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JACQUELINE

By THERESE BENTZON (MME. BLANC)

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE BAND

Love, like any other human malady, should be treated according to the age and temperament of the sufferer. Madame de Nailles, who was a very keen observer, especially where her own interests were concerned, lent herself with the best possible grace to everything that might amuse and distract Jacqueline, of whom she had by this time grown afraid. Not that she now dreaded her as a rival. The attitude of coldness and reserve that the young girl had adopted in her intercourse with Marien, her stepmother could see, was no evidence of coquetry. She showed, in her behavior to the friend of the family, a freedom from embarrassment which was new to her, and a frigidity which could not possibly have been assumed so persistently. No! what struck Madame de Nailles was the suddenness of this transformation. Jacqueline evidently took no further interest in Marien; she had apparently no longer any affection for herself—she, who had been once her dear little mamma, whom she had loved so tenderly, now felt herself to be considered only as a stepmother. Fraulein Schult, too, received no more confidences. What did it all mean?

Had Jacqueline, through any means, discovered a secret, which, in her hands, might be turned into a most dangerous weapon? She had a way of saying before the guilty pair: "Poor papa!" with an air of pity, as she kissed him, which made Madame de Nailles's flesh creep, and sometimes she would amuse herself by making ambiguous remarks which shot arrows of suspicion into a heart already afraid. "I feel sure," thought the Baroness, "that she has found out everything. But, no! it seems impossible. How can I discover what she knows?"

Jacqueline's revenge consisted in leaving her stepmother in doubt. She more than suspected, not without cause, that Fraulein Schult was false to her, and had the wit to baffle all the clever questions of her 'promeneuse'.

"My worship of a man of genius—a great artist? Oh! that has all come to an end since I have found out that his devotion belongs to an elderly lady with a fair complexion and light hair. I am only sorry for him."

Jacqueline had great hopes that these cruel words would be reported—as they were—to her stepmother, and, of course, they did not mitigate the Baroness's uneasiness. Madame de Nailles revenged herself for this insult by dismissing the innocent echo of the impertinence—of course, under some plausible pretext. She felt it necessary also to be very cautious how she treated the enemy whom she was forced to shelter under her own roof. Her policy—a policy imposed on her by force of circumstances—was one of great indulgence and consideration, so that Jacqueline, soon feeling that she was for the present under no control, took the bit between her teeth. No other impression can adequately convey an idea of the sort of fury with which she plunged into pleasure and excitement, a state of mind which apparently, without any transition, succeeded her late melancholy. She had done with sentiment, she thought, forever. She meant to be practical and positive, a little Parisienne, and "in the swim." There were plenty of examples among those she knew that she could follow. Berthe, Helene, and Claire Wermant were excellent leaders in that sort of thing. Those three daughters of the 'agent de change' were at this time at Treport, in charge of a governess, who let them do whatever they pleased, subject only to be scolded by their father, who came down every Saturday to Treport, on that train that was called the 'train des maris'. They had made friends with two or three American girls, who were called "fast," and Jacqueline was soon enrolled in the ranks of that gay company.

The cure that was begun on the wooden horse at Blackfern's was completed on the sea-shore.

The girls with whom she now associated were nine or ten little imps of Satan, who, with their hair flying in the wind and their caps over one ear, made the quiet beach ring with their boy-like gayety. They were called "the Blue Band," because of a sort of uniform that they adopted. We speak of them intentionally as masculine, and not feminine, because what is masculine best suited their appearance and behavior, for, though all could flirt like coquettes of experience, they were more like boys than girls, if judged by their age and their costume.

These Blues lived close to one another on that avenue that is edged with chalets, cottages, and villas, whose lower floors are abundantly provided with great glass windows, which seem to let the ocean into their very rooms, as well as to lay bare everything that passes in them to the public eye, as frankly as if their inmates bivouacked in the open street. Nothing was private; neither the meals, nor the coming and going of visitors. It must be said, however, that the inhabitants of these glass houses were very seldom at home. Bathing, and croquet, or tennis, at low water, on the sands, searching for shells, fishing with nets, dances at the Casino, little family dances alternating with concerts, to which even children went till nine o'clock, would seem enough to fill up the days of these young people, but they had also to make boating excursions to Cayeux, Crotoy, and Hourdel, besides riding parties in the beautiful country that surrounded the Chateau of Lizerolles, where they usually dismounted on their return.

At Lizerolles they were received by Madame d'Argy, who was delighted that they provided safe amusement for her son, who appeared in the midst of this group of half-grown girls like a young cock among the hens of his harem. Frederic d'Argy, the young naval officer, who was enjoying his holiday, as M. de Nailles had said, was enjoying it exceedingly. How often, long after, on board the ship Floye, as he paced the silent quarter-deck, far from any opportunity of flirting, did he recall the forms and faces of these young girls, some dark, some fair, some rosy- half-women and half-children, who made much of him, and scolded him, and teased him, and contended for his attentions, while no better could be had, on purpose to tease one another. Oh! what a delightful time he had had! They did not leave him to himself one moment. He had to lift them into their saddles, to assist them as they clambered over the rocks, to superintend their attempts at swimming, to dance with them all by turns, and to look after them in the difficult character of Mentor, for he was older than they, and were they not entrusted to his care? What a serious responsibility! Had not Mentor even found himself too often timid and excited when one little firm foot was placed in his hand, when his arm was round one little waist, when he

could render her as a cavalier a thousand little services, or accept with gladness the role of her consoler. He did everything he could think of to please them, finding all of them charming, though Jacqueline never ceased to be the one he preferred, a preference which she might easily have inferred from the poor lad's unusual timidity and awkwardness when he was brought into contact with her. But she paid no attention to his devotion, accepting himself and all he did for her as, in some sort, her personal property.

He was of no consequence, he did not count; what was he but her comrade and former playfellow?

Happily for Fred, he took pleasure in the familiarity with which she treated him—a familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering. He was in the seventh heaven for a whole fortnight, during which he was the recipient of more dried flowers and bows of ribbon than he ever got in all the rest of his life—the American girls were very fond of giving keepsakes—but then his star waned. He was no longer the only one. The grown-up brother of the Wermants came to Treport—Raoul, with his air of a young man about town—a boulevardier, with his jacket cut in the latest fashion, with his cockle-shell of a boat, which he managed as well on salt water as on fresh, sculling with his arms bare, a cigarette in his mouth, a monocle in his eye, and a pith-helmet, such as is worn in India. The young ladies used to gather on the sands to watch him as he struck the water with the broad blade of his scull, near enough for them to see and to admire his nautical ability. They thought all his jokes amusing, and they delighted in his way of seizing his partner for a waltz and bearing her off as if she were a prize, hardly allowing her to touch the floor.

Fred thought him, with his stock of old jokes, very ill-mannered. He laughed at his sculling, and had a great mind to strike him after he saw him waltzing with Jacqueline. But he had to acknowledge the general appreciation felt for the fellow whom he called vulgar.

Raoul Wermant did not stay long at Treport. He had only come to see his sisters on his way to Dieppe, where he expected to meet a certain Leah Skip, an actress from the 'Nouveautes'. If he kept her waiting, however, for some days, it was because he was loath to leave the handsome Madame de Villegry, who was living near her friend Madame de Nailles, recruiting herself after the fatigues of the winter season. Such being the situation, the young girls of the Blue Band might have tried in vain to make any impression upon him. But the hatred with which he inspired Fred found some relief in the composition of fragments of melancholy verse, which the young midshipman hid under his mattresses. It is not an uncommon thing for naval men to combine a love of the sea with a love of poetry. Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection. The poor fellow compared Raoul Wermant to Faust, and himself to Siebel. He spoke of

> The youth whose eyes were brimming with salt tears,
> Whose heart was troubled by a thousand fears,
> Poor slighted lover!-since in his heavy heart
> All his illusions perish and depart.

Again, he wrote of Siebel:

> O Siebel!—thine is but the common fate!
> They told thee Fortune upon youth would wait;
> 'Tis false when love's in question-and you may—

Here he enumerated all the proofs of tenderness possible for a woman to give her lover, and then he added:

> You may know all, poor Siebel!—all, some day,
> When weary of this life and all its dreams,
> You learn to know it is not what it seems;
> When there is nothing that can cheer you more,
> All that remains is fondly to adore!

And after trying in vain to find a rhyme for lover, he cried:

> Oh! tell me—if one grief exceeds another
> Is not this worst, to feel mere friendship moves
> To cruel kindness the dear girl he loves?

Fred's mother surprised him one night while he was watering with his tears the ink he was putting to so sorry a use. She had been aware that he sat up late at night—his sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius—for she had seen the glare of light from his little lamp burning later than the usual bedtime of the chateau, in one of the turret chambers at Lizerolles.

In vain Fred denied that he was doing anything, in vain he tried to put his papers out of sight; his mother was so persuasive that at last he owned everything to her, and in addition to the comfort he derived from his confession, he gained a certain satisfaction to his 'amour-propre', for Madame d'Argy thought the verses beautiful. A mother's geese are always swans. But it was only when she said, "I don't see why you should not marry your Jacqueline—such a thing is not by any means impossible," and promised to do all in her power to insure his happiness, that Fred felt how dearly he loved his mother. Oh, a thousand times more than he had ever supposed he loved her! However, he had not yet done with the agonies that lie in wait for lovers.

Madame de Monredon arrived one day at the Hotel de la Plage, accompanied by her granddaughter, whom she had taken away from the convent before the beginning of the holidays. Since she had fully arranged the marriage with M. de Talbrun, it seemed important that Giselle should acquire some liveliness, and recruit her health, before the fatal wedding-day arrived. M. de Talbrun liked ladies to be always well and always lively, and it was her duty to see that Giselle accommodated herself to his taste; sea- bathing, life in the open air, and merry companions, were the things she needed to make her a little less thin, to give her tone, and to take some of her convent stiffness out of her. Besides, she could have free intercourse with her intended husband, thanks to the greater freedom of manners permitted at the sea-side. Such were the ideas of Madame de Monredon.

Poor Giselle! In vain they dressed her in fine clothes, in vain they talked to her and scolded her from morning till night, she continued to be the little convent-bred schoolgirl she had always been; with downcast eyes, pale as a flower that has known no sunlight, and timid to a point of suffering. M. de Talbrun frightened her as much as ever, and she had looked forward to the comfort of weeping in the arms of Jacqueline, who, the last time she had seen her, had been herself so unhappy. But what was her astonishment to find the young girl, who, a few weeks before, had made her such tragic confidences through the grille in the convent parlor, transformed into a creature bent on excitement and amusement. When she attempted to allude to the subject on which Jacqueline had spoken to her at the convent, and to ask her what it was that had then made her so unhappy, Jacqueline cried: "Oh! my dear, I have forgotten all about it!" But there was exaggeration in this profession of forgetfulness, and she hurriedly drew Giselle back to the game of croquet, where they were joined by M. de Talbrun.

The future husband of Giselle was a stout young fellow, short and thick- set, with broad shoulders, a large flat face, and strong jaws, ornamented with an enormous pair of whiskers, which partly compensated him for a loss of hair. He had never done anything but shoot and hunt over his property nine months in the year, and spend the other three months in Paris, where the jockey Club and ballet-dancers sufficed for his amusement. He did not pretend to be a man whose bachelor life had been altogether blameless, but he considered himself to be a "correct" man, according to what he understood by that expression, which implied neither talents, virtues, nor good manners; nevertheless, all the Blue Band agreed that he was a finished type of gentleman-hood. Even Raoul's sisters had to confess, with a certain disgust, that, whatever people may say, in our own day the aristocracy of wealth has to lower its flag before the authentic quarterings of the old noblesse. They secretly envied Giselle because she was going to be a grande dame, while all the while they asserted that old-fashioned distinctions had no longer any meaning. Nevertheless, they looked forward to the day when they, too, might take their places in the Faubourg St. Germain. One may purchase that luxury with a fortune of eight hundred thousand francs.

The croquet-ground, which was underwater at high tide, was a long stretch of sand that fringed the shingle. Two parties were formed, in which care was taken to make both sides as nearly equal as possible, after which the game began, with screams, with laughter, a little cheating and some disputes, as is the usual custom. All this appeared to amuse Oscar de Talbrun—exceedingly. For the first time during his wooing he was not bored. The Misses Sparks—Kate and Nora—by their "high spirits" agreeably reminded him of one or two excursions he had made in past days into Bohemian society.

He formed the highest opinion of Jacqueline when he saw how her still short skirts showed pretty striped silk stockings, and how her well- shaped foot was planted firmly on a blue ball, when she was preparing to roquer the red one. The way in which he fixed his eyes upon her gave great offense to Fred, and did it not alarm and shock Giselle? No! Giselle looked on calmly at the fun and talk around her, as unmoved as the stump of a tree, spoiling the game sometimes by her ignorance or her awkwardness, well satisfied that M. de Talbrun should leave her alone. Talking with him was very distasteful to her.

"You have been more stupid than usual," had been what her grandmother had never failed to say to her in Paris after one of his visits, which he alternated with bouquets. But at Treport no one seemed to mind her being stupid, and indeed M. de Talbrun hardly thought of her existence, up to the moment when they were all nearly caught by the first wave that came rolling in over the croquet-ground, when all the girls took flight, flushed, animated, and with lively gesticulation, while the gentlemen followed

with the box into which had been hastily flung hoops, balls, and mallets.

On their way Count Oscar condescendingly explained to Fred, as to a novice, that the only good thing about croquet was that it brought men and girls together. He was himself very good at games, he said, having remarkably firm muscles and exceptionally sharp sight; but he went on to add that he had not been able to show what he could do that day. The wet sand did not make so good a croquet-ground as the one he had had made in his park! It is a good thing to know one's ground in all circumstances, but especially in playing croquet. Then, dexterously passing from the game to the players, he went on to say, under cover of giving Fred a warning, that a man need not fear going too far with those girls from America—they had known how to flirt from the time they were born. They could look out for themselves, they had talons and beaks; but up to a certain point they were very easy to get on with. Those other players were queer little things; the three sisters Wermant were not wanting in chic, but, hang it!—the sweetest flower of them all, to his mind, was the tall one, the dark one—unripe fruit in perfection! "And a year or two hence," added M. de Talbrun, with all the self-confidence of an expert, "every one will be talking about her in the world of society."

Poor Fred kept silent, trying to curb his wrath. But the blood mounted to his temples as he listened to these remarks, poured into his ear by a man of thirty-five, between puffs of his cigar, because there was nobody else to whom he could make them. But they seemed to Fred very ill- mannered and ill-timed. If he had not dreaded making himself absurd, he would gladly have stood forth as the champion of the Sparks, the Wermants, and all the other members of the Blue Band, so that he might give vent to the anger raging in his heart on hearing that odious compliment to Jacqueline. Why was he not old enough to marry her? What right had that detestable Talbrun to take notice of any girl but his fiancee? If he himself could marry now, his choice would soon be made! No doubt, later—as his mother had said to him. But would Jacqueline wait? Everybody was beginning to admire her. Somebody would carry her off —somebody would cut him out while he was away at sea. Oh, horrible thought for a young lover!

That night, at the Casino, while dancing a quadrille with Giselle, he could not refrain from saying to her, "Don't you object to Monsieur de Talbrun's dancing so much with Jacqueline?"

"Who?—I?" she cried, astonished, "I don't see why he should not." And then, with a faint laugh, she added: "Oh, if she would only take him— and keep him!"

But Madame de Monredon kept a sharp eye upon M. de Talbrun. "It seems to me," she said, looking fixedly into the face of her future grandson-in- law, "that you really take pleasure in making children skip about with you."

"So I do," he replied, frankly and good-humoredly. "It makes me feel young again."

And Madame de Monredon was satisfied. She was ready to admit that most men marry women who have not particularly enchanted them, and she had brought up Giselle with all those passive qualities, which, together with a large fortune, usually suit best with a 'mariage de convenance'.

