality as to leave him free to discover and praise books which as a man he may not like, but which as a judge he must duly appreciate.

But critics, for the most part, are only readers; whence it comes that they almost always find fault with us on wrong grounds, or compliment us without reserve or measure.

The reader, who looks for no more in a book than that it should satisfy the natural tendencies of his own mind, wants the writer to respond to his predominant taste, and he invariably praises a work or a passage which appeals to his imagination, whether idealistic, gay, licentious, melancholy, dreamy, or positive, as "striking" or "well written." [4]

The public as a whole is composed of various groups, whose cry to us writers is:

"Comfort me."

"Amuse me."

"Touch me."

"Make me dream."

"Make me laugh."

"Make me shudder."

"Make me weep."

"Make me think."

And only a few chosen spirits say to the artist:

"Give me something fine in any form which may suit you best, according to your own temperament."

The artist makes the attempt; succeeds or fails.

The critic ought to judge the result only in relation to the nature of the attempt; he has no right to concern himself about tendencies. This has been said a thousand times already; it will always need repeating.

Thus, after a succession of literary schools which have given us deformed, superhuman, poetical, pathetic, charming or magnificent pictures of life, a realistic or naturalistic school has arisen, which asserts that it shows us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

All these theories of art must be recognized as of equal interest, and we must judge the works which are their outcome solely from the point of view of artistic value, with an *a priori* acceptance of the general notions which gave birth to each. To dispute the author's right to produce a poetical work or a realistic work, is to endeavor to coerce his temperament, to take exception to his originality, to forbid his using the eyes and wits bestowed on him by Nature. To blame him for seeing things as beautiful or ugly, as mean or epic, as gracious or sinister, is to reproach him for not being made on this or that pattern, and for having eyes which do not see exactly as ours see. [5]

Let him be free by all means to conceive of things as he pleases, provided he is an artist. Let us rise to poetic heights to judge an idealist, and then prove to him that his dream is commonplace, ordinary, not mad or magnificent enough. But if we judge a materialistic writer, let us show him wherein the truth of life differs from the truth in his book.

It is self-evident that schools so widely different must have adopted diametrically opposite processes in composition.

The novelist who transforms truth—immutable, uncompromising, and displeasing as it is—to extract from it an exceptional and delightful plot, must necessarily manipulate events without an exaggerated respect for probability, molding them to his will, dressing and arranging them so as to attract, excite, or affect the reader. The scheme of his romance is no more than a series of ingenious combinations, skillfully leading to the issue. The incidents are planned and graduated up to the culminating point and effect of the conclusion, which is the crowning and fatal result, satisfying the curiosity aroused from the first, closing the interest, and ending the story so

completely that we have no further wish to know what happened on the morrow to the most engaging actors in it.

The novelist who, on the other hand, proposes to give us an accurate picture of life, must carefully eschew any concatenation of events which might seem exceptional. His aim is not to tell [6] a story to amuse us, or to appeal to our feelings, but to compel us to reflect, and to understand the occult and deeper meaning of events. By dint of seeing and meditating he has come to regard the world, facts, men, and things in a way peculiar to himself, which is the outcome of the sum total of his studious observation. It is this personal view of the world which he strives to communicate to us by reproducing it in a book. To make the spectacle of life as moving to us as it has been to him, he must bring it before our eyes with scrupulous exactitude. Hence he must construct his work with such skill, it must be so artful under so simple a guise, that it is impossible to detect and sketch the plan, or discern the writer's purpose.

Instead of manipulating an adventure and working it out in such a way as to make it interesting to the last, he will take his actor or actors at a certain period of their lives, and lead them by natural stages to the next. In this way he will show either how men's minds are modified by the influence of their environment, or how their passions and sentiments are evolved; how they love or hate, how they struggle in every sphere of society, and how their interests clash—social interests, pecuniary interests, family interests, political interests. The skill of his plan will not consist in emotional power or charm, in an attractive opening or a stirring catastrophe, but in the happy grouping of small but constant facts from which the final purpose of the work may be discerned. If within three hundred pages he depicts ten years of a life so as to show what its individual and characteristic significance may have been in the midst of all the other human beings which surrounded it, he ought to know how to eliminate from among the numberless [7] trivial incidents of daily life all which do not serve his end, and how to set in a special light all those which might have remained invisible to less clear-sighted observers, and which give his book caliber and value as a whole.

It is intelligible that this method of construction, so unlike the old manner which was patent to all, must often mislead the critics, and that they will not all detect the subtle and secret wires—almost invisibly fine—which certain modern artists use instead of the one string formerly known as the "plot."

In a word, while the novelist of yesterday preferred to relate the crises of life, the acute phases of the mind and heart, the novelist of to-day writes the history of the heart, soul, and intellect in their normal condition. To achieve the effects he aims at—that is to say, the sense of simple reality, and to point the artistic lesson he endeavors to draw from it—that is to say, a revelation of what his contemporary man is before his very eyes, he must bring forward no facts that are not irrefragible and invariable.

But even when we place ourselves at the same point of view as these realistic artists, we may discuss and dispute their theory, which seems to be comprehensively stated in these words: "The whole Truth and nothing but the Truth." Since the end they have in view is to bring out the philosophy of certain constant and current facts, they must often correct events in favor of probability and to the detriment of truth; for

"Le vrai peut quelquefois, n'être pas le vraisemblable." (Truth may sometimes not seem probable.)

The realist, if he is an artist, will endeavor not to show us a commonplace photograph of life, but [8] to give us a presentment of it which shall be more complete, more striking, more cogent than reality itself. To tell everything is out of the question; it would require at least a volume for each day to enumerate the endless, insignificant incidents which crowd our existence. A choice must be made—and this is the first blow to the theory of "the whole truth."

Life, moreover, is composed of the most dissimilar things, the most unforeseen, the most contradictory, the most incongruous; it is merciless, without sequence or connection, full of inexplicable, illogical, and contradictory catastrophes, such as can only be classed as miscellaneous facts. This is why the artist, having chosen his subject, can only select such characteristic details as are of use to it, from this life overladen with chances and trifles, and reject everything else, everything by the way.

To give an instance from among a thousand. The number of persons who, every day, meet with an accidental death, all over the world, is very considerable. But how can we bring a tile onto the head of an important character, or fling him under the wheels of a vehicle in the middle of a story, under the pretext that accident must have its due?

Again, in life there is no difference of foreground and distance, and events are sometimes hurried on, sometimes left to linger indefinitely. Art, on the contrary, consists in the employment of foresight, and elaboration in arranging skillful and ingenious transitions, in setting essential events in a strong light, simply by the craft of composition, and giving all else the degree of relief, in proportion to their importance, requisite to produce a convincing sense of the special [9] truth to be conveyed.

"Truth" in such work consists in producing a complete illusion by following the common logic of facts and not by transcribing them pell-mell, as they succeed each other.

Whence I conclude that the higher order of Realists should rather call themselves Illusionists.

How childish it is, indeed, to believe in this reality, since to each of us the truth is in his own mind, his own organs. Our own eyes and ears, taste and smell, create as many different truths as there are human beings on earth. And our brains, duly and differently informed by those organs, apprehend, analyze, and decide as differently as if each of us were a being of an alien race. Each of us, then, has simply his own illusion of the world—poetical, sentimental, cheerful, melancholy, foul, or gloomy, according to his nature. And the writer has no other mission than faithfully to reproduce this illusion, with all the elaborations of art which he may have learnt and have at his command. The illusion of beauty—which is merely a conventional term invented by man! The illusion of ugliness—which is a matter of varying opinion! The illusion of truth—never immutable! The illusion of depravity—which fascinates so many minds! All the great artists are those who can make other men see their own particular illusion.

Then we must not be wroth with any theory, since each is simply the outcome, in generalizations, of a special temperament analyzing itself.

Two of these theories have more particularly been the subject of discussion, and set up in opposition to each other instead of being admitted on an equal footing: that of the purely analytical novel, and that of the objective novel. [10]

The partisans of analysis require the writer to devote himself to indicating the smallest evolutions of a soul, and all the most secret motives of our every action, giving but a quite secondary importance to the act and fact in itself. It is but the goal, a simple milestone, the excuse for the book. According to them, these works, at once exact and visionary, in which imagination merges into observation, are to be written after the fashion in which a philosopher composes a treatise on psychology, seeking out causes in their remotest origin, telling the why and wherefore of every impulse, and detecting every reaction of the soul's movements under the promptings of interest, passion, or instinct.

The partisans of objectivity—odious word—aiming, on the contrary, at giving us an exact presentment of all that happens in life, carefully avoid all complicated explanations, all disquisitions on motive, and confine themselves to let persons and events pass before our eyes. In their opinion, psychology should be concealed in the book, as it is in reality, under the facts of existence.

The novel as conceived of on these lines gains in interest; there is more movement in the narrative, more color, more of the stir of life.

Hence, instead of giving long explanations of the state of mind of an actor in the tale, the objective writer tries to discover the action or gesture which that state of mind must inevitably lead to in that personage, under certain given circumstances. And he makes him so demean himself from one end of the volume to the other, that all his actions, all his movements shall be [11] the expression of his inmost nature, of all his thoughts, and all his impulses or hesitancies. Thus they conceal psychology instead of flaunting it; they use it as the skeleton of the work, just as the invisible bony framework is the skeleton of the human body. The artist who paints our portrait does not display our bones.

To me it seems that the novel executed on this principle gains also in sincerity. It is, in the first place, more probable, for the persons we see moving about us do not divulge to us the motives from which they act.

We must also take into account the fact that, even if by close observation of men and women we can so exactly ascertain their characters as to predict their behavior under almost any circumstances, if we can say decisively: "Such a man, of such a temperament, in such a case, will do this or that"; yet it does not follow that we could lay a finger, one by one, on all the secret evolutions of his mind—which is not our own; all the mysterious pleadings of his instincts—which are not the same as ours; all the mingled promptings of his nature—in which the organs, nerves, blood, and flesh are different from ours.

However great the genius of a gentle, delicate man, guileless of passions and devoted to science and work, he never can so completely transfuse himself into the body of a dashing, sensual, and violent man, of exuberant vitality, torn by every desire or even by every vice, as to understand and delineate the inmost impulses and sensations of a being so unlike himself, even though he may very adequately foresee and relate all the actions of his life.

In short, the man who writes pure psychology can do no more than put himself in the place of all his puppets in the various situations in which he places them. It is impossible that he should [12] change his organs, which are the sole intermediary between external life and ourselves, which constrain us by their perceptions, circumscribe our sensibilities, and create in each of us a soul essentially dissimilar to all those about us. Our purview and knowledge of the world, and our ideas of life, are acquired by the aid of our senses, and we cannot help transferring them, in some degree, to all the personages whose secret and unknown nature we propose to reveal. Thus, it is always ourselves that we disclose in the body of a king or an assassin, a robber or an honest man, a courtesan, a nun, a young girl, or a coarse market woman; for we are compelled to put the problem in this personal form: "If *I* were a king, a murderer, a prostitute, a nun, or a market woman, what should *I* do, what should *I* think, how should *I* act?" We can only vary our characters by altering the age, the sex, the social position, and all the circumstances of life, of that *ego* which nature has in fact inclosed in an insurmountable barrier of organs of sense. Skill consists in not betraying this *ego* to the reader, under the various masks which we employ to

cover it.

Still, though on the point of absolute exactitude, pure psychological analysis is impregnable, it can nevertheless produce works of art as fine as any other method of work.

Here, for instance we have the *Symbolists*. And why not? Their artistic dream is a worthy one; and they have this especially interesting feature: that they know and proclaim the extreme difficulty of art.

And, indeed, a man must be very daring or foolish to write at all nowadays. And so many and such various masters of the craft, of such multifarious genius, what remains to be done that has not been done, or what to say that has not been said? Which of us all can boast of having written a page, a phrase, which is not to be found—or something very like it—in some other book? When we read, we who are so soaked in (French) literature that our whole body seems as it were a mere compound of words, do we ever light on a line, a thought, which is not familiar to us, or of which we have not had at least some vague forecast? [13]

The man who only tries to amuse his public by familiar methods, writes confidently, in his candid mediocrity, works intended only for the ignorant and idle crowd. But those who are conscious of the weight of centuries of past literature, whom nothing satisfies, whom everything disgusts because they dream of something better, to whom the bloom is off everything, and who always are impressed with the uselessness, the commonness of their own achievements—these come to regard literary art as a thing unattainable and mysterious, scarcely to be detected save in a few pages by the greatest masters.

A score of phrases suddenly discovered thrill us to the heart like a startling revelation; but the lines which follow are just like all other verse, the further flow of prose is like all other prose.

Men of genius, no doubt, escape this anguish and torment because they bear within themselves an irresistible creative power. They do not sit in judgment on themselves. The rest of us, who are no more than persevering and conscientious workers, can only contend against invincible discouragement by unremitting effort. [14]

Two men by their simple and lucid teaching gave me the strength to try again and again: Louis Bouilhet and Gustave Flaubert.

If I here speak of myself in connection with them, it is because their counsels, as summed up in a few lines, may prove useful to some young writers who may be less self-confident than most are when they make their *début* in print. Bouilhet, whom I first came to know somewhat intimately about two years before I gained the friendship of Flaubert, by dint of telling me that a hundred lines—or less—if they are without a flaw and contain the very essence of the talent and originality of even a second-rate man, are enough to establish an artist's reputation, made me understand that persistent toil and a thorough knowledge of the craft, might, in some happy hour of lucidity, power, and enthusiasm, by the fortunate occurrence of a subject in perfect concord with the tendency of our mind, lead to the production of a single work, short but as perfect as we can make it. Then I learned to see that the best-known writers have hardly ever left us more than one such volume; and that needful above all else is the good fortune which leads us to hit upon and discern, amid the multifarious matter which offers itself for selection, the subject which will absorb all our faculties, all that is of worth in us, all our artistic powers.

At a later date, Flaubert, whom I had occasionally met, took a fancy to me. I ventured to show him a few attempts. He read them kindly and replied: "I cannot tell whether you will have any talent. What you have brought me proves a certain intelligence; but never forget this, young man: talent—as Chateaubriand[1] says—is nothing but long patience. Go and work." [15]

[1] The idea did not originate with Chateaubriand.

I worked; and I often went to see him, feeling that he liked me, for he had taken to calling me, in jest, his disciple. For seven years I wrote verses, I wrote tales, I even wrote a villainous play. Nothing of all this remains. The master read it all; then, the next Sunday while we breakfasted together, he would give me his criticisms, driving into me by degrees two or three principles which sum up the drift of his long and patient exhortations: "If you have any originality," said he, "you must above all things bring it out; if you have not you must acquire it."

Talent is long patience.

Everything you want to express must be considered so long, and so attentively, as to enable you to find some aspect of it which no one has yet seen and expressed. There is an unexplored side to everything, because we are wont never to use our eyes but with the memory of what others before us have thought of the things we see. The smallest thing has something unknown in it; we must find it. To describe a blazing fire, a tree in a plain, we must stand face to face with that fire or that tree, till to us they are wholly unlike any other fire or tree. Thus we may become original.

Then, having established the truth that there are not in the whole world two grains of sand, two flies, two hands, or two noses absolutely alike, he would make me describe in a few sentences some person or object, in such a way as to define it exactly, and distinguish it from every other of the same race or species.

"When you pass a grocer sitting in his doorway," he would say, "a porter smoking his pipe, or a cab stand, show me that grocer and that porter, their attitude and their whole physical aspect, [16]

including, as indicated by the skill of the portrait, their whole moral nature, in such a way that I could never mistake them for any other grocer or porter; and by a single word give me to understand wherein one cab horse differs from fifty others before or behind it."

I have explained his notions of style at greater length in another place; they bear a marked relation to the theory of observation I have just laid down. Whatever the thing we wish to say, there is but one word to express it, but one verb to give it movement, but one adjective to qualify it. We must seek till we find this noun, this verb, and this adjective, and never be content with getting very near it, never allow ourselves to play tricks, even happy ones, or have recourse to sleights of language to avoid a difficulty. The subtlest things may be rendered and suggested by applying the hint conveyed in Boileau's line:

"D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir." "He taught the power of a word put in the right place."

There is no need for an eccentric vocabulary to formulate every shade of thought—the complicated, multifarious, and outlandish words which are put upon us nowadays in the name of artistic writing; but every modification of the value of a word by the place it fills must be distinguished with extreme clearness. Give us fewer nouns, verbs, and adjectives, with almost inscrutable shades of meaning, and let us have a greater variety of phrases, more variously constructed, ingeniously divided, full of sonority and learned rhythm. Let us strive to be admirable in style, rather than curious in collecting rare words. [17]

It is in fact more difficult to bend a sentence to one's will and make it express everything—even what it does not say, to fill it full of implications of covert and inexplicit suggestions, than to invent new expressions, or seek out in old and forgotten books all those which have fallen into disuse and lost their meaning, so that to us they are as a dead language.

The French tongue, to be sure, is a pure stream, which affected writers never have and never can trouble. Each age has flung into the limpid waters its pretentious archaisms and euphuisms, but nothing has remained on the surface to perpetuate these futile attempts and impotent efforts. It is the nature of the language to be clear, logical, and vigorous. It does not lend itself to weakness, obscurity, or corruption.

Those who describe without duly heeding abstract terms, those who make rain and hail fall on the *cleanliness* of the window panes, may throw stones at the simplicity of their brothers of the pen. The stones may indeed hit their brothers, who have a body, but will never hurt simplicity—which has none.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

LA GUILLETTE, ETRETAT, September, 1887.

PIERRE ET JEAN [19]

CHAPTER I

"Tschah!" exclaimed old Roland suddenly, after he had remained motionless for a quarter of an hour, his eyes fixed on the water, while now and again he very slightly lifted his line sunk in the sea.

Madame Roland, dozing in the stern by the side of Madame Rosémilly, who had been invited to join the fishing-party, woke up, and turning her head to look at her husband, said:

"Well, well! Gérome."

And the old fellow replied in a fury:

"They do not bite at all. I have taken nothing since noon. Only men should ever go fishing. Women always delay the start till it is too late."

His two sons, Pierre and Jean, who each held a line twisted round his forefinger, one to port and one to starboard, both began to laugh, and Jean remarked:

"You are not very polite to our guest, father."

M. Roland was abashed, and apologized.

"I beg your pardon, Madame Rosémilly, but that is just like me. I invite ladies because I like to be with them, and then, as soon as I feel the water beneath me, I think of nothing but the fish."

Madame Roland was now quite awake, and gazing with a softened look at the wide horizon of cliff and sea. [20]

"You have had good sport, all the same," she murmured.

But her husband shook his head in denial, though at the same time he glanced complacently at the basket where the fish caught by the three men were still breathing spasmodically, with a low

rustle of clammy scales and struggling fins, and dull, ineffectual efforts, gasping in the fatal air. Old Roland took the basket between his knees and tilted it up, making the silver heap of creatures slide to the edge that he might see those lying at the bottom, and their death-throes became more convulsive, while the strong smell of their bodies, a wholesome reek of brine, came up from the full depths of the creel. The old fisherman sniffed it eagerly, as we smell at roses, and exclaimed:

"Cristi! But they are fresh enough!" and he went on: "How many did you pull out, doctor?"

His eldest son, Pierre, a man of thirty, with black whiskers trimmed square like a lawyer's, his moustache and beard shaved away, replied:

"Oh, not many; three or four."

The father turned to the younger. "And you, Jean?" said he.

Jean, a tall fellow, much younger than his brother, fair, with a full beard, smiled and murmured:

"Much the same as Pierre—four or five."

Every time they told the same fib, which delighted father Roland. He had hitched his line round a row-lock, and folding his arms he announced:

"I will never again try to fish after noon. After ten in the morning it is all over. The lazy brutes will not bite; they are taking their siesta in the sun." And he looked round at the sea on all sides, [21] with the satisfied air of a proprietor.

He was a retired jeweler who had been led by an inordinate love of seafaring and fishing to fly from the shop as soon as he had made enough money to live in modest comfort on the interest of his savings. He retired to le Havre, bought a boat, and became an amateur skipper. His two sons, Pierre et Jean, had remained at Paris to continue their studies, and came for the holidays from time to time to share their father's amusements.

On leaving school, Pierre, the elder, five years older than Jean, had felt a vocation to various professions and had tried half a dozen in succession, but, soon disgusted with each in turn, he started afresh with new hopes. Medicine had been his last fancy, and he had set to work with so much ardor that he had just qualified after an unusually short course of study, by a special remission of time from the minister. He was enthusiastic, intelligent, fickle, but obstinate, full of Utopias and philosophical notions.

Jean, who was as fair as his brother was dark, as deliberate as his brother was vehement, as gentle as his brother was unforgiving, had quietly gone through his studies for the law and had just taken his diploma as a licentiate, at the time when Pierre had taken his in medicine. So they were now having a little rest at home, and both looked forward to settling at Havre if they could find a satisfactory opening.

But a vague jealousy, one of those dormant jealousies which grow up between brothers or sisters and slowly ripen till they burst, on the occasion of a marriage perhaps, or of some good fortune [22] happening to one of them, kept them on the alert in a sort of brotherly and non-aggressive animosity. They were fond of each other, it is true, but they watched each other. Pierre, five years old when Jean was born, had looked with the eyes of a little petted animal at that other little animal which had suddenly come to lie in his father's and mother's arms and to be loved and fondled by them. Jean, from his birth, had always been a pattern of sweetness, gentleness, and good temper, and Pierre had by degrees begun to chafe at everlastingly hearing the praises of this great lad whose sweetness in his eyes was indolence, whose gentleness was stupidity, and whose kindliness was blindness. His parents, whose dream for their sons was some respectable and undistinguished calling, blamed him for so often changing his mind, for his fits of enthusiasm, his abortive beginnings, and all his ineffectual impulses toward generous ideas and the liberal professions.

Since he had grown to manhood they no longer said in so many words: "Look at Jean and follow his example," but every time he heard them say "Jean did this—Jean does that," he understood their meaning and the hint the words conveyed.

Their mother, an orderly soul, a thrifty and rather sentimental woman of the middle class, with the soul of a soft-hearted book-keeper, was constantly quenching the little rivalries between her two big sons to which the petty events of their life in common gave rise day by day. Another little circumstance, too, just now disturbed her peace of mind, and she was in fear of some complication; for in the course of the winter, while her boys were finishing their studies, each in [23] his own line, she had made the acquaintance of a neighbor, Mme. Rosémilly, the widow of a captain of a merchantman who had died at sea two years before. The young widow—quite young, only three-and-twenty—a woman of strong intellect who knew life by instinct as the free animals do, as though she had seen, gone through, understood, and weighed every conceivable contingency, and judged them with a wholesome, strict, and benevolent mind, had fallen into the habit of calling to work or chat for an hour in the evening with these friendly neighbors, who would give her a cup of tea.

Father Roland, always goaded on by his seafaring craze, would question their new friend about the departed captain; and she would talk of him, and his voyages, and his old-world tales, without hesitation, like a resigned and reasonable woman who loves life and respects death.

The two sons on their return, finding the pretty widow quite at home in the house forthwith began to court her, less from any wish to charm her than from the desire to cut each other out.

Their mother, being practical and prudent, sincerely hoped that one of them might win the young widow, for she was rich; and then she would have liked that the other should not be grieved.

Mme. Rosémilly was fair, with blue eyes, a mass of light waving hair, fluttering at the least breath of wind, and an alert, daring, pugnacious little way with her, which did not in the least answer to the sober method of her mind.

She already seemed to like Jean best, attracted, no doubt, by an affinity of nature. This preference, however, she betrayed only by an almost imperceptible difference of voice and look [24] and also by occasionally asking his opinion. She seemed to guess that Jean's views would support her own, while those of Pierre must inevitably be different. When she spoke of the doctor's ideas on politics, art, philosophy, or morals, she would sometimes say: "Your crotchets." Then he would look at her with the cold gleam of an accuser drawing up an indictment against woman—all women, poor weak things.

Never till his sons came home had M. Roland invited her to join his fishing expeditions, nor had he ever taken his wife; for he liked to put off before daybreak, with his ally, Captain Beausire, a master mariner retired, whom he had first met on the quay at high tides and with whom he had struck up an intimacy, and the old sailor Papagris, known as Jean Bart, in whose charge the boat was left.

But one evening of the week before, as Mme. Rosémilly, who had been dining with them, remarked, "It must be great fun to go out fishing," the jeweler, flattered on his passion, and suddenly fired with the wish to impart it, to make a convert after the manner of priests, exclaimed: "Would you like to come?"

"To be sure I should."

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

"Are you the woman to be ready to start at five in the morning?"

She exclaimed in horror:

"No, indeed: that is too much."

He was disappointed and chilled, suddenly doubting her true vocation. However, he said: [25]

"At what hour can you be ready?"

"Well—at nine?"

"Not before?"

"No, not before. Even that is very early."

The old fellow hesitated; he certainly would catch nothing, for when the sun has warmed the sea the fish bite no more; but the two brothers had eagerly pressed the scheme, and organized and arranged everything there and then.

So on the following Tuesday the *Pearl* had dropped anchor under the white rocks of Cape la Héve; they had fished till mid-day, then they had slept awhile, and then fished again without catching anything; and then it was that father Roland, perceiving, rather late, that all that Mme. Rosémilly really enjoyed and cared for was the sail on the sea, and seeing that his lines hung motionless, had uttered in a spirit of unreasonable annoyance, that vehement "Tschah!" which applied as much to the pathetic widow as to the creatures he could not catch.

Now he contemplated the spoil—his fish—with the joyful thrill of a miser; and seeing as he looked up at the sky that the sun was getting low: "Well, boys," said he, "suppose we turn homeward."

The young men hauled in their lines, coiled them up, cleaned the hooks and stuck them into corks, and sat waiting.

Roland stood up to look out like a captain:

"No wind," said he. "You will have to pull, young 'uns."

And suddenly extending one arm to the northward, he exclaimed:

"Here comes the packet from Southampton."

Away over the level sea, spread out like a blue sheet, vast and sheeny and shot with flame and [26] gold, an inky cloud was visible against the rosy sky in the quarter to which he pointed, and below it they could make out the hull of the steamer, which looked tiny at such a distance. And to the southward other wreaths of smoke, numbers of them, could be seen, all converging toward the Havre pier, now scarcely visible as a white streak with the light-house, upright, like a horn, at the end of it.

Roland asked: "Is not the *Normandie* due to-day?" And Jean replied:

"Yes, to-day."

"Give me my glass. I fancy I see her out there."

The father pulled out the copper tube, adjusted it to his eye, sought the speck, and then, delighted to have seen it, exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, there she is. I know her two funnels. Would you like to look, Mme. Rosémilly?"

She took the telescope and directed it toward the Atlantic horizon, without being able, however, to find the vessel, for she could distinguish nothing—nothing but blue, with a colored halo round it, a circular rainbow—and then all manner of queer things, winking eclipses which made her feel sick.

She said as she returned the glass:

"I never could see with that thing. It used to put my husband in quite a rage; he would stand for hours at the window watching the ships pass."

Old Roland, much put out, retorted:

"Then it must be some defect in your eye, for my glass is a very good one."

Then he offered it to his wife.

"Would you like to look?" [27]

"No, thank you. I know beforehand that I could not see through it."

Mme. Roland, a woman of eight-and-forty, but who did not look it, seemed to be enjoying this excursion and this waning day more than any of the party.

Her chestnut hair was only just beginning to show streaks of white. She had a calm, reasonable face, a kind and happy way with her which it was a pleasure to see. Her son Pierre was wont to say that she knew the value of money, but this did not hinder her from enjoying the delights of dreaming. She was fond of reading, of novels and poetry, not for their value as works of art, but for the sake of the tender melancholy mood they would induce in her. A line of poetry, often but a poor one, often a bad one, would touch the little chord, as she expressed it, and give her the sense of some mysterious desire almost realized. And she delighted in these faint emotions which brought a little flutter to her soul, otherwise as strictly kept as a ledger.

Since settling at Havre she had become perceptibly stouter, and her figure, which had been very supple and slight, had grown heavier.

This day on the sea had been delightful to her. Her husband, without being brutal, was rough with her, as a man who is the despot of his shop is apt to be rough, without anger or hatred; to such men to give an order is to swear. He controlled himself in the presence of strangers, but in private he let loose and gave himself terrible vent, though he was himself afraid of every one. She, in sheer horror of the turmoil, of scenes, of useless explanations, always gave way and never asked for anything; for a very long time she had not ventured to ask Roland to take her out in the [28] boat. So she had joyfully hailed this opportunity, and was keenly enjoying the rare and new pleasure.

From the moment when they started she surrendered herself completely body and soul, to the soft, gliding motion over the waves. She was not thinking; her mind was not wandering through either memories or hopes; it seemed to her as though her heart, like her body, was floating on something soft and liquid and delicious which rocked and lulled it.

When their father gave the word to return, "Come, take your places at the oars!" she smiled to see her sons, her two great boys, take off their jackets and roll up their shirt-sleeves on their bare arms.

Pierre, who was the nearest to the two women, took the stroke oar, Jean the other, and they sat waiting till the skipper should say: "Give way!" For he insisted on everything being done according to strict rule.

Both at once, as if by a single effort, they dipped the oars and lay back, pulling with all their might, and then a struggle began to display their strength. They had come out easily, under sail, but the breeze had died away, and the masculine pride of the two brothers was suddenly aroused by the prospect of measuring their powers. When they went out alone with their father they plied the oars without any steering, for Roland would be busy getting the lines ready, while he kept a lookout in the boat's course, guiding it by a sign or a word: "Easy, Jean, and you, Pierre, put your back into it." Or he would say, "Now, then, number one; come, number two—a little elbow grease." Then the one who had been dreaming pulled harder, the one who had got excited eased [29] down, and the boat's head came round.

But to-day they meant to display their biceps. Pierre's arms were hairy, somewhat lean but sinewy; Jean's were round and white and rosy, and the knot of muscles moved under the skin.

At first Pierre had the advantage. With his teeth set, his brow knit, his legs rigid, his hands clenched on the oar, he made it bend from end to end at every stroke, and the *Pearl* was veering landward. Father Roland, sitting in the bows, so as to leave the stern seat to the two women,

wasted his breath shouting, "Easy, number one; pull harder, number two!" Pierre pulled harder in his frenzy, and "number two" could not keep time with his wild stroke.

At last the skipper cried: "Stop her!" The two oars were lifted simultaneously, and then by his father's orders Jean pulled alone for a few minutes. But from that moment he had it all his own way; he grew eager and warmed to his work, while Pierre, out of breath and exhausted by his first vigorous spurt, was lax and panting. Four times running father Roland made them stop while the elder took breath, so as to get the boat into her right course again. Then the doctor humiliated and fuming, his forehead dropping with sweat, his cheeks white, stammered out:

"I cannot think what has come over me; I have a stitch in my side. I started very well, but it has pulled me up."

Jean asked: "Shall I pull alone with both oars for a time?"

"No, thanks, it will go off." [30]

And their mother, somewhat vexed, said:

"Why, Pierre, what rhyme or reason is there in getting in such a state. You are not a child."

And he shrugged his shoulders and set to once more.

Mme. Rosémilly pretended not to see, not to understand, not to hear. Her fair head went back with an engaging little jerk every time the boat moved forward, making the fine wayward hairs flutter about her temples.

But father Roland presently called out:

"Look, the *Prince Albert* is catching us up!"

They all looked round. Long and low in the water, with her two raking funnels and two yellow paddle-boxes like two round cheeks, the Southampton packet came plowing on at full steam, crowded with passengers under open parasols. Its hurrying, noisy paddle-wheels beating up the water, which fell again in foam, gave it an appearance of haste as of a courier pressed for time, and the upright stem cut through the water, throwing up two thin translucent waves which glided off along the hull.

When it had come quite near the *Pearl*, father Roland lifted his hat, the ladies shook their handkerchiefs, and half a dozen parasols eagerly waved on board the steamboat responded to this salute as she went on her way, leaving behind her a few broad undulations on the still and glassy surface of the sea.

There were other vessels, each with its smoky cap, coming in from every part of the horizon toward the short white jetty, which swallowed them up, one after another, like a mouth. And the fishing barks and lighter craft with broad sails and slender masts, stealing across the sky in tow of inconspicuous tugs, were coming in, faster and slower, toward the devouring ogre, who from [31] time to time seemed to have had a surfeit, and spewed out to the open sea another fleet of steamers, brigs, schooners, and three-masted vessels with their top-weight of tangled antlers. The hurrying steam-ships flew off to the right and left over the smooth bosom of the ocean, while sailing vessels, cast off by the pilot-tugs which had hauled them out, lay motionless, dressing themselves from the mainmast to the fore-top in canvas, white or brown, and ruddy in the setting sun.

Mme. Roland, with her eyes half-shut, murmured: "Good heavens, how beautiful the sea is!"

And Mme. Rosémilly replied with a long sigh, which, however, had no sadness in it:

"Yes, but it is sometimes very cruel, all the same."

Roland exclaimed:

"Look, there is the *Normandie* just going in. A big ship, isn't she?"

Then he described the coast opposite, far, far away, on the other side of the mouth of the Seine—that mouth extended over twenty kilometers, said he. He pointed out Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the little river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados which make the coast unsafe as far as Cherbourg. Then he enlarged on the question of the sand banks in the Seine, which shift at every tide so that the pilots of Quillebœuf are at fault if they do not survey the channel every day. He bid them notice how the town of Havre divided Upper from Lower Normandy. In Lower Normandy the shore sloped down to the sea in pasture-lands, fields, and meadows. The coast of Upper Normandy, on the contrary, was steep, a high cliff, ravined, cleft [32] and towering, forming an immense white rampart all the way to Dunkirk, while in each hollow a village or a port lay hidden: Etretat, Fécamp, Saint-Valery, Tréport, Dieppe, and the rest.

The two women did not listen. Torpid with comfort and impressed by the sight of the ocean covered with vessels rushing to and fro like wild beasts about their den, they sat speechless, somewhat awed by the soothing and gorgeous sunset. Roland alone talked on without end; he was one of those whom nothing can disturb. Women, whose nerves are more sensitive, sometimes feel, without knowing why, that the sound of useless speech is as irritating as an insult.

Pierre and Jean, who had calmed down, were rowing slowly, and the *Pearl* was making for the harbor, a tiny thing among those huge vessels.

When they came alongside of the quay, Papagris, who was waiting there, gave his hand to the ladies to help them out, and they took the way into the town. A large crowd—the crowd which haunts the pier every day at high tide—was also drifting homeward. Mme. Roland and Mme. Rosémilly led the way, followed by the three men. As they went up the rue de Paris they stopped now and then in front of a milliner's or jeweler's shop, to look at a bonnet or an ornament; then after making their comments they went on again. In front of the Place de la Bourse Roland paused, as he did every day, to gaze at the docks full of vessels—the *Bassin du Commerce*, with other docks beyond, where the huge hulls lay side by side, closely packed in rows, four or five deep. And masts innumerable; along several kilometers of quays the endless masts, with their yards, poles, and rigging, gave this great gap in the heart of the town the look of a dead forest. [33] Above this leafless forest the gulls were wheeling, and watching to pounce, like a falling stone, on any scraps flung overboard; a sailor boy, fixing a pulley to a cross-beam, looked as if he had gone up there bird's-nesting.

"Will you dine with us without any sort of ceremony, just that we may end the day together?" said Mme. Roland to her friend.

"To be sure I will, with pleasure; I accept equally without ceremony. It would be dismal to go home and be alone this evening."

Pierre, who had heard, and who was beginning to be restless under the young woman's indifference, muttered to himself: "Well, the widow is taking root now, it would seem." For some days past he had spoken of her as "the widow." The word, harmless in itself, irritated Jean merely by the tone given to it, which to him seemed spiteful and offensive.

The three men spoke not another word till they reached the threshold of their own house. It was a narrow one, consisting of a ground-floor and two floors above, in the rue Belle-Normande. The maid, Joséphine, a girl of nineteen, a rustic servant-of-all-work at low wages, gifted to excess with the startled, animal expression of a peasant, opened the door, went upstairs at her master's heels to the drawing-room, which was on the first floor, and then said:

"A gentleman called—three times."

Old Roland, who never spoke to her without shouting and swearing, cried out:

"Who do you say called, in the devil's name?"

She never winced at her master's roaring voice, and replied: [34]

"A gentleman from the lawyer's."

"What lawyer?"

"Why M'sieu' Canu—who else?"

"And what did this gentleman say?"

"That M'sieu' Canu will call in himself in the course of the evening."

Maître Lecanu was M. Roland's lawyer, and in a way his friend, managing his business for him. For him to send word that he would call in the evening, something urgent and important must be in the wind; and the four Rolands looked at each other, disturbed by the announcement as folks of small fortune are wont to be at any intervention of a lawyer, with its suggestions of contracts, inheritance, law-suits—all sorts of desirable or formidable contingencies. The father, after a few moments of silence, muttered:

"What on earth can it mean?"

Mme. Rosémilly began to laugh.

"Why, a legacy, of course. I am sure of it. I bring good luck."

But they did not expect the death of any one who might leave them anything.

Mme. Roland who had a good memory for relationships, began to think over all their connections on her husband's side and on her own, to trace up pedigrees and the ramifications of cousinship.

Before even taking off her bonnet she said:

"I say, father" (she called her husband "Father" at home, and sometimes "Monsieur Roland" before strangers), "tell me, do you remember who it was that Joseph Lebru married for the second time?"

"Yes—a little girl named Dumenil, stationer's daughter." [35]

"Had they any children?"

"I should think so! four or five at least."

"Not from that quarter, then."

She was quite eager already in her search; she caught at the hope of some added ease dropping

from the sky. But Pierre, who was very fond of his mother, who knew her to be somewhat visionary and feared she might be disappointed, a little grieved, a little saddened if the news were bad instead of good, checked her:

"Do not get excited, mother; there is no rich American uncle. For my part I should sooner fancy that it is about a marriage for Jean."

Every one was surprised at the suggestion, and Jean was a little ruffled by his brother's having spoken of it before Madame Rosémilly.

"And why for me rather than for you? The hypothesis is very disputable. You are the elder; you, therefore, would be the first to be thought of. Besides, I do not wish to marry."

Pierre smiled sneeringly:

"Are you in love, then?"

And the other, much put out, retorted:

"Is it necessary that a man should be in love because he does not care to marry yet?"

"Ah, there you are! That 'yet' sets it right; you are waiting."

"Granted that I am waiting, if you will have it so."

But old Roland who had been listening and cogitating, suddenly hit upon the most probable solution.

"Bless me! what fools we are to be racking our brains. Maître Lecanu is our very good friend; he knows that Pierre is looking out for a medical partnership and Jean for a lawyer's office, and he has found something to suit one of you." [36]

This was so obvious and likely that every one accepted it.

"Dinner is ready," said the maid. And they all hurried off to their rooms to wash their hands before sitting down to table.

Ten minutes after they were at dinner in the little dining-room on the ground-floor.

At first they were silent; but presently Roland began again in amazement at this lawyer's visit.

"For after all, why did he not write? Why should he have sent his clerk three times? Why is he coming himself?"

Pierre thought it quite natural.

"An immediate decision is required, no doubt; and perhaps there are certain confidential conditions which it does not do to put into writing."

Still, they were all puzzled, and all four a little annoyed at having invited a stranger, who would be in the way of their discussing and deciding on what should be done.

They had just gone upstairs again when the lawyer was announced. Roland flew to meet him:

"Good-evening, my dear Maître," said he, giving his visitor the title which in France is the official prefix to the name of every lawyer.

Mme. Rosémilly rose.

"I am going," she said. "I am very tired."

A faint attempt was made to detain her; but she would not consent, and went home without either of the three men offering to escort her as they always had done. [37]

Mme. Roland did the honors eagerly to their visitor.

"A cup of coffee, Monsieur?"

"No, thank you. I have this moment done dinner."

"A cup of tea, then?"

"Thank you, I will not refuse presently. First we must attend to business."

The total silence which succeeded this remark was broken only by the regular ticking of the clock, and below stairs the clatter of saucepans which the girl was cleaning—too stupid even to listen at the door.

The lawyer went on:

"Did you, in Paris, know a certain M. Maréchal—Léon Maréchal?"

M. and Mme. Roland both exclaimed at once: "I should think so!"

"He was a friend of yours?"

Roland replied: "Our best friend, monsieur, but a fanatic for Paris; never to be got away from the

boulevard. He was head clerk in the exchequer office. I have never seen him since I left the capital, and latterly we had ceased writing to each other. When people are far apart, you know—"

The lawyer gravely put in:

"M. Maréchal is deceased."

Both man and wife responded with the little movement of pained surprise, genuine or false, but always ready, with which such news is received.

Maître Lecanu went on:

"My colleague in Paris has just communicated to me the main item of his will, by which he makes your son Jean—Monsieur Jean Roland—his sole legatee."

They were all too much amazed to utter a single word. Mme. Roland was the first to control her [38]
emotions and stammered out:

"Good heavens! Poor Léon—our poor friend! Dear me! Dear me! Dead!"

The tears started to her eyes, a woman's silent tears, drops of grief from her very soul, which trickle down her cheeks and seem so very sad, being so clear. But Roland was thinking less of the loss than of the prospect announced. Still, he dared not at once inquire into the clauses of the will and the amount of the fortune, so to work around to these interesting facts he asked.

"And what did he die of, poor Maréchal?"

Maître Lecanu did not know in the least.

"All I know is," said he, "that, dying without any direct heirs, he has left the whole of his fortune—about twenty thousand francs a year ($3,840) in three per cents—to your second son, whom he has known from his birth up, and judges worthy of the legacy. If M. Jean should refuse the money, it is to go to the foundling hospitals."

Old Roland could not conceal his delight and exclaimed:

"Sacristi! It is the thought of a kind heart. And if I had no heir I would not have forgotten him; he was a true friend."

The lawyer smiled.

"I was very glad," he said, "to announce the event to you myself. It is always a pleasure to be the bearer of good news."

It had not struck him that this good news was that of the death of a friend, of Roland's best friend; and the old man himself had suddenly forgotten the intimacy he had just spoken of with so much conviction. [39]

Only Mme. Roland and her sons still looked mournful. She, indeed, was still shedding a few tears, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, which she then pressed to her lips to smother her deep sobs.

The doctor murmured:

"He was a good fellow, very affectionate. He often invited us to dine with him—my brother and me."

Jean, with wide-open, glittering eyes, laid his hand on his handsome fair beard, a familiar gesture with him, and drew his fingers down it to the tip of the last hairs, as if to pull it longer and thinner. Twice his lips parted to utter some decent remark, but after long meditation he could only say this:

"Yes, he was certainly fond of me. He would always embrace me when I went to see him."

But his father's thoughts had set off at a gallop—galloping round this inheritance to come; nay, already in hand; this money lurking behind the door which would walk in quite soon, to-morrow, at a word of consent.

"And there is no possible difficulty in the way?" he asked. "No lawsuit—no one to dispute it?"

Maître Lecanu seemed quite easy.

"No; my Paris correspondent states that everything is quite clear. M. Jean has only to sign his acceptance."

"Good. Then—then the fortune is quite clear?"

"Perfectly clear."

"All the necessary formalities have been gone through?"

"All."

Suddenly the old jeweler had an impulse of shame—obscure, instinctive, and fleeting; shame of [40]
his eagerness to be informed, and he added:

"You understand when I ask all these questions so immediately it is to save my son disagreeables which he might not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassing liabilities, what not! And a legatee finds himself in an inextricable thorn bush. After all, I am not the heir—but I think first of the little 'un."

They were accustomed to speak of Jean among themselves as the "little one," though he was much bigger than Pierre.

Suddenly Mme. Roland seemed to wake from a dream, to recall some remote fact, a thing almost forgotten that she had heard long ago, and of which she was not altogether sure. She inquired doubtingly:

"Were you not saying that our poor friend Maréchal had left his fortune to my little Jean?"

"Yes, madame."

And she went on simply:

"I am much pleased to hear it; it proves that he was attached to us."

Roland had risen.

"And would you wish, my dear sir, that my son should at once sign his acceptance?"

"No—no, M. Roland. To-morrow, at my office to-morrow, at two o'clock, if that suits you."

"Yes, to be sure—yes, indeed, I should think so."

Then Mme. Roland, who had also risen and who was smiling after her tears, went up to the lawyer, and laying her hand on the back of his chair while she looked at him with the pathetic eyes of a grateful mother, she said:

"And now for that cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu?" [41]

"Now I will accept it with pleasure, madame."

The maid, on being summoned, brought in first some dry biscuits in deep tin boxes, those crisp, insipid English cakes which seem to have been made for a parrot's beak, and soldered into metal cases for a voyage round the world. Next she fetched some little gray linen doilies, folded square, those tea-napkins which in thrifty families never get washed. A third time she came in with the sugar basin and cups; then she departed to heat the water. They sat waiting.

No one could talk; they had too much to think about and nothing to say. Mme. Roland alone attempted a few commonplace remarks. She gave an account of the fishing excursion, and sang the praises of the *Pearl* and of Mme. Rosémilly.

"Charming! charming!" the lawyer said again and again.

Roland, leaning against the marble mantelshelf as if it were winter and the fire burning, with his hands in his pockets and his lips puckered for a whistle, could not keep still, tortured by the invincible desire to give vent to his delight. The two brothers, in two armchairs that matched, one on each side of the center-table, stared in front of them, in similar attitudes full of dissimilar expression.

At last the tea appeared. The lawyer took a cup, sugared it, and drank it, after having crumbled into it a little cake which was too hard to crunch. Then he rose, shook hands, and departed.

"Then it is understood," repeated Roland. "To-morrow, at your place, at two?"

"Quite so. To-morrow, at two."

Jean had not spoken a word. [42]

When their guest had gone, silence fell again till father Roland clapped his two hands on his younger son's shoulders, crying:

"Well, you devilish lucky dog! You don't embrace me!"

Then Jean smiled. He embraced his father, saying:

"It had not struck me as indispensable."

The old man was beside himself with glee. He walked about the room, strummed on the furniture with his clumsy nails, turned about on his heels, and kept saying:

"What luck! what luck! Now, that is really what I call luck!"

Pierre asked:

"Then you used to know this Maréchal well?"

And his father replied:

"I believe you! Why, he used to spend every evening at our house. Surely you remember he used to fetch you from school on half-holidays, and often took you back again after dinner. Why, the very day when Jean was born it was he who went for the doctor. He had been breakfasting with

us when your mother was taken ill. Of course we knew at once what it meant, and he set off post-haste. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that because we had a good laugh over it afterward. It is very likely that he may have thought of that when he was dying, and as he had no heir he may have said to himself: 'I remember helping to bring that youngster into the world, so I will leave him my savings.'"

Mme. Roland, sunk in a deep chair, seemed lost in reminiscences once more. She murmured, as though she were thinking aloud: [43]

"Ah, he was a good friend, very devoted, very faithful, a rare soul in these days."

Jean got up.

"I shall go out for a little walk," he said.

His father was surprised and tried to keep him; they had much to talk about, plans to be made, decisions to be formed. But the young man insisted, declaring that he had an engagement. Besides, there would be time for settling everything before he came into possession of his inheritance. So he went away, for he wished to be alone to reflect. Pierre, on his part, said that he too was going out, and after a few minutes followed his brother.

As soon as he was alone with his wife, father Roland took her in his arms, kissed her a dozen times on each cheek, and replying to a reproach she had often brought against him, said:

"You see, my dearest, it would have been of no good to stay any longer in Paris and work for the children till I dropped, instead of coming here to recruit my health, since fortune drops on us from the skies."

She was quite serious.

"It drops from the skies on Jean," she said. "But Pierre?"

"Pierre? But he is a doctor; he will make plenty of money; besides, his brother will surely do something for him."

"No, he would not take it. Besides, this legacy is for Jean, only for Jean. Pierre will find himself at a great disadvantage."

The old fellow seemed perplexed: "Well, then, we will leave him rather more in our will."

"No; that again would not be quite just." [44]

"Drat it all!" he exclaimed. "What do you want me to do in the matter? You always hit on a whole heap of disagreeable ideas. You must spoil all my pleasures. Well, I am going to bed. Good-night. All the same, I call it good luck, jolly good luck!"

And he went off, delighted in spite of everything, and without a word of regret for the friend so generous in his death.

Mme. Roland sat thinking again, in front of the lamp which was burning out.

CHAPTER II

As soon as he got out, Pierre made his way to the Rue de Paris, the high-street of Havre, brightly lighted up, lively and noisy. The rather sharp air of the seacoast kissed his face, and he walked slowly, his stick under his arm and his hands behind his back. He was ill at ease, oppressed, out of heart, as one is after hearing unpleasant tidings. He was not distressed by any definite thought, and he would have been puzzled to account, on the spur of the moment, for this dejection of spirit and heaviness of limb. He was hurt somewhere, without knowing where; somewhere within him there was a pin-point of pain—one of these almost imperceptible wounds which we cannot lay a finger on, but which incommode us, tire us, depress us, irritate us—a slight and occult pang, as it were a small seed of distress.

When he reached the square in front of the theater, he was attracted by the lights in the Café Tortoni, and slowly bent his steps to the dazzling façade; but just as he was going in he reflected that he would meet friends there and acquaintances—people he would be obliged to talk to; and [45] fierce repugnance surged up in him for this commonplace good-fellowship over coffee cups and liqueur glasses. So, retracing his steps, he went back to the high-street leading to the harbor.

"Where shall I go?" he asked himself, trying to think of a spot he liked which would agree with his frame of mind. He could not think of one, for being alone made him feel fractious, yet he could not bear to meet any one. As he came out on the Grand Quay he hesitated once more; then he turned toward the pier; he had chosen solitude.

Going close by a bench on the breakwater he sat down, tired already of walking and out of humor with his stroll before he had taken it.

He said to himself: "What is the matter with me this evening?" And he began to search in his memory for what vexation had crossed him, as we question a sick man to discover the cause of his fever.

His mind was at once irritable and sober; he got excited, then he reasoned, approving or blaming

his impulses; but in time primitive nature at last proved the stronger; the sensitive man always had the upper hand over the intellectual man. So he tried to discover what had induced this irascible mood, this craving to be moving without wanting anything, this desire to meet some one for the sake of differing from him, and at the same time this aversion for the people he might see and the things they might say to him.

And then he put the question to himself, "Can it be Jean's inheritance?"

Yes, it was certainly possible. When the lawyer had announced the news he had felt his heart beat a little faster. For, indeed, one is not always master of one's self; there are sudden and [46] pertinacious emotions against which a man struggles in vain.

He fell into meditation on the physiological problem of the impression produced on the instinctive element in man, and giving rise to a current of painful or pleasurable sensations diametrically opposed to those which the thinking man desires, aims at, and regards as right and wholesome, when he has risen superior to himself by the cultivation of his intellect. He tried to picture to himself the frame of mind of a son who has inherited a vast fortune, and who, thanks to that wealth, may now know many long-wished-for delights which the avarice of his father had prohibited—a father, nevertheless, beloved and regretted.

He got up and walked on to the end of the pier. He felt better, and glad to have understood, to have detected himself, to have unmasked *the other* which lurks in us.

"Then I was jealous of Jean," thought he. "That is really vilely mean. And I am sure of it now, for the first idea which came into my head was that he would marry Madame Rosémilly. And yet I am not in love myself with that priggish little goose, who is just the woman to disgust a man with good sense and good conduct. So it is the most gratuitous jealousy, the very essence of jealousy, which is merely because it is! I must keep an eye on that!"

By this time he was in front of the flagstaff, whence the depth of water in the harbor is signaled, and he struck a match to read the list of vessels signaled in the roadstead and coming in with the next high tide. Ships were due from Brazil, from La Plata, from Chili and Japan, two Danish brigs, [47] a Norwegian schooner, and a Turkish steamship—which startled Pierre as much as if it had read a Swiss steamship; and in a whimsical vision he pictured a great vessel crowded with men in turbans climbing the shrouds in loose trousers.

"How absurd," thought he. "But the Turks are a maritime people, too."

A few steps further on he stopped again, looking out at the roads. On the right, above Sainte-Adresse, the two electric lights of Cape la Hève, like monstrous twin Cyclops, shot their long and powerful beams across the sea. Starting from two neighboring centers, the two parallel shafts of light, like the colossal tails of two comets, fell in a straight and endless slope from the top of the cliff to the uttermost horizon. Then, on the two piers, two more lights, the children of these giants, marked the entrance to the harbor; and far away on the other side of the Seine others were in sight, many others, steady or winking, flashing or revolving, opening and shutting like eyes—the eyes of the ports—yellow, red, and green, watching the night-wrapped sea covered with ships; the living eyes of the hospitable shore saying, merely by the mechanical and regular movement of their eyelids: "I am here. I am Trouville; I am Honfleur; I am the Audemer River." And high above all the rest, so high that from this distance it might be taken for a planet, the airy light-house of Etouville showed the way to Rouen across the sand banks at the mouth of the great river.

Out on the deep water, the limitless water, darker than the sky, stars seemed to have fallen here and there. They twinkled in the night haze, small, close to shore or far away—white, red, and green, too. Most of them were motionless; some, however, seemed to be scudding onward. These [48] were the lights of the ships at anchor or moving about in search of moorings.

Just at this moment the moon rose behind the town; and it, too, looked like some huge, divine pharos lighted up in the heavens to guide the countless fleet of stars in the sky. Pierre murmured, almost speaking aloud: "Look at that! And we let our bile rise for two-pence!"

On a sudden, close to him, in the wide, dark ditch between the two piers, a shadow stole up, a large shadow of fantastic shape. Leaning over the granite parapet, he saw that a fishing-boat had glided in, without the sound of a voice or the splash of a ripple, or the plunge of an oar, softly borne in by its broad, tawny sail spread to the breeze from the open sea.

He thought to himself: "If one could but live on board that boat, what peace it would be—perhaps!"

And then a few steps further again, he saw a man sitting at the very end of the breakwater.

A dreamer, a lover, a sage—a happy or a desperate man? Who was it? He went forward, curious to see the face of this lonely individual, and he recognized his brother.

"What, is it you, Jean?"

"Pierre! You? What has brought you here?"

