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Théophile Gautier**

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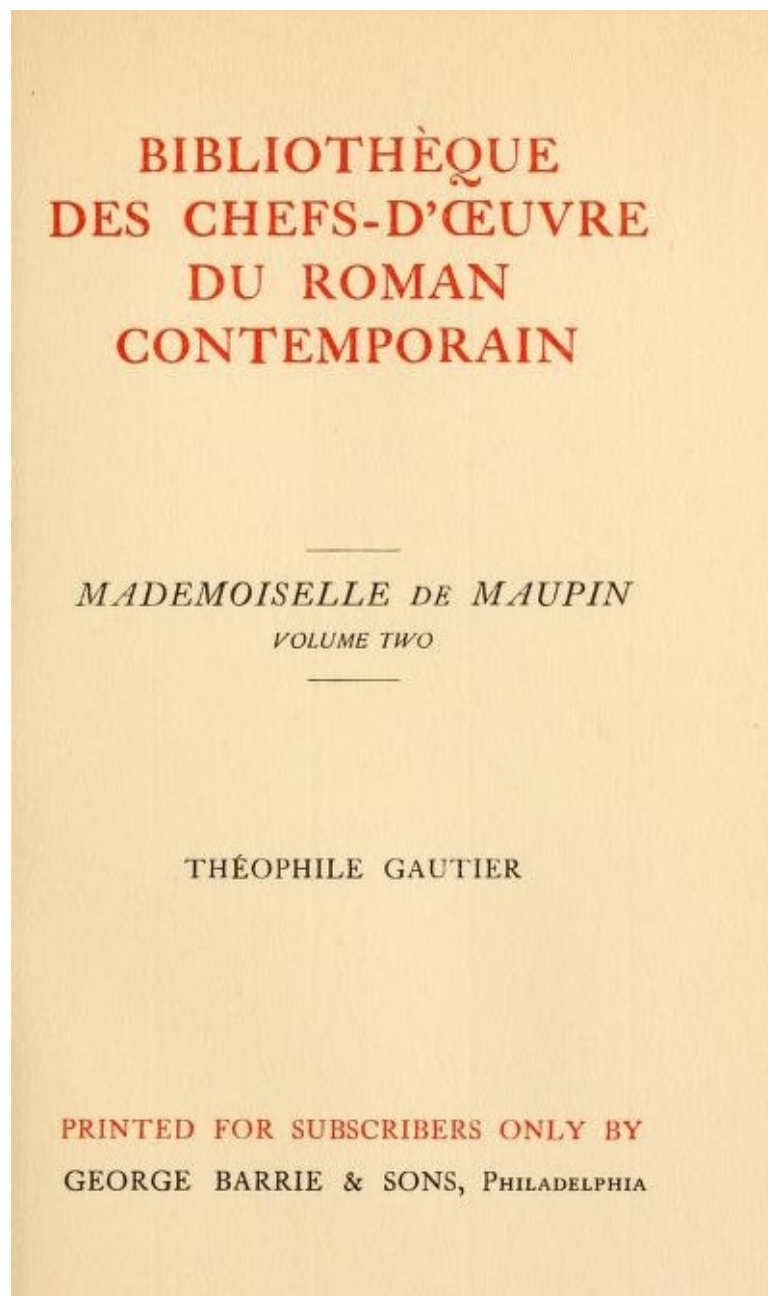
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# MADemoiselle de MAUPIN

VOLUME TWO

BY

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

THE REALISTS

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1897



*Chapter XII — Her supple, yielding body shaped itself to mine like wax and took its whole exterior outline as exactly as possible:—water would not have found its way more scrupulously into every irregularity in the line.—Thus glued to my side, she produced the effect of the double stroke that painters give to the shadow side of their picture in laying on their color.*

THIS EDITION OF

BY

I. G. BURNHAM

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER LE SUEUR

AND DRAWINGS BY

ÉDOUARD TOUDOUZE

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IX

That is the fact.—I love a man, Silvio.—I tried for a long while to deceive myself; I gave a different name to the sentiment I felt, I clothed it in the guise of pure, disinterested friendship; I believed that it was nothing more than the admiration I have for all beautiful persons and all beautiful things; I walked for several days through the deceitful, laughing paths that wander about every new-born passion; but I realize now in what a deep and terrible slough I have become involved. There is no way of concealing the truth from myself longer; I have examined myself carefully, I have coolly considered all the circumstances; I have gone to the bottom of the most trivial details; I have searched every corner of my heart with the assurance due to the habit of studying one's self; I blush to think it and to write it; but the fact, alas! is only too certain.—I love this young man, not with the affection of a friend, but with love;—yes, with love.

You, whom I have loved so dearly, Silvio, my dear, my only friend and companion, have never made me feel anything of the sort, and yet, if there ever was under heaven a close, warm friendship, if ever two hearts, although utterly different, understood each other perfectly, ours was that friendship and ours those two hearts. How many swiftly-flying hours have we passed together! what endless conversations, always too soon ended! how many things we have said to each other that no one ever said before!—We had, each in the other's heart, the window that Momus would have opened in man's side. How proud I was to be your friend, although younger than you—I so foolish, you so sensible!

My feeling for this young man is really incredible; no woman ever disturbed my peace of mind so strangely. The sound of his clear, silvery voice acts upon my nerves and excites me in a most peculiar way; my soul hangs upon his lips, like a bee upon a flower, to drink the honey of his words.—I cannot brush against him as we pass without shivering from head to foot, and in the evening, when the time comes to say good-night and he gives me his soft, satiny hand, my whole life rushes to the place he has touched and I can feel the pressure of his fingers an hour after.

This morning I looked at him for a long while without his seeing me.—I was hidden behind my curtain.—He was at his window which is exactly opposite mine.—This part of the chateau was built toward the close of the reign of Henri IV.; it is half of brick, half of unhewn stone, according to the custom of the time; the window is long and narrow, with stone lintel and a stone balcony.—Théodore—for you have already guessed of course that he is the young man in question—was leaning in a melancholy attitude on the rail, and seemed to be deep in meditation.—Draperies of red damask with large flowers, half drawn aside, fell in broad folds behind him and served as a background.—How beautiful he was, and what a marvellous effect his dark, sallow face produced against the dark red! Two great bunches of hair, black and glossy, like the grape clusters of Erigone of old, fell gracefully along his cheeks and made a charming frame for the pure and delicate oval of his beautiful face. His round, plump neck was entirely bare and he wore a sort of dressing-gown with flowing sleeves not unlike a woman's robe. He held in his hand a yellow tulip, at which he plucked pitilessly in his reverie, throwing the pieces to the wind.



*Chapter IX — This morning I looked at him for a long while without his seeing me.—I was hidden behind my curtain.—He was at his window which is exactly opposite mine.—\*\*\*Théodore—for you have already guessed of course that he is the young man in question—was leaning in a melancholy attitude on the rail, and seemed to be deep in meditation.*

One of the shafts of light that the sun projected on the wall cast its reflection on the window, and the picture took on a warm golden tone that the most chatoyant of Giorgione's canvases might have envied.

With that long hair waving gently in the wind, that marble neck thus uncovered, that ample robe enveloping the form, those lovely hands protruding from the sleeves like the pistils of a flower peeping from among their petals, he seemed not the handsomest of men but the loveliest of women,—and I said to myself in my heart: "He is a woman, oh! he is a woman!"—Then I suddenly remembered an absurd thing I wrote to you long ago, you know, about my ideal and the way in which I was surely destined to meet her; the beautiful dame in the Louis XIII. park, the red and white chateau, the terrace, the avenues of old chestnuts and the interview at the window; I gave you all the details before.—And there it was—what I saw was the exact realization of my dream.—There was the style of architecture, the effect of light, the type of beauty, the coloring and the character I had longed for;—nothing was lacking, except that the lady was a man;—but I confess that at that moment I had entirely forgotten that.

It must be that Théodore is a woman in disguise; it cannot be otherwise. His excessive beauty, excessive even for a woman, is not the beauty of a man, were he Antinous, the friend of Adrian, or Alexis, the friend of Virgil.—He is a woman, *parbleu!* and I am a fool to have tormented myself so. In that way everything is explained as naturally as possible, and I am not such a monster as I thought.

Does God put such long, dark, silky fringes upon a man's coarse eyelids? Would he tinge our vile, thick-lipped, hairy mouths with that bright, delicate carmine? Our bones, hewn with reaping-hooks and roughly jointed, do not deserve to be swathed in flesh so white and delicate; our battered skulls were not made to be bathed in waves of such lovely hair.

O beauty! we are made only to love thee and adore thee on our knees, if we have found thee—to seek thee incessantly throughout the world, if that happiness has not been vouchsafed us; but to possess thee, to be thou ourselves, is possible only for angels and women. Lovers, poets, painters and sculptors, we all seek to erect an altar to thee, the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter in his canvas, the sculptor in his marble; but the source of everlasting despair is the inability to give tangible form to the beauty one feels, and to be enveloped by a body which does not realize the idea of the body you understand to be yours.

I once saw a young man who had stolen the bodily form I ought to have had. The villain was just what I would have liked to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and beside him I looked like a rough drawing of him. He was of my height, but stronger and more slender; his figure resembled mine, but possessed a refinement and dignity that I have not. His eyes were of the same shade as mine, but they had a sparkle and an animation that mine will never have. His nose had been cast in the same mould as mine, but it seemed to have been retouched by the chisel of a skilful sculptor; the nostrils were more open and more passionate, the flat surfaces more sharply defined, and it had a heroic cast of which that respectable part of my countenance is entirely devoid. You would have said that nature had tried first to make that perfected myself in my person.—I seemed to be the blotted and unsightly rough draft of the thought of which he was the copy in fine type. When I saw him walk, stop, salute the ladies, sit down and lie down with the perfect grace that results from beautiful proportions, I was seized with such horrible melancholy and jealousy as the clay model must feel as it dries up and cracks in obscurity in a corner of the studio, while the haughty marble statue, which would not exist but for it, stands proudly erect on its carved pedestal and attracts the notice and the enthusiastic praise of visitors. For after all that rascal was simply myself cast a little more successfully and with less unruly bronze that worked itself more carefully into the hollow places of the mould.—I consider him very insolent to strut about thus with my form, and to play the braggart as if he were an original type; at the best, he is simply a plagiarist from me, for I was born before him, and except for me nature would never have had the idea of making him as he is.—When women lauded his good manners and the charms of his person, I had a most intense longing to rise and say to them: "Fools that you are, praise me directly, for this gentleman is myself, and it is a useless circumlocution to send him what comes back to me."—At other times my fingers itched to strangle him and to turn his soul out of that body that belonged to me, and I hovered about him with clenched fists and compressed lips, like a nobleman hovering around his palace, in which a family of beggars have taken up their abode during his absence, perplexed as to the best means of casting them out.—The young man is a stupid creature, by the way, and succeeds so much the better on that account.—And sometimes I envy him his stupidity more than his beauty.—The dictum of the Gospel as to the poor in spirit is not complete: they shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven; I know nothing about that, nor do I care; but there is no doubt that they inherit the kingdom of earth—they have money and fair women, that is to say, the only two desirable things in the world.—Do you know a man of spirit who is rich, or a youth of courage and of any sort of merit who has a passable mistress?—Although Théodore is very beautiful, I have never desired his beauty, and I prefer that he should have it, rather than I.

Those strange passions of which the elegies of the ancient poets are full, which used to surprise us so and which we could not conceive, are therefore possible, nay, probable. In the translations we made of them, we used to substitute names of women for the names we found. Juventius was changed to Juventia, Alexis became Ianthe. The comely youths became lovely maidens, and thus we reconstituted the unnatural seraglio of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and the gentle Virgil. It was a very gallant occupation, which proved simply how little we understood the genius of the ancients.

I am a man of the Homeric days;—the world in which I live is not mine, and I have no comprehension of the society that surrounds me. Christ did not come to earth for me; I am as great a pagan as Alcibiades and Phidias.—I have never been to Golgotha to pluck the passion-flowers, and the deep stream that flows from the side of the Crucified One and forms a red girdle around the world has not bathed me in its waves;—my rebellious body refuses to recognize the supremacy of the soul, and my flesh does not understand why it should be mortified.—To me the earth is as fair as heaven, and I think that the correction of physical form is virtue. Spiritual matters are not my forte, I like a statue better than a phantom and high noon better than twilight. Three things delight my soul: gold, marble, and purple,—brilliancy, solidity, color. My dreams are made of those, and all the palaces I build for my chimeras are constructed with those materials.—Sometimes I have other dreams—of long cavalcades of snow-white horses, without saddle or bridle, ridden by handsome, naked young men, who pass upon a band of deep blue as on the friezes of the Parthenon; or deputations of maidens crowned with fillets, with tunics with straight folds and ivory cisterns, who seem to wind about an enormous vase.—There is never any mist or haze, anything indistinct or uncertain. My sky has no clouds, or, if it has any, they are solid clouds, carved with the sculptor's chisel, made from blocks of marble that have fallen from the statue of Jupiter. Mountains with sharply-outlined peaks rise abruptly along its edges, and the sun, leaning on one of the highest summits, opens wide its yellow lion's eye with the golden eyelids.—The grasshopper chirps and sings, and the corn bursts its sheath; the vanquished shadow, unable to withstand the heat, musters its platoons and takes refuge at the foot of the trees; everything is radiant and glowing and resplendent. The slightest detail acquires substance and becomes boldly accentuated; every object assumes robust shape and color. There is no place for the tameness and reverie of Christian art.—That world is mine.—The brooks in my landscapes fall in carved streams from a carved urn; between those tall, green reeds, as resonant as those of Eurotas, you see the gleam of the rounded, silvery hip of some naiad with sea-green hair. In

yonder dark oak forest Diana passes, her quiver on her back, with her flying scarf and her buskins with interlaced bands. She is followed by her pack and her nymphs with the melodious names.—My pictures are painted in four tones like those of the primitive painters, and often they are only colored bas-reliefs; for I love to put my finger on what I have seen and to follow the curve of the contours into its deepest recesses; I consider everything from every point of view and walk around it with a light in my hand.—I have contemplated love in the old-fashioned light, as a bit of sculpture more or less perfect. How is the arm? Not bad.—The hands do not lack delicacy.—What think you of that foot? I think that the ankle has no nobility, and that the heel is commonplace. But the neck is well placed and well shaped, the curved lines are wavy enough, the shoulders are plump and well modelled.—The woman would make a passable model and several portions of her would bear to be cast.—Let us love her.

I have always been like this. For women I have the glance of a sculptor, not that of a lover. I have been anxious all my life about the shape of the decanter, never about the quality of its contents. If I had had Pandora's box in my hands, I believe I never should have opened it. I said just now that Christ did not come to earth for me; nor did Mary, the star of the modern Heaven, the gentle mother of the glorious Babe.

Often and long have I stood beneath the stone foliage of cathedrals, in the uncertain light from the stained-glass windows, at the hour when the organ moaned of itself, when an invisible finger was placed upon the keys and the wind blew through the pipes,—and I have buried my eyes deep in the pale azure of the Madonna's sorrowful eyes. I have followed piously the emaciated outline of her face, the faintly-marked arch of her eyebrows; I have admired her smooth, luminous forehead, her chastely transparent temples, her cheek bones tinged with a dark, maidenly flush, more delicate than the peach bloom; I have counted one by one the lovely golden lashes that cast their trembling shadow on her cheeks; I have distinguished, in the half-light in which she is bathed, the fleeting outlines of her slender, modestly bent neck; I have even, with audacious hand, raised the folds of her tunic and seen without a veil that virgin bosom, swollen with milk, that was never pressed by any save divine lips; I have followed the tiny blue veins in their most imperceptible ramifications, I have placed my finger upon them to force the celestial fluid to gush forth in white threads; I have brushed with my lips the bud of the mystic rose.

Ah well! I confess that all that immaterial beauty, so fleet-winged and so vaporous that one feels that it will soon take flight, made a very slight impression on me.—I like the Venus Anadyomene better, a thousand times better.—The antique eyes, turned up at the comers, the pure, sharply-cut lip, so amorous and so well adapted to be kissed, the full, low forehead, the hair, wavy as the sea, and knotted carelessly behind the head, the firm, lustrous shoulders, the back with its thousand charming sinuosities, the small, closely-united breasts, all the rounded, tense outlines, the broad hips, the delicate strength, the evident superhuman vigor in a body so adorably feminine, delight me and enchant me to a degree of which you, the Christian and the virtuous man, can form no idea.

Mary, despite the humble air that she affects, is much too haughty for me; the tip of her toes, swathed in white bands, hardly rests upon the globe, already turning blue in the distance, on which the ancient dragon writhes.—Her eyes are the loveliest on earth, but they are always looking up toward the sky or down at her feet; they never look you in the face,—they have never served as a mirror to a human form.—And then, I do not like the clouds of smiling cherubs who circle about her head in a light vapor. I am jealous of those tall virile angels, with floating hair and robes, who so amorously crowd about her in the pictures of the Assumption; the hands clasped together to support her, the wings fluttering to fan her, displease and annoy me. Those dandies of heaven, coquettish, over-bearing youngsters, in tunics of light and wigs of gold thread, with their beautiful blue and green feathers, seem to me too gallant by far, and if I were God, I would be careful how I gave my mistress such pages.

Venus comes forth from the sea to visit the world—as befits a divinity who loves men—alone and naked.—She prefers the earth to Olympus, and has more men than gods for lovers; she does not envelop herself in the languorous veils of mysticism; she stands, her dauphin behind her, her foot upon her shell of mother-of-pearl; the sun strikes upon her gleaming breast, and with her white hand, she holds in the air the wavy masses of her lovely hair, in which old father Ocean has scattered his most perfect pearls.—You can see her; she conceals nothing, for modesty was invented only for the ugly, it is a modern invention, the offspring of Christian contempt for form and matter.

O old world! all that thou didst revere is despised; thy idols are overthrown in the dust; emaciated anchorites, dressed in rags and tatters, bleeding martyrs, their shoulders torn by the tigers of thy circuses, have perched upon the pedestals of thy beautiful, charming gods;—Christ has enveloped the world in His shroud. Beauty must needs blush for itself and put on a winding-sheet.—Ye comely youths with your limbs rubbed in oil, who struggle in the lyceum or the gymnasium, under the brilliant sky, in the sunlight of Attica, before the marvelling crowd; ye maidens of Sparta who dance the *bibase*, and who run naked to the summit of Taygetus, resume your tunics and chlamydes;—your reign is past. And ye, moulders of marble, Prometheuses in bronze, break your chisels:—there will be no more sculptors.—The palpable world is dead. A dark, lugubrious thought alone fills the immense void.—Cleomenes is going to the weavers' shops to see what folds the cloth or linen takes.

Virginity, thou bitter weed, born in soil drenched with blood, whose blanched and sickly flower blossoms painfully in the damp shade of cloisters, beneath a cold shower of lustral water;—thou rose without perfume, bristling with thorns, thou hast replaced for us the lovely, joyous roses, bathed in spikenard and Falernian, of the dancing girls of Sybaris!

The ancient world knew naught of thee, unfruitful flower; thou didst never form a part of its wreaths whose perfume intoxicated;—in that lusty, healthy society thou wouldst have been disdainfully trodden under foot.—Virginity, mysticism, melancholy—three unknown words—three new diseases, brought to earth by Christ.—Ye pallid spectres, who inundate our world with your frozen tears, and who, with your elbows on a cloud and your hands on your breasts, can say nothing but "O death! O death!" ye could never have stepped foot upon that earth, peopled with indulgent, madcap gods!

I look upon woman, after the ancient fashion, as a beautiful slave destined to minister to our pleasures.—Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. To me she is still something dissimilar and inferior to us, whom we adore and with whom we toy, a plaything more intelligent than if it were made of ivory or gold, and having the power to pick itself up if it is dropped on the ground.—I have been told, because of that, that I have a low opinion of women; it seems to me, on the contrary, to show that I have a very high opinion of them.

Upon my word I cannot see why women are so eager to be looked upon as men.—I can understand that they might long to be boa-constrictors, lions or elephants, but that they should long to be men passes my comprehension. If I had been at the Council of Trent when this important question was discussed, namely, whether woman is a man, I should most certainly have given my opinion in the negative.

I have in the course of my life written some amorous verses, or at all events some that claimed to be so considered.—I have just read over a part of them. The modern idea of love is absolutely lacking.—If they were written in Latin distiches instead of in French rhymes, they might be taken for the work of a wretched poet of Augustus's time. And I am amazed that the women, for whom they were written, did not take serious offence at them instead of being charmed with them.—To be sure, women understand no more about poetry than cabbages and roses, which is very natural and simple, they being themselves poetry, or at least the best instruments of poetry: the flute does not hear or understand the tune that you play upon it.

In these poems I speak of nothing but golden or ebon locks, the miraculous fineness of the skin, the roundness of the arm, the small size of the feet and the refined shape of the hand, and they all end with an humble entreaty to the divinity to accord as speedily as possible the enjoyment of all those beautiful things.—In the finest passages, there is naught but garlands suspended at the door, showers of roses, incense, a succession of Catullian kisses, delicious, sleepless nights, quarrels with Aurora coupled with injunctions to the aforesaid Aurora to withdraw behind old Tithonus's saffron-colored curtains;—there is splendor without heat, resonance without vibration.—They are rhythmical, polished, written with sustained interest; but, through all the refinements and veils of expression, you can feel the sharp, stern voice of the master trying to assume a softer tone in speaking to the slave.—Not, as in the erotic poems written since the Christian era, does a heart ask another heart to love it, because it loves; there is no smiling, azure lake inviting a brook to plunge into its bosom that they may reflect together the stars of heaven; no pair of doves spreading their wings at the same time to fly to the same nest.

Cynthia, you are fair; make haste. Who knows if you will be alive to-morrow?—Your hair is blacker than the lustrous flesh of an Ethiopian maiden. Make haste; in a few years slender silvery threads will glide in among its dense masses;—these roses smell sweet to-day, to-morrow they will have the odor of death and will be only the dead bodies of roses.—Let us inhale your roses so long as they resemble your cheeks; let us kiss your cheeks so long as they resemble your roses.—When you are old, Cynthia, no one will care aught for you, not even the lictor's assistants if you should pay them, and you will run after me whom you repulse to-day. Wait until Saturn has furrowed with his nail that pure and gleaming brow, and you will see how your threshold, now so besieged, so implored, so covered with flowers and so wet with tears, will be avoided, accursed and covered with weeds and nettles.—Make haste, Cynthia; the smallest wrinkle may serve as a grave for the greatest love.