Meantime Jacqueline piqued herself upon her worldly wisdom, which she looked upon as equal to Madame de Monredon's, since the terrible event which had filled her mind with doubts. She thought M. de Talbrun would do well enough for a husband, and she took care to say so to Giselle.

"It is a fact," she told her, with all the self-confidence of large experience, "that men who are very fascinating always remain bachelors. That is probably why Monsieur de Cymier, Madame de Villegry's handsome cousin, does not think of marrying."

She was mistaken. The Comte de Cymier, a satellite who revolved around that star of beauty, Madame de Villegry, had been by degrees brought round by that lady herself to thoughts of matrimony.

Madame de Villegry, notwithstanding her profuse use of henna and many cosmetics, which was always the first thing to strike those who saw her, prided herself on being uncompromised as to her moral character. There are some women who, because they stop short of actual vice, consider themselves irreproachable. They are willing, so to speak, to hang out the bush, but keep no tavern. In former times an appearance of evil was avoided in order to cover evil deeds, but at present there are those who, under the cover of being only "fast," risk the appearance of evil.

Madame de Villegry was what is sometimes called a "professional beauty." She devoted many hours daily to her toilette, she liked to have a crowd of admirers around her. But when one of them became too troublesome, she got rid of him by persuading him to marry. She had before this proposed several young girls to Gerard de Cymier, each one plainer and more insignificant than the others. It was to tell his dear friend that the one she had last suggested was positively too ugly for him, that the young attache to an embassy had come down to the sea-side to visit her.

The day after his arrival he was sitting on the shingle at Madame de Villegry's feet, both much amused by the grotesque spectacle presented by the bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness and deformity. Of course Madame de Villegry did not bathe, being, as she said, too nervous. She was sitting under a large parasol and enjoying her own superiority over those wretched, amphibious creatures who waddled on the sands before her, comparing Madame X to a seal and Mademoiselle Z to the skeleton of a cuttle-fish.

"Well! it was that kind of thing you wished me to marry," said M. de Cymier, in a tone of resentment.

"But, my poor friend, what would you have? All young girls are like that. They improve when they are married."

"If one could only be sure."

"One is never sure of anything, especially anything relating to young girls. One can not say that they do more than exist till they are married. A husband has to make whatever he chooses out of them. You are quite capable of making what you choose of your wife. Take the risk, then."

"I could educate her as to morals—though, I must say, I am not much used to that kind of instruction; but you will permit me to think that, as to person, I should at least wish to see a rough sketch of what I may expect in my wife before my marriage."

At that moment, a girl who had been bathing came out of the water a few yards from them; the elegant outline of her slender figure, clad in a bathing-suit of white flannel, which clung to her closely, was thrown into strong relief by the clear blue background of a summer sky.

"Tiens!—but she is pretty!" cried Gerard, breaking off what he was saying: "And she is the first pretty one I have seen!"

Madame de Villegry took up her tortoiseshell opera-glasses, which were fastened to her waist, but already the young girl, over whose shoulders an attentive servant had flung a wrapper—a 'peignoir-eponge'—had run along the boardwalk and stopped before her, with a gay "Good-morning!"

"Jacqueline!" said Madame de Villegry. "Well, my dear child, did you find the water pleasant?"

"Delightful!" said the young girl, giving a rapid glance at M. de Cymier, who had risen.

He was looking at her with evident admiration, an admiration at which she felt much flattered. She was closely wrapped in her soft, snow-white peignoir, bordered with red, above which rose her lovely neck and head. She was trying to catch, on the point of one little foot, one of her bathing shoes, which had slipped from her. The foot which, when well shod, M. de Talbrun, through his eyeglass, had so much admired, was still prettier without shoe or stocking. It was so perfectly formed, so white, with a little pink tinge here and there, and it was set upon so delicate an ankle! M. de Cymier looked first at the foot, and then his glance passed upward over all the rest of the young figure, which could be seen clearly under the clinging folds of the wet drapery. Her form could be discerned from head to foot, though nothing was uncovered but the pretty little arm which held together with a careless grace the folds of her raiment. The eye of the experienced observer ran rapidly over the outline of her figure, till it reached the dark head and the brown hair, which rippled in little curls over her forehead. Her complexion, slightly golden, was not protected by one of those absurd hats which many bathers place on top of oiled silk caps which fit them closely. Neither was the precaution of oiled silk wanted to protect the thick and curling hair, now sprinkled with great drops that shone like pearls and diamonds. The water, instead of plastering her hair upon her temples, had made it more curly and more fleecy, as it hung over her dark eyebrows, which, very near together at the nose, gave to her eyes a peculiar, slightly oblique expression. Her teeth were dazzling, and were displayed by the smile which parted her lips—lips which were, if anything, too red for her pale complexion. She closed her eyelids now and then to shade her eyes from the too blinding sunlight. Those eyes were not black, but that hazel which has golden streaks. Though only half open, they had quickly taken in the fact that the young man sitting beside Madame de Villegry was very handsome.

As she went on with a swift step to her bathing-house, she drew out two long pins from her back hair, shaking it and letting it fall down her back with a slightly impatient and imperious gesture; she wished, probably, that it might dry more quickly.

"The devil!" said M. de Cymier, watching her till she disappeared into the bathing-house. "I never should have thought that it was all her own! There is nothing wanting in her. That is a young creature it is pleasant to see."

"Yes," said Madame de Villegry, quietly, "she will be very good-looking when she is eighteen."

"Is she nearly eighteen?"

"She is and she is not, for time passes so quickly. A girl goes to sleep a child, and wakes up old enough to be married. Would you like to be informed, without loss of time, as to her fortune?"

"Oh! I should not care much about her dot. I look out first for other things."

"I know, of course; but Jacqueline de Nailles comes of a very good family."

"Is she the daughter of the deputy?"

"Yes, his only daughter. He has a pretty house in the Parc Monceau and a chateau of some importance in the Haute-Vienne."

"Very good; but, I repeat, I am not mercenary. Of course, if I should marry, I should like, for my wife's sake, to live as well as a married man as I have lived as a bachelor."

"Which means that you would be satisfied with a fortune equal to your own. I should have thought you might have asked more. It is true that if you have been suddenly thunderstruck that may alter your calculations —for it was very sudden, was it not? Venus rising from the sea!"

"Please don't exaggerate! But you are not so cruel, seeing you are always urging me to marry, as to wish me to take a wife who looks like a fright or a horror."

"Heaven preserve me from any such wish! I should be very glad if my little friend Jacqueline were destined to work your reformation."

"I defy the most careful parent to find anything against me at this moment, unless it be a platonic devotion. The youth of Mademoiselle de Nailles is an advantage, for I might indulge myself in that till we were married, and then I should settle down and leave Paris, where nothing keeps me but—"

"But a foolish fancy," laughed Madame de Villegry. "However, in return for your madrigal, accept the advice of a friend. The Nailles seem to me to be prosperous, but everybody in society appears so, and one never knows what may happen any day. You would not do amiss if, before you go on, you were to talk with Wermant, the 'agent de change', who has a considerable knowledge of the business affairs of Jacqueline's father. He could tell you about them better than I can."

"Wermant is at Treport, is he not? I thought I saw him—"

"Yes, he is here till Monday. You have twenty-four hours."

"Do you really think I am in such a hurry?"

"Will you take a bet that by this time to-morrow you will not know exactly the amount of her dot and the extent of her expectations?"

"You would lose. I have something else to think of—now and always."

"What?" she said, carelessly.

"You have forbidden me ever to mention it."

Silence ensued. Then Madame de Villegry said, smiling:

"I suppose you would like me to present you this evening to my friends the De Nailles?"

And in fact they all met that evening at the Casino, and Jacqueline, in a gown of scarlet foulard, which would have been too trying for any other girl, seemed to M. de Cymier as pretty as she had been in her bathing- costume. Her hair was not dressed high, but it was gathered loosely together and confined by a ribbon of the same color as her gown, and she wore a little sailor hat besides. In this costume she had been called by M. de Talbrun the "Fra Diavolo of the Seas," and she never better supported that part, by liveliness and audacity, than she did that evening, when she made a conquest that was envied—wildly envied—by the three Demoiselles Wermant and the two Misses Sparks, for the handsome Gerard, after his first waltz with Madame de Villegry, asked no one to be his partner but Mademoiselle de Nailles.

The girls whom he neglected had not even Fred to fall back upon, for Fred, the night before, had received orders to join his ship. He had taken leave of Jacqueline with a pang in his heart which he could hardly hide, but to which no keen emotion on her part seemed to respond. However, at least, he

was spared the unhappiness of seeing the star of De Cymier rising above the horizon.

"If he could only see me," thought Jacqueline, waltzing in triumph with M. de Cymier. "If he could only see me I should be avenged."

But he was not Fred. She was not giving him a thought. It was the last flash of resentment and hatred that came to her in that moment of triumph, adding to it a touch of exquisite enjoyment.

Thus she performed the obsequies of her first love!

Not long after this M. de Nailles said to his wife:

"Do you know, my dear, that our little Jacqueline is very much admired? Her success has been extraordinary. It is not likely she will die an old maid."

The Baronne assented rather reluctantly.

"Wermant was speaking to me the other day," went on M. de Nailles. "It seems that that young Count de Cymier, who is always hanging around you, by the way, has been making inquiries of him, in a manner that looks as if it had some meaning, as to what is our fortune, our position. But really, such a match seems too good to be true."

"Why so?" said the Baronne. "I know more about it than you do, from Blanche de Villegry. She gave me to understand that her cousin was much struck by Jacqueline at first sight, and ever since she does nothing but talk to me of M. de Cymier—of his birth, his fortune, his abilities— the charming young fellow seems gifted with everything. He could be Secretary of Legation, if he liked to quit Paris: In the meantime attache to an Embassy looks very well on a card. Attache to the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs does not seem so good. Jacqueline would be a countess, possibly an ambassadress. What would you think of that!"

Madame de Nailles, who understood policy much better than her husband, had suddenly become a convert to opportunism, and had made a change of base. Not being able to devise a plan by which to suppress her young rival, she had begun to think that her best way to get rid of her would be by promoting her marriage. The little girl was fast developing into a woman—a woman who would certainly not consent quietly to be set aside. Well, then, it would be best to dispose of her in so natural a way. When Jacqueline's slender and graceful figure and the freshness of her bloom were no longer brought into close comparison with her own charms, she felt she should appear much younger, and should recover some of her prestige; people would be less likely to remark her increasing stoutness, or the red spots on her face, increased by the salt air which was so favorable to young girls' complexions. Yes, Jacqueline must be married; that was the resolution to which Madame de Nailles had come after several nights of sleeplessness. It was her fixed idea, replacing in her brain that other fixed idea which, willingly or unwillingly, she saw she must give up—the idea of keeping her stepdaughter in the shade.

"Countess! Ambassadress!" repeated M. de Nailles, with rather a melancholy smile. "You are going too fast, my dear Clotilde. I don't doubt that Wermant gave the best possible account of our situation; but when it comes to saying what I could give her as a dot, I am very much afraid. We should have, in that case, to fall back on Fred, for I have not told you everything. This morning Madame d'Argy, who has done nothing but weep since her boy went away, and who, she says, never will get accustomed to the life of misery and anxiety she will lead as a sailor's mother, exclaimed, as she was talking to me: 'Ah! there is but one way of keeping him at Lizerolles, of having him live there as the D'Argys have lived before him, quietly, like a good landlord, and that would be to give him your daughter; with her he would be entirely satisfied.'"

"Ah! so that is the reason why she asked whether Jacqueline might not stay with her when we go to Italy! She wishes to court her by proxy. But I don't think she will succeed. Monsieur de Cymier has the best chance."

"Do you suppose the child suspects—"

"That he admires her? My dear friend, we have to do with a very sharp— sighted young person. Nothing escapes the observation of Mademoiselle 'votre fille'."

And Madame de Nailles, in her turn, smiled somewhat bitterly.

"Well," said Jacqueline's father, after a few moments' reflection, "it may be as well that she should weigh for and against a match before deciding. She may spend several years that are difficult and dangerous trying to find out what she wants and to make up her mind."

"Several years?"

"Hang it! You would not marry off Jacqueline at once?"

"Bah! many a girl, practically not as old as she, is married at sixteen or seventeen."

"Why! I fancied you thought so differently!"

"Our ways of thinking are sometimes altered by events, especially when they are founded upon sincere and disinterested affection."

"Like that of good parents, such as we are," added M. de Nailles, ending her sentence with an expression of grateful emotion.

For one moment the Baronne paled under this compliment.

"What did you say to Madame d'Argy?" she hastened to ask.

"I said we must give the young fellow's beard time to grow."

"Yes, that was right. I prefer Monsieur de Cymier a hundred times over.
Still, if nothing better offers—a bird in the hand, you know—"

Madame de Nailles finished her sentence by a wave of her fan.

"Oh! our bird in the hand is not to be despised. A very handsome estate—"

"Where Jacqueline would be bored to death. I should rather see her radiant at some foreign court. Let me manage it. Let me bring her out. Give me carte blanche and let me have some society this winter."

Madame de Nailles, whether she knew it or not—probably she did, for she had great skill in reading the thoughts of others—was acting precisely in accordance with the wishes or the will of Jacqueline, who, having found much enjoyment in the dances at the Casino, had made up her mind that she meant to come out into society before any of her young companions.

"I shall not have to beg and implore her," she said to herself, anticipating the objections of her stepmother. "I shall only have politely to let her suspect that such a thing may have occurred as having had a listener at a door. I paid dearly enough for this hold over her. I have no scruple in using it."

Madame de Nailles was not mistaken in her stepdaughter; she was very far advanced beyond her age, thanks to the cruel wrong that had been done her by the loss of her trust in her elders and her respect for them. Her heart had had its past, though she was still hardly more than a child— a sad past, though its pain was being rapidly effaced. She now thought about it only at intervals. Time and circumstances were operating on her as they act upon us generally; only in her case more quickly than usual, which produced in her character and feelings phenomena that might have seemed curious to an observer. She was something of a woman, something of a child, something of a philosopher. At night, when she was dancing with Wermant, or Cymier, or even Talbrun, or on horseback, an exercise which all the Blues were wild about, she was an audacious flirt, a girl up to anything; and in the morning, at low tide, she might be seen, with her legs and feet bare, among the children, of whom there were many on the sands, digging ditches, making ramparts, constructing towers and fortifications in wet sand, herself as much amused as if she had been one of the babies themselves. There was screaming and jumping, and rushing out of reach of the waves which came up ready to overthrow the most complicated labors of the little architects, rough romping of all kinds, enough to amaze and disconcert a lover.

But no one could have guessed at the thoughts which, in the midst of all this fun and frolic, were passing through the too early ripened mind of Jacqueline. She was thinking that many things to which we attach great value and importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand barriers raised against the sea by childish hands; that everywhere there must be flux and reflux, that the beach the children had so dug up would soon become smooth as a mirror, ready for other little ones to dig it over again, tempting them to work, and yet discouraging their industry. Her heart, she thought, was like the sand, ready for new impressions. The elegant form of M. de Cymier slightly overshadowed it, distinct among other shadows more confused.

And Jacqueline said to herself with a smile, exactly what her father and
Madame de Nailles had said to each other:

"Countess!—who knows? Ambassadress! Perhaps—some day—"

CHAPTER VIII

A PUZZLING CORRESPONDENCE

"But I can not see any reason why we should not take Jacqueline with us to Italy. She is just of an age to profit by it."

These words were spoken by M. de Nailles after a long silence at the breakfast-table. They startled his hearers like a bomb.

Jacqueline waited to hear what would come next, fixing a keen look upon her stepmother. Their eyes met like the flash of two swords.

The eyes of the one said: "Now, let us hear what you will answer!" while the other strove to maintain that calmness which comes to some people in a moment of danger. The Baroness grew a little pale, and then said, in her softest tones:

"You are quite right, 'mon ami', but Jacqueline, I think, prefers to stay."

"I decidedly prefer to stay," said Jacqueline.

