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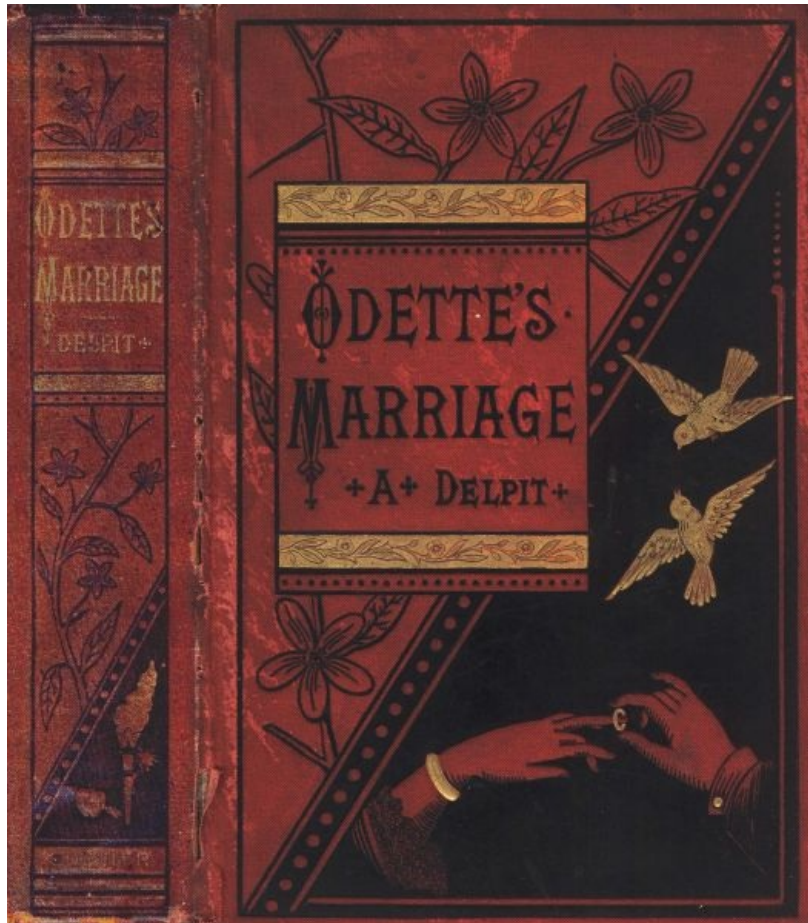
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ODETTE'S MARRIAGE;

A Novel,

FROM THE
FRENCH OF ALBERT DELPIT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE "RÉVUE DES DEUX MONDES,"

BY EMILY PRESCOTT.

FIFTH EDITION.

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1882

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ODETTE'S MARRIAGE.

Odette's Marriage.

CHAPTER I.

She rode slowly up the sandy avenue of the country house, and drew rein before the broad steps.

"Good morning, Odette!" Mme. Descoutures called to her, leaning over the balustrade. "Come up here before you go into the house. I wish to have a little talk with you."

"Is my father at home?"

"No; he has gone out for a walk, with my husband."

Odette called her groom and dismounted. Gathering the long black train of her riding habit in her hand, she quietly ascended the steps leading to the terrace facing the sea. Mme. Descoutures met her with an embrace and the exclamation:

"Heavens! how lovely you are!"

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Odette was wonderfully beautiful this morning. Her habit showed her exquisite form to the best advantage, graceful and flexible as a young willow tree. The transparent complexion was slightly flushed from her ride; the forehead, crossed by a delicate line between the eye-brows, was gilded by the warm reflection from her glorious golden hair.

A strange contrast—her eyes were dark. Large, black eyes, beaming with intelligence and cultivation, but shadowed by an expression of pride and sadness. She stood before her friend, straight and slender; her lips parted in a slight smile, and the rich splendor of her hair shining in the sunbeams. Mme. Descoutures continued:

"You are simply magnificent! But I called you to give you a scolding, and here I am paying you compliments!"

Odette sank carelessly into one of the arm-chairs on the terrace.

"My dear child, I am worried about you. Your whole character seems to be changing. Every one is speaking about it. You were always gay and happy until this Winter, while now!—I know you must find it very dull here, of course, but it was your own choice to come. You could have stayed in Paris if you had wished to. Are you listening to me?"

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"Certainly."

"Since you are here, can you not try to be a little more agreeable? You have seemed tired and languid ever since you came home from Pornic, and, what is worse, this ennui seems to be increasing every day. You have not looked in a book for a whole month. In spite of your passion for music, you have not once opened the piano this Winter. It is the same way with your painting. Your only pleasure seems to be to sit by the sea, and stare at it. Of course, it is very fashionable to admire the sea; but I really think you might exert yourself to be a little more entertaining—not with me, of course. Friends of ten years' standing never try to entertain each other—but to your father's friends and mine. Are you listening?"

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"Certainly."

"Forgive me for scolding you. I am giving you not only my own opinion, but that of others as well; Mme. Bricourt, for example. You know that Mme. Bricourt is an authority. She came to call on me yesterday while you were out driving with Paul Frager. She is very fond of you. You need not deny it. She thinks a great deal of you. According to her ideas, the education you have received is a disgrace, and there is no need to add to it by your conduct. You have never been baptized, never been to the communion, and, to tell the truth, you are a regular heathen. You do not even try to conceal it. It is your father's fault, I know. He is an atheist. So much the worse for him and for you. I am not shocked, of course, as I am somewhat advanced in my ideas, you know; but every one is not up to my standard, and many people are horrified."

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This time Odette did not even reply "Certainly." Leaning back in her chair,

she was gazing straight ahead. Far away the Mediterranean was lost to sight in a bank of crimson clouds. To the left lay Carqueirannes; its little houses, clinging to the hill, looked like a flock of black and white sheep. Now and then a group of fishermen could be seen dragging a long wet net across the beach. To the right stretched an immense pine forest, with here and there an oak tree, shining in the warm October sunbeams. Down to the right, between two small pine woods, lay the road leading from Carqueirannes to Canet, crossing the Toulon main highway farther on.

While Odette continued lost in her reverie, her friend rambled on at ease. Corinne Descoutures was a happy woman. Most incomplete natures feel at least something of their incompleteness, but Corinne firmly believes herself the most beautiful and intellectual woman in the world. Her forty years do not trouble her in the least. She makes up by art all that she has lost by nature. She paints, of course, and very ridiculously—that is, when she has too much white on one side, there will be far too much red on the other. Her eye-brows would be very fine, only they are never twice in the same place. She thinks her tall form is queenly; her aquiline nose, an imperial profile; her extraordinary leanness, an exquisite fragility. As to her dresses, they are the delight of those who meet her, and the perpetual mortification of her friends. Her friendship with Odette came about by mere chance. M. Descoutures is one of those amateur scientists, gentle, modest and inoffensive, who revolve around some celebrated man, in humble adoration.

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He had happened to become attached to Odette's father, and his wife had approved of this friendship (about the only point of agreement in their lives). The poor little man was extinguished by his wife—several inches taller than he. At first he struggled against his fate, but he soon saw that there is no use opposing a Mme. Descoutures! And, finally, just from living with her so long, he had arrived at a state of profound admiration for her.

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Their friends spoke of him as "Corinne's husband," and "Corinne's husband" never complained; always approved of everything, and clung closer and closer to the great Laviguerie, who appreciated him in return. He left his dignified wife alone as much as possible, and she never complained. Knowing that Laviguerie wished to retire to the quiet of the country to write a scientific book, she had offered him her villa near Carqueirannes, which explains how they all four happened to be assembled there at present.

In spite of her sublime self-conceit, Corinne had to confess, at last, to herself that Odette was not paying her the least attention, and, tapping her gently on the shoulder, said:

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"Odette! stop dreaming, and attend to me. I see you do not agree with me, and you are wrong."

"If it was your own opinion, my dear friend, I would accept it with pleasure; but why should I care for what Mme. Bricourt says? I know I am an atheist, a materialist, and spoiled by reading too much. People tell all sorts of stories about me. My father brought me up according to his ideas, and I thank him for it. You must take me as I am. Does my education disgrace me? I have learned by it the most thorough contempt for what is called religion. My ideas are shocking, I suppose, because I always tell the truth. I have read books that a young girl ought not to read, they say. They have educated me, so I am not a doll, like most young ladies. But I have disdainfully refused the hand of Amable Bricourt—that is my crime. His venerable mother (as he calls her) will never forgive me for having disappointed her admirable son (as she calls him)."

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Corinne replied roguishly: "Ah! you prefer Paul Frager's company."

Odette shrugged her shoulders. "M. Frager is as little to me as the admirable son himself, or any of those who have proposed to me. I shall never marry, as I have already told you a hundred times. Only I believe he is unhappy; for some reason he does not live with his mother, and I know he grieves over it. Besides that, he talks well, is very intelligent and cultivated, and has one great advantage over everybody else—he never has made love to me."

"What! he never has made love to you?"

"Never, in any way."

"He has been completely devoted to you for the past year. Why, knowing you to be here, he has come to pass the Winter at Canet, not a mile away!"

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Odette burst into a silvery laugh.

"Who knows? he may have come solely on your account, dear Corinne." But before her friend could reply, she continued: "To tell the truth, I am bored to death."

"Since your trip to Pornic!"

Mme. Descoutures said these words with some emphasis, which Odette seemed to understand, as she grew pale. A yellow lightning shot across the depths of her dark eyes. Her lips moved as if she were about to speak, but, evidently changing her mind, she sank again into her reverie, her eyes fixed on the sea.

"Have I annoyed you?" Corinne asked gently; "then let us leave this subject. Have you heard from Germaine to-day?"

The name of Germaine roused Odette again. "No," she replied. "No letter from her for three days. If I do not hear before to-night, I shall telegraph to Naples. I am afraid she is sick."

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She rose and paced up and down the terrace in great agitation. Her face expressed the deepest anxiety.

"Come, come, do not be so distressed! Germaine, perhaps, has been kept busy by her aunt; you know Mme. Rozan's health is very delicate. But see, while we have been chatting, the gentlemen have finished their stroll, and are returning by the beach."

The young girl smoothed her forehead with her hand as if to drive away the shadow lurking there, and, leaning over the balustrade, threw a kiss to the gentlemen below. Then, turning to Mme. Descoutures, with a gesture of supreme contempt, she added: "As to the venerable Mme. Bricourt, I do not care a straw for her opinion. As to Paul Frager, he is not at all in love with me. He lives solitary, away from his family, and I intend to keep him for a friend. I must go and take off my habit now. I will be back soon."

Francis Laviguerie is sixty years old. He is tall and manly looking. He stoops a little when he walks, as if the mighty intellect in his large head were too heavy a burden. His gray hair, with his keen black eyes, give him a soldierly appearance. In fact, he is a soldier. He has fought all his life for what he considers the truth. His early life was one of poverty and privation, but his abilities were soon recognized, and his thirtieth year found him professor in the College of France, proclaiming himself the disciple of Herbert Spencer, whose doctrines he strictly followed. He has long been a member of the Academy of Sciences, and, since 1867, of the French Academy also.

In private life he is firm, gentle, simple and unostentatious. His whole life has been one long devotion to science and labor. He has known sorrow of all kinds. Twice married, both wives are dead—one after three years of married life; the other, ten months, each having presented him with a daughter.

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Germaine and Odette at first were brought up together; but the friends of the philosopher noticed that he showed a great preference for Odette, the youngest, and seemed to ignore Germaine completely. In 1865 Mme. Rozan, a sister of his first wife, happening to come to Paris, begged him to give her the little Germaine—a sickly, nervous child—and he consented gladly in spite of Odette's tears and despair.

The little sisters simply worshiped each other, and during the eleven long years that they had been separated, their devoted love had suffered nothing from absence, that great enemy of human affections. They wrote to each other every day, relating every incident of their lives. They knew each other as intimately as if they had never been separated. One wrote about Vesuvius and the beautiful Adriatic; the other, about the fogs and mud of Paris. They sent volumes to each other, and each could have given the most minute descriptions of the other and her surroundings. However, an abyss separated the two sisters. Mme. Rozan, religious without being bigoted, had educated her niece in her own ideas, and it was the greatest grief of Germaine's life that Odette thought differently. By common consent they avoided the dangerous subject of religion; but Germaine never forgot to pray for her misguided sister.

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"Good morning, Corinne," said M. Laviguerie, sitting down in the chair his daughter had vacated. "Odette was with you. She did not run away from me, I hope."

"Oh, no; she simply went to her room to take off her riding-habit."

"Will you excuse me if I read this letter? It was just handed to me."

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"Certainly, sir," replied Corinne; "besides, I must retire, myself, as lunch will soon be ready, and I am not dressed for the day." Then, turning to her husband with the air of an empress addressing the meanest of her subjects: "It seems to me, sir, you delay to offer me your arm."

M. Descoutures, always very short, seemed to shrink two or three inches more, and, knocking over a camp-stool in his haste, murmured, "Pardon me, Madame, I thought—"

They always addressed each other in this formal style. The humble M. Descoutures did not remain long absent; merely the five minutes necessary to escort his wife to the door of her rooms and return. When he reappeared upon the terrace, M. Laviguerie had just finished reading his letter. He looked harassed and worried.

"Have you received any bad news, dear friend, in your letter?"

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"No bad news; still it is very annoying."

"Corinne's husband" did not seem the same man when alone with his friend. His shyness almost entirely disappeared, and he ventured to talk, taking care to disguise his ideas somewhat in apologetic phrases, wrapping them in cotton, as it were.

"I need some advice," continued Laviguerie, "and I can not do better than to turn to you. During our long friendship, I have often admired the correctness of your judgment, and your common sense, which is never at fault. Doubtless, you have sometimes wondered that I kept my eldest daughter so far away from me. It is strange, I confess, and many have been astonished at it, I suppose. I am obliged now to change this state of affairs. Mme. Rozan is dead, and Germaine writes that she is leaving Naples to come back to her father and sister."

"But I am sure, my dear Laviguerie, that this reunion will give Odette the

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greatest happiness, and I do not see—"

"Why I called it annoying? I will tell you. You never met my first wife. When I married her, she was a lovely young girl, cultivated and charming. Perhaps I ought to have inquired into the antecedents of the family; but I was in love. I did nothing of the kind, and I was wrong. I soon discovered that my wife was one of those women whose nervous system rules the whole body. At first, I hoped I was mistaken; but a physiologist can never deceive himself long. She would be seized with fits of the deepest depression, morbid despair, followed by floods of tears, or else immoderate laughter. Her character changed little by little, until I no longer dared to take her out with me. When Germaine was born, she seemed to rally for a time, but soon became again a prey to the most violent nervous affection, and, in one of her spasms, died, leaving me a widower, with a little girl who, of course, had inherited the mother's disease. I had a daughter a prey to hysteria, as others have a deformed or a blind child. I married again, as you know; I wanted a home. I will say nothing of my second wife. You know how I loved her—so sweet, so calm, so gentle. She died when Odette was born. Ah! my friend, I should have died of grief, if it had not been for my work."

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He stopped a few minutes. The strong man was shaken by these sad memories, as the tempest tosses the oak tree. He continued more slowly:

"For eight years Germaine and Odette grew up side by side, and I watched them with the most searching eyes. I soon found in Germaine the frightful symptoms of her mother's disease. She was excessively nervous and sensitive, so that when her aunt asked for her, it was with great satisfaction I consented. I had ceased to love her. It was cruel and selfish of me, I know; but I am only a man, and subject to the same faults and failings as the meanest of them!"

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"And now Germaine is coming home," replied M. Descoutures, "permit me to say, with the greatest respect, that I think you did wrong. But what is past is past. To-day, your duty—if I may venture to say that word to a man like you—is to receive your daughter as if everything were all right. You need not fear that Odette could possibly become nervous by living with her. Odette is too full of vitality, and—" M. Descoutures stopped short. Corinne had appeared, and he never spoke more than was absolutely necessary, when she was near.

Corinne had painted her cheeks as red as those dolls that speak when they are pressed in the stomach. Her hair fell over her shoulders like the blonde locks of some little twelve-year-old, or the drooping branches of a weeping willow.

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She was beaming with happiness. Her heart was beating fast for that Paul Frager of whom she had been speaking to Odette. She had always supposed his frequent visits to the villa had been on Odette's account. But, as she learned this to have been a mistake, there was no longer any room for doubt—she, Corinne, was the beloved object of his affections.

Almost at the same time Odette returned, simply dressed as usual, looking like a beautiful Amazon with her helmet of sparkling gold.

She kissed her father, shook hands with M. Descoutures, and cried cheerfully, "Are we never to have any lunch? I am famishing."

Laviguerie was still harassed by Germaine's near arrival. However, nothing could be done to prevent it. As they were passing into the lunch room, he detained Odette a few minutes. "My dear child," he said, "you have not heard from your sister for several days, I believe. Has it not seemed strange to you?" Odette grew pale, and said anxiously:

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"Is she sick?"

"No! but a great sorrow has befallen her. Mme. Rozan is dead."

"Her aunt is dead? But then she will come to us?"

"Yes; this evening."

Odette threw her arms around her father's neck. "She is coming back! Oh! how happy I am! I wanted her every minute and every hour. Let me kiss you again for the glorious news!" And she embraced him a third time with all the grace and roguishness of a spoiled child. Then, running into the dining-room, she danced up to her friends, saying: "Germaine is coming! She is coming this evening! We will all go to the depot to meet her!"

M. Laviguerie came in behind his daughter, silent and sad. "You know, father, there is a room next to mine that she can have. We have been separated so long that now we must be together all the time." Laviguerie looked on, sadly smiling at his daughter's happiness. Putting her arms around his neck, she continued: "Do you not like to see me so happy? Are you afraid that I shall love Germaine more than I do you? You need not fear. I have

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always loved Germaine the most, and yet had plenty of love for my dear father."

Laviguerie took his daughter in his arms and, kissing her brow, simply said: "You have a loving heart, dear child."

Lunch passed off gayly. Nothing is more contagious than joy or sadness. Which of us has not experienced the effect of a hearty laugh? Odette chatted merrily on about her plans for the future. She would make Germaine so happy; they would have so much to see together, and then they must make plans to marry off our "dear little Germaine"—not to any of the old Academy professors, but to some nice, interesting young gentleman.

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No one interrupted Odette. Her father was recalling the misery of his first marriage. M. Descoutures was enjoying her charming and gay vivacity; while Corinne was dreaming of her conquest. Happy Corinne! As usual, she was imagining a love scene. This time, it was Paul Frager at her feet, his eyes cast down, confessing his passion. She would reply: "Poor, dear boy," and imprint a chaste kiss on his brow.

Having brought things to so satisfactory a conclusion, Corinne deigned to smile and join in the merry conversation.

Paul Frager is a young man of a tall and elegant figure, with delicate and regular features. His black hair, cut close to his head, gives energy to his sweet expression. He has beautiful black eyes, frank and sincere, that look you full in the face. His dark heavy moustache can not hide his dazzlingly white teeth. He has many friends. No one can help loving that warm and sympathetic heart, always ready for any sacrifice to love or friendship. His manly strength would lead one to doubt the almost womanly tenderness and delicacy of sentiment which seem to be the foundation of his character. Admitted to the bar when very young, he has since lived quietly on a small income, inherited from his father, collecting material for a work on comparative legislation, which he hopes to publish some of these days.

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Each year he travels two or three months, usually afoot, studying the manners and customs of different countries. Two years ago, he traveled in this way through Italy. Perhaps next year he may go to England.

Up to the year 1872, his life was as calm as a lake in Scotland on a Summer evening. His mother's second marriage took place at this time, and ever since his friends had noticed a great change in him. He became still more absorbed in his studies; became silent and almost morose. Then another change was noticed in him; his gaiety seemed to return. But suddenly, one morning, he left Paris and established himself at Canet, a pretty little fishing village, which lies stretched out sleepily like a great lizard, basking in the sun, on the shore of the Mediterranean.

When he had returned from his morning's ride with Odette, he sat down to his work by the open window. He heard from time to time the heavy waves breaking against the rocks below. He was gazing out of the window at the glorious panorama of water and clouds, when he heard a knock at the door. He called out, "Come in," without turning his head. The door opened with a creak, and some one entered.

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"It is I, my dear fellow! Of course, you did not expect to see me; but I wished to have a little talk with you."

At the sound of this voice, Paul turned around quickly, and with evident astonishment:

"You? Can it be you—here?"

"Yes; here I am, returning from Italy with your mother. I did not want to pass so near you without dropping in to see you."

He was a man about forty years old, very tall, broad-shouldered, and strikingly handsome. His hair, slightly gray, covered only the back and sides of his head. He was elegantly but very simply dressed—the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole.

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Claude Sirvin, in 1876, was at the height of his fame and renown. Life had only caresses to offer him. When very young, he won the great "prix de Rome" by his "Death of Beaufort." As usual, wealth and honor accompanied success, and he stepped at once to the front rank among artists. He was a man of the world at the same time, and allowed himself to be made love to by the dozens of pretty little fools who are always ready to throw themselves at the head of any celebrated man. Having always plenty of money at his command, he lived the life of a prince, spending freely and enjoying life to the utmost. But he always kept his glowing, devoted passion for his art free from the least stain or impurity. It was his religion, his faith, his God. He was admitted to the Institute in 1873. A few months later, a rumor arose that Claude was Claude no longer—Claude was going to be married; then that Claude was married.