"I came out to get some fresh air. And you?"

Jean began to laugh.

"I too came out for fresh air." And Pierre sat down by his brother's side.

"Lovely—isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, lovely." [49]

He understood from the tone of voice that Jean had not looked at anything. He went on:

"For my part, whenever I come here I am seized with a wild desire to be off with all those boats, to the north or the south. Only to think that all those little sparks out there have just come from the uttermost ends of the earth, from the lands of great flowers and beautiful olive or copper colored girls, the lands of humming-birds, of elephants, of roaming lions, of negro kings, from all the lands which are like fairy tales to us who no longer believe in the White Cat or the Sleeping Beauty. It would be awfully jolly to be able to treat one's self to an excursion out there; but, then, it would cost a great deal of money, no end—"

He broke off abruptly, remembering that his brother had that money now; and released from care, released from laboring for his daily bread, free, unfettered, happy, and light-hearted, he might go whither he listed, to find the fair-haired Swedes or the brown damsels of Havana. And then one of those involuntary flashes which were common with him, so sudden and swift that he could neither anticipate them, nor stop them, nor qualify them, communicated, as it seemed to him, from some second, independent, and violent soul, shot through his brain.

"Bah! He is too great a simpleton; he will marry that little Rosémilly." He was standing up now. "I will leave you to dream of the future. I want to be moving." He grasped his brother's hand and added in a heavy tone:

"Well, my dear old boy, you are a rich man. I am very glad to have come upon you this evening to [50] tell you how pleased I am about it, how truly I congratulate you, and how much I care for you."

Jean, tender and soft-hearted, was deeply touched.

"Thank you, my good brother—thank you!" he stammered.

And Pierre turned away with his slow step, his stick under his arm, and his hands behind his back.

Back in the town again, he once more wondered what he should do, being disappointed of his walk and deprived of the company of the sea by his brother's presence. He had an inspiration. "I will go and take a glass of liqueur with old Marowsko," and he went off toward the quarter of the town known as Ingouville.

He had known old Marowsko—*le père Marowsko*, he called him—in the hospitals in Paris. He was a Pole, an old refugee, it was said, who had gone through terrible things out there, and who had come to ply his calling as a chemist and druggist in France after passing a fresh examination. Nothing was known of his early life, and all sorts of legends had been current among the indoor and outdoor patients and afterwards among his neighbors. This reputation as a terrible conspirator, a nihilist, a regicide, a patriot ready for anything and everything, who had escaped death by a miracle, had bewitched Pierre Roland's lively and bold imagination; he had made friends with the old Pole, without, however, having ever extracted from him any revelation as to his former career. It was owing to the young doctor that this worthy had come to settle at Havre, counting on the large custom which the rising practitioner would secure him. Meanwhile he lived very poorly in his little shop, selling medicines to the small tradesmen and workmen in his part of [51] the town.

Pierre often went to see him and chat with him for an hour after dinner, for he liked Marowsko's calm look and rare speech, and attributed great depth to his long spells of silence.

A single gas-burner was alight over the counter crowded with phials. Those in the window were not lighted, from motives of economy. Behind the counter, sitting on a chair with his legs stretched out and crossed, an old man, quite bald, with a large beak of a nose which, as a prolongation of his hairless forehead, gave him a melancholy likeness to a parrot, was sleeping soundly, his chin resting on his breast. He woke at the sound of the shop-bell, and recognizing the doctor, came forward to meet him, holding out both hands.

His black frock coat, streaked with stains of acids and syrups, was much too wide for his lean little person, and looked like a shabby old cassock; and the man spoke with a strong Polish accent which gave a childlike character to his thin voice, the lisping note and intonations of a young thing learning to speak.

Pierre sat down, and Marowsko asked him: "What news, dear doctor?"

"None. Everything as usual, everywhere."

"You do not look very gay this evening."

"I am not often gay."

"Come, come, you must shake that off. Will you try a glass of liqueur?"

"Yes, I do not mind."

"Then I will give you something new to try. For these two months I have been trying to extract

something from currants, of which only a syrup has been made hitherto—well, and I have done it. [52]
I have invented a very good liqueur—very good indeed; very good."

And quite delighted, he went to a cupboard, opened it, and picked out a bottle which he brought forth. He moved and did everything in jerky gestures, always incomplete; he never quite stretched out his arm, nor quite put out his legs; nor made any broad and definite movements. His ideas seemed to be like his actions; he suggested them, promised them, sketched them, hinted at them, but never fully uttered them.

And indeed, his great end in life seemed to be the concoction of syrups and liqueurs. "A good syrup or a good liqueur is enough to make a fortune," he would often say.

He had compounded hundreds of these sweet mixtures without ever succeeding in floating one of them. Pierre declared that Marowsko always reminded him of Marat.

Two little glasses were fetched out of the back shop and placed on the mixing-board. Then the two men scrutinized the color of the fluid by holding it up to the gas.

"A fine ruby," Pierre declared.

"Isn't it?" Marowsko's old parrot-face beamed with satisfaction.

The doctor tasted, smacked his lips, meditated, tasted again, meditated again, and spoke:

"Very good—capital; and quite new in flavor. It is a find, my dear fellow."

"Ah, really? Well, I am very glad."

Then Marowsko took counsel as to baptizing the new liqueur. He wanted to call it "Extract of currants," or else "*Fine Groseille*," or "*Grosélia*," or again "*Groséline*." Pierre did not approve of [53]
either of these names.

Then the old man had an idea:

"What you said just now would be very good, very good: 'Fine Ruby.'" But the doctor disputed the merit of this name, though it had originated with him. He recommended simply "Groseillette," which Marowsko thought admirable.

Then they were silent, and sat for some minutes without a word under the solitary gas-lamp. At last Pierre began, almost in spite of himself: "A queer thing has happened at home this evening. A friend of my father's, who is lately dead, has left his fortune to my brother."

The druggist did not at first seem to understand, but after thinking it over he hoped that the doctor had half the inheritance. When the matter was clearly explained to him he appeared surprised and vexed; and to express his dissatisfaction at finding that his young friend had been sacrificed, he said several times over:

"It will not look well."

Pierre, who was relapsing into nervous irritation, wanted to know what Marowsko meant by this phrase.

Why would it not look well? What was there to look badly in the fact that his brother had come into the money of a friend of the family?

But the cautious old man would not explain further.

"In such a case the money is left equally to the two brothers, and I tell you, it will not look well."

And the doctor, out of all patience, went away, returned to his father's house, and went to bed. For some time yet he could hear Jean moving softly about the adjoining room, and then, after [54]
drinking two glasses of water, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

The doctor awoke next morning firmly resolved to make his fortune. Several times already he had come to the same determination without following up the reality. At the outset of all his trials of some new career the hopes of rapidly acquired riches kept up his efforts and confidence, till the first obstacle, the first check, threw him into a fresh path. Snug in bed between the warm sheets, he lay meditating. How many medical men had become wealthy in quite a short time! All that was needed was a little knowledge of the world; for in the course of his studies he had learnt to estimate the most famous physicians, and he judged them all to be asses. He was certainly as good as they, if not better. If by any means he could secure a practice among the wealth and fashion of Havre, he could easily make a hundred thousand francs a year. And he calculated with great exactitude what his certain profits must be. He would go out in the mornings to visit his patients; at the very moderate average of ten a day, at twenty francs each, that would mount up to seventy-two thousand francs a year at least, or even seventy-five thousand; for ten patients was certainly below the mark. In the afternoon he would be at home to, say, another ten patients, at ten francs each—thirty-six thousand francs. Here, then, in round numbers, was an income of twenty thousand francs. Old patients, or friends whom he would charge only ten francs for a visit, or see at home for five, would perhaps make a slight reduction [55]
on this sum total, but consultations with other physicians and various incidental fees would make

up for that.

Nothing would be easier than to achieve this by skillful advertising remarks in the *Figaro* to the effect that the scientific faculty of Paris had their eye on him, and were interested in the cures effected by the modest young practitioner of Havre! And he would be richer than his brother, richer and more famous; and satisfied with himself, for he would owe his fortune solely to his own exertions; and liberal to his old parents, who would be justly proud of his fame. He would not marry, would not burden his life with a wife who would be in his way, but then he might make love. He felt so sure of success that he sprang out of bed as though to grasp it on the spot, and he dressed to go and search through the town for rooms to suit him.

Then, as he wandered about the streets, he reflected how slight are the causes which determine our actions. Any time these three weeks he might and ought to have come to this decision, which, beyond a doubt, the news of his brother's inheritance had abruptly given rise to.

He stopped before every door where a placard proclaimed that "fine apartments" or "handsome rooms" were to be let; announcements without an adjective he turned from with scorn. Then he inspected them with a lofty air, measuring the height of the rooms, sketching the plan in his note-book, with the passages, the arrangements of the exits, explaining that he was a medical man and had many visitors. He must have a broad and well-kept staircase; nor could he be any higher up than the first floor.

After having written down seven or eight addresses and scribbled two hundred notes, he got [56] home to breakfast a quarter of an hour too late.

In the hall he heard the clatter of plates. Then they had begun without him! Why? They were never wont to be so punctual. He was nettled and put out, for he was somewhat thin-skinned. As he went in Roland said to him:

"Come, Pierre, make haste, devil take you! You know we have to be at the lawyer's at two o'clock. This is not the day to be dawdling about."

Pierre sat down without replying, after kissing his mother and shaking hands with his father and brother; and he helped himself from the deep dish in the middle of the table to the cutlet which had been kept for him. It was cold and dry, probably the least tempting of them all. He thought that they might have left it on the hot plate till he came in, and not lose their heads so completely as to have forgotten their other son, their eldest.

The conversation, which his entrance had interrupted, was taken up again at the point where it had ceased.

"In your place," Mme. Roland was saying to Jean, "I will tell you what I should do at once. I should settle in handsome rooms so as to attract attention; I should rise on horseback and select one or two interesting cases to defend and make a mark in court. I would be a sort of amateur lawyer, and very select. Thank God you are out of all danger of want, and if you pursue a profession, it is, after all, only that you may not lose the benefit of your studies, and because a man ought never to sit idle."

Old Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed:

"Christi! In your place I should buy a nice yacht, a cutter on the build of our pilot-boats. I would [57] sail as far as Senegal in such a boat as that."

Pierre, in his turn, spoke his views. After all, said he, it was not his wealth which made the moral worth, the intellectual worth of a man. To a man of inferior mind it was only a means of degradation, while in the hands of a strong man it was a powerful lever. They, to be sure, were rare. If Jean were a really superior man, now that he could never want he might prove it. But then he must work a hundred times harder than he would have done in other circumstances. His business now must be not to argue for or against the widow and the orphan, and pocket his fees for every case he gained, but to become a really eminent legal authority, a luminary of the law. And he added in conclusion:

"If I were rich wouldn't I dissect no end of bodies!"

Father Roland shrugged his shoulders.

"That is all very fine," he said. "But the wisest way of life is to take it easy. We are not beasts of burden, but men. If you are born poor you must work; well, so much the worse; and you do work. But where you have dividends! You must be a flat if you grind yourself to death."

Pierre replied haughtily:

"Our notions differ. For my part, I respect nothing on earth but learning and intellect; everything else is beneath contempt."

Mme. Roland always tried to deaden the constant shocks between father and son; she turned the conversation, and began talking of a murder committed the week before at Bolbec Nointot. Their minds were immediately full of the circumstances under which the crime had been committed, and absorbed by the interesting horror, the attractive mystery of crime, which, however [58] commonplace, shameful, and disgusting, exercises a strange and universal fascination over the curiosity of mankind. Now and again, however, old Roland looked at his watch. "Come," said he,

"it is time to be going."

Pierre sneered.

"It is not yet one o'clock," he said. "It really was hardly worth while to condemn me to eat a cold cutlet."

"Are you coming to the lawyer's?" his mother asked.

"I? No. What for?" he replied dryly. "My presence is quite unnecessary."

Jean sat silent, as though he had no concern in the matter. When they were discussing the murder at Bolbec he, as a legal authority, had put forward some opinions and uttered some reflections on crime and criminals. Now he spoke no more; but the sparkle in his eye, the bright color in his cheeks, the very gloss of his beard seemed to proclaim his happiness.

When the family had gone, Pierre, alone once more, resumed his investigations in the apartments to let. After two or three hours spent in going up and down stairs, he at last found, in the Boulevard François, a pretty set of rooms; a spacious entresol with two doors on two different streets, two drawing-rooms, a glass corridor, where his patients while they waited, might walk among flowers, and a delightful dining-room with a bow-window looking out over the sea.

When it came to taking it, the terms—three thousand francs—pulled him up; the first quarter must be paid in advance, and he had nothing, not a penny to call his own. [59]

The little fortune his father had saved brought him in about eight thousand francs a year, and Pierre had often blamed himself for having placed his parents in difficulties by his long delay in deciding on a profession, by forfeiting his attempts and beginning fresh courses of study. So he went away, promising to send his answer within two days, and it occurred to him to ask Jean to lend him the amount of this quarter's rent, or even of a half-year, fifteen hundred francs, as soon as Jean should have come into possession.

"It will be a loan for a few months at most," he thought. "I shall repay him, very likely, before the end of the year. It is a simple matter, and he will be glad to do so much for me."

As it was not yet four o'clock, and he had nothing to do, absolutely nothing, he went to sit in the public gardens; and he remained a long time on a bench, without an idea in his brain, his eyes fixed on the ground, crushed by weariness amounting to distress.

And yet this was how he had been living all these days since his return home, without suffering so acutely from the vacuity of his existence and from inaction. How had he spent his time from rising in the morning till bed-time?

He had loafed on the pier at high tide, loafed in the streets, loafed in the cafés, loafed at Marowsko's, loafed everywhere. And on a sudden this life, which he had endured till now, had become odious, intolerable. If he had had any pocket-money he would have taken a carriage for a long drive in the country, along by the farm-ditches shaded by beech and elm trees; but he had to think twice of the cost of a glass of beer or a postage-stamp, and such an indulgence was out of his ken. It suddenly struck him how hard it was for a man of past thirty to be reduced to ask his [60] mother, with a blush, for a twenty-franc piece every now and then; and he muttered, as he scored the gravel with the ferrule of his stick:

"Christi, if I only had money!"

And again the thought of his brother's legacy came into his head like the sting of a wasp; but he drove it out indignantly, not choosing to allow himself to slip down that descent to jealousy.

Some children were playing about in the dusty paths. They were fair little things with long hair, and they were making little mounds of sand with the greatest gravity and careful attention, to crush them at once by stamping on them.

It was one of those gloomy days with Pierre when we pry into every corner of our souls and shake out every crease.

"All our endeavors are like the labors of those babies," thought he. And then he wondered whether the wisest thing in life were not to beget two or three of these little creatures and watch them grow up with complacent curiosity. A longing for marriage breathed on his soul. A man is not so lost when he is not alone. At any rate, he hears some one stirring at his side in hours of trouble or of uncertainty; and it is something only to be able to speak on equal terms to a woman when one is suffering.

Then he began thinking of women. He knew very little of them, never having had any but very transient connections as a medical student, broken off as soon as the month's allowance was spent, and renewed or replaced by another the following month. And yet there must be some very [61] kind, gentle, and comforting creatures among them. Had not his mother been the good sense and saving grace of his own home? How glad he would be to know a woman, a true woman.

He started up with a sudden determination to go and call on Mme. Rosémilly. But he promptly sat down again. He did not like that woman. Why not? She had too much vulgar and sordid common sense; besides, did she not seem to prefer Jean? Without confessing it to himself too bluntly, this preference had a great deal to do with his low opinion of the widow's intellect; for, though he loved his brother, he could not help thinking him somewhat mediocre and believing himself the

superior. However, he was not going to sit there till nightfall; and as he had done on the previous evening, he anxiously asked himself: "What am I going to do?"

At this moment he felt in his soul the need of a melting mood, of being embraced and comforted. Comforted—for what? He could not have put it into words; but he was in one of those hours of weakness and exhaustion when a woman's presence, a woman's kiss, the touch of a hand, the rustle of a petticoat, a soft look out of black or blue eyes, seem the one thing needful, there and then, to our heart. And the memory flashed upon him of a little barmaid at a beer-house, whom he had walked home with one evening, and seen again from time to time.

So once more he rose, to go and drink a bock with the girl. What should he say to her? What would she say to him? Nothing, probably. But what did that matter? He would hold her hand for a [62] few seconds. She seemed to have a fancy for him. Why, then, did he not go to see her oftener?

He found her dozing on a chair in the beer-shop, which was almost deserted. Three men were drinking and smoking with their elbows on the oak tables; the book-keeper in her desk was reading a novel, while the master, in his shirt-sleeves, lay sound asleep on a bench.

As soon as she saw him the girl rose eagerly, and coming to meet him, said:

"Good-day, monsieur—how are you?"

"Pretty well; and you?"

"I—oh, very well. How scarce you make yourself."

"Yes. I have very little time to myself. I am a doctor, you know."

"Indeed! You never told me. If I had known that—I was out of sorts last week and I would have sent for you. What will you take?"

"A bock. And you?"

"I will have a bock too since you are game to treat me."

She had addressed him with the familiar *tu*, and continued to use it, as if the offer of a drink had tacitly conveyed permission. Then, sitting down opposite each other, they talked for a while. Every now and then she took his hand with the light familiarity of girls whose kisses are for sale, and looking at him with inviting eyes, she said:

"Why don't you come here oftener? I like you very much, sweetheart."

He was already disgusted with her; he saw how stupid she was, and common, smacking of low life. A woman, he told himself, should appear to us in a dream, or such a glory as may poetize her [63] vulgarity.

Next she asked him:

"You went by the other morning with a handsome fair man, wearing a big beard. Is he your brother?"

"Yes, he is my brother."

"Awfully good-looking."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed; and he looks like a man who enjoys life, too."

What strange craving impelled him on a sudden to tell this tavern-wench about Jean's legacy? Why should this thing, which he kept at arm's-length when he was alone, which he drove from him for fear of the torment it brought upon his soul, rise to his lips at this moment? And why did he allow it to overflow them, as if he needed once more to empty out his heart to some one, gorged as it was with bitterness?

He crossed his legs and said:

"He has wonderful luck, that brother of mine. He has just come into a legacy of twenty thousand francs a year."

She opened those covetous blue eyes of hers very wide.

"Oh! and who left him that? His grandmother or his aunt?"

"No. An old friend of my parents'."

"Only a friend! Impossible! And you—did he leave you nothing?"

"No. I knew him very slightly."

She sat thinking some minutes; then, with an odd smile on her lips, she said:

"Well, he is a lucky dog, that brother of yours, to have friends of that pattern. My word! and no [64] wonder he is so unlike you."

He longed to slap her, without knowing why; and he asked with pinched lips: "And what do you

mean by saying that?"

She had put on a stolid, innocent face.

"O—h, nothing. I mean he has better luck than you."

He tossed a franc piece on the table and went out.

Now he kept repeating the phrase: "No wonder he is so unlike you."

What had her thought been, what had been her meaning under those words? There was certainly some malice, some spite, something shameful in it. Yes, that hussy must have fancied, no doubt, that Jean was Maréchal's son. The agitation which came over him at the notion of this suspicion cast at his mother was so violent that he stood still, looking about him for some place where he might sit down. In front of him was another café. He went in, took a chair, and as the waiter came up, "A bock," he said.

He felt his heart beating, his skin was goose-flesh. And then the recollection flashed upon him of what Marowsko had said the evening before. "It will not look well." Had he had the same thought, the same suspicion as this baggage? Hanging his head over the glass, he watched the white froth as the bubbles rose and burst, asking himself: "Is it possible that such a thing should be believed?"

But the reasons which might give rise to this horrible doubt in other men's minds now struck him, one after another, as plain, obvious, and exasperating. That a childless old bachelor should leave his fortune to a friend's two sons was the most simple and natural thing in the world; but [65] that he should leave the whole of it to one alone—of course people would wonder, and whisper, and end by smiling. How was it that he had not foreseen this, that his father had not felt it? How was it that his mother had not guessed it? No; they had been too delighted at this unhoped-for wealth for the idea to come near them. And besides, how should these worthy souls have ever dreamed of anything so ignominious?

But the public—their neighbors, the shopkeepers, their own tradesmen, all who knew them—would not they repeat the abominable thing, laugh at it, enjoy it, make game of his father and despise his mother?

And the barmaid's remark that Jean was fair and he dark, that they were not in the least alike in face, manner, figure, or intelligence, would now strike every eye and every mind. When any one spoke of Roland's son, the question would be: "Which, the real or the false?"

He rose, firmly resolved to warn Jean, and put him on his guard against the frightful danger which threatened their mother's honor.

But what could Jean do? The simplest thing, no doubt, would be to refuse the inheritance, which would then go to the poor, and to tell all friends or acquaintances who had heard of the bequest that the will contained clauses and conditions impossible to subscribe to, which would have made Jean not inheritor but merely a trustee.

As he made his way home he was thinking that he must see his brother alone, so as not to speak of such a matter in the presence of his parents. On reaching the door he heard a great noise of [66] voices and laughter in the drawing-room, and when he went in he found Captain Beausire and Mme. Rosémilly, whom his father had brought home and engaged to dine with them in honor of the good news. Vermouth and absinthe had been served to whet their appetites, and every one had been at once put into good spirits. Captain Beausire, a funny little man who had become quite round by dint of being rolled about at sea, and whose ideas also seemed to have been worn round, like the pebbles of a beach, while he laughed with his throat full of *r*'s, looked upon life as a capital thing, in which everything that might turn up was good to take. He clinked his glass against father Roland's, while Jean was offering two freshly filled glasses to the ladies. Mme. Rosémilly refused, till Captain Beausire, who had known her husband, cried:

"Come, come, madame, *bis repetita placent*, as we say in the lingo, which is as much as to say two glasses of vermouth never hurt any one. Look at me; since I have left the sea, in this way I give myself an artificial roll or two every day before dinner; I add a little pitching after my coffee, and that keeps things lively for the rest of the evening. I never rise to a hurricane, mind you, never, never. I am too much afraid of damage."

Roland, whose nautical mania was humored by the old mariner, laughed heartily, his face flushed already and his eye watery from the absinthe. He had a burly shopkeeping stomach—nothing but stomach—in which the rest of his body seemed to have got stowed away; the flabby paunch of men who spend their lives sitting, and who have neither thighs, nor chest, nor arms, nor neck; the seat of their chairs having accumulated all their substance in one spot. Beausire, on the [67] contrary, though short and stout, was as tight as an egg and as hard as a cannon-ball.

Mme. Roland had not emptied her glass and was gazing at her son Jean with sparkling eyes, happiness had brought a color to her cheeks.

In him too the fullness of joy had now blazed out. It was a settled thing, signed and sealed; he had twenty thousand francs a year. In the sound of his laugh, in the fuller voice with which he spoke, in his way of looking at the others, his more positive manners, his greater confidence, the assurance given by money was at once perceptible.

Dinner was announced, and as the old man was about to offer his arm to Mme. Rosémilly, his wife exclaimed:

"No, no, father. Everything is for Jean to-day."

Unwonted luxury graced the table. In front of Jean, who sat in his father's place, an enormous bouquet of flowers intermingled with ribbon favors—a bouquet for a really great occasion—stood up like a cupola dressed with flags, and was flanked by four high dishes, one containing a pyramid of splendid peaches; the second, a monumental cake gorged with whipped cream and covered with pinnacles of sugar—a cathedral in confectionery; the third, slices of pine-apple floating in clear syrup; and the fourth unheard-of lavishness—black grapes brought from the warmer south.

"The devil!" exclaimed Pierre as he sat down. "We are celebrating the accession of Jean the Rich."

After the soup, Madeira was passed round, and already every one was talking at once. Beausire was giving the history of a dinner he had eaten at San Domingo at the table of a negro general. Old Roland was listening, and at the same time trying to get in, between the sentences, his [68]
account of another dinner, given by a friend of his at Mendon, after which every guest was ill for a fortnight. Mme. Rosémilly, Jean, and his mother were planning an excursion to breakfast at Saint Jouin, from which they promised themselves the greatest pleasure; and Pierre was only sorry that he had not dined alone in some pot-house by the sea, so as to escape all this noise and laughter and glee which fretted him. He was wondering how he could now set to work to confide his fears to his brother, and induce him to renounce the fortune he had already accepted and of which he was enjoying the intoxicating foretaste. It would be hard on him, no doubt; but it must be done; he could not hesitate; their mother's reputation was at stake.

The appearance of an enormous shade-fish threw Roland back on fishing stories. Beausire told some wonderful tales of adventure on the Gaboon, at Sainte-Marie, in Madagascar, and above all, off the coasts of China and Japan, where the fish are as queer-looking as the natives. And he described the appearance of these fishes—their goggle gold eyes, their blue or red bellies, their fantastic fins like fans, their eccentric crescent-shaped tails—with such droll gesticulation that they all laughed till they cried as they listened.

Pierre alone seemed incredulous, muttering to himself: "True enough, the Normans are the Gascons of the north!"

After the fish came a vol-au-vent; then a roast fowl, a salad, French beans with a Pithiviers lark-pie. Mme. Rosémilly's maid-servant helped to wait on them, and the fun rose with the number of glasses of wine they drank. When the cork of the first champagne bottle was drawn with a pop, [69]
father Roland, highly excited, imitated the noise with his tongue and then declared: "I like that noise better than a pistol-shot."

Pierre, more and more fractious every moment, retorted with a sneer:

"And yet it is perhaps a greater danger for you."

Roland, who was on the point of drinking, set his full glass down on the table again, and asked:

"Why?"

He had for some time been complaining of his health, of heaviness, giddiness, frequent and unaccountable discomfort. The doctor replied:

"Because the bullet might very possibly miss you, while the glass of wine is dead certain to hit you in the stomach."

"And what then?"

"Then it scorches your inside, upsets your nervous system, makes the circulation sluggish, and leads the way to the apoplectic fit which always threatens a man of your build."

The jeweler's incipient intoxication had vanished like smoke before the wind. He looked at his son with fixed, uneasy eyes, trying to discover whether he was making game of him.

But Beausire exclaimed:

"Oh, these confounded doctors! They all sing the same tune; eat nothing, drink nothing, never make love or enjoy yourself; it all plays the devil with your precious health. Well, all I can say is I have done all these things, sir, in every quarter of the globe, wherever and as often as I have had the chance, and I am none the worse." [70]

Pierre answered with some asperity:

"In the first place, captain, you are a stronger man than my father; and in the next, all free livers talk as you do till the day when—when they come back no more to say to the cautious doctor: 'You were right.' When I see my father doing what is worst and most dangerous for him, it is but natural that I should warn him. I should be a bad son if I did otherwise."

Mme. Roland, much distressed, now put in her word: "Come, Pierre, what ails you? For once it cannot hurt him? Think of what an occasion it is for him, for all of us. You will spoil his pleasure

and make us all unhappy. It is too bad of you to do such a thing."

He muttered, as he shrugged his shoulders:

"He can do as he pleases. I have warned him."

But father Roland did not drink. He sat looking at his glass full of the clear and luminous liquor while its light soul, its intoxicating soul, flew off in tiny bubbles mounting from its depths in hurried succession to die on the surface. He looked at it with the suspicious eye of a fox smelling at a dead hen and suspecting a trap. He asked doubtfully: "Do you think it will really do me much harm?" Pierre had a pang of remorse and blamed himself for letting his ill-humor punish the rest:

"No," said he. "Just for once you may drink it; but do not take too much, or get into the habit of it."

Then old Roland raised his glass, but still he could not make up his mind to put it to his lips. He contemplated it regretfully, with longing and with fear; then he smelt it, tasted it, drank it in sips, swallowing them slowly, his heart full of terrors, of weakness and greediness; and then, when he had drained the last drop, of regret. [71]

Pierre's eye suddenly met that of Mme. Rosémilly; it rested on him clear and blue, far-seeing and hard. And he read, he knew, the precise thought which lurked in that look, the indignant thought of this simple and right-minded little woman; for the look said: "You are jealous—that is what you are. Shameful!"

He bent his head and went on with his dinner.

He was not hungry and found nothing nice. A longing to be off harassed him, a craving to be away from these people, to hear no more of their talking, jests, and laughter.

Father Roland meanwhile, to whose head the fumes of the wine were rising once more, had already forgotten his son's advice and was eyeing a champagne-bottle with a tender leer as it stood, still nearly full, by the side of his plate. He dared not touch it for fear of being lectured again, and he was wondering by what device or trick he could possess himself of it without exciting Pierre's remark. A ruse occurred to him, the simplest possible. He took up the bottle with an air of indifference, and holding it by the neck, stretched his arm across the table to fill the doctor's glass, which was empty; then he filled up all the other glasses, and when he came to his own he began talking very loud, so that if he poured anything into it they might have sworn it was done inadvertently. And in fact no one took any notice.

Pierre, without observing it, was drinking a good deal. Nervous and fretted, he every minute raised to his lips the tall crystal funnel where the bubbles were dancing in the living, translucent fluid. He let the wine slip very slowly over his tongue, that he might feel the little sugary sting of the fixed air as it evaporated. [72]

Gradually a pleasant warmth glowed in his frame. Starting from the stomach as from a focus, it spread to his chest, took possession of his limbs, and diffused itself throughout his flesh, like a warm and comforting tide, bringing pleasure with it. He felt better now, less impatient, less annoyed, and his determination to speak to his brother that very evening faded away; not that he thought for a moment of giving it up, but simply not to disturb the happy mood in which he found himself.

Beausire presently arose to propose a toast. Having bowed to the company, he began:

"Most gracious ladies and gentlemen, we have met to do honor to a happy event which has befallen one of our friends. It used to be said that Fortune was blind, but I believe that she is only short-sighted or tricksy, and that she has lately brought a good pair of glasses which enabled her to discover in the town of Havre the son of our worthy friend Roland, skipper of the *Pearl*."

Every one cried bravo and clapped their hands, and the elder Roland rose to reply. After clearing his throat, for it felt thick and his tongue was heavy, he stammered out:

"Thank you, captain, thank you—for myself and my son. I shall never forget your behavior on this occasion. Here's good luck to you!"

His eyes and nose were full of tears, and he sat down, finding nothing more to say.

Jean, who was laughing, spoke in his turn:

"It is I," said he, "who ought to thank my friends here, my excellent friends," and he glanced at Mme. Rosémilly, "who have given me such a touching evidence of their affection. But it is not by words that I can prove my gratitude. I will prove it to-morrow, every hour of my life, always, for our friendship is not one of those which fade away." [73]

His mother, deeply moved, murmured: "Well said, my boy."

But Beausire cried out:

"Come, Mme. Rosémilly, speak on behalf of the fair sex."

She raised her glass, and in a pretty voice, slightly touched with sadness, she said: "I will pledge you to the memory of Monsieur Maréchal."

There was a few moments' lull, a pause for decent meditation, as after prayer. Beausire, who always had a flow of compliment, remarked:

"Only a woman ever thinks of these refinements." Then turning to father Roland: "And who was this Maréchal, after all? You must have been very intimate with him."

The old man, emotional with drink, began to whimper, and in a broken voice he said:

"Like a brother, you know. Such a friend as one does not make twice—we were always together—he dined with us every evening—and would treat us to the play—I need say no more—no more—no more. A true friend—a real true friend—wasn't he, Louise?"

His wife merely answered: "Yes; he was a faithful friend."

Pierre looked at his father and then at his mother, then, as the subject changed, he drank some more wine. He scarcely remembered the remainder of the evening. They had coffee, then [74] liqueurs, and they laughed and joked a great deal. At about midnight he went to bed, his mind confused and his head heavy; and he slept like a brute till nine next morning.

CHAPTER IV

These slumbers, lapped in champagne and chartreuse, had soothed and calmed him, no doubt, for he awoke in a very benevolent frame of mind. While he was dressing he appraised, weighed, and summed up the agitations of the past day, trying to bring out quite clearly and fully their real and occult causes, those personal to himself as well as those from outside.

It was, in fact, possible that the girl at the beer-shop had had an evil suspicion—a suspicion worthy of such a hussy—on hearing that only one of the Roland brothers had been made heir to a stranger; but have not such natures as she always similar notions, without a shadow of foundation, about every honest woman? Do they not, whenever they speak, vilify, calumniate, and abuse all whom they believe to be blameless? Whenever a woman who is above imputation is mentioned in their presence, they are as angry as if they were being insulted, and exclaim: "Ah, yes, I know your married women; a pretty sort they are! Why, they have more lovers than we have, only they conceal it because they are such hypocrites. Oh, yes, a pretty sort, indeed!"

Under any other circumstances he would certainly not have understood, not have imagined the possibility of such an insinuation against his poor mother, who was so kind, so simple, so [75] excellent. But his spirit seethed with the leaven of jealousy that was fermenting within him. His own excited mind, on the scent, as it were, in spite of himself, for all that could damage his brother, had even perhaps attributed to the tavern barmaid an odious intention of which she was innocent. It was possible that his imagination had, unaided, invented this dreadful doubt—his imagination, which he never controlled, which constantly evaded his will and went off, unfettered, audacious, adventurous, and stealthy, into the infinite world of ideas, bringing back now and then some which were shameless and repulsive, and which it buried in him, in the depths of his soul, in its most fathomless recesses, like something stolen. His heart, most certainly, his own heart had secrets from him; and had not that wounded heart discerned in this atrocious doubt a means of depriving his brother of the inheritance of which he was jealous? He suspected himself now, cross-examining all the mysteries of his mind as bigots search their consciences.

Mme. Rosémilly, though her intelligence was limited, had certainly a woman's instinct, scent, and subtle intuitions. And this notion had never entered her head, since she had, with perfect simplicity, drunk the blessed memory of the deceased Maréchal. She was not the woman to have done this if she had had the faintest suspicion. Now he doubted no longer; his involuntary displeasure at his brother's windfall of fortune and his religious affection for his mother had magnified his scruples—very pious and respectable scruples, but exaggerated. As he put this conclusion into words in his own mind he felt happy, as at the doing of a good action; and he [76] resolved to be nice to every one beginning with his father, whose manias, and silly statements, and vulgar opinions, and too conspicuous mediocrity were a constant irritation to him.

He came in not late for breakfast, and amused all the family by his fun and good-humor.

His mother, quite delighted, said to him:

"My little Pierre, you have no notion how humorous and clever you can be when you choose."

And he talked, putting things in a witty way, and making them laugh by ingenious hits at their friends. Beausire was his butt, and Mme. Rosémilly a little, but in a very judicious way, not too spiteful. And he thought as he looked at his brother: "Stand up for her, you muff. You may be as rich as you please, I can always eclipse you when I take the trouble."

As they drank their coffee he said to his father:

"Are you going out in the *Pearl* to-day?"

"No, my boy."

"May I have her with Jean Bart?"

"To be sure, as long as you like."

He bought a good cigar at the first tobacconist's and went down to the quay with a light step. He glanced up at the sky, which was clear and luminous, of a pale blue, freshly swept by the sea breeze.

Papagris, the boatman, commonly called Jean Bart, was dozing in the bottom of the boat, which he was required to have in readiness every day at noon when they had not been out fishing in the morning.

"You and I together, mate," cried Pierre. He went down the iron ladder of the quay and leaped into the vessel.

"Which way is the wind?" he asked. [77]

"Due east still, M'sieu Pierre. A fine breeze out at sea."

"Well, then, old man, off we go!"

They hoisted the foresail and weighed anchor; and the boat, feeling herself free, glided slowly down toward the jetty on the still water of the harbor. The breath of wind that came down the street caught the top of the sail so lightly as to be imperceptible, and the *Pearl* seemed endowed with life—the life of a vessel driven on by a mysterious latent power. Pierre took the tiller, and, holding his cigar between his teeth, he stretched his legs on the bunk, and with his eyes half-shut in the blinding sunshine, he watched the great tarred timbers of the breakwater as they glided past.

When they reached the open sea, round the nose of the north pier which had sheltered them, the fresher breeze puffed in the doctor's face and on his hands, like a somewhat icy caress, filled his chest, which rose with a long sigh to drink it in, and swelling the tawny sail, tilted the *Pearl* on her beam and made her more lively. Jean Bart hastily hauled up the jib, and the triangle of canvas, full of wind, looked like a wing; then, with two strides to the stern, he let out the spanker, which was close-reefed against its mast.

Then, along the hull of the boat, which suddenly heeled over and was running at top speed, there was a soft, crisp sound of water hissing and rushing past. The prow ripped up the sea like the share of a plough gone mad, and the yielding water it turned up curled over and fell white with foam, as the ploughed soil, heavy and brown, rolls and falls in a ridge. At each wave they met—and there was a short, chopping sea—the *Pearl* shivered from the point of the bowsprit to the [78] rudder, which trembled under Pierre's hand; when the wind blew harder in gusts, the swell rose to the gunwale as if it would overflow into the boat. A coal brig from Liverpool was lying at anchor, waiting for the tide; they made a sweep round her stern and went to look at each of the vessels in the roads one after another; then they put further out to look at the unfolding line of coast.

For three hours Pierre, easy, calm, and happy, wandered to and fro over the dancing waters, guiding the thing of wood and canvas, which came and went at his will, under the pressure of his hand, as if it were a swift and docile winged creature.

He was lost in day-dreams, the dreams one has on horseback or on the deck of a boat; thinking of his future, which should be brilliant, and the joys of living intelligently. On the morrow he would ask his brother to lend him fifteen hundred francs for three months, that he might settle at once in the pretty rooms on the Boulevard François, 1er.

Suddenly the sailor said: "The fog is coming up, M'sieu Pierre. We must go in."

He looked up and saw to the northward a gray shade, filmy but dense, blotting out the sky and covering the sea; it was sweeping down on them like a cloud fallen from above. He tacked for the land and made for the pier, scudding before the wind and followed by the flying fog, which gained upon them. When it reached the *Pearl*, wrapping her in its intangible density, a cold shudder ran over Pierre's limbs, and a smell of smoke and mold, the peculiar smell of a sea fog, made him close his mouth that he might not taste the cold, wet vapor. By the time the boat was at her usual moorings in the harbor the whole town was buried in this fine mist, which did not fall [79] but yet wetted everything like rain, and glided and rolled along the roofs and streets like the flow of a river. Pierre, with his hands and feet frozen, made haste home and threw himself on his bed to take a nap till dinner-time. When he made his appearance in the dining-room his mother was saying to Jean:

"The glass corridor will be lovely. We will fill it with flowers. You will see. I will undertake to care for them and renew them. When you give a party the effect will be quite fairy like."

"What in the world are you talking about?" the doctor asked.

"Of a delightful apartment I have just taken for your brother. It is quite a find; an entresol looking out on two streets. There are two drawing-rooms, a glass passage, and a little circular dining-room, perfectly charming for a bachelor's quarters."

Pierre turned pale.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Boulevard François, 1er."

There was no possibility for doubt. He took his seat in such a state of exasperation that he longed

to exclaim: "This is really too much! Is there nothing for any one but him?"

His mother, beaming, went on talking: "And only fancy, I got it for two thousand eight hundred francs a year. They asked three thousand, but I got a reduction of two hundred francs on taking for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be delightfully housed there. An elegant home is enough to make the fortune of a lawyer. It attracts clients, charms them, holds them fast, [80] commands respect, and shows them that a man who lives in such good style expects a good price for his words."

She was silent for a few seconds and then went on:

"We must look out for something suitable for you; much less pretentious, since you have nothing, but nice and pretty all the same. I assure you it will be to your advantage."

Pierre replied contemptuously:

"For me! Oh, I shall make my way by hard work and learning."

But his mother insisted: "Yes, but I assure you that to be well lodged will be of use to you nevertheless."

About half-way through the meal he suddenly asked:

"How did you first come to know this man Maréchal?"

Old Roland looked up and racked his memory:

"Wait a bit; I scarcely recollect. It is such an old story now. Ah, yes, I remember. It was your mother who made acquaintance with him in the shop, was it not, Louise? He first came to order something, and then he called frequently. We knew him as a customer before we knew him as a friend."

Pierre, who was eating beans, sticking his fork into them one by one as if he were spitting them, went on:

"And when was it that you made his acquaintance?"

Again Roland sat thinking, but he could remember no more and appealed to his wife's better memory.

"In what year was it, Louise? You surely have not forgotten, you who remember everything. Let me see—it was in—in—in fifty-five or fifty-six? Try to remember. You ought to know better than I." [81]

She did in fact think it over for some minutes, and then replied in a steady voice and with calm decision:

"It was in fifty-eight, old man. Pierre was three years old. I am quite sure that I am not mistaken, for it was in that year that the child had scarlet fever, and Maréchal, whom we then knew but very little, was of the greatest service to us."

Roland exclaimed:

"To be sure—very true; he was really invaluable. When your mother was half-dead with fatigue and I had to attend to the shop, he would go to the chemist's to fetch your medicine. He really had the kindest heart! And when you were well again, you cannot think how glad he was and how he petted you. It was from that time that we became such great friends."

And this thought rushed into Pierre's soul, as abrupt and violent as a cannon-ball rending and piercing it: "Since he knew me first, since he was so devoted to me, since he was so fond of me and petted me so much, since I—*I* was the cause of this great intimacy with my parents, why did he leave all his money to my brother and nothing to me?"

He asked no more questions and remained gloomy; absent-minded rather than thoughtful, feeling in his soul a new anxiety as yet undefined, the secret germ of a new pain.

He went out early, wandering about the streets once more. They were shrouded in the fog which made the night heavy, opaque, and nauseous. It was like a pestilential rock dropped on earth. It could be seen swirling past the gas-lights, which it seemed to put out at intervals. The pavement was as slippery as on a frosty night after a rain, and all sorts of evil smells seemed to come up [82] from the bowels of the houses—the stench of cellars, drains, sewers, squalid kitchens—to mingle with the horrible savor of this wandering fog.

Pierre, with his shoulders up and his hands in his pockets, not caring to remain out of doors in the cold, turned into Marowsko's. The druggist was asleep as usual under the gas-light, which kept watch. On recognizing Pierre, for whom he had the affection of a faithful dog, he shook off his drowsiness, went for two glasses, and brought out the *Groseillette*.

"Well," said the doctor, "how is the liqueur getting on?"

The Pole explained that four of the chief cafés in the town had agreed to have it on sale, and that two papers, the *Northcoast Pharos* and the *Havre Semaphore*, would advertise it, in return for certain chemical preparations to be supplied to the editors.

After a long silence Marowsko asked whether Jean had come definitely into possession of his fortune; and then he put two or three other questions vaguely referring to the same subject. His jealous devotion to Pierre rebelled against this preference. And Pierre felt as though he could hear him thinking; he guessed and understood, read in his averted eyes and in the hesitancy of his tone, the words which rose to his lips but were not spoken—which the druggist was too timid or too prudent and cautious to utter.

At this moment, he felt sure, the old man was thinking: "You ought not to have suffered him to accept this inheritance which will make people speak ill of your mother."

Perhaps, indeed, Marowsko believed that Jean was Maréchal's son. Of course he believed it! How [83]
could he help believing it when the thing must seem so possible, so probable, self-evident? Why, he himself, Pierre, her son—had not he been for these three days past fighting with all the subtlety at his command to cheat his reason, fighting against this hideous suspicion?

And suddenly the need to be alone, to reflect, to discuss the matter with himself—to face boldly, without scruple or weakness, this possible but monstrous thing—came upon him anew, and so imperative that he rose without even drinking his glass of *Groseillette*, shook hands with the astounded druggist and plunged out into the foggy streets again.

He asked himself: "What made this Maréchal leave all his fortune to Jean?"

It was not jealousy now which made him dwell on this question, not the rather mean but natural envy which he knew lurked within him, and with which he had been struggling these three days, but the dread of an overpowering horror; the dread that he himself should believe Jean, his brother, was that man's son.

No. He did not believe it; he could not even ask himself the question which was a crime! Meanwhile he must get rid of this faint suspicion, improbable as it was, utterly and for ever. He craved for light, for certainty—he must win absolute security in his heart, for he loved no one in the world but his mother. And as he wandered alone through the darkness he would rack his memory and his reason with a minute search that should bring out the blazing truth. Then there would be an end to the matter; he would not think of it again—never. He would go and sleep.

He argued thus: "Let me see: first to examine the facts; then I will recall all I know about him, his [84]
behavior to my brother and to me. I will seek out the causes which might have given rise to this preference. He knew Jean from his birth? Yes, but he had known me first. If he had loved my mother silently, unselfishly, he would surely have chosen me, since it was through me, through my scarlet fever, that he became so intimate with my parents. Logically, then, he ought to have preferred me, to have had a keener affection for me—unless it were that he felt an instinctive attraction and predilection for my brother as he watched him grow up."

Then, with desperate tension of brain and of all the powers of his intellect, he strove to reconstitute from memory the image of this Maréchal, to see him, to know him, to penetrate the man whom he had seen pass by him, indifferent to his heart during all those years in Paris.

But he perceived that the slight exertion of walking somewhat disturbed his ideas, dislocated their continuity, weakened their precision, clouded his recollection. To enable him to look at the past and at unknown events with so keen an eye that nothing should escape it, he must be motionless in a vast and empty space. And he made up his mind to go and sit on the jetty as he had done that other night. As he approached the harbor he heard, out at sea, a lugubrious and sinister wail like the bellowing of a bull, but more long-drawn and steady. It was the roar of a fog-horn, the cry of a ship lost in the fog. A shiver ran through him, chilling his heart; so deeply did this cry of distress thrill his soul and nerves that he felt as if he had uttered it himself. Another and a similar voice answered with such another moan, but further away; then, close by, the fog- [85]
horn on the pier gave out a fearful sound in answer. Pierre made for the jetty with long steps, thinking no more of anything, content to walk on into this ominous and bellowing darkness.

When he had seated himself at the end of the breakwater he closed his eyes, that he might not see the two electric lights, now blurred by the fog, which make the harbor accessible at night, and the red glare of the light on the south pier, which was, however, scarcely visible. Turning half-round, he rested his elbows on the granite and hid his face in his hands.

Though he did not pronounce the word with his lips, his mind kept repeating: "Maréchal—Maréchal," as if to raise and challenge the shade. And on the black background of his closed eyelids, he suddenly saw him as he had known him: a man of about sixty, with a white beard cut in a point and very thick eyebrows, also white. He was neither tall nor short, his manner was pleasant, his eyes gray and soft, his movements gentle, his whole appearance that of a good fellow, simple and kindly. He called Pierre et Jean "my dear children," and had never seemed to prefer either, asking them both together to dine with him. And then Pierre, with the pertinacity of a dog seeking a lost scent, tried to recall the words, gestures, tones, looks, of this man who had vanished from the world. By degrees he saw him quite clearly in his rooms in the rue Tronchet, where he received his brother and himself at dinner.

He was waited on by two maids, both old women who had been in the habit—a very old one, no doubt—of saying "Monsieur Pierre" and "Monsieur Jean." Maréchal would hold out both hands, [86]
the right hand to one of the young men, the left to the other, as they happened to come in.

"How are you, my children?" he would say. "Have you any news of your parents? As for me, they

never write to me."

The talk was quiet and intimate, of commonplace matters. There was nothing remarkable in the man's mind, but much that was winning, charming, and gracious. He had certainly been a good friend to them, one of those good friends of whom we think the less because we feel sure of them.

Now, reminiscences came readily to Pierre's mind. Having seen him anxious from time to time, and suspecting his student's impecuniousness, Maréchal had of his own accord offered and lent him money, a few hundred francs perhaps, forgotten by both, and never repaid. Then this man must always have been fond of him, always have taken an interest in him, since he thought of his needs. Well then—well then—why leave his whole fortune to Jean? No, he had never shown any more marked affection for the younger than for the elder, had never been more interested in one than in the other, or seemed to care more tenderly for this one or that one. Well then—well then—he must have had some strong secret reason for leaving everything to Jean—everything—and nothing to Pierre.

The more he thought, the more he recalled the past few years, the more extraordinary, the more incredible was it that he should have made such a difference between them. And an agonizing pang of unspeakable anguish piercing his bosom made his heart beat like a fluttering rag. Its [87] springs seemed broken, and the blood rushed through in a flood, unchecked, tossing it with wild surges.

Then in an undertone, as a man speaks in a nightmare, he muttered: "I must know. My God! I must know."

He looked further back now, to an earlier time, when his parents had lived in Paris. But the faces escaped him, and this confused his recollections. He struggled above all to see Maréchal with light, or brown, or black hair. But he could not; the later image, his face as an old man, blotted out all others. However, he remembered that he had been slighter, and had a soft hand, and that he often brought flowers. Very often—for his father would constantly say: "What, another bouquet! But this is madness, my dear fellow; you will ruin yourself in roses." And Maréchal would say: "No matter; I like it."

And suddenly his mother's voice and accent, his mother's as she smiled and said: "Thank you, my kind friend," flashed on his brain, so clearly that he could have believed he heard her. She must have spoken those words very often that they should remain thus graven on her son's memory.

So Maréchal brought flowers; he, the gentleman, the rich man, the customer, to the humble shop-keeper, the jeweler's wife. Had he loved her? Why should he have made friends with these tradespeople if he had not been in love with the wife? He was a man of education and fairly refined tastes. How many a time had he discussed poets and poetry with Pierre. He did not appreciate these writers from an artistic point of view, but with sympathetic and responsive feeling. The doctor had often smiled at his emotions which had struck him as rather silly; now he [88] plainly saw that this sentimental soul could never, never have been the friend of his father, who was so matter-of-fact, so narrow, so heavy, to whom the word "Poetry" meant idiocy.

This Maréchal then, being young, free, rich, ready for any form of tenderness, went by chance into the shop one day, having perhaps observed its pretty mistress. He had bought something, had come again, had chatted, more intimately each time, paying by frequent purchases for the right of a seat in the family, of smiling at the young wife and shaking hands with the husband.

And what next—what next—good God—what next?

He had loved and petted the first child, the jeweler's child, till the second was born; then, till death, he had remained impenetrable; and when his grave was closed, his flesh dust, his name erased from the list of the living, when he himself was quiet and forever gone, having nothing to scheme for, to dread or to hide, he had given his whole fortune to the second child! Why?

The man had all his wits; he must have understood and foreseen that he might, that he almost infallibly must, give grounds for the supposition that the child was his. He was casting obloquy on a woman. How could he have done this if Jean were not his son?

And suddenly a clear and fearful recollection shot through his brain. Maréchal was fair—fair like Jean. He now remembered a little miniature portrait he had seen formerly in Paris, on the drawing-room chimney-shelf, and which had since disappeared. Where was it? Lost, or hidden away? Oh, if he could but have it in his hands for one minute! His mother kept it perhaps in the [89] unconfessed drawer where love-tokens were treasured.

His misery at this thought was so intense that he uttered a groan, one of those brief moans wrung from the breast by a too intolerable pang. And immediately, as if it had heard him, as if it had understood and answered him, the fog-horn on the pier bellowed out close to him. Its voice, like that of a fiendish monster, more resonant than thunder—a savage and appalling roar contrived to drown the clamor of the wind and waves—spread through the darkness, across the sea, which was invisible under its shroud of fog. And again, through the mist, far and near, responsive cries went up to the night. They were terrifying, these calls given forth by the great blind steam-ships.

Then all was silent once more.

Pierre had opened his eyes and was looking about him, startled to find himself here, roused from

his nightmare.

"I am mad," thought he, "I suspect my mother." And a surge of love and emotion, of repentance and prayer and grief, welled up in his heart. His mother! Knowing her as he knew her, how could he ever have suspected her? Was not the soul, was not the life of this simple-minded, chaste, and loyal woman clearer than water? Could any one who had seen and known her ever think of her but as above suspicion? And he, her son, had doubted her! Oh, if he could but have taken her in his arms at that moment, how he would have kissed and caressed her, and gone on his knees to crave pardon.

Would she have deceived his father—she? [90]

His father!—A very worthy man no doubt, upright and honest in business, but with a mind which had never gone beyond the horizon of his shop. How was it that this woman, who must have been very pretty—as he knew, and it could still be seen—gifted, too, with a delicate, tender, emotional soul, have accepted a man so unlike herself as a suitor and a husband? Why inquire? She had married, as young French girls do marry, the youth with a little fortune proposed to her by their relations. They had settled at once in their shop in the Rue Montmartre; and the young wife, ruling over the desk, inspired by the feeling of a new home, and the subtle and sacred sense of interests in common which fills the place of love, and even of regard, by the domestic hearth of most of the commercial houses of Paris, had set to work with all her superior and active intelligence, to make the fortune they hoped for. And so her life had flowed on, uniform, peaceful and respectable, but loveless.

Loveless?—was it possible then that a woman should not love? That a young and pretty woman, living in Paris, reading books, applauding actresses for dying of passion on the stage, could live from youth to old age, without once feeling her heart touched? He would not believe it of any one else; why should she be different from all others, though she was his mother?

She had been young, with all the poetic weaknesses which agitate the heart of a young creature. Shut up, imprisoned in the shop, by the side of a vulgar husband who always talked of trade, she had dreamed of moonlight nights, of voyages, of kisses exchanged in the shades of evening. And then, one day a man had come in, as lovers do in books, and had talked as they talk. [91]

She had loved him. Why not? She was his mother. What then? Must a man be blind and stupid to the point of rejecting evidence because it concerns his mother? And she had been frail. Why, yes, since this man had had no other love, since he had remained faithful to her when she was far away and growing old. Why yes, since he had left all his fortune to his son—their son!

And Pierre started to his feet, quivering with such rage that he longed to kill some one. With his arm outstretched, his hand wide open, he wanted to hit, to bruise, to smash, to strangle! Whom? Everyone; his father, his brother, the dead man, his mother!

He hurried off homeward. What was he going to do?

As he passed a turret close to the signal mast the strident howl of the fog-horn went off in his very face. He was so startled that he nearly fell, and shrank back as far as the granite parapet. The steamer which was the first to reply seemed to be quite near and was already at the entrance, the tide having risen.

Pierre turned round and could discern its red eye dim through the fog. Then, in the broad light of the electric lanterns, a huge black shadow crept up between the piers. Behind him the voice of the lookout man, the hoarse voice of an old retired sea-captain, shouted:

"What ship?" And out of the fog the voice of the pilot standing on deck—not less hoarse—replied:

"The Santa Lucia."