Her adversary, much relieved by this response, could not repress a sigh.

"It seems singular," said M. de Nailles.

"What! that I prefer to pass a month or six weeks with Madame d'Argy?
Besides, Giselle is going to be married during that time."

"They might put it off until we come back, I should suppose."

"Oh! I don't think they would," cried the Baroness. "Madame de Monredon is so selfish. She was offended to think we should talk of going away on the eve of an event she considers so important. Besides, she has so little regard for me that I should think her more likely to hasten the wedding-day rather than retard it, if it were only for the pleasure of giving us a lesson."

"I am sorry. I should have been glad to be, as she wished, one of Giselle's witnesses, but people don't take my position into consideration. If I do not take advantage of the recess—"

"Besides," interrupted Jacqueline, carelessly, "your journey must coincide with that of Monsieur Marien."

She had the pleasure of seeing her stepmother again slightly change color. Madame de Nailles was pouring out for herself a cup of tea with singular care and attention.

"Of course," said M. de Nailles. His daughter pitied him, and cried, with an increasing wish to annoy her stepmother: "Mamma, don't you see that your teapot has no tea in it? Yes," she went on, "it must be delightful to travel in Italy in company with a great artist who would explain everything; but then one would be expected to visit all the picture-galleries, and I hate pictures, since—"

She paused and again looked meaningly at her stepmother, whose soft blue eyes showed anguish of spirit, and seemed to say: "Oh, what a cruel hold she has upon me!" Jacqueline continued, carelessly—"Picture-galleries I don't care for—I like nature a hundred times better. Some day I should like to take a journey to suit myself, my own journey! Oh, papa, may I? A journey on foot with you in the Tyrol?"

Madame de Nailles was no great walker.

"Both of us, just you and I alone, with our alpenstocks in our hands—it would be lovely! But Italy and painters—"

Here, with a boyish flourish of her hands, she seemed to send that classic land to Jericho!

"Do promise me, papa!"

"Before asking a reward, you must deserve it," said her father, severely, who saw something was wrong.

During her stay at Lizerolles, which her perverseness, her resentment, and a repugnance founded on instincts of delicacy, had made her prefer to a journey to Italy, Jacqueline, having nothing better to do, took it into her head to write to her friend Fred. The young man received three letters at three different

ports in the Mediterranean and in the West Indies, whose names were long associated in his mind with delightful and cruel recollections. When the first was handed to him with one from his mother, whose letters always awaited him at every stopping-place, the blood flew to his face, his heart beat violently, he could have cried aloud but for the necessity of self-command in the presence of his comrades, who had already remarked in whispers to each other, and with envy, on the pink envelope, which exhaled 'l'odor di femina'. He hid his treasure quickly, and carried it to a spot where he could be alone; then he kissed the bold, pointed handwriting that he recognized at once, though never before had it written his address. He kissed, too, more than once, the pink seal with a J on it, whose slender elegance reminded him of its owner. Hardly did he dare to break the seal; then forgetting altogether, as we might be sure, his mother's letter, which he knew beforehand was full of good advice and expressions of affection, he eagerly read this, which he had not expected to receive:

"LIZEROLLES, October, 5, 188-

"MY DEAR FRED:

"Your mother thinks you would be pleased to receive a letter from me, and I hope you will be. You need not answer this if you do not care to do so. You will notice, 'par parenthese', that I take this opportunity of saying you and not thou to you. It is easier to change the familiar mode of address in writing than in speaking, and when we meet again the habit will have become confirmed. But, as I write, it will require great attention, and I can not promise to keep to it to the end. Half an hour's chat with an old friend will also help me to pass the time, which I own seems rather long, as it is passed by your sweet, dear mother and myself at Lizerolles. Oh, if you were only here it would be different! In the first place, we should talk less of a certain Fred, which would be one great advantage. You must know that you are the subject of our discourse from morning to night; we talk only of the dangers of the seas, the future prospects of a seaman, and all the rest of it. If the wind is a little higher than usual, your mother begins to cry; she is sure you are battling with a tempest. If any fishing-boat is wrecked, we talk of nothing but shipwrecks; and I am asked to join in another novena, in addition to those with which we must have already wearied Notre Dame de Treport. Every evening we spread out the map: 'See, Jacqueline, he must be here now—no, he is almost there,' and lines of red ink are traced from one port to another, and little crosses are made to show the places where we hope you will get your letters—'Poor boy, poor, dear boy!' In short, notwithstanding all the affectionate interest I take in you, this is sometimes too much for me. In fact, I think I must be very fond of thee not to have grown positively to hate thee for all this fuss. There! In this last sentence, instead of saying you, I have said thee! That ought to gild the pill for you!

We do not go very frequently to visit Treport, except to invoke for you the protection of Heaven, and I like it just as well, for since the last fortnight in September, which was very rainy, the beach is dismal—so different from what it was in the summer. The town looks gloomy under a cloudy sky with its blackened old brick houses! We are better off at Lizerolles, whose autumnal beauties you know so well that I will say nothing about them. — Oh, Fred, how often I regret that I am not a boy! I could take your gun and go shooting in the swamps, where there are clouds of ducks now. I feel sure that if you were in my place, you could kill time without killing game; but I am at the end of my small resources when I have played a little on the piano to amuse your mother and have read her the 'Gazette de France'. In the evening we read a translation of some English novel. There are neighbors, of course, old fogies who stay all the year round in Picardy—but, tell me, don't you find them sometimes a little too respectable? My greatest comfort is in your dog, who loves me as much as if I were his master, though I can not take him out shooting. While I write he is lying on the hem of my gown and makes a little noise, as much as to tell me that I recall you to his remembrance. Yet you are not to suppose that I am suffering from ennui, or am ungrateful, nor above all must you imagine that I have ceased to love your excellent mother with all my heart. I love her, on the contrary, more than ever since I passed this winter through a great, great sorrow—a sorrow which is now only a sad remembrance, but which has changed for me the face of everything in this world. Yes, since I have suffered myself, I understand your mother. I admire her, I love her more than ever.

How happy you are, my dear Fred, to have such a sweet mother,— a real mother who never thinks about her face, or her figure, or her age, but only of the success of her son; a dear little mother in a plain black gown, and with pretty gray hair, who has the manners and the toilette that just suit her, who somehow always seems to say: 'I care for nothing but that which affects my son.' Such mothers are rare, believe me. Those that I know, the mothers of my friends, are for the most part trying to appear as young as their daughters—

nay, prettier, and of course more elegant. When they have sons they make them wear jackets a l'anglaise and turn-down collars, up to the age when I wore short skirts. Have you noticed that nowadays in Paris there are only ladies who are young, or who are trying to make themselves appear so? Up to the last moment they powder and paint, and try to make themselves different from what age has made them. If their hair was black it grows blacker—if red, it is more red. But there is no longer any gray hair in Paris—it is out of fashion. That is the reason why I think your mother's pretty silver curls so lovely and 'distingues'. I kiss them every night for you, after I have kissed them for myself.

"Have a good voyage, come back soon, and take care of yourself, dear Fred."

The young sailor read this letter over and over again. The more he read it the more it puzzled him. Most certainly he felt that Jacqueline gave him a great proof of confidence when she spoke to him of some mysterious unhappiness, an unhappiness of which it was evident her stepmother was the cause. He could see that much; but he was infinitely far from suspecting the nature of the woes to which she alluded. Poor Jacqueline! He pitied her without knowing what for, with a great outburst of sympathy, and an honest desire to do anything in the world to make her happy. Was it really possible that she could have been enduring any grief that summer when she had seemed so madly gay, so ready for a little flirtation? Young girls must be very skilful in concealing their inmost feelings! When he was unhappy he had it out by himself, he took refuge in solitude, he wanted to be done with existence. Everybody knew when anything went wrong with him. Why could not Jacqueline have let him know more plainly what it was that troubled her, and why could she not have shown a little tenderness toward him, instead of assuming, even when she said the kindest things to him, her air of mockery? And then, though she might pretend not to find Lizerolles stupid, he could see that she was bored there. Yet why had she chosen to stay at Lizerolles rather than go to Italy?

Alas! how that little pink letter made him reflect and guess, and turn things over in his mind, and wish himself at the devil—that little pink letter which he carried day and night on his breast and made it crackle as it lay there, when he laid his hand on the satin folds so near his heart! It had an odor of sweet violets which seemed to him to overpower the smell of pitch and of salt water, to fill the air, to perfume everything.

"That young fellow has the instincts of a sailor," said his superior officers when they saw him standing in attitudes which they thought denoted observation, though with him it was only reverie. He would stand with his eyes fixed upon some distant point, whence he fancied he could see emerging from the waves a small, brown, shining head, with long hair streaming behind, the head of a girl swimming, a girl he knew so well.

"One can see that he takes an interest in nautical phenomena, that he is heart and soul in his profession, that he cares for nothing else. Oh, he'll make a sailor! We may be sure of that!"

Fred sent his young friend and cousin, by way of reply, a big packet of manuscript, the leaves of which were of all sizes, over which he had poured forth torrents of poetry, amorous and descriptive, under the title: At Sea.

Never would he have dared to show her this if the ocean had not lain between them. He was frightened when his packet had been sent. His only comfort was in the thought that he had hypocritically asked Jacqueline for her literary opinion of his verses; but she could not fail, he thought, to understand.

Long before an answer could have been expected, he got another letter, sky-blue this time, much longer than the first, giving him an account of Giselle's wedding.

"Your mother and I went together to Normandy, where the marriage was to take place after the manner of old times, 'in the fashion of the Middle Ages,' as our friends the Wermants said to me, who might perhaps not have laughed at it had they been invited. Madame de Monredon is all for old customs, and she had made it a great point that the wedding should not take place in Paris. Had I been Giselle, I should not have liked it. I know nothing more elegant or more solemn than the entrance of a bridal party into the Madeleine, but we shall have to be content with Saint-Augustin. Still, the toilettes, as they pass up the aisle, even there, are very effective, and the decoration of the tall, high altar is magnificent. Toc! Toc! First come the beadles with their halberds, then the loud notes of the organ, then the wide doors are thrown open, making a noise as they turn on their great hinges, letting the noise of carriages outside be heard in the church; and then comes the bride in a ray of sunshine. I could wish for nothing more. A grand wedding in the country is

much more quiet, but it is old-fashioned. In the little village church the guests were very much crowded, and outside there was a great mob of country folk. Carpets had been laid down over the dilapidated pavement, composed principally of tombstones. The rough walls were hung with scarlet. All the clergy of the neighborhood were present. A Monsignor—related to the Talbruns—pronounced the nuptial benediction; his address was a panegyric on the two families. He gave us to understand that if he did not go back quite as far as the Crusades, it was only because time was wanting.

Madame de Monredon was all-glorious, of course. She certainly looked like an old vulture, in a pelisse of gray velvet, with a chinchilla boa round her long, bare neck, and her big beak, with marabouts overshadowing it, of the same color. Monsieur de Talbrun —well! Monsieur de Talbrun was very bald, as bald as he could be. To make up for the want of hair on his head, he has plenty of it on his hands. It is horrid, and it makes him look like an animal. You have no idea how queer he looked when he sat down, with his big, pink head just peeping over the back of the crimson velvet chair, which was, however, almost as tall as he is. He is short, you may remember. As to our poor Giselle, the prettiest persons sometimes look badly as brides, and those who are not pretty look ugly. Do you recollect that picture—by Velasquez, is it not? of a fair little Infanta stiffly swathed in cloth of gold, as becomes her dignity, and looking crushed by it? Giselle's gown was of point d'Alencon, old family lace as yellow as ancient parchment, but of inestimable value. Her long corsage, made in the fashion of Anne of Austria, looked on her like a cuirass, and she dragged after her, somewhat awkwardly, a very long train, which impeded her movement as she walked. A lace veil, as hereditary and time-worn as the gown, but which had been worn by all the Monredons at their weddings, the present dowager's included, hid the pretty, light hair of our dear little friend, and was supported by a sort of heraldic comb and some orange-flowers; in short, you can not imagine anything more heavy or more ugly. Poor Giselle, loaded down with it, had red eyes, a face of misery, and the air of a martyr. For all this her grandmother scolded her sharply, which of course did not mend matters. 'Du reste', she seemed absorbed in prayer or thought during the ceremony, in which I took up the offerings, by the way, with a young lieutenant of dragoons just out of the military school at Saint Cyr: a uniform always looks well on such occasions. Nor was Monsieur de Talbrun one of those lukewarm Christians who hear mass with their arms crossed and their noses in the air. He pulled a jewelled prayerbook out of his pocket, which Giselle had given him. Speaking of presents, those he gave her were superb: pearls as big as hazelnuts, a ruby heart that was a marvel, a diamond crescent that I am afraid she will never wear with such an air as it deserves, and two strings of diamonds 'en riviere', which I should suppose she would have reset, for rivieres are no longer in fashion. The stones are enormous.

"But, poor dear! she could care little for such things. All she wanted was to get back as quickly as she could into her usual clothes. She said to me, again and again: 'Pray God for me that I may be a good wife. I am so afraid I may not be. To belong to Monsieur de Talbrun in this world, and in the next; to give up everything for him, seems so extraordinary. Indeed, I think I hardly knew what I was promising.' I felt sorry for her; I kissed her. I was ready to cry myself, and poor Giselle went on: 'If you knew, dear, how I love you! how I love all my friends! really to love, people must have been brought up together—must have always known each other.' I don't think she was right, but everybody has his or her ideas about such things. I tried, by way of consoling her, to draw her attention to the quantities of presents she had received. They were displayed on several tables in the smaller drawing-room, but her grandmother would not let them put the name of the giver upon each, as is the present custom. She said that it humiliated those who had not been able to make gifts as expensive as others. She is right, when one comes to think of it. Nor would she let the trousseau be displayed; she did not think it proper, but I saw enough to know that there were marvels in linen, muslin, silks, and surahs, covered all over with lace. One could see that the great mantua-maker had not consulted the grandmother, who says that women of distinction in her day did not wear paltry trimmings.

"Dinner was served under a tent for all the village people during the two mortal hours we had to spend over a repast, in which Madame de Monredon's cook excelled himself. Then came complimentary addresses in the old-fashioned style, composed by the village schoolmaster who, for a wonder, knew what he was about; groups of village children, boys and girls, came bringing their offerings, followed by pet lambs decked with ribbons; it was all in the style of the days of Madame de Genlis. While we danced in the salons there was dancing in the barn, which had been decorated for the occasion. In short; lords and ladies and laborers all seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did. The Parisian gentlemen who danced were not very numerous. There were a few friends of Monsieur de

Talbrun's, however—among them, a Monsieur de Cymier, whom possibly you remember having seen last summer at Treport; he led the cotillon divinely. The bride and bridegroom drove away during the evening, as they do in England, to their own house, which is not far off. Monsieur de Talbrun's horses—a magnificent pair, harnessed to a new 'caleche'—carried off Psyche, as an old gentleman in gold spectacles said near me. He was a pretentious old personage, who made a speech at table, very inappropriate and much applauded. Poor Giselle! I have not seen her since, but she has written me one of those little notes which, when she was in the convent, she used to sign Enfant de Marie. It begged me again to pray earnestly for her that she might not fail in the fulfilment of her new duties. It seems hard, does it not? Let us hope that Monsieur de Talbrun, on his part, may not find that his new life rather wearies him! Do you know what should have been Giselle's fate—since she has a mania about people being thoroughly acquainted before marriage? What would two or three years more or less have mattered? She would have made an admirable wife for a sailor; she would have spent the months of your absence kneeling before the altar; she would have multiplied the lamentations and the tendernesses of your excellent mother. I have been thinking this ever since the wedding-day—a very sad day, after all.

"But how I have let my pen run on. I shall have to put on two stamps, notwithstanding my thin paper. But then you have plenty of time to read on board-ship, and this account may amuse you. Make haste and thank me for it.

"Your old friend,

"JACQUELINE."