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At first, no one would believe the absurd report. Every one added his witticism, to the effect that it was impossible. What would become of all the forsaken Ariadnes? Then arose a story that he had married a Russian princess, with eleven millions in her own right. (No one knew why she always had exactly eleven millions.) Then, another story was heard, that he had married a little actress out of the "Comédie Française." When the truth first came out, his friends were dumb with astonishment. They learned that Claude had married a Creole widow, of small fortune and exquisite beauty. Elaine was a very cultivated, refined woman, and she fascinated Claude by her gentle, womanly dignity.

Paul offered an easy chair to his step-father, and sat down facing him.

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"Well, my dear Paul, you are still the same. You can not conceal your thought that my visit is a disagreeable surprise to you."

"Sir!"

"Never mind—I am not annoyed; but we must have an important conversation together—may be a long one. You were studying as I came in. Can you give me your attention for an hour or two?"

"My time is at your disposal, sir; and, since you have taken the trouble to come and visit me, I should be very impolite if I did not express myself as grateful for your kindness."

"Thank you, my dear Paul. I have only one request to make, and that is, that you will give me your attention. First, I must recall the past. In tropical countries, girls marry young. You were born when Mme. Frager was only fifteen years old. For eighteen years, she devoted her whole life to you. You were eighteen years old when I first saw your mother. I was deeply interested in her from the first moment. Although thirty-three years old, she barely appeared twenty-five. I was so fortunate as to please her. The noble woman had brought you to manhood. Her task might be considered as accomplished. I begged for her hand, and she made me the happiest of mortals by granting my request. Ever since that time, you have been opposed to me. The time has now come to put an end to this misunderstanding. Before my marriage, I confess, my life was not what it should have been. As you grow older, dear Paul, you will learn that one of the first virtues in this world is charity. I confessed my faults to your mother. She, alone, had the right to condemn me. She forgave me, and I had the inestimable happiness of giving my name to the one I love and reverence more than all else on earth. I regret to awaken these painful memories, but I am coming to our unfortunate disagreement; you have never forgiven me for marrying your mother. I was never angry at you. Children are always more or less selfish in their affections. You never reflected that, after having consecrated the best years of her life to you, your mother had the right to think at last of her own happiness. In short, you were offended at her marriage with me, and separated yourself entirely from us, leaving your mother, who loved you so tenderly, turning your back on me, who was anxious to give you the affection of an older brother. But, instead of being angry, we only respected you the more. Such pride shows that you are warm-hearted and impulsive. You will understand that, under ordinary circumstances, I should never have intruded upon you; but the cause of my journey here was the anxiety aroused by your last few letters to your mother."

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Paul was listening with the greatest attention. Claude Sirvin was speaking with all his heart in his words, and Paul could not help being touched by them. The artist talked, as he painted, with his whole soul. His voice was sometimes tender and sweet, then it rose to firmness, according to the thought he was expressing. This eloquence was what made him so dangerously fascinating to women.

He continued: "Now we come to the cause of my visit. I have spoken of our anxiety. For some time past, your letters have been feverish, glowing, nervous, and it is easy to guess that you are in love at last."

Paul started visibly, blushed, and then grew pale, trembling violently. Claude gently took his hand:

"Do not say anything. Wait till I have finished. You love a young girl. Is it not so? I was sure of it, Paul. Love, with you, is not merely a violent caprice, as it is with some. Your heart belongs to her, once and for all; and, that frightens you, for you say to yourself: 'I can not marry. I am poor.' Have I not guessed aright?"

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"Ah, sir," replied Paul, sadly, "every one of your words is truth. I love a young girl, but I can not describe her—you would think me a fool; and, then, there are no words strong enough to do her justice. It is absurd, I know, but you understand. I met her in Paris last Winter, at a party. And, to think that at first I did not notice her! She went to the piano, and played some sonata or nocturne, with her soul shining bright in her glorious eyes. I felt at once that I belonged no longer to myself, but to that young girl, so calm, so unconscious." Paul was completely carried away by the remembrance of that evening. He was again under its magic spell. He continued: "After that first interview, I was introduced to her, and seized every opportunity to be with her. Now you know the reason of my burying myself at Canet for the Winter. It is because she is staying hardly a mile away. You have been talking to me in a way that has opened my heart, and I have replied with frankness and truth."

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"Thank you. That is what I expected. But, now, why are you not happy in your love? There are two reasons; either the young lady is poor, and you dread to offer her your small fortune, knowing that a life of straightened circumstances is often worse than absolute poverty; or else she is rich, and you are too proud to have her think you can be actuated by interested motives."

"Ah! that is it? You see that our affection for you has caused us to guess right once more. Now, what is the use of a father and mother, except to smoothe away difficulties? What is mine is your mother's. Do not deny it. That is law, you know. Mme. Frager was poor when she gave me her hand, and I had the happiness of presenting her with the wealth she was so fitted to adorn. Let me add that every year a small sum has been set aside from our abundance, for your marriage-portion. It now amounts to a little more than three hundred thousand francs. You know that I can make all the money I need with my brush; so it is a mere trifle for me. You can, you must, accept it as it is offered. Now, you can go to your loved one, and say: 'I am no longer poor. I love you. Will you accept my love?'"

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Paul was deeply moved. This man, who had been showing him such thoughtful tenderness, he had bitterly hated for four years, for Claude was right; he had never forgiven him for coming between his mother and himself. He could not speak. Tears of gratitude and joy stood in his eyes. Claude understood his emotion, and gently pressed his hand.

"How good you are!" finally exclaimed the young man. "Not content with surpassing every one by your genius, you have the best heart in the world! You are right. An offer like yours should be accepted as generously as it is made. I will not swear an eternal gratitude. It is not necessary. You know me well enough to know that I am now bound to you for life!"

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Claude was delighted. His really kind heart was pleased with the signs of Paul's happiness—his work; and then, he was flattered at having won the heart of this obstinate rebel at last. Claude was accustomed to charm every one around him, and, was he to blame if he took a certain pride in his rôle of universal fascinator?

"And now," he continued, "will you not tell me her name?"

Paul hesitated. "Will you forgive me, if I wait until I have proposed to her? Oh, Heavens! if she should not love me!"

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Claude smiled at his step-son. He was thinking that he, too, had known the pangs and joys of youth and love, which the first gray hair banishes for ever! He repeated, half sadly, Metastasio's immortal couplet:

"O jeunesse! printemps de la vie—
O printemps! jeunesse de l'année."

Then, "Now we must separate. You can go to her, and I will return to your mother, at Hyères, and announce the success of my mission. You can bring us her answer, and we will all come to Canet, for, of course, she will say 'Yes!'"

So they separated with no further words. The hearts of both were too full. To tell the truth, Claude was the happiest of the two, as, to receive is merely a delight, while to give is the purest and sweetest of all happiness!

An exquisite landscape lay before Paul as he hurried to the villa—forests, mountains and rocks—the beautiful sea, bounding the horizon on three sides; but he saw nothing of it. He hurried along, his whole frame trembling with excitement. What should he say to Odette? What would she reply? Did she love him? He did not know. He knew that she enjoyed his society; but, what did that signify? He knew she was proud—disdainful, even—finding it impossible to dissemble in the least; not at all a flirt, she studiously avoided anything leading to a declaration of love, which is the delight of most women. Therefore, he had some slight grounds for hope; but, as he had carefully avoided anything like love-making—knowing himself so poor—he was completely ignorant of the state of her heart. But he worshiped her so devoutly; his faith in her was so sublime; his love so inexpressibly tender, he felt she must love him in return.

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All this time, Corinne Descoutures had been dreaming languidly by the open window. She was disturbed in her reverie by the sound of a bell, and glancing around, she saw Paul coming up the steps. "Oh, joy! it is he!" But she was in despair that she was not dressed to the best advantage. Of course, he had come to "declare his passion." She rushed to the mirror in the hall, straightened one of her eye-brows, and, in less than a second, was back in her arm-chair, still languidly dreaming. As Paul came in she noticed his exceeding pallor. "What an interesting young man! He seemed deeply agitated," she thought. In fact, he was agitated. He wanted to see Odette, of course; and, how could he make Mme. Descoutures understand that he wished her to go away, and send Odette to him. Corinne opened hostilities. She leaned her head languishingly to one side, like a sick canary, and said plaintively: "I hope you are quite well, M. Frager."

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"Very well, indeed, thank you."

Pause.

Mme. Descoutures continued still more plaintively: "You have suffered much, have you not, dear friend?"

Second pause.

This time he did not understand her. Why should this dried-up old woman ask him such a question as that? Corinne mistook the young man's astonishment for emotion. She was touched, and, for the first time in her life, spoke simply and cordially.

"Excuse me," she said, "for speaking so to you; but Odette and I have often spoken together about you, and always with the greatest interest—so young, so solitary, separated from your family—"

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Paul thought he understood. Mme. Descoutures wished to indicate to him that Odette was expecting some day a proposal from him; besides, he had never mentioned his mother's second marriage to any of his friends—always calling her Mme. Frager; so, thinking his suit encouraged by Odette's friend, he said with sincere gratitude: "I thank you for your great kindness, Madame. My life, indeed, has not been very happy; but, since you give me hope—" Corinne's features had already assumed an expression of startled modesty, like Psyche surprised by Cupid, when the door opened, and Odette came in. "Ah! M. Frager," holding out her hand to him, "I am so glad to see you. I was just wishing to give you a little errand in the village."

Corinne's first thought was a wish for Odette's total annihilation; her second, to bless her. Of course, she interrupted them at a most interesting crisis; but still, she could entertain Paul for a few minutes, while Corinne could slip away, change her dress, and reappear in all her war-paint and feathers, when they could resume their conversation at the point where they had left off.

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"I leave you with Odette; but, if you will be so kind as to wait for me, I will soon return."

Odette and Paul were alone.

"If you will take the trouble to buy me a—"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," said Paul; "but, I am afraid I could not pay any attention to your commission just now. I want to speak to you on a very serious subject, and I implore you to listen to me."

She glanced at him, saw his pallor and agitation, and understood him immediately. Her eyes looked almost contemptuous as she seemed to think: "What a pity! Another man in love with me; and he was such a pleasant

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friend!"

Paul continued: "You must have noticed the happiness it has always given me to be with you. Family reasons have prevented my explaining myself before; now, they are at an end, and I come to you boldly, to say I love you."

She sat quietly opposite him, playing carelessly with the fringe of the parasol in her hand.

Paul continued passionately: "I adore the very trifles you have touched. Believe me, this has been in my mind from the first hour I ever saw you. I address myself to you, rather than to your father, as I know your choice will have his approval."

Odette leaned back in her chair, crossed her hands on her lap, and, in a calm tone, with a slight, contemptuous inflection, said: "Your proposal is a great compliment, sir. As such, I thank you, as I thank all who come to me on the same errand. But I must reply as I have replied to those who have done me so much honor: I do not wish to marry." [52]

There was no chance to mistake her calm, convincing reply. Paul saw his hopes utterly annihilated. His fall was the more complete, as he had felt himself encouraged in his pursuit since he had entered the house. A wild despair shone from his eyes. He started up, and, in a voice whose mortal anguish would have softened the hardest heart, exclaimed: "Ah! that is what you have said to all the others! but no one ever loved you as I love! When a man marries, he offers his wife the battered remains of a heart that has been dragged through all kinds of filth! But I, long before I met you, knew that I could never love but once in my life; and, when I saw you, I felt that here was the woman to whom my life, my thoughts, my soul, belonged! When I was unhappy, my consolation was, 'She will love me some day.' When I was happy, I thought, 'What a pity she does not love me yet!' and joy turned to sadness. If I were to tell you all the absurdities I have committed, merely to be with you! The morning you were reading in the garden, I was hidden behind the rock against which you were leaning. The evening you walked alone on the sea-shore, I was close by you. At night, I watched your window; and you tell me what you tell your other lovers! What have they ever done? Some of them have married since then, as if they could forget you. But I—I am yours for life and death—yours, whether you want me or not; bound to you by my love, by my will, and by my passion." [53]

As he spoke, Odette sat up, listening, full of pity for his sorrow and suffering. He was right. He deserved something more than the careless reply she usually made. She looked at him with inexpressible tenderness, her dark eyes moist with tears.

"You love me. I believe you sincerely. You are wounded, and I am very sorry. Forgive me for being the cause of your suffering. I assure you that I never dreamed of anything like this; otherwise, I should not have allowed you to cherish a love that I could never return. I beg your pardon for the grief I have caused you; but I can never be your wife, because I do not love you." [54]

At these words, Paul felt his strength leaving him. He sank into a chair, and, burying his face in his hands, he wept. This proud, strong man wept in his despair like a little child. Tears were falling from Odette's eyes as she sought to take his hand. He pushed her away. Raising his head, he said with the composure of utter hopelessness: "Forgive me. I have not shed tears for many years. You do not love me. I shall die. With me, my heart is my life, and I know death will soon relieve me from my suffering. I endured agonies when my mother married a second time, four years ago. I left her. I became nearly insane with jealous grief. I hated my step-father until an hour ago; but he then removed the obstacles to my confession of love to you. I forgot everything in my gratitude, because my love for you is stronger than my love for my mother; and, now, you escape from me. You see that I can not help dying of grief." [55]

Odette's heart was bleeding at his supreme despair. Suddenly she raised her head, with a gesture of sudden resolution. "Dear friend," she said, "I will make you a confession. It wounds me to the soul to make it; but you must be cured of your unfortunate passion, and the only way is to show that I am unworthy of it."

She was shuddering and pale. "I do not marry you, because I can not. If I had only known this before! You are too late. I have loved another, insanely, passionately as you love me. For a whole month I lived on his words, his glances; and, if he had opened his arms, I should have fallen into them." [56]

Odette stood before him, red with shame, yet proudly laying bare her heart to cure her friend, at the expense of untold suffering to herself. She continued: "The very words he let fall were of inspired eloquence. He had all combined that could fascinate a woman; fame, genius, and beauty. My punishment for having given my heart unsought is, that now I can not love

you—for, I might have loved you. I now lose you forever; but I have at least cured you of loving one so unworthy."

"You, unworthy of me!" cried Paul, no longer able to restrain his passion. "You have loved another; but, what is there to blame in that? You have not fallen in the least from your pedestal. Do you think that, because you have met and admired some man of genius, your life must be blasted ever after; that you can never have a home, with children of your own? Let me have the hope of some day replacing him in your heart!"

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Odette thanked him through her falling tears for his noble answer to her confession; but replied, "Alas, it is impossible. No man can ever forgive his wife her love for another."

"What do I care if I am the second in your heart? I will surround you with such divine tenderness, such glowing passion, that you can not help loving me."

Odette's firmness returned. She was on the point of saying No, when Paul interrupted her.

"You would be so happy with me. My family would worship you almost as I do. You know how I love my mother. She is beautiful, good, and the most cultivated woman I ever knew. I have never spoken of my step-father, because—because until to-day I had the greatest dislike for him. But I always acknowledged his great genius. You have admired his paintings a hundred times—Claude Sirvin. My family, you see, is worthy of even you."

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Paul stopped, startled at Odette's sudden pallor. If a bomb-shell had exploded at her feet, it would not have shocked her as did this name of Claude Sirvin. Her teeth chattered. The young man cried:

"My God! Odette! what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing; a dizziness merely." Her will-power was very strong, evidently, as she regained self-possession almost immediately, and, smiling faintly: "You see, it is nothing!" And, as he was about to speak, she said: "If you will leave me alone three minutes, I will give you my final answer. Go down to the foot of the garden, and back."

"And you will tell me——?"

She smiled and pointed to the door. Hardly had he disappeared, when her features became gloomy, and the line in her forehead deepened. "I, the daughter-in-law of Claude Sirvin!" then started as if frightened at the sound of her own voice. She seemed torn by conflicting emotions. Suddenly, as if to put an end to her indecision, she sprang to the door and ran after Paul. "Paul," she almost screamed to him. The young man was slowly returning up the garden walk. At the sound of her voice, he sprang to her. Odette grasped his hand:

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"Swear that you will forget my confession."

"I solemnly swear it."

"Swear that you will never regret marrying me!"

"I solemnly swear it."

"Then you may keep my hand; it is yours."

"Odette!"

He was on the point of throwing himself at her feet, when Corinne appeared. She had profited by her absence, and was now perfectly resplendent! Imagine a low-necked dress, covered with ruffles—little ones, wide ones, ruffles trimmed with fringe; ruffles trimmed with red and yellow silk; ruffles in every direction. The dress was made short in front so as to show the large feet, squeezed into slippers a size too small; and showing, also, the black stockings embroidered with gold-thread.

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Odette nearly laughed outright, but leaning towards Paul, she said: "Come back this evening." He was sorry to leave her so soon, but he obeyed his divinity and left, without a glance at Mme. Descoutures. "Where has M. Frager gone?" she asked, settling herself in an arm-chair.

"He has gone home."

"Gone home—just as I return!" These few words contained the very essence of bitter disappointment. Odette in her preoccupation, did not notice it, however, and simply asked: "Is my father in his study?"

"Yes, I believe so; but you know he does not like to be disturbed at his work."

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"Oh! he will not mind. I want to tell him something important."

"What is it?"

"That I am going to be married."

"To be married!"

"Yes; to M. Paul Frager. I have just accepted him;" and she quietly walked off, leaving Corinne a prey to the most intense astonishment and disappointment.

This state did not last long. It was succeeded by the most violent anger against Odette, who had stolen her lover—for she never doubted but that the young man had come to see her, and, during her absence, Odette had bewitched him in some way. Medea, jealous of Creusa; Hermione, furious at Andromache; Calypso and Eucharis; none of the betrayed lovers of mythology or fiction hated their rivals more than Corinne hated Odette from henceforth. Odette never suspected it. If she had, she would not have cared. But Achilles was murdered by Paris, the coward; and a little gnat can drive an elephant nearly distracted; the proof of which is that the hatred of Corinne—that seemingly inoffensive, silly and vain nonentity—was the cause of untold misery to Odette.

The "venerable Mme. Bricourt" is a round, plump little old woman. Her face is so full of wrinkles that it looks like a last year's apple, still clinging to the branch. She is an artist in her way, as she possesses the talent of saying the cruelest things about her friends, while apparently praising them; and more than all, shows a gentle sympathy to them that appeals to their hearts, so that they confide all their secrets to her.

She wished her son to marry Odette, solely because M. Laviguerie was one of the lions of the day; and, as nothing would be refused to such a celebrated man, member of two academies, Mme. Bricourt thought that her son might attain to some high office as his son-in-law. At present he is merely a civil engineer.

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As to this "admirable son," he was as stupid as he was big and awkward, which is saying a great deal. Mme. Bricourt soon recognized his lack of refinement and intellect, and, by a stroke of genius, dubbed him "My admirable son." This title imposed on her friends as she expected, and, seeing its success, Amable adopted the same tone in speaking of his mother; so that soon "the venerable Mme. Bricourt" became an established authority on all subjects.

She was peacefully reading by the window this afternoon, when Corinne was announced. Mme. Descoutures was looking for an ally, still furious from her late discomfiture.

"You look as sweet as a peach, my dear child," said Mme. Bricourt, as they kissed each other. As soon as Mme. Bricourt discovered the faults and foibles of her friends, she knew how to play upon them as skillfully as a gypsy on her guitar. So she was always paying Corinne compliments on her beauty, or the wonderful amount of admiration she received; even going so far as to call her "my dear child." Could anything be more delicately flattering?

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"What lucky chance brought you here to-day?"

"I am come to invite you to dine with us this evening."

"With the greatest pleasure."

"I hope your son will accompany you."

The face of "the venerable Mme. Bricourt" was shaded by an expression of sad resignation.

"You know, my dear child, that my son is such an admirable worker. From morning to night he is buried in his business, and I am afraid he will wear himself out before long. He left this morning for Toulon, to find an important reference in some book in the public library."

To tell the truth, Amable Bricourt had gone to Toulon to spend the day with some friends in a billiard-saloon.

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Corinne resumed: "We shall all regret his absence very much, particularly as we are celebrating to-night the arrival of Mr. Laviguerie's oldest daughter, as well as Odette's engagement."

"Is Odette going to be married?"

"To M. Paul Frager. It is the very latest news. Her father was just telling me the arrangement suited him in every respect."

"It really is a very excellent match, I should say," Mme. Bricourt continued, in her most dove-like tones. "Odette is a remarkably fine girl. It is a great pity she has been so badly brought up. Why, my son, of course, knows almost everything; but there are certain things that Odette is perfectly familiar with, that I doubt if he ever heard of. But she is pretty. I know some people say she does not know how to dress, and that her features are not perfectly regular; but still, she is pretty. It is not beauty. Her mouth is too large, and her ears are not set on right; but still, she is pretty."

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Imagine Corinne's delight when she saw from these remarks that Mme. Bricourt was on her side!