"Where from?" [92]

"Italy."

"What port?"

"Naples."

And before Pierre's bewildered eyes rose as he fancied, the fiery pennon of Vesuvius, while, at the foot of the volcano, fire-flies danced in the orange-groves of Sorrento or Castellamare. How often had he dreamed of these familiar names as if he knew the scenery. Oh, if he might but go away, now at once, never mind whither, and never come back, never write, never let any one know what had become of him! But no, he must go home—home to his father's house, and go to bed.

He would not. Come what might he would not go in; he would stay there till daybreak. He liked the roar of the fog-horns. He pulled himself together and began to walk up and down like an officer on watch.

Another vessel was coming in behind the other, huge and mysterious. An English Indiaman, homeward bound.

He saw several more come in, one after another, out of the impenetrable vapor. Then, as the damp became quite intolerable, Pierre set out toward the town. He was so cold that he went into

a sailors' tavern to drink a glass of grog, and when the hot and pungent liquor had scorched his mouth and throat he felt a hope revive within him.

Perhaps he was mistaken. He knew his own vagabond unreason so well! No doubt he was mistaken. He had piled up the evidence as a charge is drawn up against an innocent person, whom it is always so easy to convict when we wish to think him guilty. When he should have slept he would think differently. [93]

Then he went in and to bed, and by sheer force of will he at last dropped asleep.

CHAPTER V

But the doctor's frame lay scarcely more than an hour or two in the torpor of troubled slumbers. When he awoke in the darkness of his warm, closed room, he was aware, even before thought was awake in him, of the painful oppression, the sickness of heart which the sorrow we have slept on leaves behind it. It is as though the disaster of which the shock merely jarred us at first, had, during sleep, stolen into our very flesh, bruising and exhausting it like a fever. Memory returned to him like a blow, and he sat up in bed. Then slowly, one by one, he again went through all the arguments which had wrung his heart on the jetty while the fog-horns were bellowing. The more he thought the less he doubted. He felt himself dragged along by his logic to the inevitable certainty, as by a clutching, strangling hand.

He was thirsty and hot, his heart beat wildly. He got up to open his window and breathe the fresh air, and as he stood there a low sound fell on his ear through the wall. Jean was sleeping peacefully, and gently snoring. He could sleep! He had no presentiment, no suspicions! A man who had known their mother left him all his fortune; he took the money and thought it quite fair and natural! He was sleeping, rich and contented, not knowing that his brother was gasping with anguish and distress. And rage boiled up in him against this heedless and happy sleeper.

Only yesterday he would have knocked at his door, have gone in, and sitting by the bed, would [94] have said to Jean, scared by the sudden waking:

"Jean, you must not keep this legacy which by to-morrow may have brought suspicion and dishonor on our mother."

But to-day he could say nothing; he could not tell Jean that he did not believe him to be their father's son. Now he must guard, must bury the shame he had discovered, hide from every eye the stain which he had detected and which no one must perceive, not even his brother—especially not his brother.

He no longer thought about the vain respect of public opinion. He would have been glad that all the world should accuse his mother if only he, he alone, knew her to be innocent! How could he bear to live with her every day, believing as he looked at her that his brother was the child of a stranger?

And how calm and serene she was, nevertheless, how sure of herself she always seemed! Was it possible that such a woman as she, pure of soul and upright in heart, should fall, dragged astray by passion, and yet nothing ever appear afterward of her remorse and the stings of a troubled conscience? Ah, but remorse must have tortured her, long ago in the earlier days, and then have faded out, as everything fades. She had surely bewailed her sin, and then, little by little, had almost forgotten it. Have not all women, all, this fault of prodigious forgetfulness which enables them, after a few years, hardly to recognize the man to whose kisses they have lent their lips? The kiss strikes like a thunder-bolt, the love passes away like a storm, and then life, like the sky, is calm once more, and begins again as it was before. Do you ever remember a cloud? [95]

Pierre could no longer endure to stay in the room! This house, his father's house, crushed him. He felt the roof weigh on his head, and the walls suffocate him. And as he was very thirsty he lighted his candle to go to drink a glass of fresh water from the filter in the kitchen.

He went down the two flights of stairs; then, as he was coming up again with the water-bottle filled, he sat down, in his nightshirt, on a step of the stairs where there was a draught, and drank, without a tumbler, in long pulls like a runner who is out of breath. When he ceased to move the silence of the house touched his feelings; then, one by one, he could distinguish the faintest sounds. First there was the ticking of the clock in the dining-room which seemed to grow louder every second. Then he heard another snore, an old man's snore, short, labored and hard, his father beyond doubt; and he writhed at the idea, as if it had but this moment sprung upon him, that these two men, sleeping under the same roof—father and son—were nothing to each other! Not a tie, not the very slightest, bound them together, and they did not know it! They spoke to each other affectionately, they embraced each other, they rejoiced and lamented together over the same things, just as if the same blood flowed in their veins. And two men born at opposite ends of the earth could not be more alien to each other than this father and son. They believed they loved each other, because a lie had grown up between them. This paternal love, this filial love, were the outcome of a lie—a lie which could not be unmasked, and which no one would ever [96] know but he, the true son.

But yet, but yet—if he were mistaken? How could he make sure? Oh, if only some likeness, however slight, could be traced between his father and Jean, one of those mysterious resemblances which run from an ancestor to the great-great-grandson, showing that the whole

race are the offspring of the same kiss. To him, a medical man, so little would suffice to enable him to discern this—the curve of a nostril, the space between the eyes, the character of the teeth or hair; nay less—a gesture, a trick, a habit, an inherited taste, any mark or token which a practiced eye might recognize as characteristic.

He thought long, but could remember nothing; no, nothing. But he had looked carelessly, observed badly, having no reason for spying such imperceptible indications.

He got up to go back to his room and mounted the stairs with a slow step, still lost in thought. As he passed the door of his brother's room he stood stock still, his hand put out to open it. An imperative need had just come over him to see Jean at once, to look at him at his leisure, to surprise him in his sleep, while the calm countenance and relaxed features were at rest and all the grimace of life put off. Thus he might catch the dormant secret of his physiognomy, and if any appreciable likeness existed it would not escape him.

But supposing Jean were to wake, what could he say? How could he explain this intrusion?

He stood still, his fingers clenched on the door-handle, trying to devise a reason, an excuse. Then he remembered that a week ago he had lent his brother a phial of laudanum to relieve a fit of [97] toothache. He might himself have been in pain this night and have come to find the drug. So he went in with a stealthy step, like a robber. Jean, his mouth open, was sunk in deep, animal slumbers. His beard and fair hair made a golden patch on the white linen; he did not wake, but he ceased snoring.

Pierre, leaning over him, gazed at him with hungry eagerness. No, this youngster was not in the least like Roland; and for the second time the recollection of the little portrait of Maréchal, which had vanished, recurred to his mind. He must find it! When he should see it perhaps he should cease to doubt!

His brother stirred, conscious no doubt of a presence, or disturbed by the light of the taper on his eyelids. The doctor retired on tiptoe to the door which he noiselessly closed; then he went back to his room, but not to bed again.

Day was long in coming. The hours struck one after another on the dining-room clock, and its tone was a deep and solemn one, as though the little piece of clockwork had swallowed a cathedral bell. The sound rose through the empty staircase, penetrating through walls and doors, and dying away in the rooms where it fell on the torpid ears of the sleeping household. Pierre had taken to walking to and fro between his bed and the window. What was he going to do? He was too much upset to spend this day at home. He wanted still to be alone, at any rate till the next day, to reflect, to compose himself, to strengthen himself for the common every-day life which he must take up again.

Well, he would go over to Trouville to see the swarming crowd on the sands. That would amuse [98] him, change the air of his thoughts, and give him time to inure himself to the horrible thing he had discovered. As soon as morning dawned he made his toilet and dressed. The fog had vanished and it was fine, very fine. As the boat for Trouville did not start till nine, it struck the doctor that he must greet his mother before starting.

He waited till the hour at which she was accustomed to get up, and then went downstairs. His heart beat so violently as he touched her door that he paused for breath. His hand as it lay on the lock was limp and tremulous, almost incapable of the slight effort of turning the handle to open it. He knocked. His mother's voice inquired:

"Who is there?"

"I—Pierre."

"What do you want?"

"Only to say good morning, because I am going to spend the day at Trouville with some friends."

"But I am still in bed."

"Very well, do not disturb yourself. I shall see you this evening, when I come in."

He hoped to get off without seeing her, without pressing on her cheek the false kiss which it made his heart sick to think of. But she replied:

"No. Wait a moment. I will let you in. Wait till I get into bed again."

He heard her bare feet on the floor and the sound of the bolt drawn back. Then she called out:

"Come in."

He went in. She was sitting up in bed, while, by her side, Roland, with a silk handkerchief by way of nightcap and his face to the wall, still lay sleeping. Nothing ever woke him but a shaking hard [99] enough to pull his arm off. On the days when he went fishing it was Joséphine, rung up by Papagris at the hour fixed, who roused her master from his stubborn slumbers.

Pierre as he went toward his mother, looked at her with a sudden sense of never having seen her before. She held up her face, he kissed each cheek, and then sat down in a low chair.

"It was last evening that you decided on this excursion?" she asked.

"Yes, last evening."

"Will you return to dinner?"

"I do not know. At any rate do not wait for me."

He looked at her with stupefied curiosity. This woman was his mother! All those features, seen daily from childhood, from the time when his eye could first distinguish things, that smile, that voice—so well known, so familiar, abruptly struck him as new, different from what they had always been to him hitherto. He understood now that, loving her, he had never looked at her. All the same it was very really she, and he knew every little detail of her face; still, it was the first time he clearly identified them all. His anxious attention, scrutinizing her face which he loved, recalled a difference, a physiognomy he had never before discerned.

He rose to go; then, suddenly yielding to the invincible longing to know which had been gnawing at him since yesterday, he said:

"By the way, I fancy I remember that you used to have, in Paris, a little portrait of Maréchal, in the drawing-room." [100]

She hesitated for a second or two, or at least he fancied she hesitated; then she said:

"To be sure."

"What has become of the portrait?"

She might have replied more readily:

"That portrait—stay; I don't exactly know—perhaps it is in my desk."

"It would be kind of you to find it."

"Yes, I will look for it. What do you want it for?"

"Oh, it was not for myself. I thought it would be a natural thing to give it to Jean, and that he would be pleased to have it."

"Yes, you are right; that is a good idea. I will look for it, as soon as I am up."

And he went out.

It was a blue day, without a breath of wind. The folks in the streets seemed in good spirits, the merchants going to business, the clerks going to their office, the girls going to their shop. Some sang as they went, exhilarated by the bright weather.

The passengers were already going on board the Trouville boat; Pierre took a seat aft on a wooden bench.

He asked himself:

"Now was she uneasy at my asking for the portrait or only surprised? Has she mislaid it, or has she hidden it? Does she know where it is, or does she not? If she has hidden it—why?"

And his mind, still following up the same line of thought from one deduction to another, came to this conclusion:

That portrait—of a friend, of a lover, had remained in the drawing-room in a conspicuous place, [101] till one day when the wife and mother perceived, first of all and before any one else, that it bore a likeness to her son. Without doubt she had for a long time been on the watch for this resemblance; then, having detected it, having noticed its beginnings, and understanding that any one might, any day, observe it too, she had one evening removed the perilous little picture and had hidden it, not daring to destroy it.

Pierre recollected quite clearly now that it was long, long before they left Paris that the miniature had vanished. It had disappeared, he thought, about the time when Jean's beard was beginning to grow, which had made him suddenly and wonderfully like the fair young man who smiled from the picture frame.

The motion of the boat as it put off disturbed and dissipated his meditations. He stood up and looked at the sea. The little steamer, once outside the piers, turned to the left, and puffing and snorting and quivering, made for a distant point visible through the morning haze. The red sail of a heavy fishing-bark, lying motionless on the level waters, looked like a large rock standing up out of the sea. And the Seine, rolling down from Rouen, seemed a wide inlet dividing two neighboring lands. They reached the harbor of Trouville in less than an hour, and as it was the time of day when the world was bathing, Pierre went to the shore.

From a distance it looked like a garden full of gaudy flowers. All along the stretch of yellow sand, from the pier as far as the Roches Noires, sunshades of every hue, hats of every shape, dresses of every color, in groups outside the bathing huts, in long rows by the margin of the waves, or scattered here and there, really looked like immense bouquets on a vast meadow. And the Babel [102] of sounds—voices near and far ringing thin in the light atmosphere, shouts and cries of children being bathed, clear laughter of women—all made a pleasant, continuous din, mingling with the unheeding breeze, and breathed with the air itself.

Pierre walked on among all this throng, more lost, more remote from them, more isolated, more drowned in his torturing thoughts, than if he had been flung overboard from the deck of a ship a hundred miles from shore. He passed by them and heard a few sentences without listening; and he saw, without looking, how the men spoke to the women, and the women smiled at the men. Then, suddenly, as if he had awoke, he perceived them all; and hatred of them all surged up in his soul, for they seemed happy and content.

Now, as he went, he studied the groups, wandering round them full of a fresh set of ideas. All these many-hued dresses which covered the sands like nosegays, these pretty stuffs, those showy parasols, the fictitious grace of tightened waists, all the ingenious devices of fashion from the smart little shoe to the extravagant hat, the insinuating charm of gesture, voice and smile, all the coquettish airs in short displayed on this sea-shore, suddenly struck him as stupendous efflorescences of female depravity. All these bedizened women aimed at pleasing, bewitching, and deluding some man. They had dressed themselves out for men—for all men—all excepting the husband whom they no longer needed to conquer. They had dressed themselves out for the lover of yesterday and the lover of to-morrow, for the stranger they might meet and notice or [103] were perhaps on the lookout for.

And these men sitting close to them, eye to eye and mouth to mouth, invited them, hunted them like game, coy and furtive notwithstanding that it seemed so near and so easy to capture. This wide shore was, then, no more than a love-market—some drove a hard bargain for their kisses while others only promised them. And he reflected that it was everywhere the same, all the world over.

His mother had done what others did—that was all. Others? No. For there were exceptions—many, very many. These women he saw about him, rich, giddy, love-seeking, belonged on the whole to the class of fashionable and showy women of the world, some indeed to the less respectable sisterhood, for on these sands, trampled by the legion of idlers, the tribe of virtuous, home-keeping women were not to be seen.

The tide was rising, driving the foremost rank of visitors gradually landward. He saw the various groups jump up and fly, carrying their chairs with them, before the yellow waves as they rolled up edged with a lacelike frill of foam. The bathing-machines too were being pulled up by horses, and along the planked way which formed the promenade running along the shore from end to end, there was now an increasing flow, slow and dense, of well-dressed people in two opposite streams elbowing and mingling. Pierre, made nervous and exasperated by this bustle, made his escape into the town, and went to get his breakfast at a modest tavern on the skirts of the fields.

When he had finished with coffee, he stretched his legs on a couple of chairs under a lime tree in [104] front of the house, and as he had hardly slept the night before, he presently fell into a doze. After resting for some hours he shook himself, and finding that it was time to go on board again he set out, tormented by a sudden stiffness which had come upon him during his long nap. Now he was eager to be at home again; to know whether his mother had found the portrait of Maréchal. Would she be the first to speak of it, or would he be obliged to ask for it again? If she waited to be questioned further it must be because she had some secret reason for not showing the miniature.

But when he was at home again, and in his room, he hesitated about going down to dinner. He was too wretched. His revolted soul had not yet had time to calm down. However, he made up his mind to it, and appeared in the dining-room just as they were sitting down.

All their faces were beaming.

"Well," said Roland, "are you getting on with your purchases? I do not want to see anything till it is all in its place."

And his wife replied: "Oh, yes. We are getting on. But it takes much consideration to avoid buying things that do not match. The furniture question is an absorbing one."

She had spent the day in going with Jean to cabinet-makers and upholsterers. Her fancy was for rich materials, rather splendid, to strike the eye at once. Her son, on the contrary, wished for something simple and elegant. So in front of everything put before them they had each repeated their arguments. She declared that a client, a defendant, must be impressed; that as soon as he is [105] shown into his counsel's waiting-room he should have a sense of wealth.

Jean, on the other hand, wishing to attract only an elegant and opulent class, was anxious to captivate persons of refinement by his quiet and perfect taste.

And this discussion, which had gone on all day, began again with the soup.

Roland had no opinion. He repeated: "I do not want to hear anything about it. I will go and see it when it is all finished."

Mme. Roland appealed to the judgment of her elder son.

"And you, Pierre, what do you think of the matter?"

His nerves were in a state of such intense excitement that he would have liked to reply with an oath. However, he only answered in a dry tone quivering with annoyance:

"Oh, I am quite of Jean's mind. I like nothing so well as simplicity, which, in matters of taste, is

equivalent to rectitude in matters of conduct."

His mother went on:

"You must remember that we live in a city of commercial men, where good taste is not to be met with at every turn."

Pierre replied:

"What does that matter? Is that a reason for living as fools do? If my fellow-townsmen are stupid and ill-bred, need I follow their example? A woman does not misconduct herself because her neighbor has a lover." [106]

Jean began to laugh.

"You argue by comparisons which seem to have been borrowed from the maxims of a moralist."

Pierre made no reply. His mother and his brother reverted to the question of stuffs and armchairs.

He sat looking at them, as he had looked at his mother in the morning before starting for Trouville; looking at them as a stranger who would study them, and he felt as though he had really suddenly come into a family of which he knew nothing.

His father, above all, amazed his eye and his mind. That flabby, burly man, happy and besotted, was his own father! No, no; Jean was not in the least like him.

His family!

Within these two days an unknown and malignant hand, the hand of a dead man, had torn asunder and broken, one by one, all the ties which had held these four human beings together. It was all over, all ruined. He had now no mother—for he could no longer love her now that he could not revere her with that perfect, tender, and pious respect which a son's love demands; no brother—since his brother was the child of a stranger; nothing was left him but his father, that coarse man whom he could not love in spite of himself.

And he suddenly broke out:

"I say, mother, have you found that portrait?"

She opened her eyes in surprise.

"What portrait?"

"The portrait of Maréchal."

"No—that is to say—yes—I have not found it, but I think I know where it is." [107]

"What is that?" asked Roland. And Pierre answered:

"A little likeness of Maréchal which used to be in the drawing-room in Paris. I thought that Jean might be glad to have it."

Roland exclaimed:

"Why, yes, to be sure; I remember it perfectly. I saw it again last week. Your mother found it in her desk when she was tidying the papers. It was on Thursday or Friday. Do you remember, Louise? I was shaving myself when you took it out and laid it on a chair by your side with a pile of letters of which you burnt half. Strange, isn't it, that you should have come across that portrait only two or three days before Jean heard of his legacy? If I believed in presentiments I should think that this was one."

Mme. Roland calmly replied:

"Yes, I know where it is. I will fetch it presently."

Then she had lied! When she had said that very morning to her son, who had asked her what had become of the miniature: "I don't exactly know—perhaps it is in my desk"—it was a lie! She had seen it, touched it, handled it, gazed at it but a few days since; and then she had hidden it away again in the secret drawer with those letters—his letters.

Pierre looked at the mother who had lied to him; looked at her with the concentrated fury of a son who had been cheated, robbed of his most sacred affection, and with the jealous wrath of a man who, after long being blind, at last discovers a disgraceful betrayal. If he had been that woman's husband—and not her child—he would have gripped her by the wrists, seized her by the shoulders or the hair, have flung her on the ground, have hit her, hurt her, crushed her! And he might say nothing, do nothing, show nothing, reveal nothing. He was her son; he had no vengeance to take. And he had not been deceived. [108]

Nay, but she had deceived his tenderness, his pious respect. She owed to him to be without reproach, as all mothers owe it to their children. If the fury that boiled within him verged on hatred it was that he felt her to be even more guilty toward him than toward his father.

The love of man and wife is a voluntary compact in which the one who proves weak is guilty only of perfidy; but when the wife is a mother her duty is a higher one, since nature has intrusted her

with a race. If she fails then she is cowardly, worthless, infamous.

"I do not care," said Roland suddenly, stretching out his legs under the table, as he did every evening while he sipped his glass of black-currant brandy, "You may do worse than live idle when you have a snug little income. I hope Jean will have us to dinner in style now. Hang it all! if I have an indigestion now and then I cannot help it."

Then turning to his wife he added:

"Go and fetch that portrait, little woman, as you have done your dinner. I should like to see it again myself."

She rose, took a taper, and went. Then, after an absence which Pierre thought long, though she was not away more than three minutes, Mme. Roland returned smiling, and holding an old-fashioned gilt frame by the ring.

"Here it is," said she, "I found it at once." [109]

The doctor was the first to put forth his hand; he took the picture, and holding it a little away from him, he examined it. Then, fully aware that his mother was looking at him, he slowly raised his eyes and fixed them on his brother to compare the faces. He could hardly refrain, in his violence, from saying: "Dear me! How like Jean!" And though he dared not utter the terrible words, he betrayed his thought by his manner of comparing the living face with the painted one.

They had, no doubt, details in common; the same beard, the same brow; but nothing sufficiently marked to justify the assertion: "This is the father and that the son." It was rather a family likeness, a relationship of physiognomies in which the same blood courses. But what to Pierre was far more decisive than the common aspect of the faces, was that his mother had risen, had turned her back, and was pretending, too deliberately, to be putting the sugar basin and the liqueur bottle away in a cupboard. She understood that he knew, or at any rate had his suspicions.

"Hand it on to me," said Roland.

Pierre held out the miniature and his father drew the candle toward him to see it better; then he murmured in a pathetic tone:

"Poor fellow! To think that he was like that when we first knew him! Cristi! How time flies! He was a good-looking man, too, in those days, and with such a pleasant manner—was not he, Louise?"

As his wife made no answer he went on:

"And what an even temper! I never saw him put out. And now it is all at an end—nothing left of him—but what he bequeathed to Jean. Well, at any rate you may take your oath that that man [110] was a good and faithful friend to the last. Even on his deathbed he did not forget us."

Jean, in his turn, held out his hand for the picture. He gazed at it for a few minutes and then said regretfully:

"I do not recognize it at all. I only remember him with white hair."

He returned the miniature to his mother. She cast a hasty glance at it, looking away again as if she were frightened; then in her usual voice, she said:

"It belongs to you now, my little Jean, as you are his heir. We will take it to your new rooms." And when they went into the drawing-room she placed the picture on the chimney-shelf by the clock, where it had formerly stood.

Roland filled his pipe; Pierre and Jean lighted cigarettes. They commonly smoked them, Pierre while he paced the room, Jean, sunk in a deep armchair, with his legs crossed. Their father always sat astride on a chair and spit from afar into the fireplace.

Mme. Roland, on a low seat by a little table on which the lamp stood, embroidered, or knitted, or marked linen.

This evening she was beginning a piece of worsted work, intended for Jean's lodgings. It was a difficult and complicated pattern, and required all her attention. Still, now and again, her eye, which was counting the stitches, glanced up swiftly and furtively at the little portrait of the dead as it leaned against the clock. And the doctor, who was striding to and fro across the little room in four or five steps, met his mother's look at each turn. [111]

It was as though they were spying on each other; and acute uneasiness, intolerable to be borne, clutched at Pierre's heart. He was saying to himself—at once tortured and glad:

"She must be in misery at this moment if she knows that I guess!" And each time he reached the fireplace he stopped for a few seconds to look at Maréchal's fair hair, and show quite plainly that he was haunted by a fixed idea. So that this little portrait, smaller than an opened palm, was like a living being, malignant and threatening, suddenly brought into this house and this family.

Presently the street-door bell rang. Mme. Roland, always so self-possessed, started violently, betraying to her doctor son the anguish of her nerves. Then she said: "It must be Mme. Rosémilly"; and her eye again anxiously turned to the mantelshelf.

Pierre understood, or thought he understood, her fears and misery. A woman's eye is keen, a woman's wit is nimble, and her instincts suspicious. When this woman who was coming in should see the miniature of a man she did not know, she might perhaps at the first glance discover the likeness between this face and Jean. Then she would know and understand everything.

He was seized with a dread, a sudden and horrible dread of this shame being unveiled, and, turning about just as the door opened, he took the little painting and slipped it under the clock without being seen by his father and brother.

When he met his mother's eyes again they seemed to him altered, dim, and haggard.

"Good evening," said Mme. Rosémilly. "I have come to ask you for a cup of tea." [112]

But while they were bustling about her and asking after her health, Pierre made off, the door having been left open.

When his absence was perceived they were all surprised. Jean, annoyed for the young widow, who, he thought, would be hurt, muttered: "What a bear!"

Mme. Roland replied: "You must not be vexed with him; he is not very well to-day and tired with his excursion to Trouville."

"Never mind," said Roland, "that is no reason for taking himself off like a savage."

Mme. Rosémilly tried to smooth matters by saying:

"Not at all, not at all. He has gone away in the English fashion; people always disappear in that way in fashionable circles if they want to leave early."

"Oh, in fashionable circles, I dare say," replied Jean. "But a man does not treat his family *à l'Anglaise*, and my brother has done nothing else for some time past."

CHAPTER VI

For a week or two nothing occurred at the Rolands'. The father went fishing; Jean, with his mother's help, was furnishing and settling himself; Pierre, very gloomy, never was seen excepting at mealtimes.

His father having asked him one evening:

"Why the deuce do you always come in with a face as cheerful as a funeral? This is not the first time I have remarked it"—the doctor replied:

"The fact is I am terribly conscious of the burden of life."

The old man had not a notion what he meant, and with an aggrieved look he went on: "It really is too bad. Ever since we had the good luck to come into this legacy, every one seems unhappy. It is as though some accident had befallen us, as if we were in mourning for some one." [113]

"I am in mourning for some one," said Pierre.

"You are? For whom?"

"For some one you never knew, and of whom I was too fond."

Roland imagined that his son alluded to some girl with whom he had had some love passages, and he said:

"A woman, I suppose."

"Yes, a woman."

"Dead?"

"No. Worse. Ruined!"

"Ah!"

Though he was startled by this unexpected confidence, in his wife's presence too, and by his son's strange tone about it, the old man made no further inquiries, for in his opinion such affairs did not concern a third person.

Mme. Roland affected not to hear; she seemed ill and was very pale. Several times already her husband, surprised to see her sit down as if she were dropping into her chair, and to hear her gasp as if she could not draw her breath, had said:

"Really, Louise, you look very ill; you tire yourself too much with helping Jean. Give yourself a little rest. Sacristi! The rascal is in no hurry, as he is a rich man."

She shook her head without a word.

But to-day her pallor was so great that Roland remarked on it again.

"Come, come," said he, "this will not do at all, my dear old woman. You must take care of yourself." Then, addressing his son, "You surely must see that your mother is ill. Have you [114]

questioned her, at any rate?"

Pierre replied: "No; I had not noticed that there was anything the matter with her."

At this Roland was angry.

"But it stares you in the face, confound you! What on earth is the good of your being a doctor if you cannot even see that your mother is out of sorts? Why, look at her, just look at her. Really, a man might die under his very eyes and this doctor would never think there was anything the matter!"

Mme. Roland was panting for breath, and so white that her husband exclaimed:

"She is going to faint."

"No, no, it is nothing—I shall get better directly—it is nothing."

Pierre had gone up to her and was looking at her steadily.

"What ails you?" he said. And she repeated in an undertone:

"Nothing, nothing—I assure you, nothing."

Roland had gone to fetch some vinegar; he now returned and handing the bottle to his son he said:

"Here—do something to ease her. Have you felt her heart?"

As Pierre bent over to feel her pulse she pulled away her hand so vehemently that she struck it against a chair which was standing by.

"Come," said he in icy tones, "let me see what I can do for you, as you are ill."

Then she raised her arm and held it out to him. Her skin was burning, the blood throbbing in short irregular leaps. [115]

"You are certainly ill," he murmured. "You must take something to quiet you. I will write you a prescription." And as he wrote, stooping over the paper, a low sound of choked sighs, smothered, quick breathing and suppressed sobs made him suddenly look round at her. She was weeping, her hands covering her face.

Roland, quite distracted, asked her:

"Louise, Louise, what is the matter with you? What on earth ails you?"

She did not answer, but seemed racked by some deep and dreadful grief. Her husband tried to take her hands from her face, but she resisted him, repeating:

"No, no, no."

He appealed to his son.

"But what is the matter with her? I never saw her like this."

"It is nothing," said Pierre, "she is a little hysterical."

And he felt as if it were a comfort to him to see her suffering thus, as if this anguish mitigated his resentment and diminished his mother's load of opprobrium. He looked at her as a judge satisfied with his day's work.

Suddenly she rose, rushed to the door with such a swift impulse that it was impossible to forestall or to stop her, and ran off to lock herself into her room.

Roland and the doctor were left face to face.

"Can you make head or tail of it?" said the father.

"Oh, yes," said the other. "It is a little nervous disturbance, not alarming or surprising; such attacks may very likely recur from time to time." [116]

They did in fact recur, almost every day; and Pierre seemed to bring them on with a word, as if he had the clue to her strange and new disorder. He would discern in her face a lucid interval of peace and with the willingness of a torturer would, with a word, revive the anguish that had been lulled for a moment.

But he, too, was suffering, as cruelly as she. It was dreadful pain to him that he could no longer love her nor respect her, that he must put her on the rack. When he had laid bare the bleeding wound which he had opened in her woman's, her mother's heart, when he felt how wretched and desperate she was, he would go out alone, wander about the town, so torn by remorse, so broken by pity, so grieved to have thus hammered her with his scorn as her son, that he longed to fling himself into the sea and put an end to it all by drowning himself.

Ah! How gladly, now, would he have forgiven her. But he could not, for he was incapable of forgetting. If only he could have desisted from making her suffer; but this again he could not, suffering as he did himself. He went home to his meals, full of relenting resolutions; then, as soon as he saw her, as soon as he met her eye—formerly so clear and frank, now so evasive,

frightened, and bewildered—he struck at her in spite of himself, unable to suppress the treacherous words which would rise to his lips.

The disgraceful secret, known to them alone, goaded him up against her. It was as a poison flowing in his veins and giving him an impulse to bite like a mad dog.

And there was no one in the way now to hinder his reading her; Jean lived almost entirely in his new apartments, and only came home to dinner and to sleep every night at his father's. [117]

He frequently observed his brother's bitterness and violence, and attributed them to jealousy. He promised himself that some day he would teach him his place and give him a lesson, for life at home was becoming very painful as a result of these constant scenes. But as he now lived apart he suffered less from this brutal conduct, and his love of peace prompted him to patience. His good fortune, too, had turned his head, and he scarcely paused to think of anything which had no direct interest for himself. He would come in full of fresh little anxieties, full of the cut of a morning-coat, of the shape of a felt hat, of the proper size for his visiting-cards. And he talked incessantly of all the details of his house—the shelves fixed in his bedroom cupboard to keep linen on, the pegs to be put up in the entrance hall, the electric bells contrived to prevent illicit visitors to his lodgings.

It had been settled that on the day when he should take up his abode there they should make an excursion to Saint Jouin, and return after dining there, to drink tea in his rooms. Roland wanted to go by water, but the distance and the uncertainty of reaching it in a sailing-boat if there should be a head-wind, made them reject his plan, and a break was hired for the day.

They started by ten to get there to breakfast. The dusty high road lay across the plain of Normandy, which, by its gentle undulations, dotted with farms embowered in trees, wears the aspect of an endless park. In the vehicle, as it jogged on at the slow trot of a pair of heavy horses, sat the four Rolands, Mme. Rosémilly, and Captain Beausire, all silent, deafened by the rumble of [118] the wheels, and with their eyes shut to keep out the clouds of dust.

It was harvest-time. Alternating with the dark hue of clover and the raw green of beetroot, the yellow corn lighted up the landscape with gleams of pale gold; the fields looked as if they had drunk in the sunshine which poured down on them. Here and there the reapers were at work, and in the plots where the scythe had been put in the men might be seen see-sawing as they swept the level soil with the broad, wing-shaped blade.

After a two-hours' drive the break turned off to the left, past a windmill at work—a melancholy, gray wreck, half rotten and doomed, the last survivor of its ancient race; then it went into a pretty inn yard, and drew up at the door of a smart little house, a hostelry famous in those parts.

The mistress, well known as "La belle Alphonsine," came smiling to the threshold, and held out her hand to the two ladies who hesitated to take the high step.

Some strangers were already at breakfast under a tent by a grass plot shaded by apple trees—Parisians, who had come from Etretat; and from the house came sounds of voices, laughter, and the clatter of plates and pans.

They were eating in a room, as the outer dining halls were all full. Roland suddenly caught sight of some shrimping nets hanging against the wall.

"Ah! ha!" cried he, "you catch prawns here?"

"Yes," replied Beausire. "Indeed it is the place on all the coast where most are taken."

"First rate! Suppose we try to catch some after breakfast." [119]

As it happened it would be low tide at three o'clock, so it was settled that they should all spend the afternoon among the rocks, hunting prawns.

They made a light breakfast, as a precaution against the tendency of blood to the head when they should have their feet in the water. They also wished to reserve an appetite for dinner, which had been ordered on a grand scale and to be ready at six o'clock, when they came in.

Roland could not sit still for impatience. He wanted to buy the nets specially constructed for fishing prawns, not unlike those used for catching butterflies in the country. Their name on the French coast is *lanets*; they are netted bags on a circular wooden frame, at the end of a long pole. Alphonsine, still smiling, was happy to lend them. Then she helped the two ladies to make an impromptu change of toilet, so as not to spoil their dresses. She offered them skirts, coarse worsted stockings and hemp shoes. The men took off their socks and went to the shoemaker's to buy wooden shoes instead.

Then they set out, the nets over their shoulders and creels on their backs. Mme. Rosémilly was quite sweet in this costume, with an unexpected charm of countrified audacity. The skirt which Alphonsine had lent her, coquettishly tucked up and firmly stitched so as to allow of her running and jumping fearlessly on the rocks, displayed her ankle and lower calf—the firm calf of a strong and agile little woman. Her dress was loose to give freedom to her movements, and to cover her head she had found an enormous garden hat of coarse yellow straw with an extravagantly broad brim; and to this, a bunch of tamarisk pinned in to cock it on one side, gave a very dashing and military effect. [120]

Jean, since he had come into his fortune, had asked himself every day whether or no he should marry her. Each time he saw her he made up his mind to ask her to be his wife, and then, as soon as he was alone again, he considered that by waiting he would have time to reflect. She was now less rich than he, for she had but twelve thousand francs a year; but it was in real estate, in farms and lands near the docks in Havre; and this by-and-by might be worth a great deal. Their fortunes were thus approximately equal, and certainly the young widow attracted him greatly.

As he watched her walking in front of him that day he said to himself:

"I must really decide; I cannot do better, I am sure."

They went down a little ravine, sloping from the village to the cliff, and the cliff, at the end of this comb, rose about eighty meters above the sea. Framed between the green slopes to the right and left, a great triangle of silvery blue water could be seen in the distance, and a sail, scarcely visible, looked like an insect out there. The sky, pale with light, was so merged into one with the water that it was impossible to see where one ended and the other began; and the two women, walking in front of the men, stood out against this bright background, their shapes clearly defined in their closely-fitting dresses.

Jean, with a sparkle in his eye, watched the smart ankle, the neat leg, the supple waist, and the coquettish broad hat of Mme. Rosémilly as they fled away before him. And this flight fired his ardor, urging him on to the sudden determination which comes to hesitating and timid natures. The warm air, fragrant with seacoast odors—gorse, clover and thyme, mingling with the salt [121] smell of the rocks at low tide—excited him still more, mounting to his brain; and every moment he felt a little more determined, at every step, at every glance he cast at the alert figure; he made up his mind to delay no longer, to tell her that he loved her and hoped to marry her. The prawn-fishing would favor him by affording him an opportunity; and it would be a pretty scene too, a pretty spot for love-making—their feet in a pool of limpid water while they watched the long feelers of the shrimps lurking under the wrack.

When they had reached the end of the comb and the edge of cliff, they saw a little footpath slanting down the face of it; and below them, about half-way between the sea and the foot of the precipice, an amazing chaos of enormous boulders tumbled over and piled one above the other on a sort of grassy and undulating plain which extended as far as they could see to the southward, formed by an ancient landslip. On this long shelf of brushwood and grass, disrupted, as it seemed, by the shocks of a volcano, the fallen rocks seemed the wreck of a great ruined city which had once looked out on the ocean, sheltered by the long white wall of the overhanging cliff.

"That is fine!" exclaimed Mme. Rosémilly, standing still. Jean had come up with her, and with a beating heart offered his hand to help her down the narrow steps cut in the rock.

They went on in front, while Beausire, squaring himself on his little legs, gave his arm to Mme. Roland, who felt giddy at the gulf before her.

The two young people who led the way, went fast till on a sudden they saw, by the side of a wooden bench which afforded a resting place about half-way down the slope, a thread of clear [122] water, springing from a crevice in the cliff. It fell into a hollow as large as a washing basin which it had worn in the stone; then, falling in a cascade, hardly two feet high, it trickled across the footpath, which it had carpeted with cresses, and was lost among the briars and grass on the raised shelf where the boulders were piled.

"Oh, I am so thirsty!" cried Mme. Rosémilly.

But how could she drink? She tried to catch the water in her hand, but it slipped away between her fingers. Jean had an idea; he placed a stone on the path and on this she knelt down to put her lips to the spring itself, which was thus on the same level.

When she raised her head, covered with myriads of tiny drops, sprinkled all over her face, her hair, her eyelashes, and her dress, Jean bent over her and murmured: "How pretty you look!"

She answered in the tone in which she might have scolded a child:

"Will you be quiet!"

These were the first words of flirtation they had ever exchanged.

"Come," said Jean, much agitated. "Let us go on before they come up with us."

For in fact they could see quite near them now, Captain Beausire's back as he came down, stern foremost, so as to give both hands to Mme. Roland; and further up, further off, Roland still letting himself slip, lowering himself on his hams and clinging on with both his hand and elbows at the speed of a tortoise, Pierre keeping in front of him to watch his movements.

The path, now less steep, was here almost a road, zigzagging between the huge rocks which had [123] at some former time rolled from the hilltop. Mme. Rosémilly and Jean set off at a run and they were soon on the beach. They crossed it and reached the rocks, which stretched in a long and flat expanse covered with seaweed, and broken by endless gleaming pools. The ebbed waters lay beyond, very far away, across this plain of slimy weed, of a black and shining olive-green.

Jean rolled up his trousers above his calf, and his sleeves to his elbows, that he might get wet without caring; then saying: "Forward!" he leaped boldly into the first tidepool they came to.

The lady, more cautious, though fully intending to go in too, presently, made her way round the little pond, stepping timidly, for she slipped on the grassy weed.

"Do you see anything?" she asked.

"Yes, I see your face reflected in the water."

"If that is all you see, you will not have good fishing."

He murmured tenderly in reply:

"Of all fishing it is that I should like best to succeed in."

She laughed: "Try; you will see how it will slip through your net."

"But yet—if you will?"

"I will see you catch prawns—and nothing else—for the moment."

"You are cruel—let us go a little further; there are none here."

He gave her his hand to steady her on the slippery rocks. She leaned on him rather timidly, and he suddenly felt himself overpowered by love and insurgent with passion, as if the fever that had been incubating in him had waited till to-day to declare its presence. [124]

They soon came to a deeper rift, in which long slender weeds, fantastically tinted, like floating green and rose-colored hair, were swaying under the quivering water as it trickled off to the distant sea through some invisible crevice.

Mme. Rosémilly cried out: "Look, look, I see one, a big one. A very big one, just there!" He saw it too, and stepped boldly into the pool though he got wet up to the waist. But the creature, waving its long whiskers, gently retired in front of the net. Jean drove it toward the seaweed, making sure of his prey. When it found itself blockaded it rose with a dart over the net, shot across the mere, and was gone. The young woman, who was watching the chase in great excitement, could not help exclaiming: "Oh! Clumsy!"

He was vexed, and without a moment's thought dragged his net over a hole full of weed. As he brought it to the surface again he saw in it three large transparent prawns, caught blindfold in their hiding place.

He offered them in triumph to Mme. Rosémilly, who was afraid to touch them, for fear of the sharp, serrated crest which arms their heads. However, she made up her mind to it, and taking them up by the tips of their long whiskers she dropped them one by one into her creel, with a little seaweed to keep them alive. Then, having found a shallower pool of water, she stepped in with some hesitation, for the cold plunge of her feet took her breath away, and began to fish on her own account. She was dextrous and artful, with the light hand and the hunter's instinct, which are indispensable. At almost every dip she caught up some prawns, beguiled and surprised [125] by her ingeniously gentle pursuit.

Jean now caught nothing; but he followed her, step by step, touched her now and again, bent over her, pretended great distress at his own awkwardness, and besought her to teach him.

"Show me," he kept saying. "Show me how."

And then, as their two faces were reflected side by side in water so clear that the black weeds at the bottom made a mirror, Jean smiled at the face which looked up at him from the depth, and now and then from his finger tips blew it a kiss which seemed to light upon it.

"Oh! how tiresome you are!" she exclaimed. "My dear fellow, you should never do two things at once."

He replied: "I am only doing one—loving you."

She drew herself up and said gravely:

"What has come over you these ten minutes; have you lost your wits?"

"No, I have not lost my wits. I love you, and at last I dare to tell you so."

They were at this moment both standing in the salt pool wet half-way up to their knees and with dripping hands, holding their nets. They looked into each other's eyes.

She went on in a tone of amused annoyance.

"How very ill-advised to tell me so here and now. Could you not wait till another day instead of spoiling my fishing?"

"Forgive me," he murmured, "but I could not longer hold my peace. I have loved you a long time. To-day you have intoxicated me and I lost my reason."

Then suddenly she seemed to have resigned herself to talk business and think no more of pleasure. [126]

"Let us sit down on that stone," said she, "we can talk more comfortably." They scrambled up a rather high boulder, and when they had settled themselves side by side in the bright sunshine,

she began again:

"My good friend, you are no longer a child, and I am not a young girl. We both know perfectly well what we are about and we can weigh the consequences of our actions. If you have made up your mind to make love to me to-day I must naturally infer that you wish to marry me."

He was not prepared for this matter-of-fact statement of the case, and he answered blandly:

"Why, yes."

"Have you mentioned it to your father and mother?"

"No; I wanted to know first whether you would accept me."

She held out her hand, which was still wet, and as he eagerly clasped it:

"I am ready and willing," she said. "I believe you to be kind and true-hearted. But remember, I should not like to displease your parents."

"Oh, do you think that my mother has never foreseen it, or that she would be as fond of you as she is if she did not hope that you and I should marry?"

"That is true. I am a little disturbed."

They said no more. He, for his part, was amazed at her being so little disturbed, so rational. He had expected pretty little flirting ways, refusals which meant yes, a whole coquettish comedy of love chequered by prawn-fishing in the splashing water. And it was all over; he was pledged, married with twenty words. They had no more to say about it since they were agreed, and they [127] now sat, both somewhat embarrassed by what had so swiftly passed between them; a little perplexed, indeed, not daring to speak, not daring to fish, not knowing what to do.

Roland's voice rescued them.

"This way, this way, children. Come and watch Beausire. The fellow is positively clearing out the sea!"

The captain had, in fact, had a wonderful haul. Wet above his hips, he waded from pool to pool, recognizing the likeliest spots at a glance, and searching all the hollows hidden under seaweed, with a steady slow sweep of his net. And the beautiful transparent, sandy-gray prawns skipped in his palm as he picked them out of the net with a dry jerk and put them into his creel. Mme. Rosémilly, surprised and delighted, remained at his side, almost forgetful of her promise to Jean, who followed them in a dream, giving herself up entirely to the childish enjoyment of pulling the creatures out from among the waving seagrasses.

Roland suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah, here comes Mme. Roland to join us."

She had remained at first on the beach with Pierre, for they had neither of them any wish to play at running about among the rocks and paddling in the tide-pools; and yet they had felt doubtful about staying together. She was afraid of him, and her son was afraid of her and of himself; afraid of his own cruelty, which he could not control. But they sat down side by side on the stones. And both of them, under the heat of the sun, mitigated by the sea breeze, gazing at the [128] wide, fair horizon of blue water streaked and shot with silver, thought as if in unison: "How delightful this would have been—once."

She did not venture to speak to Pierre, knowing that he would return some hard answer; and he dared not address his mother, knowing that in spite of himself he should speak violently. He sat twitching the water-worn pebbles with the end of his cane, switching them and turning them over. She, with a vague look in her eyes, had picked up three or four little stones and was slowly and mechanically dropping them from one hand into the other. Then her unsettled gaze, wandering over the scene before her, discerned, among the weedy rocks, her son Jean fishing with Mme. Rosémilly. She looked at them, watching their movements, dimly understanding, with motherly instinct, that they were talking as they did not talk every day. She saw them leaning over side by side when they looked into the water, standing face to face when they questioned their hearts, then scrambled up the rock and seated themselves to come to an understanding. Their figures stood out very sharply, looking as if they were alone in the middle of the wide horizon, and assuming a sort of symbolic dignity in that vast expanse of sky and sea and cliff.

Pierre, too, was looking at them, and a harsh laugh suddenly broke from his lips. Without turning to him Mme. Roland said:

"What is it?"

He spoke with a sneer.

"I am learning. Learning how a man lays himself out to be cozened by his wife." [129]

She flushed with rage, exasperated by the insinuation she believed was intended.

"In whose name do you say that?"

"In Jean's, by heaven! It is immensely funny to see those two."

She murmured in a low voice, tremulous with feeling: "O Pierre, how cruel you are. That woman is honesty itself. Your brother could not find a better."

He laughed aloud, a hard, satirical laugh:

"Ha! hah! hah! Honesty itself! All wives are honesty itself,—and all husbands are—betrayed." And he shouted with laughter.

She made no reply, but rose, hastily went down the sloping beach, and at the risk of tumbling into one of the rifts hidden by the seaweed, of breaking a leg or an arm, she hastened, almost running, plunging through the pools without looking, straight to her other son.

Seeing her approach, Jean called out:

"Well, mother? So you have made the effort?"

Without a word she seized him by the arm, as if to say: "Save me, protect me!"

He saw her agitation, and greatly surprised he said:

"How pale you are; what is the matter?"

She stammered out:

"I was nearly falling; I was frightened at the rocks."

So then Jean guided her, supported her, explained the sport to her that she might take an interest in it. But as she scarcely heeded him, and as he was bursting with the desire to confide in some one, he led her away and in a low voice said to her:

"Guess what I have done!"

"But—what—I don't know." [130]

"Guess."

"I cannot. I don't know."

"Well, I have told Mme. Rosémilly that I wish to marry her."

She did not answer, for her brain was buzzing, her mind in such distress that she could scarcely take it in. She echoed: "Marry her?"

"Yes. Have I done well? She is charming, do not you think?"

"Yes, charming. You have done very well."

"Then you approve?"

"Yes, I approve."

"But how strangely you say so. I could fancy that—that you were not glad."

"Yes, indeed, I am—very glad."

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly."

And to prove it she threw her arms round him and kissed him heartily with warm motherly kisses. Then, when she had wiped her eyes, which were full of tears, she observed upon the beach a man lying flat at full length like a dead body, his face hidden against the stones; it was the other one, Pierre, sunk in thought and desperation.

At this she led her little Jean further away, quite to the edge of the waves, and there they talked for a long time of this marriage on which he had set his heart.

The rising tide drove them back to rejoin the fishers, and then they all made their way to the shore. They roused Pierre, who pretended to be sleeping; and then came a long dinner washed down with many kinds of wine. [131]

CHAPTER VII

In the break, on their way home, all the men dozed excepting Jean. Beausire and Roland dropped every five minutes on to a neighbor's shoulder which repelled them with a shove. Then they sat up, ceased to snore, opened their eyes, muttered "a lovely evening!" and almost immediately fell over on the other side.

By the time they reached Havre their drowsiness was so heavy that they had great difficulty in shaking it off, and Beausire even refused to go to Jean's rooms where tea was waiting for them. He had to be set down at his own door.

The young lawyer was to sleep in his new abode for the first time; and he was full of rather puerile glee which had suddenly come over him, at being able, that very evening to show his betrothed the rooms she was so soon to inhabit.

The maid had gone to bed, Mme. Roland having declared that she herself would boil the water and make the tea, for she did not like the servants to be kept up for fear of fire.

No one had yet been into the lodgings but herself, Jean, and the workmen, that the surprise might be the greater at their being so pretty.

Jean begged them all to wait a moment in the ante-room. He wanted to light the lamps and candles, and he left Mme. Rosémilly in the dark with his father and brother; then he cried! "Come in!" opening the double door to its full width. [132]

The glass gallery, lighted by a chandelier and little colored lamps hidden among palms, india-rubber plants and flowers, was first seen like a scene on the stage. There was a spasm of surprise. Roland, dazzled by such luxury, muttered an oath, and felt inclined to clap his hands as if it were a pantomime scene. They then went into the first drawing-room, a small room hung with dead gold and furnished to match. The larger drawing-room—the lawyer's consulting-room, very simple, hung with light salmon-color, was dignified in style.

Jean sat down in his armchair in front of his writing-table loaded with books, and in a solemn, rather stilted tone, he began:

"Yes, madame, the letter of the law is explicit, and, assuming the consent I promised you, it affords me absolute certainty that the matter we discussed will come to a happy conclusion within three months."

He looked at Mme. Rosémilly, who began to smile and glanced at Mme. Roland. Madame Roland took her hand and pressed it. Jean, in high spirits, cut a caper like a schoolboy, exclaiming: "Hah! How well the voice carries in this room; it would be capital for speaking in."

And he declaimed:

"If humanity alone, if the instinct of natural benevolence which we feel toward all who suffer, were the motive of the acquittal we expect of you, I should appeal to your compassion, gentlemen of the jury, to your hearts as fathers and as men; but we have law on our side, and it is the point of law only which we shall submit to your judgment."

Pierre was looking at this home which might have been his, and he was restive under his brother's frolics, thinking him really too silly and witless. [133]

Mme. Roland opened a door on the right.

"This is the bedroom," said she.

She had devoted herself to its decoration with all her mother's love. The hangings were of Rouen cretonne imitating old Normandy chintz, and the Louis XV design—a shepherdess, in a medallion held in the beaks of a pair of doves—gave the walls, curtains, bed, and armchairs a festive, rustic style that was extremely pretty!

"Oh, how charming!" Mme. Rosémilly exclaimed, becoming a little serious as they entered the room.

"Do you like it?" asked Jean.

"Immensely."

"You cannot imagine how glad I am."

They looked at each other for a second, with confiding tenderness in the depths of their eyes.

She had felt a little awkward, however, a little abashed, in this room which was to be hers. She noticed as she went in that the bed was a large one, quite a family bed, chosen by Mme. Roland, who had no doubt foreseen and hoped that her son should soon marry; and this motherly foresight pleased her, for it seemed to tell her that she was expected in the family.

When they had returned to the drawing-room Jean abruptly threw open the door to the left, showing the circular dining-room with three windows, and decorated to imitate a Chinese lantern. Mother and son had here lavished all the fancy of which they were capable, and the room, with its bamboo furniture, its mandarins, jars, silk hangings glistening with gold, transparent blinds threaded with beads looking like drops of water, fans nailed to the wall to [134] drape the hangings on, screens, swords, masks, cranes made of real feathers, and a myriad trifles in china, wood, paper, ivory, mother of pearl, and bronze, had the pretentious and extravagant aspect which unpracticed hands and uneducated eyes inevitably stamp on things which need the utmost tact, taste, and artistic education. Nevertheless it was the most admired; only Pierre made some observations with rather bitter irony which hurt his brother's feelings.

Pyramids of fruit stood on the table and monuments of cakes. No one was hungry; they picked at the fruit and nibbled at the cakes rather than ate them. Then, at the end of about an hour, Mme. Rosémilly begged to take leave. It was decided that old Roland should accompany her home and set out with her forthwith; while Madame Roland, in the maid's absence, should cast a maternal eye over the house and see that her son had all he needed.

"Shall I come back for you?" asked Roland.

She hesitated a moment and then said: "No, dear old man; go to bed. Pierre will see me home."

As soon as they were gone she blew out the candles, locked up the cakes, the sugar, and liqueurs in a cupboard of which she gave the key to Jean; then she went into the bedroom, turned down the bed, saw that there was fresh water in the water-bottle, and that the window was properly closed.

Pierre and Jean had remained in the little outer drawing-room; the younger still sore under the criticism passed on his taste, and the elder chafing more and more at seeing his brother in this abode. They both sat smoking without a word. Pierre suddenly started to his feet. [135]

"Cristi!" he exclaimed. "The widow looked very jaded this evening. Long excursions do not improve her."

Jean felt his spirit rising with one of those sudden and furious rages which boil up in easy-going natures when they are wounded to the quick. He could hardly find breath to speak, so fierce was his excitement, and he stammered out:

"I forbid you ever again to say 'the widow' when you speak of Mme. Rosémilly."

Pierre turned on him haughtily:

"You are giving me an order, I believe. Are you gone mad by any chance?"

Jean had pulled himself up.

"I am not gone mad, but I have had enough of your manners to me."

Pierre sneered: "To you? And are you any part of Mme. Rosémilly?"

"You are to know that Mme. Rosémilly is about to become my wife."

Pierre laughed the louder.

"Ah! ha! Very good. I understand now why I should no longer speak of her as 'the widow.' But you have taken a strange way of announcing your engagement."

"I forbid any jesting about it. Do you hear? I forbid it."

Jean had come close up to him, pale, and his voice quivering with exasperation at this irony leveled at the woman he loved and had chosen. [136]

But on a sudden Pierre turned equally furious. All the accumulation of impotent rage, of suppressed malignity, of rebellion choked down for so long past, all his unspoken despair mounted to his brain, bewildering it like a fit.

"How dare you? How dare you? I order you to hold your tongue—do you hear? I order you."