Amuse him! How could he be amused by so great an insult? What! thank her for giving him over even in thought to Giselle or to anybody? Oh, how wicked, how ungrateful, how unworthy!

The six pages of foreign-post paper were crumpled up by his angry fingers. Fred tore them with his teeth, and finally made them into a ball which he flung into the sea, hating himself for having been so foolish as to let himself be caught by the first lines, as a foolish fish snaps at the bait, when, apropos to the church in which she would like to be married, she had added "But we should have to be content with Saint- Augustin."

Those words had delighted him as if they had really been meant for himself and Jacqueline. This promise for the future, that seemed to escape involuntarily from her pen, had made him find all the rest of her letter piquant and amusing. As he read, his mind had reverted to that little phrase which he now found he had interpreted wrongly. What a fall! How his hopes now crumbled under his feet! She must have done it on purpose—but no, he need not blacken her! She had written without thought, without purpose, in high spirits; she wanted to be witty, to be droll, to write gossip without any reference to him to whom her letter was addressed. That we who some day would make a triumphal entry into St. Augustin would be herself and some other man—some man with whom her acquaintance had been short, since she did not seem to feel in that matter like Giselle. Some one she did not yet know? Was that sure? She might know her future husband already, even now she might have made her choice—Marcel d'Etaples, perhaps, who looked so well in uniform, or that M. de Cymier, who led the cotillon so divinely. Yes! No doubt it was he—the last-comer. And once more Fred suffered all the pangs of jealousy. It seemed to him that in his loneliness, between sky and sea, those pangs were more acute than he had ever known them. His comrades teased him about his melancholy looks, and made him the butt of all their jokes in the cockpit. He resolved, however, to get over it, and at the next port they put into, Jacqueline's letter was the cause of his entering for the first time some discreditable scenes of dissipation.

At Bermuda he received another letter, dated from Paris, where Jacqueline had rejoined her parents, who had returned from Italy. She sent him a commission. Would he buy her a riding-whip? Bermuda was renowned for its horsewhips, and her father had decided that she must go regularly to the riding-school. They seemed anxious now to give her, as preliminary to her introduction into society, not only such pleasures as horseback exercise, but intellectual enjoyment also. She had been taken to the Institute to hear M. Legouve, and what was better still, in December her stepmother would give a little party every fortnight and would let her sit up till eleven o'clock. She was also to be taken to make some calls. In short, she felt herself rising in importance, but the first thing that had made her feel so was Fred's choice of her to be his literary confidant. She was greatly obliged to him, and did not know how she could better prove to him that she was worthy of so great an honor than by telling him quite frankly just what she thought of his verses. They were very, very pretty. He had talent—great talent. Only, as in attending the classes of M. Regis she had acquired some little knowledge of the laws of versification, she would like to warn him against impairing a thought for the benefit of a rhyme, and she pointed out several such places in his compositions, ending thus:

"Bravo! for sunsets, for twilights, for moonshine, for deep silence, for starry nights, and silvery seas—in such things you excel; one feels as if one were there, and one envies you the fairy scenes of ocean. But, I implore you, be not sentimental. That is the feeble part of your poetry, to my thinking, and spoils the rest. By the way, I should like to ask you whose are those soft eyes, that silky hair, that radiant smile, and all that assortment of amber, jet, and coral occurring so often in your visions? Is she—or rather, are they—black, yellow, green, or tattooed, for, of course, you have met everywhere beauties of all colors? Several times when it appeared as if the lady of your dreams were white, I fancied you were drawing a portrait of Isabelle Ray. All the girls, your old friends, to whom I have shown At Sea, send you their compliments, to which I join my own. Each of them will beg you to write her a sonnet; but first of all, in virtue of our ancient friendship, I want one myself.

"JACQUELINE."

So! she had shown to others what was meant for her alone; what profanation! And what was more abominable, she had not recognized that he was speaking of herself. Ah! there was nothing to be done now but to forget her. Fred tried to do so conscientiously during all his cruise in the Atlantic, but the moment he got ashore and had seen Jacqueline, he fell again a victim to her charms.

CHAPTER IX

BEAUTY AT THE FAIR

She was more beautiful than ever, and her first exclamation on seeing him was intended to be flattering: "Ah! Fred, how much you have improved! But what a change! What an extraordinary change! Why, look at him! He is still himself, but who would have thought it was Fred!"

He was not disconcerted, for he had acquired aplomb in his journeys round the globe, but he gave her a glance of sad reproach, while Madame de Nailles said, quietly:

"Yes, really—How are you, Fred? The tan on your face is very becoming to you. You have broadened at the shoulders, and are now a man— something more than a man, an experienced sailor, almost an old seadog."

And she laughed, but only softly, because a frank laugh would have shown little wrinkles under her eyes and above her cheeks, which were getting too large.

Her toilette, which was youthful, yet very carefully adapted to her person, showed that she was by no means as yet "laid on the shelf," as Raoul Wermant elegantly said of her. She stood up, leaning over a table covered with toys, which it was her duty to sell at the highest price possible, for the place of a meeting so full of emotions for Fred was a charity bazaar.

The moment he arrived in Paris the young officer had been, so to speak, seized by the collar. He had found a great glazed card, bidding him to attend this fair, in a fashionable quarter, and forthwith he had forgotten his resolution of not going near the Nailles for a long time.

"This is not the same thing," he said to himself. "One must not let one's self be supposed to be stingy." So with these thoughts he went to the bazaar, very glad in his secret heart to have an excuse for breaking his resolution.

The fair was for the benefit of sufferers from a fire—somewhere or other. In our day multitudes of people fall victims to all kinds of dreadful disasters, explosions of boilers, explosions of fire-damp, of everything that can explode, for the agents of destruction seem to be in a state of unnatural excitement as well as human beings. Never before, perhaps, have inanimate things seemed so much in accordance with the spirit of the times. Fred found a superb placard, the work of Cheret, a pathetic scene in a mine, banners streaming in the air, with the words 'Bazar de Charite' in gold letters on a red ground, and the courtyard of the mansion where the fair was held filled with more carriages than one sees at a fashionable wedding. In the vestibule many footmen were in attendance, the chasseurs of an Austrian ambassador, the great hulking fellows of the English embassy, the gray-liveried servants of old Rozenkranz, with their powdered heads, the negro man belonging to Madame Azucazillo, etc., etc. At each arrival there was a frou-frou of satin and lace, and inside the sales room was a hubbub like the noise in an aviary. Fred, finding himself at once in the full stream of Parisian life, but for the moment

not yet part of it, indulged in some of those philosophic reflections to which he had been addicted on shipboard.

Each of the tables showed something of the tastes, the character, the peculiarities of the lady who had it in charge. Madame Sterny, who had the most beautiful hands in the world, had undertaken to sell gloves, being sure that the gentlemen would be eager to buy if she would only consent to try them on; Madame de Louisgrif, the 'chanoiness', whose extreme emaciation was not perceived under a sort of ecclesiastical cape, had an assortment of embroideries and objects of devotion, intended only for ladies—and indeed for only the most serious among them; for the table that held umbrellas, parasols and canes suited to all ages and both sexes, a good, upright little lady had been chosen. Her only thought was how much money she could make by her sales. Madame Strahlberg, the oldest of the Odinskas, obviously expected to sell only to gentlemen; her table held pyramids of cigars and cigarettes, but nothing else was in the corner where she presided, supple and frail, not handsome, but far more dangerous than if she had been, with her unfathomable way of looking at you with her light eyes set deep under her eyebrows, eyes that she kept half closed, but which were yet so keen, and the cruel smile that showed her little sharp teeth. Her dress was of black grenadine embroidered with silver. She wore half mourning as a sort of announcement that she was a widow, in hopes that this might put a stop to any wicked gossip which should assert that Count Strahlberg was still living, having got a divorce and been very glad to get it. Yet people talked about her, but hardly knew what to bring against her, because, though anything might be suspected, nothing was known. She was received and even sought after in the best society, on account of her wonderful talents, which she employed in a manner as perverse as everything else about her, but which led some people to call her the 'Judic des salons'. Wanda Strahlberg was now holding between her lips, which were artificially red, in contrast to the greenish paleness of her face, which caused others to call her a vampire, one of the cigarettes she had for sale. With one hand, she was playing, graceful as a cat, with her last package of regalias, tied with green ribbon, which, when offered to the highest bidder, brought an enormous sum. Her sister Colette was selling flowers, like several other young girls, but while for the most part these waited on their customers in silence, she was full of lively talk, and as unblushing in her eagerness to sell as a 'bouquetiere' by profession. She had grown dangerously pretty. Fred was dazzled when she wanted to fasten a rose into his buttonhole, and then, as he paid for it, gave him another, saying: "And here is another thrown in for old acquaintance' sake."

"Charity seems to cover many things," thought the young man as he withdrew from her smiles and her glances, but yet he had seen nothing so attractive among the black, yellow, green or tattooed ladies about whom Jacqueline had been pleased to tease him.

"Fred!"

It was Jacqueline's voice that arrested him. It was sharp and almost angry. She, too, was selling flowers, while at the same time she was helping Madame de Nailles with her toys; but she was selling with that decorum and graceful reserve which custom prescribes for young girls. "Fred, I do hope you will wear no roses but mine. Those you have are frightful. They make you look. like a village bridegroom. Take out those things; come! Here is a pretty boutonniere, and I will fasten it much better in your buttonhole—let me."

In vain did he try to seem cold to her; his heart thawed in spite of himself. She held him so charmingly by the lapel of his coat, touching his cheek with the tip end of an aigrette which set so charmingly on the top of the most becoming of fur caps which she wore. Her hair was turned up now, showing her beautiful neck, and he could see little rebellious hairs curling at their own will over her pure, soft skin, while she, bending forward, was engaged in his service. He admired, too, her slender waist, only recently subjected to the restraint of a corset. He forgave her on the spot. At this moment a man with brown hair, tall, elegant, and with his moustache turned up at the ends, after the old fashion of the Valois, revived recently, came hurriedly up to the table of Madame de Nailles. Fred felt that that inimitable moustache reduced his not yet abundant beard to nothing.

"Mademoiselle Jacqueline," said the newcomer, "Madame de Villegry has sent me to beg you to help her at the buffet. She can not keep pace with her customers, and is asking for volunteers."

All this was uttered with a familiar assurance which greatly shocked the young naval man.

"You permit me, Madame?"

The Baroness bowed with a smile, which said, had he chosen to interpret it, "I give you permission to carry her off now—and forever, if you wish it."

At that moment she was placing in the half-unwilling arms of Hubert Marien an enormous rubber balloon and a jumping-jack, in return for five Louis which he had laid humbly on her table. But

Jacqueline had not waited for her stepmother's permission; she let herself be borne off radiant on the arm of the important personage who had come for her, while Colette, who perhaps had remarked the substitution for her two roses, whispered in Fred's ear, in atone of great significance "Monsieur de Cymier."

The poor fellow started, like a man suddenly awakened from a happy dream to face the most unwelcome of realities. Impelled by that natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst, he went toward the buffet, affecting a calmness which it cost him a great effort to maintain. As he went along he mechanically gave money to each of the ladies whom he knew, moving off without waiting for their thanks or stopping to choose anything from their tables. He seemed to feel the floor rock under his feet, as if he had been walking the deck of a vessel. At last he reached a recess decorated with palms, where, in a robe worthy of 'Peau d'Ane' in the story, and absolutely a novelty in the world of fashions robe all embroidered with gold and rubies, which glittered with every movement made by the wearer—Madame de Villegry was pouring out Russian tea and Spanish chocolate and Turkish coffee, while all kinds of deceitful promises of favor shone in her eyes, which wore a certain tenderness expressive of her interest in charity. A party of young nymphs formed the court of this fair goddess, doing their best to lend her their aid. Jacqueline was one of them, and, at the moment Fred approached, she was offering, with the tips of her fingers, a glass of champagne to M. de Cymier, who at the same time was eagerly trying to persuade her to believe something, about which she was gayly laughing, while she shook her head. Poor Fred, that he might hear, and suffer, drank two mouthfuls of sherry which he could hardly swallow.

"One who was really charitable would not hesitate," said M. de Cymier, "especially when every separate hair would be paid for if you chose. Just one little curl—for the sake of the poor. It is very often done: anything is allowable for the sake of the poor."

"Maybe it is because, as you say, that it is very often done that I shall not do it," said Jacqueline, still laughing. "I have made up my mind never to do what others have done before me."

"Well, we shall see," said M. de Cymier, pretending to threaten her.

And her young head was thrown back in a burst of inextinguishable laughter.

Fred fled, that he might not be tempted to make a disturbance. When he found himself again in the street, he asked himself where he should go. His anger choked him; he felt he could not keep his resentment to himself, and yet, however angry he might be with Jacqueline, he would have been unwilling to hear his mother give utterance to the very sentiments that he was feeling, or to harsh judgments, of which he preferred to keep the monopoly. It came into his mind that he would pay a little visit to Giselle, who, of all the people he knew, was the least likely to provoke a quarrel. He had heard that Madame de Talbrun did not go out, being confined to her sofa by much suffering, which, it might be hoped, would soon come to an end; and the certainty that he should find her if he called at once decided him. Since he had been in Paris he had done nothing but leave cards. This time, however, he was sure that the lady upon whom he called would be at home. He was taken at once into the young wife's boudoir, where he found her very feeble, lying back upon her cushions, alone, and working at some little bits of baby-clothes. He was not slow to perceive that she was very glad to see him. She flushed with pleasure as he came into the room, and, dropping her sewing, held out to him two little, thin hands, white as wax. "Take that footstool—sit down there—what a great, great pleasure it is to see you back again!" She was more expansive than she had been formerly; she had gained a certain ease which comes from intercourse with the world, but how delicate she seemed! Fred for a moment looked at her in silence, she seemed so changed as she lay there in a loose robe of pale blue cashmere, whose train drawn over her feet made her look tall as it stretched to the end of the gilded couch, round which Giselle had collected all the little things required by an invalid—bottles, boxes, work-bag, dressing-case, and writing materials.

"You see," she said, with her soft smile, "I have plenty to occupy me, and I venture to be proud of my work and to think I am creating marvels."

As she spoke she turned round on her closed hand a cap that seemed microscopic to Fred.

"What!" he cried, "do you expect him to be small enough to wear that!"

"Him! you said him; and I am sure you will be right. I know it will be a boy," replied Giselle, eagerly, her fair face brightened by these words. "I have some that are still smaller. Look!" and she lifted up a pile of things trimmed with ribbons and embroidery. "See; these are the first! Ah! I lie here and fancy how he will look when he has them on. He will be sweet enough to eat. Only his papa wants us to give him a name that I think is too long for him, because it has always been in the family— Enguerrand."

"His name will be longer than himself, I should say, judging by the dimensions of this cap," said Fred, trying to laugh.

"Bah!" replied Giselle, gayly, "but we can get over it by calling him Gue-gue or Ra-ra. What do you think? The difficulty is that names of that kind are apt to stick to a boy for fifty years, and then they seem ridiculous. Now a pretty abbreviation like Fred is another matter. But I forget they have brought up my chocolate. Please ring, and let them bring you a cup. We will take our luncheon together, as we used to do."

"Thank you, I have no appetite. I have just come from a certain buffet where I lost it all."

"Oh! I suppose you have been to the Bazaar—the famous Charity Fair! You must have made a sensation there on your return, for I am told that the gentlemen who are expected to spend the most are likely to send their money, and not to show themselves. There are many complaints of it."

"There were plenty of men round certain persons," replied Fred, dryly.
"Madame de Villegry's table was literally besieged."

"Really! What, hers! You surprise me! So it was the good things she gave you that make you despise my poor chocolate," said Giselle, rising on her elbow, to receive the smoking cup that a servant brought her on a little silver salver.

"I didn't take much at her table," said Fred, ready to enter on his grievances. "If you wish to know the reason why, I was too indignant to eat or drink."

"Indignant?"