"As for M. Frager," continued Mme. Bricourt, sweetly, "I do not know him well enough to pass judgment on him. He ought to be something remarkable, to marry the daughter of such a distinguished man as Laviguerie. But, to tell the truth, I do not think he will turn out well. He has no business, you know; and, when a young man has no business—I am thinking of the way in which my admirable son passes his time! Why does Paul Frager live alone? Why will his family have nothing to do with him? The future alone will answer these questions, and let us hope that they will be favorably answered."

She was interrupted by a carriage driving rapidly and noisily past. She leaned out of the window, bowing and smiling to some one, saying: "The pretty dear!"

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"The pretty dear" was none other than Odette, driving with her father to meet Germaine at the depot.

Odette was beaming with joy at the thought of her darling sister, so soon to be with her. Her important interview with Paul had sobered her for awhile; but, now, she was only thinking of how happy she was. Her head was full of plans for the amusement of "darling Germaine," and she chattered on to her father, the picture of hope and happiness. Laviguerie said, "You are exquisitely lovely to-day, my child;" and, as she said gayly, "Just wait till you have seen Germaine—she will eclipse me and every body else!" the philosopher felt a jealous pang as he thought, "How she worships her!"

Odette had hastened their starting to such an extent that they had now over half an hour to wait. Her father sat down quietly in the shade of the little white station, while Odette walked impatiently up and down the platform, asking the men around anxiously, if the train was not late—consulting her watch a dozen times at least, and comparing it with the big clock over the door. Finally, she said to herself, she would walk six times around the building, and had just accomplished the third circuit, when she heard the shrill whistle of the locomotive. She sprang to the edge of the platform, and looked eagerly down the track. She saw the train far away, skirting the shore of the Mediterranean, with its white plume of steam floating in the air. These three or four minutes seemed an eternity. Finally, the train stopped before her, a door opened, and a young lady stepped out, followed by her waiting-maid.

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The young traveler had no time to look around her before Odette was embracing her; they cried "Odette!" "Germaine!" and crying and laughing at the same time, they embraced again and again. M. Laviguerie looked on, more affected than he would have supposed possible. Germaine had changed so completely from the delicate, nervous child he remembered. Her black, abundant hair was drawn back from her broad, noble brow, where purity and dignity seemed to reign. She had grown tall, was very finely proportioned, and her large, gray eyes only added to the general impression of sincerity and sweet refinement.

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The two sisters were lost in their examination and admiration of each other,—they paid no attention to the train steaming past, to the baggage piled up around them, nor to M. Laviguerie standing impatiently near them. He finally interrupted them by saying, "Isn't it my turn now?" and as Germaine came to him, he kissed her almost affectionately, then leading them to the carriage, he left them, saying, "I will walk home, after sending your maid and your luggage in the omnibus."

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The sisters were alone in the carriage. They only stopped embracing to embrace again,—they had so many years to make up! At last, Odette said, "Dear Germaine, you are so beautiful! Your photographs never showed the lovely soul looking out through your eyes! Oh! if you only knew how happy I am."

And as Germaine sighed, "I know you are sad over Mme. Rozan's death—forgive me, please, for seeming to rejoice at what is your sorrow!"

"There is nothing to forgive, my darling Odette," replied Germaine. "But you know, for eleven years, Mme. Rozan has been the kindest, sweetest, most loving and devoted of mothers to me." And leaning her head against Odette's shoulder, she wept softly, while Odette caressed her tenderly. They soon drove up the avenue to the villa, and Germaine tried to control her emotion, as she saw that it grieved her sister, and besides, she was to meet strangers at the house. Odette smiled and said, "You will soon have the pleasure of being introduced to M. and Mme. Descoutures. That will cheer you up somewhat; and to add to your happiness, you will meet the 'venerable Mme. Bricourt' and her 'admirable son.'"

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Germaine could not help smiling as she replied, "I know them now, from your descriptions, as well as if I had been living here with you." They entered the house. Corinne met them smiling, and appearing to admire Germaine exceedingly; as they passed through the drawing-room, Germaine noticed a small gentleman bowing to her in the shadow of the curtains. She answered his salutation, but Corinne said, naïvely, "Oh, never mind him, that is only my husband." This was the introduction of the master of the house to the oldest daughter of his most intimate friend.

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When Odette and Germaine were finally alone in their room, Odette locked the doors, and seating her sister on the sofa, she sat down at her feet, on the carpet. "Now, darling," she commenced, "how much we have to tell each

other! One can not write about everything, you know. With your wonderful beauty you must have set many a heart on fire. I have always heard, too, the Italians were very inflammable."

"I never went into society at all, you know."

"That does not make any difference. No matter if you were shut up in a tower, like the princess in the fairy-tale—some handsome young stranger would find you out."

Germaine blushed—Odette clapped her hands with delight and cried, "Ah, ha! Am I not right?"

"Little goose!" Germaine replied, smilingly.

"I don't care if I am a goose, I am right all the same, or you would not blush so. Is he blonde or brunette?"

"Very dark. However, there is no romance at all, only a very ordinary incident; but as my life was so quiet and retired, I magnified somewhat a very simple affair."

"Tell me your 'ordinary incident,' I am all attention."

"Well, then, once upon a time (two years ago), my aunt and I were taking a walk in the country, when two beggars, covered with dirty rags, came toward us, and began to beg. We were very much frightened at their threatening gestures, and gave them all the money we had with us. Then one pointed to my ear-rings, saying they were very pretty. I understood him, and taking them off, handed them to him. In short, they took every bit of jewelry from us, and were turning to leave, when a young man, who, it seems, had been watching us from a little hill near by, suddenly sprang down upon them, and, belaboring them with his iron walking-stick, forced them to return to us not only the jewelry they had taken, but the money as well; and begged to be allowed to escort us home. I had time then to look at him, and saw that he was tall, handsome, and even in his simple linen suit exceedingly distinguished looking. We were nearly home when our protector uttered a cry of pain and fell at our feet. The wretched beggars, furious at losing their booty, had followed us at a distance and thrown a large stone, which had struck the young man on the shoulder, making a painful wound. With my assistance, our new friend managed to drag himself to our house."

Odette burst out laughing. "Is that what you call an 'ordinary incident?' Italy must be a queer place if it is. But tell me, how long did your 'fairy prince,' your 'protector,' your 'new friend,' stay at your house?"

"Two days."

"And since then?"

"I have never seen him."

"Did he never write to you?"

"A simple letter of thanks for our hospitality."

"Well, any way, I hope he said good-bye in a proper heart-broken manner, with tears in his eyes, etc."

"Not in the least."

"But you, at least, were miserable?"

Germaine let her beautiful liquid eyes rest on her sister's face, as she quietly replied "Yes."

"Then you love a young man whom you never saw but those two days, whom you hardly know, and you have never tried to meet him again."

"I do not know if I love him. I think not, for it would be ridiculous to fall in love so quickly as that. But when I think of him, it is with the most inexpressible tenderness. Even now I have only to shut my eyes to see him as plainly as ever. Can you imagine a flower whose perfume would remain, even after the flower had long since withered away? He passed me by. I looked at him, I listened to his voice, and I can not forget. That is all."

"Now, dear," said Odette, "confess that, in coming to France, you had the hope of some day meeting again your 'protector.'"

"I do not know about that; but I had one aim and object in coming here, that I am sure of; and that is your conversion to Christianity."

Odette started; then taking her sister's hand and trying to speak as tenderly as before: "Do you not remember my wish never to discuss religion?"

"I remember it; but I shall never agree to it. It would be a crime if I should! My poor blind sister, my greatest happiness on earth is the hope of opening your eyes to the Light some day."

But as they loved each other too much to say any thing wounding, they left the subject immediately, and Germaine continued: "Now I have told you every thing, I must ask you the same questions you asked me. Tell me now about your love affairs."

The line in Odette's forehead deepened as she replied: "I have nothing of the kind to tell you; not even a two-day romance like yours. I am going to be married, that's all."

"You are going to be married! and never told me!"

"It has only been settled to-day."

"Do you love him very, very much?" whispered Germaine, leaning caressingly toward her sister.

Odette replied, without committing herself, and yet so as to satisfy Germaine. "He is worthy of the most tender devotion. He is kind, manly and good. He is tall, dark, twenty-two years old, and his name is Paul Frager. There! I have answered all your questions beforehand. Heavens! it is striking four—dinner-time—and we are not dressed. Get ready as quickly as you can, for I must take the scolding for it."

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No sooner was the door closed behind Odette, who had hurried off without observing her sister's evident agitation, than Germaine, turning the key in the lock, threw herself on the sofa in the most bitter despair. She congratulated herself, however, that she had not happened to name the hero of her little romance, for it was Paul Frager! And Paul Frager was engaged to her sister! Her tears fell fast, and bitter sobs convulsed her whole frame. She saw him before her as clearly and distinctly as if she were still at Naples, waiting upon the wounded man. And she would see him again to-night; and Odette was going to marry him! And Odette loved him, of course. Had she not said so just now?

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She was roused from her grief by the first dinner-bell. Hurrying to dress, she succeeded in partly driving away her sorrow. When Odette returned she was ready to accompany her down stairs, and they entered the drawing-room together. No painter could have imagined a more charming picture than these two lovely girls presented. The complete dissimilarity between them heightened their rare beauty. Mme. Bricourt had only sincere expressions of admiration for them. A new and startling plan was maturing in her brain. She wished her son to marry a daughter of the great Laviguerie, and if she could not have one, was prepared to give chase to the other, so she and Mme. Descoutures overwhelmed poor Germaine with a flood of compliments. At last, to change the subject, Germaine ventured to make some remark to Mme. Bricourt about her "admirable son." That put an end to all other conversation, as the "venerable mother" never stopped, when once started on that subject. Corinne apologized when dessert was served, saying, "I beg ten thousand pardons for interrupting you, dear friend, but I must order dinner hurried a little, as we expect, immediately afterwards, to see M. Frager, with his father and mother, M. and Mme. Claude Sirvin."

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Odette and Germaine both became deadly pale, and to conceal their emotion, proposed an adjournment to the terrace.

After leaving the villa, Paul's only thought was to hasten to his mother to tell her of his happiness. He engaged a carriage, and promising a handful of silver to the driver, was soon galloping over the sandy, dusty road to Hyères. He was to marry Odette! The wind was blowing almost a gale, the surf dashed furiously against the rocks, the sand was blown up into fantastic wreaths, whirling along the road; the branches of the trees were tossing wildly above him, and the carriage was dashing madly along, enveloped in a cloud of dust. Life seemed to him too short for his happiness! Odette had accepted him! God was good, and life was bliss!

Paul found his mother alone. Claude with his usual sympathetic instinct had gone "to hunt up a landscape," leaving the mother to welcome her son after four years of separation. If they would leave the address, he would follow them on his return.

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"You love her, and she loves you," said Mme. Sirvin, after an hour or so spent in conversation. "I am not jealous, dear. I know that our hearts are large enough to contain two boundless affections at the same time. I know you are convinced that she is the most beautiful, the most charming, the most accomplished being in the world. I am satisfied. I know that you are incapable of loving any one unworthy of you. Claude has already told me of your complete surrender."

"My step-father has been an angel to me to-day. Tell him that I seal my gratitude by embracing you."

Elaine Sirvin might have posed for the Venus of Milo. There was absolutely nothing to criticize in her faultless face and figure. Her beautiful blonde hair was wound like a crown around her queenly head. Her large eyes were as pure and blue as a mountain lake; her delicate, sweet mouth, fresh as a ripe peach; her exquisite profile—twenty times had Claude commenced to paint this ideal beauty, and twenty times had he abandoned the half-finished portrait, saying his genius was not equal to such a model.

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Paul left directions for Claude to follow them, and set out with his mother for the villa. As they only spoke of Odette, the ride seemed very short to him; he looked neither to right nor left, and yet the scene was well worthy of attention. The wind had died away; the air was clear and perfumed; the sky shone soft as an opal, and the Mediterranean lay before them in silvery loveliness. Paul noticed nothing, not even a shadowy form that started from the rocks as the carriage approached and came towards it; but, as he happened to speak just then to his driver, the vague, white shadow stopped, and, turning, disappeared.

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It was Odette. Ten minutes before this, she had complained of a sudden headache, and refusing her sister's offers of aid, said she was going down to the beach, and would soon return. Her father remarked that it would be more polite to remain to receive the expected guests; but saying they would excuse her, as she was indisposed, she sauntered down to the beach. She sat down on a rock near the road, and recalled the past. The sea moaned and murmured softly at her feet. Above her lay the vast expanse of deep blue sky, while in her heart raged a tempest of sorrow and passionate despair.

She saw, as in a dream, the little ivy-clad cottage where she had spent that month at Pornic; and, then, the day when she was strolling by the sea and met the friends who introduced her to Claude Sirvin. Ah! those eyes! so full of genius and fascination! At the first glance Odette felt she was conquered. Violent were her struggles against this sudden passion; but all were in vain. Her heart had found its master. Claude soon discovered her love, and returned it in his way. He had come to Pornic for some "sea effects," and as he daily went out to sketch, they were constantly meeting. As all looked up to the great painter with wondering admiration, Odette's infatuation was not noticed by her friends. Claude's love for her was ephemeral, though bright while it lasted; and, when, one morning he received a despatch announcing his wife's sudden illness at Paris, he left immediately, leaving a short letter of excuses for Odette.

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"She will forget me soon," he thought to himself. But she had never forgotten him. She soon learned the truth through her friends and by her own womanly instinct. At first, she hated his wife; but soon repented of her injustice in this. She never expected to marry; but when Paul consented to make her his wife, knowing of her former infatuation, and make her the daughter-in-law of the man she loved, she hailed it as a means of escape from her misery. Revolving these things in her mind, Odette sat alone by the sea.

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She had completely forgotten the villa and Paul's arrival.

Mme. Sirvin readily excused Odette's absence by her sudden illness, and the thought never came to Paul that she could do anything that called for an excuse.

As he was quietly dreaming in a chair on the terrace, a little hand took his, and a sweet voice cried, "M. Frager! I am very glad to meet you again."

Paul stared at Germaine with the greatest astonishment.

"Will you not walk with me in the garden?"

"With pleasure. I have not forgotten our meeting at Naples, and your kindness to me there."

"My aunt is dead, and I have returned home, to be with my father and sister." [88]

"Is it possible that you are Odette's sister? Why, of course, the name of Laviguerie,—I might have known"——

Germaine noticed that even her name had escaped his memory.

"Yes," she continued, "I am soon to be your sister-in-law. You did not know that when you saw me last!"

If the moon had shone under the trees, as it shone on the sea and the rocks, it would have sparkled on the tears falling from her eyes.

They strolled around the garden, and as they returned, Paul remarked, "How surprised Odette will be."

"But, my dear friend, she must never know we have ever met before."

"Not know"——

"I am afraid I can not explain myself clearly; but you know we always sent each other a letter every day. As it happened, at the time of your visit, my aunt was not very well, so I did not have the leisure to write as fully as usual. You must excuse me, but afterwards, the little incident quite escaped my memory; and I am afraid now, if Odette hears of it for the first time, she will be a little annoyed. Please do not mention it to her." [89]

"Certainly not."

"Thank you; and do not smile at my anxiety to avoid causing Odette any uneasiness."

Odette, meanwhile, was gazing sadly at the sea; suddenly she heard the sound of carriage wheels. It must be Claude! Her heart beat loud and fast. The carriage approached in the moonlight, and Odette shuddered as she recognized him. When the horses were within a few steps, she called, "Stop!" in such a tone of command that, involuntarily, the driver drew rein. Then advancing to the astonished Claude, she said, "It is I!"

"You!" [90]

He left the carriage; the driver, turning around, drove off.

They were alone. Nothing but the sea and the rocks to listen to their words.

"Did your step-son give you the name of the young lady he is to marry?"

"No; he seemed to prefer waiting until he was sure of her consent."

"She is before you!"

"You!"

Claude seemed overwhelmed at this revelation; finally he said, "But you know it is impossible!"

"Why?"

He did not reply, so she continued:

"Because I have loved you? Your step-son knows it; that is, he knows that I have loved before. He forgave me, for he has a noble heart. So I can never marry? My life is to be blasted for ever? I can not marry a man that I, at least, esteem and admire? But how will he ever know you were my first love? You are incapable of the cowardice of betraying my secret, and no one else knows it." [91]

"But it would be wrong to marry the son, after having loved the father."

She parted her hair which had fallen over her pale face, and, gazing fixedly at him, said:

"After having loved you? I love you still! I have struggled to forget, but in vain. The thought of you is always gnawing, gnawing at my heart. At the idea

of becoming your daughter, I shouted in my joy, for I was saved! Duty will succeed where every thing else has failed, and I shall be free from this disgraceful love which is my despair!"

As her dark eyes flamed in their anguish, Claude hesitated, then repeated:

"This marriage shall never take place."

"Who will prevent it?"

"I will."

"You can not! I defy you to do your utmost. You can not prevent it now!"

Four weeks later Odette's marriage took place.

Odette was right when she said Claude would find it impossible to prevent it. The only way in which it could have been done, would have been to tell Paul of that passionate love in Odette's heart; and Claude, of course, could not reveal her secret.

As time passed on, he became more accustomed to the idea; and resolving to see as little of Odette as possible in the future, and always to be formally ceremoniously reserved whenever he was obliged to meet her, he was forced to let things take their course.

Among the witnesses to the ceremony was Grenoble, Claude's most intimate friend. He is celebrated for his sparkling, witty conversation in all the salons of Paris. For twenty-five years, he was one of that noble army of martyrs who fling themselves before the Juggernaut car of art. His genius as a sculptor made him famous, but left him to starve.

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We often think that genius is all that is necessary to win fame and riches, and we are usually right as regards painting and literature; but it is different with music and sculpture.

When an earnest, talented sculptor is poor, his life is one long torture. His only income is what he occasionally receives for some small statuette, which the dealers condescend to buy—merely an aggravation, when, like Grenoble, one's imagination is teeming with grand statues, immortal works of art.

There are fanatics in art as well as in religion. His advanced, republican ideas made him the enemy of the reigning government, and, in spite of the solicitations of his friends who recognized his genius, no minister would give him an order. As a member of the Imperial Cabinet said to Claude one day, as he was arguing for Grenoble: "But, my dear Claude, do you not see that it is as much as we can do to reward our friends? You would not have us lavish money and commissions on our enemies!"

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With the Republic came honor, fame and wealth to Grenoble. But it was too late. He had lived in poverty for so many years that he had become accustomed to it, and would not leave the little studio in Claude's house, to which he had become so attached. He repaid Claude's hospitality by presenting him from time to time with some noble statue, or an exquisite bronze; and he was always ready to give his friend sincere and valuable advice on any subject.

He advised Paul not to go to Italy or Spain on his wedding-trip. "There is no need to go so far away to find glorious scenery and grand cathedrals. Go to Bordeaux and, taking the south-eastern railroad, stop at Albi, with its magnificent cathedral, then at Montauban, one of the most picturesquely situated towns in the world; then at Toulouse, the former capital of southern France, full of grand, old palaces, half buried under piles of rubbish, and worthy of a long visit. As you come nearer the Mediterranean, stop at Carcassonne,—you will imagine you are living in the thirteenth century while you are there. Narbonne comes next, the old Roman colony; then Nismes, with its Roman amphitheatre; Montpellier, with its fine museums; and then you arrive, once more, at the beautiful shores of the Mediterranean."

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This trip pleased both Paul and Odette, and accepting Grenoble's advice, they left for Bordeaux. Paul was in heaven. Odette was his wife! That glorious splendor of hair, those deep, dark eyes, that perfect form; all belonged to him, and he never tired of gazing at her. His love for her was complete. He loved her with his whole heart and his mind. And yet he sought to know her thoughts, to study the workings of her heart and imagination, for a worm was gnawing at his heart, one thought was tormenting him incessantly,—the thought of that *other*, of that man whom she had loved before! However, he believed she had forgotten him; she was so gentle, so loving and sweet. One night, while she was sleeping, he raised himself on his elbow to look at her by the pale light of the night-lamp. How infinitely lovely she looked as she lay there so quietly, and how inexpressibly sad it was that another had stolen into her heart before him! He gazed at that beautiful face in its frame of golden hair, her exquisite teeth shining between her moist lips. She opened her eyes under his burning gaze, and smiling sweetly, said, "You were looking at me asleep?" She could not help being pleased and touched at the adoration and humble worship that Paul lavished at her feet. She had been studying him since her marriage, and was astonished at the cultivation his mind had received. He could discuss painting, sculpture and poetry, as if he were himself a painter or a poet. He understood his chosen profession, law, as not

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one lawyer in a thousand does. His frank, beautiful eyes, and fine profile, made him remarkably handsome, and his goodness of heart was constantly being shown in numberless little instances. No poor person could apply to him in vain. Many a time had Odette surprised him in that simple, quiet charity that pleases most on high.

One evening, Paul sat down at the piano and sang in a charming, cultivated voice, a little Russian song.

Odette cried, "And are you a musician, too? You have every talent!"

"I have only one, and that is to love my wife."