Jean, startled by his violence, was silent for a few seconds, trying in the confusion of mind which comes of rage to hit on the thing, the phrase, the word, which might stab his brother to the heart. He went on, with an effort to control himself that he might aim true, and to speak slowly that the words might hit more keenly:

"I have known for a long time that you were jealous of me, ever since the day when you first began to talk of 'the widow' because you knew it annoyed me."

Pierre broke into one of those strident and scornful laughs which were common with him:

"Ah! ah! Good Heavens! Jealous of you? I? I? And of what? Good God! Of your person or your mind?"

But Jean knew full well that he had touched the wound in his soul.

"Yes, jealous of me—jealous from your childhood up. And it became fury when you saw that this woman liked me best and would have nothing to say to you."

Pierre, stung to the quick by this assumption, stuttered out:

"I? I? Jealous of you? And for the sake of that goose, that gaby, that simpleton?"

Jean, seeing that he was aiming true, went on:

"And how about the day when you tried to pull me round in the *Pearl*? And all you said in her presence to show off? Why you are bursting with jealousy? And when this money was left to me you were maddened, you hated me, you showed it in every possible way, and made every one suffer for it; not an hour passes that you do not spit out the bile that is choking you." [137]

Pierre clenched his fist in his fury with an almost irresistible impulse to fly at his brother and seize him by the throat.

"Hold your tongue," he cried. "At least say nothing about that money."

Jean went on:

"Why your jealousy oozes out at every pore. You never say a word to my father, my mother, or me that does not declare it plainly. You pretend to despise me because you are jealous. You try to pick a quarrel with every one because you are jealous. And now that I am rich you can no longer contain yourself; you have become venomous, you torture our poor mother as if she were to

blame!"

Pierre had retired step by step as far as the fireplace, his mouth half open, his eyes glaring, a prey to one of those mad fits of passion in which crime is committed.

He said again in a lower tone, gasping for breath: "Hold your tongue—for God's sake hold your tongue!"

"No! For a long time I have been wanting to give you my whole mind! you have given me an opening—so much the worse for you. I love the woman; you know it, and laugh her to scorn in my presence—so much the worse for you. But I will break your viper's fangs, I tell you. I will make [138] you treat me with respect."

"With respect—you?"

"Yes—me."

"Respect you? You who have brought shame on us all by your greed."

"You say—? Say it again—again."

"I say that it does not do to accept one man's fortune when another is reputed to be your father."

Jean stood rigid, not understanding, dazed by the insinuation he scented.

"What? Repeat that once more."

"I say—what everybody is muttering, what every gossip is blabbing—that you are the son of the man who left you his fortune. Well, then—a decent man does not take money which brings dishonor on his mother."

"Pierre! Pierre! Pierre! Think what you are saying. You? It is you who give utterance to this infamous thing?"

"Yes, I. It is I. Have you not seen me crushed with woe this month past, spending my nights without sleep and my days in lurking out of sight like an animal? I hardly know what I am doing or what will become of me, so miserable am I, so crazed with shame and grief; for first I guessed —and now I know it."

"Pierre! Be silent. Mother is in the next room. Remember she may hear—she must hear."

But Pierre felt that he must unburden his heart. He told Jean all his suspicions, his arguments, his struggles, his assurance, and the history of the portrait—which had again disappeared. He spoke in short broken sentences almost without coherence—the language of a sleep-walker. [139]

He seemed to have quite forgotten Jean, and his mother in the adjoining room. He talked as if no one were listening, because he must talk, because he had suffered too much and smothered and closed the wound too tightly. It had festered like an abscess and the abscess had burst, splashing every one. He was pacing the room in the way he almost always did, his eyes fixed on vacancy, gesticulating in a frenzy of despair, his voice choked with tearless sobs and revulsions of self-loathing; he spoke as if he were making a confession of his own misery and that of his nearest kin, as though he were casting his woes to the deaf, invisible winds which bore away his words.

Jean, distracted and almost convinced on a sudden by his brother's blind vehemence, was leaning against the door behind which, as he guessed, their mother had heard them.

She could not get out, she must come through this room. She had not come; then it was because she dared not.

Suddenly Pierre stamped his foot:

"I am a brute," he cried, "to have told you this."

And he fled, bare-headed, down the stairs.

The noise of the front-door closing with a slam roused Jean from the deep stupor into which he had fallen. Some seconds had elapsed, longer than hours, and his spirit had sunk into the numb torpor of idiocy. He was conscious, indeed, that he must presently think and act, but he would wait, refusing to understand, to know, to remember, out of fear, weakness, cowardice. He was [140] one of those procrastinators who put everything off till the morrow; and when he was compelled to come to a decision then and there, still he instinctively tried to gain a few minutes.

But the perfect silence which now reigned, after Pierre's vociferations, the sudden stillness of walls and furniture, with the bright light of six wax candles and two lamps, terrified him so greatly that he suddenly longed to make his escape too.

Then he roused his brain, roused his heart, and tried to reflect.

Never in his life had he had to face a difficulty. There are men who let themselves glide onward like running water. He had been duteous over his tasks for fear of punishment, and had got through his legal studies with credit because his existence was tranquil. Everything in the world seemed to him quite natural and never aroused his particular attention. He loved order, steadiness, and peace, by temperament, his nature having no complications; and face to face with this catastrophe, he found himself like a man who has fallen into the water and cannot swim.

At first he tried to be incredulous. His brother had told a lie, out of hatred and jealousy. But yet, how could he have been so vile as to say such a thing of their mother if he had not himself been distraught by despair? Besides, stamped on Jean's ear, on his sight, on his nerves, on the inmost fibers of his flesh, were certain words, certain tones of anguish, certain gestures of Pierre's, so full of suffering that they were irresistibly convincing; as incontrovertible as certainty itself.

He was too much crushed to stir or even to will. His distress became unbearable; and he knew that behind the door was his mother who had heard everything and was waiting. [141]

What was she doing? Not a movement, not a shudder, not a breath, not a sigh revealed the presence of a living creature behind that panel. Could she have run away? But how? If she had run away—she must have jumped out of the window into the street. A shock of terror roused him —so violent and imperious that he drove the door in rather than opened it, and flung himself into the bedroom.

It was apparently empty, lighted by a single candle standing on the chest of drawers.

Jean flew to the window, it was shut and the shutters bolted. He looked about him, peering into the dark corners with anxious eyes, and he then noticed that the bed-curtains were drawn. He ran forward and opened them. His mother was lying on the bed, her face buried in the pillow which she had pulled up over her ears that she might hear no more.

At first he thought she had smothered herself. Then taking her by the shoulders, he turned her over without her leaving go of the pillow, which covered her face, and in which she had set her teeth to keep herself from crying out.

But the mere touch of this rigid form, of those arms so convulsively clenched, communicated to him the shock of her unspeakable torture. The strength and determination with which she clutched the linen case full of feathers with her hands and teeth, over her mouth and eyes and ears, that he might neither see her nor speak to her, gave him an idea, by the turmoil it roused in him, of the pitch suffering may rise to, and his heart, his simple heart, was torn with pity. He was [142] no judge, not he; not even a merciful judge; he was a man full of weakness and a son full of love. He remembered nothing of what his brother had told him; he neither reasoned nor argued, he merely laid his two hands on his mother's inert body, and not being able to pull the pillow away, he exclaimed, kissing her dress:

"Mother, mother, my poor mother, look at me."

She would have seemed to be dead but that an almost imperceptible shudder ran through all her limbs, the vibration of a strained cord. And he repeated:

"Mother, mother, listen to me. It is not true. I know that it is not true."

A spasm seemed to come over her, a fit of suffocation; then she suddenly began to sob into the pillow. Her sinews relaxed, her rigid muscles yielded, her fingers gave way and left go of the linen; and he uncovered her face.

She was pale, quite colorless; and from under her closed lids tears were stealing. He threw his arms round her neck and kissed her eyes, slowly, with long heart-broken kisses, wet with her tears; and he said again and again:

"Mother, my dear mother, I know it is not true. Do not cry; I know it. It is not true."

She raised herself, she sat up, looked in his face, and with an effort of courage such as it must cost in some cases to kill one's self, she said:

"No, my child; it is true."

And they remained speechless, each in the presence of the other. For some minutes she seemed again to be suffocating, craning her throat and throwing back her head to get breath; then she once more mastered herself and went on: [143]

"It is true, my child. Why lie about it? It is true. You would not believe me if I denied it."

She looked like a crazy creature. Overcome by alarm, he fell on his knees by the bedside murmuring:

"Hush, mother, be silent." She stood up with terrible determination and energy.

"I have nothing more to say, my child. Good-by." And she went toward the door.

He threw his arms about her exclaiming:

"What are you doing, mother; where are you going?"

"I do not know. How should I know—There is nothing left for me to do, now that I am alone."

She struggled to be released. Holding her firmly, he could find only words to say again and again:

"Mother, mother, mother!" And through all her efforts to free herself she was saying:

"No, no. I am not your mother now. I am nothing to you, to anybody—nothing, nothing. You have neither father nor mother now, poor boy—good-by."

It struck him clearly that if he let her go now he should never see her again; lifting her up in his arms he carried her to an armchair, forced her into it, and kneeling down in front of her barred her in with his arms.

"You shall not quit this spot, mother. I love you and I will keep you! I will keep you always—I love you and you are mine."

She murmured in a dejected tone:

"No, my poor boy, it is impossible. You weep to-night, but to-morrow you would turn me out of the house. You, even you, could not forgive me."

He replied: "I? I? How little you know me!" with such a burst of genuine affection that with a cry, [144] she seized his head by the hair with both hands, and dragging him violently to her kissed him distractedly all over the face.

Then she sat still, her cheek against his, feeling the warmth of his skin through his beard, and she whispered in his ear: "No, my little Jean, you would not forgive me to-morrow. You think so, but you deceive yourself. You have forgiven me this evening, and that forgiveness has saved my life; but you must never see me again."

And he repeated, clasping her in his arms:

"Mother, do not say that."

"Yes, my child, I must go away. I do not know where, nor how I shall set about it, nor what I shall do; but it must be done. I could never look at you, nor kiss you, do you understand?"

Then he in his turn spoke into her ear:

"My little mother, you are to stay, because I insist, because I want you. And you must pledge your word to obey me, now at once."

"No, my child."

"Yes, mother, you must; do you hear? You must."

"No, my child, it is impossible. It would be condemning us all to the tortures of hell. I know what that torment is; I have known it this month past. Your feelings are touched now, but when that is over, when you look on me as Pierre does, when you remember what I have told you—oh, my Jean, think—think—I am your mother!"

"I will not let you leave me, mother. I have no one but you."

"But think, my son, we can never see each other again without both of us blushing, without my [145] feeling that I must die of shame, without my eyes falling before yours."

"But it is not so mother."

"Yes, yes, yes, it is so! Oh, I have understood all your poor brother's struggles, believe me! All—from the very first day. Now when I hear his step in the house my heart beats as if it would burst, when I hear his voice I am ready to faint. I still had you; now I have you no longer. Oh, my little Jean! Do you think I could live between you two?"

"Yes, I should love you so much that you would cease to think of it."

"As if that were possible!"

"But it is possible!"

"How do you suppose that I could cease to think of it, with your brother and you on each hand? Would you cease to think of it, I ask you?"

"I? I swear I should."

"Why you would think of it at every hour of the day."

"No, I swear it. Besides, listen, if you go away I will enlist and get killed."

This boyish threat quite overcame her; she clasped Jean in a passionate and tender embrace. He went on:

"I love you more than you think—ah much more, much more. Come, be reasonable. Try to stay for only one week. Will you promise me one week? You cannot refuse me that?"

She laid her two hands on Jean's shoulders, and holding him at arm's length she said:

"My child, let us try and be calm and not give way to emotions. First, listen to me. If I were ever to hear from your lips what I have heard for this month past from your brother, if I were once to [146] see in your eyes what I read in his, if I could fancy from a word or a look that I was as odious to you as I am to him—within one hour, mark me—within one hour I should be gone forever."

"Mother, I swear to you—"

"Let me speak. For a month past I have suffered all that any creature can suffer. From the moment when I perceived that your brother, my other son, suspected me, that as the minutes

went by, he guessed the truth, every moment of my life has been a martyrdom which no words could tell you."

Her voice was so full of woe that the contagion of her misery brought the tears to Jean's eyes.

He tried to kiss her, but she held him off.

"Leave me—listen; I still have so much to say to make you understand. But you never can understand. You see, if I stayed—I must—no, no. I cannot."

"Speak on, mother, speak."

"Yes, indeed, for at least I shall not have deceived you. You want me to stay with you? For what—for us to be able to see each other, speak to each other, meet at any hour of the day at home, for I no longer dare open a door for fear of finding your brother behind it. If we are to do that, you must not forgive me—nothing is so wounding as forgiveness—but you must owe me no grudge for what I have done. You must feel yourself strong enough, and so far unlike the rest of the world, as to be able to say to yourself that you are not Roland's son without blushing for the fact or despising me. I have suffered enough—I have suffered too much; I can bear no more, no indeed, no more! And it is not a thing of yesterday, mind you, but of long, long years. But you could never [147] understand that, how should you! If you and I are to live together and kiss each other, my little Jean, you must believe that though I was your father's mistress I was yet more truly his wife, his real wife; that at the bottom of my heart, I cannot be ashamed of it; that I have no regrets; that I love him still even in death; that I shall always love him and never loved any other man; that he was my life, my joy, my hope, my comfort, everything—everything in the world to me for so long! Listen, my boy, before God, who hears me, I should never have had a joy in my existence if I had not met him; never anything—not a touch of tenderness or kindness, not one of those hours which make us regret growing old,—nothing. I owe everything to him! I had but him in the world, and you two boys, your brother and you. But for you, all would have been empty, dark, and void as the night. I should never have loved, or known, or cared for anything—I should not even have wept—for I have wept, my little Jean; oh yes, and bitter tears, since we came to Havre. I was his wholly and forever; for ten years I was as much his wife as he was my husband before God who created us for each other. And then I began to see that he loved me less. He was always kind and courteous, but I was not what I had been to him. It was all over! Oh, how I have cried! How dreadful and delusive life is! Nothing lasts. Then we came here—I never saw him again; he never came. He promised it in every letter. I was always expecting him, and I never saw him again—and now he is dead! But he still cared for us since he remembered you. I shall love him to my latest [148] breath, and I never will deny him, and I love you because you are his child, and I could never be ashamed of him before you. Do you understand? I could not. So if you wish me to remain you must accept the situation as his son, and we will talk of him sometimes; and you must love him a little and we must think of him when we look at each other. If you will not do this—if you cannot—then good-by, my child; it is impossible that we should live together. Now, I will act by your decision."

Jean replied gently:

"Stay, mother."

She clasped him in her arms, and her tears flowed again; then, with her face against his, she went on:

"Well, but Pierre. What can we do about Pierre?"

Jean murmured:

"We will find some plan! You cannot live with him any longer."

At the thought of her elder son she was convulsed with terror.

"No, I cannot; no, no!" And throwing herself on Jean's breast she cried in distress of mind:

"Save me from him, you my little one. Save me; do something—I don't know what. Think of something. Save me."

"Yes, mother, I will think of something."

"And at once. You must, this minute. Do not leave me. I am so afraid of him—so afraid."

"Yes, yes; I will hit on some plan. I promise you I will."

"But at once; quick, quick! You cannot imagine what I feel when I see him." [149]

Then she murmured softly in his ear: "Keep me here, with you."

He paused, reflected, and with his blunt good-sense saw at once the dangers of such an arrangement. But he had to argue for a long time, combatting her scared, terror-stricken insistence.

"Only for to-night," she said. "Only for to-night. And to-morrow morning you can send word to Roland that I was taken ill."

"That is out of the question, as Pierre left you here. Come take courage. I will arrange everything, I promise you, to-morrow; I will be with you by nine o'clock. Come, put on your bonnet. I will take

you home."

"I will do just what you desire," she said with a childlike impulse of timidity and gratitude.

She tried to rise, but the shock had been too much for her, she could not stand.

He made her drink some sugared water and smell at some salts, while he bathed her temples with vinegar. She let him do what he would, exhausted but comforted, as after the pains of child-birth. At last she could walk and she took his arm. The town hall clock struck three as they went past.

Outside their own door Jean kissed her, saying:

"Good-night, mother, keep up your courage."

She stealthily crept up the silent stairs, and into her room, undressed quickly, and slipped into bed with a long-forgotten sense of guilt. Roland was snoring. In all the house Pierre alone was awake, and had heard her come in. [150]

CHAPTER VIII

When he got back to his lodgings Jean dropped on a sofa; for the sorrows and anxieties which made his brother long to be moving, and to flee like a hunted prey, acted differently on his torpid nature and broke the strength of his arms and legs. He felt too limp to stir a finger, even to get to bed; limp body and soul, crushed and heart-broken. He had not been hit, as Pierre had been, in the purity of filial love, in the secret dignity which is the refuge of a proud heart; he was overwhelmed by the stroke of fate which, at the same time threatened his own nearest interests.

When at last his spirit was calmer, when his thoughts had settled like water that has been stirred and lashed, he could contemplate the situation which had come before him. If he had learned the secret of his birth through any other channel he would assuredly have been very wroth and very deeply pained, but after his quarrel with his brother, after the violent and brutal betrayal which had shaken his nerves, the agonizing emotion of his mother's confession had so bereft him of energy that he could not rebel. The shock to his feelings had been so great as to sweep away in an irresistible tide of pathos, all prejudice, and all the sacred delicacy of natural morality. Besides, he was not a man made for resistance. He did not like contending against any one, least of all against himself, so he resigned himself at once; and by instinctive tendency, a congenital love of peace, and of easy and tranquil life, he began to anticipate the agitations which must surge up around him and at once be his ruin. He foresaw that they were inevitable, and to avert [151] them he made up his mind to superhuman efforts of energy and activity. The knot must be cut immediately, this very day; for even he had fits of that imperious demand for a swift solution which is the only strength of weak natures, incapable of a prolonged effort of will. His lawyer's mind, accustomed as it was to disentangling and studying complicated situations and questions of domestic difficulties in families that had got out of gear, at once foresaw the more immediate consequences of his brother's state of mind. In spite of himself, he looked at the issue from an almost professional point of view, as though he had to legislate for the future relations of certain clients after a moral disaster. Constant friction against Pierre had certainly become unendurable. He could easily evade it, no doubt, by living in his own lodgings; but even then it was not possible that their mother should live under the same roof with her elder son. For a long time he sat meditating, motionless, on the cushions, devising and rejecting various possibilities, and finding nothing that satisfied him.

But suddenly an idea took him by storm. This fortune which had come to him. Would an honest man keep it?

"No," was the first immediate answer, and he made up his mind that it must go to the poor. It was hard, but it could not be helped. He would sell his furniture and work like any other man, like any other beginner. This manful and painful resolution spurred his courage; he rose and went to the window, leaning his forehead against the pane. He had been poor; he could become poor again. After all, he should not die of it. His eyes were fixed on the gas lamp burning at the opposite side [152] of the street. A woman, much belated, happened to pass; suddenly he thought of Mme. Rosémilly with the pang at his heart, the shock of deep feeling which comes of a cruel suggestion. All the dire results of his decision rose up before him together. He would have to renounce his marriage, renounce happiness, renounce everything. Could he do such a thing after having pledged himself to her? She had accepted him knowing him to be rich. She would take him still if he were poor; but had he any right to demand such a sacrifice? Would it not be better to keep this money in trust, to be restored to the poor at some future date?

And in his soul, where selfishness put on a guise of honesty, all these specious interests were struggling and contending. His first scruples yielded to ingenious reasoning, then came to the top again, and again disappeared.

He sat down again, seeking some decisive motive, some all-sufficient pretext to solve his hesitancy and convince his natural rectitude. Twenty times over had he asked himself this question: "Since I am this man's son, since I know and acknowledge it, is it not natural that I should also accept the inheritance?"

But even this argument could not suppress the "No" murmured by his inmost conscience.

Then came the thought: "Since I am not the son of the man I always believed to be my father, I can take nothing from him, neither during his lifetime nor after his death. It would be neither dignified nor equitable. It would be robbing my brother."

This new view of the matter having relieved him and quieted his conscience, he went to the window again. [153]

"Yes," he said to himself, "I must give up my share of the family inheritance. I must let Pierre have the whole of it, since I am not his father's son. That is but just. Then is it not just that I should keep my father's money?"

Having discerned that he could take nothing of Roland's savings, having decided on giving up the whole of this money, he agreed; he resigned himself to keeping Maréchal's; for if he rejected both he would find himself reduced to beggary.

This delicate question being thus disposed of, he came back to that of Pierre's presence in the family. How was he to be got rid of? He was giving up his search for any practical solution when the whistle of a steam-vessel coming into port seemed to blow him an answer by suggesting a scheme.

Then he threw himself on his bed without undressing, and dozed and dreamed until daybreak.

At a little before nine he went out to ascertain whether his plans were feasible. Then, after making sundry inquiries and calls, he went to his old home. His mother was waiting for him in her room.

"If you had not come," she said, "I should never have dared to go down."

In a minute Roland's voice was heard on the stairs: "Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all!"

There was no answer, and he roared out, with a thundering oath this time: "Joséphine, what the devil are you about?"

The girl's voice came up from the depths of the basement:

"Yes, m'sieu—what is it?"

"Where is your Miss'es?" [154]

"Madame is upstairs with M'sieu Jean."

Then he shouted, looking up at the higher floor: "Louise!"

Mme. Roland half opened her door and answered:

"What is it, my dear?"

"Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all!"

"Yes, my dear, I am coming."

And she went down, followed by Jean.

Roland, as soon as he saw him, exclaimed:

"Hallo! There you are! Sick of your home already?"

"No, father, but I had something to talk over with mother this morning."

Jean went forward holding out his hand, and when he felt his fingers in the old man's fatherly clasp, a strange, unforeseen emotion thrilled through him, and a sense as of parting and farewell without return.

Mme. Roland asked:

"Pierre is not come down?"

Her husband shrugged his shoulders:

"No, but never mind him; he is always behind hand. We will begin without him."

She turned to Jean:

"You had better go to call him, my child; it hurts his feelings if we do not wait for him."

"Yes, mother. I will go."

And the young man went. He mounted the stairs with the fevered determination of a man who is about to fight a duel and who is in a fright. When he knocked at the door Pierre said:

"Come in."

He went in. The elder was writing, leaning over his table. [155]

"Good morning," said Jean.

Pierre rose.

"Good morning," and they shook hands as if nothing had occurred.

"Are you not coming down to breakfast?"

"Well—you see—I have a good deal to do." The elder brother's voice was tremulous, and his anxious eye asked his younger brother what he meant to do.

"They are waiting for you."

"Oh! There is—is my mother down?"

"Yes, it was she who sent me to fetch you."

"Ah, very well; then I will come."

At the door of the dining-room he paused, doubtful about going in first; then he abruptly opened the door and saw his father and mother seated at the table opposite each other.

He went straight up to her without looking at her or saying a word, and bending over her offered his forehead for her to kiss, as he had done for some time past, instead of kissing her on both cheeks as of old. He supposed that she put her lips near, but he did not feel them on his brow, and he straightened himself with a throbbing heart after this feint of a caress. And he wondered:

"What did they say to each other after I had left?"

Jean constantly addressed her tenderly as "mother," or "dear mother," took care of her, waited on her, and poured out her wine.

Then Pierre understood that they had wept together, but he could not read their minds. Did Jean believe in his mother's guilt, or think his brother a base wretch?

And all his self-reproach for having uttered the horrible thing came upon him again, choking his throat and his tongue, and preventing his either eating or speaking. [156]

He was now a prey to an intolerable desire to fly, to leave the house which was his home no longer, and these persons who were bound to him by such imperceptible ties. He would gladly have been off that moment, no matter whither, feeling that everything was over, that he could not endure to stay with them, that his presence was torture to them, and that they would bring on him incessant suffering too great to endure. Jean was talking, chatting with Roland. Pierre, as he did not listen, did not hear. But he presently was aware of a pointed tone in his brother's voice and paid more attention to his words. Jean was saying:

"She will be the finest ship in their fleet. They say she is of 6,500 tons. She is to make her first trip next month."

Roland was amazed.

"So soon? I thought she was not to be ready for sea this summer."

"Yes. The work has been pushed forward very vigorously, to get her through her first voyage before the autumn. I looked in at the Company's office this morning, and was talking with one of the directors."

"Indeed! Which of them?"

"M. Marchand, who is a great friend of the Chairman of the Board."

"Oh! Do you know him?"

"Yes. And I wanted to ask him a favor."

"Then you will get me leave to go over every part of the *Lorraine* as soon as she comes into port?"

"To be sure, nothing can be easier."

Then Jean seemed to hesitate, to be weighing his words, and to want to lead up to a difficult subject. He went on: [157]

"On the whole, life is very endurable on board those great Transatlantic liners. More than half the time is spent on shore in two splendid cities—New York and Havre; and the remainder at sea with delightful company. In fact, very pleasant acquaintances are sometimes made among the passengers, and very useful in after-life—yes, really very useful. Only think, the captain, with his perquisites on coal, can make as much as twenty-five thousand francs a year or more."

Roland muttered an oath followed by a whistle, which testified to his deep respect both for the sum and the captain.

Jean went on:

"The purser makes as much as ten thousand, and the doctor has a fixed salary of five thousand, with lodgings, keep, light, firing, service, and everything, which makes it up to ten thousand at least. That is very good pay."

Pierre, raising his eyes, met his brother's and understood.

Then, after some hesitation, he asked:

"Is it very hard to get a place as medical man on board a Transatlantic liner?"

"Yes—and no. It all depends on circumstances and recommendation."

There was a long pause; then the doctor began again.

"Next month, you say, the *Lorraine* is to sail?"

"Yes. On the 7th."

And they said no more.

Pierre was considering. It certainly would be a way out of many difficulties if he could embark as medical officer on board the steamship. By-and-by he could see; he might perhaps give it up. [158] Meanwhile he would be gaining a living, and asking for nothing from his parents. Only two days since he had been forced to sell his watch, for he would no longer hold out his hand to beg of his mother. So he had no other resource left, no opening to enable him to eat the bread of any house but this which had become uninhabitable, or sleep in any other bed, or under any other roof. He presently said with some little hesitation:

"If I could, I would very gladly sail in her."

Jean asked:

"What should hinder you?"

"I know no one in the Transatlantic Shipping Company."

Roland was astounded:

"And what has become of all your fine schemes for getting on?"

Pierre replied in a low voice:

"There are times when we must bring ourselves to sacrifice everything and renounce our fondest hopes. And after all it is only to make a beginning, a way of saving a few thousand francs to start fair with afterward."

His father was promptly convinced.

"That is very true. In a couple of years you can put by six or seven thousand francs, and that well laid out, will go a long way. What do you think of the matter, Louise?"

She replied in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible:

"I think Pierre is right."

Roland exclaimed:

"I will go and talk it over with M. Poulin; I know him very well. He is assessor of the Chamber of [159] Commerce and takes an interest in the affairs of the Company. There is M. Lenient, too, the ship-owner, who is intimate with one of the vice-chairmen."

Jean asked his brother:

"Would you like me to feel my way with M. Marchand at once?"

"Yes, I should be very glad."

After thinking a few minutes, Pierre added:

"The best thing I can do, perhaps, will be to write to my professors at the College of Medicine who had a great regard for me. Very inferior men are sometimes shipped on board those vessels. Letters of strong recommendation from such professors as Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel would do more for me in an hour than all the doubtful introductions in the world. It would be enough if your friend M. Marchand would lay them before the board."

Jean approved heartily.

"Your idea is really capital." And he smiled, quite reassured, almost happy, sure of success and incapable of allowing himself to be unhappy for long.

"You will write to-day?" he said.

"Directly. Now; at once. I will go and do so. I do not care for any coffee this morning; I am too nervous."

He rose and left the room.

Then Jean turned to his mother:

"And you, mother, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. I do not know."

"Will you come with me to call on Mme. Rosémilly?"

"Why, yes—yes." [160]

"You know I must positively go to see her to-day."

"Yes, yes. To be sure."

"Why must you positively?" asked Roland, whose habit it was never to understand what was said in his presence.

"Because I promised her I would."

"Oh, very well. That alters the case." And he began to fill his pipe, while the mother and son went upstairs to make ready.

When they were in the street Jean said:

"Will you take my arm, mother?"

He was never accustomed to offer it, for they were in the habit of walking side by side. She accepted, and leaned on him.

For some time they did not speak; then he said:

"You see that Pierre is quite ready and willing to go away."

She murmured:

"Poor boy."

"But why 'poor boy'? He will not be in the least unhappy on board the *Lorraine*!"

"No—I know. But I was thinking of so many things."

And she thought for a long time, her head bent, accommodating her step to her son's; then, in the peculiar voice in which we sometimes give utterance to the conclusion of long and secret meditations, she exclaimed:

"How horrible life is! If by any chance we come across any sweetness in it, we sin in letting ourselves be happy, and pay dearly for it afterward."

He said in a whisper:

"Do not speak of that any more, mother."

"Is that possible? I think of nothing else." [161]

"You will forget it."

Again she was silent; then with deep regret she said:

"How happy I might have been, married to another man."

She was visiting it on Roland now, throwing all the responsibility of her sin on his ugliness, his stupidity, his clumsiness, the heaviness of his intellect, and the vulgarity of his person. It was to this that it was owing that she had betrayed him, had driven one son to desperation, and had been forced to utter to the other the most agonizing confession that can make a mother's heart bleed. She muttered: "It is so frightful for a young girl to have to marry such a husband as mine."

Jean made no reply. He was thinking of the man he had hitherto believed to be his father; and possibly the vague notion he had long since conceived, of that father's inferiority, with his brother's constant irony, the scornful indifference of others, and the very maid-servant's contempt for Roland, had somewhat prepared his mind for his mother's terrible avowal. It had all made it less dreadful to him to find that he was another man's son; and if, after the great shock and agitation of the previous evening, he had not suffered the reaction of rage, indignation, and rebellion which Mme. Roland had feared, it was because he had long been unconsciously chafing under the sense of being the child of this well-meaning lout.

They had now reached the dwelling of Mme. Rosémilly.

She lived on the road to Sainte-Adresse, on the second floor of a large tenement which she owned. The windows commanded a view of the whole roadstead.

On seeing Mme. Roland, who entered first, instead of merely holding out her hands as usual, she [162] put her arms round her and kissed her, for she divined the purpose of her visit.

The furniture of this drawing-room, all in stamped velvet, was always shrouded in chair-covers. The walls, hung with flowered paper, were graced by four engravings, the purchase of her late husband, the captain. They represented sentimental scenes of seafaring life. In the first, a fisherman's wife was seen, waving a handkerchief on shore, while the vessel which bore away her husband vanished on the horizon. In the second, the same woman on her knees on the same shore, under a sky shot with lightning, wrung her arms as she gazed into the distance at her husband's boat, which was going to the bottom amid impossible waves.

The others represented similar scenes in a higher rank of society. A young lady with fair hair,

resting her elbows on the edge of a large steamship quitting the shore, gazed at the already distant coast with eyes full of tears and regret. Whom is she leaving behind?

Then the same young lady sitting by an open window with a view of the sea, had fainted in an armchair; a letter she had dropped lay at her feet. So he is dead! What despair!

Visitors were generally much moved and charmed by the commonplace pathos of these obvious and sentimental works. They were at once intelligible without question or explanation, and the poor women were to be pitied, though the nature of the grief of the more elegant of the two was not precisely known. But this very doubt contributed to the sentiment. She had, no doubt, lost her lover. On entering the room the eye was immediately attracted to these four pictures, and riveted [163] as if fascinated. If it wandered it was only to return and contemplate the four expressions on the faces of the two women, who were as like each other as two sisters. And the very style of these works, in their shining frames, crisp, sharp, and highly finished, with the elegance of a fashion plate, suggested a sense of cleanliness and propriety which was confirmed by the rest of the fittings. The seats were always in precisely the same order, some against the wall and some round the circular center-table. The immaculately white curtains hung in such straight and regular pleats that one longed to crumple them a little; and never did a grain of dust rest on the shade under which the gilt clock, in the taste of the first empire—a terrestrial globe supported by Atlas on his knees—looked like a melon left there to ripen.

The two women as they sat down somewhat altered the normal position of their chairs.

"You have not been out this morning?" asked Mme. Roland.

"No. I must own to being rather tired."

And she spoke as if in gratitude to Jean and his mother, of all the pleasure she had derived from the expedition and the prawn-fishing.

"I ate my prawns this morning," she added, "and they were excellent. If you felt inclined we might go again one of these days."

The young man interrupted her:

"Before we start on a second fishing excursion, suppose we complete the first?"

"Complete it? It seems to me quite finished." [164]

"Nay, madame, I, for my part, caught something on the rocks of Saint Jouin which I am anxious to carry home with me."

She put on an innocent and knowing look.

"You? What can it be? What can you have found?"

"A wife. And my mother and I have come to ask you whether she has changed her mind this morning."

She smiled: "No, monsieur. I never change my mind."

And then he held out his hand, wide open, and she put hers into it with a quick, determined movement. Then he said: "As soon as possible, I hope."

"As soon as you like."

"In six weeks?"

"I have no opinion. What does my future mother-in-law say?"

Mme. Roland replied with a rather melancholy smile:

"I? Oh, I can say nothing. I can only thank you for having accepted Jean, for you will make him very happy."

"We will do our best, mamma."

Somewhat overcome, for the first time, Mme. Rosémilly rose, and throwing her arms round Mme. Roland, kissed her a long time as a child of her own might have done; and under this new embrace the poor woman's sick heart swelled with deep emotion. She could not have expressed the feeling; it was at once sad and sweet. She had lost her son, her big boy, but in return she had found a daughter, a grown-up daughter.

When they faced each other again, and were seated, they took hands and remained so, looking at each other and smiling, while they seemed to have forgotten Jean. [165]

Then they discussed a number of things which had to be thought of in view of an early marriage, and when everything was settled and decided Mme. Rosémilly seemed suddenly to remember a further detail and asked: "You have consulted M. Roland, I suppose?"

A flush of color mounted at the same instant to the face of both mother and son. It was the mother who replied:

"Oh, no, it is quite unnecessary!" Then she hesitated, feeling that some explanation was needed, and added: "We do everything without saying anything to him. It is enough to tell him what we

have decided on."

Mme. Rosémilly, not in the least surprised, only smiled, taking it as a matter of course, for the good man counted for so little.

When Mme. Roland was in the street again with her son she said:

"Suppose we go to your rooms for a little while. I should be glad to rest."

She felt herself homeless, shelterless, her own house being a terror to her.

They went into Jean's apartments.

As soon as the door was closed upon her she heaved a deep sigh, as if that bolt had placed her in safety, but then, instead of resting as she had said, she began to open the cupboards, to count the piles of linen, the pocket handkerchiefs, and socks. She changed the arrangement to place them in more harmonious order, more pleasing to her housekeeper's eye; and when she had put everything to her mind, laying out the towels, the shirts, and the drawers on their several shelves and dividing all the linen into three principal classes, body-linen, household linen, and table-linen, [166] she drew back and contemplated the results, and called out:

"Come here, Jean, and see how nice it looks."

He went and admired it to please her.

On a sudden, when he had sat down again, she came softly up behind his armchair, and putting her right arm round his neck she kissed him, while she laid on the chimney shelf a small packet wrapped in white paper which she held in the other hand.

"What is that?" he asked. Then, as she made no reply, he understood, recognizing the shape of the frame.

"Give it to me!" he said.

She pretended not to hear him, and went back to the linen cupboards. He got up hastily, took the melancholy relic, and going across the room, put it in the drawer of his writing table which he locked and doubled locked. She wiped away a tear with the tip of her finger, and said in a rather quavering voice: "Now I am going to see whether your new servant keeps the kitchen in good order. As she is out I can look into everything and make sure."

CHAPTER IX

Letters of recommendation from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel, written in the most flattering terms with regard to Doctor Pierre Roland, their pupil, had been submitted by Monsieur Marchand to the directors of the Transatlantic Shipping Company, seconded by M. Poulin, judge of the Chamber of Commerce, M. Lenient, a great ship-owner, and M. Marival, deputy to the Mayor of Havre, and a particular friend of Captain [167] Beausire's. It proved that no medical officer had yet been appointed to the *Lorraine*, and Pierre was lucky enough to be nominated within a few days.

The letter announcing it was handed to him one morning by Joséphine, just as he was dressed. His first feeling was that of a man condemned to death who is told that his sentence is commuted; he had an immediate sense of relief at the thought of his early departure and of the peaceful life on board, cradled by the rolling waves, always wandering, always moving. His life under his father's roof was now that of a stranger, silent and reserved. Ever since the evening when he allowed the shameful secret he had discovered to escape him in his brother's presence, he had felt that the last ties to his kindred were broken. He was harassed by remorse for having told this thing to Jean. He felt that it was odious, indecent, and brutal, and yet it was a relief to him to have uttered it.

He never met the eyes either of his mother or his brother; to avoid his gaze theirs had become surprisingly alert, with the cunning of foes who fear to cross each other. He was always wondering: "What can she have said to Jean? Did she confess or deny it? What does my brother believe? What does he think of her—what does he think of me?" He could not guess, and it drove him to frenzy. And he scarcely ever spoke to them, excepting when Roland was by, to avoid his questioning.

As soon as he received the letter announcing his appointment he showed it at once to his family. His father, who was prone to rejoicing over everything, clapped his hands. Jean spoke seriously, though his heart was full of gladness: "I congratulate you with all my heart, for I know there were [168] several other candidates. You certainly owe it to your professors' letters."

His mother bent her head and murmured:

"I am very glad you have been successful."

After breakfast he went to the Company's offices to obtain information on various particulars, and he asked the name of the doctor on board the *Picardie*, which was to sail next day, to inquire of him as to the details of his new life and any details he might think useful.

Doctor Pirette having gone on board, Pierre went to the ship, where he was received in a little

stateroom by a young man with a fair beard, not unlike his brother. They talked together a long time.

In the hollow depths of the huge ship they could hear a confused and continuous commotion; the noise of bales and cases pitched down into the hold mingling with footsteps, voices, the creaking of the machinery lowering the freight, the boatswain's whistle, and the clatter of chains dragged or wound onto capstans by the snorting and panting engine which sent a slight vibration from end to end of the great vessel.

But when Pierre had left his colleague and found himself in the street once more, a new form of melancholy came down on him, enveloping him like the fogs which roll over the sea, coming up from the ends of the world and holding in their intangible density something mysteriously impure, as it were the pestilential breath of a far-away, unhealthy land.

In his hours of greatest suffering he had never felt himself so sunk in a foul pit of misery. It was as though he had given the last wrench; there was no fiber of attachment left. In tearing up the [169] roots of every affection he had not hitherto had the distressful feeling which now came over him, like that of a lost dog. It was no longer a torturing mortal pain, but the frenzy of a forlorn and homeless animal, the physical anguish of a vagabond creature without a roof for shelter, lashed by the rain, the wind, the storm, all the brutal forces of the universe. As he set foot on the vessel, as he went into the cabin rocked by the waves, the very flesh of the man, who had always slept in a motionless and steady bed, had risen up against the insecurity henceforth of all his morrows. Till now that flesh had been protected by a solid wall built into the earth which held it, by the certainty of resting in the same spot, under a roof which could resist the gale. Now all that, which it was a pleasure to defy in the warmth of home, must become a peril and a constant discomfort. No earth under foot, only the greedy, heaving, complaining sea; no space around for walking, running, losing the way, only a few yards of planks to pace like a convict among other prisoners; no trees, no gardens, no streets, no houses; nothing but water and clouds. And the ceaseless motion of the ship beneath his feet. On stormy days he must lean against the wainscot, hold on to the doors, cling to the edge of the narrow berth to save himself from rolling out. On calm days he would hear the snorting throb of the screw, and feel the swift flight of the ship, bearing him on in its unpausing, regular, exasperating race.

And he was a prey to this vagabond convict's life solely because his mother had sinned.

He walked on, his heart sinking with the despairing sorrow of those who are doomed to exile. He no longer felt a haughty disdain and scornful hatred of the strangers he met, but a woeful [170] impulse to speak to them, to tell them all that he had to quit France, to be listened to and comforted. There was in the very depths of his heart the shamefaced need of a beggar who would fain hold out his hand—a timid but urgent need to feel that some one would grieve at his departing.

He thought of Marowsko. The old Pole was the only person who loved him well enough to feel true and keen emotion, and the doctor at once determined to go and see him.

When he entered the shop, the druggist, who was pounding powders in a marble mortar, started and left his work:

"You are never to be seen nowadays," said he.

Pierre explained that he had had a great many serious matters to attend to, but without giving the reason, and he took a seat, asking:

"Well, and how is business doing?"

Business was not doing at all. Competition was fearful, and rich folks rare in that workman's quarter. Nothing would sell but cheap drugs, and the doctors did not prescribe the costlier and more complicated remedies on which a profit is made of five hundred per cent. The old fellow ended by saying: "If this goes on for three months I shall shut up shop. If I did not count on you, dear good doctor, I should have turned shoeblack by this time."

Pierre felt a pang, and made up his mind to deal the blow at once, since it must be done.

"I—oh, I cannot be of any use to you. I am leaving Havre early next month." [171]

Marowsko took off his spectacles, so great was his agitation.

"You! You! What are you saying?"

"I say that I am going away, my poor friend."

The old man was stricken, feeling his last hope slipping from under him, and he suddenly turned against this man, whom he had followed, whom he loved, whom he had so implicitly trusted, and who forsook him thus.

He stammered out:

"You are surely not going to play me false—you?"

Pierre was so deeply touched that he felt inclined to embrace the old fellow.

"I am not playing you false. I have not found anything to do here, and I am going as medical

officer on board a transatlantic passenger boat."

"O Monsieur Pierre! And you always promised you would help me to make a living!"

"What can I do? I must make my own living. I have not a farthing in the world."

Marowsko said: "It is wrong; what you are doing is very wrong. There is nothing for me but to die of hunger. At my age this is the end of all things. It is wrong. You are forsaking a poor old man who came here to be with you. It is wrong."

Pierre tried to explain, to protest, to give reasons, to prove that he could not have done otherwise; the Pole, enraged by his desertion, would not listen to him, and he ended by saying, with an allusion no doubt to political events:

"You French—you never keep your word!"

At this Pierre rose, offended on his part, and taking rather a high tone he said: [172]

"You are unjust, père Marowsko; a man must have very strong motives to act as I have done, and you ought to understand that. Au revoir—I hope I may find you more reasonable." And he went away.

"Well, well," he thought, "not a soul will feel a sincere regret for me."

His mind sought through all the people he knew or had known, and among the faces which crossed his memory he saw that of the girl at the tavern who led him to doubt his mother.

He hesitated, having still an instinctive grudge against her, then suddenly reflected on the other hand: "After all, she was right." And he looked about him to find the turning.

The beer-shop, as it happened, was full of people, and also full of smoke. The customers, tradesmen, and laborers, for it was a holiday, were shouting, calling, laughing, and the master himself was waiting on them, running from table to table, carrying away empty glasses and returning them crowned with froth.

When Pierre had found a seat not far from the desk he waited, hoping that the girl would see him and recognize him. But she passed him again and again as she went to and fro, pattering her feet under her skirts with a smart little strut. At last he rapped a coin on the table, and she hurried up.

"What will you take, sir?"

She did not look at him; her mind was absorbed in calculations of the liquor she had served.

"Well," said he, "this is a pretty way of greeting a friend."

She fixed her eyes on his face: "Ah!" said she hurriedly. "Is it you? You are pretty well? But I have [173] not a minute to-day. A bock did you wish for?"

"Yes, a bock!"

When she brought it he said:

"I have come to say good-by. I am going away."

And she replied indifferently:

"Indeed. Where are you going?"

"To America."

"A very fine country, they say."

And that was all!

Really he was very ill-advised to address her on such a busy day; there were too many people in the café.

Pierre went down to the sea. As he reached the jetty he descried the *Pearl*; his father and Beausire were coming in. Papagris was pulling, and the two men, seated in the stern, smoked their pipes with a look of perfect happiness. As they went past, the doctor said to himself: "Blessed are the simple-minded!" And he sat down on one of the benches on the breakwater, to try to lull himself in animal drowsiness.

When he went home in the evening his mother said, without daring to lift her eyes to his face:

"You will want a heap of things to take with you. I have ordered your underlinen, and I went into the tailor shop about cloth clothes; but is there nothing else you need—things which I, perhaps, know nothing about?"

His lips parted to say, "No, nothing." But he reflected that he must accept the means of getting a decent outfit, and he replied in a very calm voice: "I hardly know myself, yet. I will make inquiries at the office."

He inquired, and they gave him a list of indispensable necessaries. His mother, as she took it from his hand, looked up at him for the first time for very long, and in the depths of her eyes [174]

there was the humble expression, gentle, sad, and beseeching, of a dog that has been beaten and begs forgiveness.

On the 1st of October the *Lorraine* from Saint-Nazaire, came into the harbor of Havre to sail on the 7th, bound for New York, and Pierre Roland was to take possession of the little floating cabin in which henceforth his life was to be confined.

Next day as he was going out, he met his mother on the stairs waiting for him, to murmur in an almost inaudible voice:

"You would not like me to help you to put things to rights on board?"

"No, thank you. Everything is done."

Then she said:

"I should have liked to see your cabin."

"There is nothing to see. It is very small and very ugly."

And he went downstairs, leaving her stricken, leaning against the wall with a wan face.

Now Roland, who had gone over the *Lorraine* that very day, could talk of nothing all dinner time but this splendid vessel, and wondered that his wife should not care to see it as their son was to sail on board.

Pierre had scarcely any intercourse with his family during the days which followed. He was nervous, irritable, hard, and his rough speech seemed to lash every one indiscriminately. But the day before he left he was suddenly quite changed, and much softened. As he embraced his parents before going to sleep on board for the first time he said:

"You will come to say good-by to me on board, will you not?" [175]

Roland exclaimed:

"Why, yes, of course—of course, Louise?"

"Certainly, certainly," she said in a low voice.

Pierre went on: "We sail at eleven precisely. You must be there by half-past nine at the latest."

"Hah!" cried his father. "A good idea! As soon as we have bid you good-bye, we will make haste on board the *Pearl*, and look out for you beyond the jetty, so as to see you once more. What do you say, Louise?"

"Certainly."

Roland went on: "And in that way you will not lose sight of us among the crowd which throngs the breakwater when the great liners sail. It is impossible to distinguish your own friends in the mob. Does that meet your views?"

"Yes, to be sure; that is settled."

An hour later he was lying in his berth—a little crib as long and narrow as a coffin. There he remained with his eyes wide open for a long time, thinking over all that had happened during the last two months of his life, especially in his own soul. By dint of suffering and making others suffer, his aggressive and revengeful anguish had lost its edge, like a blunted sword. He scarcely had the heart left in him to owe any one or anything a grudge; he let his rebellious wrath float away down stream, as his life must. He was so weary of wrestling, weary of fighting, weary of hating, weary of everything, that he was quite worn out; and tried to stupefy his heart with forgetfulness as he dropped asleep. He heard vaguely, all about him, the unwonted noises of the ship, slight noises, and scarcely audible on this calm night in port; and he felt no more of the [176] dreadful wound which had tortured him hitherto but the discomfort and strain of its healing.

He had been sleeping soundly when the stir of the crew roused him. It was day; the tidal train had come down to the pier bringing the passengers from Paris. Then he wandered about the vessel among all these busy, bustling folks inquiring for their cabins, questioning and answering each other at random, in the scare and fuss of a voyage already begun. After greeting the captain and shaking hands with his comrade the purser, he went into the saloon where some Englishmen were already asleep in the corners. The large low room, with its white marble panels framed in gilt beading, was furnished with looking-glasses, which prolonged, in endless perspective, the long tables flanked by pivot-seats covered with red velvet. It was fit, indeed, to be the vast floating cosmopolitan dining hall, where the rich natives of two continents might eat in common. Its magnificent luxury was that of great hotels, and theaters, and public rooms; the imposing and commonplace luxury which appeals to the eye of the millionaire.

The doctor was on the point of turning into the second-class saloon, when he remembered that a large cargo of emigrants had come on board the night before, and he went down to the lower deck. There, in a sort of basement, low and dark, like a gallery in a mine, Pierre could discern some hundreds of men, women, and children, stretched on shelves fixed one above another, or lying on the floor in heaps. He could not see their faces, but could dimly make out this squalid, ragged crowd of wretches, beaten in the struggle for life, worn out and crushed, setting forth, each with a starving wife and weakly children, for an unknown land where they hoped, perhaps, [177]

not to die of hunger. And as he thought of their past labor—wasted labor, and barren effort—of the mortal struggle taken up afresh and in vain each day, of the energy expended by this tattered crew who were going to begin again, not knowing where, this life of hideous misery, he longed to cry out to them:

"Tumble yourselves overboard, rather, with your women and your little ones." And his heart ached so with pity that he went away unable to endure the sight.

He found his father, his mother, Jean, and Mme. Rosémilly waiting for him in his cabin.

"So early!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mme. Roland in a trembling voice. "We wanted to have a little time to see you."

He looked at her. She was dressed all in black as if she were in mourning, and he noticed that her hair, which only a month ago had been gray, was now almost white. It was very difficult to find space for four persons to sit down in the little room, and he himself got onto his bed. The door was left open, and they could see a great crowd hurrying by, as if it were a street on a holiday, for all the friends of the passengers and a host of inquisitive visitors had invaded the huge vessel. They pervaded the passages, the saloons, every corner of the ship; and heads peered in at the doorway while a voice murmured outside: "That is the doctor's cabin."

Then Pierre shut the door; but no sooner was he shut in with his own party than he longed to open it again, for the bustle outside covered their agitation and want of words.

Mme. Rosémilly at last felt she must speak.

"Very little air comes in through those little windows." [178]

"Portholes," said Pierre. He showed her how thick the glass was, to enable it to resist the most violent shocks, and took a long time explaining the fastening. Roland presently asked: "And you have your doctor's shop here?"

The doctor opened a cupboard and displayed an array of phials ticketed with Latin names on white paper labels. He took one out and enumerated the properties of its contents; then a second and a third, a perfect lecture on therapeutics, to which they all listened with great attention. Roland, shaking his head, said again and again: "How very interesting." There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," said Pierre, and Captain Beausire appeared.

"I am late," he said as he shook hands, "I did not want to be in the way." He too sat down on the bed and silence fell once more.

Suddenly the captain pricked his ears. He could hear orders being given, and he said:

"It is time for us to be off if we mean to get on board the *Pearl* to see you once more outside, and bid you good-by out on the open sea."

Old Roland was very eager about this, to impress the voyagers on board the *Lorraine*, no doubt, and he rose in haste.

"Good-by, my boy." He kissed Pierre on the whiskers and then opened the door.

Mme. Roland had not stirred, but sat with downcast eyes, very pale. Her husband touched her arm:

"Come," he said, "we must make haste, we have not a minute to spare."

She pulled herself up, went to her son and offered him first one and then another cheek of white [179]
wax which he kissed without saying a word. Then he shook hands with Mme. Rosémilly and his brother, asking:

"And when is the wedding to be?"

"I do not know yet exactly. We will make it fit in with one of your return voyages."

At last they were all out of the cabin, and up on deck among the crowd of visitors, porters and sailors. The steam was snorting in the huge belly of the vessel which seemed to quiver with impatience.

"Good-by," said Roland in a great bustle.

"Good-by," replied Pierre, standing on one of the landing-planks lying between the deck of the *Lorraine* and the quay. He shook hands all round once more, and they were gone.

"Make haste, jump into the carriage," cried the father.

A fly was waiting for them and took them to the outer harbor, where Papagris had the *Pearl* in readiness to put out to sea.

There was not a breath of air; it was one of those crisp, still autumn days, when the sheeny sea looks as cold and hard as polished steel.

Jean took one oar, the sailor seized the other and they pulled off. On the breakwater, on the

piers, even on the granite parapets, a crowd stood packed, hustling and noisy, to see the *Lorraine* come out. The *Pearl* glided down between these two waves of humanity and was soon outside the mole.

Captain Beausire, seated between the two women, held the tiller, and he said:

"You will see, we shall be close in her way —— close."

And the two oarsmen pulled with all their might to get out as far as possible. Suddenly Roland [180] cried out:

"Here she comes! I see her masts and her two funnels! She is coming out of the inner harbor."

"Cheerily, lads!" cried Beausire.

Mme. Roland took out her handkerchief and held it to her eyes.

Roland stood up, clinging to the mast, and answered:

"At this minute she is working round in the outer harbor. She is standing still—now she moves again! She was taking the tow-rope on board, no doubt. There she goes. Bravo! She is between the piers! Do you hear the crowd shouting? Bravo! The *Neptune* has her in tow. Now I see her bows—here she comes—here she is! Gracious heavens, what a ship! Look! look!"

Mme. Rosémilly and Beausire looked up behind them, the oarsmen ceased pulling; only Mme. Roland did not stir.

The immense steamship, towed by a powerful tug, which, in front of her, looked like a caterpillar, came slowly and majestically out of the harbor. And the good people of Havre, who crowded the piers, the beach, and the windows, carried away by a burst of patriotic enthusiasm, cried: "*Vive la Lorraine!*" with acclamations and applause for this magnificent beginning, this birth of the beautiful daughter given to the sea by the great maritime town.

She, as soon as she had passed beyond the narrow channel between the two granite walls, feeling herself free at last, cast off the tow-ropes and went off alone, like a monstrous creature walking on the waters.

"Here she is—here she comes, straight down on us!" Roland kept shouting; and Beausire, beaming, exclaimed: "What did I promise you! Heh! Do I know the way?" [181]

Jean in a low tone said to his mother: "Look, mother, she is close upon us!" And Mme. Roland uncovered her eyes, blinded by tears.

The *Lorraine* came on, still under the impetus of her swift exit from the harbor, in the brilliant, calm weather. Beausire, with his glass to his eye, called out:

"Look out! M. Pierre is at the stern, all alone, plainly to be seen! Look out!"

The ship was almost touching the *Pearl* now, as tall as a mountain and as swift as a train. Mme. Roland, distraught and desperate, held out her arms toward it; and she saw her son, her Pierre, with his officer's cap on, throwing kisses to her with both hands.