"Yes, the word is not at all too strong. When one has passed whole months away from what is unwholesome and artificial, such things as make up life in Paris, one becomes a little like Alceste, Moliere's misanthrope, when one gets back to them. It is ridiculous at my age, and yet if I were to tell you—"

"What?—you puzzle me. What can there be that is unwholesome in selling things for the poor?"

"The poor! A pretty pretext! Was it to benefit the poor that that odious Countess Strahlberg made all those disreputable grimaces? I have seen kermesses got up by actresses, and, upon my word, they were good form in comparison."

"Oh! Countess Strahlberg! People have heard about her doings until they are tired of them," said Giselle, with that air of knowing everything assumed by a young wife whose husband has told her all the current scandals, as a sort of initiation.

"And her sister seems likely to be as bad as herself before long."

"Poor Colette! She has been so badly brought up. It is not her fault."

"But there's Jacqueline," cried Fred, in a sudden outburst, and already feeling better because he could mention her name.

"Allons, donc! You don't mean to say anything against Jacqueline?" cried Giselle, clasping her hands with an air of astonishment. "What can she have done to scandalize you—poor little dear?"

Fred paused for half a minute, then he drew the stool in the form of an X, on which he was sitting, a little nearer to Giselle's sofa, and, lowering his voice, told her how Jacqueline had acted under his very eyes. As he went on, watching as he spoke the effect his words produced upon Giselle, who listened as if slightly amused by his indignation, the case seemed not nearly so bad as he had supposed, and a delicious sense of relief crept over him when she to whom he told his wrongs after hearing him quietly to the end, said, smiling:

"And what then? There is no great harm in all that. Would you have had her refuse to go with the gentleman Madame de Villegry had sent to fetch her? And why, may I ask, should she not have done her best to help by pouring out champagne? An air put on to please is indispensable to a woman, if she wishes to sell anything. Good Heavens! I don't approve any more than you do of all these worldly forms of charity, but this kind of thing is considered right; it has come into fashion. Jacqueline had the permission of her parents, and I really can't see any good reason why you should complain of her. Unless—why not tell me the whole truth, Fred? I know it—don't we always know what concerns the people that we care for? And I might possibly some day be of use to you. Say! don't you think you are—a little bit jealous?"

Less encouragement than this would have sufficed to make him open his heart to Giselle. He was delighted that some woman was willing he should confide in her. And what was more, he was glad to have it proved that he had been all wrong. A quarter of an hour later Giselle had comforted him, happy herself that it had been in her power to undertake a task of consolation, a work in which, with sweet humility, she felt herself at ease. On the great stage of life she knew now she should never play any important part, any that would bring her greatly into view. But she felt that she was made to be a confidant, one of those perfect confidants who never attempt to interfere rashly with the course of events, but who wait upon the ways of Providence, removing stones, and briers and thorns, and making everything turn out for the best in the end. Jacqueline, she said, was so young! A little wild, perhaps, but what a treasure! She was all heart! She would need a husband worthy of her, such a man as Fred. Madame d'Argy, she knew, had already said something on the subject to her father. But it would have to be the Baroness that Fred must bring over to their views; the Baroness was acquiring more and more influence over her husband, who seemed to be growing older every day. M. de Nailles had evidently much, very much upon his mind. It was said in business circles that he had for some time past been given to speculation. Oscar said so. If that were the case, many of Jacqueline's suitors might withdraw. Not all men were so disinterested as Fred.

"Oh! As to her dot—what do I care for her dot?" cried the young man. "I have enough for two, if she would only be satisfied to live quietly at Lizerolles!"

"Yes," said the judicious little matron, nodding her head, "but who would like to marry a midshipman? Make haste and be a lieutenant, or an ensign."

She smiled at herself for having made the reward depend upon exertion, with a sort of maternal instinct. It was the same instinct that would lead her in the future to promise Enguerrand a sugar-plum if he said his lesson. "Nobody will steal your Jacqueline till you are ready to carry her off. Besides, if there were any danger I could give you timely warning."

"Ah! Giselle, if she only had your kind heart—your good sense."

"Do you think I am better and more reasonable than other people? In what way? I have done as so many other girls do; I have married without knowing well what I was doing."

She stopped short, fearing she might have said too much, and indeed Fred looked at her anxiously.

"You don't regret it, do you?"

"You must ask Monsieur de Talbrun if he regrets it," she said, with a laugh. "It must be hard on him to have a sick wife, who knows little of what is passing outside of her own chamber, who is living on her reserve fund of resources—a very poor little reserve fund it is, too!"

Then, as if she thought that Fred had been with her long enough, she said: "I would ask you to stay and see Monsieur de Talbrun, but he won't be in, he dines at his club. He is going to see a new play tonight which they say promises to be very good."

"What! Will he leave you alone all the evening?"

"Oh! I am very glad he should find amusement. Just think how long it is that I have been pinned down here! Poor Oscar!"

CHAPTER X

GISELLE'S CONSOLATION

The arrival of the expected Enguerrand hindered Giselle from pleading Fred's cause as soon as she could have wished. Her life for twenty-four hours was in great danger, and when the crisis was past, which M. de Talbrun treated very indifferently, as a matter of course, her first cry was "My baby!" uttered in a tone of tender eagerness such as had never been heard from her lips before.

The nurse brought him. He lay asleep swathed in his swaddling clothes like a mummy in its wrappings, a motionless, mysterious being, but he seemed to his mother beautiful—more beautiful than anything she had seen in those vague visions of happiness she had indulged in at the convent, which

were never to be realized. She kissed his little purple face, his closed eyelids, his puckered mouth, with a sort of respectful awe. She was forbidden to fatigue herself. The wet-nurse, who had been brought from Picardy, drew near with her peasant cap trimmed with long blue streamers; her big, experienced hands took the baby from his mother, she turned him over on her lap, she patted him, she laughed at him. And the mother-happiness that had lighted up Giselle's pale face died away.

"What right," she thought, "has that woman to my child?" She envied the horrid creature, coarse and stout, with her tanned face, her bovine features, her shapeless figure, who seemed as if Nature had predestined her to give milk and nothing more. Giselle would so gladly have been in her place! Why wouldn't they permit her to nurse her baby?

M. de Talbrun said in answer to this question:

"It is never done among people in our position. You have no idea, of all it would entail on you—what slavery, what fatigue! And most probably you would not have had milk enough."

"Oh! who can tell? I am his mother! And when this woman goes he will have to have English nurses, and when he is older he will have to go to school. When shall I have him to myself?"

And she began to cry.

"Come, come!" said M. de Talbrun, much astonished, "all this fuss about that frightful little monkey!"

Giselle looked at him almost as much astonished as he had been at her. Love, with its jealousy, its transports, its anguish, its delights had for the first time come to her—the love that she could not feel for her husband awoke in her for her son. She was ennobled—she was transfigured by a sense of her maternity; it did for her what marriage does for some women—it seemed as if a sudden radiance surrounded her.

When she raised her infant in her arms, to show him to those who came to see her, she always seemed like a most chaste and touching representation of the Virgin Mother. She would say, as she exhibited him: "Is he not superb?" Every one said: "Yes, indeed!" out of politeness, but, on leaving the mother's presence, would generally remark: "He is Monsieur de Talbrun in baby-clothes: the likeness is perfectly horrible!"

The only visitor who made no secret of this impression was Jacqueline, who came to see her cousin as soon as she was permitted—that is, as soon as her friend was able to sit up and be prettily dressed, as became the mother of such a little gentleman as the heir of all the Talbruns. When Jacqueline saw the little creature half-smothered in the lace that trimmed his pillows, she burst out laughing, though it was in the presence of his mother.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" she cried, "how ugly! I never should have supposed we could have been as ugly as that! Why, his face is all the colors of the rainbow; who would have imagined it? And he crumples up his little face like those things in gutta-percha. My poor Giselle, how can you bear to show him! I never, never could covet a baby!"

Giselle, in consternation, asked herself whether this strange girl, who did not care for children, could be a proper wife for Fred; but her habitual indulgence came to her aid, and she thought:

"She is but a child herself, she does not know what she is saying," and profiting by her first tete-a-tete with Jacqueline's stepmother, she spoke as she had promised to Madame de Nailles.

"A matchmaker already!" said the Baroness, with a smile. "And so soon after you have found out what it costs to be a mother! How good of you, my dear Giselle! So you support Fred as a candidate? But I can't say I think he has much chance; Monsieur de Nailles has his own ideas."

She spoke as if she really thought that M. de Nailles could have any ideas but her own. When the adroit Clotilde was at a loss, she was likely to evoke this chimerical notion of her husband's having an opinion of his own.

"Oh! Madame, you can do anything you like with him!"

The clever woman sighed:

"So you fancy that when people have been long married a wife retains as much influence over her husband as you have kept over Monsieur de Talbrun? You will learn to know better, my dear."

"But I have no influence," murmured Giselle, who knew herself to be her husband's slave.

"Oh! I know better. You are making believe!"

"Well, but we were not talking about me, but—"

"Oh! yes. I understood. I will think about it. I will try to bring over Monsieur de Nailles."

She was not at all disposed to drop the meat for the sake of the shadow, but she was not sure of M. de Cymier, notwithstanding all that Madame de Villegry was at pains to tell her about his serious intentions. On the other hand, she would have been far from willing to break with a man so brilliant, who made himself so agreeable at her Tuesday receptions.

"Meantime, it would be well if you, dear, were to try to find out what Jacqueline thinks. You may not find it very easy."

"Will you authorize me to tell her how well he loves her? Oh, then, I am quite satisfied!" cried Giselle.

But she was under a mistake. Jacqueline, as soon as she began to speak to her of Fred's suit, stopped her:

"Poor fellow! Why can't he amuse himself for some time longer and let me do the same? Men seem to me so strange! Now, Fred is one who, just because he is good and serious by nature, fancies that everybody else should be the same; he wishes me to be tethered in the flowery meads of Lizerolles, and browse where he would place me. Such a life would be an end of everything—an end to my life, and I should not like it at all. I should prefer to grow old in Paris, or some other capital, if my husband happened to be engaged in diplomacy. Even supposing I marry— which I do not think an absolute necessity, unless I can not get rid otherwise of an inconvenient chaperon—and to do my stepmother justice, she knows well enough that I will not submit to too much of her dictation!"

"Jacqueline, they say you see too much of the Odinskas."

"There! that's another fault you find in me. I go there because Madame Strahlberg is so kind as to give me some singing-lessons. If you only knew how much progress I am making, thanks to her. Music is a thousand times more interesting, I can tell you, than all that you can do as mistress of a household. You don't think so? Oh! I know Enguerrand's first tooth, his first steps, his first gleams of intelligence, and all that. Such things are not in my line, you know. Of course I think your boy very funny, very cunning, very—anything you like to fancy him, but forgive me if I am glad he does not belong to me. There, don't you see now that marriage is not my vocation, so please give up speaking to me about matrimony."

"As you will," said Giselle, sadly, "but you will give great pain to a good man whose heart is wholly yours."

"I did not ask for his heart. Such gifts are exasperating. One does not know what to do with them. Can't he—poor Fred—love me as I love him, and leave me my liberty?"

"Your liberty!" exclaimed Giselle; "liberty to ruin your life, that's what it will be."

"Really, one would suppose there was only one kind of existence in your eyes—this life of your own, Giselle. To leave one cage to be shut up in another—that is the fate of many birds, I know, but there are others who like to use their wings to soar into the air. I like that expression. Come, little mother, tell me right out, plainly, that your lot is the only one in this world that ought to be envied by a woman."

Giselle answered with a strange smile:

"You seem astonished that I adore my baby; but since he came great things seem to have been revealed to me. When I hold him to my breast I seem to understand, as I never did before, duty and marriage, family ties and sorrows, life itself, in short, its griefs and joys. You can not understand that now, but you will some day. You, too, will gaze upon the horizon as I do. I am ready to suffer; I am ready for self-sacrifice. I know now whither my life leads me. I am led, as it were, by this little being, who seemed to me at first only a doll, for whom I was embroidering caps and dresses. You ask whether I am satisfied with my lot in life. Yes, I am, thanks to this guide, this guardian angel, thanks to my precious Enguerrand."

Jacqueline listened, stupefied, to this unexpected outburst, so unlike her cousin's usual language; but the charm was broken by its ending with the tremendously long name of Enguerrand, which always made her laugh, it was in such perfect harmony with the feudal pretensions of the Monredons and the Talbruns.

"How solemn and eloquent and obscure you are, my dear," she answered. "You speak like a sibyl. But one thing I see, and that is that you are not so perfectly happy as you would have us believe, seeing

that you feel the need of consolations. Then, why do you wish me to follow your example?"

"Fred is not Monsieur de Talbrun," said the young wife, for the moment forgetting herself.

"Do you mean to say—"

"I meant nothing, except that if you married Fred you would have had the advantage of first knowing him."

"Ah! that's your fixed idea. But I am getting to know Monsieur de
Cymier pretty well."

"You have betrayed yourself," cried Giselle, with indignation. "Monsieur de Cymier!"

"Monsieur de Cymier is coming to our house on Saturday evening, and I must get up a Spanish song that Madame Strahlberg has taught me, to charm his ears and those of other people. Oh! I can do it very well. Won't you come and hear me play the castanets, if Monsieur Enguerrand can spare you? There is a young Polish pianist who is to play our accompaniment. Ah, there is nothing like a Polish pianist to play Chopin! He is charming, poor young man! an exile, and in poverty; but he is cared for by those ladies, who take him everywhere. That is the sort of life I should like—the life of Madame Strahlberg—to be a young widow, free to do what I pleased."

"She may be a widow—but some say she is divorced."

"Oh! is it you who repeat such naughty scandals, Giselle? Where shall charity take refuge in this world if not in your heart? I am going—your seriousness may be catching. Kiss me before I go."

"No," said Madame de Talbrun, turning her head away.

After this she asked herself whether she ought not to discourage Fred. She could not resolve on doing so, yet she could not tell him what was false; but by eluding the truth with that ability which kind-hearted women can always show when they try to avoid inflicting pain, she succeeded in leaving the young man hope enough to stimulate his ambition.

CHAPTER XI

FRED ASKS A QUESTION

Time, whatever may be said of it by the calendars, is not to be measured by days, weeks, and months in all cases; expectation, hope, happiness and grief have very different ways of counting hours, and we know from our own experience that some are as short as a minute, and others as long as a century. The love or the suffering of those who can tell just how long they have suffered, or just how long they have been in love, is only moderate and reasonable.

Madame d'Argy found the two lonely years she passed awaiting the return of her son, who was winning his promotion to the rank of ensign, so long, that it seemed to her as if they never would come to an end. She had given a reluctant consent to his notion of adopting the navy as a profession, thinking that perhaps, after all, there might be no harm in allowing her dear boy to pass the most dangerous period of his youth under strict discipline, but she could not be patient forever! She idolized her son too much to be resigned to living without him; she felt that he was hers no longer. Either he was at sea or at Toulon, where she could very rarely join him, being detained at Lizerolles by the necessity of looking after their property. With what eagerness she awaited his promotion, which she did not doubt was all the Nailles waited for to give their consent to the marriage; of their happy half-consent she hastened to remind them in a note which announced the new grade to which he had been promoted. Her indignation was great on finding that her formal request received no decided answer; but, as her first object was Fred's happiness, she placed the reply she had received in its most favorable light when she forwarded it to the person whom it most concerned. She did this in all honesty. She was not willing to admit that she was being put off with excuses; still less could she believe in a refusal.

She accepted the excuse that M. de Nailles gave for returning no decided answer, viz.: that "Jacqueline was too young," though she answered him with some vehemence: "Fred was born when I was eighteen." But she had to accept it. Her ensign would have to pass a few more months on the coast of Senegal, a few more months which were made shorter by the encouragement forwarded to him by

his mother, who was careful to send him everything she could find out that seemed to be, or that she imagined might be, in his favor; she underlined such things and commented upon them, so as to make the faintest hypothesis seem a certainty. Sometimes she did not even wait for the post. Fred would find, on putting in at some post, a cablegram: "Good news," or "All goes well," and he would be beside himself with joy and excitement until, on receiving his poor, dear mother's next letter, he found out on how slight a foundation her assurance had been founded.