She sprang to him and embraced him, saying, "I love you, dear Paul." And no one would have suspected that she was saying to herself, "I must love him; he is worthy of my whole heart." [98]

So time passed on. They had been traveling now for a couple of months, and, as February approached, they decided to return to Carqueirannes for a few weeks. Odette was changing gradually; growing gentler, sweeter and more loving, as the days drifted by in such dreamy tranquillity. After nights of feverish anxiety and sleepless despair, came this refreshing peace. Every day she grew happier, and more affectionately disposed towards her husband. The hours seemed to have wings. Mornings, they would stroll into the country, or explore the depths of the forest, as light-hearted and gay as two little children. Paul would stop from time to time to wreath flowers in her hair. Suddenly, in front of them they would see the Mediterranean, and would sit down on the fresh grass to enjoy the lovely scene. Neither would say a word, but would listen to the voices of the forest. The birds, singing and chattering as they flew from branch to branch; the trees, nodding to each other as if they had some secrets to impart; the insects, buzzing and hiding in the grass and moss; the continual murmur that Nature has in her solitude, all combined to intoxicate the young couple. Sometimes Odette would spring up, saying: "The idyl has lasted long enough this morning. Let us go and get some lunch." So they would return, laughing and gay, for Odette was gay from morning till night in this new life. After lunch they would have music, and the rest of the day would pass so quickly that when night spread her dark mantle over the earth, they could hardly refrain from exclaiming, "What! already!" [99]

Ah! if Paul had only had the key to her heart! But he was too passionately in love to notice the delicate shades of her character. He did not see that her nervous, feverish restlessness was slowly leaving her for ever. But he occasionally seemed to feel an intuition of something of the kind, for one night he said: "You remind me of that story in the Arabian Nights, where the only cure for the sick woman was marriage. You came to me an invalid, but when we return home you will be strong and well." [100]

Odette started and grew pale. She felt she was not cured yet, but only on the road to health, and was sad and thoughtful for a few minutes. Her new happiness soon restored her cheerfulness, and the day passed as pleasantly as usual. The next day they strolled down to the beach and were soon in the midst of the immense rocks and boulders that the waves have dashed against for centuries.

Odette said: "Do you know what day of the month it is?"

"No." [101]

"To-day is Thursday, the twelfth of February. Do you not remember it was the twelfth, and a Thursday, when you first spoke to me of love?" She added, "Would you have killed yourself, if I had refused your offer?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"No; but I was thinking that I am not worthy of such love. No one ought to throw away his life for a woman. And you, just entering life, would you have destroyed all your hopes and dreams of the future for such a weak creature as I am?"

Paul shuddered as he replied: "You do not love me as I love you: or you would understand that there is no medium—either the bliss of possession, or the consolation of death; and if I thought you would ever cease to love me, I —"

"What would you do?" she said, looking almost haughtily at him.

"I would dash you to death now, against these rocks!" [102]

"Dear, dear Paul!" she exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms, subdued by his cry of jealous fury.

This was the happiest day since their marriage. They revelled in the glorious sunshine of this southern Spring that sends the blood dancing through the veins, and fills the heart with happiness and joy. They were late in

returning home, as they lunched at a little wayside inn, like a couple of merry young students. Paul found a letter from Paris awaiting him on his return, and glanced over it while Odette was dressing for dinner. It was from Mme. Sirvin, who complained of their long wanderings. She said it seemed a year since the marriage, and begged them to come home soon. She was hoping to be so happy with her dear son with her once more! for, it had been arranged that "the children" were to live at home, and their rooms had long been ready for their arrival. She had had some trouble to reconcile Claude to this plan, as he did not think the young couple would like it very much. Odette, perhaps, wished for a separate establishment; but no where could she be more at home than with her parents, in their large and elegant mansion on the avenue.

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Paul read the letter through again, and admired the delicate thoughtfulness of his step-father for Odette's slightest wishes. He was delighted with his mother's plan, and saw no reason why it would not be charming in every respect. His unreasonable jealousy had separated him from her for so long, and he was so tenderly fond and proud of her, that the idea of living once more in the same house, pleased him beyond measure. When Odette returned, he gave her the letter, saying, "Here is some good news for us." As she read Mme. Sirvin's offer of a home, she trembled, and it required all her strength to keep from showing her agitation.

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"Well, what do you say?" said Paul, smiling.

"I say—that M. Sirvin is right. I should not like it at all to live with them."

"I thought you would say so; but read on. My mother says we can be as free as we could be any where. We have the whole of the second story to ourselves, with separate table and entrance, and need never see the Sirvins if we do not wish to."

"I thought, perhaps, we could travel for a longer time."

"But, dearest Odette, we must settle down some time, and here is a charming nest all prepared for us. Besides, I can not study or write while we live as we have been living lately."

Odette was in despair. She, like Claude, was struggling in vain against this dangerous plan. And she, like him, would be forced to submit to circumstances, unless she wished to excite suspicion. As she was silent, Paul supposed she was convinced.

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"You agree with me?" he said.

"Not at all," she replied; "I implore you to refuse your mother's offer."

"You implore me! That is too formidable a word for such a simple matter. You do not wish to live with my mother? I love you too much to refuse you any thing, Odette; but it will be a great sacrifice to me. I hoped to regain those four years of happiness that I have lost. It would be a wonderful pleasure to be always near her; but, since you think otherwise, we will give up the idea. It is a little curious that both you and Claude should oppose the plan."

This union of her name with Claude's frightened her, and, interrupting him hastily, she said: "I see now how selfish it would be to oppose it any longer. You can write your mother that you accept." As Paul thanked her with a tender embrace, she continued: "But not just yet! Let us have another month or so of this sweet, idle life. Not just yet."

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"We will stay as long as you please. You shall fix the day yourself for our return to civilization."

The shadows cleared away from her face. Instinctively she clung to Paul; but he only saw an expression of tender affection in what was really the appeal to him for protection and help.

So their former pleasant life was resumed, and the days passed as happily as before. Towards the end of February, Paul proposed to go to Italy, stopping at Nice. But Odette said, "No." She did not wish to leave Carqueirannes, where they were so happy. Finally, one day, about the middle of March, Paul found her emptying closets, etc., and asked the reason.

She replied, "I am getting ready to have the trunks packed. You left it to me to fix the day for our return, you know, and I have decided upon to-morrow. Only, I wish to stop one day in Dijon, to see my old cousin, Anna. I will arrange everything; now you can go and smoke your cigar in the garden, for you will be in my way."

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"All right; I obey; but first, my reward." Odette smiled, and offered him her fresh, sweet lips. He seemed disposed to linger over them, but she pushed him gently aside and then sent him off. She followed him with her eyes and exclaimed, with an indescribable air of triumph and pride, "I love him! He is good; he is handsome; he is intelligent. I love him at last!"

And she could have shouted aloud in her joy. She had shaken off the old love, and she felt free from its degrading chains. Now she was safe. She could return to Paris serene and calm. What did it matter where she lived now? She was at peace with herself and all the world. She would at first see as little of Claude as possible, and never would have any more to do with him than was necessary for appearances.

They started for Paris the next day, stopping at Dijon, to see Anna Laviguerie, a distant cousin, aged and poor, who would have died of starvation long ago if Odette had not sent her money from time to time. Thanks to her cousin, Mdlle. Anna was able to spend her days in complete mental and physical peace, which is really, if we did but know it, two-thirds of what we call happiness in this world.

The old lady was so gratified and pleased at their visit that they were really touched; but they could not stop long; the next day they took the express for Paris. As they came north they found the weather very much colder, of course, and the country was covered with snow.

When the train stopped in the Paris dépôt, the first person they saw was Grenoble waving his long arms in welcome, while Mme. Sirvin stood near him, beaming with joy.

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"Let me look at you, dear children," said Elaine, when they were seated in the carriage. "You have both grown handsome during your travels. Have they not, Grenoble? You must excuse your step-father's absence; he has been out of town a few days and will not return until to-morrow."

Odette enquired for her father and sister. Elaine replied that she would meet them at the house. The conversation ran on, gay and lively. Paul pressed his mother's hand from time to time, as if he would say, "You are not mistaken. I am very, very happy."

Grenoble seemed to think his suggestions for their trip had proved very successful, and said that Paris would seem dull and gloomy after the southern sunshine.

They soon arrived at the house where Laviguerie and Germaine were awaiting them. Germaine looked pale, but smiling and lovely as usual.

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"Are you happy?" she found time to whisper to Odette.

"Very happy. I love him, and he loves me."

"May God watch over your happiness. And He will. Your husband will love you as long as he lives, and he is worthy of your utmost love."

She did not even sigh at this happiness, built upon the ruins of hers. She seemed quietly happy all the evening, as usual. It would have needed a very close observer to have noticed the slight tremor when she happened to meet her brother-in-law's glance. The company broke up at eleven, as Odette was tired from her journey. Their rooms were ready on the second floor, as Mme. Sirvin had written. The sweet intimacy of their early married life had come to an end, as Paul and Odette, of course, now had their separate apartments.

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In spite of her fatigue, Odette could not sleep. She lay with wide-open eyes, staring at the dying embers on the hearth. She would see Claude the next day! What would he say to her? What would she reply? What could they say, these two that used to love one another? Not that she was afraid. She loved Paul now, and was cured of the old infatuation. But in spite of such thoughts, a dull pain was gnawing at her heart. Any slight noise, the fire-brands falling, startled her into almost a fever. She finally fell asleep, but was haunted by weird dreams all night long, and woke in the morning exhausted and nervous.

Until their house-keeping arrangements were completed, they were to take their meals with the Sirvins, so Odette kept her room until lunch time, when she knew the dreaded interview must take place.

As she entered the lunch room with Mme. Sirvin, she saw Claude talking to Grenoble by the window. He turned as she approached and said politely and naturally: "I hope you have recovered from the fatigue of your journey, Madame."

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She thanked him by a formal salutation, but she could not utter a sound. She felt as if some one had suddenly pierced her heart with a red-hot iron. She soon excused herself on a plea of headache, and returned to her room. Then slowly she drew a chair in front of the long cheval glass, and, sinking into it, gazed at her reflection. Her face was livid. Her eyes were nearly twice their natural size. She passed her hand across her cold brow, and said in a tone of utter despair:

"I am lost!"

At the sound of her own voice she trembled from head to foot. So all her struggles and efforts had been in vain. She had seen him, and one glance had

brought the old passion back again in all its strength and power. What could she do? Where could she flee? She could implore Paul to save her, to take her away, any where; but it would break his heart.

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Her arms crossed, she paced up and down, nervous, feverish, almost insane. Who could help her? Perhaps Germaine. If she were to confess every thing to her sister! She would go immediately! She rang for the maid. Paul answered the summons, and, with the tender vigilance of affection, inquired if she were sick, or if any thing were the matter. Her excitement lent her strength to dissemble: "I am better, thank you. I want to see Germaine. I have a thousand things to tell her. No!—I do not care to have you go with me."

She spoke quite naturally, almost smilingly, running a pin again and again into her hat, which she held in her hand. She felt that her husband must be allowed no glimpse of her anguish. And how could he have had the least suspicion? How could he know any thing of her unhappy passion?

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As soon as she was alone on the street, her former thought came again to her, to confess every thing to Germaine. But she felt now it was impossible. Her womanly instinct revolted at the thought of such a confession. There are some things that can never be confided, even to a dearly loved sister. She hurried along, her eyes fixed on the ground, accusing herself of cowardice; that one little sentence from Claude had sufficed to undo the work of months. M. Laviguerie occupied the first floor of one of those large, old-fashioned houses on the quai Voltaire, with high ceilings, comfortable and airy. Germaine had taken possession of two large sunny rooms, one for her bedroom, the other her sitting-room, and was always at home to any one in trouble. Mme. de Rozan had left her a considerable fortune, which she expended in feeding the hungry and clothing the poor, with tender words of sympathy and hope for those in sorrow. Thus was her life spent; almost nun-like in her self-sacrificing devotion to suffering humanity.

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At seven o'clock, every morning, she attended early service at Saint Germain-des-Prés. She then visited her poor people until lunch time, when she returned home to be with her father, trying to enter into his pursuits and make his life cheerful and happy.

At first, M. Laviguerie was somewhat embarrassed in her presence. He did not feel at ease with this daughter that he had condemned to disease and morbid nervousness. Her peaceful life seemed to subvert all his theories. But he felt re-assured of his correct judgment when he saw her devotion to religion and charity. He saw in her many little traits that reminded him of her mother, and when M. Descoutures, one day, with great hesitation, ventured to enquire his present opinion of Germaine, he replied, "I was not mistaken. There are certain unmistakable symptoms. Women of this nature must always have something to which they can devote their time and energies; at present, Germaine thinks of nothing but her religion and her poor people. I do not interfere at all, of course."

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Germaine was sewing busily on a black dress, for a poor woman whose husband had been killed the day before by some accident, when Odette came to her room.

"You are very kind to come and see me so soon, dear Odette; but how feverish you are. Are you sick?"

"I am not well, Germaine. I am suffering beyond expression. Do not ask me any questions, I can not answer them; but I come to you for help. I am being carried away by a raging torrent, and I cling to you for safety!"

Germaine was dumb with astonishment and consternation, then suddenly she comprehended, and as Odette stopped, she said, "Oh, unhappy soul! You do not love your husband!"

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"Oh, no, no!" cried Odette, terrified at her sister's keenness. "You are mistaken, I do love him."

"But not as you ought to love him," replied Germaine, as excited as Odette, "for then you could not be unhappy. Then you would appreciate your wonderfully happy lot in life, or, if you were in trouble you would appeal to him, not come to me."

Odette came closer to her sister, seized her hands and said slowly: "You are right. I do not love him."

Germaine's eyes flashed with anger. What! *his* wife! belong to *him*! so tenderly loved, and no love for him in return! Oh, it was infamous! She groaned in her despair, but suddenly reproached herself that her sympathy was all for Paul. She conquered her anger, and with infinite tenderness said: "Then, dear one, I understand your sufferings; but, hope! dearest Odette. Every one has hours of anguish and despair; but hope, and you will regain your lost love. Depend on me and on God!"

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As Germaine repeated her last word, the young wife cried: "You can believe and pray. I can not; I have tried, and found nothing to answer me." She covered her face with her hands, while sobs convulsed her frame from head to foot.

"Weep, dear Odette. I weep with you from the depths of my heart. I do not understand, though. Why did you marry if you did not love him? and, if you loved him, why have you changed so suddenly?"

Odette commenced a true confession, but again her womanly delicacy rebelled. She could not tell her pure and gentle sister the shameful secret of her marriage, and no words could she bring over her lips. At last she said: "Do not leave me alone, Germaine; come back with me to the house to-day. I must return now. Come with me, I beseech you. I will leave a note for my father, so that he will come up to dinner." [119]

"I will do whatever you wish," Germaine replied.

Claude happened to have invited a few gentlemen to dinner, so the conversation was very gay and animated. Odette wished nothing more than to be left to her own thoughts; but Grenoble insisted upon discussing art with her, and she replied with some vivacity. As she became interested in the subject, her wit and sparkling sallies drew the attention of the whole party. Grenoble and the gentlemen applauded. She was inexpressibly beautiful—her nervous excitement flushing her delicate complexion and lending brilliancy to her glorious eyes. Claude looked at her in wondering admiration, appreciating her rare wit and beauty.

Usually he went out after dinner, or the gentlemen adjourned to the studio; but no one left the drawing-room this evening. [120]

"You are eloquent, Madame," said Grenoble. "I never heard an art critic express himself better. Women play with paradoxes as skilfully as Japanese jugglers play with knives."

"Do not abuse the paradox, M. Grenoble. It is the truth of to-morrow."

Grenoble turned to Claude, saying: "Do you know that I think you are very foolish to be hunting every where for a model for your Danae. If Mme. Frager would consent, you could copy from her the loveliest head that ever was painted on canvas. Do you not agree with me, Mme. Elaine?"

"You are right, Grenoble," replied Mme. Sirvin.

Neither Claude nor Odette replied; but in her heart Odette resolved she never would sit to him. The conversation soon took another turn, and a different subject was introduced.

As for Germaine, her heart was bleeding all the evening. Her thoughts were now in Naples, and now on the sad revelation of the afternoon. How was it that Odette could help loving Paul—so handsome, so good, so loyal! For the first time her virgin heart suffered something like the pangs of jealousy. When she bade him good night, she had to close her eyes that he might not see the tender love and pity swimming in their depths. [121]

"But you must not go home alone, Germaine," said Mme. Sirvin. "The carriage is ready. Paul will go with you."

"Oh, no!" she replied, quickly. "Odette will lend me her maid," and to Paul's polite insistance she gave a firm refusal. She had whispered, "Be brave," to Odette, and as she drove off, asked herself why life never unites those who would be happiest together.

As the days passed on, Claude's friends were astonished that they saw so little of him. Of course he was working at his painting for the "Salon," but that was no reason for his staying at home all the time. Before, as well as since his marriage, Claude always went out every evening, either into society or to some of his friends' studios. As artists can only work by daylight, they usually retire early, and are ready for work in the morning before the rest of the world is awake. But Claude was an exception, as he had always gone much into society. So it was a great change for him to pass his evenings quietly at home, and when a month had thus elapsed, the astonishment of his friends bordered on consternation.

At first Claude did not understand himself; but gradually, he was forced to acknowledge the complete surrender of his heart to Odette. The magic charm in her every movement, the tender grace of her face and figure; all seemed to change his very being. [123]

His happiest hours were when he could sit and watch her quietly as she leaned back in her arm-chair, gazing into the fire. He had never dreamed it possible that, as his step-daughter, he could look upon her with anything more than a fatherly interest; so he was not watching his heart at all, until suddenly he found himself bound hand and foot, like an eagle caught in a net. He was frightened and dismayed when he realized the extent and depth of his passionate admiration. He tried to forget himself in his work, but his thoughts were always with her, working or idle. One morning he commenced painting quite early, and worked busily for two or three hours at his great Danae painting; suddenly he rose and stepped back a few feet to judge of the effect. With horror, he saw that his Danae was an exact portrait of Odette. Seizing a cloth, he hastily rubbed out the whole morning's work, and patiently recommenced to sketch Danae's head. Again, after hours of labor, did the golden hair and glorious dark eyes smile at him from the canvas. This time he erased the paint with his pen-knife, as if no trace should remain of his insane infatuation. He threw his brush into a corner of the studio, and as Grenoble happened to enter just then, he said "Come, I will sit for you to-day, I can not paint;" and taking off some wet cloths wound around a bust, in the center of the room, he sat down opposite it. [124]

Grenoble had been working at this portrait bust of his friend for some months, and every one said it was the finest work he had ever accomplished. It was Claude Sirvin, the man and the artist, human and inspired. Before answering, Grenoble stopped in front of the Danae. "Splendid!" he said. "Your Jupiter is perfect! and this drapery is marvelous. But, your Danae seems to bother you. Why don't you take my advice and take your daughter-in-law for your model?" and, without noticing Claude's agitation, he quietly sat down on his camp-stool and said, "As you are kind enough to sit, I will see what I can accomplish to-day." [125]

Grenoble repeated his advice about the Danae at breakfast and dinner, again and again, until all had become so accustomed to the idea, that Odette's disinclination seemed almost childish. Claude sincerely thought (he was always sincere), that perhaps he could get free from her haunting image, if he could once get it fairly on the canvas.

So Claude yielded, Odette yielded, and the result was, that one pleasant afternoon in April, they were sitting alone in the studio. It was quite warm in the room. On a table near by, some pastilles were burning to perfume the smoke-laden air. Buried in an arm-chair, her head posed according to directions, Odette lay lost in thought, her eye gazing at vacancy. Around her the thousand and one curious objects to be found in all studios—here a pile of armor glistening in the sun, there some drapery thrown carelessly over an easel; every where frames and pictures of all shapes and sizes. She was posing in a low-necked dress to show her throat fully; around her neck a heavy pearl necklace—Danae's pearls, her first temptation. They had not spoken for more than two hours. At first Odette had taken a large Spanish knife in her hand, playing with it to hide her nervousness somewhat; but it dropped from her fingers, and she sat quiet, staring at vacancy, trying to control her wildly beating heart. She would rather die than let him see the intense agitation this tête-à-tête was causing her. [126]

Claude commenced to paint with great energy; but the sweet intoxication of her presence gradually mounted to his brain. He had just completed the face, when the necklace slipped on her neck. He rose, and, speaking for the first time in two hours, said: "If you will allow me, I will—" As he approached, she looked at him. Did he see the love in her eyes? or, was he conquered by [127]

his own passion? His fingers had just touched the necklace, when he seized her passionately in his arms, and, kissing her bare white throat, he murmured: "I love you." At one bound she was on her feet. She escaped from his arms, haggard and trembling. She extended her hand to protect herself, and the large knife she still held struck his cheek, making a slight wound which began to bleed. Then Odette, with a cry of horror, fled from the room.