But he was going away, flying, vanishing, a tiny speck already, no more than an imperceptible spot on the enormous vessel. She tried still to distinguish him, but she could not.

Jean took her hand:

"You saw?" he said.

"Yes, I saw. How good he is!"

And they turned to go home.

"Cristi! How fast she goes!" exclaimed Roland with enthusiastic conviction.

The steamer, in fact, was shrinking every second, as though she were melting away in the ocean. Mme. Roland, turning back to look at her, watched her disappearing on the horizon, on her way to an unknown land at the other side of the world.

In that vessel which nothing could stay, that vessel which she soon would see no more, was her son, her poor son. And she felt as though half her heart had gone with him; she felt, too, as if her [182] life were ended; yes, and she felt as though she would never see the child again.

"Why are you crying?" asked her husband, "when you know he will be back again within a month."

She stammered out: "I don't know, I cry because I am hurt."

When they had landed, Beausire at once took leave of them to go to breakfast with a friend. Then Jean led the way with Mme. Rosémilly, and Roland said to his wife:

"A very fine fellow, all the same, is our Jean."

"Yes," replied the mother.

And her mind being too much bewildered to think of what she was saying, she went on:

"I am very glad that he is to marry Mme. Rosémilly."

The worthy man was astounded.

"Heh? What? He is to marry Mme. Rosémilly?"

"Yes, we meant to ask your opinion about it this very day."

"Bless me. And has this engagement been long in the wind?"

"Oh, no, only a very few days. Jean wished to make sure that she would accept him before consulting you."

Roland rubbed his hands.

"Very good. Very good. It is capital. I entirely approve."

As they were about to turn off from the quay down the Boulevard François 1er, his wife once more looked back to cast a last look at the high seas, but she could see nothing now but a puff of [183] gray smoke, so far away, so faint that it looked like a film of haze.

DREAMS [184]

It was after a dinner of friends, of old friends. There were five of them, a writer, a doctor, and three rich bachelors without any profession.

They had talked about everything, and a feeling of lassitude came on, that feeling of lassitude which precedes and leads to the departure of guests after festive gatherings. One of those present, who had for the last five minutes been gazing silently at the surging boulevard starred with gas-lamps, and rattling with vehicles, said suddenly:

"When you've nothing to do from morning till night, the days are long."

"And the nights, too," assented the guest who sat next to him. "I sleep very little; pleasures fatigue me; conversation is monotonous. Never do I come across a new idea, and I feel, before talking to anyone, a violent longing to say nothing and listen to nothing. I don't know what to do with my evenings."

And the third idler remarked:

"I would pay a great deal for anything that would enable me to pass merely two pleasant hours every day."

Then the writer, who had just thrown his overcoat across his arm, turned round to them and said:

"The man who could discover a new vice, and introduce it among his fellow-creatures, even though it were to shorten their lives, would render a greater service to humanity than the man [185] who found the means of securing to them eternal salvation and eternal youth."

The doctor burst out laughing, and, while he chewed his cigar, he said:

"Yes, but 'tis not so easy as that to discover it. Men have, however crudely, been seeking for and working for the object you refer to since the beginning of the world. The men who came first reached perfection at once in this way. We are hardly equal to them."

One of the three idlers murmured:

"'Tis a pity!"

Then, after a minute's pause, he added:

"If we could only sleep, sleep well without feeling hot or cold, sleep with that perfect unconsciousness we experience on nights when we are thoroughly fatigued, sleep without dreams."

"Why without dreams?" asked the guest sitting next to him.

The other replied:

"Because dreams are not always pleasant, and they are always fantastic, improbable, disconnected, and because when we are asleep we cannot have the sort of dreams we like. We require to be awake when we dream."

"And what's to prevent you from being so?" asked the writer.

The doctor flung away the end of his cigar.

"My dear fellow, in order to dream when you are awake you need great power and great exercise of will, and when you try to do it, great weariness is the result. Now, real dreaming, that journey of our thoughts through delightful visions, is assuredly the sweetest experience in the world; but [186] it must come naturally, it must not be provoked in a painful manner, and must be accompanied by

absolute bodily comfort. This power of dreaming I can give you provided you promise that you will not abuse it."

The writer shrugged his shoulders:

"Ah! yes, I know—haschich, opium, green tea—artificial paradises. I have read Baudelaire, and I even tasted the famous drug, which made me very sick."

But the doctor, without stirring from his seat, said:

"No: ether, nothing but ether, and I would suggest that you literary men ought to use it sometimes."

The three rich men drew closer to the doctor.

One of them said:

"Explain to us the effects of it."

And the doctor replied:

"Let us put aside big words, shall we not? I am not talking of medicine or morality; I am talking of pleasure. You give yourselves up every day to excesses which consume your lives. I want to indicate to you a new sensation, only possible to intelligent men, let us say even very intelligent men, dangerous, like everything that overexcites our organs, but exquisite. I might add that you would require a certain preparation, that is to say, a practice, to feel in all their completeness the singular effects of ether.

"They are different from the effects of haschich, from the effects of opium and morphia, and they cease as soon as the absorption of the drug is interrupted, while the other generators of day dreams continue their action for hours.

"I am now going to try to analyze as clearly as possible the way one feels. But the thing is not [187] easy, so facile, so delicate, so almost imperceptible, are these sensations.

"It was when I was attacked by violent neuralgia that I made use of this remedy, which perhaps I have since slightly abused.

"I had in my head and in my neck acute pains, and an intolerable heat of the skin, a feverish restlessness. I took up a large flagon of ether, and lying down, I began to inhale it slowly.

"At the end of some minutes, I thought I heard a vague murmur, which ere long became a sort of humming, and it seemed to me that all the interior of my body had become light, light as air, that it was dissolving into vapor.

"Then came a sort of torpor of the soul, a somnolent sense of comfort in spite of the pains which still continued, but which, however, had ceased to make themselves felt. It was one of those sensations which we are willing to endure and not any of those frightful wrenches against which our tortured body protests.

"Soon, the strange and delightful sense of emptiness which I felt in my chest extended to my limbs, which, in their turn, became light, as light as if the flesh and the bones had been melted and the skin only were left, the skin necessary to enable me to realize the sweetness of living, of bathing in this well-being. Then I perceived that I was no longer suffering. The pain had gone, melted also, evaporated. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding what was said. At one time, there were only indistinct sounds, at another time a word reached my ear. But I recognized that this was only the humming I had heard before, accentuated. I was not [188] asleep; I was not awake; I comprehended, I felt, I reasoned with the utmost clearness and depth, with extraordinary energy and intellectual pleasure, with a singular intoxication arising from this separation of my mental faculties.

"It was not like the dreams caused by haschich or the somewhat sickly visions that come from opium; it was an amazing acuteness of reasoning, a new way of seeing, judging, and appreciating the things of life, and with the certainty, the absolute consciousness that this was the true way.

"And the old image of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, that all the mysteries were unveiled, so much did I find myself under the sway of a new, strange, and irrefutable logic. And arguments, reasonings, proofs, rose up in a heap before my brain only to be immediately displaced by some stronger proof, reasoning, argument. My head had in fact, become a battle-ground of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with invincible intelligence, and I experienced a huge delight at the manifestation of my power.

"It lasted a long, long time. I still kept inhaling the ether from the opening of my flagon. Suddenly I perceived that it was empty."

The four men exclaimed at the same time:

"Doctor, a prescription at once for a liter of ether!"

But the doctor, putting on his hat, replied:

"As for that, certainly not; go and get poisoned by others!"

And he left them.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is your idea on the subject?

MOONLIGHT

[189]

Madame Julie Roubere was awaiting her elder sister, Madame Henriette Letore, who had just returned after a trip to Switzerland.

The Letore household had left nearly five weeks ago. Madame Henriette had allowed her husband to return alone to their estate in Calvados, where some matters of business required his attention, and come to spend a few days in Paris with her sister. Night came on. In the quiet parlor, darkened by twilight shadows, Madame Roubere was reading, in an absent-minded fashion, raising her eyes whenever she heard a sound.

At last, she heard a ring at the door, and presently her sister appeared, wrapped in a traveling cloak. And immediately without any formal greeting, they clasped each other ardently, only desisting for a moment to begin embracing each other over again. Then they talked, asking questions about each other's health, about their respective families, and a thousand other things, gossiping, jerking out hurried, broken sentences and rushing about while Madame Henriette was removing her hat and veil.

It was now quite dark. Madame Roubere rang for a lamp, and as soon as it was brought in, she scanned her sister's face, and was on the point of embracing her once more. But she held back, scared and astonished at the other's appearance. Around her temples, Madame Letore had two long locks of white hair. All the rest of her hair was of a glossy, raven-black hue; but there alone, [190] at each side of her head, ran as it were, two silvery streams which were immediately lost in the black mass surrounding them. She was nevertheless only twenty-four years old, and this change had come on suddenly since her departure for Switzerland.

Without moving, Madame Roubere gazed at her in amazement, tears rising to her eyes, as she thought that some mysterious and terrible calamity must have fallen on her sister. She asked:

"What is the matter with you, Henriette?"

Smiling with a sad face, the smile of one who is heartsick, the other replied:

"Why nothing I assure you. Were you noticing my white hair?"

But Madame Roubere impetuously seized her by the shoulders, and with a searching glance at her repeated:

"What is the matter with you? Tell me what is the matter with you. And if you tell me a falsehood, I'll soon find it out."

They remained face to face, and Madame Henriette, who became so pale that she was near fainting, had two pearly tears at each corner of her drooping eyes.

Her sister went on asking:

"What has happened to you? What is the matter with you? Answer me!"

Then, in a subdued voice, the other murmured:

"I have—I have a lover."

And, hiding her forehead on the shoulder of her younger sister, she sobbed.

Then, when she had grown a little calmer, when the heaving of her breast had subsided, she commenced to unbosom herself, as if to cast forth this secret from herself, to empty this sorrow [191] of hers into a sympathetic heart.

Thereupon, holding each other's hands tightly grasped, the two women went over to a sofa in a dark corner of the room, into which they sank, and the younger sister, passing her arm over the elder one's neck, and drawing her close to her heart, listened.

"Oh! I recognize that there was no excuse for one; I do not understand myself, and since that day I feel as if I were mad. Be careful my child, about yourself—be careful! If you only knew how weak we are, how quickly we yield, we fall. All it needs is a nothing, so little, so little, a moment of tenderness, one of those sudden fits of melancholy which steal into your soul, one of those longings to open your arms, to love, to embrace, which we all have at certain moments.

"You know my husband, and you know how fond of him I am; but he is mature and sensible, and cannot even comprehend the tender vibrations of a woman's heart. He is always, always the same, always good, always smiling, always kind, always perfect. Oh! how I sometimes have wished that he would roughly clasp me in his arms, that he would embrace me with those slow,

sweet kisses which make two beings intermingle, which are like mute confidences! How I wished that he was self-abandoned and even weak, so that he should have need of me, of my caress, of my tears!

"This all seems very silly; but we women are made like that. How can we help it?

"And yet the thought of deceiving never came near me. To-day, it has happened, without love, without reason, without anything, simply because the moon shone one night on the Lake of [192] Lucerne.

"During the month when we were traveling together, my husband, with his calm indifference, paralyzed my enthusiasm, extinguished my poetic ardor. When we were descending the mountain paths at sun-rise, when as the four horses galloped along with the diligence, we saw, in the transparent morning haze, valleys, woods, streams, and villages, I clasped my hands with delight, and said to him: 'What a beautiful scene, darling! Kiss me now!' He only answered with a smile of chilling kindliness: 'There is no reason why we should kiss each other because you like the landscape.'

"And his words froze me to the heart. It seems to me that when people love each other, they ought to feel more moved by love than ever in the presence of beautiful scenes.

"Indeed he prevented the effervescent poetry that bubbled up within me from gushing out. How can I express it? I was almost like a boiler, filled with steam and hermetically sealed.

"One evening (we had been for four days staying in the Hotel de Fluelen), Robert, having got one of his sick headaches, went to bed immediately after dinner, and I went to take a walk all alone along the edge of the lake.

"It was a night such as one might read of in a fairy tale. The full moon showed itself in the middle of the sky; the tall mountains, with their snowy crests seemed to wear silver crowns; the waters of the lake glittered with tiny rippling motions. The air was mild, with that kind of penetrating freshness which softens us till we seem to be swooning, to be deeply affected without any [193] apparent cause. But how sensitive, how vibrating, the heart is at such moments! How quickly it leaps up, and how intense are its emotions!

"I sat down on the grass, and gazed at that vast lake so melancholy and so fascinating, and a strange thing passed into me; I became possessed with an insatiable need of love, a revolt against the gloomy dullness of my life. What! Would it never be my fate to be clasped in the arms of a man whom I loved on a bank like this under the glowing moonlight? Was I never then, to feel on my lips those kisses so deep, delicious, and intoxicating which lovers exchange on nights that seem to have been made by God for passionate embraces? Was I never to know such ardent, feverish love in the moonlit shadows of a summer's night?

"And I burst out weeping like a woman who has lost her reason. I heard some person stirring behind me. A man was intently gazing at me. When I turned my head round, he recognized me, and, advancing, said:

"'You are weeping, Madame?'

"It was a young barrister who was traveling with his mother, and whom we had often met. His eyes had frequently followed me.

"I was so much confused that I did not know what answer to give or what to think of the situation. I told him I felt ill.

"He walked on by my side in a natural and respectable fashion, and began talking to me about what we had seen during our trip. All that I had felt he translated into words; everything that made me thrill he understood perfectly, better than I did myself. And all of a sudden he recited [194] some verses of Alfred de Musset. I felt myself choking, seized with indescribable emotion. It seemed to me that the mountains themselves, the lake, the moonlight, were singing to me about things ineffably sweet.

"And it happened, I don't know how, I don't know why, in a sort of hallucination.

"As for him I did not see him again till the morning of his departure.

"He gave me his card!"

And, sinking into her sister's arms, Madame Letore, broke into groans—almost into shrieks.

Then, Madame Roubere, with a self-contained and serious air, said very gently:

"You see, sister, very often it is not a man that we love, but love. And your real lover that night was the moonlight."

THE CORSICAN BANDIT [195]

The road with a gentle winding reached the middle of the forest. The huge pine-trees spread above our heads a mournful-looking vault, and gave forth a kind of long, sad wail, while at either side their straight slender trunks formed, as it were, an army of organ-pipes, from which seemed to issue that monotonous music of the wind through the tree-tops.

After three hours' walking there was an opening in this row of tangled branches. Here and there an enormous pine-parasol, separated from the others, opening like an immense umbrella, displayed its dome of dark green; then, all of a sudden, we gained the boundary of the forest, some hundreds of meters below the defile which leads into the wild valley of Niolo.

On the two projecting heights which commanded a view of this pass, some old trees grotesquely twisted, seemed to have mounted with painful efforts, like scouts who had started in advance of the multitude heaped together in the rear. When we turned round, we saw the entire forest stretched beneath our feet, like a gigantic basin of verdure, whose edges, which seemed to reach the sky, were composed of bare rocks shutting in on every side.

We resumed our walk, and, ten minutes later, we found ourselves in the defile.

Then I beheld an astonishing landscape. Beyond another forest, a valley, but a valley such as I had never seen before, a solitude of stone ten leagues long, hollowed out between two high [196] mountains, without a field or a tree to be seen. This was the Niolo valley, the fatherland of Corsican liberty, the inaccessible citadel, from which the invaders had never been able to drive out the mountaineers.

My companion said to me: "Is it here, too, that all our bandits have taken refuge?"

Ere long we were at the further end of this chasm so wild, so inconceivably beautiful.

Not a blade of grass, not a plant—nothing but granite. As far as our eyes could reach, we saw in front of us a desert of glittering stone, heated like an oven by a burning sun, which seemed to hang for that very purpose right above the gorge. When we raised our eyes towards the crests, we stood dazzled and stupefied by what we saw. They looked red and notched like festoons of coral, for all the summits are made of porphyry; and the sky overhead seemed violet, lilac, discolored by the vicinity of these strange mountains. Lower down the granite was of scintillating gray, and under our feet it seemed rasped, pounded; we were walking over shining powder. At our right, along a long and irregular course, a tumultuous torrent ran with a continuous roar. And we staggered along under this heat, in this light, in this burning, arid, desolate valley cut by this ravine of turbulent water which seemed to be ever hurrying onward, without being able to fertilize these rocks, lost in this furnace which greedily drank it up without being penetrated or refreshed by it.

But suddenly there was visible at our right a little wooden cross sunk in a little heap of stones. A man had been killed there; and I said to my companion: [197]

"Tell me about your bandits."

He replied:

"I knew the most celebrated of them, the terrible St. Lucia. I will tell you his history.

"His father was killed in a quarrel by a young man of the same district, it is said; and St. Lucia was left alone with his sister. He was a weak and timid youth, small, often ill, without any energy. He did not proclaim the vendetta against the assassin of his father. All his relatives came to see him, and implored of him to take vengeance; he remained deaf to their menaces and their supplications.

"Then, following the old Corsican custom, his sister, in her indignation, carried away his black clothes, in order that he might not wear mourning for a dead man who had not been avenged. He was insensible to even this outrage, and rather than take down from the rack his father's gun, which was still loaded, he shut himself up, not daring to brave the looks of the young men of the district.

"He seemed to have even forgotten the crime and he lived with his sister in the obscurity of their dwelling.

"But, one day, the man who was suspected of having committed the murder, was about to get married. St. Lucia did not appear to be moved by this news, but, no doubt, out of sheer bravado, the bridegroom, on his way to the church, passed before the two orphans' house.

"The brother and the sister, at their window, were eating little fried cakes when the young man saw the bridal procession moving past the house. Suddenly he began to tremble, rose up without [198] uttering a word, made the sign of the cross, took the gun which was hanging over the fireplace, and he went out.

"When he spoke of this later on, he said: 'I don't know what was the matter with me; it was like fire in my blood; I felt that I should do it, that in spite of everything I could not resist, and I concealed the gun in a cave on the road to Corte.'

"An hour later, he came back, with nothing in his hand, and with his habitual air of sad weariness. His sister believed that there was nothing further in his thoughts.

"But when night fell he disappeared.

"His enemy had, the same evening, to repair to Corte on foot, accompanied by his two bridesmen.

"He was pursuing his way, singing as he went, when St. Lucia stood before him, and looking straight in the murderer's face, exclaimed: 'Now is the time!' and shot him point-blank in the chest.

"One of the bridesmen fled; the other stared at the young man saying:

"'What have you done, St. Lucia?'

"Then he was going to hasten to Corte for help, but St. Lucia said in stern tone:

"'If you move another step, I'll shoot you through the legs.'

"The other, aware that till now he had always appeared timid, said to him: 'You would not dare to do it!' and he was hurrying off when he fell instantaneously, his thigh shattered by a bullet.

"And St. Lucia, coming over to where he lay, said:

"'I am going to look at your wound; if it is not serious, I'll leave you there; if it is mortal I'll finish you off.' [199]

"He inspected the wound, considered it mortal, and slowly re-loading his gun, told the wounded man to say a prayer, and shot him through the head.

"Next day he was in the mountains.

"And do you know what this St. Lucia did after this?

"All his family were arrested by the gendarmes. His uncle, the curé, who was suspected of having incited him to this deed of vengeance, was himself put into prison, and accused by the dead man's relatives. But he escaped, took a gun in his turn, and went to join his nephew in the cave.

"Next, St. Lucia killed, one after the other, his uncle's accusers, and tore out their eyes to teach the others never to state what they had seen with their eyes.

"He killed all the relatives, all the connections of his enemy's family. He massacred during his life fourteen gendarmes, burned down the houses of his adversaries, and was up to the day of his death the most terrible of the bandits, whose memory we have preserved."

The sun disappeared behind Monte Cinto and the tall shadow of the granite mountain went to sleep on the granite of the valley. We quickened our pace in order to reach before night the little village of Albertaccio, nothing better than a heap of stones welded beside the stone flanks of a wild gorge. And I said as I thought of the bandit:

"What a terrible custom your vendetta is!"

My companion answered with an air of resignation:

"What, would you have? A man must do his duty!"

A DEAD WOMAN'S SECRET [200]

She had died painlessly, tranquilly, like a woman whose life was irreproachable, and she now lay on her back in bed, with closed eyes, calm features, her long white hair carefully arranged as if she had again made her toilet ten minutes before her death, all her pale physiognomy so composed, now that she had passed away, so resigned that one felt sure a sweet soul had dwelt in that body, that this serene grandmother had spent an untroubled existence, that this virtuous woman had ended her life without any shock, without any remorse.

On his knees, beside the bed, her son, a magistrate of inflexible principles, and her daughter Marguerite, in religion, Sister Eulalie, were weeping distractedly. She had from the time of their infancy armed them with an inflexible code of morality, teaching them a religion without weakness and a sense of duty without any compromise. He, the son, had become a magistrate, and, wielding the weapon of the law, he struck down without pity the feeble and the erring. She, the daughter, quite penetrated with the virtue that had bathed her in this austere family, had become the spouse of God through disgust with men.

They had scarcely known their father; all they knew was that he had made their mother unhappy without learning any further details. The nun passionately kissed one hand of her dead mother, which hung down, a hand of ivory like that of Christ in the large crucifix which lay on the bed. At [201] the opposite side of the prostrate body, the other hand seemed still to grasp the rumpled sheet with that wandering movement which is called the fold of the dying, and the lines had retained little wavy creases as a memento of those last motions which precede the eternal motionlessness.

A few light taps at the door caused the two sobbing heads to rise up, and the priest who had just dined, entered the apartment. He was flushed, a little puffed, from the effects of the process of digestion which had just commenced; for he had put a good dash of brandy into his coffee in order to counteract the fatigue caused by the last nights he had remained up and that which he anticipated from the night that was still in store for him. He had put on a look of sadness, that simulated sadness of the priest to whom death is a means of livelihood. He made the sign of the cross, and coming over to them with his professional gesture said:

"Well, my poor children, I have come to help you to pass these mournful hours."

But Sister Eulalie suddenly rose up.

"Thanks, father, but my brother and I would like to be left alone with her. These are the last moments that we now have for seeing her; so we want to feel ourselves once more, the three of us, just as we were years ago when we—we—we were only children, and our poor—poor mother —"

She was unable to finish with the flood of tears that gushed from her eyes, and the sobs that were choking her.

But the priest bowed, with a more serene look on his face, for he was thinking of his bed. "Just as you please, my children." [202]

Then, he knelt down, again crossed himself, prayed, rose up, and softly stole away murmuring as he went: "She was a saint."

They were left alone, the dead woman and her children. A hidden timepiece kept regularly ticking in its dark corner, and through the open window the soft odors of hay and of woods penetrated with faint gleams of moonlight. No sound in the fields outside, save the wandering notes of toads and now and then the humming of some nocturnal insect darting into like a ball, and knocking itself against the wall.

An infinite peace, a divine melancholy, a silent serenity surrounded this dead woman, seemed to emanate from her, to evaporate from her into the atmosphere outside and to calm Nature itself.

Then the magistrate, still on his knees, his head pressed against the bed-clothes, in a far-off, heart-broken voice that pierced through the sheets and the coverlet, exclaimed:

"Mamma, mamma, mamma!" And the sister, sinking down on the floor, striking the wood with her forehead fanatically, twisting herself about and quivering like a person in an epileptic fit, groaned: "Jesus, Jesus—mamma—Jesus!"

And both of them shaken by a hurricane of grief panted with a rattling in their throats.

Then the fit gradually subsided, and they now wept in a less violent fashion, like the rainy calm that follows a squall on a storm-beaten sea. Then, after some time, they rose, and fixed their glances on the beloved corpse. And memories, those memories of the past, so sweet, so torturing to-day, came back to their minds with all those little forgotten details, those little details so [203] intimate and familiar, which make the being who is no more live over again. They recalled circumstances, words, smiles, certain intonations of voice which belonged to one whom they should hear speaking to them again. They saw her once more happy and calm, and phrases she used in ordinary conversation rose to their lips. They even remembered a little movement of the hand peculiar to her, as if she were keeping time when she was saying something of importance.

And they loved her as they had never before loved her. And by the depth of their despair they realized how strongly they had been attached to her, and how desolate they would find themselves now.

She had been their mainstay, their guide, the best part of their youth, of that happy portion of their lives which had vanished; she had been the bond that united them to existence, the mother, the mamma, the creative flesh, the tie that bound them to their ancestors. They would henceforth be solitary, isolated; they would have nothing on earth to look back upon.

The nun said to her brother:

"You know how mamma used always to read over her old letters. They are all there in her drawer. Suppose we read them in our turn, and so revive all her life this night by her side? It would be like a kind of road of the cross, like making the acquaintance of her mother, of grandparents whom we never knew, whose letters are there, and of whom she has so often talked to us, you remember?"

And they drew forth from the drawer a dozen little packets of yellow paper, carefully tied up and placed close to one another. They flung these relics on the bed, and selecting one of them on [204] which the word "Father" was written, they opened and read what was in it.

It consisted of those very old letters which are to be found in old family writing-desks, those letters which have the flavor of another century. The first said, "My darling," another "My beautiful little girl," then others "My dear child," and then again "My dear daughter." And

suddenly the nun began reading aloud, reading for the dead her own history, all her tender souvenirs. And the magistrate listened, while he leaned on the bed, with his eyes on his mother's face. And the motionless corpse seemed happy.

Sister Eulalie, interrupting herself, said: "We ought to put them into the grave with her, to make a winding-sheet of them, and bury them with her."

And then she took up another packet, on which the descriptive word did not appear.

And in a loud tone she began: "My adored one, I love you to distraction. Since yesterday I have been suffering like a damned soul burned by the recollection of you. I feel your lips on mine, your eyes under my eyes, your flesh under my flesh. I love you! I love you! You have made me mad! My arms open! I pant with an immense desire to possess you again. My whole body calls out to you, wants you. I have kept in my mouth the taste of your kisses."

The magistrate rose up; the nun stopped reading. He snatched the letter from her, and sought for the signature. There was none, save under the words, "He who adores you," the name "Henry." Their father's name was René. So then he was not the man.

Then, the son, with rapid fingers, fumbled in the packet of letters took another of them, and read: [205]
"I can do without your caresses no longer."

And, standing up, with the severity of a judge passing sentence, he gazed at the impassive face of the dead woman.

The nun, straight as a statue, with teardrops standing at each corner of her eyes, looked at her brother, waiting to see what he meant to do. Then he crossed the room, slowly reached the window, and looked out thoughtfully into the night.

When he turned back, Sister Eulalie, her eyes now quite dry, still remained standing near the bed, with a downcast look.

He went over to the drawer and flung in the letters which he had picked up from the floor. Then he drew the curtains round the bed.

And when the dawn made the candles on the table look pale, the son rose from his armchair, and without even a parting glance at the mother whom he had separated from them and condemned, he said slowly:

"Now, my sister, let us leave the room."

THE CAKE [206]

Let us say that her name was Madame Anserre so as not to reveal her real name.

She was one of those Parisian comets which leave, as it were, a trail of fire behind them. She wrote verses and novels; she had a poetic heart, and was ravishingly beautiful. She opened her doors to very few—only to exceptional people, those who are commonly described as princes of something or other.

To be a visitor at her house constituted a claim, a genuine claim of intellect: at least this was the estimate set on her invitations.

Her husband played the part of an obscure satellite. To be the husband of a star is not an easy thing. This husband had, however, an original idea, that of creating a State within a State, of possessing a merit of his own, a merit of the second order; it is true; but he did, in fact, in this fashion, on the days when his wife held receptions, hold receptions also on his own account. He had his special set who appreciated him, listened to him, and bestowed on him more attention than they did on his brilliant partner.

He had devoted himself to agriculture—to agriculture in the Chamber. There are in the same way generals in the Chamber—those who are born, who live, and who die, on the round leather chairs of the War Office, are all of this sort, are they not? Sailors in the Chambers—viz., in the Admiralty —Colonizers in the Chamber, etc., etc. So he had studied agriculture, indeed he had studied it [207]
deeply, in its relations with the other sciences, with political economy, with the Fine Arts—we dress up the Fine Arts with every kind of science, since we even call the horrible railway bridges "works of art." At length he reached the point when it was said of him: "He is a man of ability." He was quoted in the Technical Reviews; his wife had succeeded in getting him appointed a member of a committee at the Ministry of Agriculture.

This latest glory was quite sufficient for him.

Under the pretext of diminishing the expenses, he sent out invitations to his friends for the day when his wife received hers, so that they associated together, or rather they did not—they formed two groups. Madame, with her escort of artists, academicians, and Ministers, occupied a kind of gallery, furnished and decorated in the style of the Empire. Monsieur generally withdrew with his agriculturists into a smaller portion of the house used as a smoking-room and ironically described by Madame Anserre as the Salon of Agriculture.

The two camps were clearly separated. Monsieur, without jealousy, moreover, sometimes penetrated into the Academy, and cordial handshakings were exchanged, but the Academy entertained infinite contempt for the Salon of Agriculture, and it was rarely that one of the princes of science, of thought, or of anything else mingled with the agriculturists.

These receptions occasioned little expense—a cup of tea, a cake, that was all. Monsieur, at an earlier period, had claimed two cakes, one for the academy, and one for the agriculturists, but Madame having rightly suggested that this way of acting seemed to indicate two camps, two [208] receptions, two parties, Monsieur did not press the matter, so that they used only one cake, of which Madame Anserre did the honors at the Academy, and which then passed into the Salon de Agriculture.

Now, this cake was soon, for the Academy, a subject of observation well calculated to arouse curiosity. Madame Anserre never cut it herself. That function always fell to the lot of one or other of the illustrious guests. The particular duty, which was supposed to carry with it honorable distinction, was performed by each person for a pretty long period, in one case for three months, scarcely ever for more; and it was noticed that the privilege of "cutting the cake" carried with it a heap of other marks of superiority—a sort of royalty, or rather very accentuated vice-royalty.

The reigning cutter spoke in a haughty tone, with an air of marked command; and all the favors of the mistress of the house were for him alone.

These happy individuals were in moments of intimacy described in hushed tones behind doors as the "favorites of the cake," and every change of favorite introduced into the Academy a sort of revolution. The knife was a scepter, the pastry an emblem; the chosen ones were congratulated. The agriculturists never cut the cake. Monsieur himself was always excluded, although he ate his share.

The cake was cut in succession by poets, by painters, and by novelists. A great musician had the privilege of measuring the portions of the cake for some time; an ambassador succeeded him. Sometimes a man less well-known, but elegant and sought after, one of those who are called according to the different epochs, "true gentleman," or "perfect knight," or "dandy," or something [209] else, seated himself, in his turn, before the symbolic cake. Each of them, during his ephemeral reign, exhibited greater consideration towards the husband; then, when the hour of his fall had arrived, he passed on the knife towards the other and mingled once more with the crowd of followers and admirers of the "beautiful Madame Anserre."

This state of things lasted a long time, but comets do not always shine with the same brilliance. Everything gets worn out in society. One would have said that gradually the eagerness of the cutters grew feebler; they seemed to hesitate at times when the tray was held out to them; this office, once so much coveted, became less and less desired. It was retained for a shorter time; they appeared to be less proud of it.

Madame Anserre was prodigal of smiles and civilities. Alas! no one was found any longer to cut it voluntarily. The new comers seemed to decline the honor. The "old favorites" reappeared one by one like dethroned princes who have been replaced for a brief spell in power. Then, the chosen ones became few, very few. For a month (O, prodigy!) M. Anserre cut open the cake; then he looked as if he were getting tired of it; and one evening Madame Anserre, the beautiful Madame Anserre, was seen cutting it herself. But this appeared to be very wearisome to her, and, next day, she urged one of her guests so strongly to do it that he did not dare to refuse.

The symbol was too well-known, however; the guests stared at one another with scared anxious faces. To cut the cake was nothing, but the privileges to which this favor had always given a claim now frightened people; therefore, the moment the dish made its appearance the [210] academicians rushed pell-mell into the Salon of Agriculture, as if to shelter themselves behind the husband, who was perpetually smiling. And when Madame Anserre, in a state of anxiety, presented herself at the door with a cake in one hand and the knife in the other, they all seemed to form a circle around her husband as if to appeal to him for protection.

Some years more passed. Nobody cut the cake now; but yielding to an old inveterate habit, the lady who had always been gallantly called "the beautiful Madame Anserre" looked out each evening for some devotee to take the knife, and each time the same movement took place around her, a general flight, skillfully arranged, and full of combined maneuvers that showed great cleverness, in order to avoid the offer that was rising to her lips.

But, one evening, a young man presented himself at her reception—an innocent, unsophisticated youth. He knew nothing about the mystery of the cake; accordingly, when it appeared, and when all the rest ran away, when Madame Anserre took from the man-servant's hands the dish and the pastry, he remained quietly by her side.

She thought that perhaps he knew about the matter; she smiled, and in a tone which showed some emotion, said:

"Will you be kind enough, dear Monsieur, to cut this cake?"

He displayed the utmost readiness, and took off his gloves, flattered at such an honor being conferred on him.

"Oh, to be sure Madame, with the greatest pleasure." [211]

Some distance away in the corner of the gallery, in the frame of the door which led into the Salon of the Agriculturists, faces which expressed utter amazement were staring at him. Then, when the spectators saw the new comer cutting without any hesitation, they quickly came forward.

An old poet jocosely slapped the neophyte on the shoulder.

"Bravo, young man!" he whispered in his ear.

The others gazed at him with curiosity. Even the husband appeared to be surprised. As for the young man, he was astonished at the consideration which they suddenly seemed to show towards him; above all, he failed to comprehend the marked attentions, the manifest favor, and the species of mute gratitude which the mistress of the house bestowed on him.

It appears, however, that he eventually found out.

At what moment, in what place, was the revelation made to him? Nobody could tell; but, when he again presented himself at the reception, he had a preoccupied air, almost a shamefaced look, and he cast around him a glance of uneasiness.

The bell rang for tea. The man-servant appeared. Madame Anserre, with a smile, seized the dish, casting a look about her for her young friend; but he had fled so precipitately that no trace of him could be seen any longer. Then, she went looking everywhere for him, and ere long she discovered him in the Salon of the Agriculturists. With his arm locked in that of the husband, he was consulting that gentleman as to the means employed for destroying phylloxera.

"My dear Monsieur," she said to him, "will you be so kind as to cut this cake for me?" [212]

He reddened to the roots of his hair, and hanging down his head, stammered out some excuses. Thereupon M. Anserre took pity on him, and turning towards his wife, said:

"My dear, you might have the goodness not to disturb us. We are talking about agriculture. So get your cake cut by Baptiste."

And since that day nobody has ever cut Madame Anserre's cake.

A LIVELY FRIEND [213]

They had been constantly in each other's society for a whole winter in Paris. After having lost sight of each other, as generally happens in such cases, after leaving college, the two friends met again one night, long years after, already old and white-haired, the one a bachelor, the other married.

M. de Meroul lived six months in Paris and six months in his little chateau of Tourbeville. Having married the daughter of a gentleman in the district, he had lived a peaceful, happy life with the indolence of a man who has nothing to do. With a calm temperament and a sedate mind, without any intellectual audacity or tendency towards revolutionary independence of thought, he passed his time in mildly regretting the past, in deploring the morals and the institutions of to-day, and in repeating every moment to his wife, who raised her eyes to Heaven, and sometimes her hands also, in token of energetic assent:

"Under what a government do we live, great God!"

Madame de Meroul mentally resembled her husband, just as if they had been brother and sister. She knew by tradition that one ought, first of all, to reverence the Pope and the King!

And she loved them and respected them from the bottom of her heart, without knowing them, with a poetic exaltation, with a hereditary devotion, with all the sensibility of a well-born woman. She was kindly in every fold of her soul. She had no child, and was incessantly regretting it. [214]

When M. de Meroul came across his old school fellow Joseph Mouradour at a ball, he experienced from this meeting a profound and genuine delight, for they had been very fond of one another in their youth.

After exclamations of astonishment over the changes caused by age in their bodies and their faces, they had asked one another a number of questions as to their respective careers.

Joseph Mouradour, a native of the South of France, had become a Councilor General in his own neighborhood. Frank in his manners, he spoke briskly and without any circumspection telling all his thoughts with sheer indifference to prudential considerations. He was a Republican, of that race of good-natured Republicans who make their own ease the law of their existence, and who carry freedom of speech to the verge of brutality.

He called at his friend's address in Paris, and was immediately a favorite, on account of his easy cordiality, in spite of his advanced opinions. Madame de Meroul exclaimed:

"What a pity! such a charming man!"

M. de Meroul said to his friend, in a sincere and confidential tone: "You cannot imagine what a wrong you do to our country." He was attached to his friend nevertheless, for no bonds are more

solid than those of childhood renewed in later life. Joseph Mouradour chaffed the husband and wife, called them "my loving turtles," and occasionally gave vent to loud declarations against people who were behind the age, against all sorts of prejudices and traditions. [215]

When he thus directed the flood of his democratic eloquence, the married pair, feeling ill at ease, kept silent through a sense of propriety and good-breeding; then the husband tried to turn off the conversation, in order to avoid any friction. Joseph Mouradour did not want to know anyone unless he was free to say what he liked.

Summer came round. The Merouls knew no greater pleasure than to receive their old friends in their country house at Tourbeville. It was an intimate and healthy pleasure, the pleasure of homely gentlefolk who had spent most of their lives in the country. They used to go to the nearest railway station to meet some of their guests, and drove them to the house in their carriage, watching for compliments on their district, on the rapid vegetation, on the condition of the roads in the department, on the cleanliness of the peasants' houses, on the bigness of the cattle they saw in the fields, on everything that met the eye as far as the edge of the horizon.

They liked to have it noticed that their horse trotted in a wonderful manner for an animal employed a part of the year in field-work; and they awaited, with anxiety the newcomer's opinion on their family estate, sensitive to the slightest word, grateful for the slightest gracious attention.

Joseph Mouradour was invited, and he announced his arrival.

The wife and the husband came to meet the train, delighted to have the opportunity of doing the honors of their house.

As soon as he perceived them, Joseph Mouradour jumped out of his carriage with a vivacity which increased their satisfaction. He grasped their hands warmly, congratulated them, and intoxicated [216] them with compliments.

He was quite charming in his manner as they drove along the road to the house; he expressed astonishment at the height of the trees, the excellence of the crops, and the quickness of the horse.

When he placed his foot on the steps in front of the chateau, M. de Meroul said to him with a certain friendly solemnity:

"Now you are at home."

Joseph Mouradour answered: "Thanks old fellow; I counted on that. For my part, besides, I never put myself out with my friends. That's the only hospitality I understand."

Then, he went up to his own room, where he put on the costume of a peasant, as he was pleased to describe it, and he came down again not very long after, attired in blue linen, with yellow boots, in the careless rig-out of a Parisian out for a holiday. He seemed, too to have become more common, more jolly, more familiar, having assumed along with his would-be rustic garb a free and easy swagger which he thought suited the style of dress. His new apparel somewhat shocked M. and Madame de Meroul who even at home on their estate always remained serious and respectable, as the particle "de" before their name exacted a certain amount of ceremonial even with their intimate friends.

After lunch, they went to visit the farms; and the Parisian stupefied the respectable peasants by talking to them as if he were a comrade of theirs.

In the evening, the curé dined at the house—a fat old priest, wearing his Sunday suit, who had [217] been specially asked that day in order to meet the newcomer.

When Joseph saw him he made a grimace, then he stared at the priest in astonishment as if he belonged to some peculiar race of beings, the like of which he had never seen before at such close quarters. He told a few smutty stories allowable enough with a friend after dinner, but apparently somewhat out of place in the presence of an ecclesiastic. He did not say, "Monsieur l'Abbe," but merely "Monsieur"; and he embarrassed the priest with philosophical views as to the various superstitions that prevailed on the surface of the globe.

He remarked:

"Your God, monsieur, is one of those persons whom we must respect, but also one of those who must be discussed. Mine is called Reason; he has from time immemorial been the enemy of yours."

The Merouls, greatly put out, attempted to divert his thoughts.

The curé left very early.

Then the husband gently remarked:

"You went a little too far with that priest."

But Joseph immediately replied:

"That's a very good joke, too! Am I to bother my brains about a devil-dodger? At any rate, do me the favor of not ever again having such an old fogy to dinner. Curses on his impudence!"

"But, my friend, remember his sacred character."

Joseph Mouradour interrupted him:

"Yes, I know. We must treat them like girls, who get roses for being well behaved! That's all right, my boy! When these people respect my convictions, I will respect theirs!" [218]

This was all that happened that day.

Next morning, Madame de Meroul, on entering her drawing-room, saw lying on the table three newspapers which made her draw back in horror. "Le Voltaire," "Le Republique Francaise," and "La Justice."

Presently, Joseph Mouradour, still in his blue blouse, appeared on the threshold, reading "L'Intransigeant" attentively. He exclaimed:

"There is a splendid article by Rochefort. This fellow is marvelous."

He read the article in a loud voice, laying so much stress on its most striking passages that he did not notice the entrance of his friend.

M. de Meroul had a paper in each hand. "Le Gaulois" for himself and "Le Clarion" for his wife.

The ardent prose of the master-writer who overthrew the empire, violently declaimed, recited in the accent of the South, rang through the peaceful drawing-room, shook the old curtains with their rigid folds, seemed to splash the walls, the large upholstered chairs, the solemn furniture fixed in the same position for the past century, with a hail of words, rebounding, impudent, ironical and crushing.

The husband and the wife, the one standing, the other seated, listened in a state of stupor, so scandalized that they no longer even ventured to make a gesture. Mouradour launched out the concluding passage in the article as one lets forth a jet of fireworks, then in an emphatic tone remarked:

"That's a stinger, eh?" [219]

But suddenly he perceived the two prints belonging to his friend, and he seemed himself for a moment overcome with astonishment. Then, he came across to his host with great strides, demanding in angry tone:

"What do you want to do with these papers?" M. de Meroul replied in a hesitating voice:

"Why, these—these are my—my newspapers."

"Your newspapers! Look here, now, you are only laughing at me! You will do me the favor to read mine, to stir you up with a few new ideas, and, as for yours—this is what I do with them—"

And before his host, filled with confusion, could prevent him, he seized the two newspapers and flung them out through the window. Then he gravely placed "La Justice" in the hands of Madame de Meroul and "Le Voltaire" in those of her husband, and he sank into an armchair to finish "L'Intransigeant."

The husband and the wife, through feelings of delicacy, made a show of reading a little, then they handed back the Republican newspapers, which they touched with their finger-tips as if they had been poisoned.

Then he burst out laughing, and said:

"A week of this sort of nourishment, and I'll have you converted to my ideas."

At the end of the week, in fact, he ruled the house. He had shut the door on the curé, whom Madame Meroul went to see in secret. He gave orders that neither the "Gaulois" nor the "Clarion" were to be admitted into the house, which a man-servant went to get in a mysterious fashion at the post-office, and which, on his entrance, were hidden away under the sofa cushions. [220] He regulated everything just as he liked, always charming, always good-natured, a jovial and all powerful tyrant.

Other friends were about to come on a visit, religious people with Legitimist opinions. The master and mistress of the chateau considered it would be impossible to let them meet their lively guest, and, not knowing what to do, announced to Joseph Mouradour one evening that they were obliged to go away from home for a few days about a little matter of business, and they begged of him to remain in the house alone.

He showed no trace of emotion, and replied:

"Very well; 'tis all the same to me; I'll wait here for you as long as you like. What I say is this—there need be no ceremony between friends. You're quite right to look after your own affairs—why the devil shouldn't you? I'll not take offense at your doing that, quite the contrary. It only makes me feel quite at my ease with you. Go, my friends—I'll wait for you."

M. and Madame Meroul started next morning.

He is waiting for them.

THE ORPHAN [221]

Mademoiselle Source had adopted this boy under very sad circumstances. She was at the time thirty-six years old. She was deformed, having in her infancy slipped off her nurse's lap into the fireplace, and getting her face so shockingly burned that it ever afterwards presented a frightful appearance. This deformity had made her resolve not to marry, for she did not want any man to marry her for her money.

A female neighbor of hers, being left a widow during her pregnancy, died in child-birth, without leaving a sou. Mademoiselle Source took the new-born child, put him out to nurse, reared him, sent him to a boarding-school, then brought him home in his fourteenth year, in order to have in her empty house somebody who would love her, who would look after her, who would make her old age pleasant.

She resided on a little property four leagues away from Rennes, and she now dispensed with a servant. The expenses having increased to more than double what they had been since this orphan's arrival, her income of three thousand francs was no longer sufficient to support three persons.

She attended to the housekeeping and the cooking herself, and she sent out the boy on errands, letting him further occupy himself with cultivating the garden. He was gentle, timid, silent, and caressing. And she experienced a deep joy, a fresh joy at being embraced by him, without any [222] apparent surprise or repugnance being exhibited by him on account of her ugliness. He called her "Aunt" and treated her as a mother.

In the evening they both sat down at the fireside, and she got nice things ready for him. She heated some wine and toasted a slice of bread, and it made a charming little meal before going to bed. She often took him on her knees and covered him with kisses, murmuring in his ear with passionate tenderness. She called him: "My little flower, my cherub, my adored angel, my divine jewel." He softly accepted her caresses, concealing his head on the old maid's shoulder. Although he was now nearly fifteen years old, he had remained small and weak, and had a rather sickly appearance.

Sometimes Mademoiselle Source brought him to the city, to see two married female relatives of hers, distant cousins, who were living in the suburbs, and who were the only members of her family in existence. The two women had always found fault with her for having adopted this boy on account of the inheritance; but for all that they gave her a cordial welcome, having still hopes of getting a share for themselves, a third, no doubt, if what she possessed were only equally divided.

She was happy, very happy, always taken up with her adopted child. She bought books for him to improve his mind, and he devoted himself ardently to reading.

He no longer now climbed on her knees to fondle her as he had formerly done; but instead would go and sit down in his little chair in the chimney-corner and open a volume. The lamp placed at the edge of the little table, above his head, shone on his curly hair, and on a portion of his forehead; he did not move, he did not raise his eyes, he did not make any gesture. He read on, [223] interested, entirely absorbed in the adventures which formed the subject of the book.

She, seated opposite to him, gazed at him with an eager, steady look, astonished at his studiousness, often on the point of bursting into tears.

She said to him now and then: "You will fatigue yourself, my treasure!" in the hope that he would raise his head, and come across to embrace her; but he did not even answer her; he had not heard or understood what she was saying; he paid no attention to anything save what he read in these pages.

For two years he devoured an incalculable number of volumes. His character changed.

After this, he asked Mademoiselle Source many times for money, which she gave him. As he always wanted more, she ended by refusing, for she was both regular and energetic, and knew how to act rationally when it was necessary to do so. By dint of entreaties he obtained a large sum one night from her; but when he urged her to give him another sum a few days later, she showed herself inflexible, and did not give way to him further, in fact.

He appeared to be satisfied with her decision.

He again became quiet, as he had formerly been, loving to remain seated for entire hours, without moving, plunged in deep reverie. He now did not even talk to Madame Source, merely answering her remarks with short, formal words. Nevertheless, he was agreeable and attentive in his manner towards her; but he never embraced her now.

She had by this time grown slightly afraid of him when they sat facing one another at night at opposite sides of the chimney-piece. She wanted to wake him up, to make him say something, no [224] matter what, that would break this dreadful silence, which was like the darkness of a wood. But he did not appear to listen to her, and she shuddered with the terror of a poor feeble woman when she had spoken to him five or six times successively without being able to get a word out of

him.

What was the matter with him? What was going on in that closed up head? When she had been thus two or three hours sitting opposite him, she felt herself getting daft, and longed to rush away and to escape into the open country in order to avoid that mute, eternal companionship and also some vague danger, which she could not define, but of which she had a presentiment.

She frequently shed tears when she was alone. What was the matter with him? When she gave expression to a desire, he unmurmuringly carried it into execution. When she wanted to have anything brought to her from the city, he immediately went there to procure it. She had no complaint to make of him; no, indeed! And yet....

Another year flitted by, and it seemed to her that a new modification had taken place in the mind of the young man. She perceived it; she felt it; she divined it. How? No matter! She was sure she was not mistaken; but she could not have explained in what the unknown thoughts of this strange youth had changed.

It seemed to her that till now he had been like a person in a hesitating frame of mind who had suddenly arrived at a determination. This idea came to her one evening as she met his glance, a [225] fixed singular glance which she had not seen in his face before.

Then, he commenced to watch her incessantly and she wished she could hide herself in order to avoid that cold eye, riveted on her.

He kept staring at her, evening after evening for hours together, only averting his eyes when she said, utterly unnerved:

"Do not look at me like that, my child!"

Then he hung down his head.

But, the moment her back was turned, she once more felt that his eyes were upon her. Wherever she went he pursued her with his persistent gaze.

Sometimes, when she was walking in her little garden, she suddenly noticed him squatted on the stump of a tree as if he were lying in wait for her; and again when she sat in front of the house mending stockings while he was digging some cabbage-bed, he kept watching her, as he worked, in a sly, continuous fashion.

It was in vain that she asked him:

"What's the matter with you, my boy? For the last three years you have become very different. I don't find you the same. Tell me what ails you, and what you are thinking of, I beg of you."

He invariably replied, in a quiet, weary tone:

"Why, nothing ails me, Aunt!"

And when she persisted, appealing to him thus:

"Ah! my child, answer me, answer me when I speak to you. If you knew what grief you caused me, you would always answer, and you would not look at me that way. Have you any trouble? Tell me! I'll console you!"

He went away with a tired air, murmuring: [226]

"But there is nothing the matter with me, I assure you."

He had not grown much, having always a childish aspect, although the features of his face were those of a man. They were, however, hard and badly-cut. He seemed incomplete, abortive, only half-finished, and disquieting as a mystery. He was a close, impenetrable being, in whom there seemed always to be some active, dangerous mental travail taking place.

Mademoiselle Source was quite conscious of all this, and she could not from that time forth, sleep at night, so great was her anxiety. Frightful terrors, dreadful nightmares assailed her. She shut herself up in her own room, and barricaded the door, tortured by fear.

What was she afraid of? She could not tell.

Fear of everything, of the night, of the walls, of the shadows thrown by the moon on the white curtains of the windows, and above all, fear of him.

Why?

What had she to fear? Did she know what it was?

She could live this way no longer! She felt certain that a misfortune threatened her, a frightful misfortune.

She set forth secretly one morning, and went into the city to see her relatives. She told them about the matter in a gasping voice. The two women thought she was going mad and tried to reassure her.

She said:

"If you knew the way he looks at me from morning till night. He never takes his eyes off me! At times, I feel a longing to cry for help, to call in the neighbors, so much am I afraid. But what could I say to them? He does nothing to me except to keep looking at me." [227]

The two female cousins asked:

"Is he ever brutal to you? Does he give you sharp answers?"

She replied:

"No, never; he does everything I wish; he works hard; he is steady; but I am so frightened I don't mind that much. He has something in his head, I am certain of that—quite certain. I don't care to remain all alone like that with him in the country."

The relatives, scared by her words, declared to her that they were astonished, and could not understand her; and they advised her to keep silent about her fears and her plans, without, however, dissuading her from coming to reside in the city, hoping in that way that the entire inheritance would eventually fall into their hands.

They even promised to assist her in selling her house and in finding another near them.

Mademoiselle Source returned home. But her mind was so much upset that she trembled at the slightest noise, and her hands shook whenever any trifling disturbance agitated her.

Twice she went again to consult her relatives, quite determined now not to remain any longer in this way in her lonely dwelling. At last, she found a little cottage in the suburbs, which suited her, and she privately bought it.

The signature of the contract took place on a Tuesday morning, and Mademoiselle Source devoted the rest of the day to the preparations for her change of residence.

At eight o'clock in the evening she got into the diligence which passed within a few hundred yards of her house, and she told the conductor to let her down in the place where it was his custom to stop for her. The man called out to her as he whipped his horses: [228]

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Source—good night!"

She replied as she walked on:

"Good evening, Pere Joseph." Next morning, at half-past seven, the postman who conveyed letters to the village, noticed at the cross-road, not far from the high road, a large splash of blood not yet dry. He said to himself: "Hallo! some boozer must have got a bleeding in the nose."

But he perceived ten paces farther on a pocket-handkerchief also stained with blood. He picked it up. The linen was fine, and the postman in alarm, made his way over to the dike, where he fancied he saw a strange object.

Mademoiselle Source was lying at the bottom on the grass, her throat cut open with a knife.

An hour later, the gendarmes, the examining magistrate, and other authorities made an inquiry as to the cause of death.

The two female relatives, called as witnesses, told all about the old maid's fears and her last plans.

The orphan was arrested. Since the death of the woman who had adopted him, he wept from morning till night, plunged at least to all appearance, in the most violent grief.

He proved that he had spent the evening up to eleven o'clock in a café. Ten persons had seen him, having remained there till his departure.

Now the driver of the diligence stated that he had set down the murdered woman on the road between half-past nine and ten o'clock.

The accused was acquitted. A will, a long time made, which had been left in the hands of a notary [229] in Rennes, made him universal legatee. So he inherited everything.

For a long time, the people of the country put him into a quarantine, as they still suspected him. His house, which was that of the dead woman, was looked upon as accursed. People avoided him in the street.

But he showed himself so good-natured, so open, so familiar, that gradually these horrible doubts were forgotten. He was generous, obliging, ready to talk to the humblest about anything as long as they cared to talk to him.

The notary, Maitre Rameay, was one of the first to take his part, attracted by his smiling loquacity. He said one evening at a dinner at the tax-collector's house:

"A man who speaks with such facility and who is always in good humor could not have such a crime on his conscience."

Touched by his argument, the others who were present reflected, and they recalled to mind the long conversations with this man who made them stop almost by force at the road corners to communicate his ideas to them, who insisted on their going into his house when they were

passing by his garden, who could crack a joke better than the lieutenant of the gendarmes himself, and who possessed such contagious gayety that, in spite of the repugnance with which he inspired them, they could not keep from always laughing in his company.

All doors were opened to him, after a time.

He is, to-day, the mayor of his own township.