Sometimes, she wrote him disagreeable things about Jacqueline, as if she would like to disenchant him, and then he said to himself: "By this, I am to understand that my affairs are not going on well; I still count for little, notwithstanding my promotion." Ah! if he could only have had, so near the beginning of his career, any opportunity of distinguishing himself! No brilliant deed would have been too hard for him. He would have scaled the very skies. Alas! he had had no chance to win distinction, he had only had to follow in the beaten track of ordinary duty; he had encountered no glorious perils, though at St. Louis he had come very near leaving his bones, but it was only a case of typhoid fever. This fever, however, brought about a scene between M. de Nailles and his mother.

"When," she cried, with all the fury of a lioness, "do you expect to come to the conclusion that my son is a suitable match for Jacqueline? Do you imagine that I shall let him wait till he is a post-captain to satisfy the requirements of Mademoiselle your daughter—provided he does not die in a hospital? Do you think that I shall be willing to go on living— if you can call it living!—all alone and in continual apprehension? Why do you let him keep on in uncertainty? You know his worth, and you know that with him Jacqueline would be happy. Instead of that—instead of saying once for all to this young man, who is more in love with her than any other man will ever be: 'There, take her, I give her to you,' which would be the straightforward, sensible way, you go on encouraging the caprices of a child who will end by wasting, in the life you are permitting her to lead, all the good qualities she has and keeping nothing but the bad ones."

"Mon Dieu! I can't see that Jacqueline leads a life like that!" said M. de Nailles, who felt that he must say something.

"You don't see, you don't see! How can any one see who won't open his eyes? My poor friend, just look for once at what is going on around you, under your own roof—"

"Jacqueline is devoted to music," said her father, good-humoredly.
Madame d'Argy in her heart thought he was losing his mind.

And in truth he was growing older day by day, becoming more and more anxious, more and more absorbed in the great struggle—not for life; that might exhaust a man, but at least it was energetic and noble—but for superfluous wealth, for vanity, for luxury, which, for his own part, he cared nothing for, and which he purchased dearly, spurred on to exertion by those near to him, who insisted on extravagances.

"Oh! yes, Jacqueline, I know, is devoted to music," went on Madame d'Argy, with an air of extreme disapproval, "too much so! And when she is able to sing like Madame Strahlberg, what good will it do her? Even now I see more than one little thing about her that needs to be reformed. How can she escape spoiling in that crowd of Slavs and Yankees, people of no position probably in their own countries, with whom you permit her to associate? People nowadays are so imprudent about acquaintances! To be a foreigner is a passport into society. Just think what her poor mother would have said to the bad manners she is adopting from all parts of the globe? My poor, dear Adelaide! She was a genuine Frenchwoman of the old type; there are not many such left now. Ah!" continued Madame d'Argy, without any apparent connection with her subject, "Monsieur de Talbrun's mother, if he had one, would be truly happy to see him married to Giselle!"

"But," faltered M. de Nailles, struck by the truth of some of these remarks, "I make no opposition—quite the contrary—I have spoken several times about your son, but I was not listened to!"

"What can she say against Fred?"

"Nothing. She is very fond of him, that you know as well as I do. But those childish attachments do not necessarily lead to love and marriage."

"Friendship on her side might be enough," said Madame d'Argy, in the tone of a woman who had never known more than that in marriage. "My poor Fred has enthusiasm and all that, enough for two. And in time she will be madly in love with him—she must! It is impossible it should be otherwise."

"Very good, persuade her yourself if you can; but Jacqueline has a pretty strong will of her own."

Jacqueline's will was a reality, though the ideas of M. de Nailles may have been illusion.

"And my wife, too!" resumed the Baron, after a long sigh. "I don't know how it is, but Jacqueline, as she has grown up, has become like an unbroken colt, and those two, who were once all in all to each other, are now seldom of one mind. How am I to act when their two wills cross mine, as they often do? I have so many things on my mind. There are times when—"

"Yes, one can see that. You don't seem to know where you are. And do you think that the disposition she shows to act, as you say, like an unbroken colt, is nothing to me? Do you think I am quite satisfied with my son's choice? I could have wished that he had chosen for his wife— but what is the use of saying what I wished? The important thing is that he should be happy in his own way. Besides, I dare say the young thing will calm down of her own accord. Her mother's daughter must be good at heart. All will come right when she is removed from a circle which is doing her no good; it is injuring her in people's opinion already, you must know. And how will it be by-and-bye? I hear people saying everywhere: 'How can the Nailles let that young girl associate so much with foreigners?' You say they are old school-fellows, they went to the 'cours' together. But see if Madame d'Etaples and Madame Ray, under the same pretext, let Isabelle and Yvonne associate with the Odinskas! As to that foolish woman, Madame d'Avrigny, she goes to their house to look up recruits for her operettas, and Madame Strahlberg has one advantage over regular artists, there is no call to pay her. That is the reason why she invites her. Besides which, she won't find it so easy to marry Dolly."

"Oh! there are several reasons for that," said the Baron, who could see the mote in his neighbor's eye, "Mademoiselle d'Avrigny has led a life so very worldly ever since she was a child, so madly fast and lively, that suitors are afraid of her. Jacqueline, thank heaven, has never yet been in what is called the world. She only visits those with whom she is on terms of intimacy."

"An intimacy which includes all Paris," said Madame d'Argy, raising her eyes to heaven. "If she does not go to great balls, it is only because her stepmother is bored by them. But with that exception it seems to me she is allowed to do anything. I don't see the difference. But, to be sure, if Jacqueline is not for us, you have a right to say that I am interfering in what does not concern me."

"Not at all," said the unfortunate father, "I feel how much I ought to value your advice, and an alliance with your family would please me more than anything."

He said the truth, for he was disturbed by seeing M. de Cymier so slow in making his proposals, and he was also aware that young girls in our day are less sought for in marriage than they used to be. His friend Wermant, rich as he was, had had some trouble in capturing for Berthe a fellow of no account in the Faubourg St. Germain, and the prize was not much to be envied. He was a young man without brains and without a sou, who enjoyed so little consideration among his own people that his wife had not been received as she expected, and no one spoke of Madame de Belvan without adding: "You know, that little Wermant, daughter of the 'agent de change'."

Of course, Jacqueline had the advantage of good birth over Berthe, but how great was her inferiority in point of fortune! M. de Nailles sometimes confided these perplexities to his wife, without, however, receiving much comfort from her. Nor did the Baroness confess to her husband all her own fears. In secret she often asked herself, with the keen insight of a woman of the world well trained in artifice and who possessed a thorough knowledge of mankind, whether there might not be women capable of using a young girl so as to put the world on a wrong scent; whether, in other words, Madame de Villegry did not talk everywhere about M. de Cymier's attentions to Mademoiselle de Nailles in order to conceal his relations to herself? Madame de Villegry indeed cared little about standing well in public opinion, but rather the contrary; she would not, however, for the world have been willing, by too openly favoring one man among her admirers, to run the risk of putting the rest to flight. No doubt M. de Cymier was most assiduous in his attendance on the receptions and dances at Madame de Nailles's, but he was there always at the same time as Madame de Villegry herself. They would hold whispered conferences in corners, which might possibly have been about Jacqueline, but there was no proof that they were so, except what Madame de Villegry herself said. "At any rate," thought Madame de Nailles, "if Fred comes forward as a suitor it may stimulate Monsieur de Cymier. There are men who put off taking a decisive step till the last moment, and are only to be spurred up by competition."

So every opportunity was given to Fred to talk freely with Jacqueline when he returned to Paris. By this time he wore two gold-lace stripes upon his sleeve. But Jacqueline avoided any tete-a-tete with him as if she understood the danger that awaited her. She gave him no chance of speaking alone with her. She was friendly—nay, sometimes affectionate when other people were near them, but more commonly she teased him, bewildered him, excited him. After an hour or two spent in her society he would go home sometimes savage, sometimes desponding, to ponder in his own room, and in his own heart, what interpretation he ought to put upon the things that she had said to him.

The more he thought, the less he understood. He would not have confided in his mother for the world; she might have cast blame on Jacqueline. Besides her, he had no one who could receive his

confidences, who would bear with his perplexities, who could assist in delivering him from the network of hopes and fears in which, after every interview with Jacqueline, he seemed to himself to become more and more entangled.

At last, however, at one of the soirees given every fortnight by Madame de Nailles, he succeeded in gaining her attention.

"Give me this quadrille," he said to her.

And, as she could not well refuse, he added, as soon as she had taken his arm: "We will not dance, and I defy you to escape me."

"This is treason!" she cried, somewhat angrily. "We are not here to talk; I can almost guess beforehand what you have to say, and—"

But he had made her sit down in the recess of that bow-window which had been called the young girls' corner years ago. He stood before her, preventing her escape, and half-laughing, though he was deeply moved.

"Since you have guessed what I wanted to say, answer me quickly."

"Must I? Must I, really? Why didn't you ask my father to do your commission? It is so horribly disagreeable to do these things for one's self."

"That depends upon what the things may be that have to be said. I should think it ought to be very agreeable to pronounce the word on which the happiness of a whole life is to depend."

"Oh! what a grand phrase! As if I could be essential to anybody's happiness? You can't make me believe that!"

"You are mistaken. You are indispensable to mine."

"There! my declaration has been made," thought Fred, much relieved that it was over, for he had been afraid to pronounce the decisive words.

"Well, if I thought that were true, I should be very sorry," said Jacqueline, no longer smiling, but looking down fixedly at the pointed toe of her little slipper; "because—"

She stopped suddenly. Her face flushed red.

"I don't know how to explain to you;" she said.

"Explain nothing," pleaded Fred; "all I ask is Yes, nothing more. There is nothing else I care for."

She raised her head coldly and haughtily, yet her voice trembled as she said:

"You will force me to say it? Then, no! No!" she repeated, as if to reaffirm her refusal.

Then, alarmed by Fred's silence, and above all by his looks, he who had seemed so gay shortly before and whose face now showed an anguish such as she had never yet seen on the face of man, she added:

"Oh, forgive me!—Forgive me," she repeated in a lower voice, holding out her hand. He did not take it.

"You love some one else?" he asked, through his clenched teeth.

She opened her fan and affected to examine attentively the pink landscape painted on it to match her dress.

"Why should you think so? I wish to be free."

"Free? Are you free? Is a woman ever free?"

Jacqueline shook her head, as if expressing vague dissent.

"Free at least to see a little of the world," she said, "to choose, to use my wings, in short—"

And she moved her slender arms with an audacious gesture which had nothing in common with the flight of that mystic dove upon which she had meditated when holding the card given her by Giselle.

"Free to prefer some other man," said Fred, who held fast to his idea with the tenacity of jealousy.

"Ah! that is different. Supposing there were anyone whom I liked—not more, but differently from the way I like you—it is possible. But you spoke of loving!"

"Your distinctions are too subtle," said Fred.

"Because, much as it seems to astonish you, I am quite capable of seeing the difference," said Jacqueline, with the look and the accent of a person who has had large experience. "I have loved once—a long time ago, a very long time ago, a thousand years and more. Yes, I loved some one, as perhaps you love me, and I suffered more than you will ever suffer. It is ended; it is over—I think it is over forever."

"How foolish! At your age!"

"Yes, that kind of love is ended for me. Others may please me, others do please me, as you said, but it is not the same thing. Would you like to see the man I once loved?" asked Jacqueline, impelled by a juvenile desire to exhibit her experience, and also aware instinctively that to cast a scrap of past history to the curious sometimes turns off their attention on another track. "He is near us now," she added.

And while Fred's angry eyes, under his frowning brows, were wandering all round the salon, she pointed to Hubert Marien with a movement of her fan.

Marien was looking on at the dancing, with his old smile, not so brilliant now as it had been. He now only smiled at beauty collectively, which was well represented that evening in Madame de Nailles's salon. Young girls 'en masse' continued to delight him, but his admiration as an artist became less and less personal.

He had grown stout, his hair and beard were getting gray; he was interested no longer in Savonarola, having obtained, thanks to his picture, the medal of honor, and the Institute some months since had opened its doors to him.

"Marien? You are laughing at me!" cried Fred.

"It is simply the truth."

Some magnetic influence at that moment caused the painter to turn his eyes toward the spot where they were talking.

"We were speaking of you," said Jacqueline.

And her tone was so singular that he dared not ask what they were saying. With humility which had in it a certain touch of bitterness he said, still smiling:

"You might find something better to do than to talk good or evil of a poor fellow who counts now for nothing."

"Counts for nothing! A fellow to be pitied!" cried Fred, "a man who has just been elected to the Institute—you are hard to satisfy!"

Jacqueline sat looking at him like a young sorceress engaged in sticking pins into the heart of a waxen figure of her enemy. She never missed an opportunity of showing her implacable dislike of him.

She turned to Fred: "What I was telling you," she said, "I am quite willing to repeat in his presence. The thing has lost its importance now that he has become more indifferent to me than any other man in the world."

She stopped, hoping that Marien had understood what she was saying and that he resented the humiliating avowal from her own lips that her childish love was now only a memory.

"If that is the only confession you have to make to me," said Fred, who had almost recovered his composure, "I can put up with my former rival, and I pass a sponge over all that has happened in your long past of seventeen years and a half, Jacqueline. Tell me only that at present you like no one better than me."

She smiled a half-smile, but he did not see it. She made no answer.

"Is he here, too—like the other!" he asked, sternly.

And she saw his restless eyes turn for an instant to the conservatory, where Madame de Villegry, leaning back in her armchair, and Gerard de Cymier, on a low seat almost at her feet, were carrying on their platonic flirtation.

"Oh! you must not think of quarrelling with him," cried Jacqueline, frightened at the look Fred fastened on De Cymier.

"No, it would be of no use. I shall go out to Tonquin, that's all."

"Fred! You are not serious."

"You will see whether I am not serious. At this very moment I know a man who will be glad to exchange with me."

"What! go and get yourself killed at Tonquin for a foolish little girl like me, who is very, very fond of you, but hardly knows her own mind. It would be absurd!"

"People are not always killed at Tonquin, but I must have new interests, something to divert my mind from—"

"Fred! my dear Fred"—Jacqueline had suddenly become almost tender, almost suppliant. "Your mother! Think of your mother! What would she say? Oh, my God!"

"My mother must be allowed to think that I love my profession better than all else. But, Jacqueline," continued the poor fellow, clinging in despair to the very smallest hope, as a drowning man catches at a straw, "if you do not, as you said, know exactly your own mind—if you would like to question your own heart—I would wait—"

Jacqueline was biting the end of her fan—a conflict was taking place within her breast. But to certain temperaments there is pleasure in breaking a chain or in leaping a barrier; she said:

"Fred, I am too much your friend to deceive you."

At that moment M. de Cymier came toward them with his air of assurance:
"Mademoiselle, you forget that you promised me this waltz," he said.

"No, I never forget anything," she answered, rising.

Fred detained her an instant, saying, in a low voice:

"Forgive me. This moment, Jacqueline, is decisive. I must have an answer. I never shall speak to you again of my sorrow. But decide now— on the spot. Is all ended between us?"

"Not our old friendship, Fred," said Jacqueline, tears rising in her eyes.

"So be it, then, if you so will it. But our friendship never will show itself unless you are in need of friendship, and then only with the discretion that your present attitude toward me has imposed."

"Are you ready, Mademoiselle," said Gerard, who, to allow them to end their conversation, had obligingly turned his attention to some madrigals that Colette Odinska was laughing over.