That brutal, imperious formula summarizes the ancient elegy; it constantly comes back to that; that is its main argument, the strongest, the Achilles of its arguments. After that it hasn't very much to say, and when it has promised a robe of byssus of two colors and a string of pearls of equal size, it is at the end of its tether.—It also includes almost all of what I find most conclusive under such circumstances.—I do not, however, always confine myself to this somewhat restricted programme, and I embroider my poor canvas with a few threads of silk of different colors, picked up here and there. But these threads are short or knotted together twenty times and do not cling firmly to the woof. I speak politely of love because I have read many beautiful things on the subject. Only an actor's talent is needed for that. With many women this external appearance is enough; the habit of writing and using the imagination prevents me from falling short in such matters, and every mind at all experienced, by applying itself to the task, can readily attain that result; but I do not feel a word of what I say, and I keep repeating, in an undertone, with the poet of old: "Cynthia, make haste."

I have often been accused of being a knave and a pretender.—No one on earth would like so well as I to speak freely and to empty his heart!—but as I have no idea or sentiment in common with the people about me,—as there would be a hurrah and a general hue and cry at the first true word I spoke, I have preferred to keep silent, or, if I speak, to give utterance only to idiotic remarks that are received everywhere and entitled to privilege of citizenship.—I should receive a warm welcome if I said to women such things as I have just written to you! I fancy that they wouldn't much relish my way of looking at things or the view I take of love.—As for the men, I cannot tell them to their faces that they are wrong not to walk on four legs; and in truth I have a more favorable opinion of them.—I have no desire to quarrel at every word. What difference does

it make after all what I think or what I don't think? that I am sad when I seem cheerful, cheerful when I have an air of melancholy! No-body is inclined to cry out at me because I don't go about naked; may I not dress my face as well as my body? Why should a mask be more reprehensible than a pair of breeches, and a lie than a corset?

Alas! the earth revolves about the sun, roasted on one side, frozen on the other. There is a battle in which six hundred thousand men cut and slash at one another; it is the loveliest day imaginable; the flowers are coquettish beyond words and boldly throw open their gorgeous breasts even under the horses' feet. To-day a fabulous number of worthy deeds are done; it rains in torrents, there is snow and thunder and lightning and hail; one would say that the world was coming to an end. The benefactors of humanity are covered with mud up to their middle like dogs, unless they have a carriage. Creation mocks pitilessly at the creature and lets fly stinging sarcasms at every turn. Everybody is indifferent to everybody else, and everything lives or vegetates according to its own law. Whether I do this or that, whether I live or die, whether I suffer or enjoy, whether I dissemble or speak frankly, what matters it to the sun or the turnips or even to mankind? A wisp of straw fell on an ant and broke his third leg at the second joint; a rock fell upon a village and crushed it; I do not believe that one of those disasters brings more tears than the other to the golden eyes of the stars. You are my best friend, if that word is not as hollow as a bell; if I should die, it is perfectly certain that, however distressed you might be, you wouldn't go without your dinner even for two days, and that, notwithstanding that terrible catastrophe, you would continue to enjoy your game of backgammon.—Who of my friends, who of my mistresses will remember my names and baptismal names twenty years hence, and who would recognize me in the street, if I should pass by with a coat that was out at the elbows?—Oblivion and annihilation, that is the end of man.

I feel as utterly alone as possible, and all the threads that lead from me to external things and from them to me have broken one by one. There have been few instances where a man who has retained the power to judge his impulses has reached such a degree of brutishness. I resemble a decanter of liquor which has been left uncorked and from which the spirit has evaporated completely. The liquid has the same appearance and the same color; taste it, you will find it as insipid as water.

When I think of it I stand aghast at the rapidity of this decomposition; if this continues I must pickle myself or I shall inevitably rot, and the worms will attack me, as I no longer have a soul, and that alone marks the distinction between a body and a corpse.—Not more than a year ago I still had something human about me;—I moved about and sought enlightenment. I had one thought that I cherished more than all the rest, a sort of goal, an ideal; I longed to be loved, I dreamed the dreams common to youths of that age,—less vague, less chaste, to be sure, than those of ordinary young men, but contained nevertheless within reasonable bounds. Gradually all the incorporeal part of me became detached and faded away and naught remained at the bottom but a thick layer of coarse slime. The dream became a nightmare and the chimera a succubus;—the world of the soul closed its ivory doors in my face; I no longer understand anything except what I touch with my hands; I have dreams of stone; everything condenses and hardens about me, nothing wavers, nothing vacillates, there is no air or breath; matter weighs me down, takes possession of me, crushes me; I am like a pilgrim who should fall asleep on a summer's day with his feet in the water, and wake in winter with his legs caught and embedded in the ice. I no longer desire the love or friendship of any one; even glory, that resplendent halo that I so craved for my brow, no longer arouses the slightest desire in my mind. There is but one thing, alas! that stirs my pulses now, and that is the horrible desire that draws me toward Théodore.—This is the sum of all my moral notions. Whatever is physically beautiful is good, whatever is ugly is bad.—If I should see a lovely woman whom I knew to be the wickedest creature on earth, adulteress and poisoner, I confess that it would make no difference to me and would in no wise interfere with my taking delight in her, if I found the shape of her nose what it should be.

This is my idea of supreme happiness:—A large square building with no outside windows: a large court-yard, surrounded by a colonnade of white marble, a crystal fountain in the centre with a jet of quicksilver after the Arabian fashion, orange-trees and pomegranates in boxes, arranged alternately; overhead a deep blue sky and a bright yellow sun;—tall greyhounds with pointed muzzles would lie sleeping here and there; from time to time barefooted negroes with gold ringlets about their legs, and beautiful, slender white maid-servants, dressed in rich and fanciful costumes, would pass in and out under the arches, baskets on their arms or jugs on their heads. And I should be seated, silent and motionless, beneath a magnificent canopy, surrounded by piles of cushions, a great tame lion under my elbow, the bare breast of a young female slave under my foot by way of hassock, and smoking opium in a long jade pipe.

I cannot imagine paradise in any other form; and if God wills that I shall go there after my death, he will build me a little kiosk on that plan in the corner of some star.—Paradise as it is commonly described seems to me far too musical, and I confess in all humility that I am absolutely incapable of sitting through a sonata that should last only ten thousand years.

You see what my Eldorado is, my promised land; it is as good a dream as another; but it has this special peculiarity, that I never introduce any known face into it; that no one of my friends ever crossed the threshold of that imaginary palace; that no one of the women I have had has ever been seated beside me on the velvet cushions: I am always alone there in the midst of apparitions. I have never had an idea of loving all the female figures, all the lovely shades of young girls with which I people it; I have never fancied one of them in love with me.—In that seraglio of my fantasy, I have created no favorite sultana. There are negresses there, mulattresses, Jewesses with blue skin and red hair, Greeks and Circassians, Spaniards and



Englishwomen; but they are to me simply symbols of coloring and feature, and I have them as one has all sorts of wine in his cellar and all species of humming-birds in his collection. They are pleasure machines, pictures that need no frame, statues that come to you when you have a fancy to look at them nearer at hand and call them. A woman has this incontestable advantage over a statue, that she turns of herself in whatever direction you choose, whereas you must make the circuit of the statue and station yourself where the best view is to be had—which is tiresome.

You must see that with such ideas I cannot remain in these times or in this world; for one cannot exist thus without regard to time and space. I must find something else.

Such a conclusion is the simple and logical result of such thoughts.—When one seeks only the gratification of the eye, symmetry of figure and purity of feature, one accepts them wherever he finds them. This explains the extraordinary aberrations of love among the ancients.

Since the days of Christ there has not been a single statue of man in which youthful beauty was idealized and reproduced with the care that characterizes the ancient sculptors.—Woman has become the symbol of moral and physical beauty: man has really been dethroned since the day the child was born at Bethlehem. Woman is the queen of creation; the stars join to form a crown for her head, the crescent moon deems it an honor to form a cradle for her foot, the sun gives her his purest gold to make trinkets, painters who wish to flatter the angels give them the features of women, and far be it from me to blame them for it.—Before the coming of the sweet-tempered, courteous dealer in parables, it was very different; men did not feminize the gods or heroes whom they wished to make seductive; they had their type, at once sturdy and delicate, but always masculine, however amorous the outlines, however smooth and devoid of muscles and veins the workmen may have made their divine legs and arms. They readily made the special beauties of women consistent with this type. They broadened the shoulders, they lessened the size of the hips, they gave more prominence to the breast, they accentuated more strongly the joints of the arms and thighs.—There is almost no difference between Paris and Helen. Wherefore the hermaphrodite was one of the most ardently-cherished chimeras of the ancient idolatry.

That son of Hermes and Aphrodite is, in very truth, one of the most attractive creations of pagan genius. It is impossible to imagine anything more ravishingly beautiful than those two bodies, both perfect, harmoniously melted together, those two types of beauty, so equal yet so different, which unite to form one that is superior to either, because they mutually soften each other and bring out each the other's good points: to one who adores form exclusively, can there be a more pleasing uncertainty than that due to the sight of that back, those doubtful loins, those legs, so strong and slender that you are in doubt whether they should be attributed to Mercury on the point of taking flight or Diana coming from the bath? The trunk is a combination of the most charming singularities; above the full round chest of the lusty youth rises with strange grace the swelling breast of a young virgin. Beneath the sides, well wrapped in flesh and feminine in their softness, you divine the muscles and the ribs, as in the sides of a young man; the stomach is a little flat for a woman, a little round for a man, and there is something vague and indecisive about the whole character of the body, which it is impossible to describe and which has a charm all its own.—Théodore would surely be a most excellent model of that kind of beauty; it seems to me, however, that in him the feminine element carries the day and that he has retained more of Salmacis than the Hermaphrodite of the *Metamorphoses*.

The strange part of it all is that I hardly think of his sex now, and that I love him with a sense of perfect security. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that this love is an abomination, and I tell myself so in the harshest possible way; but it comes only from the lips, it is an argument that I urge upon myself and fail to appreciate; it really seems to me that it is the simplest thing in the world and that any other in my place would do the same.

I look at him, I listen to him talk or sing—for he sings admirably—and I take an indescribable pleasure in it.—He seems to me so much like a woman that one day, in the heat of conversation, I called him madame inadvertently, whereat he laughed, and it seemed to me a decidedly forced laugh.

But if he is a woman, what can be his motive for masquerading thus? I cannot answer the question in any way. That a very young, very handsome and perfectly beardless youth should disguise himself as a woman might be conceived; in that way he would open a thousand doors that would otherwise remain obstinately closed to him, and the jest might lead him into a complication of adventures thoroughly *Dædalian* and enjoyable. In that way one can gain access to a woman who is closely guarded or carry a citadel by storm under cover of a surprise. But I cannot understand what advantage can accrue to a young and beautiful woman from travelling around the country in male attire: she can only lose by it. A woman is not likely to renounce thus the pleasure of being courted, flattered and adored; she would renounce life rather, and she would do wisely, for what is a woman's life without all that?—Nothing—or something worse than death. And I always wonder that women who are thirty years old, or have the small-pox, don't jump from the top of a steeple.

Notwithstanding all that, something stronger than all arguments cries out to me that he is a woman, and that she is the woman I have dreamed of, whom alone I am to love, and who is to love me alone;—yes, it is she, the goddess with the eagle glance, with the fair royal hands, who smiled condescendingly upon me from her seat on her throne of clouds. She has presented herself to me in this disguise to put me to the test, to see if I would recognize her, if my amorous gaze would penetrate the veils in which she has enveloped herself, as in the marvellous tales where fairies appear at first in the guise of beggars, then suddenly stand forth resplendent in gold and jewels.

I have recognized you, oh! my love! At sight of you my heart leaped in my breast as Saint-Jean leaped in the breast of Sainte-Anne, when she was visited by the Virgin; the air was filled with a blaze of light; I smelt the odor of divine ambrosia; I saw the train of fire at your feet, and I understood at once that you were not an ordinary mortal.

The melodious notes of Sainte-Cecilia's viol, to which the angels listened with delight, are hoarse and discordant compared with the pearly cadences that issue from your ruby lips; the youthful, smiling Graces dance incessantly about you; the birds, when you pass through the woods, murmur as they bend their little feathered heads in order to see you more clearly, and whistle their sweetest refrains to you; the amorous moon rises earlier to kiss you with her pale silver lips, for she has abandoned her shepherd for you; the wind is careful not to efface the delicate print of your dainty foot upon the sand; the fountain, when you lean over it, becomes smoother than crystal, for fear of wrinkling and disturbing the reflection of your celestial face; even the modest violets open their little hearts to you, and play countless little coquettish tricks from before you; the jealous strawberry is stung to emulation and strives to equal the divine carnation of your lips; the infinitesimal gnat hums joyously and applauds you by flapping his wings;—all nature loves and admires you, its loveliest work!

Ah! now I live!—hitherto I had been no better than a dead man: now I have thrown off my shroud, and I stretch out my two thin hands from the grave toward the sun; my blue spectre-like color has left me. My blood flows swiftly through my veins. The ghastly silence that reigned about me is broken at last. The black, opaque arch that weighed upon my brow is lighted up. A thousand mysterious voices whisper in my ear; lovely stars sparkle above me and carpet the windings of my path with their gold spangles; the marguerites smile sweetly on me and the bells tinkle my name with their little twisted tongues. I understand a multitude of things that I used not to understand, I discover marvellous affinities and sympathies, I know the language of the roses and the nightingales, and I can read fluently the book I could not even spell. I have discovered that I have a friend in yonder respectable old oak, covered with mistletoe and parasitic plants, and that the frail and languorous periwinkle, whose great blue eye is always overflowing with tears, has long cherished a secret, discreet passion for me:—it is love, it is love that has unsealed my eyes and given me the key to the enigma.—Love descended into the depths of the cavern where my cowering, drowsy soul was freezing to death; he took it by the hand and led it up the steep and narrow stairway to the outer world. All the doors of the prison were burst open and for the first time the poor Psyche came forth from the me in which she was confined.

Another life has become mine. I breathe through another's lungs, and the blow that should wound him would kill me.—Before this happy day I was like those stupid Japanese idols who are forever looking at their stomach. I was the spectator of myself, the pit at the comedy. I was acting; I watched myself live and listened to the beating of my heart as to the oscillations of a pendulum. That is the whole story. Images were reproduced in my distraught eyes; sounds fell upon my unheeding ear, but nothing from the outer world reached my soul. Nobody's existence was essential to me; indeed I doubted if there were any other existence than mine, nor was I quite sure even of that. It seemed to me that I was alone in the midst of the universe, and that all the rest was only smoke, images, vain illusions, fleeting apparitions destined to people that void.—What a difference!

And yet, what if my presentiment had misled me, if Théodore should prove to be in truth a man, as everybody believes him to be! Such marvellous beauty has sometimes been seen in man; extreme youth may assist the illusion.—It is something I will not think about, for it would drive me mad; the grain that fell yesterday into my sterile heart has already penetrated it, in every direction, with its thousand filaments; it has taken a strong hold there and it would be impossible for me to tear it out. It has already become a green and flourishing tree and its knotted roots have struck deep.—If I should be convinced beyond a doubt that Théodore is not a woman, alas! I cannot say that I should not love him still.

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## X

You were very wise, my sweet friend, to try and dissuade me from the plan I had conceived of seeing men near at hand, of studying them closely, before giving my heart to any one of them.—I have extinguished love, yes, even the possibility of love, within me forever.

What poor creatures we girls are; brought up with so much care, surrounded by a triple wall of virginal precautions and reticence;—allowed to hear nothing, to suspect nothing, our principal knowledge being to know nothing, in what strange misconceptions do we pass our lives and what deceitful chimeras lull us to sleep in their arms!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice accursed be the moment when the idea of this travesty first occurred to me; what horrors, what infamous vulgarity I have been compelled to witness or to listen to! what a treasure of chaste and priceless ignorance I have squandered in a short time!

It was a lovely moonlight night, do you remember? when we walked together at the foot of the garden, in that gloomy, unfrequented path, terminated at one end by a statue of a Faun playing the flute, a Faun without a nose and covered with a thick leprosy of greenish-black moss—and at the other end by an imitation vista drawn on the wall and half washed away by the rain.—Through the still sparse foliage of the elms we could see the twinkling stars and the curve of the silver sickle. The odor of young shoots and fresh flowers came to our nostrils from the flower-

beds, borne upon the languid breath of a faint breeze; an invisible bird warbled a strange, languorous tune; we, like true girls, talked of love and lovers, of the handsome cavalier we had seen at mass; we shared the few notions of the world and of things that we had in our heads; we twisted and turned in a hundred ways a phrase we had heard by chance, the meaning of which seemed to us obscure and strange; we asked each other a thousand of the silly questions that the most perfect innocence alone can imagine.—What primitive poesy, what adorable nonsense in those furtive interviews of two little fools fresh from boarding-school!

You wanted for your lover a gallant, proud young man, with black hair and moustaches, long spurs, long plumes, and a long sword—a sort of amorous Hector—and you were all for the heroic and triumphant; you dreamed of nothing but duels and escalades, and marvellous devotion, and you would readily have thrown your glove in among the lions so that your Esplandian might go and pick it up. It was very comical to see a little girl as you were then, fair-haired and blushing, bending in the slightest breeze, declaim those noble tirades without taking breath, and with the most martial air imaginable.

I, although I was only six months older than you, was six years less romantic; the thing that interested me most was to know what men said among themselves and what they did when they went away from salons and theatres:—I felt that there were many dark, unsavory corners in their lives, carefully concealed from our eyes, which it was most important for us to know about. Sometimes, hiding behind a curtain, I watched from a distance the young gentlemen who came to the house, and it seemed to me at such times that I could detect something cynical and mean in their bearing, vulgar indifference or discourteous preoccupation which I no longer noticed when they had been admitted, and which they seemed to lay aside as if by enchantment at the threshold of the salon. All of them, young and old alike, seemed to me to have adopted a uniform conventional mask, conventional sentiments, and a conventional mode of speech, when they were in the presence of women.—From the corner of the salon where I sat up straight as a doll, my back not touching the back of my chair, pulling my bouquet to pieces in my fingers, I looked and listened; my eyes were cast down, and yet I saw everything to right and left, before and behind me:—like the fabulous eyes of the lynx, my eyes looked through walls, and I could have told what was taking place in the adjoining room.

I had also noticed a notable difference in the way they spoke to married women; there were none of the discreet, polite, playfully-childish sentences such as they addressed to me or my companions, but a more flippant sportiveness, less grave and more familiar manners, the significant reticence and circumlocutions that follow quickly from a corrupt nature that knows it has one similarly corrupt before it; I felt that there was an element of union between them that did not exist between us, and I would have given everything to know what that element was.

With what anxiety and frenzied curiosity did I follow with eye and ear the buzzing, laughing groups of young men who, after breaking through the circle at a few points, resumed their promenade, talking together and casting ambiguous glances as they passed. Incredulous sneering smiles flickered about their full lips; they had the appearance of laughing at what they had said and of retracting the compliments and words of adoration with which they had overwhelmed us. I did not hear their words; but I understood, from the movement of their lips, that they were talking a language that was unknown to me and that no one had ever used before me. Even those who had the most humble and submissive manner tossed their heads with very perceptible indications of ennui and rebellion;—a panting sound, like that made by an actor when he reaches the end of a long speech, escaped from their lungs in spite of them, and they would half turn on their heels as they left us, in an eager, hurried way that denoted inward satisfaction at being relieved from the severe task of being courteous and gallant.

I would have given a year of my life to listen, unseen, to one hour of their conversation. I frequently understood from certain attitudes, from an occasional gesture or an oblique glance in my direction, that I was the subject of conversation among them and that they were discussing either my age or my face. At such times I was on burning coals; the few indistinct words, the fragments of phrases that reached my ears at intervals, excited my curiosity to the highest pitch but could not satisfy it, and I fell into strange doubts and perplexities.

Generally what they said seemed to be favorable, and it was not that that disturbed me: I cared very little whether they thought I was beautiful; but the brief remarks whispered in the ear and almost always followed by long laughter and significant winks—those were what I would have liked to know about; and for one of those sentences spoken in an undertone behind a curtain or in the angle of a door, I would without regret have interrupted the sweetest and most delightful conversation in the world.

If I had had a lover, I would have liked much to know how he would have spoken of me to another man, and in what terms he would have boasted of his good fortune to his boon companions, with a little wine in his head and both elbows on the table.

I know now and in truth I am very sorry to know.—It is always so.

My idea was a mad one, but what is done is done and one cannot unlearn what one has learned. I did not listen to you, my dear Graciosa, and I am sorry for it; but one doesn't always listen to reason, especially when it issues from such a pretty mouth as yours, for, I don't know why it is, but one cannot believe that advice is good unless it is given by some old bald or gray head, as if having been a fool for sixty years could make you wise.

But all this tormented me too much, and I couldn't stand it; I was broiling in my little skin like a chestnut on the stove. The fatal apple was ripening in the foliage above my head, and I must

needs bite into it at last, being at liberty to throw it away afterwards, if it seemed to me to have a bitter taste.

I did like fair-haired Eve, my dearest grandmother—I bit.

The death of my uncle, my only remaining kinsman, leaving me in control of my actions, I carried out the plan I had so long dreamed of.—My precautions were taken with the greatest care so that no one should suspect my sex: I had learned to use the sword and pistol; I was a perfect horsewoman and daring to a point that few equerries could equal; I made a careful study of the proper way of wearing a cloak and brandishing a crop, and in the course of a few months I succeeded in transforming a girl who was considered very pretty, into a youth who was much prettier and who lacked almost nothing except a moustache,—I turned what property I had into cash, and left the town, resolved not to return until I had acquired thorough experience.