THE BLIND MAN

[230]

How is it that the sunlight gives us such joy? Why does this radiance when it falls on the earth fill us with so much delight of living? The sky is all blue, the fields are all green, the houses all white; and our ravished eyes drink in those bright colors which bring mirthfulness to our souls. And then there springs up in our hearts a desire to dance, a desire to run, a desire to sing, a happy lightness of thought, a sort of enlarged tenderness; we feel a longing to embrace the sun.

The blind, as they sit in the doorways, impassive in their eternal darkness, remain as calm as ever in the midst of this fresh gayety, and, not comprehending what is taking place around them, they keep every moment stopping their dogs from gamboling.

When, at the close of the day, they are returning home on the arm of a young brother or a little sister, if the child says: "It was a very fine day!" the other answers: "I could notice that 'twas fine. Loulou wouldn't keep quiet."

I have known one of these men whose life was one of the most cruel martyrdoms that could possibly be conceived.

He was a peasant, the son of a Norman farmer. As long as his father and mother lived, he was more or less taken care of; he suffered little save from his horrible infirmity; but as soon as the old people were gone, an atrocious life of misery commenced for him. A dependent on a sister of [231] his, everybody in the farmhouse treated him as a beggar who is eating the bread of others. At every meal the very food he swallowed was made a subject of reproach against him; he was called a drone, a clown; and although his brother-in-law had taken possession of his portion of the inheritance, the soup was given to him grudgingly—just enough to save him from dying.

His face was very pale, and his two big white eyes were like wafers; and he remained unmoved in spite of the insults inflicted upon him, so shut up in himself that one could not tell whether he felt them at all.

Moreover, he had never known any tenderness, his mother having always treated him unkindly, and caring scarcely at all for him; for in country places the useless are obnoxious, and the peasants would be glad, like hens, to kill the infirm of their species.

As soon as the soup had been gulped down, he went to the door in summer-time and sat down, to the chimney-corner in winter time, and, after that, never stirred all night. He made no gesture, no movement; only his eyelids, quivering from some nervous affection, fell down sometimes over his white, sightless orbs. Had he any intellect, any thinking faculty, any consciousness of his own existence? Nobody cared to inquire as to whether he had or no.

For some years things went on in this fashion. But his incapacity for doing anything as well as his impassiveness eventually exasperated his relatives, and he became a laughing-stock, a sort of martyred buffoon, a prey given over to native ferocity, to the savage gaiety of the brutes who surrounded him.

It is easy to imagine all the cruel practical jokes inspired by his blindness. And, in order to have [232] some fun in return for feeding him, they now converted his meals into hours of pleasure for the neighbors and of punishment for the helpless creature himself.

The peasants from the nearest houses came to this entertainment; it was talked about from door to door, and every day the kitchen of the farmhouse was full of people. Sometimes they put on the table, in front of his plate, when he was beginning to take the soup, some cat or some dog. The animal instinctively scented out the man's infirmity, and, softly approaching, commenced eating noiselessly, lapping up the soup daintily; and, when a rather loud licking of the tongue awakened the poor fellow's attention, it would prudently scamper away to avoid the blow of the spoon directed at it by the blind man at random!

Then the spectators huddled against the walls burst out laughing, nudged each other, and stamped their feet on the floor. And he, without ever uttering a word, would continue eating with the aid of his right hand, while stretching out his left to protect and defend his plate.

At another time they made him chew corks, bits of wood, leaves, or even filth, which he was unable to distinguish.

After this, they got tired even of these practical jokes; and the brother-in-law, mad at having to support him always, struck him, cuffed him incessantly, laughing at the useless efforts of the other to ward off or return the blows. Then came a new pleasure—the pleasure of smacking his

face. And the plough-men, the servant girls, and even every passing vagabond were every moment giving him cuffs, which caused his eyelashes to twitch spasmodically. He did not know [233] where to hide himself, and remained with his arms always held out to guard against people coming too close to him.

At last he was forced to beg.

He was placed somewhere on the high-road on market-days, and as soon as he heard the sound of footsteps or the rolling of a vehicle, he reached out his hat, stammering:—

"Charity, if you please!"

But the peasant is not lavish, and for whole weeks he did not bring back a sou.

Then he became the victim of furious, pitiless hatred. And this is how he died.

One winter the ground was covered with snow, and it froze horribly. Now his brother-in-law led him one morning at this season a great distance along the high-road in order that he might solicit alms. The blind man was left there all day, and when night came on, the brother-in-law told the people of his house that he could find no trace of the mendicant. Then he added:

"Pooh! best not bother about him! He was cold, and got someone to take him away. Never fear! he's not lost. He'll turn up soon enough to-morrow to eat the soup."

Next day, he did not come back.

After long hours of waiting, stiffened with the cold, feeling that he was dying, the blind man began to walk. Being unable to find his way along the road, owing to its thick coating of ice, he went on at random, falling into dykes, getting up again, without uttering a sound, his sole object being to find some house where he could take shelter. [234]

But by degrees the descending snow made a numbness steal over him, and his feeble limbs being incapable of carrying him farther, he had to sit down in the middle of an open field. He did not get up again.

The white flakes which kept continually falling buried him, so that his body, quite stiff and stark, disappeared under the incessant accumulation of their rapidly thickening mass; and nothing any longer indicated the place where the corpse was lying.

His relatives made pretense of inquiring about him and searching for him for about a week. They even made a show of weeping.

The winter was severe, and the thaw did not set in quickly. Now, one Sunday, on their way to mass, the farmers noticed a great flight of crows, who were whirling endlessly above the open field, and then, like a shower of black rain, descended in a heap at the same spot, ever going and coming.

The following week these gloomy birds were still there. There was a crowd of them up in the air, as if they had gathered from all corners of the horizon; and they swooped down with a great cawing into the shining snow, which they filled curiously with patches of black, and in which they kept rummaging obstinately. A young fellow went to see what they were doing, and discovered the body of the blind man, already half devoured, mangled. His wan eyes had disappeared, pecked out by the long, voracious beaks.

And I can never feel the glad radiance of sunlit days without sadly remembering and gloomily pondering over the fate of the beggar so disinherited in life that his horrible death was a relief for all those who had known him.

A WIFE'S CONFESSION [235]

My friend, you have asked me to relate to you the liveliest recollections of my life. I am very old, without relatives, without children; so I am free to make a confession to you. Promise me one thing—never to reveal my name.

I have been much loved, as you know; I have often myself loved. I was very beautiful; I may say this to-day, when my beauty is gone. Love was for me the life of the soul, just as the air is the life of the body. I would have preferred to die rather than exist without affection, without having somebody always to care for me. Women often pretend to love only once with all the strength of their hearts; it has often happened to be so violent in one of my attachments that I thought it would be impossible for my transports ever to end. However, they always died out in a natural fashion, like a fire when it has no more fuel.

I will tell you to-day the first of my adventures, in which I was very innocent, but which led to the others. The horrible vengeance of that dreadful chemist of Pecq recalls to me the shocking drama of which I was, in spite of myself, a spectator.

I had been a year married to a rich man, Comte Herve de Ker—— a Breton of ancient family, whom I did not love, you understand. True love needs, I believe at any rate, freedom and

impediments at the same time. The love which is imposed, sanctioned by law, and blessed by the priest—can we really call that love? A legal kiss is never as good as a stolen kiss. My husband [236] was tall in stature, elegant, and a really fine gentleman in his manners. But he lacked intelligence. He spoke in a downright fashion, and uttered opinions that cut like the blade of a knife. He created the impression that his mind was full of ready-made views instilled into him by his father and mother, who had themselves got them from their ancestors. He never hesitated, but on every subject immediately made narrow-minded suggestions, without showing any embarrassment and without realizing that there might be other ways of looking at things. One felt that his head was closed up, that no ideas circulated in it, none of those ideas which renew a man's mind and make it sound, like a breath of fresh air passing through an open window into a house.

The chateau in which we lived was situated in the midst of a desolate tract of country. It was a large, melancholy structure, surrounded by enormous trees, with tufts of moss on it resembling old men's white beards. The park, a real forest, was enclosed in a deep trench called the ha-ha; and at its extremity, near the moorland, we had big ponds full of reeds and floating grass. Between the two, at the edge of a stream which connected them, my husband had got a little hut built for shooting wild ducks.

We had, in addition to our ordinary servants, a keeper, a sort of brute devoted to my husband to the death, and a chambermaid, almost a friend, passionately attached to me. I had brought her back from Spain with me five years before. She was a deserted child. She might have been taken for a gipsy with her dusky skin, her dark eyes, her hair thick as a wood and always clustering [237] around her forehead. She was at the time sixteen years old, but she looked twenty.

The autumn was beginning. We hunted much, sometimes on neighboring estates, sometimes on our own; and I noticed a young man, the Baron de C——, whose visits at the chateau became singularly frequent. Then he ceased to come; I thought no more about it; but I perceived that my husband changed in his demeanor towards me.

He seemed taciturn and preoccupied; he did not kiss me; and, in spite of the fact that he did not come into my room, as I insisted on separate apartments in order to live a little alone, I often at night heard a furtive step drawing near my door, and withdrawing a few minutes after.

As my window was on the ground-floor I thought I had also often heard someone prowling in the shadow around the chateau. I told my husband about it, and, having looked at me intently for some seconds, he answered:

"It is nothing—it is the keeper."

Now, one evening, just after dinner, Herve, who appeared to be extraordinarily gay, with a sly sort of gaiety, said to me:

"Would you like to spend three hours out with the guns, in order to shoot a fox who comes every evening to eat my hens?"

I was surprised. I hesitated; but, as he kept staring at me with singular persistency, I ended by replying:

"Why, certainly, my friend." I must tell you that I hunted like a man the wolf and the wild boar. So [238] it was quite natural that he should suggest this shooting expedition to me.

But my husband, all of a sudden, had a curiously nervous look; and all the evening he seemed agitated, rising up and sitting down feverishly.

About ten o'clock, he suddenly said to me:

"Are you ready?"

I rose; and, as he was bringing me my gun himself, I asked:

"Are we to load with bullets or with deershot?"

He showed some astonishment; then he rejoined:

"Oh! only with deershot; make your mind easy! that will be enough."

Then, after some seconds, he added in a peculiar tone:

"You may boast of having splendid coolness."

I burst out laughing.

"I? Why, pray? Coolness because I went to kill a fox? But what are you thinking of, my friend?"

And we quietly made our way across the park. All the household slept. The full moon seemed to give a yellow tint to the old gloomy building, whose slate roof glittered brightly. The two turrets that flanked it had two plates of light on their summits, and no noise disturbed the silence of this clear, sad night, sweet and still, which seemed in a death-trance. Not a breath of air, not a shriek from a toad, not a hoot from an owl; a melancholy numbness lay heavy on everything. When we

were under the trees in the park, a sense of freshness stole over me, together with the odor of fallen leaves. My husband said nothing; but he was listening, he was watching, he seemed to be smelling about in the shadows, possessed from head to foot by the passion for the chase. [239]

We soon reached the edges of the ponds.

Their tufts of rushes remained motionless; not a breath of air caressed it; but movements which were scarcely perceptible ran through the water. Sometimes the surface was stirred by something, and light circles gathered around, like luminous wrinkles enlarging indefinitely.

When we reached the hut where we were to lie in wait, my husband made me go in first; then he slowly loaded his gun, and the dry cracking of the powder produced a strange effect on me. He saw that I was shuddering, and asked:

"Does this trial happen to be quite enough for you? If so, go back."

I was much surprised, and I replied:

"Not at all. I did not come to go back without doing anything. You seem queer this evening."

He murmured, "As you wish," and we remained there without moving.

At the end of about half-an-hour, as nothing broke the oppressive stillness of this bright autumn night, I said, in a low tone:

"Are you quite sure he is passing this way?"

Herve winced as if I had bitten him, and with his mouth close to my ear, he said:

"Make no mistake about it. I am quite sure."

And once more there was silence.

I believe I was beginning to get drowsy when my husband pressed my arm, and his voice, changed to a hiss, said:

"Do you see him over there under the trees?" [240]

I looked in vain; I could distinguish nothing. And slowly Herve now cocked his gun, all the time fixing his eyes on my face.

I was myself making ready to fire, and suddenly, thirty paces in front of us, appeared in the full light of the moon a man who was hurrying forward with rapid movements, his body bent, as if he were trying to escape.

I was so stupefied that I uttered a loud cry; but, before I could turn round, there was a flash before my eyes; I heard a deafening report, and I saw the man rolling on the ground, like a wolf hit by a bullet.

I burst into dreadful shrieks, terrified, almost going mad; then a furious hand—it was Herve's—seized me by the throat. I was flung down on the ground, then carried off by his strong arms. He ran, holding me up, till we reached the body lying on the grass, and he threw me on top of it violently, as if he wanted to break my head.

I thought I was lost; he was going to kill me; and he had just raised his heel up to my forehead when, in his turn, he was gripped, knocked down before I could yet realize what had happened.

I rose up abruptly, and I saw kneeling on top of him Porquita, my maid, clinging like a wild cat to him with desperate energy, tearing off his beard, his moustache, and the skin of his face.

Then, as if another idea had suddenly taken hold of her mind, she rose up, and, flinging herself on the corpse, she threw her arms around the dead man, kissing his eyes and his mouth, opening the dead lips with her own lips, trying to find in them a breath and a long, long kiss of lovers. [241]

My husband, picking himself up, gazed at me. He understood, and falling at my feet, said:

"Oh! forgive me, my darling, I suspected you, and I killed this girl's lover. It was my keeper that deceived me."

But I was watching the strange kisses of that dead man and that living woman, and her sobs and her writhings of sorrowing love—

And at that moment I understood that I might be unfaithful to my husband.

RELICS OF THE PAST [242]

My dear Colette,—I do not know whether you remember a verse of M. Sainte-Beuve which we have read together, and which has remained fixed in my memory; for me this verse speaks eloquently; and it has very often reassured my poor heart, especially for some time past. Here it is:

"To be born, to live, and die in the same house."

I am now all alone in this house where I was born, where I have lived, and where I hope to die. It is not gay every day, but it is pleasant; for there I have souvenirs all around me.

My son Henri is a barrister; he comes to see me twice a year. Jeanne is living with her husband at the other end of France, and it is I who go to see her each autumn. So here I am, all, all alone, but surrounded by familiar objects which incessantly speak to me about my own people, the dead, and the living separated from me by distance.

I no longer read much; I am too old for that; but I am constantly thinking, or rather dreaming. I do not dream as I used to do long ago. You may recall to mind any wild fancies, the adventures our brains concocted when we were twenty, and all the horizons of happiness that dawned upon us!

Nothing out of all our dreaming has been realized, or rather it is quite a different thing that has happened, less charming, less poetic, but sufficient for those who know how to accept their lot in this world bravely. [243]

Do you know why we women are so often unhappy? It is because we are taught in our youth to believe too much in happiness! We are never brought up with the idea of fighting, of striving, of suffering. And, at the first shock, our hearts are broken; we look forward, with blind faith, to cascades of fortunate events. What does happen is at best but a partial happiness, and thereupon we burst out sobbing. Happiness, the real happiness that we dream of, I have come to know what that is. It does not consist in the arrival of great bliss, for any great bliss that falls to our share is to be found in the infinite expectation of a succession of joys to which we never attain. Happiness is happy expectation; it is the horizon of hope; it is, therefore, endless illusion; and, old as I am, I create illusions for myself still, in fact, every day I live; only their object is changed, my desires being no longer the same. I have told you that I spend my brightest hours in dreaming. What else should I do?

I have two ways of doing this. I am going to tell you what they are; they may perhaps prove useful to you.

Oh! the first is very simple; it consists in sitting down before my fire in a low armchair made soft for my old bones, and looking back at the things that have been put aside.

One life is so short, especially a life entirely spent in the same spot:

"To be born, to live, and die in the same house."

The things that bring back the past to our recollection are heaped, pressed together; and, we are old, it sometimes seems no more than ten days since we were young. Yes; everything slips away from us, as if life itself were but a single day: morning, evening, and then comes night—a night without a dawn! [244]

When I gaze into the fire, for hours and hours, the past rises up before me as though it were but yesterday. I no longer think of my present existence; reverie carries me away; once more I pass through all the changes of my life.

And I often am possessed by the illusion that I am a young girl, so many breaths of bygone days are wafted back to me, so many youthful sensations and even impulses, so many throbbings of my young heart—all the passionate ardor of eighteen; and I have clear, as fresh realities, visions of forgotten things. Oh! how vividly, above all, do the memories of my walks as a young girl come back to me! There, in the armchair of mine, before the fire, I saw once more, a few nights since, a sunset on Mont Saint-Michel, and immediately afterwards I was riding on horseback through the forest of Uville with the odors of the damp sand and of the flowers steeped in dew, and the evening star sending its burning reflection through the water and bathing my face in its rays as I galloped through the copse. And all I thought of then, my poetic enthusiasm at the sight of the boundless sea, my keen delight at the rustling of the branches as I passed, my most trivial impressions, every fragment of thought, desire, or feeling, all, all came back to me as if I were there still, as if fifty years had not glided by since then, to chill my blood and moderate my hopes. But my other way of reviving the long ago is much better.

You know, or you do not know, my dear Colette, that we destroy nothing in the house. We have upstairs, under the roof, a large room for cast-off things which we call "the lumber-room." [245] Everything which is no longer used is thrown there. I often go up there, and gaze around me. Then I find once more a heap of nothings that I had ceased to think about, and that recalled a heap of things to my mind. They are not those beloved articles of furniture which we have known since our childhood and to which are attached recollections of events of joys or sorrows, dates in our history, which, from the fact of being intermingled with our lives, have assumed a kind of personality, a physiognomy, which are the companions of our pleasant or gloomy house, the only companions, alas! that we are sure not to lose, the only ones that will not die, like the others—those whose features, whose loving eyes, whose lips, whose voices, have vanished for ever. But I find instead among the medley of worn-out gewgaws those little old insignificant objects which have hung on by our side for forty years without ever having been noticed by us, and which, when we suddenly lay eyes on them again, have somehow the importance, the significance of relics of the past. They produce on my mind the effect of those people—whom we have known for a very long time without ever having seen them as they really are, and who, all of a sudden, some

evening, quite unexpectedly, break out into a stream of interminable talk, and tell us all about themselves down to their most hidden secrets, of which we had never even suspected the existence.

And I move about from one object to the other with a little thrill in my heart every time something fixes my attention. I say to myself: "See there! I broke that the night Paul started for Lyons;" or else, "Ah! there is mamma's little lantern, which she used to carry with her going to [246] her evening devotions on dark winter nights." There are even things in this room which have no story to tell me, which have come down from my grandparents, things therefore, whose history and adventures are utterly unknown to those who are living to-day, and whose very owners nobody knows now. Nobody has seen the hands that used to touch them or the eyes that used to gaze at them. These are the things that make me have long, long dreams. They represent to my mind desolate people whose last remaining friend is dead. You, my dear Colette, can scarcely comprehend all this, and you will smile at my simplicity, my childish, sentimental whims. You are a Parisian, and you Parisians do not understand this interior life, those eternal echoes of one's own heart. You live in the outer world, with all your thoughts in the open. Living alone as I do, I can only speak about myself. When you are answering this letter, tell me a little about yourself, that I may also be able to put myself in your place, as you will be able to put yourself in mine to-morrow.

But you will never completely understand M. de Sainte Beuve's verse:

"To be born, to live, and to die in one house."

A thousand kisses, my old friend,

ADELAIDE.

THE PEDDLER [247]

How many trifling occurrences, things which have left only a passing impression on our minds, humble dramas of which we have got a mere glimpse so that we have to guess at or suspect their real nature, are, while we are still young and inexperienced, threads, so to speak, guiding us, step by step, towards a knowledge of the painful truth!

Every moment, when I am retracing my steps during the long wandering reveries which distract my thoughts along the path through which I saunter at random, my soul takes wing, and suddenly I recall little incidents of a gay or sinister character which, emerging from the shades of the past, flit before my memory as the birds flit through the bushes before my eyes.

This summer, I wandered along a road in Savoy which commands a view of the right bank of the Lake of Bourget, and, while my glance floated over that mass of water, mirror-like and blue, with a unique blue, pale, tinted with glittering beams by the setting sun, I felt my heart stirred by that attachment which I have had since my childhood for the surface of lakes, for rivers, and for the sea. On the opposite bank of the vast liquid plate, so wide that you did not see the ends of it, one vanishing in the Rhone, and the other in the Bourget, rose the high mountain, jagged like a crest up to the topmast peak of the "Cats's Tooth." On either side of the road, vines, trailing from tree to tree, choked under their leaves their slender supporting branches, and they extended in [248] garlands through the fields, green, yellow, and red garlands, festooning from one trunk to the other, and spotted with clusters of dark grapes.

The road was deserted, white, and dusty. All of a sudden, a man emerged out of the thicket of large trees which shuts in the village of Saint-Innocent, and, bending under a load, he came towards me, leaning on a stick.

When he had come closer to me, I discovered that he was a peddler, one of those itinerant dealers who go about the country from door to door, selling paltry objects cheaply, and thereupon a reminiscence of long ago arose up in my mind, a mere nothing almost, the recollection simply of an accidental meeting I had one night between Argenteuil and Paris when I was twenty-one.

All the happiness of my life, at this period, was derived from boating. I had taken a room in an obscure inn at Argenteuil, and, every evening, I took the Government clerks' train, that long slow train which, in its course, sets down at different stations a crowd of men with little parcels, fat and heavy, for they scarcely walk at all, so that their trousers are always baggy owing to their constant occupation of the office-stool. This train, in which it seemed to me I could even sniff the odor of the writing-desk, of official documents and boxes, deposited me at Argenteuil. My boat was waiting for me, ready to glide over the water. And I rapidly plied my oar so that I might get out and dine at Bezons or Chatou or Epinay or Saint-Ouen. Then I came back, put up my boat, and made my way back on foot to Paris with the moon shining down on me.

Well, one night on the white road I perceived just in front of me a man walking. Oh! I was [249] constantly meeting those night travelers of the Parisian suburbs so much dreaded by belated citizens. This man went on slowly before me with a heavy load on his shoulders.

I came right up to him by quickening my pace so much that my footsteps rang on the road. He

stopped and turned round; then, as I kept approaching nearer and nearer, he crossed to the opposite side of the road.

As I rapidly passed him, he called out to me:

"Hallo! good evening, monsieur."

I responded:

"Good evening, mate."

He went on:

"Are you going far?"

"I am going to Paris."

"You won't be long getting there; you're going at a good pace. As for me, I have too big a load on my shoulders to walk so quickly."

I slackened my pace. Why had this man spoken to me? What was he carrying in this big pack? Vague suspicions of crime sprang up in my mind, and rendered me curious. The columns of the newspapers every morning contain so many accounts of crimes committed in this place, the peninsula of Gennevilliers, that some of them must be true. Such things are not invented merely to amuse readers—all this catalogue of arrests and varied misdeeds with which the reports of the law courts are filled.

However, this man's voice seemed rather timid than bold, and up to the present his manner had been more discreet than aggressive.

In my turn I began to question him:

"And you—are you going far?" [250]

"Not farther than Asnieres."

"Is Asnieres your place of abode?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am a peddler by occupation, and I live at Asnieres."

He had quitted the sidewalk, where pedestrians move along in the daytime under the shadows of the trees, and he was soon in the middle of the road. I followed his example. We kept staring at each other suspiciously, each of us holding his stick in his hand. When I was sufficiently close to him, I felt less distrustful. He evidently was disposed to assume the same attitude towards me, for he asked:

"Would you mind going a little more slowly?"

"Why do you say this?"

"Because I don't care for this road by night. I have goods on my back, and two are always better than one. When two men are together, people don't attack them."

I felt that he was speaking truly, and that he was afraid. So I yielded to his wishes, and the pair of us walked on, side by side, this stranger and I, at one o'clock in the morning, along the road leading from Argenteuil to Asnieres.

"Why are you going home so late when it is so dangerous?" I asked my companion.

He told me his history. He had not intended to return home this evening, as he had brought with him that very morning a stock of goods to last him three or four days. But he had been so fortunate in disposing of them that he found it necessary to get back to his abode without delay in order to deliver next day a number of things which had been bought on credit.

He explained to me with genuine satisfaction that he had managed the business very well, having a tendency to talk confidentially, and that the knick-knacks he displayed were useful to him in [251] getting rid, while gossiping, of other things which he could not easily sell.

He added:

"I have a shop in Asnieres. 'Tis my wife keeps it."

"Ah! So you're married?"

"Yes, m'sieur, for the last fifteen months. I have got a very nice wife. She'll get a surprise when she sees me coming home to-night."

He then gave me an account of his marriage. He had been after this young girl for two years, but she had taken time to make up her mind.

She had, since her childhood, kept a little shop at the corner of a street, where she sold all sorts of things—ribbons, flowers in summer, and principally pretty little shoe-buckles, and many other gewgaws, in which, owing to the favor of a manufacturer, she enjoyed a speciality. She was well-known in Asnieres as "La Bluette." This name was given to her because she often dressed in blue. And she made money, as she was very skillful in everything she did. His impression was that she

was not very well at the present moment; he believed she was in the family way, but he was not quite sure. Their business was prospering; and he traveled about exhibiting samples to all the small traders in the adjoining districts. He had become a sort of traveling commission-agent for some of the manufacturers, working at the same time for them and for himself.

"And you—what are you," he said.

I answered him with an air of embarrassment. I explained that I had a sailing-boat and two yawls in Argenteuil, that I came for a row every evening, and that, as I was fond of exercise, I [252] sometimes walked back to Paris, where I had a profession, which—I led him to infer—was a lucrative one.

He remarked:

"Faith, if I had spondulics like you, I wouldn't amuse myself by trudging that way along the roads at night—'Tisn't safe along here."

He gave me a sidelong glance, and I asked myself whether he might not all the same, be a criminal of the sneaking type who did not want to run any fruitless risk.

Then he restored my confidence when he murmured:

"A little less quickly, if you please. This pack of mine is heavy."

The sight of a group of houses showed that we had reached Asnieres.

"I am nearly at home," he said. "We don't sleep in the shop; it is watched at night by a dog, but a dog who is worth four men. And then it costs too much to live in the center of the town. But listen to me, monsieur! You have rendered me a precious service, for I don't feel my mind at ease when I'm traveling with my pack along the roads. Well, now you must come in with me, and drink a glass of mulled wine with my wife if she hasn't gone to bed, for she is a sound sleeper, and doesn't like to be waked up. Besides, I'm not a bit afraid without my pack, and so I'll see you to the gates of the city with a cudgel in my hand."

I declined the invitation; he insisted on my coming in; I still held back; he pressed me with so much eagerness, with such an air of real disappointment, such expressions of deep regret—for he had the art of expressing himself very forcibly—asking me in the tone of one who felt wounded "whether I objected to have a drink with a man like him," that I finally gave way and followed him [253] up a lonely road towards one of those big dilapidated houses which are to be found on the outskirts of suburbs.

In front of this dwelling I hesitated. This high barrack of plaster looked like a den for vagabonds, a hiding-place for suburban brigands. But he pushed forward a door which had not been locked, and made me go in before him. He led me forward by the shoulders, through profound darkness, towards a staircase where I had to feel my way with my hands and feet, with a well-grounded apprehension of tumbling into some gaping cellar.

When I had reached the first landing, he said to me: "Go on up! 'Tis the sixth story."

I searched my pockets, and, finding there a box of vestas, I lighted the way up the ascent. He followed me, puffing under his pack, repeating:

"Tis high! 'tis high!"

When we were at the top of the house, he drew forth from one of his inside pockets a key attached to a thread, and unlocking his door he made me enter.

It was a little whitewashed room, with a table in the center, six chairs, and a kitchen-cupboard close to the wall.

"I am going to wake up my wife," he said; "then I am going down to the cellar to fetch some wine; it doesn't keep here."

He approached one of the two doors which opened out of this apartment, and exclaimed:

"Bluette! Bluette!" Bluette did not reply. He called out in a louder tone: "Bluette! Bluette!" [254]

Then knocking at the partition with his fist, he growled: "Will you wake up in God's name?"

He waited, glued his ear to the key-hole, and muttered, in a calmer tone: "Pooh! if she is asleep, she must be let sleep! I'll go and get the wine: wait a couple of minutes for me."

He disappeared. I sat down and made the best of it.

What had I come to this place for? All of a sudden, I gave a start, for I heard people talking in low tones, and moving about quietly, almost noiselessly, in the room where the wife slept.

Deuce take it! Had I fallen into some cursed trap? Why had this woman—this Bluette—not been awakened by the loud knocking of her husband at the doorway leading into her room; could it have been merely a signal conveying to accomplices: "There's a mouse in the trap! I'm going to look out to prevent him escaping. 'Tis for you to do the rest!"

Certainly, there was more stir than before now in the inner room; I heard the door opening from within. My heart throbbed. I retreated towards the further end of the apartment, saying to

myself: "I must make a fight of it!" and, catching hold of the back of a chair with both hands, I prepared for a desperate struggle.

The door was half opened, a hand appeared which kept it ajar; then a head, a man's head covered with a billycock hat, slipped through the folding-doors, and I saw two eyes staring hard at me. Then so quickly that I had not time to make a single movement by way of defense, the individual, the supposed criminal, a tall young fellow in his bare feet with his shoes in his hands, a good looking chap, I must admit—half a gentleman, in fact, made a dash for the outer door, and rushed [255] down the stairs.

I resumed my seat. The adventure was assuming a humorous aspect. And I waited for the husband, who took a long time fetching the wine. At last I heard him coming up the stairs, and the sound of his footsteps made me laugh, with one of those solitary laughs which it is hard to restrain.

He entered with two bottles in his hands. Then he asked me:

"Is my wife still asleep? You didn't hear her stirring—did you?"

I knew instinctively that there was an ear pasted against the other side of the partition-door, and I said: "No, not at all."

And now he again called out:

"Pauline!"

She made no reply, and did not even move.

He came back to me, and explained:

"You see, she doesn't like me to come home at night, and take a drop with a friend."

"So then you believe she was not asleep?"

He wore an air of dissatisfaction.

"Well, at any rate," he said, "let us have a drink together."

And immediately he showed a disposition to empty the two bottles one after the other without more ado.

This time I did display some energy. When I had swallowed one glass I rose up to leave. He no longer spoke of accompanying me, and with a sullen scowl, the scowl of a common man in an angry mood, the scowl of a brute whose violence is only slumbering, in the direction of his wife's sleeping apartment, he muttered: [256]

"She'll have to open that door when you've gone."

I stared at this poltroon, who had worked himself into a fit of rage without knowing why, perhaps, owing to an obscure presentiment, the instinct of the deceived male who does not like closed doors. He had talked about her to me in a tender strain; now assuredly he was going to beat her.

He exclaimed, as he shook the lock once more:

"Pauline!"

A voice like that of a woman waking out of her sleep, replied from behind the partition:

"Eh! what?"

"Didn't you hear me coming in?"

"No, I was asleep! Let me rest."

"Open the door!"

"Yes, when you're alone. I don't like you to be bringing home fellows at night to drink with you."

Then I took myself off, stumbling down the stairs, as the other man, of whom I had been the accomplice had done. And, as I resumed my journey toward Paris, I realized that I had just witnessed in that wretched abode a scene of the eternal drama which is being acted every day, under every form, and among every class.

THE AVENGER [257]

When M. Antoine Leuillet married the Widow Mathilde Souris, he had been in love with her for nearly ten years.

M. Souris had been his friend, his old college chum. Leuillet was very fond of him, but found him rather a muff. He often used to say: "That poor Souris will never set the Seine on fire."

When Souris married Mdlle. Mathilde Duval, Leuillet was surprised and somewhat vexed, for he

had a slight weakness for her. She was the daughter of a neighbor of his, a retired haberdasher with a good bit of money. She was pretty, well-mannered, and intelligent. She accepted Souris on account of his money.

Then Leuillet cherished hopes of another sort. He began paying attentions to his friend's wife. He was a handsome man, not at all stupid, and also well off. He was confident that he would succeed; he failed. Then he fell really in love with her, and he was the sort of lover who is rendered timid, prudent, and embarrassed by intimacy with the husband. Mme. Souris fancied that he no longer meant anything serious by his attentions to her, and she became simply his friend. This state of affairs lasted nine years.

Now, one morning, Leuillet received a startling communication from the poor woman. Souris had died suddenly of aneurism of the heart.

He got a terrible shock, for they were of the same age; but the very next moment, a sensation of profound joy, of infinite relief of deliverance, penetrated his body and soul. Mme. Souris was free. [258]

He had the tact, however, to make such a display of grief as the occasion required; he waited for the proper time to elapse, and attended to all the conventional usages. At the end of fifteen months he married the widow.

His conduct was regarded as not only natural but generous. He had acted like a good friend and an honest man. In short he was happy, quite happy.

They lived on terms of the closest confidence, having from the first understood and appreciated each other. One kept nothing secret from the other, and they told each other their inmost thoughts. Leuillet now loved his wife with a calm trustful affection; he loved her as a tender, devoted partner, who is an equal and a confidante. But there still lingered in his soul a singular and unaccountable grudge against the deceased Souris, who had been the first to possess this woman, who had had the flower of her youth and of her soul, and who had even robbed her of her poetic attributes. The memory of the dead husband spoiled the happiness of the living husband; and this posthumous jealousy now began to torment Leuillet's heart day and night.

The result was that he was incessantly talking about Souris, asking a thousand minute and intimate questions about him, and seeking for information as to all his habits and personal characteristics. And he pursued him with railleries even into the depths of the tomb, recalling with self-satisfaction his oddities, emphasizing his absurdities, and pointing out his defects.

Every minute he kept calling out to his wife from one end to the other of the house: [259]

"Hallo, Mathilde!"

"Here am I, dear."

"Come and let us have a chat."

She always came over to him, smiling, well aware that Souris was to be the subject of the chat, and anxious to gratify her second husband's harmless fad.

"I say! do you remember how Souris wanted, one day, to prove to me that small men are always better loved than big men?"

And he launched out into reflections unfavorable to the defunct husband, who was small, and discreetly complimentary to himself, as he happened to be tall.

And Mme. Leuillet let him think that he was quite right; and she laughed very heartily, turned the first husband into ridicule in a playful fashion for the amusement of his successor, who always ended by remarking:

"Never mind! Souris was a muff!"

They were happy, quite happy. And Leuillet never ceased to testify his unabated attachment to his wife by all the usual manifestations.

Now, one night when they happened to be both kept awake by the renewal of youthful ardor, Leuillet, who held his wife clasped tightly in his arms, and had his lips glued to hers, said:

"Tell me this, darling."

"What?"

"Souris—'tisn't easy to put the question—was he very—very amorous?"

She gave him a warm kiss, as she murmured:

"Not so much as you, my duck."

His male vanity was flattered, and he went on:

"He must have been—rather a flat—eh?" [260]

She did not answer. There was merely a sly little laugh on her face, which she pressed close to her husband's neck.

He persisted in his questions:

"Come now! Don't deny that he was a flat—well, I mean, rather an awkward sort of fellow?"

She nodded slightly.

"Well, yes, rather awkward."

He went on:

"I'm sure he used to weary you many a night—isn't that so?"

This time, she had an access of frankness, and she replied:

"Oh! yes."

He embraced her once more when she made this acknowledgment, and murmured:

"What an ass he was! You were not happy with him?"

She answered:

"No. He was not always jolly."

Leuillet felt quite delighted, making a comparison in his own mind between his wife's former situation and her present one.

He remained silent for some time: then, with a fresh outburst of merit, he said:

"Tell me this!"

"What?"

"Will you be quite candid—quite candid with me?"

"Certainly, dear."

"Well, look here! Have you never been tempted to—to deceive this imbecile, Souris?"

Mme. Leuillet uttered a little "Oh!" in a shamefaced way, and again cuddled her face closer to her husband's chest. But he could see that she was laughing. [261]

He persisted:

"Come now, confess it! He had a head just suited for a cuckold, this blockhead! It would be so funny! This good Souris! Oh! I say, darling, you might tell it to me—only to me!"

He emphasized the words "to me," feeling certain that if she wanted to show any taste when she deceived her husband, he, Leuillet, would have been the man; and he quivered with joy at the expectation of this avowal, sure that if she had not been the virtuous woman she was he could have had her then.

But she did not reply, laughing incessantly as if at the recollection of something infinitely comic.

Leuillet, in his turn, burst out laughing at the notion that he might have made a cuckold of Souris. What a good joke! What a capital bit of fun, to be sure!

He exclaimed in a voice broken by convulsions of laughter.

"Oh! poor Souris! poor Souris! Ah! yes, he had that sort of head—oh, certainly he had!"

And Mme. Leuillet now twisted herself under the sheets, laughing till the tears almost came into her eyes.

And Leuillet repeated: "Come, confess it! confess it! Be candid. You must know that it cannot be unpleasant to me to hear such a thing."

Then she stammered, still choking with laughter.

"Yes, yes."

Her husband pressed her for an answer.

"Yes, what? Look here! tell me everything." [262]

She was now laughing in a more subdued fashion, and, raising her mouth up to Leuillet's ear, which was held towards her in anticipation of some pleasant piece of confidence, she whispered —"Yes, I did deceive him!"

He felt a cold shiver down his back, and utterly dumbfounded, he gasped.

"You—you—did—really—deceive him?"

She was still under the impression that he thought the thing infinitely pleasant, and replied.

"Yes—really—really."

He was obliged to sit up in bed so great was the shock he received, holding his breath, just as overwhelmed as if he had just been told that he was a cuckold himself. At first, he was unable to articulate properly; then after the lapse of a minute or so, he merely ejaculated.

"Ah!"

She, too, had stopped laughing now, realizing her mistake too late.

Leuillet, at length asked.

"And with whom?"

She kept silent, cudgeling her brain to find some excuse.

He repeated his question.

"With whom?"

At last, she said.

"With a young man."

He turned towards her abruptly, and in a dry tone, said.

"Well, I suppose it wasn't with some kitchen wench. I ask you who was the young man—do you understand?" [263]

She did not answer. He tore away the sheet which she had drawn over her head, and pushed her into the middle of the bed, repeating.

"I want to know with what young man—do you understand?"

Then, she replied with some difficulty in uttering the words.

"I only wanted to laugh." But he fairly shook with rage: "What? How is that? You only wanted to laugh? So then you were making game of me? I'm not going to be satisfied with these evasions, let me tell you! I ask you what was the young man's name?"

She did not reply, but lay motionless on her back.

He caught hold of her arm and pressed it tightly.

"Do you hear me, I say? I want you to give me an answer when I speak to you."

Then, she said, in nervous tones.

"I think you must be going mad! Let me alone!"

He trembled with fury, so exasperated that he scarcely knew what he was saying, and, shaking her with all his strength, he repeated.

"Do you hear me? do you hear me?"

She wrenched herself out of his grasp with a sudden movement, and with the tips of her fingers slapped her husband on the nose. He entirely lost his temper, feeling that he had been struck, and angrily pounced down on her.

He now held her under him, boxing her ears in a most violent manner, and exclaiming:

"Take that—and that—and that—there you are, you trollop!"

Then, when he was out of breath, exhausted from beating her, he got up, and went over to the chest of drawers to get himself a glass of sugared orange-water for he was almost ready to faint after his exertion. [264]

And she lay huddled up in bed, crying and heaving great sobs, feeling that there was an end of her happiness, and that it was all her own fault.

Then, in the midst of her tears, she faltered:

"Listen, Antoine, come here! I told you a lie—listen! I'll explain it to you."

And now, prepared to defend herself, armed with excuses and subterfuges, she slightly raised her head all tangled under her crumpled nightcap.

And he, turning towards her, drew close to her, ashamed at having whacked her, but feeling intensely still in his heart's core as a husband an inexhaustible hatred against that woman who had deceived his predecessor, Souris.

ALL OVER [265]

The Comte de Lormerin had just finished dressing himself. He cast a parting glance at the large glass, which occupied an entire panel of his dressing-room, and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, though he was quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no projecting paunch, with a scanty moustache of doubtful shade in his thin face, which seemed fair rather than white, he had presence, that "chic" in short, that indescribable something which

establishes between two men more difference than millions.

He murmured, "Lormerin is still alive!"

And he made his way into the drawing-room where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work-table of the gentleman who never works, there were a dozen letters lying beside three newspapers of different opinions. With a single touch of the finger he exposed to view all these letters, like a gambler giving the choice of a card; and he scanned the handwriting, a thing he did each morning before tearing open the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry and vague anxiety. What did these sealed mysterious papers bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing in each case the hand that wrote them, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, [266] friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always gave him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he regarded it with disquietude, with a sort of internal shiver.

He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, and yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying glass which he used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. "Who is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have often read its prosings, yes, very often. But this must have been a long, long time ago. Who the deuce can it be from? Pooh! 'tis only from somebody asking for money."

And he tore open the letter. Then he read.

> "My dear Friend,—You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I quitted Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call 'my hospital.' Do you remember him? He died five years ago, and now, I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married, for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you have never seen. I informed you [267] about her entrance into the world, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.
>
> "You, you are always the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well, if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call Lison, come and dine this evening with her, with the elderly Baronne de Vance, your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, stretches out to you, without complaining of her lot, a devoted hand, which you must clasp, but no longer kiss, my poor Jaquelet.
>
> "Lise de Vance."

Lormerin's heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair, with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by poignant feelings that made the tears mount up to his eyes!

If he had ever loved a woman in his life it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called "Cinder-Flower" on account of the strange color of her hair, and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a fine, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail Baronne, the wife of that, gouty, pimply Baron, who had abruptly carried her off to the provinces, shut her up, kept her apart through jealousy, through jealousy of the handsome Lormerin.

Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he, too, had been truly loved. She familiarly gave him the name of Jaquelet, and she used to pronounce that word in an exquisite fashion.

A thousand memories that had been effaced came back to him, far off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening, she called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went out for a stroll [268] in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The odor of her bodice embalmed the warm air—the odor of her bodice, and also a little, the odor of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

She replied:

"I don't know. 'Tis the moon and the water that have affected me. Every time I see poetic things, they seize hold of my heart, and I have to cry."

He smiled, moved himself, considering her feminine emotion charming—the emotion of a poor little woman whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering:

"My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love affair short-lived and dainty it had been, and all over too so quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by this old brute of a Baron, who had carried off his wife, and never shown her afterwards to anyone!

Lormerin had forgotten, in good sooth, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out the other so quickly in Paris when one is a bachelor! No matter he had kept a little chapel for her in his heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose up, and said: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

And instinctively he turned round towards the glass in order to inspect himself from head to foot. [269]
He reflected: "She must have grown old unpleasantly, more than I have!" And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those bygone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were not of importance.

The whole day, he kept thinking of this phantom. What was she like now? How funny it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! Would he alone recognize her?

He made his toilet with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better with the coat, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch with the curling-iron, for he had preserved his hair, and started very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he saw on entering a pretty drawing-room freshly furnished, was his own portrait, an old faded photograph, dating from the days of his good-fortune, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose up abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an old woman with white hair who extended both hands towards him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other with long, long kisses, then, lifting up his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep. [270]

He could not abstain from murmuring:

"It is you, Lise?"

She replied:

"Yes, it is I; it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, isn't that so? I have had so much sorrow—so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now—or rather don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept—and young! If I had by chance met you in the street, I would have cried, 'Jaquelet!' Now sit down and let us, first of all, have a chat. And then I'll show you my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You'll see how she resembles me—or rather how I resemble her—no, it is not quite that: she is just like the 'me' of former days—you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared that there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over; it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman—it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. What had he come to do in this house? Of what could he speak? Of the long-ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything to mind in the presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer recall to mind all the nice, tender things so sweet, so bitter, that had assailed his heart, some time since, when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Cinder-Flower. What then had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved? that woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young one who used to call him "Jaquelet" so prettily? [271]

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they only talked in commonplace phrases, broken and slow, she rose up, and pressed the button of the bell.

"I am going to call Renee," she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a dress; next, a young voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, mamma!"

Lormerin remained scared, as if at the sight of an apparition.

He stammered:

"Good-day, Mademoiselle."

Then, turning towards the mother:

"Oh! it is you!..."

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and come back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even

younger still, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

"Good-day, Lison!"

A man-servant announced:

"Dinner is ready, Madame."

And they proceeded towards the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea:

"Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled, repeating over and over again: [272]

"Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eye of the young girl that he found again his memories of the past. Twenty times he opened his mouth to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison?—" forgetting this white-haired lady who was regarding him with looks of tenderness.

And yet there were moments when he no longer felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glance, in her entire being, something which he did not find again. And he made prodigious efforts of mind to recall his lady love, to seize again what had escaped from her to him, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

The Baronne said:

"You have lost your old sprightliness, my poor friend."

He murmured:

"There are many other things that I have lost!"

But in his heart touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more, like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar phrase of her mother which she had borrowed, a certain style of speaking and thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He got away early, and took a turn along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Apart from the two women, he now [273] saw only one, a young one, the one of former days returned, and he loved her as he had loved her in bygone years. He loved her with greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think on what he should do.

But, as he was passing, with a wax candle in his hand, before the glass, the large glass in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightful ravages, which he had not perceived till now.

And he sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring:

"All over, Lormerin!"

LETTER FOUND ON A DROWNED MAN [274]

You ask me, madame, whether I am laughing at you? You cannot believe that a man has never been smitten with love. Well, no, I have never loved, never!

What is the cause of this? I really cannot tell. Never have I been under the influence of that sort of intoxication of the heart which we call love! Never have I lived in that dream, in that exaltation, in that state of madness into which the image of a woman casts us. I have never been pursued, haunted, roused to fever-heat, lifted up to Paradise by the thought of meeting, or by the possession of, a being who had suddenly become for me more desirable than any good fortune, more beautiful than any other creature, more important than the whole world! I have never wept, I have never suffered, on account of any of you. I have not passed my nights thinking of one woman without closing my eyes. I have no experience of waking up with the thought and the memory of her shedding their illumination on me. I have never known the wild desperation of

hope when she was about to come, or the divine sadness of regret when she parted with me, leaving behind her in the room a delicate odor of violet powder and flesh.

I have never been in love.

I, too, have often asked myself why is this. And truly I can scarcely tell. Nevertheless, I have found some reasons for it; but they are of a metaphysical character, and perhaps you will not be able to appreciate them. [275]

I suppose I sit too much in judgment on women to submit much to their fascination. I ask you to forgive me for this remark. I am going to explain what I mean. In every creature there is a moral being and a physical being. In order to love, it would be necessary for me to find a harmony between these two beings which I have never found. One has always too great a predominance over the other, sometimes the moral, sometimes the physical.

The intellect which we have a right to require in a woman, in order to love her, is not the same as virile intellect. It is more and it is less. A woman must have a mind open, delicate, sensitive, refined, impressionable. She has no need of either power or initiative in thought, but she must have kindness, elegance, tenderness, coquetry, and that faculty of assimilation which, in a little while, raises her to an equality with him who shared her life. Her greatest quality must be tact, that subtle sense which is to the mind what touch is to the body. It reveals to her a thousand little things, contours, angles, and forms in the intellectual order.

Very frequently pretty women have not intellect to correspond with their personal charms. Now the slightest lack of harmony strikes me and pains me at the first glance. In friendship, this is not of importance. Friendship is a compact in which one fairly divides defects and merits. We may judge of friends, whether man or woman, take into account the good they possess, neglect the evil that is in them, and appreciate their value exactly, while giving ourselves up to an intimate sympathy of a deep and fascinating character. [276]

In order to love, one must be blind, surrender oneself absolutely, see nothing, reason on nothing, understand nothing. One must adorn the weakness as well as the beauty of the beloved object, renounce all judgment, all reflection, all perspicacity.

I am incapable of such blindness, and rebel against a seductiveness not founded on reason. This is not all. I have such a high and subtle idea of harmony, that nothing can ever realize my ideal. But you will call me a madman. Listen to me. A woman, in my opinion, may have an exquisite soul and a charming body, without that body and that soul being in perfect accord with one another. I mean that persons who have noses made in a certain shape are not to be expected to think in a certain fashion. The fat have no right to make use of the same words and phrases as the thin. You, who have blue eyes, madame, cannot look at life, and judge of things and events as if you had black eyes. The shades of your eyes should correspond, by a sort of fatality, with the shades of your thought. In perceiving these things I have the scent of a bloodhound. Laugh if you like, but it is so.

And yet I imagined that I was in love for an hour, for a day. I had foolishly yielded to the influence of surrounding circumstances. I allowed myself to be beguiled by the mirage of an aurora. Would you like me to relate for you this short history?

I met, one evening, a pretty enthusiastic woman who wanted, for the purpose of humoring a poetic fancy, to spend a night with me in a boat on a river. I would have preferred a room and a bed; however, I consented to take instead the river and the boat. [277]

It was in the month of June. My fair companion chose a moonlight night in order to excite her imagination all the better.

We had dined at a riverside inn, and then we set out in the boat about ten o'clock. I thought it a rather foolish kind of adventure; but as my companion pleased me I did not bother myself too much about this. I sat down on the seat facing her; I seized the oars, and off we started.

I could not deny that the scene was picturesque. We glided past a wooded isle full of nightingales, and the current carried us rapidly over the river covered with silvery ripples. The toads uttered their shrill, monotonous cry; the frogs croaked in the grass by the river's bank, and the lapping of the water as it flowed on made around us a kind of confused murmur almost imperceptible, disquieting, and gave us a vague sensation of mysterious fear.

The sweet charm of warm nights and of streams glittering in the moonlight penetrated us. It seemed bliss to live and to float thus, and to dream and to feel by one's side a young woman sympathetic and beautiful.

I was somewhat affected, somewhat agitated, somewhat intoxicated by the pale brightness of the night and the consciousness of my proximity to a lovely woman.

"Come and sit beside me," she said.

I obeyed.

She went on:

"Recite some verses for me."

This appeared to be rather too much. I declined; she persisted. She certainly wanted to have the utmost pleasure, the whole orchestra of sentiment, from the moon to the rhymes of poets. In the [278] end, I had to yield, and, as if in mockery, I recited for her a charming little poem by Louis Bouilbet, of which the following are a few strophes:

"I hate the poet who with tearful eye
Murmurs some name while gazing tow'rds a star,
Who sees no magic in the earth or sky,
Unless Lizette or Ninon be not far.

"The bard who in all Nature nothing sees
Divine, unless a petticoat he ties
Amorously to the branches of the trees
Or nightcap to the grass, is scarcely wise.

"He has not heard the eternal's thunder tone,
The voice of Nature in her various moods,
Who cannot tread the dim ravines alone,
And of no woman dream 'mid whispering woods."

I expected some reproaches. Nothing of the sort. She murmured:

"How true it is!"

I remained stupefied. Had she understood?

Our boat was gradually drawing nearer to the bank, and got entangled under a willow which impeded its progress. I drew my arm around my companion's waist, and very gently moved my lips towards her neck. But she repulsed me with an abrupt, angry movement:

"Have done, pray! You are rude!"

I tried to draw her towards me. She resisted, caught hold of the tree, and was near flinging us both into the water. I deemed it the prudent course to cease my importunities. [279]

She said:

"I would rather have you capsized. I feel so happy. I want to dream—that is so nice." Then, in a slightly malicious tone, she added:

"Have you, then, already forgotten the verses you recited for me just now?"

She was right. I became silent.

She went on:

"Come! row!"

And I plied the oars once more.

I began to find the night long and to see the absurdity of my conduct.

My companion said to me:

"Will you make me a promise?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"To remain quiet, well-behaved, and discreet, if I permit you—"

"What? Say what you mean!"

"Here is what I mean! I want to lie down on my back at the bottom of the boat with you by my side. But I forbid you to touch me, to embrace me—in short to—to caress me."

I promised. She warned me:

"If you move, I'll capsize the boat."

And then we lay down side by side, our eyes turned towards the sky, while the boat glided slowly through the water. We were rocked by the gentle movements of the shallop. The light sounds of the night came to us more distinctly in the bottom of the boat, sometimes causing us to start. And I felt springing up within me a strange, poignant emotion, an infinite tenderness, something like an irresistible impulse to open my arms in order to embrace, to open my heart in order to love, to [280] give myself, to give my thoughts, my body, my life, my entire being to someone.

My companion murmured, like one in a dream:

"Where are we? Where are we going? It seems to me that I am quitting the earth. How sweet it is! Ah! if you loved me—a little!!!"

My heart began to throb. I had no answer to give. It seemed to me that I loved her. I had no longer any violent desire. I felt happy there by her side, and that was enough for me.

And thus we remained for a long, long time without stirring. We caught each other's hands; some delightful force rendered us motionless, an unknown force stronger than ourselves, an alliance, chaste, intimate, absolute of our persons lying there side by side which belonged to each other without touching. What was this? How do I know. Love, perhaps?

Little by little, the dawn appeared. It was three o'clock in the morning. Slowly, a great brightness spread over the sky. The boat knocked against something. I rose up. We had come close to a tiny islet.

But I remained ravished, in a state of ecstasy. In front of us stretched the shining firmament, red, rosy, violet, spotted with fiery clouds resembling golden vapors. The river was glowing with purple, and three houses on one side of it seemed to be burning.

I bent towards my companion. I was going to say: "Oh! look!" But I held my tongue, quite dazed, and I could no longer see anything except her. She, too, was rosy, with the rosy flesh tints with which must have mingled a little the hue of the sky. Her tresses were rosy; her eyes were rosy; her teeth were rosy; here dress, her laces, her smile, all were rosy. And in truth I believed, so [281] overpowering was the illusion, that the aurora was there before me.

She rose softly to her feet, holding out her lips to me; and I moved towards her, trembling, delirious, feeling indeed that I was going to kiss Heaven, to kiss happiness, to kiss a dream which had become a woman, to kiss the ideal which had descended into human flesh.

She said to me: "You have a caterpillar in your hair." And suddenly I felt myself becoming as sad as if I had lost all hope in life.

That is all, madame. It is puerile, silly, stupid. But I am sure that since that day it would be impossible for me to love. And yet—who can tell?