Jacqueline shook her head resolutely, though at that moment her heart felt as if it were in a vise, and the moisture in her eyes looked like anything but a refusal. Then, without giving herself time for further thought, she whirled away into the dance with M. de Cymier. It was over, she had flung to the winds her chance for happiness, and wounded a heart more cruelly than Hubert Marien had ever wounded hers. The most horrible thing in this unending warfare we call love is that we too often repay to those who love us the harm that has been done us by those whom we have loved. The seeds of mistrust and perversity sown by one man or by one woman bear fruit to be gathered by some one else.

CHAPTER XII

A COMEDY AND A TRAGEDY

The departure of Frederic d'Argy for Tonquin occasioned a break in the intercourse between his mother and the family of De Nailles. The wails of Hecuba were nothing to the lamentations of poor Madame d'Argy; the unreasonableness of her wrath and the exaggeration in her reproaches hindered even Jacqueline from feeling all the remorse she might otherwise have felt for her share in Fred's departure. She told her father, who the first time in her life addressed her with some severity, that she

could not be expected to love all the young men who might threaten to go to the wars, or to fling themselves from fourth-story windows, for her sake.

"It was very indelicate and inconsiderate of Fred to tell any one that it was my fault that he was doing anything so foolish," she said, with true feminine deceit, "but he has taken the very worst possible means to make me care for him. Everybody has too much to say about this matter which concerns only him and me. Even Giselle thought proper to write me a sermon!"

And she gave vent to her feelings in an exclamation of three syllables that she had learned from the Odinskas, which meant: "I don't care!" (je m'en moque).

But this was not true. She cared very much for Giselle's good opinion, and for Madame d'Argy's friendship. She suffered much in her secret heart at the thought of having given so much pain to Fred. She guessed how deep it was by the step to which it had driven him. But there was in her secret soul something more than all the rest, it was a puerile, but delicious satisfaction in feeling her own importance, in having been able to exercise an influence over one heart which might possibly extend to that of M. de Cymier. She thought he might be gratified by knowing that she had driven a young man to despair, if he guessed for whose sake she had been so cruel. He knew it, of course. Madame de Nailles took care that he should not be ignorant of it, and the pleasure he took in such a proof of his power over a young heart was not unlike that pleasure Jacqueline experienced in her coquetry—which crushed her better feelings. He felt proud of the sacrifice this beautiful girl had made for his sake, though he did not consider himself thereby committed to any decision, only he felt more attached to her than ever. Ever since the day when Madame de Villegry had first introduced him at the house of Madame de Nailles, he had had great pleasure in going there. The daughter of the house was more and more to his taste, but his liking for her was not such as to carry him beyond prudence. "If I chose," he would say to himself after every time he met her, "if I chose I could own that jewel. I have only to stretch out my hand and have it given me." And the next morning, after going to sleep full of that pleasant thought, he would awake glad to find that he was still as free as ever, and able to carry on a flirtation with a woman of the world, which imposed no obligations upon him, and yet at the same time make love to a young girl whom he would gladly have married but for certain reports which were beginning to circulate among men of business concerning the financial position of M. de Nailles.

They said that he was withdrawing money from secure investments to repair (or to increase) considerable losses made by speculation, and that he operated recklessly on the Bourse. These rumors had already withdrawn Marcel d'Etaples from the list of his daughter's suitors. The young fellow was a captain of Hussars, who had no scruple in declaring the reason of his giving up his interest in the young lady. Gerard de Cymier, more prudent, waited and watched, thinking it would be quite time enough to go to the bottom of things when he found himself called upon to make a decision, and greatly interested meantime in the daily increase of Jacqueline's beauty. It was evident she cared for him. After all, it was doing the little thing no harm to let her live on in the intoxication of vanity and hope, and to give her something to dwell upon in her innocent dreams. Never did Gerard allow himself to overstep the line he had marked out for himself; a glance, a slight pressure of the hand, which might have been intentional, or have meant nothing, a few ambiguous words in which an active imagination might find something to dream about, a certain way of passing his arm round her slight waist which would have meant much had it not been done in public to the sound of music, were all the proofs the young diplomatist had ever given of an attraction that was real so far as consisted with his complete selfishness, joined to his professional prudence, and that systematic habit of taking up fancies at any time for anything, which prevents each fancy as it occurs from ripening into passion.

He alluded indirectly to Fred's departure in a way that turned it into ridicule. While playing a game of 'boston' he whispered into Jacqueline's ear something about the old-fashionedness and stupidity of Paul and Virginia, and his opinion of "calf-love," as the English call an early attachment, and something about the right of every girl to know a suitor long before she consents to marry him. He said he thought that the days of courtship must be the most delightful in the life of a woman, and that a man who wished to cut them short was a fellow without delicacy or discretion!

From this Jacqueline drew the conclusion that he was not willing to resemble such a fellow, and was more and more persuaded that there was tenderness in the way he pressed her waist, and that his voice had the softness of a caress when he spoke to her. He made many inquiries as to what she liked and what she wished for in the future, as if his great object in all things was to anticipate her wishes. As for his intimacy with Madame de Villegry, Jacqueline thought nothing of it, notwithstanding her habitual mistrust of those she called old women. In the first place, Madame de Villegry was her own mistress, nothing hindered them from having been married long ago had they wished it; besides, had not Madame de Villegry brought the young man to their house and let every one see, even Jacqueline herself, what was her object in doing so? In this matter she was their ally, a most zealous and kind ally, for she was continually advising her young friend as to what was most becoming to her and how she

might make herself most attractive to men in general, with little covert allusions to the particular tastes of Gerard, which she said she knew as well as if he had been her brother.

All this was lightly insinuated, but never insisted upon, with the tact which stood Madame de Villegry in stead of talent, and which had enabled her to perform some marvellous feats upon the tight-rope without losing her balance completely. She, too, made fun of the tragic determination of Fred, which all those who composed the society of the De Nailles had been made aware of by the indiscreet lamentations of Madame d'Argy.

"Is not Jacqueline fortunate?" cried. Colette Odinska, who, herself always on a high horse, looked on love in its tragic aspect, and would have liked to resemble Marie Stuart as much as she could, "is she not fortunate? She has had a man who has gone abroad to get himself killed —and all for her!"

Colette imagined herself under the same circumstances, making the most of a slain lover, with a crape veil covering her fair hair, her mourning copied from that of her divorced sister, who wore her weeds so charmingly, but who was getting rather tired of a single life.

As for Miss Kate Sparks and Miss Nora, they could not understand why the breaking of half-a-dozen hearts should not be the prelude to every marriage. That, they said with much conviction, was always the case in America, and a girl was thought all the more of who had done so.

Jacqueline, however, thought more than was reasonable about the dangers that the friend of her childhood was going to encounter through her fault. Fred's departure would have lent him a certain prestige, had not a powerful new interest stepped in to divert her thoughts. Madame d'Avrigny was getting up her annual private theatricals, and wanted Jacqueline to take the principal part in the play, saying that she ought to put her lessons in elocution to some use. The piece chosen was to illustrate a proverb, and was entirely new. It was as unexceptionable as it was amusing; the most severe critic could have found no fault with its morality or with its moral, which turned on the eagerness displayed by young girls nowadays to obtain diplomas. Scylla and Charybdis was its name. Its story was that of a young bride, who, thinking to please a husband, a stupid and ignorant man, was trying to obtain in secret a high place in the examination at the Sorbonne—'un brevet superieur'. The husband, disquieted by the mystery, is at first suspicious, then jealous, and then is overwhelmed with humiliation when he discovers that his wife knows more of everything than himself. He ends by imploring her to give up her higher education if she wishes to please him. The little play had all the modern loveliness and grace which Octave Feuillet alone can give, and it contained a lesson from which any one might profit; which was by no means always the case with Madame d'Avrigny's plays, which too often were full of risky allusions, of critical situations, and the like; likely, in short, to "sail too close to the wind," as Fred had once described them. But Madame d'Avrigny's prime object was the amusement of society, and society finds pleasure in things which, if innocence understood them, would put her to the blush. This play, however, was an exception. There had been very little to cut out this time. Madame de Nailles had been asked to take the mother's part, but she declined, not caring to act such a character in a house where years before in all her glory she had made a sensation as a young coquette. So Madame d'Avrigny had to take the part herself, not sorry to be able to superintend everything on the stage, and to prompt Dolly, if necessary—Dolly, who had but four words to say, which she always forgot, but who looked lovely in a little cap as a femme de chambre.

People had been surprised that M. de Cymier should have asked for the part of the husband, a local magistrate, stiff and self-important, whom everybody laughed at. Jacqueline alone knew why he had chosen it: it would give him the opportunity of giving her two kisses. Of course those kisses were to be reserved for the representation, but whether intentionally or otherwise, the young husband ventured upon them at every rehearsal, in spite of the general outcry—not, however, very much in earnest, for it is well understood that in private theatricals certain liberties may be allowed, and M. de Cymier had never been remarkable for reserve when he acted at the clubs, where the female parts were taken by ladies from the smaller theatres. In this school he had acquired some reputation as an amateur actor. "Besides," as he remarked on making his apology, "we shall do it very awkwardly upon the stage if we are not allowed to practise it beforehand." Jacqueline burst out laughing, and did not make much show of opposition. To play the part of his wife, to hear him say to her, to respond with the affectionate and familiar 'toi', was so amusing! It was droll to see her cut out her husband in chemistry, history, and grammar, and make him confound La Fontaine with Corneille. She had such a little air while doing it! And at the close, when he said to her: "If I give you a pony to-morrow, and a good hearty kiss this very minute, shall you be willing to give up getting that degree?" she responded, with such gusto: "Indeed, I shall!" and her manner was so eager, so boyish, so full of fun, that she was wildly applauded, while Gerard embraced her as heartily as he liked, to make up to himself for her having had, as his wife, the upper hand.

All this kissing threw him rather off his balance, and he might soon have sealed his fate, had not a

very sad event occurred, which restored his self-possession.

The dress rehearsal was to take place one bright spring day at about four o'clock in the afternoon. A large number of guests was assembled at the house of Madame d'Avrigny. The performance had been much talked about beforehand in society. The beauty, the singing, and the histrionic powers of the principal actress had been everywhere extolled. Fully conscious of what was expected of her, and eager to do herself credit in every way, Jacqueline took advantage of Madame Strahlberg's presence to run over a little song, which she was to—sing between the acts and in which she could see no meaning whatever. This little song, which, to most of the ladies present, seemed simply idiotic, made the men in the audience cry "Oh!" as if half-shocked, and then "Encore! Encore!" in a sort of frenzy. It was a so-called pastoral effusion, in which Colinette rhymed with herbette, and in which the false innocence of the eighteenth century was a cloak for much indelicate allusion.

"I never," said Jacqueline in self-defense, before she began the song, "sang anything so stupid. And that is saying much when one thinks of all the nonsensical words that people set to music! It's a marvel how any one can like this stuff. Do tell me what there is in it?" she added, turning to Gerard, who was charmed by her ignorance.

Standing beside the grand piano, with her arms waving as she sang, repeating, by the expression of her eyes, the question she had asked and to which she had received no answer, she was singing the verses she considered nonsense with as much point as if she had understood them, thanks to the hints given her by Madame Strahlberg, who was playing her accompaniment, when the entrance of a servant, who pronounced her name aloud, made a sudden interruption. "Mademoiselle de Nailles is wanted at home at once. Modeste has come for her."

Madame d'Avrigny went out to say to the old servant: "She can not possibly go home with you! It is only half an hour since she came. The rehearsal is just beginning."

But something Modeste said in answer made her give a little cry, full of consternation. She came quickly back, and going up to Jacqueline:

"My dear," she said, "you must go home at once—there is bad news, your father is ill."

"Ill?"

The solemnity of Madame d'Avrigny's voice, the pity in her expression, the affection with which she spoke and above all her total indifference to the fate of her rehearsal, frightened Jacqueline. She rushed away, not waiting to say good-by, leaving behind her a general murmur of "Poor thing!" while Madame d'Avrigny, recovering from her first shock, was already beginning to wonder—her instincts as an impresario coming once more to the front—whether the leading part might not be taken by Isabelle Ray. She would have to send out two hundred cards, at least, and put off her play for another fortnight. What a pity! It seemed as if misfortunes always happened just so as to interfere with pleasures.

The fiacre which had brought Modeste was at the door. The old nurse helped her young lady into it.

"What has happened to papa?" cried Jacqueline, impetuously.

There was something horrible in this sudden transition from gay excitement to the sharpest anxiety.

"Nothing—that is to say—he is very sick. Don't tremble like that, my darling-courage!" stammered Modeste, who was frightened by her agitation.

"He was taken sick, you say. Where? How happened it?"

"In his study. Pierre had just brought him his letters. We thought we heard a noise as if a chair had been thrown down, and a sort of cry. I ran in to see. He was lying at full length on the floor."

"And now? How is he now?"

"We did what we could for him. Madame came back. He is lying on his bed."

Modeste covered her face with her hands.

"You have not told me all. What else?"

"Mon Dieu! you knew your poor father had heart disease. The last time the doctor saw him he thought his legs had swelled—"

"Had!" Jacqueline heard only that one word. It meant that the life of her father was a thing of the past. Hardly waiting till the fiacre could be stopped, she sprang out, rushed into the house, opened the

door of her father's chamber, pushing aside a servant who tried to stop her, and fell upon her knees beside the bed where lay the body of her father, white and rigid.

"Papa! My poor dear—dear papa!"

The hand she pressed to her lips was as cold as ice. She raised her frightened eyes to the face over which the great change from life to death had passed. "What does it mean?" Jacqueline had never looked on death before, but she knew this was not sleep.

"Oh, speak to me, papa! It is I—it is Jacqueline!"

Her stepmother tried to raise her—tried to fold her in her arms.

"Let me alone!" she cried with horror.

It seemed to her as if her father, where he was now, so far from her, so far from everything, might have the power to look into human hearts, and know the perfidy he had known nothing of when he was living. He might see in her own heart, too, her great despair. All else seemed small and of no consequence when death was present.

Oh! why had she not been a better daughter, more loving, more devoted? why had she ever cared for anything but to make him happy?

She sobbed aloud, while Madame de Nailles, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, stood at the foot of the bed, and the doctor, too, was near, whispering to some one whom Jacqueline at first had not perceived—the friend of the family, Hubert Marien.

Marien there? Was it not natural that, so intimate as he had always been with the dead man, he should have hastened to offer his services to the widow?

Jacqueline flung herself upon her father's corpse, as if to protect it from profanation. She had an impulse to bear it away with her to some desert spot where she alone could have wept over it.

She lay thus a long time, beside herself with grief.

The flowers which covered the bed and lay scattered on the floor, gave a festal appearance to the death-chamber. They had been purchased for a fete, but circumstances had changed their destination. That evening there was to have been a reception in the house of M. de Nailles, but the unexpected guest that comes without an invitation had arrived before the music and the dancers.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORM BREAKS

Monsieur de Nailles was dead, struck down suddenly by what is called indefinitely heart-failure. The trouble in that organ from which he had long suffered had brought on what might have been long foreseen, and yet every one seemed, stupefied by the event. It came upon them like a thunderbolt. It often happens so when people who are really ill persist in doing all that may be done with safety by other persons. They persuaded themselves, and those about them are easily persuaded, that small remedies will prolong indefinitely a state of things which is precarious to the last degree. Friends are ready to believe, when the sufferer complains that his work is too hard for him, that he thinks too much of his ailments and that he exaggerates trifles to which they are well accustomed, but which are best known to him alone. When M. de Nailles, several weeks before his death, had asked to be excused and to stay at home instead of attending some large gathering, his wife, and even Jacqueline, would try to convince him that a little amusement would be good for him; they were unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed, prescribed for him by the doctors, who had been unanimous that he must "put down the brakes," give less attention to business, avoid late hours and over-exertion of all kinds. "And, above all," said one of the lights of science whom he had consulted recently about certain feelings of faintness which were a bad symptom, "above all, you must keep yourself from mental anxiety."

How could he, when his fortune, already much impaired, hung on chances as uncertain as those in a game of roulette? What nonsense! The failure of a great financial company had brought about a crisis on the Bourse. The news of the inability of Wermant, the 'agent de change', to meet his engagements,

had completed the downfall of M. de Nailles. Not only death, but ruin, had entered that house, where, a few hours before, luxury and opulence had seemed to reign.