It was the only way of solving my doubts: to have lovers would have taught me nothing, or at least it would only have afforded me incomplete information, and I wanted to study man thoroughly, to dissect him fibre by fibre with an inexorable scalpel, and to watch him, alive and palpitating, on my dissecting-table; for that, it was necessary to see him alone in his own house, off his guard, to go with him to walk, to the tavern and elsewhere.—With my disguise I could go everywhere without being noticed; no one would conceal his true character before me, all constraint and reserve would be laid aside, I should receive confidences—I would make false ones in order to receive true ones in return. Alas! women have read only the romance of man, never his history.

It is a terrifying thing to think of—a thing we do not think of—how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of those who seem to love us and whom we marry. Their real existence is as absolutely unknown to us as if they were inhabitants of Saturn or some other planet a hundred million leagues from our sublunary ball; you would say that they were of another species, and that there is not the least intellectual bond between the two sexes;—the virtues of one make the vices of the other, and the things that a man admires make a woman blush.

Our lives are transparent and may be penetrated at a glance.—It is easy to follow us from the house to the boarding-school, from the boarding-school back to the house;—what we do is a mystery to no one; every one can see our wretched crayon drawings, our bouquets in water-color, consisting of a pansy and a rose of the size of a cabbage, sweetly tied together by the stems with a bow of delicate-hued ribbon; the slippers we embroider for our father's or grandfather's birthday have nothing in themselves very occult or very disquieting.—Our sonatas and our romanzas are executed with all desirable lack of warmth. We are well and duly tied to our mother's apron-strings, and at nine o'clock, or ten at the latest, we go to our little white beds in our clean and virtuous little cells, where we are scrupulously bolted and padlocked in until the next morning. The most alert and most jealous sensitiveness could find nothing objectionable in that.

The clearest crystal is not so transparent as such a life.

The man who takes us knows what we have done from the moment we were weaned and even before, if he cares to carry his investigations so far.—Our life is not life, it is a sort of vegetating existence like that of moss and flowers; the freezing shadow of the maternal stalk hovers around us, poor, dwarfed rose-buds, who dare not open. Our principal business is to sit very straight, tightly laced and whaleboned, with our eyes properly downcast, and to outdo, in immobility and stiffness, mannikins and dolls on springs.

We are forbidden to speak, to join in the conversation farther than to answer yes and no if we are questioned. As soon as anything interesting is to be said we are sent away to practise on the harp or spinet, and our music masters are always at least sixty years old and take snuff disgustingly. The models hung in our rooms are anatomically very vague and evasive. The Greek gods, before making their appearance in young ladies' boarding-schools, take care to purchase very full box-coats at a second-hand clothing shop, and to be engraved in stipple, which makes them look like porters or cab-drivers and renders them but ill-adapted to excite our imaginations.

By dint of seeking to prevent us from becoming romantic, they make us idiots. The time when we are being educated is passed, not in teaching us something, but in preventing us from learning anything.

We are really prisoners, in body and mind; but a young man, free to do what he will, who goes out in the morning not to return until the next morning, who has money, who can earn money and dispose of it as he pleases—how could he justify his method of employing his time?—who is the man who would be willing to tell his beloved what he has done during the day and night?—Not one, even of those who are reputed the purest.

I sent my horse and my clothes to a little farm that I own at some distance from the town. I dressed myself, mounted and rode away, not without a strange oppression at the heart.—I regretted nothing, I left nothing behind, neither relatives nor friends, not a dog, not a cat, and yet I was sad, I almost had tears in my eyes; the farm, which I had never visited more than five or six times, had no sentimental attraction for me, and there was none of the fondness you sometimes feel for certain spots, which saddens you when you are obliged to leave them; but I turned two or three times to watch the spiral column of bluish smoke rising among the trees.

There I had left my title of woman, with my skirts and petticoats; in the chamber in which I had dressed were confined twenty years of my life, which were no longer to count and no longer concerned me. On the door might have been written:—"Here lies Madelaine de Maupin;"—for I

was no longer Madelaine de Maupin, but Théodore de Sérannes,—and no one was to call me again by the sweet name of Madelaine.

The drawer in which my dresses, useless thenceforth, were placed, seemed to me like the coffin of my maidenly illusions;—I was a man, or at least I had the appearance of one; the maiden was dead.

When I had altogether lost sight of the tops of the chestnut-trees that surrounded the farm, it seemed to me that I was no longer myself but another, and I remembered my former acts as those of a stranger whom I had watched, or as the beginning of a novel which I had not finished reading.

I recalled complacently a thousand little details, whose childish innocence brought to my lips an indulgent smile, sometimes a little mocking, like that of a young rake listening to the Arcadian, pastoral confidences of a school-boy of thirteen; and, at the moment I was parting from them forever, all my girlish and young-womanish follies flocked to the roadside, making friendly gestures to me and sending me kisses with the tips of their white, tapering fingers.

I put spurs to my horse to fly from this enervating emotion; the trees flew swiftly by on the right hand and the left; but the madcap swarm, buzzing louder than a swarm of bees, rushed along the paths beside the road, calling: "Madelaine! Madelaine!"

I struck my horse a sharp blow on the neck which made him double his speed. My hair stood out almost straight behind my head, my cloak was in a horizontal position, as if the folds had been carved out of stone, our pace was so swift; I looked back once and saw, like a tiny white cloud far away on the horizon, the dust that my horse's feet had raised.

I stopped a moment.

In an eglantine bush, on the edge of the road, I saw something white moving, and a voice, clear and soft as silver, struck my ear:—"Madelaine, Madelaine, where are you going so far from home, Madelaine? I am your virginity, my dear child; that is why I have a white dress, a white crown and a white skin. But why do you wear boots, Madelaine? I thought that you had a very pretty foot. Boots and short-clothes and a great plumed hat like a cavalier going to the war! Why that long sword that strikes and bruises your thigh? You have a strange outfit, Madelaine, and I am not sure if I ought to accompany you."

"If you are afraid, my dear, go back to the house, water my flowers and take care of my doves. But really you are wrong, you would be safer in these garments of stout cloth than in your gauze and fine linen. My boots prevent any one from seeing if I have a pretty foot; this sword is to defend myself and the plume waving in my hat is to frighten away the nightingales that come to sing false songs of love in my ear."

I continued my journey; in the sighs of the wind I thought I could recognize the last bar of the sonata I had learned for my uncle's birthday, and in a great rose that showed its full-blown head above a low wall, the model of the rose I had painted so often in water-colors; as I rode by a house I saw the phantoms of my curtains waving at a window. My whole past seemed to be clinging to me to prevent my going forward and arriving at a new future.

I hesitated two or three times, and I turned my horse's head the other way.

But the little blue snake, curiosity, softly hissed insidious words into my ear, and said to me:—"Go on, go on, Théodore; it is a good opportunity to learn; if you don't learn to-day, you will never know.—And will you bestow your noble heart, at random, on the first honest and passionate exterior?—Men conceal some very extraordinary secrets from us, Théodore!"

I started off at a gallop.

The short-clothes were on my body and not in my mind; I had a very unpleasant feeling, a sort of shiver of fear, to call it by its right name, at a dark place in the forest; a gunshot, fired by a poacher, almost made me faint. If it had been a highwayman, the pistols in my holsters and my long sword would certainly have been of small use to me. But gradually I recovered and paid no farther attention to it.

The sun sank slowly beneath the horizon like the lights in a theatre which are turned down when the performance is at an end. Rabbits and pheasants crossed the road from time to time; the shadows lengthened and all distant objects were tinged with red. Certain parts of the sky were of a most soft, deep lilac, others of a pale lemon or orange; the birds of night began to sing, and a multitude of curious sounds arose from the woods: the little remaining light faded away, and it became quite dark,—darker because of the shadow cast by the trees. And I, who had never been out alone at night, was in the midst of a great forest at eight o'clock! Can you imagine it, my Graciosa,—I who used almost to die of fear at the foot of the garden? My fright returned with tenfold force and my heart beat terribly fast; it was with great satisfaction, I confess, that I saw the lights of the town for which I was bound gleaming and twinkling on a hillside. As soon as I saw those bright specks—like little earthly stars they were—my fright passed away completely. It seemed to me that those unthinking lights were the open eyes of so many friends watching for me.

My horse was no less content than I, and, scenting the sweet odors of a stable, more agreeable to him than the perfume of all the marguerites and wood strawberries on earth, he trotted straight to the Hôtel du Lion-Rouge.



*Chapter X — The inn-keeper approached to ask me what I wanted for supper.*

*He was a pot-bellied man, with a red nose, wall-eyes, and a smile that made the circuit of his head. At every word he uttered he showed a double row of pointed teeth with spaces between, like an ogre's.*

A bright light shone through the leaded windows of the hotel, whose tin sign swung from right to left and moaned like an old woman, for the north wind was beginning to freshen.—I turned my horse over to a groom and entered the kitchen.

An enormous fire-place at the end of the room swallowed in its black and red maw a bundle of fagots at every mouthful, and on each side of the andirons, two dogs, almost as large as men, sat on their hind-quarters, roasting themselves with all imaginable phlegm, content to raise their paws a little and heave a sort of sigh when the heat became more intense; but they certainly would have preferred to be reduced to charcoal rather than move back an inch.

My arrival did not seem to please them, and I tried in vain to make their acquaintance by patting them on the head several times; they cast stealthy glances at me that boded no good.—That astonished me, for animals generally take to me.

The inn-keeper approached to ask me what I wanted for supper.

He was a pot-bellied man, with a red nose, wall-eyes, and a smile that made the circuit of his head. At every word he uttered he showed a double row of pointed teeth with spaces between, like an ogre's. The huge kitchen-knife that hung at his side had a doubtful look, as if it might serve several different purposes. When I had told him what I wanted, he went up to one of the dogs and kicked him. The dog got up and walked toward a sort of wheel and went inside with a piteous, complaining air and a reproachful glance at me. At last, seeing that there was no hope for him, he began to turn the wheel and thereby the spit on which the chicken was impaled that was to furnish my supper.—I resolved to throw him the scraps as a reward for his trouble, and looked about the kitchen while the repast was preparing.

The ceiling was formed of huge oaken beams, all discolored and blackened by the smoke from the fire-place and the candles. On the sideboards pewter plates more highly polished than silver

shone in the darkness, and white crockery with blue flowers.—The numerous rows of well-scoured saucepans along the walls reminded one not a little of the antique bucklers that we see hung in rows along the sides of Greek or Roman triremes—forgive me, Graciosa, the epic magnificence of that simile. One or two buxom servant-maids were moving around a great table, arranging plates and forks, music more agreeable than any other when one is hungry, for the hearing of the stomach then becomes keener than that of the ear. Take it for all in all, despite the landlord's Christmas-box mouth and saw teeth, the inn had a very honest and pleasing appearance; and even had his smile extended a fathom farther and his teeth been three times as long and white, the rain began to patter against the window-panes and the wind to howl in a fashion to take away all desire to depart, for I know nothing more depressing than the groaning of the wind on a dark and rainy night.

An idea came to me that made me smile—it was that no one in the world would have come to look for me where I was.

Indeed, who would have dreamed that little Madelaine, instead of being tucked away in her warm little bed, with her alabaster night-light beside her, a novel under her pillow, her maid in the adjoining closet, ready to run to her at the least nocturnal fright, was rocking to and fro in a straw chair in a country inn twenty leagues from her home, her booted feet resting on the andirons and her little hands buried jauntily in her pockets?

Yes, Madelinette has not remained like her companions, her elbows lazily resting on the balcony rail, between the window jasmine and volubilis, watching the violet fringe of the horizon across the plain or some little rose-colored cloud moving gently in the May breeze. She has not carpeted mother-of-pearl palaces with lily leaves, to furnish quarters for her chimeras; she has not, like you, lovely dreamers, arrayed some hollow phantom in all imaginable perfections; she has sought to compare the illusions of her heart with the reality; she has chosen to know men before giving herself to a man; she has left everything, her lovely dresses of bright-colored silks and velvets, her necklaces, her bracelets, her birds and her flowers; she has voluntarily renounced humble adoration, gallant speeches, bouquets and madrigals, the pleasure of being considered lovelier and better adorned than you, the sweet name of woman, everything that was part of her, and has started all alone, the brave girl, to travel the world over to learn the great science of life.

If people knew that, they would say that Madelaine was mad.—You said so yourself, my dear Graciosa;—but the real mad women are they who toss their hearts to the wind and sow their love at random on the stones and on the rocks, without knowing if a single seed will germinate.

O Graciosa! that is a thought I have never had without dismay: to have loved some one who was not worthy! to have shown one's heart all naked to impure eyes and allowed a profane creature to enter its sanctuary! to have mingled its limpid stream for some time with a muddy stream!—However perfectly they may be separated, some trace of the slime always remains, and the stream can never recover its original transparency.

To think that a man has kissed you and touched you; that he has seen your body; that he can say: "She is thus and so; she has such a mark in such a place; her mind runs upon this or that theme; she laughs for this thing and weeps for that; her dreams are like this; I have in my portfolio a feather from the wings of her chimera; this ring is made from her hair; a bit of her heart is folded into this letter; she caressed me so, and these are her usual words of endearment."

Ah! Cleopatra, I understand now why you always had the lover with whom you had passed the night killed in the morning.—Sublime cruelty, for which, formerly, I could find no imprecations strong enough! Great voluptuary, how well you understood human nature, and what deep purpose there was in that savagery! You did not choose that any living man should divulge the mysteries of your bed; the words of love that flew from your lips were not to be repeated.—Thus you retained your pure illusion. Experience did not tear away, bit by bit, the charming phantom you had cradled in your arms. You chose to be separated from him by a sudden blow of the axe rather than by slow distaste.—What torture, in very truth, to see the man one has chosen belying every moment the idea one has conceived of him; to discover in his character a thousand pettinesses you did not suspect; to discover that what had seemed to you so beautiful through the prism of love is really very ugly, and that he whom you had taken for a true hero of romance is, after all, only a prosaic bourgeois, who wears slippers and a dressing-gown!

I have not Cleopatra's power, and if I had it, I certainly should not have the strength to use it. And so, being neither able nor desirous to cut off my lovers' heads upon getting up in the morning, and being no more inclined to endure what other women endure, I must needs look twice before taking a lover; and that is what I propose to do three times rather than twice, if I should have any desire for one, which I very much doubt after what I have seen and heard; unless, however, I should meet in some blessed unknown country a heart like my own, as the novels say—a pure, virgin heart which has never loved and which is capable of loving, in the true sense of the word; which is not, by any manner of means, an easy thing to find.

Several cavaliers entered the inn; the storm and the darkness had prevented them from continuing their journey.—They were all young, the oldest certainly not more than thirty; their clothes indicated that they belonged to the upper classes, and, even without their clothes, their insolent familiarity and their manners would have made it sufficiently evident. There were one or two who had interesting faces; all the others had, in a greater or less degree, that sort of jovial brutality and careless good-humor which men display among themselves, and which they lay aside completely when they are in our presence.

If they could have suspected that the slender youth half-asleep on his chair in the chimney-corner

was by no means what he appeared to be, but a young girl, a morsel for a king, as they say, certainly they would very soon have changed their tone, and you would have seen them swell out and spread their feathers on the instant. They would have approached me with repeated reverences, legs straight, elbows out, a smile in their eyes and mouth and nose and hair and their whole attitude; they would have emasculated the words they used and would have spoken only in velvet and satin phrases; at my slightest movement they would have acted as if they were going to stretch themselves out on the floor by way of carpet, for fear that my tender feet might be bruised by its inequalities; every hand would have been held out to support me; the softest chair would have been placed in the most desirable position;—but I had the outward appearance of a pretty boy and not of a pretty girl.

I confess that I was almost on the point of regretting my petticoats, when I saw how little attention they paid me.—I was deeply mortified for a moment; for from time to time I forgot that I was now wearing man's clothes, and I had to remind myself of it in order to avoid an attack of bad temper.

I sat there, not saying a word, with folded arms, apparently watching with close attention the chicken on the spit, which was turning browner and browner, and the unfortunate dog whose rest I had so unluckily disturbed, who was struggling away in his wheel like several devils in the same holy-water vessel.

The youngest of the party brought his hand down on my shoulder with a force that made me wince, on my word, and extorted from me a little involuntary shriek, and asked me if I would not prefer to sup with them rather than all alone, as several could drink better than one.—I answered that it was a pleasure I should not have dared to hope for, and that I would be very glad to do it. Our places were laid together and we took our seats at the table.

The panting dog, after swallowing an enormous dipperful of water with three laps of his tongue, resumed his post opposite the other dog, who had not stirred any more than if he had been made of porcelain,—the new-comers, by a special dispensation of Providence, not having ordered chicken.

I learned, from some sentences that escaped them, that they were on their way to the court, which was then at—, where they expected to meet other friends. I told them that I was a young gentleman just from the University, on my way to visit my kins-men in the provinces by the true student's road, that is to say the longest he can find. That made them laugh, and after some comments on my innocent and artless appearance, they asked me if I had a mistress. I answered that I knew nothing about mistresses, whereat they laughed still louder. Bottle succeeded bottle with great rapidity; although I was careful almost always to leave my glass full, my head was a little heated, and, not losing sight of my idea, I managed to turn the conversation upon women. It was no difficult task; for, after theology and æsthetics, it is the subject upon which men talk most freely when they are drunk.

My companions were not exactly drunk, they carried their wine too well for that; but they began to enter upon moral discussions that had no end and to rest their elbows unceremoniously on the table.—One of them had gone so far as to put his arm about the extensive waist of one of the maid-servants, and was nodding his head most amorously; another swore that he should burst on the spot, like a toad that has been made to take snuff, unless Jeannette would let him give her a kiss on each of the great red apples that served her as cheeks. And Jeannette, not wishing that he should burst like a toad, gave him permission with very good grace and did not even check a hand that stole audaciously between the folds of her neckerchief into the moist valley of her breast, very insecurely guarded by a little golden cross, and not until he had exchanged some words with her in an undertone did he allow her to remove the dishes.

And yet they were habitués of the court and young men of refined manners, and unless I had seen it myself I should never have thought of accusing them of such familiarity with servants at an inn.—It is probable that they had just left charming mistresses, to whom they had sworn the mightiest oaths known to man: upon my word, it would never have occurred to me to request my lover not to sully lips on which I had placed mine, by contact with the cheeks of a clumsy wench.

The rascal seemed to take as much pleasure in that kiss as if he had kissed Phyllis or Oriana; it was a loud kiss, solidly and honestly bestowed, and left two little white marks on the fiery cheek of the damsel, who wiped them away with the back of the hand that had just been washing the dishes.—I do not believe that he had ever bestowed one so naturally affectionate on the chaste deity of his heart.—That was his thought apparently, for he said in an undertone and with a disdainful shrug:

"To the devil with thin women and high-flown sentiments!"

That moral maxim seemed to suit the party, and all nodded their heads approvingly.

"Faith," said another, following out the same line of thought, "I am unlucky in everything. Messieurs, allow me to inform you, under seal of the most profound secrecy, that I, who speak to you, have a passion at this moment."

"Oho!" exclaimed the others. "A passion! That is depressing to the last degree. What are you doing with a passion?"

"She's a virtuous woman, messieurs; you must not laugh, messieurs; for, after all, why shouldn't I have a virtuous woman? Have I said anything ridiculous?—I say, you over there, I'll throw the house at your head, if you don't have done."

"Well! what then?"



"She is mad over me:—she's the dearest soul in the world; speaking of souls, I know what I'm talking about, I know at least as much about 'em as I do about horses, and I give you my word that hers is the first quality. She is all exaltation, ecstasy, devotion, self-sacrifice, refinements of tenderness, everything that you can imagine that is most transcendent; but she has hardly any breast, indeed she has none at all, like a girl of fifteen at the outside.—She's pretty enough; has a well-shaped hand and pretty foot; she has too much mind and not enough flesh, and sometimes I long to drop her. Damnation! a man doesn't lie with a mind. I'm very unlucky; pity me, my dear friends."—And, made maudlin by the wine he had drunk, he began to weep hot tears.

"Jeannette will console you for the misfortune of lying with sylphs," said his neighbor, pouring him out a bumper; "her soul's so thick that you could make other women's bodies out of it, and she has flesh enough to cover the carcasses of three elephants."

O pure and noble woman! if you knew what is said of you, in wine-shops, regardless of everything, before people he does not know, by the man you love best in the world and for whom you have sacrificed everything! how shamelessly he undresses you, and with base effrontery abandons you all naked to the vinous gaze of his companions, while you sit sadly at your window, your chin resting in your hand, watching the road by which he should return to you!

If any one had told you that your lover, less than twenty-four hours perhaps after leaving you, was making love to a low-born servant, and that he had made arrangements to pass the night with her, you would have insisted that it was not possible, and you would have refused to believe it; you would hardly have trusted your own eyes and ears; but it was so, nevertheless.

The conversation lasted some time longer, extravagant and coarse to the last degree; but through all the exaggerated buffoonery and the jests, which were often obscene, one could distinguish a deep and genuine feeling of profound contempt for woman, and I learned more that evening than by reading twenty cart-loads of moral essays.

The monstrous, incredible things I heard gave to my features a tinge of melancholy and sternness which the other guests noticed and upon which they good-naturedly rallied me; but my cheerfulness refused to return.—I had shrewdly suspected that men were not as they appeared to be before us, but I did not think that they were so entirely different from their masks, and my surprise equalled my disgust.

I would ask no more than half an hour of such conversation to cure a romantic girl forever; it would be more effective than all the maternal remonstrances.

Some boasted of having as many women as they pleased, and that they had only to say a word to procure them; others exchanged receipts for procuring mistresses or lectured upon the tactics to be followed in laying siege to virtue; some ridiculed the women whose lovers they were and proclaimed themselves the most simple fools on earth for trifling away their time with such hussies.—All of them held love very cheap.

Such, then, are the thoughts they conceal from us under such attractive exteriors! Who would dream of it to see them so humble and cringing, so ready for everything?—Ah! after the victory how boldly they raise their heads and how insolently place their heels on the brow they adored from afar and on their knees! how they avenge themselves for their temporary abasement! how dearly they make us pay for their courtesies! and with what bitter insults do they seek a change from the compliments they have paid us! What fierce brutality of language and thought! what boorish manners and bearing!—It is a complete change and certainly not to their advantage. Far as my previsions had gone, they fell a long way short of the reality.