[The young man upon whom this letter was found was yesterday taken out of the Seine between Bougival and Marly. An obliging bargeman, who had searched the pockets in order to ascertain the name of the deceased, brought this paper to the author.]

MOTHER AND SON!!! [282]

We were chatting in the smoking-room after a dinner at which only men were present. We talked about unexpected legacies, strange inheritances. Then M. le Brument, who was sometimes called "the illustrious master" and at other times the "illustrious advocate," came and stood with his back to the fire.

"I have," he said, "just now to search for an heir who disappeared under peculiarly terrible circumstances. It is one of those simple and ferocious dramas of ordinary life, a thing which possibly happens every day, and which is nevertheless one of the most dreadful things I know. Here are the facts:

"Nearly six months ago I got a message to come to the side of a dying woman. She said to me:

"'Monsieur, I want to entrust to you the most delicate, the most difficult, and the most wearisome mission that can be conceived. Be good enough to take cognizance of my will, which is there on the table. A sum of five thousand francs is left to you as a fee if you do not succeed, and of a hundred thousand francs if you do succeed. I want to have my son found after my death.'

"She asked me to assist her to sit up in the bed, in order that she might be able to speak with greater ease, for her voice, broken and gasping, was gurgling in her throat.

"I saw that I was in the house of a very rich person. The luxurious apartment, with a certain [283] simplicity in its luxury, was upholstered with materials solid as the walls, and their soft surface imparted a caressing sensation, so that every word uttered seemed to penetrate their silent depths and to disappear and die there.

"The dying woman went on:

"'You are the first to hear my horrible story. I will try to have strength enough to go on to the end of it. You must know everything so that you, whom I know to be a kind-hearted man as well as a man of the world, should have a sincere desire to aid me with all your power.

"'Listen to me.

"'Before my marriage, I loved a young man, whose suit was rejected by my family because he was not rich enough. Not long afterwards, I married a man of great wealth. I married him through ignorance, through obedience, through indifference, as young girls do marry.

"'I had a child, a boy. My husband died in the course of a few years.

"'He whom I had loved had got married, in his turn. When he saw that I was a widow, he was crushed by horrible grief at knowing he was not free. He came to see me; he wept and sobbed so bitterly before my eyes that it was enough to break my heart. He at first came to see me as a friend. Perhaps I ought not to have seen him. What would you have? I was alone, so sad, so

solitary, so hopeless! And I loved him still. What sufferings we women have sometimes to endure!

"'I had only him in the world, my parents also being dead. He came frequently; he spent whole evenings with me. I should not have let him come so often, seeing that he was married. But I had [284] not enough of will-power to prevent him from coming.

"'How am I to tell you what next happened?... He became my lover. How did this come about? Can I explain it? Can anyone explain such things? Do you think it could be otherwise when two human beings are drawn towards each other by the irresistible force of a passion by which each of them is possessed? Do you believe, monsieur, that it is always in our power to resist, that we can keep up the struggle for ever, and refuse to yield to the prayers, the supplications, the tears, the frenzied words, the appeals on bended knees, the transports of passion, with which we are pursued by the man we adore, whom we want to gratify even in his slightest wishes, whom we desire to crown with every possible happiness, and whom, if we are to be guided by a worldly code of honor, we must drive to despair. What strength would it not require? What a renunciation of happiness? what self-denial? and even what virtuous selfishness?

"'In short, monsieur, I was his mistress; and I was happy. I became—and this was my greatest weakness and my greatest piece of cowardice—I became his wife's friend.

"'We brought up my son together; we made a man of him, a thorough man, intelligent, full of sense and resolution, of large and generous ideas. The boy reached the age of seventeen.

"'He, the young man, was fond of my—my lover, almost as fond of him as I was myself, for he had been equally cherished and cared for by both of us. He used to call him his "dear friend," and respected him immensely, having never received from him anything but wise counsels, and a [285] good example of rectitude, honor, and probity. He looked upon him as an old, loyal and devoted comrade of his mother, as a sort of moral father, tutor, protector—how am I to describe it?

"'Perhaps the reason why he never asked any questions was that he had been accustomed from his earliest years to see this man in the house, by his side, and by my side, always concerned about us both.

"'One evening the three of us were to dine together (these were my principal festive occasions), and I waited for the two of them, asking myself which of them would be the first to arrive. The door opened; it was my old friend. I went towards him, with outstretched arms; and he drew his lips towards mine in a long, delicious kiss.

"'All of a sudden, a sound, a rustling which was barely audible, that mysterious sensation which indicates the presence of another person, made us start and turn round with a quick movement. Jean, my son, stood there, livid, staring at us.

"'There was a moment of atrocious confusion. I drew back, holding out my hand towards my son as if in supplication; but I could see him no longer. He had gone.

"'We remained facing each other—my lover and I—crushed, unable to utter a word. I sank down on an armchair, and I felt a desire, a vague, powerful desire to fly, to go out into the night, and to disappear for ever. Then, convulsive sobs rose up in my throat, and I wept, shaken with spasms, with my heart torn asunder, all my nerves writhing with the horrible sensation of an irremediable misfortune, and with that dreadful sense of shame which, in such moments as this, falls on a [286] mother's heart.

"'He looked at me in a scared fashion, not venturing to approach me or to speak to me or to touch me, for fear of the boy's return. At last he said:

"""I am going to follow him—to talk to him—to explain matters to him. In short, I must see him and let him know—"

"'And he hurried away.

"'I waited—I waited in a distracted frame of mind, trembling at the least sound, convulsed with terror, and filled with some unutterably strange and intolerable emotion by every slight crackling of the fire in the grate.

"'I waited for an hour, for two hours, feeling my heart swell with a dread I had never before experienced, such an anguish that I would not wish the greatest of criminals to have ten minutes of such misery. Where was my son? What was he doing?

"'About midnight, a messenger brought me a note from my lover. I still know its contents by heart:

"""Has your son returned? I did not find him. I am down here. I do not want to go up at this hour."

"'I wrote in pencil on the same slip of paper:

"""Jean has not returned. You must go and find him."

"'And I remained all night in the armchair, waiting for him.

"'I felt as if I were going mad. I longed to have to run wildly about, to roll myself on the ground. And yet I did not even stir, but kept waiting hour after hour. What was going to happen? I tried to imagine, to guess. But I could form no conception, in spite of my efforts, in spite of the tortures of [287]

my soul!

"'And now my apprehension was lest they might meet. What would they do in that case? What would my son do? My mind was lacerated by fearful doubts, by terrible suppositions.

"'You understand what I mean, do you not, monsieur?

"'My chambermaid, who knew nothing, who understood nothing, was coming in every moment, believing, naturally, that I had lost my reason. I sent her away with a word or a movement of the hand. She went for the doctor, who found me in the throes of a nervous fit.

"'I was put to bed. I got an attack of brain-fever.

"'When I regained consciousness, after a long illness, I saw beside my bed my—lover—alone.

"'I exclaimed:

"""My son? Where is my son?"

"'He replied:

"""No, no, I assure you every effort has been made by me to find him, but I have failed!"

"'Then, becoming suddenly exasperated and even indignant—for women are subject to such outbursts of unaccountable and unreasoning anger—I said:

"""I forbid you to come near me or to see me again unless you find him. Go away!"

"'He did go away.

"'I have never seen one or the other of them since, monsieur, and thus I have lived for the last twenty years.

"'Can you imagine what all this meant to me? Can you understand this monstrous punishment, this slow perpetual laceration of a mother's heart, this abominable, endless waiting? Endless, did I say? No: it is about to end, for I am dying. I am dying without ever again seeing either of them—either one or the other! [288]

"'He—the man I loved—has written to me every day for the last twenty years; and I—I have never consented to see him, even for one second; for I had a strange feeling that, if he came back here, it would be at that very moment my son would again make his appearance! Ah! my son! my son! Is he dead? Is he living? Where is he hiding? Over there, perhaps, at the other side of the ocean, in some country so far away that even its very name is unknown to me! Does he ever think of me? Ah! if he only knew! How cruel children are! Did he understand to what frightful suffering he condemned me, into what depths of despair, into what tortures, he cast me while I was still in the prime of life, leaving me to suffer like this even to this moment, when I am going to die—me, his mother, who loved him with all the violence of a mother's love! Oh! isn't it cruel, cruel?

"'You will tell him all this, monsieur—will you not? You will repeat for him my last words:

"'My child, my dear, dear child, be less harsh towards poor women! Life is already brutal and savage enough in its dealings with them. My dear son, think of what the existence of your poor mother has been ever since the day when you left her. My dear child, forgive her, and love her, now that she is dead, for she has had to endure the most frightful penance ever inflicted on a woman.'

"She gasped for breath, shuddering, as if she had addressed the last words to her son and as if he stood by her bedside. [289]

"Then she added:

"'You will tell him also, monsieur, that I never again saw—the other.'

"Once more she ceased speaking, then, in a broken voice she said:

"'Leave me now, I beg of you. I want to die all alone, since they are not with me.'"

Maitre Le Brument added:

"And I left the house, messieurs, crying like a fool, so vehemently, indeed, that my coachman turned round to stare at me.

"And to think that, every day, heaps of dramas like this are being enacted all around us!

"I have not found the son—that son—well, say what you like about him, but I call him that criminal son!"

THE SPASM [290]

he hotel-guests slowly entered the dining-room, and sat down in their places. The waiters began to attend on them in a leisurely fashion so as to enable those who were late to arrive, and so as to

To avoid bringing back the dishes; and the old bathers, the *habitués*, those whose season was advancing, gazed with interest towards the door, whenever it opened, with a desire to see new faces appearing.

This is the principal distraction of health-resorts. People look forward to the dinner-hour in order to inspect each day's new arrivals, to find out who they are, what they do, and what they think. A vague longing springs up in the mind, a longing for agreeable meetings, for pleasant acquaintances, perhaps for love-adventures. In this life of elbowings, not only those with whom we have come into daily contact, but strangers, assume an extreme importance. Curiosity is aroused, sympathy is ready to exhibit itself, and sociability is the order of the day.

We cherish antipathies for a week and friendships for a month; we see other people with different eyes when we view them through the medium of the acquaintanceship that is brought about at health-resorts. We discover in men suddenly, after an hour's chat, in the evening after dinner, under the trees in the park where the generous spring bubbles up, a high intelligence and astonishing merits, and a month afterwards, we have completely forgotten these new friends, so [291] fascinating when we first met them.

There also are formed lasting and serious ties more quickly than anywhere else. People see each other every day; they become acquainted very quickly; and with the affection thus originated is mingled something of the sweetness and self-abandonment of long-standing intimacies. We cherish in after years the dear and tender memories of those first hours of friendship, the memory of those first conversations through which we have been able to unveil a soul, of those first glances which interrogate and respond to the questions and secret thoughts which the mouth has not as yet uttered, the memory of that first cordial confidence, the memory of that delightful sensation of opening our hearts to those who are willing to open theirs to us.

And the melancholy of health-resorts, the monotony of days that are all alike, help from hour to hour in this rapid development of affection.

Well, this evening, as on every other evening, we awaited the appearance of strange faces.

Only two appeared, but very remarkable-looking, a man and a woman—father and daughter. They immediately produced the same effect on my mind as some of Edgar Poe's characters; and yet there was about them a charm, the charm associated with misfortune. I looked upon them as the victims of fatality. The man was very tall and thin, rather stooping, with hair perfectly white, too white for his comparatively youthful physiognomy; and there was in his bearing, and in his person that austerity peculiar to Protestants. The daughter, who was probably twenty-four or [292] twenty-five, was small in stature, and was also very thin, very pale, and she had the air of one who was worn out with utter lassitude. We meet people like this from time to time who seem too weak for the tasks and the needs of daily life, too weak to move about, to walk, to do all that we do every day. This young girl was very pretty, with the diaphanous beauty of a phantom; and she ate with extreme slowness, as if she were almost incapable of moving her arms.

It must have been she assuredly who had come to take the waters.

They found themselves facing me at the opposite side of the table; and I at once noticed that the father had a very singular nervous spasm.

Every time he wanted to reach an object, his hand made a hook-like movement, a sort of irregular zigzig, before it succeeded in touching what it was in search of; and, after a little while, this action was so wearisome to me that I turned aside my head in order not to see it.

I noticed, too, that the young girl, during meals, wore a glove on her left hand.

After dinner, I went for a stroll in the park of the thermal establishment. This led towards the little Auvergnese station of Chatel Guyot, hidden in a gorge at the foot of the high mountain, of that mountain from which flow so many boiling springs, arising from the deep bed of extinct volcanoes. Over there, above us, the domes, which had once been craters, raised their mutilated heads on the summit of the long chain. For Chatel Guyot is situated at the spot where the region of domes begins. [293]

Beyond it, stretches out the region of peaks, and further on again the region of precipices.

The "Puy de Dome" is the highest of the domes, the Peak of Sancy is the loftiest of the peaks, and Cantal is the most precipitous of these mountain-heights.

This evening it was very warm. I walked up and down a shady path, on the side of the mountain overlooking the park, listening to the opening strains of the Casino band.

And I saw the father and the daughter advancing slowly in my direction. I saluted them, as we are accustomed to salute our hotel-companions at health resorts; and the man, coming to a sudden halt, said to me,

"Could you not, monsieur, point out to us a short walk, nice and easy, if that is possible? and excuse my intrusion on you."

I offered to show them the way towards the valley through which the little river flowed, a deep

valley forming a gorge between two tall craggy, wooded slopes.

They gladly accepted my offer.

And we talked naturally about the virtues of the waters.

"Oh!" he said, "My daughter has a strange malady, the seat of which is unknown. She suffers from incomprehensible nervous disorders. At one time, the doctors think she has an attack of heart disease, at another time, they imagine it is some affection of the liver, and at another time they declare it to be a disease of the spine. To-day, her condition is attributed to the stomach, which is the great caldron and regulator of the body, that Protean source of diseases with a thousand forms and a thousand susceptibilities to attack. This is why we have come here. For my [294] part, I am rather inclined to think it is the nerves. In any case it is very sad."

Immediately the remembrance of the violent spasmodic movement of his hand came back to my mind, and I asked him.

"But is this not the result of heredity? Are not your own nerves somewhat affected?"

He replied calmly:

"Mine? Oh! no—my nerves have always been very steady."

Then suddenly, after a pause, he went on:

"Ah! You were alluding to the spasm in my hand every time I want to reach for anything? This arises from a terrible experience which I had. Just imagine! this daughter of mine was actually buried alive?"

I could only give utterance to the word "Ah!" so great were my astonishment and emotion.

He continued:

"Here is the story. It is simple. Juliette had been subject for some time to serious attacks of the heart. We believed that she had disease of that organ, and we were prepared for the worst.

"One day she was carried into the house cold, lifeless, dead. She had fallen down unconscious in the garden. The doctor certified that life was extinct. I watched by her side for a day and two nights. I laid her with my own hands in the coffin, which I accompanied to the cemetery, where she was deposited in the family vault. It is situated in the very heart of Lorraine. [295]

"I wished to have her interred with her jewels, bracelets, necklaces, rings, all presents which she had got from me, and with her first ball-dress on.

"You may easily imagine the state of mind in which I was when I returned home. She was the only one I had, for my wife has been dead for many years. I found my way to my own apartment in a half distracted condition, utterly exhausted, and I sank into my easy-chair, without the capacity to think or the strength to move. I was nothing better now than a suffering, vibrating machine, a human being who had, as it were, been flayed alive; my soul was like a living wound.

"My old valet, Prosper, who had assisted me in placing Juliette in her coffin, and preparing her for her last sleep, entered the room noiselessly, and asked:

"'Does monsieur want anything?'

"I merely shook my head, by way of answering 'No.'

"He urged, 'Monsieur is wrong. He will bring some illness on himself. Would monsieur like me to put him to bed?'

"I answered, 'No! let me alone!'

"And he left the room.

"I know not how many hours slipped away. Oh! what a night, what a night! It was cold. My fire had died out in the huge grate; and the wind, the winter wind, an icy wind, a hurricane accompanied by frost and snow, kept blowing against the window with a sinister and regular noise.

"How many hours slipped away? There I was without sleeping, powerless, crushed, my eyes wide open, my legs stretched out, my body limp, inanimate, and my mind torpid with despair. [296] Suddenly, the great bell of the entrance gate, the great bell of the vestibule, rang out.

"I got such a shock that my chair cracked under me. The solemn, ponderous sound vibrated through the empty chateau as if through a vault. I turned round to see what the hour was by the clock. It was just two in the morning. Who could be coming at such an hour!

"And abruptly the bell again rang twice. The servants, without doubt, were afraid to get up. I took a wax-candle and descended the stairs. I was on the point of asking, 'Who is there?'

"Then I felt ashamed of my weakness, and I slowly opened the huge door. My heart was

throbbing wildly; I was frightened; I hurriedly drew back the door, and in the darkness I distinguished a white figure, standing erect, something that resembled an apparition.

"I recoiled, petrified with horror, faltering:

"'Who—who—who are you?'

"A voice replied:

"'It is I, father.'

"It was my daughter.

"I really thought I must be mad, and I retreated backwards before this advancing specter. I kept moving away, making a sign with my hand, as if to drive the phantom away, that gesture which you have noticed—that gesture of which since then I have never got rid.

"'Do not be afraid, papa; I was not dead. Somebody tried to steal my rings, and cut one of my fingers, the blood began to flow, and this reanimated me.'

"And, in fact, I could see that her hand was covered with blood. [297]

"I fell on my knees, choking with sobs and with a rattling in my throat.

"Then, when I had somewhat collected my thoughts, though I was still so much dismayed that I scarcely realized the gruesome good-fortune that had fallen to my lot, I made her go up to my room, and sit down in my easy-chair; then I ran excitedly for Prosper to get him to light up the fire again and to get her some wine and summon the rest of the servants to her assistance.

"The man entered, stared at my daughter, opened his mouth with a gasp of alarm and stupefaction, and then fell back insensible.

"It was he who had opened the vault, and who had mutilated, and then abandoned, my daughter, for he could not efface the traces of the theft. He had not even taken the trouble to put back the coffin into its place, feeling sure, besides, that he would not be suspected by me, as I completely trusted him.

"You see, Monsieur, that we are very unhappy people."

He stopped.

The night had fallen, casting its shadows over the desolate, mournful vale, and a sort of mysterious fear possessed me at finding myself by the side of those strange beings, of this young girl who had come back from the tomb and this father with his uncanny spasm.

I found it impossible to make any comment on this dreadful story. I only murmured:

"What a horrible thing!"

Then, after a minute's silence, I added:

"Suppose we go back. I think it is getting cold."

And we made our way back to the hotel.

A DUEL [298]

The war was over. The Germans occupied France. The country was panting like a wrestler lying under the knee of his successful opponent.

The first trains from Paris, after the city's long agony of famine and despair, were making their way to the new frontiers, slowly passing through the country districts and the villages. The passengers gazed through the windows at the ravaged fields and burnt hamlets. Prussian soldiers, in their black helmets with brass spikes, were smoking their pipes on horseback or sitting on chairs in front of the houses which were still left standing. Others were working or talking just as if they were members of the families. As you passed through the different towns you saw entire regiments drilling in the squares, and, in spite of the rumble of the carriage-wheels, you could every moment hear the hoarse words of command.

M. Dubuis, who during the entire siege, had served as one of the National Guard in Paris, was going to join his wife and daughter, whom he had prudently sent away to Switzerland before the invasion.

Famine and hardship had not diminished his big paunch so characteristic of the rich, peace-loving merchant. He had gone through the terrible events of the past year with sorrowful resignation and bitter complaints at the savagery of men. Now that he was journeying to the frontier at the close of the war, he saw the Prussians for the first time, although he had done his [299]

duty at the ramparts, and staunchly mounted guard on cold nights.

He stared with mingled fear and anger at those bearded, armed men, installed all over French soil as if in their own homes, and he felt in his soul a kind of fever of impotent patriotism even while he yielded to that other instinct of discretion and self-preservation which never leaves us. In the same compartment, two Englishmen, who had come to the country as sight-seers, were gazing around with looks of stolid curiosity. They were both also stout, and kept chattering in their own language, sometimes referring to their guide-book, and reading in loud tones the names of the places indicated.

Suddenly, the train stopped at a little village station, and a Prussian officer jumped up with a great clatter of his saber on the double footboard of the railway-carriage. He was tall, wore a tight-fitting uniform, and his face had a very shaggy aspect. His red hair seemed to be on fire, and his long moustache, of a paler color, was stuck out on both sides of his face, which it seemed to cut in two.

The Englishmen at once began staring at him with smiles of newly-awakened interest, while M. Dubuis made a show of reading a newspaper. He sat crouched in a corner, like a thief in the presence of a gendarme.

The train started again. The Englishmen went on chatting, and looking out for the exact scene of different battles, and, all of a sudden, as one of them stretched out his arm towards the horizon to indicate a village, the Prussian officer remarked in French, extending his long legs and lolling backwards: [300]

"We killed a dozen Frenchmen in that village, and took more than a hundred prisoners."

The Englishman, quite interested, immediately asked:

"Ha! and what is the name of this village?"

The Prussian replied:

"Pharsbourg."

He added: "We caught these French blackguards by the ears."

And he glanced towards M. Dubuis, laughing into his moustache in an insulting fashion.

The train rolled on, always passing through hamlets occupied by the victorious army. German soldiers could be seen along the roads, on the edges of fields, standing in front of gates, or chatting outside *cafés*. They covered the soil like African locusts.

The officer said, with a wave of his hand:

"If I were in command, I'd take Paris, burn everything, kill everybody. No more France!"

The Englishman, through politeness, replied simply:

"Ah! yes."

He went on:

"In twenty years, all Europe, all of it, will belong to us. Prussia is more than a match for all of them."

The Englishmen, getting uneasy, said nothing in answer to this. Their faces, which had become impassive, seemed made of wax behind their long whiskers. Then, the Prussian officer began to laugh. And still, lolling back, he began to sneer. He sneered at the downfall of France, insulted the prostrate enemy; he sneered at Austria which had been recently conquered; he sneered at the furious but fruitless defense of the departments; he sneered at the Garde Mobile and at the [301] useless artillery. He announced that Bismarck was going to build a city of iron with the captured cannon. And suddenly he pushed his boots against the thigh of M. Dubuis, who turned his eyes round, reddening to the roots of his hair.

The Englishmen seemed to have assumed an air of complete indifference, as if they had found themselves all at once shut up in their own island, far from the din of the world.

The officer took out his pipe, and looking fixedly at the Frenchman, said:

"You haven't any tobacco—have you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The German said:

"You might go and buy some for me when the train stops next."

And he began laughing afresh, as he added:

"I'll let you have the price of a drink."

The train whistled, and slackened its pace. They had reached the station which had been burnt

down; and here there was a regular stop.

The German opened the carriage-door, and, catching M. Dubuis by the arm, said:

"Go and do what I told you—quick, quick!"

A Prussian detachment occupied the station. Other soldiers were looking on from behind wooden gratings. The engine was already getting up steam in order to start off again. Then M. Dubuis hurriedly jumped on the platform, and, in spite of the warnings of the station master, dashed into the adjoining compartment.

[302]

He was alone! He tore open his waistcoat, so rapidly did his heart beat, and, panting for breath, he wiped the perspiration off his forehead.

The train drew up at another station. And suddenly the officer appeared at the carriage-door, and jumped in, followed close behind by the two Englishmen, who were impelled by curiosity. The German sat facing the Frenchman, and, laughing still, said:

"You did not want to do what I asked you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The train had just left the station.

The officer said:

"I'll cut off your moustache to fill my pipe with."

And he put out his hand towards the Frenchman's face.

The Englishmen kept staring in the same impassive fashion with fixed glances.

Already the German had caught hold of the moustache and was tugging at it, when M. Dubuis, with a back stroke of his hand, threw back the officer's arm, and, seizing him by the collar, flung him down on the seat. Then, excited to a pitch of fury, with his temples swollen and his eyes glaring, he kept throttling the officer with one hand, while with the other clenched, he began to strike him violent blows in the face. The Prussian struggled, tried to draw his saber, and to get a grip, while lying back, of his adversary. But M. Dubuis crushed him with the enormous weight of his stomach, and kept hitting him without taking breath or knowing where his blows fell. Blood flowed down the face of the German, who, choking and with a rattling in his throat, spat forth his broken teeth, and vainly strove to shake off this infuriated man who was killing him. [303]

The Englishmen had got on their feet and came closer in order to see better. They remained standing, full of mirth and curiosity, ready to bet for or against each of the combatants.

And suddenly M. Dubuis, exhausted by his violent efforts, went and resumed his seat without uttering a word.

The Prussian did not attack him, for the savage assault had scared and terrified the officer. When he was able to breathe freely, he said:

"Unless you give me satisfaction with pistols, I will kill you."

M. Dubuis replied:

"Whenever you like. I'm quite ready."

The German said:

"Here is the town of Strasbourg. I'll get two officers to be my seconds, and there will be time before the train leaves the station."

M. Dubuis, who was puffing as much as the engine, said to the Englishmen:

"Will you be my seconds?" They both answered together:

"Ah! yes."

And the train stopped.

In a minute, the Prussian had found two comrades who carried pistols, and they made their way towards the ramparts.

The Englishmen were continually looking at their watches, shuffling their feet, and hurrying on with the preparations, uneasy lest they should be too late for the train.

M. Dubuis had never fired a pistol in his life. [304]

They made him stand twenty paces away from his enemy. He was asked:

"Are you ready?"

While he was answering: "Yes, monsieur," he noticed that one of the Englishmen had opened his umbrella in order to keep off the rays of the sun.

A voice gave the word of command:

"Fire!"

M. Dubuis fired at random without minding what he was doing, and he was amazed to see the Prussian staggering in front of him, lifting up his arms, and immediately afterwards, falling straight on his face. He had killed the officer.

One of the Englishmen ejaculated: "Ah!" quivering with delight, satisfied curiosity, and joyous impatience. The other, who still kept the watch in his hand, seized M. Dubuis's arm, and hurried him in double-quick time towards the station, his fellow-countryman counting their steps, with his arms pressed close to his sides—"One! two! one! two!"

And all three marching abreast they rapidly made their way to the station like three grotesque figures in a comic newspaper.

The train was on the point of starting. They sprang into their carriage. Then, the Englishmen, taking off their traveling-caps, waved them three times over their heads, exclaiming:

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!"

Then gravely, one after the other, they stretched out the right hand to M. Dubuis, and they went back and sat in their own corner.

THE LOVE OF LONG AGO

[305]

The old-fashioned chateau was built on a wooded height. Tall trees surrounded it with dark greenery; and the vast park extended its vistas here over a deep forest and there over an open plain. Some little distance from the front of the mansion stood a huge stone basin in which marble nymphs were bathing. Other basins arranged in order succeeded each other down as far as the foot of the slope, and a hidden fountain sent cascades dancing from one to the other.

From the manor-house which preserved the grace of a superannuated coquette down to the grottos encrusted with shell-work, where slumbered the loves of a bygone age, everything in this antique demesne had retained the physiognomy of former days. Everything seemed to speak still of ancient customs, of the manners of long ago, of faded gallantries, and of the elegant trivialities so dear to our grandmothers.

In a parlor in the style of Louis XV, whose walls were covered with shepherds paying court to shepherdesses, beautiful ladies in hoop-petticoats, and gallant gentlemen in wigs, a very old woman who seemed dead as soon as she ceased to move was almost lying down in a large easy-chair, while her thin, mummy-like hands hung down, one at each side of her.

Her eyes were gazing languidly towards the distant horizon as if they sought to follow through the park visions of her youth. Through the open window every now and then came a breath of air [306] laden with the scent of grass and the perfume of flowers. It made her white locks flutter around her wrinkled forehead and old memories, through her brain.

Beside her on a tapestried stool, a young girl with long, fair hair hanging in plaits over her neck, was embroidering an altar-cloth. There was a pensive expression in her eyes, and it was easy to see that, while her agile fingers worked, her brain was busy with thoughts.

But the old lady suddenly turned round her head.

"Berthe," she said, "read something out of the newspapers for me, so that I may still know sometimes what is happening in the world."

The young girl took up a newspaper, and cast a rapid glance over it.

"There is a great deal about politics, grandmamma; am I to pass it by?"

"Yes, yes, darling. Are there no accounts of love affairs? Is gallantry, then, dead in France, that they no longer talk about abductions or adventures as they did formerly?"

The girl made a long search through the columns of the newspaper.

"Here is one," she said. "It is entitled: 'A Love-Drama!'"

The old woman smiled through her wrinkles. "Read that for me," she said.

And Berthe commenced. It was a case of vitriol-throwing. A wife, in order to avenge herself on her husband's mistress, had burned her face and eyes. She had left the Assize Court acquitted, declared to be innocent, amid the applause of the crowd. [307]

The grandmother moved about excitedly in her chair, and exclaimed:

"This is horrible—why, it is perfectly horrible! See whether you can find anything else to read for

me, darling."

Berthe again made a search; and further down in the reports of criminal cases at which her attention was still directed. She read:

"'Gloomy Drama.—A shop girl, no longer young, allowed herself to yield to the embraces of a young man. Then, to avenge herself on her lover, whose heart proved fickle, she shot him with a revolver. The unhappy man is maimed for life. The Jury, consisting of men of moral character, took the part of the murderess—regarding her as the victim of illicit love, and honorably acquitted her.'"

This time the old grandmother appeared quite shocked, and, in a trembling voice, she said.

"Why, you are mad, then, nowadays. You are mad! The good God has given you love, the only allurement in life. Man has added to this gallantry, the only distraction of our dull hours, and here are you mixing up with it vitriol and revolvers, as if one were to put mud into a flagon of Spanish wine."

Berthe did not seem to understand her grandmother's indignation.

"But grandmamma, this woman avenged herself. Remember she was married, and her husband deceived her."

The grandmother gave a start.

"What ideas have they been filling your head with, you young girls of to-day?" [308]

Berthe replied:

"But marriage is sacred, grandmamma."

The grandmother's heart, which had its birth in the great age of gallantry, gave a sudden leap.

"It is love that is sacred," she said, "Listen, child, to an old woman who has seen three generations, and who has had a long, long experience of men and women. Marriage and love have nothing in common. We marry to found a family, and we form families in order to constitute society. Society cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links, we always seek for metals of the same kind. When we marry, we must bring together suitable conditions; we must combine fortunes, unite similar races, and aim at the common interest, which is riches and children. We marry only once, my child, because the world requires us to do so, but we may love twenty times in one lifetime because nature has made us like this. Marriage, you see, is law, and love is an instinct, which impels us sometimes along a straight and sometimes along a crooked path. The world has made laws to combat our instincts—it was necessary to make them; but our instincts are always stronger, and we ought not to resist them too much, because they come from God, while the laws only come from men. If we did not perfume life with love, as much love as possible, darling, as we put sugar into drugs for children, nobody would care to take it just as it is."

Berthe opened her eyes widely in astonishment. She murmured:

"Oh! grandmamma, we can only love once."

The grandmother raised her trembling hands towards Heaven, as if again to invoke the defunct God of gallantries. She exclaimed indignantly: [309]

"You have become a race of serfs, a race of common people. Since the Revolution, it is impossible any longer to recognize society. You have attached big words to every action, and wearisome duties to every corner of existence; you believe in equality and eternal passion. People have written verses telling you that people have died of love. In my time verses were written to teach men to love every woman. And we! when we liked a gentleman, my child, we sent him a page. And when a fresh caprice came into our hearts, we were not slow in getting rid of the last lover—unless we kept both of them."

The old woman smiled with a keen smile, and a gleam of roguery twinkled in her gray eye, the sprightly, skeptical roguery of those people who did not believe that they were made of the same clay as the others, and who lived as masters for whom common beliefs were not made.

The young girl, turning very pale, faltered out:

"So then women have no honor?"

The grandmother ceased to smile. If she had kept in her soul some of Voltaire's irony, she had also a little of Jean-Jaques's glowing philosophy: "No honor! because we loved, and dared to say so, and even boasted of it? But, my child, if one of us, among the greatest ladies in France, were to live without a lover, she would have the entire court laughing at her. Those who wished to live differently had only to enter a convent. And you imagine, perhaps, that your husbands will love you alone all their lives. As if, indeed, this could be the case. I tell you that marriage is a thing [310] necessary in order that Society should exist, but it is not in the nature of our race, do you understand? There is only one good thing in life, and that is love. And how you misunderstand it! how you spoil it! You treat it as something solemn like a sacrament, or something to be bought, like a dress."

The young girl caught the old woman's trembling hands in her own.

"Hold your tongue, I beg of you, grandmamma!"

And, on her knees, with tears in her eyes, she prayed to Heaven to bestow on her a great passion, one eternal passion alone, in accordance with the dream of modern poets, while the grandmother, kissing her on the forehead, quite penetrated still by that charming, healthy logic by which the philosophers of gallantry sprinkled salt with the life of the eighteenth century, murmured:

"Take care, my poor darling! If you believe in such follies as this, you will be very unhappy."

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED

[311]

One autumn I went to stay for the hunting-season with some friends in a chateau in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical joking, as all my friends are. I do not care to know any other sort of people.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once aroused distrust in my breast. We had some capital shooting. They embraced me, they cajoled me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

"Look out, old ferret! They have something in preparation for you."

During the dinner, the mirth was excessive, far too great, in fact. I thought: "Here are people who take a double share of amusement, and apparently without reason. They must be looking out in their own minds for some good bit of fun. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!"

During the entire evening, everyone laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I smelled a practical joke in the air, as a dog smells game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word or a meaning or a gesture escape me. Everyone seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour rang for going to bed, and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why? They called to me: "Good night." I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, [312] without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance around the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the key-hole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out, and leave me in darkness."

Then I went across to the mantelpiece, and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that, I cast another glance around me without discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and I placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from without.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, time was flying; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was ridiculous. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing enormously at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure. All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower-bath [313] from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking under the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I consider one of extreme efficacy: I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it towards me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bed-clothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance-door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then, I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bed-clothes.

For at least another hour I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the chateau. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden, I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top of my own body, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest, a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down,

penetrated my ears.

I felt myself suffocating under the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whiskers. Then with all my strength I launched out a blow over this face. But I immediately [314] received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my night shirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.

O stupor! it was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into the apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor, and fallen on his stomach, spilling, in spite of himself, my breakfast over my face.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the interlude I had been striving to avoid.

Ah! how they all laughed that day!

A WARNING NOTE [315]

I have received the following letter. Thinking that it may be profitable to many readers, I make it my business to communicate it to them:

"Paris, November 15th, 1886.

"Monsieur,—You often treat either in the shape of short stories or chronicles, of subjects which have relation to what I may describe as 'current morals.' I am going to submit to you some reflections which ought, it seems to me, to furnish you with the materials for one of your tales.

"I am not married; I am a bachelor, and, as it seems to me, a rather simple man. But I fancy that many men, the greater part of men, are simple in the way that I am. As I am always, or nearly always, a plain dealer, I am not well able to see through the natural cunning of my neighbors, and I go straight ahead, with my eyes open, without sufficiently looking out for what is behind things and behind people's external behavior.

"We are nearly all accustomed, as a rule, to take appearances for realities, and to look on people as what they pretend to be; and very few possess that scent which enables certain men to divine the real and hidden nature of others. From this peculiar and conventional method of regarding life come the result that we pass, like moles, through the midst of events; and that we never believe in what is, but in what seems to be, that we declare a thing to be improbable as soon as we are shown the fact behind the veil, and that everything which displeases our idealistic [316] morality is classed by us an exception, without taking into account that these exceptions all brought together constitute nearly the total number of cases. There further results from it that credulous good people like me are deceived by everybody and especially by women, who have a talent in this direction.

"I have started far afield in order to come to the particular fact which interests me. I have a mistress, a married woman. Like many others, I imagined (do you understand?) that I had chanced on an exception, on an unhappy little woman who was deceiving her husband for the first time. I had paid attentions to her, or rather I had looked on myself as having paid attention to her for a long time, as having overcome her virtue by dint of kindness and love, and as having triumphed by the sheer force of perseverance. In fact, I had made use of a thousand precautions, a thousand devices, and a thousand subtle dallyings in order to succeed in getting the better of her.

"Now here is what happened last week: Her husband being absent for some days, she suggested that we should both dine together, and that I should attend on myself so as to avoid the presence of a man-servant. She had a fixed idea which had haunted her for the last four or five months: She wanted to get tipsy, but to get tipsy altogether without being afraid of consequences, without having to go back home, speak to her chambermaid, and walk before witnesses. She had often obtained what she called 'a gay agitation' without going farther, and she had found it delightful. So then she promised herself that she would get tipsy once, only once, but thoroughly so. She pretended at her own house that she was going to spend twenty-four hours with some friends [317] near Paris, and she reached my abode just about dinner-hour.

"A woman naturally ought not to get fuddled except when she has had too much champagne. She drinks a big glass of it fasting, and before the oysters arrive, she begins to ramble in her talk.

"We had a cold dinner prepared on a table behind me. It was enough for me to stretch out my arms to take the dishes or the plates, and I attended on myself as best I could while I listened to her chattering.

"She kept swallowing glass after glass, haunted by her fixed idea. She began by making me the recipient of meaningless and interminable confidences with regard to her sensations as a young girl. She went on and on, her eyes rather wandering, brilliant, her tongue untied, and her light ideas rolling themselves out endlessly like the blue telegraph-paper which is moved on without

stopping by the bobbin and which keeps extending its length to the click of the electric apparatus which covers it with unknown words.

"From time to time she asked me:

"'Am I tipsy?'

"'No, not yet.'

"And she went on drinking.

"She was so in a little while, not so tipsy as to lose her senses, but tipsy enough to tell the truth, as it seemed to me.

"To her confidences as to her emotions while a young girl succeeded more intimate confidences as to her relations with her husband. She made them to me without restraint till she wearied me with them, under this pretext, which she repeated a hundred times: 'I can surely tell everything [318] to you. To whom could I tell everything if it were not to you?' So I was made acquainted with all the habits, all the defects, all the fads and the most secret fancies of her husband.

"And by way of claiming my approval she asked: 'Isn't he a flat? Do you think he has taken a feather out of me? eh? So, the first time I saw you, I said to myself: "Let me see! I like him, and I'll take him for my lover." It was then you began mashing me.'

"I must have presented an odd face to her eyes at that moment, for she could see it, tipsy though she was; and with great outbursts of laughter, she exclaimed: 'Ah! you big simpleton, you did go about it cautiously; but, when men pay attention to us, you dear blockhead, you see we like it, and then they must make quick work of it, and not keep us waiting. A man must be a ninny not to understand, by a mere glance at us, that we mean "Yes." Ah! I believe I was waiting for you, you stupid! I did not know what to do in order to make you see that I was in a hurry. Oh! yes, flowers, verses, compliments, more verses, and nothing else at all! I was very near letting you go, my fine fellow, you were so long in making up your mind. And only to think that half the men in the world are like you, while the other half, ha! ha! ha!'

"This laugh of hers sent a cold shiver down my back. I stammered: 'The other half—what about the other half?'

"She still went on drinking, her eyes steeped in the fumes of sparkling wine, her mind impelled by the imperious necessity for telling the truth which sometimes takes possession of drunkards. [319]

"She replied: 'Ah! the other half makes quick work of it—too quick; but, all the same, they are right. There are days when we don't hit it off with them; but there are days, too, when it all goes right, in spite of everything.... My dear, if you only knew how funny it is—the way the two kinds of men act! You see, the timid ones, such as you, you never could imagine what sort the others are and what they do, immediately, as soon as they find themselves alone with us. They are regular dare-devils! They get many a slap in the face from us, no doubt of that, but what does that matter? They know we're the sort that kiss and don't tell! They know us well, they do!'

"I stared at her with the eyes of an Inquisitor, and with a mad desire to make her speak, to learn everything from her. How often had I put this question to myself: 'How do the other men behave towards the women who belong to us?' I was fully conscious of the fact that, from the way I saw two men talking to the same woman publicly in a drawing-room, these two men, if they found themselves, one after the other, all alone with her, would conduct themselves quite differently, although they were both equally well acquainted with her. We can guess at the first glance of the eye that certain beings, naturally endowed with the power of seduction, or only more lively, more daring than we are, reach after an hour's chat with a woman who pleases them, to a degree of intimacy to which we would not attain in a year. Well, do these men, these seducers, these bold adventurers, take, when the occasion presents itself to them, liberties with their hands and lips which to us, the timid ones, would appear odious outrages, but which women perhaps look on [320] merely as pardonable effrontery, as indecent homages to their irresistible grace!

"So I asked her: 'There are women, though, who think these men very improper?'

"She threw herself back on her chair in order to laugh more at her ease, but with a nerveless, unhealthy laugh, one of those laughs which ends in nervous fits, then, a little more calmly, she replied: 'Ha! ha! my dear, improper? that is to say, that they dare everything, at once, all, you understand, and many other things, too.'

"I felt myself horrified as if she had just revealed to me a monstrous thing.

"'And you permit this, you women?'

"'No, we don't permit it; we slap them in the face, but, for all that, they amuse us! And then with them one is always afraid, one is never easy. You must keep watching them the whole time; it is like fighting a duel. You have to keep staring into their eyes to see what they are thinking of or where they are putting their hands. They are blackguards, if you like, but they love us better than you do.'

"A singular and unexpected sensation stole over me. Although a bachelor, and determined to remain a bachelor, I suddenly felt in my breast the spirit of a husband in the face of this impudent confidence. I felt myself the friend, the ally, the brother of all these confiding men who

are, if not robbed, at least defrauded by all the rufflers of woman's waists.

"It is this strange emotion, monsieur, that I am obeying at this moment, in writing to you, and in begging of you to address a warning note to the great army of easy-going husbands. [321]

"However, I had still some lingering doubts. This woman was drunk and must be lying.

"I went on to inquire: 'How is it that you never relate these adventures to anyone, you women?'

"She gazed at me with profound pity, and with such an air of sincerity that, for the moment, I thought she had been soberized by astonishment.

"'We—But, my dear fellow, you are very foolish. Why do we never talk to you about these things? Ha! ha! ha! Does your valet tell you about his tips, his odd sous? Well, this is our little tip. The husband ought not to complain when we don't go farther. But how dull you are! To talk of these things would be to give the alarm to all ninnies! Ah! how dull you are!... And then what harm does it do as long as we don't yield?'

"I felt myself in a great state of great confusion as I put this question to her:

"'So then you have often been embraced by men?'

"She answered, with an air of sovereign contempt for the man who could have any doubt on the subject:

"'Faith!—Why, every woman has been often embraced.... Try it on with any of them, no matter whom, in order to see for yourself, you great goose! Look here! embrace Mme. de X! She is quite young, and quite virtuous. Embrace, my friend—embrace, and touch, you shall see. Ha! ha! ha!'

"All of a sudden she flung her glass straight at the chandelier. The champagne fell down in a shower, extinguished three wax-candles, stained the hangings, and deluged the table, while the broken glass was scattered about the dining-room. Then, she made an effort to seize the bottle to do the same with it, but I prevented her. After that, she burst out crying in a very loud tone—the nervous fit had come on, as I had anticipated.... [322]

"Some days later, I had almost forgotten this avowal of a tipsy woman when I chanced to find myself at an evening party with this Mme. de X—— whom my mistress had advised me to embrace. As I lived in the same direction as she did, I offered to drive her to her own door, for she was alone this evening. She accepted my offer.

"As soon as we were in the carriage, I said to myself: 'Come! I must try it on!' But I had not the courage. I did not know how to make a start, how to begin the attack.

"Then suddenly, the desperate courage of cowards came to my aid. I said to her: 'How pretty you were, this evening.'

"She replied with a laugh: 'So then, this evening was an exception, since you only remarked it for the first time.'

"I did not know what rejoinder to make. Certainly my gallantry was not making progress. After a little reflection, however, I managed to say:

"'No, but I never dared to tell you.'

"She was astonished:

"'Why?'

"'Because it is—it is a little difficult.'

"'Difficult to tell a woman that she's pretty? Why, where did you come from? You should always tell us so, even when you only half think it ... because it always gives us pleasure to hear."... [323]

"I felt myself suddenly animated by a fantastic audacity, and, catching her round the waist, I raised my lips towards her mouth.

"Nevertheless I seemed to be rather nervous about it, and not to appear so terrible to her. I must also have arranged and executed my movement very badly, for she managed to turn her head aside so as to avoid contact with my face, saying:

"'Oh no—this is rather too much—too much.... You are too quick! Take care of my hair. You cannot embrace a woman who has her hair dressed like mine!'...

"I resumed my former position in the carriage, disconcerted, unnerved by this repulse. But the carriage drew up before her gate; and she, as she stepped out of it, held out her hand to me, saying in her most gracious tones:

"'Thanks, dear monsieur, for having seen me home ... and don't forget my advice!'

"I saw her three days later. She had forgotten everything.

"And I, monsieur, I am incessantly thinking of the other sort of men—the sort of men to whom a lady's hair is no obstacle, and who know how to seize every opportunity."...

THE HORRIBLE

[324]

The shadows of a balmy night were slowly falling. The women remained in the drawing-room of the villa. The men, seated or astride on garden-chairs, were smoking in front of the door, forming a circle round a table laden with cups and wineglasses.

Their cigars shone like eyes in the darkness which, minute by minute, was growing thicker. They had been talking about a frightful accident which had occurred the night before—two men and three women drowned before the eyes of the guests in the river opposite.

General de G—— remarked:

"Yes, these things are affecting, but they are not horrible.

"The horrible, that well-known word, means much more than the terrible. A frightful accident like this moves, upsets, scares; it does not horrify. In order that we should experience horror, something more is needed than the excitation of the soul, something more than the spectacle of the dreadful death; there must be a shuddering sense of mystery or a sensation of abnormal terror beyond the limits of nature. A man who dies, even in the most dramatic conditions, does not excite horror; a field of battle is not horrible, blood is not horrible; the vilest crimes are rarely horrible.

"Hold on! here are two personal examples, which have shown me what is the meaning of horror: [325]

"It was during the war of 1870. We were retreating towards Pont-Audemer, after having passed through Rouen. The army, consisting of about twenty thousand men, twenty thousand men in disorder, disbanded, demoralized, exhausted, were going to re-form at Havre.

"The earth was covered with snow. The night was falling. They had not eaten anything since the day before. They were flying rapidly, the Prussians not being far off.

"All the Norman country, livid, dotted with the shadows of the trees surrounding the farms, extended under a black sky, heavy and sinister.

"Nothing else could be heard in the wan twilight save the confused sound, soft and undefined, of a marching throng, an endless tramping, mingled with the vague clink of pottingers or sabers. The men, bent, round-shouldered, dirty, in many cases even in rags, dragged themselves along, hurried through the snow, with a long, broken-backed stride.

"The skin of their hands stuck to the steel of their muskets' butt-ends, for it was freezing dreadfully that night. I frequently saw a little soldier take off his shoes in order to walk barefooted, so much did his foot-gear bruise him; and with every step he left a little track of blood. Then, after some time, he sat down in a field for a few minutes' rest, and he never got up again. Every man who sat down was a dead man.

"Should we have left behind us those poor exhausted soldiers, who fondly counted on being able to start afresh as soon as they had somewhat refreshed their stiffened legs? Now, scarcely had they ceased to move, and to make their almost frozen blood circulate in their veins, than an unconquerable torpor congealed them, nailed them to the ground, closed their eyes, and in one [326] second collapsed this overworked human mechanism. And they gradually sank down, their heads falling towards their knees, without, however, quite tumbling over, for their loins and their limbs lost their capacity for moving, and became as hard as wood, impossible to bend or to set upright.

"And the rest of us, more robust, kept still straggling on, chilled to the marrow of our bones, advancing by dint of forced movement through that night, through that snow, through that cold and deadly country, crushed by pain, by defeat, by despair, above all overcome by the abominable sensation of abandonment, of the end, of death, of nothingness.

"I saw two gendarmes holding by the arm a curious-looking little man, old, beardless, of truly surprising aspect.

"They were looking out for an officer, believing that they had caught a spy. The word 'spy' at once spread through the midst of the stragglers, and they gathered in a group round the prisoner. A voice exclaimed: 'He must be shot!' And all these soldiers who were falling from utter prostration, only holding themselves on their feet by leaning on their guns, felt all of a sudden that thrill of furious and bestial anger which urges on a mob to massacre.

"I wanted to speak! I was at that time in command of a battalion; but they no longer recognized the authority of their commanding officers; they would have shot myself.

"One of the gendarmes said: 'He has been following us for the last three days. He has been asking information from everyone about the artillery.' [327]

"I took it on myself to question this person.

"'What are you doing? What do you want? Why are you accompanying the army?'

"He stammered out some words in some unintelligible dialect. He was, indeed, a strange being, with narrow shoulders, a sly look, and such an agitated air in my presence that I had no longer any real doubt that he was a spy. He seemed very aged and feeble. He kept staring at me from under his eyes with humble, stupid, and crafty air.

The men all round us exclaimed:

"'To the wall! to the wall!'

"I said to the gendarmes:

"'Do you answer for the prisoner?'

"I had not ceased speaking when a terrible push threw me on my back, and in a second I saw the man seized by the furious soldiers, thrown down, struck, dragged along the side of the road, and flung against a tree. He fell in the snow, nearly dead already.

"And immediately they shot him. The soldiers fired at him, re-loaded their guns, fired again with the desperate energy of brutes. They fought with each other to have a shot at him, filed off in front of the corpse, and kept firing on at him, as people at a funeral keep sprinkling holy water in front of a coffin.

"But suddenly a cry arose of: 'The Prussians! the Prussians!'

"And all along the horizon I heard the great noise of this panic-stricken army in full flight.

"The panic, generated by these shots fired at this vagabond, had filled his very executioners with terror; and, without realizing that they were themselves the originators of the scare, rushed away [328] and disappeared in the darkness.

"I remained alone in front of the corpse with the two gendarmes whom their duty had compelled to stay with me.

"They lifted up the riddled piece of flesh, bruised and bleeding.

"'He must be examined,' said I to them.

"And I handed them a box of vestas which I had in my pocket. One of the soldiers had another box. I was standing between the two.

"The gendarme, who was feeling the body, called out:

"'Clothed in a blue blouse, a trousers, and a pair of shoes.'

"The first match went out; we lighted a second. The man went on, as he turned out his pockets:

"'A horn knife, check handkerchief, a snuff-box, a bit of packthread, a piece of bread.'

"The second match went out; we lighted a third. The gendarme, after having handled the corpse for a long time, said:

"'That is all.'

"I said:

"'Strip him. We shall perhaps find something near the skin.'

"And, in order that the two soldiers might help each other in this task, I stood between them to give them light. I saw them, by the rapid and speedily extinguished flash of the match, take off the garments one by one, and expose to view that bleeding bundle of flesh still warm, though lifeless.

"And suddenly one of them exclaimed: [329]

"'Good God, General, it is a woman!'

"I cannot describe to you the strange and poignant sensation of pain that moved my heart. I could not believe it, and I knelt down in the snow before this shapeless pulp of flesh to see for myself: it was a woman.

"The two gendarmes, speechless and stunned, waited for me to give my opinion on the matter. But I did not know what to think, what theory to adopt.

"Then the brigadier slowly drawled out:

"'Perhaps she came to look for a son of hers in the artillery, whom she had not heard from.'

"And the other chimed in:

"'Perhaps indeed that is so.'

"And I, who had seen some very terrible things in my time, began to cry. And I felt, in the presence of this corpse, in that icy cold night, the midst of that gloomy pain, at the sight of this

mystery, at the sight of this murdered stranger, the meaning of that word 'Horror.'

"Now I had the same sensation last year while interrogating one of the survivors of the Flatters Mission, an Algerian sharpshooter.

"You know the details of this atrocious drama. It is possible, however, that you are unacquainted with them.

"The Colonel traveled through the desert into the Soudan, and passed through the immense territory of the Touaregs, who are, in that great ocean of sand which stretches from the Atlantic to Egypt and from the Soudan to Algeria, a kind of pirates resembling those who ravaged the seas in former days. [330]

"The guides who accompanied the column belonged to the tribe of Chambaa, of Ouargla.

"Now, one day, they pitched their camp in the middle of the desert, and the Arabs declared that, as the spring was a little farther away, they would go with all their camels to look for water.

"Only one man warned the Colonel that he had been betrayed: Flatters did not believe this, and accompanied the convoy with the engineers, the doctors, and nearly all his officers.

"They were massacred round the spring, and all the camels captured.

"The Captain of the Arab Intelligence Department at Ouargla, who had remained in the camp, took command of the survivors, spahis and sharpshooters, and they commenced the retreat, leaving behind the baggage and the provisions for want of camels to carry them.

"Then they started on their journey through this solitude without shade and without limits, under the devouring sun which burned them from morning till night.

"One tribe came to tender its submission and brought dates as a tribute. They were poisoned. Nearly all the French died, and, among them, the last officer.

"There now only remained a few spahis with their quartermaster, Pobequin, and some native sharpshooters of the Chambaa tribe. They had still two camels left. They disappeared one night along with two Arabs.

"Then, the survivors understood that they were going to eat each other up, and, as soon as they discovered the flight of the two men with the two beasts, those who remained separated, and proceeded to march, one by one, through the soft sand, under the glare of a scorching sun, at a [331] distance of more than a gunshot from each other.

"So they went on all day, and, when they reached a spring, each of them came to drink at it in turn as soon as each solitary marcher had moved forward the number of yards arranged upon. And thus they continued marching the whole day, raising, everywhere they passed, in that level burnt-up expanse, those little columns of dust which, at a distance, indicate those who are trudging through the desert.

"But, one morning, one of the travelers made a sudden turn, and drew nearer to his neighbor. And they all stopped to look.

"The man toward whom the famished soldier drew near did not fly, but lay flat on the ground, and took aim at the one who was coming on. When he believed he was within gunshot, he fired. The other was not hit, and he continued then to advance, and cocking his gun in turn, killed his comrade.

"Then from the entire horizon, the others rushed to seek their share. And he who had killed the fallen man, cutting the corpse into pieces, distributed it.

"And they once more placed themselves at fixed distances, these irreconcilable allies, preparing for the next murder which would bring them together.