Claude did not follow her. He stood where she had left him, mechanically wiping away the drops of blood from his cheek. He seemed to see clearly now, and for the first time, that this passion for Odette was the one love of his whole life; all else had been nothing in comparison. Did she love him? He could not decide. While he was thus reflecting, time was passing. He heard the noise of a carriage being driven to the door, and, looking out of the window, he saw Odette and her husband get into it. One of the servants placed a small trunk beside the driver, the gate was opened, and the coupé drove off. So she was going away. He was seized with the utmost anxiety, for, if Odette had proclaimed his rashness, he knew well that his wife would despise him ever after. But gradually his love again gained the ascendancy, and he said to himself the next hour would decide his fate. Either Odette had left forever with her husband, or else she had invented some trivial excuse to leave home for a short time, showing she was afraid of her own weakness, and this fear would prove that she returned Claude's love. He seated himself on the sofa, burying his face in his hands, while his heart was torn with love and remorse. Night came on gradually, until all was dark outside, as his heart was, it being covered with the black pall of his disgraceful passion. He did not reflect that this woman he loved was the daughter-in-law of her who bore his name! At first he almost wished that Odette had left his house to return no more. He supposed that, if they never met again, he could conquer this love in time. But as the hours passed, his former thoughts returned to him, and he would have bought with his life's blood the assurance that he would soon see Odette again. When he heard the outside door open, and distinguished Paul's voice, he uttered a cry of joy. The young man came up to the studio almost immediately. "Why, you are in the dark!" he exclaimed, "Odette must have been sitting for you when her cousin's telegram was brought to her. I wished to go with her to Dijon, but she said it was quite unnecessary."

As the studio was so dark, Paul could not see Claude's excitement.

He asked almost unconsciously: "What train did she take?"

"The accommodation train. She will not reach Dijon till midnight. I tried to persuade her to wait for the eight o'clock express, but she wished to start as soon as possible. So she has gone."

Claude was not mistaken. Odette was fleeing from him and from herself. When she escaped from the studio, she hurried to her room, with his kiss still burning on her neck. It seemed as if she must be branded there, and every one would see the mark. Again she said, "I am lost," as she had said it a few weeks ago. And she was lost. The curse had come upon her, and she could not escape her destiny. But her conscience filled her with contempt and disgust for her own self. A voice seemed to cry, "Flee! flee for your life!" but where? and with whom? She never thought that her only safety now was in her husband; that she must confess every thing to him, and flee with him far, far away, never, never to return. She did not know that this was her last chance. She only felt the necessity of flight for to-day. She thought not of the morrow. Her mind formed a dozen plans. Finally, she decided, and trying to regain self-possession, she went to her husband's room.

Paul was busily writing. He looked up as the door opened, and cried joyfully: "Welcome, welcome! I am so glad to see you! How goes the Danae?"

"I had to break off the sitting. A telegram was brought me from Dijon. My cousin Anna is very sick, and sends for me. I should like to start immediately."

Her first lie necessitated another, and then another, without the thought occurring to her that, if Paul had asked the servants about the despatch, he would have discovered her falsehood. But the young man never stooped to any thing like that. Such trust and confidence as his is never suspicious. He tried to persuade her to wait for the express, but in vain, as she insisted upon starting immediately.

She did not draw a long breath until she was settled in the train, and the whistle of the engine sounded the shrill note of departure. She felt safe at last—in her foolish blindness—safe! As she closed her eyes, the scene in the studio appeared again. She felt Claude's burning gaze fastened upon her. She felt him approach, and again his arms were around her! She shuddered, and, opening the window, held her burning forehead to the cool night air. Then she returned to the thought of her own safety. She had fled, so she was pure and good. She loved Claude beyond expression; she had wounded him with a knife, and was fleeing from him! So she was still true to herself! She was

sincere. We never lie to ourselves. Of course, she loved Claude; but that was not her fault. We are not responsible for our feelings. We are only responsible for our actions. Who could accuse her, if the whole world could read her heart? Who could say, "She is guilty?" She was not guilty, because she had left him. She had struggled and fought against this overwhelming love. She recalled her vain efforts to throw it off. She had earnestly tried to love her husband. It was her misfortune, not her fault, that she could not succeed. She felt proud of her resistance to Claude, and the farther behind her that Paris lay, the more did shame and disgrace seem to recede from her. She thought of the monstrous hippogriff on whose back Ariosto's heroes escaped from their enemies, and the engine seemed just such another monster, bearing her away from Claude.

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And her sister, who advised her to pray! She smiled with contempt. She did not need a God to keep her from doing wrong. Will and energy are all that we need on earth. Reason, not God, rules the universe. It was reason that showed her the abyss before her, that told her to flee, and that led her to Dijon! Pray? If there were a God, He ought not to have permitted this love to take possession of her heart. He ought to have comforted her and sympathized with her struggles. It was not necessary for her to mumble prayers. When she said, "I will be true," that was all that was needed. The kiss on her neck burnt no longer while she was congratulating herself on her safety and her strength; but it was still there.

Odette was completely exhausted when she arrived at Dijon. She went to a hotel, and was asleep in five minutes after being shown to a room. When she awoke, the room was flooded with sunshine. She was ready at ten o'clock to go to her cousin.

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She had gone over the same road lately, with her husband. How many things had happened since then! The appearance of the country was entirely different, too, with no more snow or ice to be seen. As the carriage passed over the little hills, or wound around among the forest trees, the peacefulness and loveliness seemed to give her weary soul a refreshing rest. Her cousin was completely amazed at her arrival.

"What can have brought you here? I can not believe my eyes!"

"I have come to spend a few days with you. I told my husband you had sent me a telegram, because I was longing for some fresh country air."

Anna was delighted to see her. Odette accompanied her all day, from the dairy to the farm-yard, from the farm-yard to the kitchen, and every where did she seem interested and pleased. The old lady was in raptures. She had always loved Odette, but from this day she idolized her. And the young wife, in return, was grateful for the peace and oblivion of this quiet refuge. When evening arrived, they sat in front of the great fire-place, with its crackling wood fire. For many years Anna's eyes had never been open as late as ten o'clock.

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The farmer's daughter, Anna's servant, had arranged the best rooms in the house for the "pretty lady," as she called Odette. They consisted of two large rooms, occupying the whole of one side of the ground floor. Odette kissed her cousin "good-night," and went into her bed-room. She took the lamp and amused herself by examining the old-fashioned engravings on the walls, "Poniatowski throwing himself into the Elster," and "Hippocrates refusing the presents from Artaxerxes," etc. Then she put the lamp on a table and opened the window. She inhaled the fresh, cool air, and enjoyed the lovely landscape before her,—the woods in tender blue and black shades, the fields gray and white, as the moon shone through the clouds; she could hear the little brook murmuring under the drooping branches of the willow trees. She wrapped a shawl around her and sat down, to enjoy at her ease the clear, cool night, so silent and lovely.

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Suddenly she started. She saw a shadow on the garden wall. She thought she was mistaken, and leaned forward. The shadow climbed the wall and directed its way across the garden to the lighted window. Odette knew what it was. She instinctively felt that the thief, climbing into the garden at night, was the one she most dreaded to see. He crossed the garden, stepped on a stone under the window, swung himself up by his hands, and stood before her, pale and determined. They gazed at each other a moment, then,

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"I love you!" he whispered.

She receded before him to the back of the room. "What are you doing here?" she cried. "Why do you persecute me with your shameful love? I am not your wife. Leave me this minute, or I will scream for help and have you driven away as a thief!"

Claude repeated, "I love you!"

She could not recede any further, she was already against the wall. Claude stood quiet; then, in his eloquent, trembling voice, fascinating her with the tender brilliancy of his eyes, he continued: "You love me! You can not deny it. You belong to me. To me alone. I take all the shame, the disgrace, upon myself, because I worship you, because I can not live without you, because you alone are my life and my happiness. Do you not see how I, too, have fought and struggled against this love that you have awakened in my heart. But all, all in vain. We must submit to our destiny. I love you."

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Odette stood pale and trembling against the wall. She felt she was tottering on the brink of an abyss. She was falling, falling.

As Claude advanced, she raised her hand with a gesture of superb disdain.

"Coward!" she exclaimed.

Claude approached nearer.

"Coward!" she repeated.

Claude was at her side. He whispered softly again: "I love you;" and, as he opened his arms, she sank into his embrace, incapable of further resistance to the passionate love in her heart.

Odette was alone in the train. She had left Dijon the day after her arrival, and was returning to Paris. As on the journey down, her brain was throbbing with thoughts of all kinds. She was seeking excuses for her crime, and the books she had studied with her father supplied her with many. Did not Darwin write, "All human beings are forced to obey their instincts?" Spencer wrote, "Will can never conquer Nature;" while Rousseau said, "Uncontrollable emotion excuses any crime." Those she revered as her masters, justified her. Why should she feel called upon to accuse herself? Her conscience could be at rest, as she had resisted this love in her heart to the utmost.

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She recalled one quotation after another, to show that she had, after all, nothing to reproach herself with. She acknowledged no responsibility to any God. Only to her own conscience was she responsible, and that gave her absolution. Since the world is as it is, all weak human creatures must expect to be occasionally worsted in their strife against evil. And then, she knew that this life is the end of the soul. Her father had taught her that there is no Judge to punish the wicked and reward the good, as the Bible declares. And before arriving at this total annihilation, the inevitable end of all men and things, she was going to live to enjoy life and love and be happy. She would be prudent, so that no one would suspect, and there would be nothing to fear. At this moment, she thought of her sister, and a sharp pang of agony pierced her soul as she felt that Germaine would despise her. In the midst of this total shipwreck of all that was true and good in her heart, only this affection for her sister remained; and the poor creature, born with good impulses, but corrupted by her wretched education, degraded by the teachings of the brutal materialism of the day, burst into sobs of sorrow and despair.

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Then trying to find some way out of her grief, she began to apply the same sophistic reasonings to her sister. Yes, Germaine would despise her, but only because she had been brought up amid the superstitions and mummeries of religion. Germaine's judgment would be warped by her absurd faith in God and Christianity. She would not pay any attention to her contempt. An intelligent being should be governed by reason, and not by superstition. Her reason told her that when one has done all in one's power, that is sufficient. And she complacently rested in the free pardon given by her reason, without reflecting that day before yesterday her reason had been the first to condemn her.

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The unhappy creature did not know that every human being has a terrible judge in himself. No matter how low or degraded he may be, some day his conscience will stand before him, judge and executioner at the same time; and from that day he will despise himself as he is despised by all who know his crime. He will never be able to tear off this Nessus' robe that eats into his vitals!

"Yes, M. David," continued Mme. Descoutures, "I was so beautiful when I was seventeen, that I made a great sensation. I remember well one little incident. Sundays, when the men on the estate had worked particularly well during the week, my father used to put me in a chair just inside the gate, and let them come up and look at me as a reward."

Grenoble interrupted her: "And was that all the reward they received? Your father must have been a great joker."

Corinne flushed with indignation; but, before she could annihilate him with her contempt, he had left her and was chatting in another group, leaving her M. David for a victim.

It was at Mme. Descoutures's house in Paris, that this took place six weeks later. June had arrived, and, in spite of the open windows, it was very hot in the drawing-rooms, filled with guests. Laviguerie was deeply interested in a game of chess. Germaine, near him, was replying absently to the questions addressed her from time to time. Odette, alone, was carrying on a lively conversation, while Claude was talking in a gay group of artists. Paul and Mme. Sirvin had not left home this evening.

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"By the way," said Mme. Bricourt suddenly to Odette, "is your husband ill?"

"Not in the least, Madame."

"I am very glad to hear it. As we never meet him any where nowadays, I was afraid he was sick."

It was not the first time this question had been asked Odette. Lately, their friends had noticed that Odette went every where, as usual, but that her husband was seldom seen with her. Her reply was always that Paul was very busy, and that Mme. Sirvin was not quite as well as usual.

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The venerable Mme. Bricourt had no time to push her investigations further at present, as Grenoble's voice rose above all the others, and all turned to listen. He was maliciously drawing out M. Amable Bricourt, to expose his ignorance to the best advantage.

"Ah! you lean to the realistic school? By Jove! you are right! That is true art! The day of idealism is past. It has been laid on the shelf with the paintings of Ingres and Delacroix. As Zola shows us in *l'Assommoir*, truth is only found in poverty and degradation. Realism has one advantage over idealism, more people understand it. For instance: I am sure M. David is a realist. Am I not right?"

The banker stepped forward and said with great pomposity:

"I am proud to do all I can to encourage art."

"But, my dear sir, you should not!" interrupted Grenoble. "What we need nowadays is to have art discouraged! Just think of the thousands of dollars paid for paintings alone every year; and not one in a hundred is worth the canvas it is painted on. Nine-tenths of the painters decide on art for a profession, because it pays better than a clerkship."

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M. David subsided into a chair by Odette. He was a coarse, vulgar man, who had made several millions on Change. Originally from Bruges, he had bought a title of nobility, and was called Count David of Bruges—by his servants. He spoke little, thinking that his money spoke for him, and went through the world self-satisfied and contented, never noticing that he was a continual source of amusement to his acquaintances by his pretensions to nobility and his pompous vanity and conceit.

He had once proposed to Odette, and since her return to Paris, had been very attentive to her, which irritated Grenoble beyond endurance; so that now, as he saw him sit down at her side, he followed him, and standing before him, said: "I must make a portrait bust of you some day. Do not look so horrified! I shall not charge you any thing for it."

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"I always pay promptly for every thing," answered the banker, very much annoyed. "Every one will tell you that Count David—"

"Never makes a mistake in his accounts. I can well understand that!"

Odette smiled. M. David growled to himself: "These artists are so insolent. M. Grenoble, I was speaking of you the other day to a friend, recommending you, in fact; but he seemed to think you were so little known—"

"Alas!" modestly replied the famous sculptor, "it is not granted to all to have their names in every mouth, as yours is!"

This little scene passed unnoticed. Odette, after receiving a glance from Claude, rose and went to her sister, leaving M. David a prey to melancholy.

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"Can you come with us?" Mme. Frager asked her sister.

At this moment Laviguerie cried: "Checkmate!" and rose from the chess table.

"Papa has finished," Odette added, taking Germaine's arm. "So you are free. Will you come?" Then she whispered: "By the way, how is your little Bessie?"

"Very well, thank you."

There was quite a little bustle and confusion as the large party took leave, M. David and several others saying good-night at the same time. There were only seven or eight guests left after they had disappeared.

"Mme. Frager grows prettier every day," said M. Amable Bricourt, twisting his moustache.

"Her face and figure are perfection. What a pity! what a pity!" and Mme. Bricourt cast her eyes up to the ceiling, with an expression of the most angelic sympathy and sorrow.

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"Why! is there any thing wrong?" asked one of the ladies, with great curiosity.

All turned to listen. Corinne said: "Dear Mme. Bricourt, tell us what they say, so we can all know how to defend her—if it becomes necessary—our dear Odette."

The venerable Mme. Bricourt settled back in her arm-chair, and in the sweetest, softest tones, said:

"They are so wicked to spread these calumnies about her. She is a good, pure woman. I have my opinion of slanderers, and always avoid them when I can. They say she goes out a great deal with her father-in-law. Well, why shouldn't she? Only a very wicked person could see any thing wrong in that M. Frager is very busy; almost as tireless in his studies and work as my estimable son himself. So I think it very natural that M. Sirvin should be her escort. They ask, too, where all the money comes from to dress Odette so extravagantly; for M. Frager, you know, has a very small income. I protest against these malicious conclusions, with all my heart; but they reply that M. Sirvin and Mme. Frager are always together, often alone, at balls and parties, at the opera and at the theater. These are all calumnies, and I fight them every where, for Odette is as good and pure as she is lovely."

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An actress would have envied the perfect skill with which Mme. Bricourt uttered this tirade. She emphasized some words, gesticulating at others; in short, she was mistress of her art.

"It is infamous!" cried Mme. de Smarte. "I will answer for Odette, as I would for myself."

"Of course, it is infamous! and we, her friends, must stand by her. We must deny every thing, and try to explain away any thing that seems strange in her conduct. It is not her fault. She was educated so disgracefully."

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Poor little M. Descoutures had been uneasy for several minutes. He coughed timidly once or twice as if he were about to speak, for his loyal heart saw the malice and envy in these remarks. But the minute he opened his mouth, an angry glance from his wife nailed him dumb to his chair. He looked like a beetle pinned to a card in an entomologist's collection, that can move its limbs, but can not escape.

Mme. Bricourt arose to depart. Amable seized her shawl to present to her. The venerable lady looked at him with tears in her eyes, to call attention to his tender solicitude for his beloved mother.

She embraced Corinne, and saluted the others gracefully; but, before leaving the drawing-room, she launched this Parthian dart: "And it is very easy to reply to all their insinuations, that M. Sirvin was always very fond of Odette. You remember he settled that money on Paul, so he could marry her, and did all in his power to bring the match about. But I must not stop chatting here so late. Au revoir, dear friends."

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When M. and Mme. Descoutures were alone, he tried to beg her to be kinder to Odette; but she did not even deign to listen, and withdrew immediately to her apartment.

In the mean time, Laviguerie and Germaine were quietly strolling homewards. The philosopher was commencing to understand his daughter better, and, unconsciously to himself, was learning to love her more every day. He felt that her nervous strength and energy were being expended in

acts of charity and religion. He had had still another proof of it in the following incident:

One April morning, Mme. Descoutures called for Germaine to accompany her to Clermont, one of the suburbs of Paris, a little beyond Versailles. They were both muffled in furs, but beyond this there was very little resemblance in their attire. Germaine, plainly dressed in black, drew all eyes by her sweet fresh beauty; while Corinne, in addition to her striking costume, wore an immense hat, loaded with feathers and flowers. As long as they were in the train, the other travelers merely smiled quietly to themselves; but when they reached Clermont, it was mortifying for Germaine at least, as the whole population turned out to gaze at this absurd apparition. They climbed on doorsteps and fences to look at her. Corinne was delighted at what she called her triumph; how they all seemed to admire her! how they stared!

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They were passing in front of the old castle, which is now used as a prison for women. As they passed along beneath its gloomy walls, they heard voices singing, sad and sweet. Germaine listened. It sounded as if they were singing a dirge. A few steps farther and they were opposite the gate, and Germaine heard a pure, velvety voice singing the *De Profundis* slowly and richly, as it is chanted in church. She saw the gatekeeper placidly smoking his pipe in front of the gate.

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"Why are they singing a dirge?" she asked him.

"One of the prisoners is dead," he replied, politely taking off his cap.

Germaine shivered: "Dead? she is free then. How sad it must be to die in a prison!"

The gatekeeper had never thought of that. He shook his head sadly.

Corinne stood waiting for Germaine. What could she find to say to an old man like that? She called her:

"Come, child, it is cold."

"Please wait a few minutes!"

She was still listening to that angelic voice that came from the gray, gloomy chapel, the voice of a prisoner, probably, praying for her dead companion.

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"What was the crime of the one that is dead?" Germaine asked the gatekeeper.

"She killed her lover in a fit of jealousy. But the saddest thing about it, is that she has a child, a little girl. She wanted to see it before she died."

At this moment the gate was opened, a priest in his white surplice appeared, followed by two choir-boys; then the bier, covered with the black pall. Death had taken the poor Magdalen to his arms, and she was now at rest. Behind the bier walked a little girl about eight years old, pale and thin, her large black eyes full of tears.

Corinne tried to pull Germaine away.

"Excuse me, Corinne, but I can not go with you to your friend. I will meet you at the *dépôt* in an hour.

"Where are you going?"

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"I am going with this mother and child;" and, without waiting for Corinne's reply, Germaine approached the child and embraced her tenderly; then, taking her little clinging hand, she walked with her behind the bier, through the streets to the cemetery. The priest had noticed every thing, and when the ceremony was at an end, he turned to her, saying: "God will reward your kind heart, Madame."

"Dear sir, I would like to adopt this little one."

"What! would you consent?"

"Will there be any difficulty? Is there a family?"

"Alas, no, Madame. These little waifs are alone in the world. There is no place but a foundling asylum for them. But you would do well to reflect carefully before undertaking such a responsibility. Perhaps your husband—"

"I am not married, sir. My name is Germaine Laviguerie. You may, perhaps, have heard of my father (the priest nodded); he is good and kind; he allows me to do as I choose. Besides, I have some fortune of my own, and would like to adopt this little one, and bring it up according to my ideas, which are the same as yours."

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The priest bowed. He understood her noble, charitable intentions, and appreciated them. The child still stood with her eyes fastened on the tomb where they had laid her mother. Her grief was most touching in its sad

resignation. Germaine bent over her and asked, in her caressing voice: "Would you like to come with me?"

The child replied solemnly, without the least hesitation, "Yes."

The necessary formalities were soon complied with. A certificate, signed by the superintendent of the prison and by the mayor, was given to Germaine, and that was all. She had a daughter. When she arrived at the dépôt, she found Mme. Descoutures impatient at her long delay. When Corinne discovered what Germaine had accomplished, her amazement and indignation were beyond expression. She broke out into strong reproaches, however, saying: "For Heaven's sake! The idea of tying a little beggar like that to you for life! Your father will be very angry! At your age, to adopt a child!" But Germaine did not even hear her. She was whispering tenderly to the poor child.

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"What is your name?"

"Elizabeth."

"Where have you been living since your mother left you?"

"At the Foundling's Home."

"Well, dear, you will never go back there. You are my little girl now, and I will be your mother."

Elizabeth, or Bessy, as they afterwards named her, clung to her new friend, and a sad smile hovered on her wan little face. The child accepted her virgin mother.