O ideal, thou blue flower with the golden heart, that bloomest, dew-empared, beneath the spring sky, in the perfumed breath of sweet reveries, and whose fibrous roots, a thousand times finer than the silken tresses of the fairies, burrow to the depths of our soul with their countless hairy heads, to drink its purest substance; thou flower, so sweet and yet so bitter, we cannot uproot thee without making the heart bleed at every pore, and from thy broken stalk ooze great red drops, which, falling one by one into the lake of our tears, serve to measure the halting hours of our death-watch beside the bed of moribund Love!

Ah! accursed flower, how thou hast taken root in my soul! thy branches have multiplied faster than nettles in a ruin. The young nightingales came to drink from thy cup and to sing in thy shade; diamond butterflies, with emerald wings and ruby eyes, fluttered and danced around thy slender pistils, covered with golden dust; swarms of white bees sucked unsuspectingly thy poisoned honey; chimeras folded their swan wings and crossed their lion paws beneath their lovely breasts to rest beside thee. The tree of the Hesperides was no better guarded; sylphs collected the tears of the stars in lily urns, and watered thee every night with their magic watering-pots.—O plant of the ideal, more poisonous than the manchineel or the deadly upas-tree, how bitter the pang, despite thy treacherous flowers and the poison one inhales with thy perfume, of uprooting thee from my soul! Neither the cedar of Lebanon, nor the gigantic baobab, nor the palm-tree a hundred cubits high, could together fill the place thou alone dost occupy, thou little blue flower with the heart of gold!

The supper came to an end at last, and the subject of going to bed was broached; but as the number of guests was twice the number of beds, it naturally followed that it was necessary either to go to bed by detachments or for two to sleep together. It was a very simple matter for the rest of the party, but it was much less simple for me—having in view certain protuberances which the waistcoat and doublet concealed well enough, but which a simple shirt would have revealed in all their damning roundness; and certainly I was little inclined to betray my *incognito* in favor of any one of these gentlemen, who at that moment seemed to me genuine, self-confessed monsters, but

whom I have since recognized as very good fellows and at least as estimable as the rest of their sex.

He whose bed I was to share was comfortably drunk. He threw himself on the mattress with one leg and one arm hanging out, and fell asleep instantly, not as the just man sleeps, but so soundly that, if the angel of the last judgment had come and blown his trumpet in his ear, he would not have waked for that.—That sleep of his simplified the difficulty very much; I took off nothing but my doublet and my boots, climbed over the sleeper's body and lay down outside the clothes on the side next the wall.

So there I was in bed with a man! It was not a bad beginning!—I confess that, despite all my assurance, I was strangely moved and disturbed. It was so extraordinary, so novel a situation, that I could hardly convince myself that it was not a dream.—The other slept on and on, but I could not close an eye all night.

He was a young man of about twenty-four, with a by no means ugly face, black eyelashes and light moustache; his long hair flowed about his head like waves from the overturned urn of a river, a slight flush passed over his pale cheeks like a cloud under the surface of the water, his lips were partly open and smiling a vague, languid smile.

I raised myself upon my elbow and so remained a long while gazing at him by the flickering light of a candle, of which almost all the tallow had rolled down in great drops and the wick was all covered with black thieves.

We lay some distance apart. He was on the extreme edge of the bed; I, with superabundant precaution, had taken my place on the other edge.

Assuredly what I had heard was not calculated to dispose me to tenderness and the lusts of the flesh;—I held men in horror.—And yet I was more restless and agitated than I should have been: my body did not share the repugnance of my mind as fully as it ought.—My heart beat fast, I was very warm, and, twist and turn as I would, I could find no rest.

The most profound silence reigned in the inn; there was not a sound to be heard save now and then the dull thud made by a horse's foot on the stable floor, or the dropping of the rain down the chimney upon the ashes on the hearth. The candle, having reached the end of the wick, smoked and went out.

Black darkness came down between us like a curtain.—You cannot imagine the effect produced upon me by the sudden disappearance of the light.—It seemed to me that it was all at an end, and that I could no longer see my way clearly.—For an instant I was inclined to leave the bed; but what could I have done? It was only two o'clock, all the lights were out, and I could not wander about like a phantom in a strange house. I had no choice but to remain where I was and wait for daylight.

I lay there on my back; with my hands folded on my breast, trying to fix my thoughts upon something and always falling back on this, namely, that I was in bed with a man. I went so far as to wish he would wake up and find out that I was a woman.—Doubtless the wine I had taken, although it was a very small quantity, had something to do with that extravagant idea, but I could not help returning to it.—I was on the point of putting out my hand to wake him and tell him what I was.—A fold in the bedclothes, which caught my arm, was all that withheld me from carrying out my plan: it gave me time for reflection; and while I was extricating my arm, my reason, which I had totally lost, returned, if not entirely, at least enough to keep me within bounds.

Wouldn't it have been very curious if a disdainful charmer like myself, who had resolved to try a man's life ten years before giving him my hand to kiss, had surrendered to the first comer on a wretched bed in an inn! and, upon my word, I was not far from it.

Can a sudden effervescence, a sudden boiling of the blood, checkmate so effectually the most superb resolutions? and does the voice of the body speak louder than the voice of the mind?—Whenever my pride soars too high, I place the memory of that night before its eyes in order to recall it to earth.—I am beginning to share the opinion of most men: what a poor weak thing is female virtue! and upon how small a thing does it depend, *Mon Dieu!*

Ah! we seek in vain to spread our wings; there is too much slime upon them; the body is an anchor that holds the soul fast to earth; in vain does it spread its sails to the breeze of the loftiest ideas, the vessel remains immovable, as if all the sucking-fishes in the ocean were clinging to its keel. Nature takes delight in hurling such sarcasms at us. When she sees a mind standing on its pride as upon a high pillar and almost touching the sky with its head, she whispers to the red fluid to make haste and hurry to the doors of the arteries; she orders the temples to throb, the ears to ring, and lo, the lofty idea is attacked with vertigo: all its images become confused and indistinguishable, the earth seems to rise and fall like a ship's deck in a storm, the sky goes round and the stars dance a saraband; the lips which emitted naught but austere moral maxims, close and put themselves forward as if for a kiss; the arms, so strong to repel, relax and become more supple and entwining than scarfs. Add to this the contact of an epidermis, a breath blowing through your hair, and all is lost.—Often, indeed, so much is not needed;—the odor of fresh foliage coming from the fields through your open window, the sight of two birds pecking at each other, a marguerite blooming, an old love-song which persists in coming to your mind, do what you will, and which you repeat without understanding its meaning, a warm breeze that disturbs and excites you, the wooing softness of your bed or your couch—any one of these circumstances is enough; even the solitude of your chamber makes you think that two might be very comfortable there, and that no one could find a more delightful nest for a brood of pleasures. The drawn

curtains, the half-light, the silence, everything brings you back to the fatal thought that brushes you with its insidious, dovelike wings, and coos softly about your head. The soft stuffs that touch you seem to caress you and their folds cling amorously to your body.—Thereupon the maiden opens her arms to the first footman with whom she happens to be left alone; the philosopher leaves his page unfinished, and, with his head in his cloak, rushes away in hot haste to the nearest courtesan.

I certainly was not in love with the man who caused me such strange agitation.—He had no other charm than that he was not a woman, and in the state in which I then was, that was enough! A man! that mysterious creature who is concealed from us so carefully, the strange animal of whose history we know so little, the demon or the god who alone can realize all the vague dreams of pleasure whose springtime cradles our sleep, the only thought that we have from the time we are fifteen years old.

A man!—The idea of pleasure floated confusedly in my heavy head. The little that I knew of it made my desire burn the brighter. Ardent curiosity urged me to solve once for all the doubts that troubled me and recurred incessantly to my mind. The solution of the problem was on the other side of the leaf; I had but to turn it, the book was beside me.—Such a comely youth, such a narrow bed, such a dark night!—a girl with a few glasses of champagne in her brain! what a suspicious gathering!—Ah well! the result of it all was a most virtuous void.

I began to be able to distinguish the position of the window in the wall on which my eyes were fixed, by favor of the lessening darkness; the panes of glass became less opaque and the gray light of the morning, slipping behind them, restored their transparency; the sky lighted up little by little: it was day.—You cannot conceive the pleasure it gave me to see that pale gleam on the green hangings of Aumale serge which surrounded the glorious battlefield whereon my virtue had triumphed over my desires! It seemed to me that it was my crown of victory.

As for my bedfellow, he had fallen out onto the floor.

I rose, made my toilet rapidly, ran to the window and threw it open; the morning air did me good. I stood in front of the mirror to comb my hair, and I was amazed at the pallor of my face which I imagined was purple.

The others came in to see if we were still asleep, and kicked their friend, who did not seem greatly surprised to find where he was.

The horses were saddled and we resumed our journey.

But this is enough for to-day: my quill refuses to make a mark and I am disinclined to mend it; another time I will tell you the rest of my adventures; meanwhile love me as I love you, Graciosa the well-named, and do not form too poor an opinion of my virtue from what I have just told you.

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## XI

Many things are bores: it is a bore to return the money you have borrowed and have become accustomed to look upon as your own; it is a bore to-day to caress the woman you loved yesterday; it is a bore to call at a friend's house about dinner-time and find that the master and mistress have been in the country a month; it is a bore to write a novel and even more so to read one; it is a bore to have a pimple on your nose and chapped lips on the day you go to call on the idol of your heart; it is a bore to have to wear jocose boots that smile at the pavement through all their seams, and above all things to have an empty void behind the spider's web in your pocket; it is a bore to be a concierge; it is a bore to be an emperor; it is a bore to be one's self or even to be somebody else; it is a bore to go on foot because it hurts your corns, to ride because it rubs the skin off the antithesis of your front, to drive because some fat man inevitably makes a pillow of your shoulder, or to travel on a packet-boat because you are seasick and turn yourself inside out;—it is a bore to live in winter because you shiver and in summer because you perspire; but the greatest bore on earth, in hell, or in heaven, is beyond all question a tragedy, unless it be a melodrama or a comedy.

It really makes me sick at heart.—What can be more idiotic and more stupid? The great tyrants with voices like bulls, who pace across the stage from wing to wing, waving their hairy arms like the sails of a windmill, imprisoned in flesh-colored tights, are nothing more than wretched counterfeits of Bluebeard or the Bogey. Their rodomontades would make any one who could keep awake burst with laughter.

The unfortunate lovers are no less ridiculous.—It is a most diverting thing to see them come forward, dressed in black or white, with hair weeping on their shoulders, sleeves weeping on their hands, and their bodies ready to burst from their corsets like a nut when you squeeze it between your fingers; walking as if they meant to sweep the boards with the soles of their satin shoes, and in great outbursts of passion throwing back their trains with a little twist of the heel.—The dialogue, being exclusively composed of *oh!* and *ah!* which they roll about under their tongues as they spread their plumage, is pleasant pasturage surely and readily digested.—Their princes are very charming, too; only they are a bit gloomy and melancholy, which does not prevent their being the best companions in the world or elsewhere.

As for the comedy which is intended to correct our morals, and which luckily performs its duty with only moderate success, I consider that the fathers' sermons and the uncles' everlasting

repetitions of the same things are as crushing on the stage as in real life.—I am not of the opinion that you double the number of fools by representing them on the stage; there are already quite enough of them, thank God, and the race is not nearly extinct.—What is the necessity of drawing the portrait of a man with a pig's snout or the muzzle of an ox and collecting the foolish talk of a clown whom you would throw out of the window if he came to your house? The image of a pedant is as uninteresting as the pedant himself, and he is no less a pedant because you look at him in a mirror.—An actor who should succeed in imitating perfectly the manner and attitudes of a cobbler would not be much more entertaining than a real cobbler.

But there is a stage that I love, the fanciful, extravagant, impossible stage, where the virtuous public would hiss pitilessly from the first scene, for lack of understanding a word.

That is a strange stage indeed.—Glow-worms instead of lamps; a beetle beating time with its antennæ is stationed in the conductor's box. The cricket plays in the orchestra; the nightingale is first flute; little sylphs, coming from sweet-pea blossoms, hold bass-voils made of lemon peel between their pretty ivory-white legs, and with an ample supply of arms draw bows made from Titania's eyelashes over spider's web strings; the little wig with three horns worn by the beetle who leads the orchestra trembles with pleasures, and showers a luminous dust about; the harmony is sweet and the overture so well executed!

A curtain of butterflies' wings, thinner than the interior pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the regulation three blows. The hall is filled with the souls of poets sitting in stalls of mother-of-pearl, and watching the play through drops of dew mounted upon the golden pistils of lilies.—They are their opera-glasses.

The scenery resembles no known scenery; the country it represents is more unknown than America before its discovery.—The palette of the richest painter has not the half of the colors in which it is painted: the tones are all striking and unusual: ash-green, ash-blue, ultramarine, red and yellow lacquer are used lavishly.

The sky, of a greenish blue, is striped with broad light and faun-colored bands; little slender trees wave in the middle distance their sparse foliage of the color of dried rose-leaves; the background, instead of swimming in azure vapor, is of the most beautiful apple-green, and spiral columns of golden smoke float up-ward here and there. A stray beam catches upon the pediment of a ruined temple or the spire of a tower.—Cities full of steeples, pyramids, domes, arches, and balustrades are perched on hillsides and reflected in crystal lakes; tall trees with great leaves, cut deep on the edges by fairy scissors, entwine their trunks and branches inextricably to form the wings. The clouds in the sky pile up above their heads like snow-balls, you see the eyes of dwarfs and gnomes shining through their interstices and their tortuous roots bury themselves in the ground like the fingers of a giant hand. The woodpecker taps rhythmically on them with its beak of horn, and emerald-green lizards warm themselves in the sun on the moss about their feet.

The mushroom watches the play with his hat on his head, like the insolent rascal he is: the delicate violet stands on the tips of its tiny toes between two wisps of grass, and opens its blue eyes wide to see the hero pass. The bullfinch and the linnet swing on the ends of twigs to prompt the actors in their parts.

Amid the tall grass, the purple thistles and the burdocks with velvet leaves, brooks made by the tears of stags at bay wander like silver snakes; here and there anemones gleam on the turf like drops of blood and marguerites swell with pride, their heads laden with wreaths of pearls like veritable duchesses.

The characters are of no time and no country; they come and go no one knows how or why; they neither eat nor drink, they live nowhere and have no trade; they possess neither estates nor houses nor consols; sometimes they carry under their arms a little casket full of diamonds as large as pigeons' eggs; when they walk they do not brush a single drop of dew from the petals of the flowers or raise a single atom of dust from the roads.

Their clothes are the most fantastic and extravagant clothes imaginable. Pointed, steeple-shaped hats with brims as broad as a Chinese parasol and plumes of inordinate length taken from the tail of the bird of paradise and the phoenix: striped capes of brilliant colors, velvet and brocade doublets, showing their lining of satin or cloth of silver through their gold-laced slashes; full short-clothes, swelling like balloons; scarlet stockings with embroidered clocks, shoes with high heels and broad rosettes; fragile swords, point up, hilt down, all covered with cords and ribands;—so much for the men.

The women are no less curiously apparelled.—The drawings of Della Bella and Romain de Hooge may serve to indicate the general character of their attire; dresses of heavy, undulating stuffs, with broad folds which change color like the breasts of pigeons, and display all the varying hues of the iris, ample sleeves from which other sleeves issue, ruffs of open-slashed lace that rise higher than the heads for which they serve as frames, corsages covered with bows and embroidery, brooches,—strange trinkets, tufts of heron's feathers, necklaces of huge pearls, peacock's tail fans with mirrors in the centre, little slippers and pattens, wreaths of artificial flowers, spangles, striped gauze, paint, patches and everything that can add zest and piquancy to a stage costume.

It is a style that is not precisely English or German or French or Turkish or Spanish or Tartar, although it partakes a little of them all and has taken from each country, its most graceful and characteristic features.—Actors thus arrayed can say whatever they choose without offending one's ideas of probability. The fancy can run in all directions, style uncoil its variegated rings at its pleasure, like a snake warming itself in the sun; the most exotic conceits open fearlessly their

strangely-shaped calyxes and spread their perfume of amber and musk around.—There is nothing to offer any obstacle, either places or names or costumes.

How fascinating and entertaining what they say! Fine actors that they are, they do not strut about, like our howlers of melodrama, twisting their mouths and forcing the eyes out of their heads to deliver their tirades with effect;—at all events they haven't the appearance of workmen at a task, of oxen harnessed to the plot and in a hurry to have done with it; they are not plastered with chalk and rouge half an inch thick; they don't wear tin daggers and keep in reserve under their waistcoats a pig's bladder filled with chicken's blood; they don't drag the same oil-spotted rag about through whole acts.

They speak without hurry, without shrieking, like people of good breeding who attach no great importance to what they are doing; the lover makes his declaration to his sweetheart in the most nonchalant manner imaginable; as he speaks he taps his thigh with the ends of his gloved fingers or adjusts the leg of his trousers. The lady carelessly shakes the dew from her bouquet and jokes with her maid; the lover cares but little about touching his cruel enslaver's heart: his principal business is to let fall bunches of pearls from his mouth and clusters of roses, and to sow poetic precious stones like a true prodigal;—often he effaces himself altogether and allows the author to pay court to his mistress for him. Jealousy is not one of his defects and his disposition is most accommodating. With his eyes raised toward the sky, and the frieze of the theatre, he waits patiently for the poet to finish saying what passed through his mind, before resuming his rôle and returning to his knees.

The whole plot is tangled and untangled with admirable indifference; effects have no cause and causes have no effect: the brightest character is he who says the greatest number of foolish things; the greatest fool says the brightest things; the maidens make speeches that would make harlots blush; harlots declaim moral maxims. The most incredible adventures follow one another in rapid succession and are never explained; the noble father arrives post-haste from China in a little bamboo junk to identify a little kidnapped girl; the gods and fairies do nothing but ascend and descend in their machines. The plot plunges into the sea under the topaz dome of the waves and walks on the bottom of the ocean, through the forests of coral and madrepore, or rises skyward on the wings of the skylark or the griffin.—The dialogue is shared by all; the lion contributes to it with an *oh! oh!* in a vigorous roar; the wall speaks through its fissures and every one is at liberty to interrupt the most amusing scene provided that he has an epigram, a rebus or a pun to interject: Bottom's ass's head is as welcome among them as Ariel's blond locks;—the author's wit is displayed in every conceivable form; and all the contradictions are like so many facets, as it were, which reflect its different aspects, adding the colors of the prism thereto.

This apparent pell-mell and confusion are found, when all is said, to render real life more accurately under their fantastic guise than the most painstaking drama of manners.—Every man embodies all humanity in himself, and by writing what comes into his head, he succeeds better than by copying outside objects by means of a magnifying-glass.

O what a fine family!—romantic young lovers, wandering damsels, accommodating ladies' maids, sarcastic clowns, valets and innocent peasants, free-and-easy kings, whose names are unknown to the historian, and the kingdom of the geographer; parti-colored clowns with miraculous capers and biting repartees; oh! ye, who give free speech to caprice through your smiling mouths, I love you and adore you above all the world!—Perdita, Rosalind, Celia, Pandarus, Parolles, Silvio, Leander and the rest, all the charming types, so false and yet so true, who rise above vulgar reality on the bespangled wings of folly, and in whom the poet personifies his joy, his melancholy, his love and his most secret dreams under the most frivolous and most unconventional appearances.

There is one play, written for the fairies and properly to be played by moonlight, that delights me more than any other in the repertory of this theatre;—it is such a vagabond, wandering play, with such a vague plot and such strange characters, that the author himself, not knowing what title to give it, called it *Comme il vous plaira*,<sup>[1]</sup> an elastic name, which answers all purposes.

While reading that strange play, you seem to be transported into an unfamiliar world of which you have nevertheless some vague reminiscence; you are not sure whether you are dead or alive, awake or dreaming; gracious faces smile sweetly upon you and toss you an affable greeting as they pass; you feel strangely moved and disturbed at sight of them as if you should suddenly meet your ideal at an angle in the road, or the forgotten phantom of your first mistress should rise suddenly before you. Springs bubble up from the ground, murmuring half-stifled plaints; the wind stirs the foliage of the venerable trees over the exiled duke's head with compassionate sighs; and when the melancholy Jaques confides his philosophic lamentations to the stream, with the leaves of the willow, it seems to you that you yourself are speaking and that the most secret and most obscure thoughts of your heart come forth into the light.

O youthful son of the gallant Sir Rowland de Bois, so maltreated by fate! I cannot help being jealous of you; you still have a faithful servant, honest Adam, whose old age is still green under his snow-white locks.—You are banished, but not until you have at least struggled and triumphed; your wicked brother takes all your property from you, but Rosalind gives you the chain from her neck; you are poor, but you are beloved; you leave your country, but your persecutor's daughter follows you beyond the sea.

The dark forest of Arden opens wide its great arms of foliage to welcome and conceal you; the kindly forest heaps up its silkiest moss in the depths of its grottoes for your bed; it bends its leafy arches over your brow to protect you from the rain and sun; it pities you with the tears of its

springs and the sighs of its bleating fawns and deer; its rocks afford convenient desks on which to write your amorous epistles; it lends you the brambles from its bushes with which to attach them, and orders the satiny bark of its aspens to yield to the point of your stiletto when you wish to carve Rosalind's initials thereon.

If only I could have, like you, young Orlando, a vast cool forest to which to retire and live alone in my sorrow, and if, at a turning in a path, I could meet her whom I seek, recognizable, although disguised!—But, alas! the world of the soul has no verdant Arden, and only in the garden of poesy do the capricious little wild-flowers bloom whose perfumes make one oblivious of everything. In vain do we shed tears, they do not form those lovely silvery cascades; in vain do we sigh, no obliging echo takes the trouble to send back our lamentations embellished with imperfect rhymes and gay conceits.—In vain do we hang sonnets to the sharp points of all the brambles, Rosalind never picks them off, and we carve amorous ciphers on the bark of trees gratuitously.