"For two days, they lived on this human flesh which they divided amongst each other. Then, the famine came back, and he who had killed the first man began killing afresh. And again, like a butcher, he cut up the corpse, and offered it to his comrades, keeping only his own portion of it.

"And so this retreat of cannibals continued. [332]

"The last Frenchman, Pobequin, was massacred at the side of a well, the very night before the supplies arrived.

"Do you understand now what I mean by the Horrible?"

This was the story told us a few nights ago by General de G——.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT [333]

Jacques de Randal, having dined at home alone, told his valet he might go, and then he sat down at a table to write his letters.

He thus finished every year by writing and dreaming. He made for himself a sort of review of things that had happened since last New Year's Day, things that were now all over and dead; and, in proportion as the faces of his friends rose up before his eyes, he wrote them a few lines, a cordial "Good morning" on the 1st of January.

So he sat down, opened a drawer, took out of it a woman's photograph, gazed at it a few moments, and kissed it. Then, having laid it beside a sheet of note-paper, he began:

"My dear Irene.—You must have by this time the little souvenir which I sent you. I have shut myself up this evening in order to tell you."

The pen here ceased to move. Jacques rose up and began walking up and down the room.

For the last six months he had a mistress, not a mistress like the others, a woman with whom one engages in a passing intrigue, of the theatrical world or the "demi-monde, but a woman whom he loved and won. He was no longer a young man, although he was still comparatively young for a man, and he looked on life seriously in a positive and practical spirit.

Accordingly, he drew up the balance sheet of his passion, as he drew up every year the balance sheet of friendships that were ended or freshly contracted, of circumstances and persons that had entered into his life. [334]

His first ardor of love having grown calmer, he asked himself with the precision of a merchant making a calculation, what was the state of his heart with regard to her, and he tried to form an idea of what it would be in the future.

He found there a great and deep affection, made up of tenderness, gratitude, and the thousand subtle ties which give birth to long and powerful attachments.

A ring of the bell made him start. He hesitated. Would he open? But he said to himself that it was his duty to open on this New Year's night, to open to the Unknown who knocks while passing, no matter whom it may be.

So he took a wax candle, passed through the antechamber, removed the bolts, turned the key, drew the door back, and saw his mistress standing pale as a corpse, leaning against the wall.

He stammered.

"What is the matter with you?"

She replied,

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Without servants?"

"Yes."

"You are not going out?"

"No."

She entered with the air of a woman who knew the house. As soon as she was in the drawing-room, she sank into the sofa, and, covering her face with her hands, began to weep dreadfully. [335]

He knelt down at her feet, seized hold of her hands to remove them from her eyes, so that he might look at them, and exclaim,

"Irene, Irene, what is the matter with you? I implore of you to tell me what is the matter with you?"

Then, in the midst of her sobs she murmured,

"I can no longer live like this."

He did not understand.

"Live like this? What do you mean?"...

"Yes. I can no longer live like this.... I have endured so much.... He struck me this afternoon."

"Who, your husband?"

"Yes, my husband."

"Ha!"

He was astonished, having never suspected that her husband could be brutal. He was a man of the world, of the better class, a clubman, a lover of horses, a theater goer, and an expert swordsman; he was known, talked about, appreciated everywhere, having very courteous manners, a very mediocre intellect, an absence of education and of the real culture needed in order to think like all well-bred people, and finally a respect for all conventional prejudices.

He appeared to devote himself to his wife, as a man ought to do in the case of wealthy and well-

bred people. He displayed enough of anxiety about her wishes, her health, her dresses, and, beyond that, left her perfectly free.

Randal, having become Irene's friend, had a right to the affectionate hand-clasp which every husband endowed with good manners owes to his wife's intimate acquaintances. Then, when Jacques, after having been for some time the friend, became the lover, his relations with the [336] husband were more cordial, as is fitting.

Jacques had never dreamed that there were storms in this household, and he was scared at this unexpected revelation.

He asked,

"How did it happen? tell me."

Thereupon she related a long history, the entire history of her life since the day of her marriage, the first discussion arising out of a mere nothing, then accentuating itself with all the estrangement which grows up each day between two opposite types of character.

Then came quarrels, a complete separation, not apparent, but real; next, her husband showed himself aggressive, suspicious, violent. Now, he was jealous, jealous of Jacques, and this day even, after a scene, he had struck her.

She added with decision, "I will not go back to him. Do with me what you like."

Jacques sat down opposite to her, their knees touching each other. He caught hold of her hands.

"My dear love, you are going to commit a gross, an irreparable folly. If you want to quit your husband, put wrongs on one side, so that your situation as a woman of the world may be saved."

She asked, as she cast at him a restless glance:

"Then, what do you advise me?"

"To go back home and to put up with your life there till the day when you can obtain either a separation or a divorce, with the honors of war."

"Is not this thing which you advise me to do a little cowardly?" [337]

"No; it is wise and reasonable. You have a high position, a reputation to safeguard, friends to preserve, and relations to deal with. You must not lose all these through a mere caprice."

She rose up and said with violence,

"Well, no! I cannot have any more of it! It is at an end! it is at an end!"

Then, placing her two hands on her lover's shoulders, and looking at him straight in the face, she asked,

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes."

"Then keep me."

He exclaimed,

"Keep you? In my own house? Here? Why you are mad. It would mean losing you for ever; losing you beyond hope of recall! You are mad!"

She replied slowly and seriously, like a woman who feels the weight of her words,

"Listen, Jacques. He has forbidden me to see you again, and I will not play this comedy of coming secretly to your house. You must either lose me or take me."

"My dear Irene, in that case, obtain your divorce, and I will marry you."

"Yes, you will marry me in—two years at the soonest. Yours is a patient love."

"Look here! Reflect! If you remain here, he'll come to-morrow to take you away, and seeing that he is your husband, seeing that he has right and law on his side."

"I did not ask you to keep me in your own house, Jacques, but to take me anywhere you like. I [338] thought you loved me enough to do that. I have made a mistake. Good-bye!"

She turned round and went towards the door so quickly that he was only able to catch hold of her when she was outside the room.

"Listen, Irene."

She struggled and did not want to listen to him any longer, her eyes full of tears, and with these words only on her lips,

"Let me alone! let me alone! let me alone!"

He made her sit down by force, and falling once more on his knees at her feet, he now brought forward a number of arguments and counsels to make her understand the folly and terrible risk of her project. He omitted nothing which he deemed it necessary to say to convince her, finding even in his very affection for her motives of persuasion.

As she remained silent and cold, he begged of her, implored of her to listen to him, to trust him, to follow his advice.

When he had finished speaking, she only replied:

"Are you disposed to let me go away now? Take away your hands, so that I may rise up."

"Look here, Irene."

"Will you let me go?"

"Irene ... is your resolution irrevocable?"

"Do let me go."

"Tell me only whether this resolution, this foolish resolution of yours, which you will bitterly regret, is irrevocable?"

"Yes ... let me go!" [339]

"Then stay. You know well that you are at home here. We shall go away to-morrow morning."

She rose up in spite of him, and said in a hard tone:

"No. It is too late. I do not want sacrifice; I do not want devotion."

"Stay! I have done what I ought to do; I have said what I ought to say. I have no further responsibility on your behalf. My conscience is at peace. Tell me what you want me to do, and I will obey."

She resumed her seat, looked at him for a long time, and then asked, in a very calm voice:

"Explain, then."

"How is that? What do you wish me to explain?"

"Everything—everything that you have thought about before coming to this resolution. Then I will see what I ought to do."

"But I have thought about nothing at all. I ought to warn you that you are going to accomplish an act of folly. You persist; then I ask to share in this act of folly, and I even insist on it."

"It is not natural to change one's opinion so quickly."

"Listen, my dear love. It is not a question here of sacrifice or devotion. On the day when I realized that I loved you, I said this to myself, which every lover ought to say to himself in the same case: 'The man who loves a woman, who makes an effort to win her, who gets her, and who takes her, contracts so far as he is himself, and so far as she is concerned, a sacred engagement. It is, mark you, a question of dealing with a woman like you, and not with a woman of an impulsive and yielding disposition. [340]

"Marriage which has a great social value, a great legal value, possesses in my eyes only a very slight moral value, taking into account the conditions under which it generally takes place.

"Therefore, when a woman, united by this lawful bond, but having no attachment to her husband, whom she cannot love, a woman whose heart is free, meets a man whom she cares for, and gives herself to him, when a man who has no other tie, takes a woman in this way, I say that they pledge themselves towards each other by this mutual and free agreement much more than by the 'Yes' uttered in the presence of the Mayor's sash.

"I say that, if they are both honorable persons, their union must be more intimate, more real, more healthy, than if all the sacraments had consecrated it.

"This woman risks everything. And it is exactly because she knows it, because she gives everything, her heart, her body, her soul, her honor, her life, because she has foreseen all miseries, all dangers, all catastrophies, because she dares to do a bold act, an intrepid act, because she is prepared, determined to brave everything—her husband who might kill her, and society which may cast her out. This is why she is respectable in her conjugal infidelity, this is why her lover, in taking her, must also have foreseen everything, and preferred her to everything whatever may happen. I have nothing more to say. I spoke in the beginning like a man of sense whose duty it was to warn you; and now there is left in me only one man—the man who loves you. Say, then, what am I to do!"

Radiant, she closed his mouth with her lips; she said to him in a low tone: [341]

"It is not true, darling! There is nothing the matter! My husband does not suspect anything. But I wanted to see, I wanted to know, what you would do. I wished for a New Year's gift—the gift of your heart—another gift besides the necklace you have sent me. You have given it to me. Thanks!

Thanks!... God be thanked for the happiness you have given me!"

BESIDE A DEAD MAN

[342]

He was slowly dying, as consumptives die. I saw him sitting down every day at two o'clock under the windows of the hotel, facing the tranquil sea on an open-air bench. He remained for some time without moving, in the heat of the sun gazing mournfully at the Mediterranean. Every now and then, he cast a glance at the lofty mountains with vaporous summits which shuts in Mentone: then, with a very slow movement, he crossed his long legs, so thin that they seemed two bones, around which fluttered the cloth of his trousers, and he opened a book, which was always the same. And then he did not stir any more, but read on, read on with his eye and his mind; all his expiring body seemed to read, all his soul plunged, lost itself, disappeared, in this book, up to the hour when the cool air made him cough a little. Then, he got up and re-entered the hotel.

He was a tall German, with fair beard, who breakfasted and dined in his own room, and spoke to nobody.

A vague curiosity attracted me to him. One day I sat down by his side, having taken up a book, too, to keep up appearances, a volume of De Musset's poems.

And I began to run through "Rolla."

Suddenly my neighbor said to me, in good French:

"Do you know German, monsieur?"

"Not at all, monsieur."

"I am sorry for that. Since chance has thrown us side by side, I could have lent you, I could have [343] shown you, an inestimable thing—this book which I hold in my hand."

"What is it pray?"

"It is a copy of my master, Schopenhauer, annotated with his own hand. All the margins, as you may see, are covered with his handwriting."

I took the book from him reverently, and I gazed at those forms incomprehensible to me, but which revealed the immortal thoughts of the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth.

And De Musset's verses arose in my memory:

> "Hast thou found out, Voltaire, that it is bliss to die,
> Or does thy hideous smile over thy bleached bones fly?"

And involuntarily I compared the childish sarcasm, the religious sarcasm, of Voltaire with the irresistible irony of the German philosopher whose influence is henceforth ineffaceable.

Let us protest and let us be angry, let us be indignant or let us be enthusiastic, Schopenhauer has marked humanity with the seal of his disdain and of his disenchantment.

A disabused pleasure-seeker, he overthrew beliefs, hopes, poetic ideal, and chimeras, destroyed the aspirations, ravaged the confidence of souls, killed love, dragged down the chivalrous worship of women, crushed the illusions of hearts and accomplished the most gigantic talk ever attempted by skepticism. He passed over everything with his mocking spirit, and left everything empty. And even to-day those who execrate him seem to carry portions of his thought, in spite of [344] themselves, in their own souls.

"So, then, you were intimately acquainted with Schopenhauer?" I said to the German.

He smiled sadly.

"Up to the time of his death, monsieur."

And he spoke to me about the philosopher and told me about the almost supernatural impression which this strange being made on all who came near him.

He gave me an account of the interview of the old iconoclast with a French politician, a doctrinaire Republican, who wanted to get a glimpse of this man, and found him in a noisy tavern, seated in the midst of his disciples, dry, wrinkled, laughing with an unforgettable laugh, eating and tearing ideas and beliefs with a single word, as a dog tears with one bite of his teeth the tissues with which he plays.

He repeated for me the comment of this Frenchman as he went away, scared and terrified:—"I thought I had spent an hour with the devil."

Then he added,

"He had, indeed, monsieur, a frightful smile, which terrified us even after his death. I can tell you

an anecdote about it not generally known, if it has any interest for you."

And he began, in a tired voice, interrupted by frequent fits of coughing.

"Schopenhauer had just died, and it was arranged that we should watch, in turn, two by two, till morning.

"He was lying in a large apartment, very simple, vast, and gloomy. Two wax candles were burning on the bedside stand. [345]

"It was midnight when I took up my task of watching along with one of our comrades. The two friends whom we replaced had left the apartment, and we came and sat down at the foot of the bed.

"The face was not changed. It was laughing. That pucker which we knew so well lingered still around the corners of the lips, and it seemed to us that he was about to open his eyes, to move, and to speak. His thought, or rather his thoughts, enveloped us. We felt ourselves more than ever in the atmosphere of his genius, absorbed, possessed by him. His domination seemed to be even more sovereign now that he was dead. A sense of mystery was blended with the power of this incomparable spirit.

"The bodies of these men disappear, but they remain themselves; and in the night which follows the stoppage of their heart's beatings, I assure you, monsieur, they are terrifying.

"And in hushed tones we talked about him, recalling to mind certain sayings, certain formulas of his, those startling maxims which are like jets of flame flung, by means of some words, into the darkness of the Unknown Life.

"'It seems to me that he is going to speak,' said my comrade. And we stared with uneasiness bordering on fear at the motionless face with its eternal laugh. Gradually, we began to feel ill at ease, oppressed, on the point of fainting. I faltered:

"'I don't know what is the matter with me, but, I assure you, I am not well.'

"And at that moment we noticed that there was an unpleasant odor from the corpse.

"Then, my comrade suggested that we should go into the adjoining room, and leave the door open; and I assented to his proposal. [346]

"I took one of the wax candles which burned on the bedside stand, and I left the second behind. Then we went and sat down at the other end of the adjoining apartment, so as to be able to see from where we were the bed and the corpse, clearly revealed by the light.

"But he still held possession of us. One would have said that his immaterial essence, liberated, free, all-powerful and dominating, was flitting around us. And sometimes, too, the dreadful smell of the decomposed body came towards us and penetrated us, sickening and indefinable.

"Suddenly a shiver passed through our bones: a sound, a slight sound, came from the death-chamber. Immediately we fixed our glances on him, and we saw, yes, monsieur, we saw distinctly, both of us, something white flying over the bed, falling on the carpet, and vanishing under an armchair.

"We were on our feet before we had time to think of anything, distracted by stupefying terror, ready to run away. Then we stared at each other. We were horribly pale. Our hearts throbbed so fiercely that our clothes swelled over our chests. I was the first to speak.

"'You saw?'

"'Yes, I saw.'

"'Can it be that he is not dead?'

"'Why not, when the body is putrefying?'

"'What are we to do?'

"My companion said in a hesitating tone:

"'We must go and look.'

"I took our wax candle and I entered first, searching with my eye through all the large apartment with its dark corners. There was not the least movement now, and I approached the bed. But I stood transfixed with stupor and fright: Schopenhauer was no longer laughing! He was grinning in a horrible fashion, with his lips pressed together and deep hollows in his cheeks. I stammered out: [347]

"'He is not dead!'

"But the terrible odor rose up to my nose and stifled me. And I no longer moved, but kept staring fixedly at him, scared as if in the presence of the apparition.

"Then my companion, having seized the other wax candle, bent forward. Then, he touched my arm without uttering a word. I followed his glance, and I saw on the ground, under the armchair by the side of the bed, all white on the dark carpet, open as if to bite, Schopenhauer's set of

artificial teeth.

"The work of decomposition, loosening the jaws, had made it jump out of his mouth.

"I was really frightened that day, monsieur."

And as the sun was sinking towards the glittering sea, the consumptive German rose from his seat, gave me a parting bow, and retired into the hotel.

AFTER

[348]

"My darlings," said the Comtesse, "you must go to bed."

The three children, two girls and a boy, rose up, and went to kiss their grandmother.

Then, they came to say "Good night" to M. le Curé, who had dined at the chateau, as he did every Thursday.

The Abbé Mauduit put two of the young ones sitting on his knees, passing his long arms clad in black behind the children's necks; and, drawing their heads towards him with a paternal movement, he kissed each of them on the forehead with a long, tender kiss.

Then, he again set them down on the ground, and the little beings went off, the boy in front, and the girls behind.

"You are fond of children, M. le Curé," said the Comtesse.

"Very fond, Madame."

The old woman raised her bright eyes towards the priest.

"And—has your solitude never weighed too heavily on you?"

"Yes, sometimes."

He became silent, hesitated, and then added: "But I was never made for ordinary life."

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh! I know very well. I was made to be a priest: I followed my own path."

[349]

The Comtesse kept staring at him:

"Look here, M. le Curé, tell me this—tell me how it was you resolved to renounce for ever what makes us love life—the rest of us—all that consoles and sustains us? What is it that drove you, impelled you, to separate yourself from the great natural path of marriage and the family. You are neither an enthusiast nor a fanatic, neither a gloomy person nor a sad person. Was it some strange occurrence, some sorrow, that led you to take life-long vows?"

The Abbé Mauduit rose up and advanced towards the fire, then drew towards the flames the big shoes such as country priests generally wear. He seemed still hesitating as to what reply he should make.

He was a tall old man with white hair, and for the last twenty years he had been the pastor of the parish of Sainte-Antoine-du-Rocher. The peasants said of him: "There's a good man for you!" And indeed he was a good man, benevolent, friendly to all, gentle, and, to crown all, generous. Like Saint Martin, he had cut his cloak in two. He freely laughed, and wept too for very little, just like a woman,—a thing that prejudiced him more or less in the hard minds of the country people.

The old Comtesse de Saville, living in retirement in her chateau of Rocher, in order to bring up her grand-children, after the successive deaths of her son and her daughter-in-law, was very much attached to her curé, and used to say of him: "He has a kind heart!"

He came every Thursday to spend the evening at the chateau, and they were close friends, with the open and honest friendship of old people.

She persisted:

[350]

"Look here M. le Curé! 'tis your turn now to make a confession!"

He repeated: "I was not made for a life like everybody else. I saw it myself fortunately in time, and I have had many proofs since that I had made no mistake on the point.

"My parents, who were mercers in Verdiers, and rather rich, had much ambition on my account. They sent me to a boarding-school while I was very young. You cannot conceive what a boy may suffer at college, by the mere fact of separation, of isolation. This monotonous life without affection is good for some, and detestable for others. Young people have often hearts more sensitive than one supposes, and by shutting them up thus too soon, far from those they love, we may develop to an excessive extent a sensibility which is of an overstrung kind, and which becomes sickly and dangerous.

"I scarcely ever played; I never had companions; I passed my hours in looking back to my home with regret; I spent the whole night weeping in my bed. I sought to bring up before my mind recollections of my own home, trifling recollections of little things, little events. I thought incessantly of all I had left behind there. I became almost imperceptibly an over sensitive youth to whom the slightest annoyances were dreadful griefs.

"Together with this I remained taciturn, self-absorbed without expansion, without confidants. This work of mental exaltation was brought about obscurely but surely. The nerves of children are quickly excited; one ought to have regard to the fact that they live in a state of deep quiescence up to the time of their almost complete development. But does anyone reflect that, for [351]
certain students, an unjust imposition can be as great a pang as the death of a friend afterwards? Does anyone render an exact account to himself of the fact that certain young souls have with very little cause, terrible emotions, and are in a very short time diseased and incurable souls?

"This was my case. This faculty of regret developed itself in me in such a fashion that my existence became a martyrdom.

"I did not speak about it; I said nothing about it; but gradually I acquired a sensibility, or rather a sensitivity so lively that my soul resembled a living wound. Everything that touched it produced in it twitchings of pain, frightful vibrations, and consequently true ravages. Happy are the men whom nature has buttressed with indifference and armed with stoicism.

"I reached my sixteenth year. An excessive timidity had come to me from this aptitude to suffer on account of everything. Feeling myself unprotected against all the attacks of chance or fate, I feared every contact, every approach, every event. I lived on the watch as if under the constant threat of an unknown and always expected misfortune. I did not feel enough of boldness either to speak or to act publicly. I had, indeed, the sensation that life is a battle, a dreadful conflict in which one receives terrible blows, grievous, mortal wounds. In place of cherishing, like all men, the hope of good-fortune on the morrow, I only kept a confused fear of it, and I felt in my own mind a desire to conceal myself to avoid that combat in which I would be vanquished and slain.

"As soon as my studies were finished, they gave me six months' time to choose a career. A very [352]
simple event made me see clearly all of a sudden into myself, showed me the diseased condition of my mind, made me understand the danger, and caused me to make up my mind to fly from it.

"Verdiers is a little town surrounded with plains and woods. In the central streets stands my parents' house. I now passed my days far from this dwelling which I had so much regretted, so much desired. Dreams were awakened in me, and I walked all alone in the fields in order to let them escape and fly away. My father and my mother, quite occupied with business, and anxious about my future, talked to me only about their profits or about my possible plans. They were fond of me in the way that hard-headed, practical people are; they had more reason than heart in their affection for me. I lived imprisoned in my thoughts, and trembling with my eternal uneasiness.

"Now, one evening, after a long walk, I saw, as I was making my way home with great strides so as not to be late, a dog trotting towards me. He was a species of red spaniel, very lean, with long curly ears.

"When he was ten paces away from me he stopped. I did the same. Then he began wagging his tail, and came over to me with short steps and nervous movements of his whole body, going down on his paws as if appealing to me, and softly shaking his head. He then made a show of crawling with an air so humble, so sad, so suppliant, that I felt the tears coming into my eyes. I came near him; he ran away, then he came back again; and I bent down, trying to coax him to approach me with soft words. At last, he was within reach of my hands, and I gently caressed him with the [353]
most careful touch.

"He grew bold, rose up bit by bit, laid his paws on my shoulders, and began to lick my face. He followed me into the house.

"This was really the first being I had passionately loved, because he returned my affection. My attachment to this animal was certainly exaggerated and ridiculous. It seemed to me in a confused sort of way that we were two brothers, lost on this earth, and therefore isolated and without defense, one as well as the other. He never again quitted my side. He slept at the foot of my bed, ate at the table in spite of the objections of my parents, and he followed me in my solitary walks.

"I often stopped at the side of a ditch, and sat down in the grass. Sam immediately rushed up, fell asleep on my knees, and lifted up my hand with the end of his snout so that I might caress him.

"One day towards the end of June, as we were on the road from Saint-Pierre-de-Chavrol, I saw the diligence from Pavereau coming along. Its four horses were going at a gallop with its yellow box seat, and imperial crowned with black leather. The coachman cracked his whip; a cloud of dust rose up under the wheels of the heavy vehicle, then floated behind, just as a cloud would do.

"And, all of a sudden, as the vehicle came close to me, Sam, perhaps frightened by the noise and wishing to join me, jumped in front of it. A horse's foot knocked him down. I saw him rolling over, turning round, falling back again on all fours, and then the entire coach gave two big shakes, and [354]
behind it I saw something quivering in the dust on the road. He was nearly cut in two; all his intestines were hanging through his stomach, which had been ripped open, and fell in spurts of blood to the ground. He tried to get up, to walk, but he could only move his two front paws, and

scratch the ground with them, as if to make a hole. The two others were already dead. And he howled dreadfully, mad with pain.

"He died in a few minutes. I cannot describe how much I felt and suffered. I was confined to my own room for a month.

"Now, one night, my father, enraged at seeing me in such a state for so little, exclaimed:

"'How then will it be when you have real griefs—if you lose your wife or children?'

"And I began to see clearly into myself. I understood why all the small miseries of each day assumed in my eyes the importance of a catastrophe; I saw that I was organized in such a way that I suffered dreadfully from everything, that every painful impression was multiplied by my diseased sensibility, and an atrocious fear of life took possession of me. I was without passions, without ambitions; I resolved to sacrifice possible joys in order to avoid sure sorrows. Existence is short, but I made up my mind to spend it in the service of others, in relieving their troubles and enjoying their happiness. By having no direct experience of either one or the other, I would only be conscious of passionless emotions.

"And if you only knew how, in spite of this, misery tortures me, ravages me! But what would be for me an intolerable affliction has become commiseration, pity. [355]

"These sorrows which I have every day to concern myself about I could not endure if they fell on my own heart. I could not have seen one of my children die without dying myself. And I have, in spite of everything, preserved such an obscure and penetrating fear of circumstances, that the sight of the postman entering my house makes a shiver pass every day through my veins, and yet I have nothing to be afraid of now."

The Abbé Mauduit ceased speaking. He stared into the fire in the huge grate, as if he saw there mysterious things, all the unknown portion of existence which he would have been able to live if he had been more fearless in the face of suffering.

He added, then, in a subdued tone:

"I was right. I was not made for this world."

The Comtesse said nothing at first; but at length, after a long silence, she remarked:

"For my part, if I had not my grand-children, I believe I would not have the courage to live."

And the curé rose up without saying another word.

As the servants were asleep in the kitchen, she conducted him herself to the door which looked out on the garden, and she saw his tall shadow lit up by the reflection of the lamp disappearing through the gloom of night.

Then she came back and sat down before the fire, and she pondered over many things on which we never think when we are young.

A QUEER NIGHT IN PARIS [356]

Maitre Saval, notary at Vernon, was passionately fond of music. Still young, though already bald, always carefully shaved, a little corpulent, as it was fitting, wearing a gold pince-nez instead of old-fashioned spectacles, active, gallant, and joyous, he passed in Vernon for an artist. He thrummed on the piano and played on the violin, and gave musical evenings where interpretations were given of new operas.

He had even what is called a bit of a voice; nothing but a bit, a very little bit of a voice; but he managed it with so much taste that cries of "Bravo!" "Exquisite!" "Surprising!" "Adorable!" issued from every throat as soon as he had murmured the last note.

He was a subscriber to a music-publisher in Paris, who addressed new pieces to him, and he sent from time to time to the high society of the town, little notes something in this style:

"You are invited to be present on Monday evening at the house of M. Saval, notary, Vernon, at the first production of 'Sais.'"

A few officers, gifted with good voices, formed the chorus. Two or three of the vinedressers' families also sang. The notary filled the part of leader of the orchestra with so much correctness that the bandmaster of the 190th regiment of the line said to him, one day, at the *Café* de l'Europe: [357]

"Oh! M. Saval is a master. It is a great pity that he did not adopt the career of an artist."

When his name was mentioned in a drawing-room, there was always somebody found to declare: "He is not an amateur; he is an artist, a genuine artist."

And two or three persons repeated, in a tone of profound conviction:

"Oh! yes, a genuine artist," laying particular stress on the word "genuine."

Every time that a new work was interpreted at a big Parisian theater, M. Saval paid a visit to the capital.

Now, last year, according to his custom, he went to hear "Henry VIII." He then took the express which arrives in Paris at 4:30 p.m., intending to return by the 12:35 a.m. train so as not to have to sleep at a hotel. He had put on evening dress, a black coat and white tie, which he concealed under his overcoat with the collar turned up.

As soon as he had planted his foot on the Rue d' Amsterdam, he felt himself in quite a jovial mood. He said to himself:

"Decidedly the air of Paris does not resemble any other air. It has in it something indescribably stimulating, exciting, intoxicating, which fills you with a strange longing to gambol and to do many other things. As soon as I arrive here, it seems to me, all of a sudden, that I have taken a bottle of champagne. What a life one can lead in this city in the midst of artists! Happy are the elect, the great men who enjoy renown in such a city! What an existence is theirs!"

And he made plans; he would have liked to know some of those celebrated men, to talk about them in Vernon, and to spend an evening with them from time to time in Paris. [358]

But suddenly an idea struck him. He had heard allusions to little *cafés* in the outer boulevards at which well-known painters, men of letters, and even musicians gathered, and he proceeded to go up to Montmartre at a slow pace.

He had two hours before him. He wanted to have a look-round. He passed in front of taverns frequented by belated Bohemians gazing at the different faces, seeking to discover the artists. Finally, he came to the sign of "The Dead Rat," and allured by the name, he entered.

Five or six women, with their elbows resting on the marble tables, were talking in low tones about their love affairs, the quarrels of Lucie and Hortense, and the scoundrelism of Octave. They were no longer young, too fat or too thin, tired out, used up. You could see that they were almost bald; and they drank bocks like men.

M. Saval sat down at some distance from them, and waited, for the hour for taking absinthe was at hand.

A tall young man soon came in and took a seat beside him. The landlady called him M. "Romantin." The notary quivered. Was this the Romantin who had taken a medal at the last Salon?

The young man made a sign to the waiter:

"You will bring up my dinner at once, and then carry to my new studio, 15, Boulevard de Clinchy, thirty bottles of beer and the ham I ordered this morning. We are going to have housewarming."

M. Saval immediately ordered dinner. Then, he took off his overcoat, so that his dress coat and his white tie could be seen. His neighbor did not seem to notice him. He had taken up a newspaper, and was reading it. M. Saval glanced sideways at him, burning with the desire to speak to him. [359]

Two young men entered, in red vests, and peaked beards in the fashion of Henry III. They sat down opposite Romantin.

The first of the pair said:

"It is for this evening?"

Romantin pressed his hand.

"T believe you, old chap, and everyone will be there, I have Bonnat, Guillemet, Gervex, Beraud, Hebert, Duez, Clairin, and Jean-Paul Laurens. It will be a glorious blow out! And women too! Wait till you see! Every actress without exception—of course I mean, you know, all those who have nothing to do this evening."

The landlord of the establishment came across.

"Do you often have this housewarming?"

The painter replied:

"I believe you, every three months, each quarter."

M. Saval could not restrain himself any longer, and in a hesitating voice said:

"I beg your pardon for intruding on you, monsieur, but I heard your name pronounced, and I would be very glad to know if you really are M. Romantin, whose work in the last Salon I have so much admired?"

The painter answered:

"I am the very person, monsieur."

The notary then paid the artist a very well-turned compliment, showing that he was a man of culture.

The painter, gratified, thanked him politely in reply. [360]

Then they chatted. Romantin returned to the subject of his housewarming, going into details as to the magnificence of the forthcoming entertainment.

M. Saval questioned him as to all the men he was going to receive, adding:

"It would be an extraordinary piece of good fortune for a stranger to meet at one time so many celebrities assembled in the studio of an artist of your rank."

Romantin, overcome, answered:

"If it would be agreeable to you, come."

M. Saval accepted the invitation with enthusiasm, reflecting:

"I'll always have time enough to see 'Henri VIII.'"

Both of them had finished their meal. The notary insisted on paying the two bills, wishing to repay his neighbor's civilities. He also paid for the drinks of the young fellows in red velvet; then he left the establishment with the painter.

They stopped in front of a very long house, by no means high, of which all the first story had the appearance of an interminable conservatory. Six studios stood in a row with their fronts facing the boulevards.

Romantin was the first to enter, and, ascending the stairs, he opened a door, and lighted a match and then a candle.

They found themselves in an immense apartment, the furniture of which consisted of three chairs, two easels, and a few sketches lying on the ground along the walls. M. Saval remained standing at the door in a stupefied state of mind.

The painter remarked:

"Here you are! we've got to the spot; but everything has yet to be done." [361]

Then, examining the high, bare apartment, whose ceiling was veiled in shadows, he said:

"We might make a great deal out of this studio."

He walked round it, surveying it with the utmost attention, then went on:

"I have a mistress who might easily give a helping hand. Women are incomparable for hanging drapery. But I sent her to the country for to-day in order to get her off my hands this evening. It is not that she bores me, but she is too much lacking in the ways of good society. It would be embarrassing to my guests."

He reflected for a few seconds, and then added:

"She is a good girl, but not easy to deal with. If she knew that I was holding a reception, she would tear out my eyes."

M. Saval had not even moved; he did not understand.

The artist came over to him.

"Since I have invited you, you are going to give me some help."

The notary said emphatically:

"Make any use of me you please. I am at your disposal."

Romantin took off his jacket.

"Well, citizen, to work! We are first going to clean up."

He went to the back of the easel, on which there was a canvas representing a cat, and seized a very worn-out broom.

"I say! Just brush up while I look after the lighting."

M. Saval took the broom, inspected it, and then began to sweep the floor very awkwardly, raising a whirlwind of dust. [362]

Romantin, disgusted, stopped him: "Deuce take it! you don't know how to sweep the floor! Look at me!"

And he began to roll before him a heap of grayish sweepings, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Then, he gave back the broom to the notary, who imitated him.

In five minutes, such a cloud of dust filled the studio that Romantin asked:

"Where are you? I can't see you any longer."

M. Saval, who was coughing, came near to him. The painter said to him:

"How are you going to manage to get up a chandelier?"

The other, stunned, asked:

"What chandelier?"

"Why, a chandelier to light—a chandelier with wax candles."

The notary did not understand.

He answered: "I don't know."

The painter began to jump about, cracking his fingers.

"Well, monseigneur, I have found out a way."

Then he went more calmly:

"Have you got five francs about you?"

M. Saval replied:

"Why, yes."

The artist said:

"Well! you'll go and buy for me five francs' worth of wax candles while I go and see the cooper."

And he pushed the notary in his evening coat into the street. At the end of five minutes, they had returned one of them with the wax candles, and the other with the hoop of a cask. Then Romantin plunged his hand into a cupboard, and drew forth twenty empty bottles, which he fixed in the form of a crown around the hoop. [363]

He then came down, and went to borrow a ladder from the door-keeper, after having explained that he had obtained the favors of the old woman by painting the portrait of her cat exhibited on the easel.

When he mounted the ladder, he said to M. Saval:

"Are you active?"

The other, without understanding, answered:

"Why, yes."

"Well, you just climb up there, and fasten this chandelier for me to the ring of the ceiling. Then, you must put a wax candle in each bottle, and light it. I tell you I have a genius for lighting up. But off with your coat, damn it! You are just like a Jeames."

The door was opened brutally. A woman appeared, with her eyes flashing, and remained standing on the threshold.

Romantin gazed at her with a look of terror.

She waited some seconds, crossing her arms over her breast, and then, in a shrill, vibrating, exasperated voice, said:

"Ha! you sniveler, is this the way you leave me?"

Romantin made no reply. She went on:

"Ha! you scoundrel! You are again doing the swell, while you pack me off to the country. You'll soon see the way I'll settle your jollification. Yes, I'm going to receive your friends."

She grew warmer: [364]

"I'm going to slap their faces with the bottles and the wax candles...."

Romantin uttered one soft word:

"Mathilde...."

But she did not pay any attention to him; she went on:

"Wait a little my fine fellow! wait a little!"

Romantin went over to her, and tried to take her by the hands:

"Mathilde...."

But she was now fairly under way; and on she went, emptying the vials of her wrath with strong words and reproaches. They flowed out of her mouth, like a stream sweeping a heap of filth along with it. The words hurled out, seemed struggling for exit. She stuttered, stammered, yelled, suddenly recovering her voice to cast forth an insult or a curse.

He seized her hands without her having even noticed it. She did not seem to see anything, so much occupied was she in holding forth and relieving her heart. And suddenly she began to weep. The tears flowed from her eyes without making her stem the tide of her complaints. But

her words had taken a howling, shrieking tone; they were a continuous cry interrupted by sobbings. She commenced afresh twice or three times, till she stopped as if something were choking her, and at last she ceased with a regular flood of tears.

Then he clasped her in his arms and kissed her hair, affected himself.

"Mathilde, my little Mathilde, listen. You must be reasonable. You know, if I give a supper-party to my friends, it is to thank these gentlemen for the medal I got at the Salon. I cannot receive [365] women. You ought to understand that. It is not the same with artists as with other people."

She stammered in the midst of her tears:

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

He replied:

"It was in order not to annoy you, not to give you pain. Listen, I'm going to see you home. You will be very sensible, very nice; you will remain quietly waiting for me in bed, and I'll come back as soon as it's over."

She murmured:

"Yes, but you will not begin over again?"

"No, I swear to you!"

He turned towards M. Saval, who had at last hooked on the chandelier:

"My dear friend, I am coming back in five minutes. If any one arrives in my absence, do the honors for me, will you not?"

And he carried off Mathilde, who kept drying her eyes with her handkerchief as she went along.

Left to himself, M. Saval succeeded in putting everything around him in order. Then he lighted the wax candles, and waited.

He waited for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour. Romantin did not return. Then, suddenly, there was a dreadful noise on the stairs, a song shouted out in chorus by twenty mouths and a regular march like that of a Prussian regiment. The whole house was shaken by the steady tramp of feet. The door flew open, and a motley throng appeared—men and women in a row, holding one another arm in arm, in pairs, and kicking their heels on the ground, in proper [366] time, advanced into the studio like a snake uncoiling itself. They howled:

> "Come, and let us all be merry,
> Pretty maids and soldiers gay!"

M. Saval, thunderstruck, remained standing in evening dress under the chandelier. The procession of revelers caught sight of him, and uttered a shout:

"A Jeames! A Jeames!"

And they began whirling round him, surrounding him with a circle of vociferations. Then they took each other by the hand and went dancing about madly.

He attempted to explain:

"Messieurs—messieurs—mesdames—"

But they did not listen to him. They whirled about, they jumped, they brawled.

At last, the dancing ceased. M. Saval uttered the word:

"Messieurs—"

A tall young fellow, fair-haired and bearded to the nose, interrupted him:

"What's your name, my friend?"

The notary, quite scared, said:

"I am M. Saval."

A voice exclaimed:

"You mean Baptiste."

A woman said:

"Let the poor waiter alone! You'll end by making him get angry. He's paid to attend on us, and not to be laughed at by us."

Then, M. Saval noticed that each guest had brought his own provisions. One held a bottle of wine, and the other a pie. This one had a loaf of bread, and one a ham. [367]

The tall, fair young fellow placed in his hands an enormous sausage, and gave orders:

"I say! Go and settle up the sideboard in the corner over there. You are to put the bottles at the

left and the provisions at the right."

Saval, getting quite distracted, exclaimed: "But messieurs, I am a notary!"

There was a moment's silence, and then a wild outburst of laughter. One suspicious gentleman asked:

"How are you here?"

He explained, telling about his project of going to the Opera, his departure from Vernon, his arrival in Paris, and the way in which he had spent the evening.

They sat around him to listen to him; they greeted him with words of applause, and called him Scheherazade.

Romantin did not come back. Other guests arrived. M. Saval was presented to them so that he might begin his story over again. He declined; they forced him to relate it. They fixed him on one of the three chairs between two women who kept constantly filling his glass. He drank; he laughed; he talked; he sang, too. He tried to waltz with his chair, and fell on the ground.

From that moment, he forgot everything. It seemed to him, however, that they undressed him, put him to bed, and that his stomach got sick.

When he awoke, it was broad daylight, and he lay stretched with his feet against a cupboard, in a strange bed. [368]

An old woman with a broom in her hand was glaring angrily at him. At last, she said:

"Clear out, you blackguard! Clear out! What right has anyone to get drunk like this?"

He sat up in the bed, feeling very ill at ease. He asked:

"Where am I?"

"Where are you, you dirty scamp? You are drunk. Take your rotten carcass out of here as quick as you can,—and lose no time about it!"

He wanted to get up. He found that he was naked in the bed. His clothes had disappeared. He blurted out:

"Madame, I—"

Then he remembered.... What was he to do? He asked:

"Did Monsieur Romantin come back?"

The door-keeper shouted:

"Will you take your dirty carcass out of this so that he at any rate may not catch you here?"

M. Saval said, in a state of confusion:

"I haven't got my clothes; they have been taken away from me."

He had to wait, to explain his situation, give notice to his friends, and borrow some money to buy clothes. He did not leave Paris till evening.

And, when people talk about music to him in his beautiful drawing-room in Vernon, he declares with an air of authority that painting is a very inferior art.

BOITELLE [369]

Pere Boitelle (Antoine) had the reputation through the whole county of a specialist in dirty jobs. Every time a pit, a dunghill, or a cesspool required to be cleared away, or a dirt-hole to be cleansed out he was the person employed to do it.

He would come there with his nightman's tools and his wooden shoes covered with muck, and would set to work, whining incessantly about the nature of his occupation. When people asked him, then, why he did this loathsome work, he would reply resignedly:

"Faith, 'tis for my children whom I must support. This brings me in more than anything else."

He had, indeed, fourteen children. If anyone asked him what had become of them, he would say with an air of indifference:

"There are only eight of them left in the house. One is out at service, and five are married."

When the questioner wanted to know whether they were well married, he replied vivaciously:

"I did not cross them. I crossed them in nothing. They married just as they pleased. We shouldn't go against people's likings, it turns out badly. I am a night-cart-man because my parents went against my likings. But for that I would have become a workman like the others."

Here is the way his parents had thwarted him in his likings: [370]

He was at the time a soldier stationed at Havre, not more stupid than another, or sharper either, a rather simple fellow, in truth. During his hours of freedom his greatest pleasure was to walk along the quay, where the bird-dealers congregate. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a soldier from his own part of the country, he would slowly saunter along by cages where the parrots with green backs and yellow heads from the banks of the Amazon, the parrots with gray backs and red heads from Senegal, enormous macaws, which look like birds brought up in conservatories, with their flower-like feathers, their plumes and their tufts, the paroquets of every shape, who seem painted with minute care by that excellent miniaturist, God Almighty, and the little ones, all the little young birds, hopping about, yellow, blue, and variegated, mingling their cries with the noise of the quay, add to the din caused by the unloading of the vessels, as well as by passengers and vehicles, a violent clamor, loud, shrill, and deafening, as if from some distant, monstrous forest.

Boitelle would stop with stained eyes, wide-open mouth, laughing and enraptured, showing his teeth to the captive cockatoos, who kept nodding their white or yellow top-knots towards the glaring red of his breeches and the copper buckle of his belt. When he found a bird that could talk, he put questions to it, and if it happened at the time to be disposed to reply and to hold a conversation with him, he would remain there till nightfall, filled with gayety and contentment. He also found heaps of fun in looking at the monkeys, and could conceive no greater luxury for a rich man than to possess these animals, just like cats and dogs. This kind of taste for the exotic he had in his blood, as people have a taste for the chase, or for medicine, or for the priesthood. [371] He could not keep himself, every time the gates of the barracks opened, from going back to the quay, as if he felt himself drawn towards it by an irresistible longing.

Now, on one occasion, having stopped almost in ecstacy before an enormous araruna, which was swelling out its plumes, bending forward, and bridling up again as if making the court-curtseys of parrot-land, he saw the door of a little tavern adjoining the bird-dealer's shop opening, and his attention was attracted by a young negress, with a silk kerchief tied round her head, sweeping into the street the rubbish and the sand of the establishment.

Boitelle's attention was soon divided between the bird and the woman, and he really could not tell which of these two beings he contemplated with the greater astonishment and delight.

The negress, having got rid of the sweepings of the tavern, raised her eyes, and, in her turn, was dazzled by the soldier's uniform. There she stood facing him with her broom in her hands as if she were carrying arms for him, while the araruna continued making curtseys. Now at the end of a few seconds the soldier began to get embarrassed by this attention, and he walked away gingerly so as not to present the appearance of beating a retreat.

But he came back. Almost every day he passed in front of the Colonial tavern, and often he could distinguish through the window-panes the figure of the little black-skinned maid filling out "bocks" or glasses of brandy for the sailors of the port. Frequently, too, she would come out to the door on seeing him; soon, without even having exchanged a word they smiled at one another [372] like acquaintances; and Boitelle felt his heart moved when he saw suddenly glittering between the dark lips of the girl her shining row of white teeth. At length he ventured one day to enter and was quite surprised to find that she could speak French like everyone else. The bottle of lemonade, of which she was good enough to accept a glassful, remained in the soldier's recollection, memorably delicious; and it grew into custom with him to come and absorb in this little tavern on the quay all the agreeable drinks which he could afford.

For him it was a treat, a happiness, on which his thoughts were constantly dwelling, to watch the black hand of the little maid pouring out something into his glass whilst her teeth, brighter than her eyes, showed themselves as she laughed. When they had kept company in this way for two months they became fast friends, and Boitelle, after his first astonishment at discovering that this negress was in her excellent principles as good as the best girls in the country, that she exhibited a regard for economy, industry, religion, and good conduct, loved her more on that account, and became so much smitten with her that he wanted to marry her.

He told her about his intentions, which made her dance with joy. Besides, she had a little money, left her by a female oyster-dealer, who had picked her up when she had been left on the quay at Havre by an American captain. This captain had found her, when she was only about six years old, lying on bales of cotton in the hold of his ship, some hours after his departure from New York. On his arrival in Havre, he there abandoned to the care of this compassionate oyster-dealer [373] the little black creature, who had been hidden on board his vessel, he could not tell how or why.

The oyster-woman having died, the young negress became a servant at the Colonial tavern.

Antoine Boitelle added: "This will be all right if the parents don't go against it. I will never go against them, you understand never! I'm going to say a word or two to them the first time I go back to the country."

On the following week, in fact, having obtained twenty-four hours' leave, he went to see his family, who cultivate a little farm at Tourteville near Yvetot.

He waited till the meal was finished, the hour when the coffee baptized with brandy makes people more open-hearted, before informing his parents that he had found a girl answering so well to his likings in every way that there could not exist any other in all the world so perfectly suited to him.

The old people, at this observation, immediately assumed a circumspect air, and wanted explanations. Besides he had concealed nothing from them except the color of her skin.

She was a servant, without much means, but strong, thrifty, clean, well-conducted, and sensible. All these things were better than money would be in the hands of a bad housewife. Moreover, she had a few sous, left her by a woman who had reared her, a good number of sous, almost a little dowry, fifteen hundred francs in the savings' bank. The old people, overcome by his talk, and relying, too, on their own judgment, were gradually giving way, when he came to the delicate point. Laughing in rather a constrained fashion, he said: [374]

"There is only one thing you may not like. She is not a white slip."

They did not understand, and he had to explain at some length and very cautiously, to avoid shocking them, that she belonged to the dusky race of which they had only seen samples amongst figures exhibited at Epinal. Then, they became restless, perplexed, alarmed, as if he had proposed a union with the Devil.

The mother said. "Black? How much of her is black? Is the whole of her?"

He replied, "Certainly. Everywhere, just as you are white everywhere."

The father interposed, "Black? Is it as black as the pot?"

The son answered "Perhaps a little less than that. She is black, but not disgustingly black. The Curé's cassock is black; but it is not uglier than a surplice, which is white."

The father said, "Are there more black people besides her in her country?"

And the son, with an air of conviction, exclaimed, "Certainly!"

But the old man shook his head.

"This must be disagreeable?"

And the son:

"It isn't more disagreeable than anything else, seeing that you get used to it in no time."

The mother asked:

"It doesn't soil linen more than other skins, this black skin?"

"Not more than your own, as it is her proper color."

Then after many other questions, it was agreed that the parents should see this girl before coming to any decision and that the young fellow, whose period of services was coming to an end [375] in the course of a month, should bring her to the house in order that they might examine her, and decide by talking the matter over whether or not she was too dark to enter the Boitelle family.

Antoine accordingly announced that on Sunday, the 22nd of May, the day of his discharge, he would start for Tourteville with his sweetheart.

She had put on, for this journey to the house of her lover's parents, her most beautiful and most gaudy clothes, in which yellow, red, and blue were the prevailing colors, so that she had the appearance of one adorned for a national fete.

At the terminus, as they were leaving Havre, people stared at her very much, and Boitelle was proud of giving his arm to a person who commanded so much attention. Then, in the third-class carriage, in which she took a seat by his side, she excited so much astonishment among the peasants that the people in the adjoining compartments got up on their benches to get a look at her, over the wooden partition, which divided the different portions of the carriage from one another. A child, at sight of her, began to cry with terror, another concealed his face in his mother's apron. Everything went off well, however, up to their arrival at their destination. But, when the train slackened its rate of motion as they drew near Yvetot, Antoine felt ill at ease, as he would have done at an inspection when he did not know his drill-practice. Then, as he put his head out through the carriage door, he recognized, some distance away, his father who was holding the bridle of the horse yoked to a car, and his mother who had made her way to the railed [376] portion of the platform where a number of spectators had gathered.

He stepped out first, gave his hand to his sweetheart, and holding himself erect, as if he were escorting a general, he advanced towards his family.

The mother, on seeing this black lady, in variegated costume in her son's company, remained so stupefied that she could not open her mouth; and the father found it hard to hold the horse, which the engine or the negress caused to rear for some time without stopping. But Antoine, suddenly seized with the unmingled joy of seeing once more the old people, rushed forward with open arms, embraced his mother, embraced his father, in spite of the nag's fright, and then turning towards his companion, at whom the passengers on the platform stopped to stare with amazement, he proceeded to explain:

"Here she is! I told you that, at first sight, she is an odd piece; but as soon as you know her, in very truth, there's not a better sort in the whole world. Say good-morrow to her without making any pother about it."

Thereupon Mere Boitelle, herself nearly frightened out of her wits, made a sort of curtsey, while the father took off his cap, murmuring:

"I wish you good-luck!"

Then, without further delay, they climbed up on the car, the two women at the lower end on seats, which made them jump up and down, as the vehicle went jolting along the road, and the two men outside on the front seat.

Nobody spoke. Antoine, ill at ease, whistled a barrack-room air; his father lashed the nag; and his mother, from where she sat in the corner, kept casting sly glances at the negress, whose [377] forehead and cheek-bones shone in the sunlight, like well-blacked shoes.

Wishing to break the ice, Antoine turned round.

"Well," said he, "we don't seem inclined to talk."

"We must get time," replied the old woman.

He went on:

"Come! tell us the little story about that hen of yours that laid eight eggs."

It was a funny anecdote of long standing in the family. But, as his mother still remained silent, paralyzed by emotion, he started the talking himself, and narrated, with much laughter on his own part, this memorable adventure. The father, who knew it by heart, brightened at the opening words of the narrative; his wife soon followed his example; and the negress herself, when he reached the drollest part of it, suddenly gave vent to a laugh so noisy, rolling, and torrent-like that the horse, becoming excited, broke into a gallop for a little while.

This served as the introduction to their acquaintanceship. The company at length began to chat.

On reaching the house when they had all alighted, and he had conducted his sweetheart to a room, so that she might take off her dress, to avoid staining it, while she would be preparing a good dish intended to win the old people's affections while appealing to their stomachs, he drew aside his parents, near the door, and with beating heart, asked:

"Well, what do you say now?"

The father said nothing. The mother, less timid, exclaimed:

"She is too black. No, indeed, this is too much for me. It turns my blood." [378]

"That may be, but it is only for the moment."

Then they made their way into the interior of the house, where the good woman was somewhat affected at the spectacle of the negress engaged in cooking. She at once proceeded to assist her, with petticoats tucked up, active in spite of her age.

The meal was an excellent one, very long, very enjoyable. When they had afterwards taken a turn together, Antoine said to his father:

"Well dad, what do you say to this?"

The peasant took care never to compromise himself.

"I have no opinion about it. Ask your mother."

So Antoine went back to his mother, and leading her to the end of the room, said:

"Well mother, what do you think of her?"

"My poor lad, she is really too black. If she were only a little less black, I would not go against you, but this is too much. One would think it was Satan!"

He did not press her, knowing how obstinate the old woman had always been, but he felt a tempest of disappointment sweeping over his heart. He was turning over his mind what he ought to do, what plan he could devise, surprised, moreover, that she had not conquered them already as she had captivated himself. And they, all four, set out with slow steps through the cornfields, having again relapsed into silence. Whenever they passed a fence they saw a countryman sitting on the stile, and a group of brats climbed up to stare at them and everyone rushed out into the road to see the "black" whom young Boitelle had brought home with him. At a distance they noticed people scampering across the fields just as when the drum beats to draw public attention to some living phenomenon. Pere and Mere Boitelle, scared by this curiosity, which was exhibited [379] everywhere through the country at their approach, quickened their pace, walking side by side, and leaving far behind their son, when his dark companion asked what his parents thought of her.

He hesitatingly replied that they had not yet made up their minds.

But, on the village-green, people rushed out of all the houses in a flutter of excitement; and, at the sight of the gathering rabble, old Boitelle took to his heels and regained his abode, whilst Antoine, swelling with rage, his sweetheart on his arm, advanced majestically under the staring eyes which opened wide in amazement.

He understood that it was at an end, and there was no hope for him, that he could not marry his negress, she also understood it; and as they drew near the farmhouse they both began to weep. As soon as they had got back to the house, she once more took off her dress to aid the mother in the household duties, and followed her everywhere to the dairy, to the stable, to the hen-house, taking on herself the hardest part of the work, repeating always, "Let me do it Madame Boitelle," so that, when night came on, the old woman, touched but inexorable, said to her son: "She is a good, all the same. 'Tis a pity she is so black; but indeed she is too much so. I couldn't get used to it. She must go back again. She is too, too black!"

And young Boitelle said to his sweetheart:

"She will not consent. She thinks you are too black. You must go back again. I will go with you to the train. No matter—don't fret. I am going to talk to them after you are started." [380]

He then conducted her to the railway-station, still cheering her with hope, and, when he had kissed her, he put her into the train, which he watched as it passed out of sight, his eyes swollen with tears.

In vain did he appeal to the old people. They would never give their consent.

And when he had told this story, which was known all over the country, Antoine Boitelle would always add:

"From that time forward I have had no heart for anything—for anything at all. No trade suited me any longer, and so I became what I am—a nightcart-man."

People would say to him:

"Yet you got married."

"Yes, and I can't say that my wife didn't please me, seeing that I've got fourteen children; but she is not the other one, oh no—certainly not! The other one, mark you, my negress, she had only to give me one glance, and I felt as if I were in Heaven!"

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in

paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this

agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and

distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.