Corinne was mistaken as regards Laviguerie. He was not astonished at any thing Germaine ever did. At first, he thought it a little unfortunate that her fancy had happened to fall on the child of a murderess! But the philosopher felt himself bound to rise above common prejudices, and soon became interested in the child himself.

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"You expect to bring up the child?" he asked Germaine.

"You have no objection, dear father?"

"I? Not in the least. But suppose you wish to marry some of these days?"

"Dear father, you know that I shall never marry."

Laviguerie shrugged his shoulders thinking that Odette used to say the same, yet she was married. He went back to his library, saying to himself that philosophy is much easier to understand than the workings of any woman's heart, and that women, generally, were incomprehensible creatures.

A few weeks later he came, one day, to his daughter's room, saying, "Will I disturb you if I come in for a little while?"

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"You can never disturb me, dear father."

"I want to talk to you seriously, dear, dear child."

Germaine was astonished at these expressions of affection. M. Laviguerie himself was not at his ease. He had been obliged to acknowledge that in all his theories about Germaine, that he had confided to M. Descoutures, in one and all had he been proved mistaken. He continued:

"I must confess to you, dear Germaine, that I did not love you when you returned from Naples. I had formed mistaken ideas about you. You must forgive me. My preference for your sister came from my knowing her better; now that I know you as well, I wish to tell you, dear child, that you share my heart equally with Odette."

Germaine embraced her father. He continued, "I think you are one of the best women on earth. I fully appreciate your kind, good heart, and wonderful unselfishness. I have not done my duty to you, for I ought to have been looking out for a husband for my dear daughter."

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"Oh! I implore you, do not speak of that."

"But why not? You are not in earnest when you say you do not wish to marry!"

"Indeed, indeed I am!"

"I am very sorry, my daughter. The true happiness in this life, for a woman, is to be a wife and a mother. In spite of your religious ideas, you are too sensible to wish to be a nun; but the life you lead now is nothing more than that. It would gratify me beyond measure to see you well married, so that when Death comes for me I may know I leave you in loving care."

Germaine was frightened at his insistence. What could it mean?

"What possible objection can you have to it?" continued the father; "I can

see none whatever. You are young, you are attractive, you are rich. Little Bessie, of course, would be no hindrance; you could look after her just as well if you were married——"

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"But, father, before I can marry, I must find a husband, and no one has proposed to me yet."

"There you are mistaken. This very morning, a young gentleman that I respect and admire, asked my permission to address you. It was a great and agreeable surprise. He is in every respect worthy of you. When I tell you his name——"

"Do not name him, dear father. I am obliged to refuse his offer."

"But why, my dear child? You must give me some reason. Can it be possible," he continued tenderly, "that you love another?"

Germaine buried her face in her hands, as she replied "Yes."

Laviguerie smiled: "Why did you not tell me long ago? You were not afraid of my refusal, surely. I am sure that your heart has chosen well, and I consent beforehand to any thing that is for your happiness. Tell me his name, dear child."

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Germaine grew paler still. "I can never marry him, father."

"He does not return your affection?"

"He is not free to do so."

"He is married? Oh! my poor, poor child! But where did you meet him; here—in Italy?"

"I implore you, dear father, do not ask me any more questions. Let me stay with you——" Tears interrupted her.

Laviguerie took her in his arms, and, with inexpressible tenderness said: "Here, dear Germaine, you are unhappy, and I can only mingle my tears with yours. But let us speak of something else. I have received a note from Odette, inviting us to dinner to-morrow. I accepted in your name as well as my own. Have you not neglected your sister somewhat lately? I began to suspect either M. Sirvin or Paul had annoyed you in some way." He stopped. Germaine was as pale and rigid as a statue in his arms. Philosophers, as a rule, are not very clear-sighted; but Germaine's misery revealed the truth to him.

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"It is Paul that you love?"

"Yes."

"You met him in Italy?"

"Yes."

Laviguerie recalled the past; Germaine's arrival the very day of Odette's betrothal, and her silence so as not to interfere with her sister's happiness. He knew that a word from Germaine would have broken the engagement; for Odette would never have consented to be the cause of any suffering to Germaine.

Many things now seemed clear to him. He understood why the pure young girl devoted her life to the poor and unhappy, trying to relieve them as much as possible; why she spent all her leisure time sewing for them; and why she had adopted little Bessie. All this privation and work was to divert her mind from her unhappy love, and, by making others happy, to forget her own sorrow; and Laviguerie had prophesied shame and disease to this noble woman, who suffered a martyrdom with such sweet serenity. He asked himself whence came this strength to "suffer and be strong," and an immense sympathy and tenderness filled his heart.

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"My daughter, forgive me!" he said solemnly, and left the room, as he saw she was longing for solitude. He was full of amazement that religious faith could so strengthen and comfort Germaine in her hopeless sorrow, and felt his theories and principles had received a violent shock.

One night not long after this, Grenoble, after trying in vain to fall asleep, sprang from his bed, and dressed himself hastily. He was subject to fearful head-aches, and at such times his head felt as if it were being slowly crushed in a vice. He opened his door gently to go down to the garden. As he stepped into the hall, he was astonished to hear steps near him. He waited, motionless, and saw by the moonlight streaming through the window on the landing, that it was Claude, creeping softly up stairs, listening and stopping from time to time, as if afraid of being overheard. When he had disappeared in the second story, Grenoble went on his way to the garden, trying to imagine what could take Claude up stairs at this time of night, as Paul and his wife were the only ones on that floor. He thought for an instant of going up himself to see if any one were sick, but was afraid he might intrude. He strolled around the garden a few minutes when he noticed that light was streaming from Odette's window, and glancing up, he was perfectly thunder-struck at what he saw. The shadow of two figures in a close embrace was thrown on the white curtain. Claude was with Odette. It was such a sudden shock to Grenoble's loyal heart that it felled him to the ground. But it could not be as he imagined! He must have made a mistake! However, he had certainly seen Claude not five minutes ago, creeping cautiously to his rendezvous. Grenoble arose and walked to a garden-seat, staggering as if intoxicated. Then he sat down and tried to collect his thoughts. The artist was Odette's lover! A sudden light seemed thrown on their life for the last few months. He thought of those frequent tête-à-têtes, drives, etc., and that Claude seemed to have relinquished painting entirely. He would go to his studio, get his easel ready, spread his paints, and that would be all. His hand seemed too heavy to work, or his head was empty of ideas. Grenoble had not paid much attention to this idleness, as he had taken it for granted it was one of those fits of inactivity that are common to all artists when the flame of inspiration seems to burn lower and lower. But now he understood it. Claude was carried away by a terrible passion that seemed to have destroyed at the same time his genius and his honor.

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Grenoble meditated a long time, sunk in the deepest despair. He thought of Elaine, that pure, noble woman! What would become of her should she ever learn the truth? What would become of Paul? And the cause of all this misery was Claude, his own, dearest friend, the man he loved best in the whole world, of whom he was so proud, enjoying his successes and fame as if they were his own. He was dizzy and faint from his excessive emotion; going back to his room he threw himself on the bed. Late in the morning he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. When he awoke he had formed his plan, he knew what he must do. Some day or other, the disgraceful secret would be found out; he was sure of that. Who knew but what Elaine's suspicions were already aroused? Grenoble recalled her pale face, sadly changed in the last few weeks. The morning passed; he had left the house and did not return till one, when he went to the studio. He found Claude there alone, gazing mournfully at his Danae that he could not finish. He turned around as Grenoble entered, offering him his hand.

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The sculptor did not take it, but said: "Claude, be more careful next time you go to your daughter-in-law's apartments. Others might see you, as I did last night."

Claude started in surprise and consternation. Grenoble continued:

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"It is not for me to condemn you. You have been inexpressibly kind and generous to me. I was dying of hunger; you took me to your home. I was loaded with debts; you set me free. For ten years have I eaten your bread, slept under your roof, shared your joys and sorrows. Such ties can never be broken."

He approached Claude, who was listening with down-cast eyes, not even seeking to defend himself with a word. He took his hand. "My poor friend, you have done wrong."

Claude raised his head and answered hastily: "Of course, I have done wrong! Do I not know that? I feel that I have committed a great crime! But you do not know that we loved each other before she was married. We had met long ago. Is it my fault, or hers, that the love revived in our hearts?"

"Do not seek excuses. There are none. You have fallen with her into an abyss. You think it an excuse that you had met and loved before her marriage! You call that an excuse. If she loved you, what caused her to marry Paul? If you loved her, why did you consent to the marriage? The more I reflect, the less I understand. The only thing I do understand is that you are dishonored. I

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am not condemning you. I am only trying to open your eyes to the truth."

He put his arm around Claude as if he were a little child.

"You must leave home, or she must. I beseech you, do not refuse me. Am I not your friend, your brother? Breaking off this shameful intrigue now—this minute—you can not erase the past, but you can at least preserve the future. Think of that noble woman, your wife! She would never survive such a shock as this would be! She worships in you the incarnation of genius and love. Do not force her to dash you from the pedestal where she has placed you. It is not alone for her I speak, but for yourself. Elaine is half your inspiration. Your paintings have been marvelous works of art ever since your marriage; and, now that you are untrue to her, see! you have not painted a stroke in two months. But I am only appealing to your interest. I wish to touch your heart. You are good; you would not voluntarily torture that loyal woman, who loves you so fondly, who worships you next to her Maker, whose life is purity and innocence itself. You are good and noble, Claude. Will you not promise me to shake off these odious fetters? Will you not, dear, dear friend?"

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Sirvin had gently extricated himself from Grenoble's embrace. Sinking into an arm-chair, he sat motionless, his head bowed, listening, but not touched by what his friend was saying. The sculptor saw that words, reproaches, supplications, were all in vain. He became angry, and, tearing the wet cloths from the bust of Claude in the center of the studio, he gravely, solemnly examined his work. Gradually tears came to his eyes. "It is fine," he said. "I love you, Claude. I put all my talent, all my soul, into this clay. I molded what I saw in you—your beauty, your warm heart, your genius, your inspired eloquence. It is wonderful, but I added goodness, and the portrait is not perfect—you are not good!"

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He buried his fingers in the soft clay, destroying in one moment the work of so many months, and, tearing it to pieces, threw the moist clay on the floor.

"All gone! I thought you had a noble, loyal heart; you have none at all. I thought you a genius; but you are not. You are cruel, you are wicked, without strength and without goodness. There was a Claude Sirvin that I used to love; he is dead. Farewell, dear Claude—dead, dead and buried! buried and gone! Another grand promise of genius and truth crumbles to dust when the hour of fulfillment has arrived. Wretched man that I am! Claude is dead! Truth is dead! Oh, wretched world!" And he sobbed like a little child, while Claude dashed out of the room, conquered by his emotion. He heard Grenoble's accusations ringing in his ears, and he knew they were all true. This odious passion was destroying every thing good and noble in his character. His talent had flown, his honor was tarnished. He saw Elaine dying of grief, Paul committing suicide to end his disgrace.

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He remembered that Odette must be awaiting him in the drawing-room, as they were to take a walk together at two. This drawing-room, very large and elegant, occupied the front of the first floor, with four large windows opening on the avenue. The curtains were carefully closed to shut out the hot June sunshine, so that it was quite dark in the room. At each end was a large door, hung with heavy tapestry. One of these doors opened into Elaine's apartment, the other into the hall. When Claude entered, he found Odette already waiting for him.

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"I thought you were never coming. Had you forgotten our proposed walk?"

He put his arms around her, folding her close to his throbbing heart, and pressing his lips to hers in a long passionate caress.

She was astonished. "Why, what is the matter? You are trembling!"

"Grenoble saw us last night."

"Grenoble?"

"I have no time to tell you about it—somebody might interrupt us here."

"Do you love me?" she asked.

At this moment the heavy portière was raised at the other end of the room, and Elaine appeared. Claude replied:

"Do I love you? More than life or honor." Elaine came from the sunshine in her room and could not see any thing in the dim light of the drawing-room, but she recognized the voice and heard his cruel words. She uttered a low cry and disappeared. The two lovers started back in horror. Who had overheard them? Odette spoke first:

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"No one could have seen us," she said; "it is so dark in here. I will go to my room."

They crossed the hall without speaking, both a prey to the utmost anxiety and distress. Who had surprised their guilty secret? Was it Elaine? Could it

have been Paul? As they arrived at the foot of the stair-case they met Paul coming to find them.

"Good morning," he said, smiling. "It is such a lovely day, I should like to join you in your walk. When you are ready you can come for me to my mother's room. I am afraid she is not very well."

Poor Elaine. She had returned to her room completely overwhelmed by what she had heard. What woman could it have been with Claude? To whom could he have been talking? Some cruel coquette who made it her pastime to lead men astray, blinding them to their true happiness and boasting of her conquests. She, Elaine, had been a help to him in his work, his faithful companion, always ready with sweet sympathy and valuable counsel. How many times had she helped him to overcome despondency and to triumph over obstacles of all kinds. And was she to lose all this? Was she to submit passively to the sight of her happiness crumbling to the ground before her eyes? No! she would struggle to regain it! She would make every effort as long as there was the least hope; would try to win back his love; would never reproach him; would be as cheerful and as lovely as ever. She would try in every way to make herself beautiful and fascinating. One thought tormented her—she turned to the mirror to see if she were commencing to grow old. How many women have asked themselves this same question, and with what fear of the answer?

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She heard a knock at the door.

"It is I, mother; may I come in?"

Her son!

"Certainly."

Paul started when he saw how pale his mother was.

She sat down, pointing out a chair for her son; but he knelt at her feet, and, embracing her tenderly, said:

"You are the loveliest woman in the world, and the most intelligent; but, at the same time, you are the most ungrateful."

"I, ungrateful?"

"Oh! you need not look so astonished. Do you not remember when we used to live alone together, that I told you every thing? No matter what the trouble was, I would turn to you, and you would console me. How many times have you wiped away my tears! But now, you are in sorrow; and you will not confide in me."

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Paul felt his mother tremble.

"You are mistaken dear child. I am not unhappy."

"Then, why are you so sad? Why do you tremble? Why are you so pale, and why are these tears in your eyes?"

Elaine's wounded heart could not withstand this loving appeal. Her head rested on Paul's shoulder, and she burst into tears.

The young man was frightened. Was the wound so deep—

"Great God, mother! you are unhappy? What can be the cause?"

She wept without replying. Paul pressed his cheek against her lovely head, his eyes full of tears.

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"You will not tell me? But, remember, dearest mother, that you have always been my mother and sister at the same time. I know there are some things that a mother can not reveal to her son. Keep your secret from your son, but confide it to your loving brother."

"Thank you, darling. I am unhappy."

"But, why?"

"Because I—"

"Open your heart so that I can sympathize with you."

"Forgive me, Paul. I am weak and miserable. I dread to reveal my heart's secrets. A mother ought not to make a confidant of her son; but I am wretched! and who can sympathize with me but you? Who can comfort me, but you? You were angry when I married your step-father. But I loved him, and I could not resist his pleading. He confessed his faults, his past love-affairs, fully to me, and I, in my foolish vanity, thought I could change his life; thought his love would keep him pure and loyal to me. For four years his conduct has been above reproach. Is he deceiving me now? I do not know. I do not wish to know. His disloyalty, if it exists, has not taken him away from home; but I feel that he is drifting away from me. He is no longer mine. For two months has this terrible truth been slowly forcing itself upon me. I have a

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rival, a pitiless rival, whose iron will and stony heart are coming between me and my husband.

"I am losing his confidence, as well as his affection. I no longer reign supreme. If you knew how I have suffered! Many a time have I spent the whole night in tears and misery! When we met again in the morning, you knew not that my smiling face was only a mask to cover the sorrow and despair within."

"Dear, dear mother! why did you not appeal to me for sympathy long ago? Love is as cruel as it is blissful. I can imagine what I should suffer, if Odette were to drift away from me. But I do not think you need be so hopeless. Claude is true and good. You will always be his guiding star, as you have been in the past. We must forgive much to these excitable, artistic natures. That is where you have always shown such tender wisdom. Who knows but what he may return to you to-morrow, more loving, more devoted than ever?"

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She continued, with more energy, "No! this time he is caught in a strong net. This rival, whoever she may be, is dangerous. Claude has always before been incapable of dissimulation or falsehood, but she has tainted him with her poisonous hypocrisy. Do you not see how careful he is to spend as much time as possible at home with us all; he is either with us four, or with dear Odette all the time."

"Can it not be that you are mistaken? When and where could he meet her, as he is so seldom out of our sight?"

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"Ah, Paul! Must I tell you every thing? You ask me where he meets her. Here, in my house! He dares to make love to her at my very side. Why, not half an hour ago, I surprised him and some woman in the drawing-room; and he said——"

"I know," interrupted Paul, smilingly.

"What?"

"He was with Odette."

Elaine stood turned to stone. She closed her eyes, on the point of swooning. She heard again Claude's exquisite, soft tones, "I love you more than life and honor." And he had said that to Odette!

"You are astonished that I know so much," Paul continued. "I met them just as they were leaving the drawing-room together. Now, do you not see you were mistaken. Your jealous fancy causes you to misconstrue what you saw and heard. Claude is sincere and loyal; he is incapable of treachery of any kind, and you must confess now that you were entirely mistaken."

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Elaine was listening no longer. She thought she was dying. So this rival, implacable and cruel, was Odette! The conviction came to her with the irresistible force of truth. She was afraid her son would read it in her eyes, but could neither speak nor move. He continued in the same cheerful tone. "I can explain every thing, dear mother; you have been unreasonably jealous lately, and misconstrued every thing, so that you seemed to yourself to be right in your conclusions. Instead of confiding in Claude, you have shut your heart to him and sought proofs of infidelity where every thing was simple and loyal. I have noticed myself that Claude has painted very little lately, but Grenoble says this temporary paralysis comes upon him occasionally, and he only works the better after it. But I do not wish to leave you with a single suspicion; I hope to cure you completely; so tell me what you thought you heard him say just now in the drawing-room?"

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She gazed at her son with haggard eyes. She knew that Paul would not survive the truth one single hour, and, by a supreme effort, forced her lips to a smile, saying, "You are right; I was mistaken; you have cured me. Thanks! oh, my child! my child! my child!"

She kissed him again and again. "I love you, dear Paul; my jealousy is at an end—if you could only see the happiness in my heart."

The door opened and Odette came in, dressed for her walk, buttoning her gloves.

"I am ready first, Paul," she said.

"I will not keep you waiting five seconds," he replied, and whispered to his mother. "We will not tell any one our little secrets—good bye," and he hurried from the room, leaving the two women face to face, the elder knowing herself so infamously betrayed by the other!

Elaine followed Paul with her eyes. As soon as he had disappeared she rose. The savage despair in her heart flamed from her eyes. She sprang towards Odette in a burst of jealous fury.

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"Wretch!" she hissed between her teeth.

Odette started as if a bullet had reached her heart. As a flash of lightning lights up a landscape, so did every thing come clear before her eyes. She did not attempt any denial.

"Yes, Claude is my lover," she said in a hollow voice. "You call me a wretch? I have called myself nothing else for a long time. What can you do? It will kill Paul if you tell him."

Elaine felt herself fainting away. The thought of appearing so weak before Odette, gave her strength enough to drag herself to the window, where she leaned against the frame. The sun streamed in uninterrupted on the furniture, the pictures and the carpet. Its dazzling brilliancy flooded the whole room and the two women who stood there, dumb and immovable as statues—Odette, her eyes flashing anguish and suspense; Elaine, struggling against her deathly faintness. She held fast to the window-frame, her teeth chattering. The avenue was full of people—carriages dashing past to the Bois de Boulogne; the sidewalks filled with gay loungers, enjoying the glorious weather. An orange-man had raised his little stall across the avenue, and was crying his oranges in a shrill, loud voice. The trees waved gently in the soft June air. Some children were playing on the lawn between the sidewalk and the street. None of these details escaped Elaine's eyes, which yet were staring at vacancy, while her brain was burning with thoughts and ideas dashing against each other like waves on the ocean in a storm.

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She wanted to scream to Paul, "Kill this guilty wretch!" then the thought of Paul's despair restrained her. And the other woman saw her dilemma and gloated over it. What could she do? Her heart writhed in her breast. Could she see her at her table, eat in the same room, smile at her, talk to her? That would be more than human nature could endure! In spite of herself, her mouth would scream the truth, and Paul would kill himself. The poor woman felt as if she were in a cage of red-hot iron. Whichever way she turned, she hit against the bars that burned into her flesh. Paul would kill himself if she told him the truth, and she could not plunge the knife into her son's heart. She shook convulsively from head to foot. Then she forced her will to obey her, and, turning suddenly, faced Odette. She would sacrifice her life for her son—any thing—rather than that he should learn the truth. Her life was ended. She offered her heart and pride on the altar of maternity. She resolved to tear herself to pieces with her own hands, rather than have Paul suffer.

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She heard him outside, giving an order to a servant. She did not even tremble, but advanced to Odette, took her arm, forced her to sit down on the sofa, and sat down by her side. Paul came in. At the first glance he cast upon them, he cried: "My God! what is the matter, Odette? You are so pale, mother!"

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Elaine took Odette's hand affectionately. "I was very faint. Fortunately your wife was here to help me. I am quite well again now."