Birds of heaven, lend me each a feather, swallow and eagle, humming-bird and roc, that I may make of them a pair of wings to soar aloft and swiftly through unknown regions, where I shall find nothing to recall to my mind the city of the living, where I can forget that I am myself and live a strange, new life, farther than America, farther than Africa, farther than Asia, farther than the farthest island in the world, through the ocean of ice, beyond the pole where the Aurora Borealis flickers, in the impalpable kingdom to which the divine creations of poets and the types of supreme beauty take flight.

How can one endure the ordinary conversation at clubs and salons when one has heard you speak, sparkling Mercutio, whose every sentence bursts in a shower of gold and silver, like a pyrotechnic bomb beneath a star-studded sky? Pale Desdemona, what pleasure, think you, one can take in any earthly music, after the ballad of the Willow? What women do not seem ugly beside your Venuses, ye ancient sculptors, poets who wrote strophes in marble?

Ah! despite the fierce embrace with which I have sought to enlase the material world in default of the other, I feel that my birth was a mistake, that life was not made for me and that it spurns me; I can no longer take part in anything; whatever road I follow, I go astray; the smooth avenue, the stony path, alike lead me to the abyss. If I attempt to take my flight, the air condenses around me and I am caught, with out-stretched wings, unable to close them.—I can neither walk nor fly; the sky attracts me when I am on the earth, the earth when I am in the sky; aloft, the north wind pulls out my feathers; below, the stones wound my feet. My soles are too tender to walk on the broken glass of reality; the spread of my wings is too narrow to enable me to soar above earthly things, and to rise from circle to circle to the deep azure of mysticism, to the inaccessible summits of everlasting love; I am the most wretched hippogriff, the most miserable collection of heterogeneous odds and ends that has ever existed since the ocean first loved the moon and women deceived men: the monstrous Chimera put to death by Bellerophon, with his maiden's head, his lion's claws, his goat's body and his dragon's tail, was an animal of a simple make-up beside me.

In my frail breast the violet-strewn reveries of the modest maiden and the insensate ardor of courtesans on a debauch live side by side; my desires go about like lions, sharpening their claws in the dark and seeking something to devour; my thoughts, more restless and uneasy than goats, cling to the most dangerous peaks; my hatred, swollen with poison, twists its scaly folds into inextricable knots, and crawls along in ruts and ravines.

My soul is a strange country, in appearance flourishing and splendid, but more reeking with fetid, deleterious miasmas than Batavia itself; the faintest sunbeam on the slime causes reptiles and venomous insects to breed;—the great yellow tulips, the *nagassaris* and *angsoka* with their gorgeous flowers conceal the heaps of disgusting carrion. The amorous rose opens her scarlet lips in a smile and discloses her tiny dew-drop teeth to the gallant nightingales who sing sonnets and madrigals to her: nothing can be more charming; but it is a hundred to one that a dropsical toad is crawling along on her clumsy feet in the grass at the foot of the bush, whitening his path with his slaver.

There are springs clearer and more transparent than the purest diamond; but it would be better for you to drink the stagnant water of the swamp under its cloak of rotting shrubs and drowned dogs than to dip your cup in that basin.—A serpent lies hidden at the bottom, and twists and turns with frightful rapidity, disgorging his venom.

You have planted wheat; your crop is asphodel, henbane, tares and pale hemlock with twigs covered with verdigris. Instead of the root you set out, you are surprised to see the hairy, twisted limbs of the black mandragora coming up out of the earth.

If you leave a memory there and go to take it up again some time after, you will find it more covered with moss and more swarming with palmer-worms and vile insects than a stone laid on the damp floor of a cavern.

Do not try to pass through its dark forests; they are more impassable than the virgin forests of America and the jungles of Java; creepers strong as cables run from tree to tree; all the paths are obstructed by bristling plants as sharp as lance-heads; the very turf is covered with a stinging down like that of the nettle. From the arches of the foliage, gigantic bats of the vampire species hang by their nails; beetles of enormous size wave their horns threateningly, and thrash the air with their four-footed wings; monstrous, fantastic beasts, like those we see in nightmares, come clumsily forward, crushing the reeds before them. There are troops of elephants, who crush flies in the wrinkles of their flabby skin and rub their sides against the rocks and trees, rhinoceroses with their rough, uneven hides, hippopotami with their swollen snouts bristling with hair, who

knead the mud and the débris of the forest with their huge feet.

In the clearings, where the sun insinuates a luminous beam like a wedge of gold through the damp atmosphere, you will always find, on the spot where you propose to sit, a family of tigers lying at their ease, sniffing the air, winking their sea-green eyes, and polishing their velvet coats with their blood-red, papilæ-covered tongues; or else it is a tangled knot of boas, half asleep, digesting the last bull they have devoured.

Be suspicious of everything; grass, fruit, water, air, shade, sunlight, all are deadly.

Close your ears to the chattering of the little paroquets with golden beaks and emerald necks, that fly down from the trees and perch on your finger, with fluttering wings; for the little paroquets with the emerald necks will end by gently pecking your eyes out with their pretty golden beaks, just as you bend to kiss them.—So it is.

The world will have none of me; it spurns me like a spectre escaped from the tombs; I am almost as pale as one; my blood refuses to believe that I am alive and will not tinge my flesh; it crawls sluggishly through my veins like stagnant water in obstructed canals.—My heart beats for none of those things that make men's hearts beat.—My sorrows and my joys are not those of my fellow-creatures.—I have fiercely desired what no one desires; I have disdained what others wildly long for.—I have loved women who did not love me, and I have been loved when I would have liked to be hated; always too soon or too late, too much or too little, too far or not far enough; never just what was needed; either I have not arrived or I have gone beyond.—I have thrown my life out of the window, or I have concentrated it too exclusively upon a single point, and from the restless activity of the busybody I have passed to the deathlike somnolence of the *teriaki* or the Stylite on his pillar.

What I do seems always to be done in a dream; my actions seem rather the result of somnambulism than of free will; there is something within me, which I feel vaguely at a great depth, which makes me act without my own initiative, and always outside of ordinary laws; the simple and natural side of things is never revealed to me until after all the others, and I lay hold first of all that is eccentric and unusual; however straight the line, I will soon make it more winding and tortuous than a serpent; contours, unless they are marked in the most precise way, become confused and distorted. Faces take on a supernatural expression and gaze at me with awe-inspiring eyes.

Thus, by virtue of a sort of instinctive reaction, I have always clung desperately to matter, to the exterior outline of things, and I have awarded a great share of my esteem to the plastic in art.—I understand a statue perfectly, I do not understand a man; where life begins, I stop and recoil in dismay as if I had seen the head of Medusa. The phenomenon of life causes me an astonishment from which I cannot recover.—I shall make an excellent corpse, I doubt not, for I am an extremely poor living man, and the meaning of my existence escapes me completely. The sound of my voice surprises me beyond measure, and I am tempted sometimes to take it for somebody else's voice. When I choose to put out my arm and my arm obeys me, it seems to me a most prodigious thing, and I fall into the most profound stupefaction.

By way of compensation, Silvio, I perfectly understand the unintelligible; the most extravagant *motifs* seem perfectly natural to me and I enter into them with extraordinary facility. I readily find the sequel of the most capricious and most incomprehensible nightmare.—That is why the class of plays I described to you just now pleases me above all others.

Théodore and Rosette and I have great discussions on this subject: Rosette has but little relish for my system, she is for *true* truth; Théodore would give the poet more latitude, and would not exclude conventional, optical truth.—For my part, I maintain that the field must be left absolutely free for the author and that the imagination must hold sovereign sway.

Many of the guests based their arguments on the ground that plays of this sort were as a general rule outside of the ordinary stage conditions and could not be acted; I answered that that was true in one sense and false in another, just like everything else that people say, and that their ideas as to the possibilities and impossibilities of the stage seemed to me to lack exactness and to be based upon prejudices rather than arguments; and I said among other things that the play of *As You Like It* was certainly capable of being performed, especially for society people who were not accustomed to other parts.

That suggested the idea of acting it. The season is drawing on and all other forms of amusement are exhausted; we are weary of hunting, of riding and boating parties; the chances of boston, varied though they be, are not exciting enough to fill up the evening, and the proposition was received with universal enthusiasm.

A young man who knows how to paint offered his services to paint the scenery; he is working at it now with much zeal, and in a few days it will be finished.—The stage is erected in the orangery, which is the largest apartment in the chateau, and I think everything will go off well. I am to play *Orlando*; Rosette was to be the *Rosalind*, as it was proper that she should be; as my mistress and the mistress of the house, the rôle was hers as of right; but she has refused to masquerade as a man, through some whim most extraordinary for her, for prudery certainly is not one of her faults. If I had not been sure of the contrary, I should have thought that her legs are not well formed. Actually not one of the ladies in the party would consent to seem less scrupulous than Rosette, and the play was very near falling through; but Théodore, who was to take the part of the melancholy *Jaques*, offered to take her place, inasmuch as *Rosalind* is a man, almost all the time, except in the first act, when she is a woman, and with a little paint, a pair of corsets and a dress, he could carry out the deception well enough, having no beard as yet and being very

slender in figure.

We are now learning our parts and it is a curious thing to see us.—In every solitary nook in the park you are sure of finding some one, with a roll of paper in his hand, mumbling to himself, looking up at the sky, then suddenly lowering his eyes, and making the same gesture seven or eight times. Any one who didn't know that we were going to give a play would certainly take us for inmates of a lunatic asylum, or poets—which is almost a pleonasm.

I think we shall soon know our parts well enough to have a rehearsal.—I expect something very interesting. Perhaps I am wrong.—I was afraid for a moment that our actors, instead of acting by inspiration, would strive to reproduce the gestures and intonation of some fashionable comedian; but luckily they have not followed the stage closely enough to make that mistake, and it is to be hoped that, amid the natural awkwardness of people who have never stood on the boards, they will show some precious gleams of nature and a charming *naïveté* that the most consummate talent cannot equal.

Our young painter has really done marvels:—it is impossible to give a stranger look to the old tree-trunks and the ivies that enlase them; he has taken the trees in the park for his models, accentuating and exaggerating them, as should properly be done for stage scenery. The whole thing is done with admirable spirit and fancy; the rocks, the cliffs, the clouds are of mysterious, fantastic shapes; reflections play upon the surface of the water, more trembling and shimmering than quicksilver, and the ordinary coldness of the foliage is wonderfully relieved by the saffron tints laid on by the brush of autumn; the forest varies from emerald green to purple; the warmest and coldest tints blend harmoniously and the very sky changes from a delicate blue to the most glowing colors.

He has designed all the costumes in accordance with my suggestions; they are of the most beautiful type. There was an outcry at first that they could not be translated in silk and velvet or any known material, and there was a moment when the troubadour costume was on the point of being generally adopted. The ladies said that the brilliant colors would put out their eyes. To which we replied that their eyes were inextinguishable stars, and that they, on the other hand, would put out the colors, as well as the Argand lamps, the candles and the sun, if they had the chance.—They had no reply to make to that; but there were other objections that sprung up in crowds and bristled with heads like the Lernean hydra; no sooner was one head cut off than two others appeared even more stupid and obstinate.

"How do you suppose that can be done?—Everything looks all right on paper, but it's a different matter on your back; I can never get into that!—My skirt's at least four inches too short; I shall never dare to appear that way!—That ruff is too high; I look as if I were hunchbacked and hadn't any neck.—That wig ages me intolerably."

"With starch and pins and good-will anything can be done.—You're joking! a figure like yours, slenderer than a wasp's waist and quite capable of going through the ring on my little finger! I will bet twenty-five louis against a kiss that that waist will have to be pulled in.—Your skirt is very far from being too short, and if you could see what an adorable leg you have you would certainly be of my opinion.—On the contrary, your neck stands out admirably in its halo of lace.—That wig doesn't make you look a day older, and even if it should seem to add a few years, you look so exceedingly young that it ought to be a matter of perfect indifference to you; really, you would arouse strange suspicions in our minds if we didn't know where the pieces of your last doll are,"—*et cetera*.

You cannot imagine the prodigious quantity of compliments we have been obliged to squander, to compel our ladies to don charming costumes which are becoming to them beyond words.

We have also had much trouble to make them adjust their patches properly. What devilish taste women have! and of what titanic obstinacy a capricious dainty creature is capable, who thinks that straw-yellow is more becoming to her than jonquil-yellow or bright pink! I am sure that if I had applied to public affairs one-half the ruses and scheming I have employed to induce a woman to wear a red feather on the left side and not on the right, I should be Minister of State or Emperor at the very least.

What a pandemonium! what a vast, inextricable tangle a real theatre must be!

Since the suggestion of giving a play was first made, everything here has been in the most complete disorder. All the drawers are open, all the wardrobes emptied; it is a genuine case of pillage. Tables, chairs, consoles, all are covered, and we have no place to put our feet; enormous quantities of dresses, mantles, veils, petticoats, capes, caps, hats, are scattered about the house; and when you reflect that they are all to go on the bodies of seven or eight people, you involuntarily think of the jugglers at a fair who wear eight or ten coats one over the other, and you cannot realize that from all that mass only one costume for each will emerge.

The servants are constantly coming and going;—there are always two or three on the road between the chateau and the town, and if this goes on all the horses will be broken-winded.

A theatrical manager has no time to be melancholy, and I have been in that condition hardly at all for some days. I am so benumbed and bewildered that I am beginning to lose all comprehension of the play. As I play the part of *impresario* in addition to the part of *Orlando*, my task is twofold. When any difficulty arises, I am the one to whom they all run, and as my decisions are not listened to like oracles, interminable disputes are the result.

If what is called living is to be always on one's legs, to answer twenty people at once, to go up and down stairs, not to think for a minute during the day, I have never lived so hard as I have this



week; and yet *I* do not take so much part in this constant movement as you might think.—The excitement extends a very short distance below the surface, and a few fathoms down you would find dead water, without any current; life does not penetrate me so easily as that; indeed, at such times I am least alive, although I seem to act and to mingle in what is going on; action stupefies and tires me to an inconceivable degree;—when I am not acting, I am thinking or dreaming, and that is one manner of living;—I have it no longer since I have laid aside my porcelain-image repose.

Thus far I have done nothing, and I doubt if I ever shall do anything. I do not know how to stop my brain, therein lies all the difference between a man of talent and a man of genius; there is a constant effervescence, wave pushing wave; I cannot master this sort of waterspout that rises from my heart to my head, and drowns all my thoughts because they have no means of exit.—I can produce nothing, not from sterility but from superabundance; my ideas sprout in such dense, serried masses that they choke one another and cannot ripen.—However swift and impetuous the execution, it can never attain such velocity:—when I write a sentence the thought that it expresses is already as far from me as if a century had passed instead of a second, and it often happens, in spite of myself, that some part of the thought that succeeded it in my brain is mingled with it.

That is why I cannot live,—either as poet or as lover.—I can express only the ideas that I no longer have;—I have women only when I have forgotten them and love others;—how can I, a man, make my will known, when, however much I hasten, I no longer feel what I am doing and act only in accordance with a faint memory.

To take a thought from some one of my brain-cells, in the rough, like a block of marble just from the quarry, to place it before me, and from morning to night, a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other, hew and pound and chip, and carry away a pinch of dust at night to dry my writing,—that is what I never shall be able to do.

I can distinguish clearly enough in my mind the slender figure from the unhewn block, and I have a very distinct idea of it; but there are so many angles to smooth, so many protuberances to hew away, so many blows of rasp and hammer to be given to approximate the shape and catch the true curve of the outline, that my hands blister and the chisel drops to the ground.

If I persist, my fatigue reaches such a point that my sight is totally obscured and I can no longer see through the marble cloud the white divinity concealed within it. Thereupon I follow it at random, feeling my way; I bite too deep in one place, I do not go far enough in another; I hack away what should be a leg or an arm, and I leave a compact mass where there should be a hollow; instead of a goddess I make a monkey, sometimes less than a monkey, and the magnificent block, taken at such great expense of money and labor from the bowels of the earth, hammered and hewn on every side, has rather the appearance of having been gnawed and bored by polypi to make a bee-hive, than fashioned by a sculptor according to a preconceived plan.

How were you able, Michael Angelo, to cut marble in slices as a child carves a chestnut? of what steel were your unconquerable chisels made? and from whose robust loins did ye come forth, ye fruitful, hard-working artists, whom no form of matter can resist, and who describe your dream from beginning to end in color and in bronze?

It is innocent and justifiable vanity in a certain sense, after the cruel remarks I have made concerning myself—and you surely will not blame me for it, O Silvio!—but, although the world is unlikely ever to know it, and my name is predestined to oblivion, I am a poet and a painter!—I have as beautiful ideas as any poet on earth; I have created types as pure, as divine as those that are most admired among the masters.—I see them before me as clear, as distinct as if they were really painted, and if I could open a hole in my head and put a window in so that people could look, there would be the most marvellous gallery of pictures the world has ever seen. No king on earth can boast of possessing such a one.—There are Rubenses as flaring, as brilliantly lighted as the purest examples at Antwerp; my Raphaels are in a most excellent state of preservation and his Madonnas have no more winning smiles; Buonarotti does not twist a muscle with more spirit and more appalling force; the sun of Venice shines upon yonder canvas as if it were signed: *Paulus Cagliari*; the shadows of Rembrandt himself are heaped up in this picture, with a pale star of light glimmering in the distance; the pictures that are in my own manner would certainly not be despised by any one.

I am well aware that it seems strange for me to say this and that I shall seem to be suffering from the vulgar intoxication of the most idiotic pride;—but it is a fact and nothing will shake my conviction in that respect. No one will share it probably; but what am I to do? Every one is born marked with a black or white stamp. Apparently mine is black.

Sometimes I have difficulty in concealing my thoughts on this subject; it has happened not unfrequently that I have spoken too familiarly of the exalted geniuses whose footprints we should adore and upon whose statues we should gaze from afar on our knees. Once, I forgot myself so far as to say: *We*.—Luckily it was in the presence of a person who took no notice of it, otherwise I should undoubtedly have been looked upon as the most conceited puppy that ever was.

Am I not a poet and a painter, Silvio?

It is a mistake to think that all people who have been supposed to possess genius were really greater men than others. No one knows how much the pupils and obscure artists employed by Raphael contributed to his reputation; he gave his signature to the product of the mind and talent of several,—that is all.

A great writer and a great painter are in themselves enough to people a whole epoch: they must first of all attack all styles of work at once, so that, if any rivals should rise up, they can instantly accuse them of plagiarism and check them at the first step in their career; those are familiar tactics and succeed none the less every day, even though they are not new.

It may be that a man already famous has precisely the same sort of talent that you have; under penalty of being considered an imitator of him, you are obliged to divert your natural inspiration and make it flow in another channel. You were born to blow with all your lungs into the heroic clarion, or to evoke pale phantoms of the times that are no more; but you must move your fingers up and down the flute with seven holes, or tie knots on a sofa in some boudoir, all because monsieur your father did not take the trouble to throw you into the mould eight or ten years earlier, and because the world cannot conceive of such a thing as two men tilling the same field.

Thus it is that many noble intellects are compelled knowingly to take a road that is not theirs, and constantly to skirt their own domain from which they are banished, happy to cast a stealthy glance over the hedge, and to see on the other side, blooming in the sunlight, the lovely bright-colored flowers which they possess in the form of seed, but cannot sow for lack of soil.

For my own part, except for the greater or less opportunity afforded by circumstances, the difference in air and light, a door which has remained closed and should have been thrown open, a meeting missed, some one I ought to have known but have not known,—I cannot say whether I should ever have succeeded in anything.

I have not the necessary degree of stupidity to become what is called a *genius* pure and simple, nor the prodigious obstinacy which is eventually deified under the high-sounding name of *will*, when the great man has reached the radiant summit of the mountain, and which is indispensable to attain that height;—I know too well how hollow all things are and that they contain only putrefying matter, to attach myself for very long to anything and follow it ardently and exclusively through everything.

Men of genius are very shallow, and that is why they are men of genius. Lack of intelligence prevents them from perceiving the obstacles that separate them from the end they wish to attain; they go ahead, and in two or three strides devour the intervening spaces.—As their mind remains obstinately closed to certain currents, and as they see only the things that are most closely connected with their ends, they expend much less thought and action; nothing diverts them, nothing turns them aside, they act more by instinct than otherwise, and some of them, when removed from their special sphere, exhibit a nullity hard to understand.

Assuredly it is a rare and charming gift to write poetry well; few people take more pleasure than I in poetical matters;—but I do not choose to limit and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine; there are a thousand things that interest me as much as a hemistich:—the state of society and the reforms that must be undertaken are not among those things; I care extremely little whether the peasants know how to read and write or whether men eat bread or browse on grass; but there pass through my brain, in an hour, more than a hundred thousand visions which have not the slightest connection with rhyme or the *cæsura*, and that is why I actually do so little, although I have more ideas than some poets who could be burned alive with their own works.

I adore beauty and I feel it; I can describe it as well as the most amorous sculptors can understand it,—and yet I am no sculptor. The ugliness and imperfections of the rough sketch disgust me; I cannot wait until the work reaches perfection by dint of polishing and repolishing; if I could make up my mind to omit certain things in what I do, whether in versifying or in painting, I should end perhaps by writing a poem or painting a picture which would make me famous, and they who love me—if there be any one on earth who takes that trouble—would not be compelled to believe me on my word alone and would have a triumphant retort for the sardonic sneers of the detractors of that great unknown genius, myself.

I see many who take a palette and brushes and cover their canvas, paying no further attention to what caprice produces at the end of the bristles, and others who write a hundred lines at a time without an erasure and without once stopping to look up at the ceiling.—I always admire them, even if sometimes I do not admire their productions; I envy with all my heart the fascinating intrepidity and fortunate blindness that prevent them from seeing even their most palpable defects. As soon as I have drawn anything out of line I notice it instantly and am concerned beyond measure by it; and, as I am much more learned in theory than in practice, it often happens that I cannot correct an error of which I am conscious; thereupon I turn the canvas with its face to the wall and never go back to it.

I have my ideal of perfection so constantly present in my mind, that disgust with my work seizes me at once and prevents me from continuing.

Ah! when I compare with the sweet smile of my thought the ugly pout it makes on the canvas or the paper, when I see a hideous bat fly by in place of the lovely dream that opened its long wings of light in the bosom of my nights; a thistle spring up in response to the idea of a rose; and when I hear a donkey bray as I am expecting the sweetest melodies of the nightingale, I am so horribly disappointed, so angry with myself, so furious at my impotence, that I resolve never to write again or say a single word of my life, rather than commit thus the crime of high treason against my thoughts.