"We don't know whether there will be anything left for us to live upon," cried Madame de Nailles, with anguish, even while her husband's body lay in the chamber of death, and Jacqueline, kneeling beside it, wept, unwilling to receive comfort or consolation.

She turned angrily upon her stepmother and cried:

"What matter? I have no father—there is nothing else I care for."

But from that moment a dreadful thought, a thought she was ashamed of, which made her feel a monster of selfishness, rose in her mind, do what she would to hinder it. Jacqueline was sensible that she cared for something else; great as was her sense of loss, a sort of reckless curiosity seemed haunting her, while all the time she felt that her great grief ought not to give place to anything besides. "How would Gerard de Cymier behave in these circumstances?" She thought about it all one dreadful night as she and Modeste, who was telling her beads softly, sat in the faint light of the death-chamber. She thought of it at dawn, when, after one of those brief sleeps which come to the young under all conditions, she resumed with a sigh a sense of surrounding realities. Almost in the same instant she thought: "My dear father will never wake again," and "Does he love me?—does he now wish me to be his wife?— will he take me away?" The devil, which put this thought into her heart, made her eager to know the answer to these questions. He suggested how dreadful life with her stepmother would be if no means of escape were offered her. He made her foresee that her stepmother would marry again—would marry Marien. "But I shall not be there!" she cried, "I will not countenance such an infamy!" Oh, how she hoped Gerard de Cymier loved her! The hypocritical tears of Madame de Nailles disgusted her. She could not bear to have such false grief associated with her own.

Men in black, with solemn faces, came and bore away the body, no longer like the form of the father she had loved. He had gone from her forever. Pompous funeral rites, little in accordance with the crash that soon succeeded them, were superintended by Marien, who, in the absence of near relatives, took charge of everything. He seemed to be deeply affected, and behaved with all possible kindness and consideration to Jacqueline, who could not, however, bring herself to thank him, or even to look at him. She hated him with an increase of resentment, as if the soul of her dead father, who now knew the truth, had passed into her own.

Meantime, M. de Cymier took care to inform himself of the state of things. It was easy enough to do so. All Paris was talking of the shipwreck in which life and fortune had been lost by a man whose kindliness as a host at his wife's parties every one had appreciated. That was what came, people said, of striving after big dividends! The house was to be sold, with the horses, the pictures, and the furniture. What a change for his poor wife and daughter! There were others who suffered by the Wermant crash, but those were less interesting than the De Nailles. M. de Belvan found himself left by his father-in-law's failure with a wife on his hands who not only had not a sou, but who was the daughter of an 'agent de change' who had behaved dishonorably.

This was a text for dissertations on the disgrace of marrying for money; those who had done the same thing, minus the same consequences, being loudest in reprobating alliances of that kind. M. de Cymier listened attentively to such talk, looking and saying the right things, and as he heard more and more about the deplorable condition of M. de Nailles's affairs, he congratulated himself that a prudent presentiment had kept him from asking the hand of Jacqueline. He had had vague doubts as to the firm foundation of the opulence which made so charming a frame for her young beauty; it seemed to him as if she were now less beautiful than he had imagined her; the enchantment she had exercised upon him was thrown off by simple considerations of good sense. And yet he gave a long sigh of regret when he thought she was unattainable except by marriage. He, however, thanked heaven that he had not gone far enough to have compromised himself with her. The most his conscience could reproach him with was an occasional imprudence in moments of forgetfulness; no court of honor could hold him bound to declare himself her suitor. The evening that he made up his mind to this he wrote two letters, very nearly alike; one was to Madame d'Avrigny, the other to Madame de Nailles, announcing that, having received orders to join the Embassy to which he was attached at Vienna, he was about to depart at once, with great regret that he should not be able to take leave of any one. To Madame d'Avrigny he made apologies for having to give up his part in her theatricals; he entreated Madame de Nailles to accept both for herself and for Mademoiselle Jacqueline his deepest condolences and the assurance of his sympathy. The manner in which this was said was all it ought to have been, except that it might have been rather more brief. M. de Cymier said more than was necessary about his participation in their grief, because he was conscious of a total lack of sympathy. He begged the ladies would forgive him if, from feelings of delicacy and a sense of the respect due to a great sorrow, he did not, before leaving Paris, which he was about do to probably for a long time, personally present to them 'ses

hommages attristes'. Then followed a few lines in which he spoke of the pleasant recollections he should always retain of the hospitality he had enjoyed under M. de Nailles's roof, in a way that gave them clearly to understand that he had no expectation of ever entering their family on a more intimate footing.

Madame de Nailles received this letter just as she had had a conversation with a man of business, who had shown her how complete was the ruin for which in a great measure she herself was responsible. She had no longer any illusions as to her position. When the estate had been settled there would be nothing left but poverty, not only for herself, who, having brought her husband no dot, had no right to consider herself wronged by the bankruptcy, but for Jacqueline, whose fortune, derived from her mother, had suffered under her father's management (there are such men— unfaithful guardians of a child's property, but yet good fathers) in every way in which it was possible to evade the provisions of the Code intended to protect the rights of minor children. In the little salon so charmingly furnished, where never before had sorrow or sadness been discussed, Madame de Nailles poured out her complaints to her stepdaughter and insisted upon plans of strict economy, when M. de Cymier's letter was brought in.

"Read!" said the Baroness, handing the strange document to Jacqueline, after she had read it through.

Then she leaned back in her chair with a gesture which signified: "This is the last straw!" and remained motionless, apparently overwhelmed, with her face covered by one hand, but furtively watching the face of the girl so cruelly forsaken.

That face told nothing, for pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage. Jacqueline sat for some time with her eyes fixed on the decisive adieu which swept away what might have been her secret hope. The paper did not tremble in her hand, a half-smile of contempt passed over her mouth. The answer to the restless question that had intruded itself upon her in the first moments of her grief was now before her. Its promptness, its polished brutality, had given her a shock, but not the pain she had expected. Perhaps her great grief—the real, the true, the grief death brings—recovered its place in her heart, and prevented her from feeling keenly any secondary emotion. Perhaps this man, who could pay court to her in her days of happiness and disappear when the first trouble came, seemed to her not worth caring for.

She silently handed back the letter to her stepmother.

"No more than I expected," said the Baroness.

"Indeed?" replied Jacqueline with complete indifference. She wished to give no opening to any expressions of sympathy on the part of Madame de Nailles.

"Poor Madame d'Avrigny," she added, "has bad luck; all her actors seem to be leaving her."

This speech was the vain bravado of a young soldier going into action. The poor child betrayed herself to the experienced woman, trained either to detect or to practise artifice, and who found bitter amusement in watching the girl's assumed 'sang-froid'. But the mask fell off at the first touch of genuine sympathy. When Giselle, forgetful of a certain coolness between them ever since Fred's departure, came to clasp her in her arms, she showed only her true self, a girl suffering all the bitterness of a cruel, humiliating desertion. Long talks ensued between the friends, in which Jacqueline poured into Giselle's ear her sad discoveries in the past, her sorrows and anxieties in the present, and her vague plans for the future. "I must go away," she said; "I must escape somewhere; I can not go on living with Madame de Nailles—I should go mad, I should be tempted every day to upbraid her with her conduct."

Giselle made no attempt to curb an excitement which she knew would resist all she could say to calm it. She feigned agreement, hoping thereby to increase her future influence, and advised her friend to seek in a convent the refuge that she needed. But she must do nothing rashly; she should only consider it a temporary retreat whose motive was a wish to remain for a while within reach of religious consolation. In that way she would give people nothing to talk about, and her step mother could not be offended. It was never of any use to get out of a difficulty by breaking all the glass windows with a great noise, and good resolutions are made firmer by being matured in quietness. Such were the lessons Giselle herself had been taught by the Benedictine nuns, who, however deficient they might be in the higher education of women, knew at least how to bring up young girls with a view to making them good wives. Giselle illustrated this day by day in her relations to a husband as disagreeable as a husband well could be, a man of small intelligence, who was not even faithful to her. But she did not cite herself as an example. She never talked about herself, or her own difficulties.

"You are an angel of sense and goodness," sobbed Jacqueline. "I will do whatever you wish me to do."

"Count upon me—count upon all your friends," said Madame de Talbrun, tenderly.

And then, enumerating the oldest and the truest of these friends, she unluckily named Madame d'Argy. Jacqueline drew herself back at once:

"Oh, for pity's sake!" she cried, "don't mention them to me!"

Already a comparison between Fred's faithful affection and Gerard de Cymier's desertion had come into her mind, but she had refused to entertain it, declaring resolutely to herself that she never should repent her refusal. She was sore, she was angry with all men, she wished all were like Cymier or like Marien, that she might hate every one of them; she came to the conclusion in her heart of hearts that all of them, even the best, if put to the proof, would turn out selfish. She liked to think so—to believe in none of them. Thus it happened that an unexpected visit from Fred's mother, among those that she received in her first days of orphanhood, was particularly agreeable to her.

Madame d'Argy, on hearing of the death and of the ruin of M. de Nailles, was divided by two contradictory feelings. She clearly saw the hand of Providence in what had happened: her son was in the squadron on its way to attack Formosa; he was in peril from the climate, in peril from Chinese bullets, and assuredly those who had brought him into peril could not be punished too severely; on the other hand, the last mail from Tonquin had brought her one of those great joys which always incline us to be merciful. Fred had so greatly distinguished himself in a series of fights upon the river Min that he had been offered his choice between the Cross of the Legion of Honor or promotion. He told his mother now that he had quite recovered from a wound he had received which had brought him some glory, but which he assured her had done him no bodily harm, and he repeated to her what he would not tell her at first, some words of praise from Admiral Courbet of more value in his eyes than any reward.

Triumphant herself, and much moved by pity for Jacqueline, Madame d'Argy felt as if she must put an end to a rupture which could not be kept up when a great sorrow had fallen on her old friends, besides which she longed to tell every one, those who had been blind and ungrateful in particular, that Fred had proved himself a hero. So Jacqueline and her stepmother saw her arrive as if nothing had ever come between them. There were kisses and tears, and a torrent of kindly meant questions, affectionate explanations, and offers of service. But Fred's mother could not help showing her own pride and happiness to those in sorrow. They congratulated her with sadness. Madame d'Argy would have liked to think that the value of what she had lost was now made plain to Jacqueline. And if it caused her one more pang—what did it matter? He and his mother had suffered too. It was the turn of others. God was just. Resentment, and kindness, and a strange mixed feeling of forgiveness and revenge contended together in the really generous heart of Madame d'Argy, but that heart was still sore within her. Pity, however, carried the day, and had it not been for the irritating coldness of "that little hard-hearted thing," as she called Jacqueline, she would have entirely forgiven her. She never suspected that the exaggerated reserve of manner that offended her was owing to Jacqueline's dread (commendable in itself) of appearing to wish in her days of misfortune for the return of one she had rejected in the time of prosperity.

In spite of the received opinion that society abandons those who are overtaken by misfortune, all the friends of the De Nailles flocked to offer their condolences to the widow and the orphan with warm demonstrations of interest. Curiosity, a liking to witness, or to experience, emotion, the pleasure of being able to tell what has been seen and heard, to find out new facts and repeat them again to others, joined to a sort of vague, commonplace, almost intrusive pity, are sentiments, which sometimes in hours of great disaster, produce what appears to wear the look of sympathy. A fortnight after M. de Nailles's death, between the acts of Scylla and Charybdis, the principal parts in which were taken by young d'Etaples and Isabelle Ray, the company, as it ate ices, was glibly discussing the real drama which had produced in their own elegant circle much of the effect a blow has upon an ant-hill— fear, agitation, and a tumultuous rush to the scene of the disaster.

Great indignation was expressed against the man who had risked the fortune of his family in speculation. Oh! the thing had been going on for a long while. His fortune had been gradually melting away; Grandchaux was loaded down with mortgages and would bring almost nothing at a forced sale.

Everybody forgot that had M. de Nailles's speculations been successful they would have been called matters of business, conducted with great ability on a large scale. When a performer falls from the tightrope, who remembers all the times he has not failed? It is simply said that he fell from his own carelessness.

"The poor Baroness is touchingly resigned," said Madame de Villegry, with a deep sigh; "and heaven knows how many other cares she has besides the loss of money! I don't mean only the death of her

husband—and you know how much they were attached to each other—I am speaking of that unaccountable resolution of Jacqueline's."

Madame d'Avrigny here came forward with her usual equanimity which nothing disturbed, unless it were something which interfered with the success of her salon.

She was of course very sorry for her friends in trouble, but the vicissitudes that had happened to her theatricals she had more at heart.

"After all," she said, "the first act did not go off badly, did it? The musical part made up for the rest. That divine Strahlberg is ready for any emergency. How well she sang that air of 'La Petite Mariee!' It was exquisite, but I regretted Jacqueline. She was so charming in that lively little part. What a catastrophe!

What a terrible catastrophe! Were you speaking of the retreat she wishes to make in a convent? Well, I quite understand how she feels about it! I should feel the same myself. In the bewilderment of a first grief one does not care to see anything of the world. 'Mon Dieu'! youth always has these exaggerated notions. She will come back to us. Poor little thing! Of course it was no fault of hers, and I should not think of blaming Monsieur de Cymier. The exigencies of his career—but you all must own that unexpected things happen so suddenly in this life that it is enough to discourage any one who likes to open her house and provide amusement for her friends."

Every one present pitied her for the contretemps over which she had triumphed so successfully. Then she resumed, serenely:

"Don't you think that Isabelle played the part almost as well as Jacqueline? Up to the last moment I was afraid that something would go wrong. When one gets into a streak of ill-luck—but all went off to perfection, thank heaven!"

Meantime Madame Odinska was whispering to one of those who sat near her her belief that Jacqueline would never get over her father's loss. "It would not astonish me," she said, "to hear that the child, who has a noble nature, would remain in the convent and take the veil."

Any kind of heroic deed seemed natural to this foolish enthusiast, who, as a matter of fact, in her own life, had never shown any tendency to heroic virtues; her mission in life had seemed to be to spoil her daughters in every possible way, and to fling away more money than belonged to her.

"Really? Was she so very fond of her father!" asked Madame Ray, incredulously. "When he was alive, they did not seem to make much of him in his own house. Maybe this retreat is a good way of getting over a little wound to her 'amour-propre'."

"The proper thing, I think," said Madame d'Etaples, "would be for the mother and daughter to keep together, to bear the troubles before them hand in hand. Jacqueline does not seem to think much of the last wishes of the father she pretends to be so fond of. The Baroness showed me, with many tears, a letter he left joined to his will, which was written some years ago, and which now, of course, is of no value. He told mother and daughter to take care of each other and hoped they would always remain friends, loving each other for love of him. Jacqueline's conduct amazes me; it looks like ingratitude."

"Oh! she is a hard-hearted little thing! I always thought so!" said
Madame de Villegry, carelessly.

Here the rising of the curtain stopped short these discussions, which displayed so much good-nature and perspicacity. But some laid the blame on the influence of that little bigot of a Talbrun, who had secretly blown up the fire of religious enthusiasm in Jacqueline, when Madame d'Avrigny's energetic "Hush!" put an end to the discussion. It was time to come back to more immediate interests, to the play which went on in spite of wind and tide.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A mother's geese are always swans
Bathers, who exhibited themselves in all degrees of ugliness
Fred's verses were not good, but they were full of dejection
Hang out the bush, but keep no tavern

A familiarity which, had he known it, was not flattering
His sleeplessness was not the insomnia of genius
Importance in this world are as easily swept away as the sand
Natural longing, that we all have, to know the worst
Notion of her husband's having an opinion of his own
Pride supplies some sufferers with necessary courage
Seemed to enjoy themselves, or made believe they did
This unending warfare we call love
Unwilling to leave him to the repose he needed

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