Paul supposed it was the effects of his conversation with his mother; so he was not so much alarmed.

"The weather is magnificent. Go, my children."

Paul replied: "But we will not leave you if you are not well."

"No, no; go! It will do you both good to take a walk. This glorious sunshine is so delightful."

Paul kissed her, and offered his arm to Odette. She had said nothing. She was completely crushed to the ground at Elaine's great sacrifice.

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"Why do you not kiss my mother?" asked Paul, astonished at her silence.

Odette looked at Elaine humbly, deprecatingly. She leaned over and touched her lips to Mme. Sirvin's cold brow. Elaine shuddered to the very depths of her soul.

The husband and wife left the room. Then a frightful change came over this suffering saint. She remained one minute immovable—Odette's touch was still burning on her forehead. Then she sprang to her feet with a wild shriek of "Paul! Paul!" Her strength, however, had all gone; wildly beating the air with her arms, with a groan of despair, she fell her full length on the floor, rigid and unconscious.

Odette was in the cruelest suspense and anxiety during her stroll through the Bois de Boulogne with her husband. Fortunately, Paul was so gay and happy that he chatted merrily all the time, hardly giving her a chance to reply. After an hour or so they returned home, Paul saying he must go to his mother.

As they reached the gate, Odette said "I will leave you here."

"Are you not coming in?"

"Not just yet; I have a call to make in the neighborhood."

So Paul left her and went to his mother's room. As soon as he had entered the house she walked quickly to Claude's studio, and finding it empty, went in and locked the door. At last she was alone! She had had no time yet to think. Ever since her trip to Dijon had she been haunted by the dread of discovery, although she had always tried to banish the thought. If it did intrude she had always answered it by thinking that Paul would kill her, or else that she and Claude would commit suicide together. As she crouched now in a corner of the sofa these thoughts thronged her brain; she lived over again the frightful scene with Elaine, and grovelled in spirit before her sublime sacrifice. She compared herself to Elaine, and writhed at the abyss separating them; one so pure and noble, the other so degraded. It grew dark; her mind was full of despair and anguish. Would Claude never come to put an end to this cruel uncertainty?

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At last she heard his step outside. He fitted his key in the lock and opened the door. He lighted a wax taper on the mantelpiece and started when he saw Odette. He had been walking aimlessly, miles and miles, into the country, trying to find some way to retrieve his honor and extricate himself from the quicksands where his passion had led him. But he had arrived at no decision, and had returned as miserable and anxious as when he started.

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"I have been waiting hours for your return," said Odette, "for it was your wife that overheard us in the drawing-room."

"Elaine?"

"Yes! She knows all. So I was waiting till you came, to——"

"To what?"

"To commit suicide."

"Commit suicide!"

"What else can we do, now that your wife has discovered our secret? I wish you could have seen her! She knew our guilt, and yet she had the superhuman strength to speak to me, to smile and take my hand, so that she could shield her son from the blow. But no human being could stand such a struggle without succumbing sooner or later. And, besides, I should die under her contempt. My own seems, sometimes, more than I can endure. We must die!"

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Claude did not reply. His was one of those natures that look upon a secret crime as comparatively harmless. Only when it is dragged to the light do they see its guilt in its true color. And now he felt degraded in his own sight, and torn by conflicting emotions.

"We must kill ourselves. There is no other way out of it."

"Kill ourselves!" he repeated in the same tone of consternation.

"Death, or flight. Take your choice."

"But, Odette, you are insane. Your ideas are entirely too dramatic. You never see such tragedies except on the stage. When we are so happy in our love, that is not the time to commit suicide!"

"But there is no other way of escape that I can discover. We have committed a crime, and must abide the consequences. We can flee, it is true. I am ready now to take your arm and go out with you into the world, giving up home and reputation for your love. Come, shall we go?"

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"No; that is impossible, too."

Odette was filled with contempt at his cowardly indecision.

"Do you want to give me up?" she cried. "Would you leave me?"

"Leave you? never! You know I can not live without you. But I hesitate to sacrifice your honor, your reputation—"

"My honor! that was tarnished long ago when I gave it into your keeping. My reputation—what do I care for the respect of others, when I have lost my

own!"

"And the disgrace!"

"Are you afraid? I am not."

"I am only thinking of you."

She saw his hesitation.

"You are a coward! You are trembling. You did not tremble when you followed me to Dijon. You were the one that proposed flight then. Do you not see that we must accept the responsibility of our guilt, and support it with dignity and courage. I have been more distressed by the thought of retaining the respect of our friends by deceit, than by any thing else. That has tormented me at times beyond endurance; this cringing dissembling, hypocrisy and treachery. When your wife flung her disdain and contempt in my face, I breathed freely for the first time in months; for this hateful deception of all around us must now come to an end. The world, our world, will cover us with disgrace; but we need not care. Place the pleasures of our mutual love in one side of the balance, with society's contempt in the other, and which will turn the scale? Braving scandal and disgrace shows that we at least have dignity and courage left. Come, let us go."

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These burning words roused him from his torpor. How beautiful she was in her scorn and excitement! He replied to Odette, who stood straight and motionless before him:

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"No; we will not go."

Her lip curled with contempt; but without replying, she turned to the door.

"Odette, where are you going?" he cried, frightened at her silence.

"I despise you."

He sprang to her side and seized her in his arms.

"But I love you. Am I not yours, body and soul? Do you blame me for hesitating to resort to extremes? You wish to die, because you are a woman, and they always incline to tragedy. I wish to enjoy your love, and yet avoid any thing leading to scandal and disgrace." He covered her with kisses as she lay quiet in his arms.

"Be reasonable and calm. We must not meet this danger with any foolish, sentimental excitement, but with cool and wary plans. Sit down here by me, and let us discuss it quietly."

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She yielded, subdued as usual by his magnetic influence over her.

"Who knows our secret? Elaine.—Poor Elaine! I curse the day I was born when I think of what she must be suffering. As she shows herself nobler and more self-sacrificing, my remorse increases."

"Yes, indeed," sighed Odette.

There was silence between them. Both were lost in wondering admiration of Elaine's grand sacrifice. Claude continued:

"Why should not our life go on as before? Elaine will keep the secret, and I can not bear the thought of Death when we are enjoying such love and life. Flight would be shame and disgrace for both of us—your reputation irretrievably ruined, my career ended. You see that we can remain at home; Elaine will close her eyes to our affection—"

Both were flushed with shame at their cruel calculations on Elaine's tortured heart. Instinctively, they felt themselves still more closely bound together as they sunk lower and lower.

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A servant's voice was heard outside. Odette rose. She had not replied to Claude, save by her silence. She felt herself humiliated and mortified; her brave resolutions had vanished, and she accused herself of cowardice, but still she yielded to Claude's advice.

They separated,—she going to her room, and Claude to his wife, so as to have the dreaded interview over at once.

Elaine had not left her room. When Paul knocked, she had begged him to leave her alone. Alone? She could never be alone again! The thought of her husband's black and cruel treachery would never leave her. More and more did she become convinced that her renunciation of his heart was the only way to save Paul. She must sacrifice her life to save his, and she must nerve herself to seeing Claude and Odette together under her roof. She would close her eyes to the shameful truth; she would even protect it from discovery. Her only fear was that her strength would not be sufficient to carry out the sacrifice to the bitter end. One moment of thoughtlessness or resentment would undo all. Her son must be saved from the tortures she was then

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undergoing.

And Claude, she shuddered when she thought of him. She loved him no longer. She saw the idol crumble to dust that she had supposed so grand and noble. She had almost deified him in her heart, but she must have been blinded by her love. She recalled their early married life. No, he was sincere and loyal in those days. Did she deceive herself, or did he deceive her?

Her maid came in to say that M. Sirvin was at the door, wishing to see her a few minutes. She replied that he might enter, in a voice she tried in vain to control. Claude appeared pale and trembling. Elaine did not venture to even glance at him—innocence always shows more embarrassment than guilt. At last she raised her head, saying coldly, "I suppose Odette has told you that I know your cruel treachery."

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"Elaine!"

She looked him full in the face, with an expression of such scorn that he dropped his eyes.

She continued:

"Here is my decision. If I only listened to my own contempt and disgust, I would leave the house this minute with my son. Unfortunately, we can not always follow our inclinations in this world. One victim, I hope, is enough for you. I do not wish to have the son's heart broken, as you have broken the mother's. Our life can continue as usual, we four under one roof. That is all I wish to say, so will detain you no longer."

Claude stood in remorseful admiration before her. He gazed at her exquisite beauty, resembling in its stony pallor some antique statue. He saw the sublimity and strength of this noble character, and a sharp and strange regret overpowered him when he saw that he had lost her forever. Alas, for poor humanity! His keen regret caused him to forget Odette entirely, and only see Elaine in her sorrow.

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"Why do you not leave me?" said Elaine still more coldly, surprised that he did not move.

"I am waiting your permission to say—"

"There is nothing to be said. Go!"

"But you are my wife. You loved me once—"

She interrupted him with a glance.

"Certainly; but I love you no longer."

"Forgive me, but I must say one word. I will obey you, whatever you say. May I not see at least a glimmer of hope that some day when I have expiated my sin by penances, punishments without number, some day you will forgive me?"

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Seeing the cold scorn in her eyes he continued: "Very well. There are some crimes that only blood can wash away. I will kill myself."

"It is too late for that! You should have killed yourself before, not after your crime."

Pointing again to the door, he was forced to leave her.

Claude was perfectly sincere in his appeal for a hope of pardon. His heart was elastic enough to hold two affections at the same time. His passionate love for Odette did not interfere with his tender, admiring affection for Elaine; and, besides, it cut him to the quick to meet scorn and contempt where he had always before found loving idolatry.

Elaine, as he left her, buried her face in her hands, weeping: "I am bereaved. My husband is dead, but my son is left me; henceforth I only live for him."

So life recommenced for these three, as if nothing had happened. Paul always found his mother smiling and apparently cheerful. He saw her pale face, however, marked with lines of care, and was anxious about her health, fearing some secret complaint that she would not confess for fear of distressing her dear ones.

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Her torments were increasing. At first Claude and Odette were silent and constrained in her presence; then gradually their prudent guard relaxed, knowing so well that Elaine would not betray them. Paul's confidence was so absolute and loyal that not the least suspicion could come to him.

But Elaine's misery increased every hour. We can accomplish in a moment of sublime courage and despair some wonderful act of self-martyrdom; but it is beyond human strength to meet with the same heroism an agony, renewed hour after hour, day after day.

Often was she tempted to shriek out the horrible truth, and have the guilty pair driven from her presence. As the days passed by and she occasionally surprised a glance passing between them, or overheard some whispered remark, she felt that she would become insane, unless she had some respite from her unceasing torture. So one morning, about a fortnight later, she sent for M. Sirvin.

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"Sir!" said Elaine, as he appeared in answer to her summons, "I wish to have you and Mme. Frager leave the house for a short time. You can easily arrange some sketching tour with Grenoble, while Mme. Frager can accept Mme. de Smarte's invitation to spend a few days with her at St. Cloud."

Claude did not reply, and Mme. Sirvin, thinking his hesitation arose from disinclination, cried: "Do you not see that I can not stand this life another hour? I am growing insane, and my mouth will proclaim the truth in spite of my struggles to be silent."

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"We will obey you, Madame."

The same day Elaine spoke to her son, saying: "Do you not think that Odette is indisposed? She needs a change. A few days in the country would improve her health very much. Do not be selfish, and keep her shut up with you in the stifling, hot city."

"Dear mother, how thoughtful you are! A little trip to the mountains would do us both good. I will go with her next week some where—"

"What, would you leave me alone! I have a better plan than that. Let Odette accept Mme. de Smarte's invitation to St. Cloud. She would then have the advantage of country air, and yet be so near that you could go to see her every day. Grenoble and Claude are going away to-morrow on a sketching tour, so you and I will be alone together for a week or so."

Claude left the next day; Odette, two or three days later. Elaine felt as if half of her burden had been removed when the pair were no longer in her sight. The future did not look so utterly hopeless when she and her son were at last alone.

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Corinne and the humble M. Descoutures were at lunch when Mme. de Bricourt was announced. They entered the drawing-room together, Corinne having signified her august desire for him to remain and help her receive her venerable friend.

"How glad I am to see you, dear child," said Mme. de Bricourt, embracing Corinne affectionately. "How charming you look to-day. Your hair is arranged so artistically and becomingly. Do you know I am worried to death over these slanders about our poor, dear Odette. We must find some way to defend her, or her reputation will be ruined for ever. What can we do to save her?" She raised her eyes to heaven as if calling it to witness to the purity and loyalty of her heart. Fortunately heaven usually refuses to testify in such cases. Corinne had assumed an air of dumb consternation that relieved her from the responsibility of replying.

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"This love affair between Odette and Claude, is whispered about on all sides. Of course, we do not believe in it; but all agree in saying that there must be some fire where there is so much smoke. We must do some thing, dearest Corinne, to save Odette, before it is too late. We must sacrifice every thing to friendship; but, what can we do?"

"I am sure I do not know!"

"I thought perhaps you might tell her what people are saying about her; skilfully, you know, concealing the worst, perhaps. What could be more natural than for you to do so—two friends of about the same age."

Corinne smiled at this pleasant little fiction in regard to their age being the same, but replied:

"I do not think that would have the least effect, Odette is so wilful and determined."

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"Yes, I am afraid you are right. She would naturally be indignant and deny every thing. But if we could only let her husband know in some way of the disgrace hanging over his name."

Corinne's eyes sparkled. She had never forgiven Paul his desertion of her for Odette, at Carqueirannes; and here was an opportunity for revenge, both on him and on Odette.

Mme. de Bricourt continued: "He will never know, unless some accident or some devoted friend opens his eyes. If I were young and charming like you, dear child, I would not delay an instant in informing him of these slanders, so that he could refute them. I am too old to undertake the task. My fingers are not delicate enough to pour the balm into the wound; but you, dear Corinne, your gentle sympathy would heal the blow as it was made."

Corinne sighed. She was thinking of that declaration of love, so inopportunistically and fatally interrupted by Odette. Perhaps free from her sorcery, he might return to his first love. Mme. de Bricourt read these thoughts in her mind as well as if she had spoken them aloud, and was satisfied with her work. The seed she had sown would come to maturity. So she adroitly changed the subject, and, soon after, took leave.

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When Corinne returned to the drawing-room after having accompanied her friend to the door, she found M. Descoutures pacing up and down the room in great agitation, instead of sitting quietly upright in his chair, as usual.

Corinne glanced at him severely: "Are you trying to imitate the bears at the menagerie? But it is of no consequence; leave the room. I wish to be alone."

He usually vanished at this command; but this time he did not obey.

"Did you not hear me, M. Descoutures?"

He stood before her, pale, evidently trying to nerve himself to speak. He opened his mouth two or three times, but had not the courage to utter a sound. Finally, he said:

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"If—I—yes, heard you, only I—perfectly—wanted to say—"

"What do you want to say?"

"I was in the room during your conversation with Mme. de Bricourt; and, I beg your pardon if I am mistaken, but I understood from your remarks that it was your intention to repeat these foolish scandals to M. Frager."

"Well! what then?" she replied scornfully indifferent.

M. Descoutures seemed to grow more and more embarrassed. He loosened

his cravat, that appeared to be strangling him. His eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets.

He continued, however: "But you must not do any thing to open his eyes. Your heart must show you that ignorance is better than the anguish of certainty or even suspicion. In your blind, mistaken generosity, you would plunge a whole family into the bitterest sorrow and despair."

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Poor, brave little gentleman! He had spoken quickly, and only stopped as he thought of Laviguerie overwhelmed by this scandal about his favorite daughter. Corinne gazed at him in amazement, and then, struck by the absurdity of the situation, laughed and turned to leave the room. M. Descoutures rose to the occasion. Seizing her by the arm, he continued: "To begin with, you must not leave this room." Corinne drew herself to her full height and said with the greatest indignation: "Do you dare to lay hands on me! You must be insane!" She tried to leave the room, but the little man held her fast. "I am not insane now, but I was the day I married you, you cruel, wicked woman! I have been quiet for twenty years, submitting to you and your unreasonable demands. I did not care so much when you only wounded me; but now you are planning to mortally injure the friends I love most on earth, and I swear you shall not do it. I see through your plots, and if you attempt to resist me, and carry them out, by God! I will kill you!"

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M. Descoutures stood erect before her, his arms crossed. Corinne really was afraid of him. She sank into a chair. M. Descoutures pulled the bell. When the servant answered the summons, he said: "Madame Descoutures is very much indisposed. She will keep her room for a few days, and will see no callers or friends. She will not be at home to any one. Do you understand?"

The servant looked at Madame Descoutures for a ratification of the order, but he only met her gaze of stony horror. He felt vaguely that some unusual scene was taking place; that the authority in the house was changing hands.

When he had disappeared, M. Descoutures turned to his wife, saying: "Now go to your room, and do not dare to leave it."

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She rose and went to her room, his threat still ringing in her ears, "By God! I will murder you!" Her anger and baffled fury were at a white heat by this time. She charged Odette with being the cause of all this humiliation, and her affection for her was not increased by this thought. And she was balked of her revenge! At this point the good soul wept with rage. She spent an hour trying to devise some means to circumvent her husband. A Hindoo proverb says, "If you imprison a woman, keep watch over the key-hole." Corinne could write. She could use that cowardly weapon—an anonymous letter.

But how could she word it? Her accusation must be accompanied by convincing proof, or Paul's noble, trusting heart would meet it with simple disbelief. Where could she find this proof? She reflected for another hour, till finally, she started with a cry of delight. Claude and Odette must certainly have exchanged a few notes. Lovers have so much to say to each other, that, in spite of their frequent meetings, they must have occasionally written a line or two to slip into the other's hand. At first, of course they destroyed them; but Odette surely must have received some little note so sweet, so tender, that she could not deny herself the pleasure of keeping it to read again at her leisure. A woman that preserves one love-letter is lost, for a second and a third is added to it, until all are preserved, hidden away under lock and key.

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Corinne had found the thread to guide her out of the labyrinth, while her jealous hatred aided her still farther. Taking it for granted that Odette had some love-letters from Claude in her possession, where could she have concealed them. Corinne thought she was baffled at first, but she finally remembered an exquisitely carved oaken cabinet that Germaine had found in a bric-à-brac store in Naples and sent to her sister. Odette valued it very highly, and was in the habit of keeping her letters and jewelry in it. What would be more probable than that she had locked Claude's letters in this desk with her other valuables.

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So Corinne based her communication on two hypotheses; first, that any letters had passed between the lovers; second, the place where they were kept.

In any case, such an accusation, accompanied with such apparent proof, must destroy the confidence and loving trust of the husband.

He would either find the letters, or he would not find them. If his trust survived this shock Corinne could then find some other way to enlighten him.

She sat down to her writing-desk, and disguising her handwriting as much as possible, wrote as follows:

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"One of your friends believes it his duty to inform you that M. Sirvin is the favored lover of Mme. Frager. He was her lover before she married you. If you

still doubt, ask her to show you the contents of the oaken desk, in her bedroom."

Mme. Descoutures quietly folded her note, put it in an envelope, wrote the address, and calling a servant, gave it to him to mail.

M. Descoutures having given no orders to the contrary, the servant obeyed, and Corinne, from the window, watched him put it into the letter-box on the corner.

So it was launched. It was taken from the letter-box to the post-office, where it seemed lost among the thousands of other letters, circulars and newspapers. One of the employés picked it up, little dreaming that he held in his hand the fate of a whole family; he tossed it one side, on a table already covered with hundreds of letters. [219]

The Greeks of old wrote of Fate. The oracles of ancient Greece are replaced to-day by the honest, sturdy letter-carriers in their grey and black uniform.

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Odette was visiting her friend at St. Cloud; Claude and Grenoble had been absent several days on their sketching tour; Mme. Sirvin had retired early; so Paul was writing alone in his study. His book was progressing finely and would soon be ready for the publisher. Happiness is such a help to labor. He finally threw aside his pen, gayly, conscious that he had written well, and glad to have accomplished so much. He looked around for the evening paper and saw the letter lying on the table, that the servant had brought up with the paper. He noticed that the handwriting was unknown to him, and, carelessly thinking of some thing else, he opened the envelope. [220]

He read the note in one glance, without moving, or uttering a sound; then, thinking he had misunderstood it, read it again. He crushed the paper in his hand and tossed it away, saying, "Poor Odette! That such a scoundrel should dare to even take her name on his lips!" Not a moment, not an instant of suspicion. His only thought was of tender sympathy with his wife and anger at her enemy.