I cannot succeed even in writing a letter as I would like to do; I often say something entirely different; certain portions develop immeasurably, others dwindle away till they become imperceptible, and very often the idea I had it in my mind to express is not there at all, or is in a

postscript.

When I began to write you I certainly did not intend to say the half of what I have said.—I simply intended to inform you that we were going to give a play; but one word leads to a sentence; parentheses are big with other little parentheses, which in their turn have others in their wombs all ready to be born. There is no reason why this should end, why it should not go on to two hundred folio volumes—which would certainly be too much.

As soon as I take up a pen, there is a great humming and rustling of wings in my brain, as if millions of June-bugs had been let loose inside. They bump against the walls of my skull and turn and fly up and down with a horrible uproar; they are my thoughts, trying to fly away and seeking an outlet;—all of them struggle to get free at once; more than one of them breaks his paws and tears the down from his wings; sometimes the door is so blocked that not one succeeds in crossing the threshold and reaching the paper.

That is the way I am made: it is not what can be called well made, I agree, but what would you have? the fault is with the gods and not with me, a poor devil who cannot help himself. I do not need to ask your indulgence, my dear Silvio; it is accorded me in advance, and you are kind enough to read my undecipherable scrawls to the end, my headless and tailless musings; however disjointed and absurd they may be, they always interest you, because they come from me, and anything that is a part of me, even when it is worthless, is not without some value to you.

I can let you see the thing that most offends the common herd: honest pride.—But let us cry truce for a while to all these exalted topics, and as I am writing on the subject of the play we are to give, let us return to it and talk about it a little.

The rehearsal took place to-day:—never in my life have I been so upset,—not because of the embarrassment that one always feels in reciting anything before a number of people, but from an entirely different cause. We were in costume and ready to begin; Théodore alone had not appeared; we sent to his room to see what delayed him; he replied that he was almost ready and would come down in a moment.

He came; I heard his step in the corridor long before he appeared, and yet no one on earth has a lighter step than Théodore; but my feeling of sympathy for him is so strong that I divine his movements through the walls, and when I felt that he was about to put his hand on the door-knob, I began to tremble and my heart beat with horrible force. It seemed to me that something of importance in my life was about to be decided, and that I had reached a solemn, long-expected moment.

The folding-doors slowly opened and closed.

There was a general cry of admiration.—The men applauded, the women turned scarlet. Rosette alone became extremely pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden revelation were passing through her brain; she went through the same experience as myself in the opposite direction.—I have always suspected her of loving Théodore.

I have no doubt that, at that moment, she believed as I did that the pretended Rosalind was nothing less than a young and lovely woman, and the fragile card-house of her hope suddenly collapsed, while mine rose on its ruins; at least that is what I thought; I may be mistaken, for I was hardly in a condition to make accurate observations.

Aside from Rosette, there were three or four pretty women present; they looked disgustingly ugly.—Beside that sun, the star of their beauty was suddenly eclipsed, and every one wondered how he could ever have thought them passable. Men who, before that moment, would have deemed themselves very fortunate to have them for mistresses, would hardly have taken them for servants.

The image which hitherto had been drawn only faintly and with vague outlines, the adored, vainly-pursued phantom was there, before my eyes, living, palpable, no longer in half light and haze, but bathed in floods of white light; not in a fruitless disguise, but in her true costume; not in the mocking guise of a young man, but with the features of the loveliest of women.

I experienced a sensation of unbounded well-being, as if a mountain or two had been lifted off my chest.—I felt my horror of myself vanish and I was delivered from the tiresome duty of regarding myself as a monster. I began to form an altogether pastoral opinion of myself and all the violets of spring bloomed anew in my heart.

He, or rather she—for I wish to forget that I was stupid enough to take her for a man—remained a moment motionless on the threshold, as if to give the assemblage time to utter its first exclamation. A brilliant light shone upon her from head to foot, and against the dark background of the corridor that stretched away behind her, the carved doorway serving as a frame, she glowed as if the light emanated from herself instead of being reflected simply, and you would have taken her for a marvellous product of the brush rather than a human creature made of flesh and blood.

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*Chapter XI — The folding-doors slowly opened and closed.*

*There was a general cry of admiration.—The men applauded, the women turned scarlet. Rosette alone became extremely pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden revelation were passing through her brain; \*\*\*I have always suspected her of loving Théodore.*

Her long dark hair, mingled with ropes of huge pearls, fell in natural ringlets beside her lovely cheeks! her shoulders and her breast were bare, and I never saw anything so beautiful in the world; the finest marble would not compare with that exquisite perfection.—How the life rushes beneath that dark transparent skin! how white the flesh and at the same time how richly colored! and how happily the changing golden tints soften the transition from the skin to the hair! what a fascinating poem in the graceful undulations of those contours, more supple and velvety than a swan's neck!—If there were words to express what I feel, I would write you a description fifty pages long; but languages were made by some donkeys or other who had never looked closely at a woman's back or breast, and we haven't half enough of the most indispensable terms.

I really think that I must become a sculptor; for to have seen such beauty and to be unable to reproduce it in one form or another is enough to make one a raving maniac. I have written twenty sonnets on those shoulders, but that is not enough: I would like something exactly similar which I could touch with my finger; verses reproduce only the phantom of beauty and not beauty itself. The painter produces a more exact likeness, but it is only a likeness. Sculpture has all the reality that a thing absolutely false can have; it can be looked at on every side, it casts a shadow, and you can touch it. Your carved mistress differs from the genuine only in that she is a little harder and cannot speak, two very trifling drawbacks.

Her dress was made of some material of changing color, azure in the light, golden in the shadow; a close-fitting buskin was tightly laced about a foot that needed not that to make it too small, and scarlet silk stockings clung amorously about the most perfectly moulded and most tempting of legs; her arms were bare to the elbows, where they emerged from a mass of lace, round and plump and white, gleaming like polished silver and of unimaginable fineness of texture; her hands, laden with rings, languorously waved a great fan of fantastically-colored feathers, like a little pocket rainbow.

She walked into the room, her cheeks slightly flushed with a color that was not paint, and every one went into ecstasies and exclaimed and wondered if it was possible that it was really he, Théodore de Sérannes, the daring horseman, the consummate duellist, the determined hunter, and if they could be perfectly sure that it was not his twin sister.

"Why, you would have said he had never worn any other costume in his life! he is not in the least embarrassed in his movements, he walks very well and doesn't stumble over his train; he plays with his eyes and fan to perfection; and such a slender figure he has!—you could clasp it with your fingers!—It's a most extraordinary thing! it's unconceivable!—The illusion is as complete as possible: one would almost say that he has a bosom, his neck is so fat and well filled out; and not a single hair of beard, not one; and how soft his voice is! Oh! what a lovely Rosalind! who would not be her Orlando?"

Aye—who would not be Orlando to such a Rosalind, even at the price of the torments I suffered?—To love as I loved with a monstrous, unavowable passion, which, however, one cannot uproot from his heart; to be condemned to maintain the most profound silence and not to dare to say what the most prudent and respectful lover would say without fear to the most prudish and rigid of women; to feel one's self consumed by an insensate flame, unjustifiable even in the eyes of the most confirmed libertines;—what are ordinary passions beside that—a passion which is shameful in itself and hopeless, and, which, even in the improbable event of its success, would be a crime and would kill you with shame? To be reduced to hope for failure, to dread favorable chances and opportunities, and to avoid them as another would seek them—such was my fate.

The most profound discouragement had taken possession of me; I viewed myself with horror mingled with surprise and curiosity. The thing that shocked me most was the thought that I had never loved before, and that this was the first effervescence of my youth, the first daisy of my springtime of love.

In my case this monstrosity replaced the refreshing, modest illusions of adolescence; my dreams of tender affection, so fondly cherished as I walked at evening on the edge of the woods, through the narrow blushing paths, or along the white marble terraces beside the lake in the park, were to be metamorphosed into this deceitful sphinx with the equivocal smile, the ambiguous voice, before whom I stood speechless, afraid to undertake the solution of the enigma! To interpret it falsely would have caused my death; for alas! it is the only bond that attaches me to the world; when it is broken, all will be over. Take that gleam of light away from me and I shall be more silent and inanimate than the embalmed mummy of the first of the Pharaohs. At the moments when I felt most violently drawn toward Théodore, I threw myself back in dismay into Rosette's arms, although I had an indescribable feeling of repulsion for her; I tried to place her between Théodore and myself as a shield and barrier—and when I lay beside her, I felt a secret satisfaction in the thought that she at all events was unquestionably a woman, and that, even if I did not love her, she still loved me enough to prevent our liaison from degenerating into intrigue and debauchery.

I felt in my heart, however, through it all, a sort of regret at being thus unfaithful to the idea of my impossible passion; I blamed myself for it as for an act of treachery, and although I was well aware that I should never possess the object of my love, I was displeased with myself, and was cold to Rosette once more.

The rehearsal was much more successful than I hoped; Théodore, especially, was admirable; the others thought that I, too, acted extremely well.—It is not that I have the essential qualities of a good actor, and it would be a very great mistake to think that I am capable of taking other parts in the same way; but, by a strange chance, the words I had to say fitted in so well with my situation, that it seemed to me as if I had written them rather than learned them by heart from a book.—If my memory had failed me for a moment, I certainly should not have hesitated before filling the void with an improvised phrase. Orlando was myself quite as much as I was Orlando, and it is impossible to imagine a more extraordinary coincidence.

In the scene with the wrestler, when Théodore took the chain from his neck and gave it to me, as the play requires, he bestowed a glance on me so soft and languorous, so full of promise, and he pronounced with such grace and nobility of utterance the phrase: "Gentleman, wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune; that could give more but that her hand lacks means,"—that I was really confused, and was hardly able to say: "What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue? I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference. O poor Orlando!"

In the third act Rosalind, dressed as a man, reappeared under the name of Ganymede, with her cousin Celia, who has changed her name to Aliena.

That disguise made an unpleasant impression on me;—I was so accustomed already to the female costume which allowed my desires to hope, and which encouraged me, in a treacherous but seductive error! One becomes accustomed very quickly to regard his desires as realities on the strength of the most fleeting appearances, and I became very sombre when Théodore appeared in his male costume, more sombre than I had been before; for joy serves only to make grief more bitter, the sun shines only to make us more fully appreciate the horrors of darkness, and the cheerful aspect of white has no other object than to bring out all the melancholy of black.

His coat was the most coquettish and fascinating garment in the world, of a dainty, fanciful cut, all decked out with knots and ribbons, very much in the style reflected by the dandies of the court of Louis XIII.; a pointed hat, with a long curled feather, shaded the curls of his beautiful hair, and a damascened sword raised the hem of his travelling cloak.

He was dressed, however, in a way to make one feel that the virile garments had a feminine

lining; something broader at the hips and fuller at the breast, an indefinable undulation that we do not see in cloth fitted to a man's body, left but faint doubts as to the sex of the individual.

His demeanor was half deliberate, half timid, and entertaining to the last degree, and with infinite skill he made himself appear as ill at ease in a costume to which he was accustomed, as he had seemed to be at home in clothes that were not his.

My serenity gradually returned, and I convinced myself anew that he was really a woman.—I recovered sufficient self-possession to carry out my rôle properly.

Do you know the play? perhaps not. As I have done nothing but read and declaim it for a fortnight I know it by heart from beginning to end, and I cannot realize that everybody is not as familiar as myself with the plot and the intrigue; it is an error into which I am very apt to fall, to think that, when I am drunk, everybody else is drunk and trying to knock down the walls, and if I knew Hebrew, I certainly should ask my valet for my dressing-gown and slippers in that tongue, and should be very much surprised if he did not understand me.—You can read it if you choose; I assume that you have read it and touch only on those passages that have some connection with my position.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is greatly surprised to find that the bushes bear, instead of blackberries and wild plums, madrigals in her praise; strange fruits which luckily are not accustomed to grow on bramble bushes; for when one is thirsty it is more satisfactory to find good berries on the branches than bad sonnets. She is much disturbed to know who has spoiled the bark of the young trees by carving her initials on them.—Celia, who has already met Orlando, tells her, after long urging, that the rhymers is no other than the young man who vanquished Charles the wrestler, the duke's athlete.

Soon Orlando himself appears and Rosalind enters into conversation with him by asking him the time.—Surely an extremely simple beginning; one can imagine nothing more commonplace.—But have no fear; from that trite, commonplace phrase you will see an unlooked-for crop spring up of witty conceits, overflowing with curious flowers and comparisons, as if from the richest and most thoroughly fertilized soil.

After a few lines of sparkling dialogue in which each word, as it falls upon the phrase, sends out to right and left millions of dancing sparks, like a hammer falling upon a red hot bar of iron, Rosalind asks Orlando if by chance he knows the man who hangs odes on hawthorn bushes and elegies on brambles, and who seems to be afflicted with the quotidian of love, which she knows how to cure. Orlando confesses that he is the man who is tortured by love, and as she has boasted of having several infallible remedies for that disease, begs her to do him the favor of telling him one.—"You in love?" replies Rosalind, "you have none of the marks whereby a lover is recognized; you have neither a lean cheek nor a sunken eye, your hose is not ungartered nor your sleeve unbuttoned, and your shoe is tied with much grace; if you are in love with any one, it is certainly with yourself, and you have need of none of my remedies."

It was not without genuine emotion that I replied in these exact words:

"Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love thee."<sup>[2]</sup>

This reply, so unexpected, so strange, to which nothing leads up and which seemed to have been written expressly for me as if by a sort of prevision on the part of the poet, produced a great effect upon me when I repeated it before Théodore, whose divine lips were still slightly curled with the ironical expression of the passage he had just repeated, while his eyes smiled with inexpressible sweetness, and a bright beam of kindness gilded all the upper part of his young and lovely face.

"Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired, and do you truly need remedies for your madness?"

When she is fully persuaded that it is Orlando himself and no other who has written the beautiful lines that walk upon so many feet, the fair Rosalind consents to tell him her remedy. This is the gist of it: she has pretended to be the lovesick swain's beloved, and compelled him to pay court to her as to his own mistress; and, to sicken him of his passion, she gave full sway to the most extravagant caprices; sometimes she laughed, sometimes she wept; one day she received him kindly, another day cruelly; she scratched him, she spat in his face; she was not herself for a single moment; affected, inconstant, prudish, languorous, she was everything by turns, and whatever ennui, the vapors and the blue devils can instil in the way of extraordinary whims in the hollow head of a silly woman, the poor devil must needs endure and carry out.—An imp, a monkey, and an attorney in conjunction could have invented no more mischievous tricks.—This miraculous treatment did not fail to produce its effect;—the patient was driven from his "mad humor of love to a living humor of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook merely monastic;" a most satisfactory result and one which might readily be anticipated, by the way.

Orlando, as you may believe, is little disposed to recover his health by such means; but Rosalind insists and wishes to undertake the cure.—And she uttered these words: "I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me," with such significant, palpable meaning, and accompanied with such a strange glance, that it was impossible for me not to attach to them a more extended significance than that of the words themselves and not to see therein an indirect warning to declare my real sentiments.—And when Orlando replied: "With all

my heart, good youth," she exclaimed, with even more significance, and as if annoyed at her failure to make herself understood: "Nay, you must call me Rosalind."

Perhaps I was mistaken and imagined that I saw what did not really exist, but it seemed to me that Théodore had noticed my passion, although you may be sure I have never lisp'd a word of it, and that, through the veil of those borrowed expressions, behind that stage-mask, in those hermaphroditic words, he was alluding to his real sex and to our reciprocal positions. It is impossible that so bright a woman as she is, who knows so much of the world as she, should not have detected from the very first what was going on in my heart:—in default of my tongue, my eyes and my mental disturbance have spoken loud enough, and the veil of warm friendship which I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable that a watchful and interested observer could not easily look through it.—The most innocent and least experienced girl on earth would not have been deceived by it for one moment.

Some important motive, doubtless, which I may not know, compels the beauty to adopt this infernal disguise, which has been the cause of all my suffering and has been on the verge of making me a strange sort of lover: except for that, everything would have run as smoothly and easily as a carriage whose wheels are well greased, over a level road covered with fine gravel; I could have abandoned myself in sweet security to the most amorously vagabond reveries and have taken my divinity's little soft white hand in mine without shuddering with horror and recoiling twenty paces as if I had been touched with a red-hot iron, or felt the claws of Beelzebub in person.

Instead of falling into despair and raging inwardly like a genuine maniac, of beating my breast because I could not escape remorse, and lamenting because I had none, I should have said to myself with a feeling of duty well done and conscience satisfied:—"I am in love!"—a sentence as agreeable to say to one's self in the morning, under nice warm bedclothes with your head on a soft pillow, as any other conceivable sentence of the same length—always excepting this: "I have money."

After leaving my bed I could have taken my place in front of my mirror, and there, looking at myself with a sort of respect, I should have been touched, as I combed my hair, by my poetic pallor, promising myself that I would turn it to good advantage and make the most of it, for nothing is so low as to make love with a scarlet face; and when one has the ill-luck to be red-faced and in love, as may happen, I am of the opinion that he should have his face powdered every day or else renounce all idea of gentility in his appearance and turn his attention to the Margots and Toinons.

Then I could have breakfasted with suitable gravity, in order to nourish this dear body, this precious casket of passion, to manufacture with the juice of meats and game, good, amorous chyle and warm, quick blood, and to maintain it in a condition to give pleasure to charitable souls.

And after breakfast, as I picked my teeth, I would have tossed together a few irregular rhymes, by way of sonnet, all in honor of my mistress; I would have invented a thousand similes, each more novel than the last, and infinitely gallant; in the first quatrain there would have been a dance of suns, and in the second a minuet of the cardinal virtues; the two triplets would have been in equally good taste; Helen would have been treated as a bar-maid and Paris as an idiot; the magnificence of the metaphors would have left the Orient nothing to desire; the last line would have been particularly admirable and would have contained at least two witty conceits per syllable; for the poison of the scorpion is in his tail and the merit of the sonnet is in its last line.—The sonnet completed and well and duly transcribed upon laid and perfumed paper, I would have gone forth from my house a hundred cubits tall, bending my head for fear of striking against the sky and catching on the clouds—a wise precaution—and I would have declaimed my new production to all my friends and all my enemies, then to children at the breast and their nurses, then to the horses and donkeys, then to the walls and trees, to ascertain the opinion of all creation as to this last product of my vein.

In society I would have talked with women with a dogmatic air, and upheld sentimental theories in a solemn, measured voice, like a man who knows much more than he cares to say about the subject in hand, and who did not learn what he knows from books;—which inevitably produces a most prodigious effect, and makes all the women in the company who don't tell their ages and the few young girls who haven't been asked to dance, gasp for breath like carp stranded on the beach.

I might have led the happiest life imaginable, trodden on the poodle's tail without too great an outcry from his mistress, overturned small tables covered with porcelain, and eaten the best bits at table, leaving none for the rest of the company; it would all have been forgiven in view of the well-known absentmindedness of lovers; and when they saw me thus swallowing everything with a terrified mien, everybody would have clasped his hands and said; "Poor fellow!"

And then, the dreaming, mournful air, the hair in tears, the untidy stockings, the loose cravat, the long hanging arms I should have had! how I should have walked about the avenues in the park, now with great strides, now with short steps, after the manner of a man whose reason has gone completely astray! How I should have gazed at the moon between her two eyes, and made circles in the water with the utmost tranquillity!

But the gods ordered otherwise.

I have fallen in love with a beauty in doublet and boots, a haughty Bradamante who disdains the garments of her sex and leaves you at times in the most disquieting uncertainty and perplexity;—

her features and body are the features and body of a woman, but her mind is incontestably the mind of a man.

My mistress is most expert with the sword and could give lessons to the most experienced fencing-master; she has fought I know not how many duels, and killed or wounded three or four persons; in the saddle she leaps ditches ten feet wide and hunts like an old country squire:—strange qualities for a mistress! such things never happen to anybody but me.

I jest, but there certainly is no reason for it, for I have never suffered so much, and these last two months have seemed to me like two years, two centuries rather. There has been an inflow and outflow of uncertainties in my head, well adapted to confuse the strongest brain; I have been so violently agitated and pulled in every direction, I have had such frenzied impulses, such deathly prostration, such extravagant hopes, and such profound despair that I really do not know why it has not killed me. That idea has engrossed me and filled my thoughts so completely that I have wondered that it could not be seen clearly through my body, like a candle in a lantern, and I have been in mortal fear that some one would discover who was the object of this insensate passion.—However, Rosette, who is the one person in the world who has the most interest in watching the movements of my heart, has not seemed to notice anything; I think that she has been too much absorbed herself in her love for Théodore to observe my coldness to her; or else I must be a past-master in the art of dissimulation and I am not conceited enough to think that.—Théodore himself has never shown until to-day that he had the slightest suspicion of the state of my mind, and he has always talked with me in a friendly, familiar way, as a well-bred young man talks with a young man of his own age—nothing more.—His conversation with me has touched indifferently upon all sorts of subjects, art, poetry and other kindred matters; but nothing private or with a direct reference to him or myself.

Perhaps the motives that forced him to adopt this disguise no longer exist and he proposes soon to resume his proper attire: that I cannot say; it is a fact, however, that Rosalind delivered certain sentences with a significant intonation and emphasized in a very marked way all those passages in her part which were of ambiguous meaning and could be twisted in that direction.

In the scene of the rendezvous, from the moment when she reproaches Orlando for not having arrived two hours earlier, as becomes a genuine lover, but two hours after, to the dolorous sigh she utters, terrified at the extent of her passion, as she throws herself into Aliena's arms: "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love!" she displayed miraculous talent. There was an irresistible mixture of tenderness, melancholy, and love; her voice trembled with emotion, and behind the laugh one could feel that the most violent love was ready to explode; add to this all the piquancy and peculiarity of the transposition, and the novelty of seeing a young man pay court to his mistress, whom he takes for a man and who has every appearance of being one.

Expressions which would have seemed ordinary and commonplace enough under other circumstances, assumed peculiar significance then, and all the small change of similes and amorous protestations, which is current on the stage, seemed to have been recoined with new dies; indeed if the thoughts, instead of being unique and charming as they are, had been as threadbare as a judge's gown or the saddle-cloth of a hired donkey, the way in which they were expressed would have made them seem wonderfully keen and bright and in the best possible taste.

I have forgotten to tell you that Rosette, after declining the rôle of Rosalind, had good-humoredly undertaken the secondary rôle of Phœbe; Phœbe is a shepherdess in the forest of Arden, madly loved by the shepherd Sylvius, whom she cannot endure and whom she treats with consistent and crushing cruelty. Phœbe is as cold as the moon for whom she is named; she has a heart of snow that does not melt in the fire of the most ardent sighs, but whose frozen crust grows thicker and thicker and becomes as hard as the diamond; but she has no sooner seen Rosalind in the costume of the comely page, Ganymede, than all that ice dissolves in tears and the diamond becomes softer than wax. The haughty Phœbe, who laughed at love, is in love herself; she suffers now the torments she had inflicted on others. Her pride humbles itself so far as to make all the advances, and she sends to Rosalind, by poor Sylvius, a burning letter which contains a declaration of her passion in most humble and suppliant terms. Rosalind, moved to pity for Sylvius, and having, moreover, most excellent reasons for not responding to Phœbe's love, subjects her to the most cruel treatment and makes sport of her with unparalleled mercilessness and ferocity. Phœbe prefers these insults, however, to the most touching and most passionate flattery of her unhappy shepherd; she follows the fair stranger everywhere and with all her importunity succeeds in extorting from him nothing but the promise that if he ever marries a woman she shall surely be the one; meanwhile he urges her to treat Sylvius kindly and not depend upon a too flattering hope.

Rosette acted her part with a melancholy and caressing grace, a sorrowful, resigned tone that went to the heart;—and when Rosalind said to her: "I would love you, if I could," the tears were ready to overflow, and she could hardly hold them back, for Phœbe's story is her own, as Orlando's is mine, with this difference, that everything turns out happily for Orlando, and that Phœbe, disappointed in her love, is compelled to marry Sylvius instead of the charming ideal she longed to embrace. Such is life: that which affords happiness to one necessarily causes another unhappiness. It is very fortunate for me that Théodore is a woman, it is very unfortunate for Rosette that he is not a man, and she is now wallowing in the slough of amorous impossibilities in which I recently went astray.

At the end of the play Rosalind lays aside the doublet of the page Ganymede for the garments of



her own sex, is recognized by her father as his daughter, by Orlando as his mistress: the god Hymen arrives with his saffron-colored livery and his legitimate torches.—Three weddings take place.—Orlando marries Rosalind, Phœbe Sylvius, and the clown Touchstone the artless Audrey.—Then the epilogue has its say and the curtain falls.

All this has interested us exceedingly and engrossed our minds; there was, in a certain sense, a play within the play, a drama invisible to the other spectators and unsuspected by them, which we played for ourselves alone, and which, in symbolic phrases, summed up our whole lives and expressed our most secret desires.—Except for Rosalind's strange prescription I should be sicker than ever, having not even a distant hope of cure, and I should have continued to wander sadly through the winding paths of the dark forest.

And yet I have only a moral certainty; I lack proofs and I can remain no longer in this state of uncertainty; I absolutely must speak to Théodore in more definite terms. I have approached him twenty times with a sentence ready on my lips, but have not succeeded in saying it to him—I dare not; I have many opportunities to speak to him alone, either in the park or in my room, or in his, for he comes to see me and I go to see him, but I let them pass without profiting by them, although the next moment I feel a mortal regret and fly into a terrible rage with myself. I open my mouth, and in spite of all I can do, other words take the places of the words I intended to say; instead of declaring my love, I discourse upon the rain, the fine weather or some other similarly stupid subject. And the season is drawing to a close and soon we shall return to the town; the facilities which present themselves according to my wishes here will be renewed nowhere else:—perhaps we shall lose sight of each other and opposite currents will carry us in opposite directions, I doubt not.

The free and easy life of the country is such a delightful and convenient thing! the trees, even though the foliage is not quite so dense in the autumn, afford such delicious shade for the reveries of nascent love! it is difficult to resist the lovely natural surroundings! the birds sing so languorously, the flowers give forth such intoxicating odors, the turf is so soft and so golden on the hillsides! Solitude inspires countless voluptuous thoughts which the hurly-burly of the world would have scattered here and there, and the instinctive impulse of two creatures who hear their hearts beat in the silence of a deserted country-side, is to entwine their arms more tightly and to cleave to each other as if they were in truth the only living creatures in the world.

I took a walk this morning; the air was soft and damp, not the slightest particle of blue sky could be seen, and yet it was neither dark nor threatening. Two or three different shades of pearl-gray, harmoniously blended, enveloped the sky from horizon to horizon, and against that vaporous background fleecy clouds floated slowly like great pieces of wadding; they were impelled by the dying breath of a light breeze, hardly strong enough to move the tops of the most restless aspens: patches of mist rose between the tall chestnuts and indicated the course of the stream in the distance. When the breeze took breath once more, a few dry red leaves blew excitedly about and ran along the path before me like swarms of timid sparrows; then as the breeze fell, they subsided a few steps farther on: a true image of those winds that one mistakes for birds flying freely with wings outspread, but which are, after all, naught but leaves withered by the morning frost, which the slightest passing breeze takes for its plaything and its sport.

Distant points were so blurred by vapors, and the fringes of the horizon tapered away so on the edges, that it was hardly possible to tell where the sky began and the earth ended: a little darker gray, a little denser haze, indicated vaguely the separation and dividing line between the two. Through that curtain, the willows with their ashen heads seemed more like spectral trees than real trees; the irregularities of the hills resembled rather the undulations of a mass of heaped-up clouds than the lay of solid ground. The outlines of objects trembled as you looked at them, and a sort of gray woof of indescribable fineness, like a spider's web, stretched between the foreground of the landscape and the receding depths of the atmosphere; in shaded places the lines stood out much more clearly, and allowed the meshes of the net to be seen; where the light was brighter, the streak of mist was imperceptible and lost itself in a diffused light. There was in the air something drowsy, something warm and soft and dull that predisposed one strangely to melancholy.

As I walked I reflected that autumn had come for me also, and that the radiant summer had passed, never to return; the tree of my mind was even more stripped of its leaves perhaps than the trees in the forest; hardly one tiny green leaf remained on the topmost branch, swaying to and fro and trembling, all sad to see its sisters leave it one by one.

Remain upon the tree, O little leaf of the color of hope, cling to the branch with all the strength of thy nerves and fibres; be not alarmed by the whistling of the wind, O dear little leaf! for when thou hast left me, who will be able to distinguish whether I am a dead or living tree, and who will prevent the wood-cutter from cutting through my foot with his axe and making firewood of my branches?—It is not yet the time when the trees shed all their leaves, and the sun may still throw off the swaddling-clothes of mist that surround it.

The spectacles of the dying season made a deep impression upon me. I reflected that time was passing swiftly and that I might die without having pressed my ideal to my heart.

When I returned to my room I had formed a resolution.—As I cannot make up my mind to speak, I wrote my whole destiny upon a slip of paper.—It is absurd perhaps to write to a person who is living in the same house with yourself, whom you can see every day, at any hour; but I am beyond caring whether it is absurd or not.

I sealed my letter, not without trembling and changing color; then, selecting a moment when

Théodore had gone out, I placed it in the middle of his table and fled, as disturbed as if I had committed a most outrageous act.

[1] *As You Like It.*

[2] The last word in this quotation, which justifies the succeeding epithets, is not in the English version of the play.

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## XII

I promised you the sequel of my adventures; but really I am so sluggish about writing that I must love you as the apple of my eye and know you to be more curious than Eve or Psyche, to place myself in front of a table with a huge sheet of white paper which I must make black, and an inkstand deeper than the sea, each drop in which is destined to turn into thoughts, or at least into something resembling thoughts, without forming a sudden resolution to mount my horse and ride at full speed the eighty endless leagues that lie between us, in order to tell you *viva voce* what I propose to write in imperceptible fly-tracks, so that I may not be dismayed myself by the prodigious volume of my *picaresque* odyssey.

Eighty leagues! to think that there is all that space between myself and the person I love best in the world!—I have an intense longing to tear up my letter and order my horse to be saddled.—But I will think no more of it—with the clothes I am wearing, I could not approach you and resume the familiar life we led together when we were very artless and innocent little girls; if ever I go back to my petticoats it will certainly be for that purpose.

I left you, I believe, as we were leaving the inn where I passed such an amusing night and where my virtue thought it was going to be shipwrecked upon leaving the harbor.—We rode away together, going in the same direction.—My companions went into ecstasies over the beauty of my horse, which is a thoroughbred and one of the fastest horses in the world;—that fact increased my stature at least half a cubit in their estimation, and they added the merits of my steed to my own merits.—They seemed to be afraid, however, that he was too frisky and high-spirited for me.—I told them they need have no fear, and to show them that there was no danger I made him prance and curvet—then I jumped a wall of considerable height and put him at a gallop.

The party tried in vain to overtake me; I turned when I was some distance ahead of them and rode back at full speed; just before I met them, I checked my horse when all four feet were in the air and stopped him short: which is, as you may or may not know, a genuine feat.

From esteem they passed without transition to the most profound respect. They did not suspect that a young student, recently graduated from the University, was so accomplished a horseman as that. That discovery served me better than if they had discovered in me all the cardinal virtues; instead of treating me as a boy, they addressed in a tone of obsequious familiarity that pleased me.

In laying aside my clothing, I had not laid aside my pride:—being a woman no longer, I determined to be a thorough man and not to be content to have simply the external appearance of one.—I had determined to achieve as a cavalier, the triumphs I could no longer aspire to as a woman. What disturbed me most was to ascertain how I should set about procuring a stock of courage; for courage and skill in bodily exercises are the means by which a man most easily establishes a reputation. It is not that I am timid for a woman, and I have not the idiotic pusillanimity that we see in some women; but it is a long distance to the reckless, fierce brutality that is the glory of the men, and it was my intention to become a young blood, a swash-buckler, like my gentlemen of the upper circles, in order to secure a good footing in society and to enjoy all the advantages of my metamorphosis.

But I saw in the sequel that nothing was easier and that the receipt was of the simplest.

I will not tell you, according to the custom of travellers, that I made so many leagues on such a day, that I went from this place to another place, that the roast meat I ate at the Cheval-Blanc or Croix-de-Fer inn was raw or burned; that the wine was sour and the bed I slept in had curtains with flowered or figured designs: those are very important details which should be preserved for posterity; but posterity will have to do without them this time, and you must resign yourself to be left in ignorance of the number of dishes of which my dinner was composed, and whether I slept well or ill during my wanderings. Nor shall I give you an accurate description of the different landscapes, the fields of grain, the forests, the various crops and the hillsides covered with villages which have passed successively before my eyes; those things are easily imagined; take a little earth, plant a few trees and a few blades of grass, daub behind it all a bit of gray or pale-blue sky, and you will have a very adequate idea of the changing background against which our little caravan moved on.—If I went into some details of this nature in my first letter, pray excuse me, I will not fall into the same error again: as I had never been abroad before, the most trivial things seemed to me of vast importance.

One of the party, my bedfellow, he whose sleeve I came so near pulling on the memorable night whose agonies I have described to you at length, conceived an ardent passion for me and kept his horse beside mine all the time.

With the exception that I would not have taken him for a lover even if he had brought me the fairest crown on earth, I did not find him particularly disagreeable; he was well-informed and lacked neither wit nor good-humor: but, when he spoke of women, it was in a disdainful, ironical

tone, for which I could readily have torn the eyes out of his head, especially as there were many things in what he said that were cruelly true, although exaggerated, and my male costume compelled me to acknowledge their accuracy.

He asked me so urgently and so persistently to go with him to see one of his sisters, who was just at the end of her mourning for her husband, and was at that moment living with an aunt in an old chateau, that I could not refuse.—I made some objections for form's sake, for in reality I was as ready to go there as anywhere, and I could attain my object in that way as well as any other; and as he told me that he should take it very ill of me if I did not give him at least a fortnight, I answered that I would gladly do so, and that it was a bargain.

At a fork in the road, my friend said to me, pointing to the right arm of the natural Y: "That is our road."—The others shook hands with us and went in the other direction.

After riding for some hours we reached our destination.

A ditch of considerable width, but filled with dense and abundant vegetation instead of water, separated the park from the high road; the walls were of a hewn stone and, at the angles, bristled with gigantic iron artichokes and thistles which seemed to have grown like natural plants between the disjointed blocks of the wall; a small bridge of a single arch crossed this dry canal and led to the park gate.

An avenue of tall elms, rounded like a cradle-top and trimmed in the old style, was the first thing I saw; and after following it for some time, we came to a sort of circular clearing.

The trees had the appearance of being old-fashioned rather than old; they seemed to wear wigs and to be powdered; only a little circle of foliage had been preserved at the top of their heads; all the rest was carefully pruned, so that you might have taken them for plumes of abnormal size stuck in the ground at regular intervals.

Having crossed the clearing, which was covered with fine grass carefully rolled, we had to pass under another curious arrangement of foliage adorned with pots of fire, pyramids, and columns of a rustic order, all done by skilful handling of scissors and sickles in a great clump of boxwood.—Through different vistas you could see, at the right and left, a half-ruined chateau, the moss-covered stairway of a dry cascade, or it might be a vase or a statue of a nymph or a shepherd with nose and fingers broken and with doves perching on the head and shoulders.

A large flower-garden on the French plan was laid out in front of the chateau; all the squares were marked out with holly and box with absolute symmetry; it had quite as much the appearance of a carpet as of a garden: huge flowers in ball-dresses with majestic carriage and serene expression, like duchesses preparing to dance a minuet, bent their heads slightly as you passed. Others, apparently less courteous, stood straight and stiff, like dowagers embroidering. Shrubs of all possible shapes, excepting always their natural shape, round, square, pointed, triangular, in green and gray boxes, seemed to march in procession along the broad avenue and to lead you by the hand to the first steps of the entrance.

A few turrets, half surrounded by more recent buildings, towered above the roof-line of the main structure to the height of their slate-covered, extinguisher-like peaks, and their zinc vanes, cut in the shape of swallows' tails, bore witness to an honorable antiquity. The windows of the central building all opened upon a common balcony with an iron balustrade of elaborate workmanship and great beauty, and the other windows were set in stone frames with carved ciphers and figures.

Four or five huge dogs ran out, barking at the top of their lungs and leaping wildly about. They gambolled around the horses and jumped at their noses: they paid especial attention to my companion's horse, which they probably visited frequently in the stable or accompanied on the road.

All this uproar finally called out a sort of valet, half laborer, half groom, who took our horses by the reins and led them away.—I had not as yet seen a living being except a little peasant girl, timid and wild as a deer, who ran away at sight of us and crouched in a furrow behind some hemp, although we called her several times and did everything in our power to reassure her.

No one appeared at the windows; you would have said the chateau was uninhabited, or that its only occupants were spirits; for not the slightest sound could be heard outside.

We were beginning to ascend the steps, making considerable noise with our spurs, for our legs were a little tired, when we heard a sound as of doors opening and shutting within, as if some one were hurrying to meet us.

In a moment a young woman appeared at the top of the steps, rushed down to my companion and threw herself on his neck. He kissed her very affectionately and, putting his arm about her waist, lifted her up and carried her so to the landing.

"Do you know that you are very amiable and gallant for a brother, my dear Alcibiades?—Surely, monsieur, it is altogether useless for me to tell you that he's my brother, for he really does not stand on ceremony?" said the young woman, turning to me.

To which I replied that it was possible to misinterpret his actions, and that it was in a certain sense a misfortune to be her brother and thus to be excluded from the category of her adorers; that, as for myself, if I were her brother, I should be at once the unhappiest and the happiest cavalier on earth.—Whereat she smiled sweetly.

Conversing thus we entered a hall, the walls of which were hung with high warp Flemish

tapestry.—Tall trees with pointed leaves were covered with flocks of fanciful birds; the colors, faded by time, presented strange transpositions of shades; the sky was green, the trees royal blue with yellow streaks, and in the draperies of the figures the shadow was often of a directly opposite color to that of the background of the material;—the flesh resembled wood, and the nymphs walking under the faded shadows of the forest looked like unswathed mummies; their mouths alone, which had retained their original purple tint, smiled with an appearance of life. In the foreground were tall plants of a strange shade of green with great striped flowers, whose pistils resembled a peacock's crest. Sober-faced, pensive herons, their heads buried in their shoulders, their long beaks resting on their swollen crops, stood philosophically on one of their slim legs, in stagnant, black water, streaked with lines of tarnished silver; through the vistas in the foliage, one could see in the distance small chateaux with turrets like pepper-boxes and balconies crowded with lovely women in grand attire, watching processions or hunting-parties pass.

Fantastically-jagged rocks, over which foamed torrents of white wool, blended insensibly with fleecy clouds at the horizon line.

One of the things that impressed me most was the figure of a huntress shooting a bird.—Her open fingers had just released the string, and the arrow had flown; but as that part of the tapestry was in a corner, the arrow was on the other wall, having described a great curve; as for the bird, he was flying away on motionless wings and seemed to be headed for a neighboring branch.

That feathered arrow, armed with a golden tip, always in the air and never reaching its destination, had a most curious effect; it was like a melancholy, sorrowful symbol of human destiny, and the more I looked at it the more mysterious and sinister meanings I discovered in it.—The huntress stood there, her foot put forward, her leg bent, her eye with its silken lid wide open, and yet unable to see her arrow which had deviated from its path; she seemed to be looking anxiously for the flamingo with the gorgeous plumage, that she desired to bring down and expected to see fall at her feet, pierced through and through.—I do not know whether it is an error on the part of my imagination, but I detected upon that face an expression as forlorn and desperate as that of a poet who dies without having written the work upon which he expected to found his reputation, and who is seized with the pitiless death-rattle just as he is trying to dictate it.

I have written at great length about this tapestry, at greater length certainly than it deserves;—but the fanciful world created by those who work on the high warp has always had a strange fascination for me.

I am passionately fond of the imaginary vegetation, the flowers and plants that have no real existence, the forests of strange trees peopled with unicorns, *caprimulgæ*. and snow-white stags with a golden crucifix between their horns, generally pursued by red-bearded huntsmen in the costumes of Saracens.

When I was small I hardly ever entered a room hung with tapestry without a sort of shudder, and I hardly dared move.

All those figures standing against the wall, to which the undulation of the material and the play of the light imparted a sort of fantastic life, seemed to me like so many spies watching my actions in order to report them at the proper time and place, and I would not have eaten a stolen apple or cake in their presence.

What tales those solemn creatures would have to tell if they could open their red silk lips, and if sounds could penetrate the drum of their embroidered ears. Of how many murders, treasons, infamous adulteries and monstrous deeds of all sorts have they been silent, impassive witnesses!

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But let us leave the tapestry and return to our story.

"Alcibiades, I will go and tell my aunt of your arrival."

"Oh! there's no hurry about that, sister; let us sit down and talk a little while first. Allow me to introduce my young friend Théodore de Sérannes, who will pass some time here. I do not need to urge you to make him welcome;—he is his own sufficient recommendation."—I tell you what he said; do not be in a hurry to accuse me of self-conceit.—

The young lady nodded slightly as if in assent, and we talked of other things.

As we talked I made a more detailed and more careful examination of her than I had been able to do before.

She seemed to be some twenty-three or twenty-four years old and her mourning was most becoming to her; to tell the truth, her manner was not very lugubrious or desolate and I suspect that she had eaten the ashes of her Mausolus in her soup by way of rhubarb.—I do not know whether she had grieved overmuch for her defunct spouse; if she had done it, she hardly showed it now, at all events, and the pretty cambric handkerchief she had in her hand was as perfectly dry as possible.

Her eyes were not red, on the contrary they were the clearest and brightest eyes in the world, and you would have sought in vain on her cheeks the furrow through which tears had flowed; indeed, there was nothing there save two little dimples formed by the habit of smiling, and it is fair to say that, for a widow, she displayed her teeth very frequently; and it was certainly not an unpleasant spectacle, for they were small and even. I esteemed her, first of all, for not having felt

obliged, just because some poor devil of a husband had died, to blacken her eyes and make her nose red: I was grateful to her also for not affecting any little mournful airs and for talking naturally with her silvery, ringing voice, without dragging out her words and interlarding her sentences with virtuous sighs.

It seemed to me in extremely good taste; I set her down at once as a woman of intelligence, which she is in fact.

She was well built, with a foot and hand well suited to her figure; her black dress was arranged with all possible coquetry and so daintily that you entirely forgot the lugubriousness of the color, and she might have gone to a ball in that costume without causing any remark. If I ever marry and am left a widow, I shall ask her for a pattern of her dress, for she looks like an angel in it.

After some little talk, we went up to the old aunt's room.

We found her sitting in a great easy-chair with a sloping back, a little stool under her feet and beside her an old bleary-eyed, ugly-looking dog, who raised his black muzzle when we appeared and welcomed us with a far from amiable growl.

I have always looked upon old women with horror. My mother died very young; doubtless, if I had seen her grow old slowly, and her features change imperceptibly, I should have become accustomed to it without a shock.—In my childhood I was surrounded by none but youthful, laughing faces, so that I have retained an insurmountable antipathy for old people. So it was that I shuddered when the lovely widow touched the dowager's yellow brow with her pure vermilion lips.—It was something I wouldn't have taken upon myself to do. I know that I shall look like that when I am sixty; but I can do nothing to prevent it, and I pray God that I may die young like my mother.

However, the old lady had retained some simple and majestic features of her former beauty which prevented her from attaining the baked-apple stage of ugliness that is the lot of women who have been simply pretty or fresh and healthy: her eyes, although they had crow's feet at the corners and were covered by great, flabby lids, still retained some sparks of their former fire, and you could see that, under the reign of the late king, they might have emitted dazzling flashes of passion. Her fine and thin nose, slightly hooked like the beak of a bird of prey, gave to her profile a sort of solemn grandeur, tempered by the indulgent smile upon her protruding Austrian lip, which was touched with carmine according to the fashion of the last generation.