He walked up and down the room, trying to imagine who could have written the cowardly, venomous thing; but could not think of a single enemy, far or near. The idea of his wife being untrue to him brought a smile to his lips, it was so preposterous. Then, to think that the only man whose name could be coupled with hers, should be Claude! Claude, so kind, so generous and thoughtful! These hideous fancies, perhaps, arose from the fact that it was Claude's generosity that had enabled them to marry; and then, Claude and Odette were obliged to go out a great deal together, as they were dwelling under the same roof. He did not notice that he was proving that the calumny at least had some appearance of probability. He knew well the oak cabinet in her room; he could catch a glimpse of it through the open door. Involuntarily he walked in and looked at it, and a sudden instinct caused him to seize the poker from the fireplace, and knock on the lock till it gave way and the carved doors flew open. He felt ashamed of his suspicious search as he saw the little drawers and divisions open before him. He withdrew his hand that he had half extended. Then, hurriedly, stealthily, like a thief in the night, he pulled open the drawers one by one, looking their contents carefully over, and tossing them aside. At last he came across a small, square, Japanese box. He shuddered as he found it locked. He knocked it violently against the desk, so that the cover came off in his hands, and his heart stood still as he saw a package of letters inside, tied with a narrow ribbon. He tore off this band and read the letters. He uttered a stifled cry of horror and despair. A wild, insane longing to have the blood of the guilty pair, seized him. He remembered that both were away from home; but Odette was at St. Cloud. He seized his hat and rushed out of the house, saying to himself; "I will kill her! I will kill her!" The avenue was crowded with the usual Summer evening throng, happy and gay; but Paul made his way through it, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but Odette in Claude's arms, and a voice in his heart crying fiercely, Kill her! kill her! [221]

So he had been deceived from the first! Even before his marriage had Claude and Odette loved each other! Nothing but treachery! He recalled the first months of his married life, when Odette had been so inexpressibly sweet and fascinating; those long, passionate embraces; their strolls in the woods; he could see the waves dancing in the sunbeams as he closed his eyes; that enchanting "solitude à deux;" and he gnashed his teeth as he reflected that it was all treachery and deceit. Odette had been lying when she told him she loved him; lying, when she embraced him. Nothing, nothing was left him. All had been false. She must die; and Claude must die. Paul recalled Claude's visit to Canet, when he thought him the soul of generosity and honor; and that, too, was false treachery! Claude wanted to establish his mistress in a [222]

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house of her own, and could find no more suitable husband for her than his wife's son! Oh! it was infamous! And perhaps people thought that Paul had walked into the snare with his eyes open! No one could have believed that he alone was blind to his dishonor, but must have supposed his complaisant approval arose from feeling it to be to his interest to silently acquiesce! Paul stopped. He was seized with a sudden dizziness that forced him to cling to a tree for support. He had been walking blindly through the Bois de Boulogne, deserted and quiet at this late hour. His honor, as well as his happiness, had been smitten to the ground. Again he felt the instinct to kill his guilty wife drive him on. He dashed madly forward. He stumbled over a stone and fell to the ground. He grasped a drooping branch of the tree above him, and raised himself to his feet. He found his wild flight stopped by a low wall, broken down in many places, and covered with moss. He uttered a cry of dismay, for it was a cemetery that lay before him, gloomy and silent.

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Paul saw the white gravestones in the pale moonlight, extending as far as he could see. The neglected cypresses and willows stretched their shaggy arms towards each other in ghostly silence. The grass grew thick and rank on the graves. No grand monuments or tombs were to be seen; only simple crosses, or plain marble slabs, gray and discolored with age.

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It all seemed to Paul so sad, so sweetly peaceful. His anger subsided. He was hurrying to St. Cloud to kill his wife, and here lay Death at his feet. He leaned his arms on the wall and gazed on the solemn scene. Just before him lay a grave whose plain slab bore no other words save this simple inscription: "My Mother." Probably some poor, nameless woman, whose child had raised this touching tribute to her memory.

Those two words, "My Mother," sank into Paul's heart. Where was he going? To kill Odette, and to bring shame and disgrace to the wife of Claude Sirvin, the other victim of the tragedy. His mother! He thought no longer of himself, only of her, and his heart seemed ready to burst with sorrow and grief for her. How she worshiped her husband! and she would die at the news of his crime! Then the same thought came to him, in his love for his mother, that had come to the mother in her love for him; the sublime and noble idea of sacrificing himself for her happiness. The son said "My mother," as the mother had said "My son."

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His eyes still rested on the slab before him, that seemed to say: "Tread lightly; speak softly; there is some one sleeping here."

This unknown son, imploring silence for his dead mother, seemed to show Paul that his duty was silence. Mme. Sirvin must never learn the horrible truth. It was a fearful sacrifice; but had not the mother borne as much for him? She had carried him under her heart; she had brought him into the world; she had devoted her life to rear him to manhood. Now he must, in his turn, suffer for her.

But could he be silent? Could he close his eyes to his own dishonor? He would take Odette far, far away; cross the ocean; hide himself in a desert—no matter where; at least, he would leave peace and contentment with his mother.

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God seemed to reward his noble resolution, for a heavenly calm succeeded the tempest of rage in his soul. He had been on the point of committing a crime, but God had shown him that vengeance cometh from on high. Was he the only unhappy creature on earth? Among the hundreds lying so peacefully before him, there must have been some that had suffered during their mortal life. The moonlight showed hundreds and hundreds of graves, and in each one there must be either a man, or a woman, or a child; and each one had had their share of pain and sorrow.

Pain and sorrow—they meet us at the cradle, and accompany us to the grave.

Paul buried his face in his hands and wept. The cypresses, the willows, the graves—all were silent. Not a murmur, not a whisper, among the branches. Nature seemed to sympathize with his unspeakable woe. As he wept his grief seemed lightened. His mother needed him, or he would have been tempted to lay down this life that had grown such a sad, sad burden. He envied the dead around him. But still it was cowardly to even wish to die. This life is a battle-field, and God pardons no deserters. Paul said to himself he would fight it out to the bitter end, would struggle and conquer. If even his contempt and hatred should not strangle his fatal love for Odette; if, in spite of all his efforts, he could not tear her from his heart, why, even then, life is not made for happiness alone, and he ought not to complain.

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The path of duty lay plain before him. Prevent his mother from suspecting the truth; take his wife to America, for he must earn his own livelihood now. That infamous gift of Claude's should be cast in his teeth!

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He raised his head, strengthened by his decisions, and turned to retrace his steps; but where could he go? Return to Claude's house—eat his bread? Never! And yet he would be obliged to, for he must avoid giving his mother the least cause for suspicion. He would go to St. Cloud the next day to acquaint Odette with his decision. He thought of her quite calmly now; his scorn and contempt had killed his love.

It was long past midnight when he found himself again in his study. He shuddered, for he was surrounded by the traces of Odette's presence. He saw her in the book she had been reading, in the furniture, arranged according to her taste, in the paintings she admired.

He staggered into her bedchamber, where he fell into a chair, his heart beating fast. Every thing was as he had left it. The oaken cabinet faced him with its open doors and contents in disorder. The letters still lay scattered about the floor. Her room! And he had loved her so! The delicate perfume that she was accustomed to use floated in the air; in one corner stood the tiny book-case with her favorite books; Germaine's portrait smiled at him from the wall. He shivered from head to foot; and he thought his love had been killed by contempt! How foolish he had been to think that his passionate love, stronger than death itself, had been destroyed in an hour!

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He hated her; he despised her; and he adored her! He threw himself, still dressed, on the bed, and all night long he tossed and turned, his brain teeming with these burning thoughts, his heart bleeding with anguish, and his imagination recalling scenes of happiness and despair. The sun stood high in the heavens when sleep came at last to soothe his fevered brain.

Elaine wondered what made her son sleep so unusually late this morning, but would not allow him to be disturbed. Between four and five she went to his room and knocked lightly. As she received no reply she opened the door, and saw Paul throwing clothes and books into his trunk.

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"Are you going away, my son?"

He turned hastily, hesitated an instant, then tenderly embraced her. She supposed he was going to spend a day or so with Odette, and the thought filled her with sorrow and indignation; but she must conceal her feelings, so she said:

"Is it a pleasant day?"

He, too, had his terrible secret. If the room had been lighter she would have read it in his blood-shot eyes, in his drawn features, and his livid pallor. But she saw nothing of it.

"Very pleasant, mother."

A long silence. Both hesitating and embarrassed; neither daring to glance at the other. Elaine saw his reflection in the mirror and started at his paleness. Could he have any suspicions? Did he know of his wife's dishonor? How could she find out? Turning to the window, she said, "Why, here is a carriage at the door. How tiresome; some one has come to call, and I'm not dressed. But, no; it is Grenoble, and there is Claude."

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"He?" cried Paul, angrily.

Elaine turned around. She said,

"You know all."

Without replying, he buried his head in his hands. Elaine went to him, put her arms around him, and drew his head to her bosom.

"My poor child, how you must suffer."

"Oh, mother!" and he wept like a little child. She kissed him, caressed him, as if he were again the little son of so many years ago. A son never seems a man in his mother's eyes, and when he is in trouble, she takes him again to her heart, as she did in his childhood.

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She whispered:

"And have you found it out? And did you try to conceal it from me to save my happiness, as I have kept it from you to save yours, my brave Paul?"

In the midst of her bitter anguish, she still felt a glow of pride at this proof of her son's noble character. They seemed drawn still closer together by their mutual suffering—their mutual sacrifice.

Grieving over his sorrow, she forgot her own. He was so young. He had barely raised the cup of life and happiness to his lips, when it was dashed from his hand. So young, so brave, so noble!

Finally, she raised her head:

"We must weep no longer, Paul. Every crime must have its punishment. Do

your duty. Those two criminals deserve no mercy. They have dishonored the mother and the son. You know where to find them. Do your duty—my revenge and yours!"

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She raised her hand and pointed to the door, beautiful as Truth, implacable as Destiny!

A little beyond Montrétout, the road makes a sudden turn to the left. At this point commences a magnificent avenue of old elms, leading to a country house built in the days of Louis XIV, and now hardly visible through the dense foliage surrounding it.

Here lived M. and Mme. de Smarte, and here Odette was spending a few days with her friend.

Adèle de Smarte was one of the loveliest and best women in Paris, stylish and witty. It is not difficult to acquire a reputation for brilliancy by making cruel, sarcastic remarks about one's friends; but Adèle's witty conversation never belied her loving, loyal heart.

Towards eight o'clock, the guests, scattered about the grounds since dinner, gradually re-assembled in the drawing-rooms. It was one of those exquisite Summer evenings, when mere existence is bliss.

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"Do not forget your promise to give us some music this evening, dear Odette," said Mme. de Smarte.

"I have not forgotten it," she replied.

Odette was a wonderful pianist. Her exceptional musical talent had been cultivated until perfection was the result. She never waited to be urged. Only indifferent performers require coaxing and persuading, before they will attack the unfortunate piano.

"What will you have?" she asked, turning to her hostess.

"Beethoven—his music suits all tastes."

Odette commenced the sonata in C sharp, minor—that marvelous work—it is a soul crying out in its agony. Mme. Frager played it with her whole heart, and when she had finished, all remained silent still affected by its wonderful beauty.

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The sound of the door-bell broke the silence.

"Who can be coming here so late?" exclaimed Mme. de Smarte, in astonishment.

A servant opened the door to the drawing-room, and announced:

"M. Paul Frager."

Odette started to her feet as she heard her husband's name, and stood leaning against the piano.

The young man's features were distorted and pale. He was trembling, and yet seemed rigid in his stately dignity.

Odette saw at the first glance that Paul knew her crime, and felt that every thing was at an end for her, but did not stir from where she stood, bravely awaiting the blow.

Mme. de Smarte welcomed M. Frager, and enquired after his mother. But all in the room felt the tragedy to come, and all held their breath as the young man began to speak.

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"Madame," he said, bowing gravely to Mme. de Smarte, "only the importance of my errand excuses this late arrival. I hope you will forgive me, and grant me this request, that I may consider this house as my own for the next ten minutes."

All had risen to their feet, pale and trembling. All understood that the tempest had broken, and that the whispers about Odette were to be answered in this fatal hour. Adèle's heart swelled with sympathy and compassion for the betrayed husband, yet she dared not reply to him. Her husband, however, bowed to the young man in token of silent assent, and he continued slowly, "Madame, I have discovered a most abominable crime. The woman that bears my name has a lover; that lover is my mother's husband. I am ignorant of the exact length of time that my dishonor has lasted; but I know this, every one seeing me live under his roof and eat his bread, must have supposed my complaisant blindness was bought and paid for; that I, the son of one and the husband of the other, bargained with my mother's disgrace and my wife's virtue. God keep you all from such despair as mine. But if my happiness is gone for ever, I will at least preserve my honor."

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Turning to Odette, he continued:

"As M. de Smarte has had the kindness to allow me to consider this house as my own, I order you out of it, and not only out of this house, but out of

society. I want your degradation to be as public as your disgrace has been."

All were silent. Odette stood proudly defiant before them.

Pointing to the open door, Paul exclaimed, "Begone!"

A smile curled her lips. Rather die than let any one see the savage despair in her heart, she shrugged her shoulders, and passed through the groups to the door. On the threshold she turned and confronted them once more, then coolly took her shawl from a chair in the hall, threw it over her shoulders, and walked slowly down the avenue until she was lost to sight.

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She sank on the grass by the road-side, saying, "There is nothing so grand as a good, noble man," and sat there a few minutes staring blankly into the darkness. She imagined she heard steps approaching; frightened, she rose and fled.

Where could she go? To her father? Claude was away, and besides, in this supreme hour, she saw clearly that Claude would abandon her after such public disgrace. She was walking hurriedly down the road to Montrétout. She could see Paris in front of her; the thousands of lights twinkled in the distance like stars; no buildings could be separately distinguished, only a dark mass, stretched as far as she could see. The Seine lay like a ribbon before her, a belt that the proud city has wound around her waist; yonder lay a dark shadow that she knew was the Bois de Boulogne, with its thick foliage. Odette stopped to gaze at the scene before her. So that was Paris—Paris that had crowned her one of the queens of fashion and beauty! Paris that was so indulgent to respectable vice; so forgiving to concealed crimes, and so pitilessly cruel when the thin disguise was removed; so relentless when the Rubicon has once been crossed.

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The distant murmur that came to her from the great city seemed a thousand voices, crying Shame. She was an outcast!

The train was just starting as she sprang into the car. Fortunately, she met none of her acquaintances.

The scandal to-morrow would be known all over the city. The famous artist's love for his daughter-in-law would be the sensation of the hour.

Germaine alone remained to her. Germaine would receive her.

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She was driven to the old house on the Quai Voltaire, and, in spite of the late hour, found Germaine still busy at work, sewing. The door stood open into little Bessie's bed-room, so that as she worked she could watch the little one's peaceful slumber.

Germaine raised her head as the door opened, and looked quietly at her sister.

"You are astonished at seeing me, Germaine."

"I was expecting you."

"Expecting me?"

"Yes. When a woman is sunk as deep in crime and degradation as you are, the hour comes sooner or later when she is driven to seek shelter with her own family. I am not surprised."

Odette staggered back against the wall. Germaine knew all!

Her sister's cold, quiet tones pierced her to the heart. What! would Germaine, too, drive her away!

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She ran to her sister, and, seizing her hand, cried: "Do you hate me, too?"

Germaine released her hand without replying. Then the bitterness of death overcame Odette. She was alone, alone! Even Germaine repulsed her! But Germaine could not drive her away! She would never believe her sister capable of such cold-heartedness.

Grasping her hand again, she cried: "Oh, Germaine, why do you treat me so? I have only you left to love me. I never would have shut you out of my heart if you had committed a crime. Here, on my knees, I implore you to take pity on me." And she clung, sobbing, to her sister. Germaine looked down at her with infinite compassion and sorrow.

"I have no excuse, not one! But, if you only knew what I suffered, trying to resist this consuming passion. You can not know. Your life is so pure and holy, that you can not even imagine what love and passion are."

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Germaine started up, her eyes flaming: "Your criminal passion is no excuse. You think no one can resist this love that carries one away like a mighty river. You think I can not even imagine what love and passion are! But, let me tell you that I, too, know them as well as you! I carry in my heart a love as deep, as wildly passionate, as yours. You love Claude; I love Paul! Do you

remember that little romance I told you so long ago? It was Paul that was at our house. It was Paul I loved. When you told me the name of your future husband, my soul writhed in agony. But I said nothing, because I supposed of course you loved him."

Odette was still kneeling on the floor, completely overwhelmed by this revelation.

Germaine continued: "I have never entered your door since I discovered that you were betraying your noble husband. I became nearly insane with the longing to throw my arms around his neck, to lavish the love and tenderness upon him that his wife was giving to another. Many and many a time have I prayed for strength to resist this burning passion that drove me to him. My sleepless nights, my feverish days—it is with me all the time! So, do not come to me with any excuses for your crime!" Seeing Odette's utter despair, she again felt only pity for her, and stooped to embrace her. Odette avoided her, however, saying: "You have compassion on me because you are an angel, but your love for me is past."

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"Odette!"

"Yes; you love me no longer. I do not blame you. I have unconsciously caused you the greatest suffering and sorrow. I came between you and your happiness. We can never be the same again, for I have ruined your life. May I go to your room for to-night? I am fainting with fatigue, and I wish to be alone."

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Odette dragged herself to the bed-room and closed the door. So Germaine loved Paul, as Odette loved Claude! Why had one fallen, while the other stood firm? She glanced around the simple chamber, so pure and sweet. The bed stood in the alcove, half hidden by the pretty muslin curtains. A few vases and photographs lay on the mantelpiece, with a little statue of the Virgin Mary in the center. Did Germaine's strength of character come from that little statue? Could it be her religion that had sustained and comforted her in her hours of darkness? Odette meditated long and deeply. Which was true, Atheism or Religion? Which of the two sisters was the better prepared for the battle of life; the one with her beads and images, or the one with logic and reason?

Odette dared not reply. Germaine had not fallen, simply because her temptation had not been as great. It was too absurd to think that her faith in some stories about a cross and a child in a manger, had given her the victory.

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But Odette was persuaded that Germaine's flame-lit eyes revealed a love as passionate as her own. Perhaps she, too, would have conquered, if she had had this faith; and how it would have consoled her in her present loathsome degradation! Did not Christ forgive the Magdalen at his feet?

The hours passed slowly. Morning had arrived before she sank to sleep.

When she awoke, Germaine was kneeling at her bedside, holding her hand.

"You?" murmured Odette.

"Yes, dear sister. I am here to implore your forgiveness. I was harsh and cruel to you last night. Will you accept me for your companion? I have plenty of money, you know. Let us go far, far away, to some other country, where you and I can live alone together, in peace and content."

Odette replied:

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"Oh, you brave, noble heart! I am guilty and miserable; but I am not degraded enough to accept your noble offer."

She embraced her sister tenderly, humbly; then she rose.

"Farewell, dear Germaine! I must go to my doom. Farewell."

As she entered Germaine's sitting-room, she met her father, and saw by his agitation and the open letter in his hand, that he had heard from Paul.

"You, here!" he exclaimed. "Miserable girl!"

Odette had her hand on the door, but turned at these words.

"You, at least, can not reproach me, father! An hour of irresistible temptation comes to us women. We feel ourselves dragged to the edge of the precipice with a terrible grasp. Other women have some thing to cling to, some God to cry to; but I could find nothing to seize hold of. I screamed for help, but none came. I looked to Heaven, but you had taught me it was empty. I know what you are going to say. My shame and disgrace are known all over the city. I can feel the pitiless finger of scorn pointed at me. I am fallen so low that, if I did not have an angel for a sister, not one compassionate glance would fall on me. This degradation is your work, father. Are you not proud of it? God, the soul, eternity, the Virgin—they may be foolish, old-fashioned superstitions; but women without them are helpless and lost."

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She turned again to the door.

"Odette, Odette, where are you going?" cried the unhappy father.

"I am going where all women go whose honor is lost, who are desperate, who believe in neither God, nor goodness, nor justice. I am going—to perdition!"

And she disappeared, leaving her father's gray head bowed in despair, while Germaine was kneeling, her eyes and hands raised to Heaven.

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All Paris remembers Claude Sirvin's attempt at suicide.

The famous artist shot himself in the breast, but fortunately he recovered from the dangerous wound. I met him not long since, gay and smiling, with a pretty little actress on his arm.

But no one seemed so thoroughly contented and happy as Count David de Bruges; that is, until the day when his handsome horses ran away with him and overturned the carriage. His injuries were comparatively slight, but his companion, the beautiful Odette, was carried home lifeless.

In a beautiful villa, almost hidden by the grand old elm trees surrounding it, in Paissy, that lovely suburb of Paris, lives the author of that work on "Comparative Legislation," which last Winter attracted such attention in the legal circles of the old and the new world.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious printing mistakes have been corrected.
Both "fireplace" and "fire-place" were used in this book.
Both "depot" and "dépôt" were used in this book.
Page 17, closing quotation mark added.
Page 22, repeated word "the" removed in "the other, about the fogs."
Page 35, "priz" changed to "prix."
Page 100, "for-one" changed to "for one."
Page 111, "wierd" changed to "weird."
Page 160, "acknowlege" changed to "acknowledge."
Page 168, "tête-á-têtes" changed to "tête-à-têtes."
Page 176, opening quotation mark added.
Page 253, superfluous opening quotation mark removed.
Page 254, repeated word "one" removed.
Page 256, added missing period after "May 7, 1880."
Page 257, missing period added after "Detective."
Page 257, opening double quotation mark added before "Shadowed by..."
Page 257, missing period added after "colored story."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ODETTE'S MARRIAGE ***

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