Her costume was old-fashioned without being absurd, and was in perfect harmony with her face; her head-dress was a simple white cap with a narrow lace border; her long, emaciated hands, which you could see had once been beautiful, were encased in mittens with no fingers or thumbs; a dress of the color of dead leaves, with flowered work of a deeper shade, a black mantle and a paduasoy apron of changing color completed her toilet.

Old women ought always to dress in that way and respect their approaching death sufficiently to avoid decking themselves out with feathers and wreaths of flowers, ribbons of delicate shades and the countless gewgaws that are suited only to extreme youth. It is of no use for them to make advances to life; life will have nothing to do with them; they have their pains for their trouble, like the superannuated courtesans who plaster themselves with red and white paint and whom drunken mule-drivers repulse with insults and kicks.

The old lady welcomed us with the ease of manner and exquisite courtesy characteristic of those people who were of the old court, the secret of which we seem to be losing from day to day, like so many other valuable secrets—and in a voice which, though broken and trembling, was still extremely sweet.

She seemed much pleased with me and looked at me very attentively for a long while, apparently much moved.—A tear gathered in the corner of her eye and rolled slowly down one of the deep wrinkles, where it dried up and disappeared. She begged me to excuse her and said that I greatly resembled a son who was killed in the army.

All the time that I remained at the chateau, I was treated by the dear old lady with extraordinary, altogether motherly kindness because of that resemblance, real or imaginary. I found more charm in that condition of things than I anticipated at first, for the greatest favor that elderly people can confer upon me is never to speak to me and to leave the room when I enter it.

I will not tell you in detail what I did each day at R—. If I have lingered a little over all this preliminary matter and have drawn with some care these two or three physiognomies of persons and of places, it is because I had there some very strange adventures, albeit very natural and just what I ought to have foreseen when I donned the garb of a man.

My natural light-headedness led me into an imprudence which I bitterly repent, for it has brought trouble to a kind and loving heart, trouble which I cannot allay without disclosing what I am and compromising myself seriously.

In order to acquire masculine manners perfectly and to divert myself a little, I could think of nothing better than to pay court to my friend's sister.—It seemed very amusing to me to fall upon all fours when she dropped her glove and to return it to her with humble reverences, to lean over the back of her chair with an adorably languorous expression, to whisper in her ear a thousand and one flattering speeches of the most seductive description. Whenever she passed from one room to another I gracefully offered my hand; if she rode, I held her stirrup, and in walking I was always at her side; in the evening I read to her and sang with her;—in short, I performed with scrupulous accuracy all the functions of a *cicisbeo*.

I did everything that I had seen young men in love do, which amused me and made me laugh like the genuine madcap that I am, when I was alone in my chamber and reflected on all the impertinent remarks I had made in the most serious tone imaginable.

Alcibiades and the old marchioness seemed to look upon the intimacy with pleasure and left us together very often. I sometimes regretted that I was not a man in order to take advantage of the tête-à-tête; if I had been, it would have depended entirely upon me, for our charming widow seemed to have forgotten the defunct entirely, or, if she remembered him, she would readily have been unfaithful to his memory.

Having begun upon that line I could hardly draw back with honor, and it was very difficult to effect a retreat with arms and stores; I could not go beyond a certain limit, however, and I could hardly be affectionate except in words:—I hoped to reach without mishap the end of the month I was to pass at R—, and to retire with a promise to return, intending to do nothing of the kind.—I thought that when I had gone the fair widow would readily be consoled, and would soon forget me when I was out of her sight.

But, while seeking only my own amusement, I had aroused a serious passion, and things turned out differently:—which goes to prove a truth that has long been well known, to wit, that one must never play with fire or with love.

Before she fell in with me, Rosette had not known what love is. Married very young to a man many years her senior, she had felt only a sort of filial affection for him;—courted she had been, I doubt not, but she had had no lover, incredible as it may appear: either the gallants who had hitherto shown her attention were but moderately attractive, or else, which is more probable, her hour had not yet come.—The petty aristocrats and country squires who talked of nothing but fertilizers and fumets, young boars and seven-year stags, hunting cries and antlers, with an admixture of charades out of the almanac and compliments moss-grown with age, were certainly not made to commend themselves to her, and her virtue had not had to exert itself overmuch in order not to yield to them.—Moreover, the natural gaiety and playfulness of her disposition were a sufficient defence against love, that sentimental passion that takes such strong hold of dreamers and melancholy folk; the idea of sensual pleasure that her old Tithonus had been able to give her was probably not sufficient to arouse any great temptation to try it again, and she enjoyed in a mild way the pleasure of being left a widow so early in life and of having so many years to be pretty.

But on my arrival, there was a great change.—I thought at first that if I had kept strictly within the limits of cold and scrupulous courtesy, she would not have taken any notice of me; but really I was obliged to admit afterward that it would have made no difference at all, and that that supposition, although very modest, was entirely without foundation.—Alas! nothing can turn aside the fatal horoscope, and no one can avoid the influence, whether benignant or malignant, of his star.

It was Rosette's destiny to love but once in her life, and with an impossible passion; she must and she will accomplish her destiny.

I have been loved, O Graciosa, and it is a sweet experience, although I have been loved only by a woman, and in such an unnatural love there is something painful that there certainly cannot be in the other;—oh! it is a very sweet experience!—When you wake in the night and rest upon your elbow, to say to yourself: "Some one is thinking or dreaming of me; my life is of interest to somebody; a movement of my eyes or my mouth causes joy or sadness to another creature; a word I have let fall at random is carefully treasured up, commented upon and dissected for hours at a time; I am the pole toward which a restless magnet tends; my eye is a heaven, my mouth a paradise more ardently longed for than the real; if I should die, a warm shower of tears would keep my ashes warm, my grave would be brighter with flowers than a wedding-feast; if I were in danger, some one would throw himself between the point of the sword and my breast and sacrifice himself for me!"—it is lovely, and I cannot think what more one can desire in this world.

This thought caused me a feeling of pleasure for which I blamed myself, for I had nothing to give in exchange for it all, and I was in the position of a poor person who accepts presents from a rich and generous friend, with no hope of ever being able to repay them. It delighted me to be so adored and at times I gave myself up to it with strange complaisance. By dint of hearing everybody call me *monsieur* and of being treated as if I were a man, I gradually forgot that I was a woman; my disguise seemed to be my natural attire, and I forgot that I had ever worn any other; I ceased to reflect that I was, after all, only a little empty-headed creature who had made a sword of her needle and a pair of breeches out of one of her petticoats.

Many men are more like women than I am.—There is little of the woman about me except the breast, some more rounded outlines and more delicate hands; the petticoat is on my hips, not in my mind. It often happens that the sex of the mind is different from that of the body, and that is a contradiction that cannot fail to produce much confusion.—For example, if I myself had not made this resolution, insane in appearance but very wise in reality, to renounce the costume of a sex which is mine only materially and by accident, I should have been very unhappy: I love horses, fencing, all violent exercises, I like to climb and run about like a young boy; it tires me to sit with my feet close together, my elbows glued to my sides, to lower my eyes modestly, to speak in a little soft, sweet voice, and to pass worsted through the holes in a piece of canvas ten million times;—I do not like to obey the laws of society, and the words that are most frequently on my tongue are: "I will."—Behind my smooth brow and beneath my silky hair, strong and virile thoughts are constantly in motion; all the precious nonsense that generally is most attractive to women has never produced any but the slightest effect upon me, and, like Achilles disguised as a

girl, I would gladly lay aside my mirror for a sword.—The only thing about women that attracts me is their beauty;—notwithstanding the inconveniences that result from it, I would not willingly give up my figure, although it is ill-sorted with the spirit it encloses.

Such an intrigue was something novel and alluring, and I should have been greatly entertained by it if it had not been taken so seriously by poor Rosette. She set about loving me with admirable *naïveté* and earnestness, with all the force of her dear, loving heart—with a love of the sort that men do not understand, of which they cannot form even a remote idea, a refined, ardent love; she loved me as I would like to be loved if I should ever meet the reality of my dream. What a priceless treasure wasted, what white, transparent pearls, such as divers will never find in the jewel-chest of the sea! what sweet breath, what soft sighs scattered through the air, which might have been gathered by pure, loving lips!

That passion might have made a young man so happy! so many unfortunate youths, handsome, charming, well endowed, full of heart and spirit, have pleaded vainly on their knees with insensible, lifeless idols! so many loving, tender souls have thrown themselves in despair into the arms of prostitutes, or have burned out silently like a lamp in a tomb, who might have been saved from debauchery and death by a sincere passion!

What a strange thing is human destiny! and what an inveterate joker is chance.

The thing that so many others had ardently desired came to me, who did not, could not, want it. A whimsical young woman takes a fancy to travel about the country in a man's clothes in order to find out a little something as to what she is to expect on the part of her future lovers; she sleeps at an inn with an excellent brother who leads her by the end of the finger to his sister, who has nothing better to do than to fall in love with her like a cat, like a dove, like whatever is most amorous and languorous on earth.—It is very clear that, if I had been a young man, and this condition of things could have been of any service to me, it would have turned out very differently and the lady would have taken a violent dislike to me.—Fortune loves to give slippers to those who have wooden legs and gloves to those who have no hands;—the inheritance that would have enabled you to live at your ease, ordinarily falls in on the day of your death.

I went sometimes, not as often as she would have liked, to see Rosette in her bed; although she does not usually receive until she is dressed, an exception is made in my favor.—An exception would have been made in my favor in many other respects, if I had wished;—but, as the saying is, the most beautiful woman can give only what she has, and what I had would have been of little service to Rosette.

She would give me her little hand to kiss;—I confess that it afforded me some pleasure to kiss it, for it is very smooth, very white, exquisitely perfumed, and made softer by a nascent moisture; I felt it shiver and contract under my lips, whose pressure I maliciously prolonged.—Thereupon Rosette, deeply moved and with a supplicating air, would look up at me with her great eyes laden with desire and flooded with a humid, transparent light, then she would let her pretty head, which she had raised a little, the better to receive me, fall back upon the pillow.—I could see her restless bosom rise and fall under the sheet and her whole body suddenly begin to tremble.—Certainly any one who was in a condition to dare might have dared much, and it is equally certain that she would have been grateful to him for his daring and would have thanked him for skipping a few chapters of the novel.

I remained an hour or two with her, not releasing her hand which I had rested on the coverlid; we had interminable, fascinating conversations; for, although Rosette was much engrossed by her love, she believed herself to be too sure of success, not to retain almost all her freedom and playfulness of mind.—From time to time, however, her passion cast a transparent veil of gentle melancholy over her gaiety, which made her even more seductive.

Indeed, it might well have seemed an incredible thing that a young beginner, as I seemed to be, should not be overjoyed at such good fortune and profit by it to the utmost. Rosette was not so made that she was likely to meet with very cruel rebuffs, and knowing no more than she did about me, she relied upon her charms and upon my youth, in default of my love.

However, as the situation was beginning to be prolonged a little beyond the natural limits, she became anxious, and I had difficulty in restoring her former feeling of security by redoubling my flattering phrases and fine protestations. Two things about me surprised her, and she noticed contradictions in my conduct which she could not reconcile:—those two things were the warmth of my words and the coldness of my actions.

You know better than any one, my dear Graciosa, that my friendship has all the characteristics of a passion; it is sudden, ardent, intense, exclusive, it has almost everything of love even to jealousy, and I had for Rosette a friendship almost equal to my friendship for you.—One might easily misunderstand it.—Rosette misunderstood it the more completely because the coat I wore made it impossible for her to have any other idea.

As I have never loved any man, the overflow of my affection has in some sort spread through my friendships with girls and young men; I plunge into them with the same earnestness and exaltation that I put into everything I do, for it is impossible for me to be moderate in anything, especially in anything touching the heart. In my eyes there are only two classes of people, those I adore and those I abhor; all others are to me as if they did not exist, and I would drive my horse over them as I drive him over the high road; in my mind they stand on the same footing with pavements and milestones.

I am naturally expansive and I have a very caressing manner.—Sometimes, forgetting all that

such demonstrations might seem to mean, when I went to walk with Rosette I would put my arm about her waist, as I used to do when you and I walked together in the deserted path at the foot of my uncle's garden; or, as I leaned over the back of her chair while she embroidered, I would twine around my fingers the little stray hairs that grew upon her plump, round neck, or stroke with the back of my hand her lovely hair held in place by the comb, and increase its lustre—or indulge in some other of the endearments to which, as you know, I am much addicted with my dear friends.

She was very far from attributing these caresses to simple friendship. Friendship, as it is usually understood, does not go so far as that; but, seeing that I went no farther, she was inwardly surprised and did not know what to think; she decided finally that it was too great timidity on my part, due to my extreme youth and lack of practice in amorous intrigue, and that I must be encouraged by all sorts of advances and proofs of good-will.

Consequently she took pains to arrange a multitude of opportunities for tête-à-tête interviews in places well adapted to embolden me by their solitude and seclusion from all noise and all interruption; she took me to walk several times in the forest, to see if the voluptuous musings and amorous desires ordinarily aroused in impressionable hearts by the dense and propitious shade of the woods, could not be turned to her advantage.

One day, after we had wandered a long while through a very picturesque park that lay behind the chateau, and of which I knew only the portions near the buildings, she led me through a narrow path that wound capriciously among elder-bushes and hazels, to a little rustic cabin, a sort of charcoal-kiln, built of round timbers laid transversely, with a thatched roof and a door roughly made of five or six pieces of wood almost unplanned, the interstices being stuffed with moss and wild plants; close beside it, between the green roots of tall ash-trees with silvery bark, marred by black spots here and there, was an abundant spring, which, a few steps away, flowed down over two marble steps into a basin filled with water-cresses greener than the emerald.—In the spots where there were no cresses, you could see at the bottom fine sand as white as snow; the water was as clear as crystal and as cold as ice; coming suddenly from the earth and never receiving the faintest ray of sunlight in that impenetrable shade, it had not time to become warm or disturbed.—Despite its crudity, I love fresh spring water, and seeing how clear that was, I could not resist the impulse to drink some of it; I leaned over and drank several times from the hollow of my hand, having no other vessel at my disposal.

Rosette expressed a desire to drink some of the water, too, to appease her thirst, and asked me to bring her a few drops, being afraid, she said, to lean over far enough to reach it.—I dipped my two hands, joined as closely as possible, into the clear fountain, then put them like a cup to Rosette's lips and held them there until she had exhausted the water they contained, which was not long, for there was very little of it, and much of that little dropped through my fingers, although I held them close together; we made a very pretty group, and it's a pity that a sculptor was not there to make a sketch of it.

When she had almost finished, having my hand so near her lips, she could not refrain from kissing it, but in such a way that I might think she was drawing in her breath to exhaust the last pearl of water collected in my palm; but I was not deceived, and the charming blush that covered her face betrayed her plainly enough.

She took my arm again and we walked on toward the cabin. The fair widow walked as close to me as possible, and leaned toward me as she spoke so that her breast was pressed against my sleeve; an extremely shrewd position and certain to disturb the equanimity of any other than myself; I could feel distinctly the pure, firm contour and the gentle warmth; furthermore I could detect a hurried undulation, which, whether it was genuine or affected, was none the less flattering and seductive.

We arrived thus at the door of the cabin, which I opened by pushing with my foot; I certainly did not expect the spectacle that was presented to my eyes.—I supposed that the hut was carpeted with rushes, with possibly a mat on the ground and a stool or two to sit on. Nothing of the sort.

It was a boudoir furnished with all imaginable luxury.—The spaces above the doors and mirrors represented the most amorous scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Salmaces and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, and Apollo and Daphne, and other mythological loves on plain lilac cameo; the pier-glasses were covered with pompon roses carved with great delicacy, and little marguerites, of which, by a refinement of luxury, only the hearts were gilded, the leaves being silvered. All the furniture was trimmed with silk cord, which was also used to relieve hangings of the most delicate blue imaginable, marvellously well adapted to bring out the whiteness and brilliancy of the skin; the mantel was crowded with a thousand charming and curious things, as were the consoles and *étagères*, and there was an abundant supply of easy-chairs, reclining-chairs and sofas, which proved conclusively that the retreat was not destined for the most austere avocations, and that mortification of the flesh was not in vogue there.

A lovely clock in rock-work stood on a richly-incrusted bracket opposite a large Venetian mirror, in which it was reflected with strikingly brilliant effect. It had stopped, however, as if it were a superfluous thing to mark the hours in a place where they were destined to be forgotten.

I told Rosette that that refinement of luxury pleased me, that I considered it extremely good taste to conceal the greatest elegance under an appearance of simplicity, and that I strongly approved of a woman wearing embroidered petticoats and chemises trimmed with lace, with an outer garment of simple cloth; it was a delicate attention for the lover that she had or might have, for which he would be grateful beyond words, and that it certainly was better to put a diamond in a



walnut than a walnut in a gold box.

Rosette, to prove that she agreed with me, raised her dress slightly and showed me the edge of a petticoat very richly embroidered with great flowers and leaves; it rested entirely with me to be admitted to the secret of greater interior splendors; but I did not ask to see if the magnificence of the chemise equalled that of the petticoat; it is probable that it did not fall short of it.—Rosette dropped the skirt of her dress, sorry not to have shown more.—However, even that exhibition had served to disclose the beginning of a perfectly-turned calf, giving a most favorable idea of what was above.—The leg, which she put forward, the better to show off her petticoat, was in very truth miraculously graceful and shapely in its neat, tight-fitting pearl-gray silk stocking, and the little heeled slipper, terminating in a rosette of ribbon resembled the glass slipper worn by Cinderella. I complimented her most sincerely upon it and told her that I could hardly imagine a prettier leg or tinier foot.—To which she replied with a frankness and ingenuousness altogether charming and very clever, too:—

"That is true."

Then she went to a cupboard in the wall, took out several bottles of liquors and some plates of cakes and sweetmeats, placed them all upon a small table and sat down beside me in a narrow chair, so that I was obliged to put my arm behind her to avoid being too crowded. As both her hands were free, while I could use only my left, she filled my glass with her own hands and placed fruit and sugar-plums on my plate; seeing that I was helping myself rather awkwardly, she said: "Oh! don't try to do it; I'll feed you, you child, as you don't know how to feed yourself." And she put the pieces in my mouth and compelled me to swallow them faster than I wanted to do, pushing them in with her pretty fingers, just as they do to chickens when they are fattening them—which made her laugh heartily.—I could hardly avoid returning upon her fingers the kiss she had just now bestowed upon the palm of my hand, and, as if to prevent me, but really to give me a more solid support for my kiss, she struck my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand.

She had drunk two or three fingers of Crème des Barbades and a glass of Canary, and I almost as much. That assuredly was not a great quantity; but it was enough to enliven two women who were accustomed to drink nothing but water barely colored with wine.—Rosette threw herself back and pressed against my arm very amorously.—She had thrown aside her mantle, and I could see the beginning of her breast, which was distended and thrown forward by that position; the tone of the flesh was ravishingly delicate and transparent; the shape marvellously graceful and solid at the same time. I gazed at her for some time with indefinable emotion and pleasure, and the thought came to my mind that men are more favored than we in their passions, that we give the most priceless treasures into their possession and that they have nothing similar to offer us.—What a delight it must be to run one's lips over that fine, smooth skin, those swelling contours which seem to go out to meet the kiss and provoke it! that satiny flesh, those waving lines which melt into one another, the silky hair that is so soft to the touch; what inexhaustible stores of delicious pleasure that we have not with men!—Our caresses can be only-passive, and yet there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

These remarks I certainly should not have made last year, and I could have looked at all the bosoms and shoulders in the world without worrying as to whether they were well or ill shaped; but since I have laid aside the garments of my sex and have lived among young men, a sentiment has developed in me that was entirely unfamiliar to me before:—the sentiment of beauty. Women are usually devoid of that sentiment, I don't quite see why, for they would seem at first glance better fitted to judge beauty than men;—but as they are the ones who possess beauty, and as knowledge of one's self is the most difficult knowledge to acquire, it is not surprising that they know nothing about it.—Ordinarily, if one woman considers another woman pretty, you can be sure that the latter is hideously ugly, and that no man would look twice at her.—On the other hand, all the women whose beauty and grace are vaunted by men, are unanimously voted unsightly and affected by the whole petticoated swarm; there is no end to the outcries and clamor. If I were what I seem to be, I would take no other guide in making my selection, and the disapprobation of the women would be a sufficient certificate of beauty.

Now I know beauty and love it; the clothes I wear separate me from my sex and take away anything like rivalry; I am in a better position to judge than anybody else.—I am no longer a woman, but I am not yet a man, and passion will not blind me so far as to take manikins for idols; I look on coolly, without prejudice for or against, and my position is as completely disinterested as possible.

The length and fineness of the eyelashes, the transparency of the temples, the limpidity of the crystalline lens, the curves of the ear, the color and quality of the hair, the aristocratic shape of the feet and hands, the slenderness of the ankle and wrist, a thousand and one things which I used not to notice and which constitute real beauty and prove purity of breeding, guide me now in my judgments, and make it almost impossible for me to go astray.—I think that one could accept with eyes closed a woman of whom I had said: "Really, she is not bad."

By a natural consequence I am a much better judge of pictures than formerly, and, although I have only a very superficial knowledge of the masters, it would be difficult to pass off a poor work on me for a good one; I find that this study possesses a strange and profound fascination; for, like everything in the world, beauty, moral or physical, requires to be studied and cannot be understood at once.

But let us return to Rosette; the transition from this subject to her is not a difficult one; they are two ideas that attract each other.

As I said, the fair widow had thrown herself back against my arm and her head rested against my shoulder; emotion tinged her cheeks with a delicate pink flush, admirably heightened by a coquettish little black patch; her teeth glistened through her smile like rain-drops in the heart of a poppy, and her lashes, half-lowered, enhanced the moist brilliancy of her great eyes;—a sunbeam caused a thousand metallic gleams to play upon her silken, glossy hair, a few locks of which had escaped from the comb and fell in natural curls along her plump, round neck, showing off the warm whiteness of the skin; some tiny stray hairs, more rebellious than the others, held aloof from the mass and flew hither and thither in capricious spirals, gleaming like gold, and taking on all the shades of the prism as the light passed through them:—you would have said they were some of the golden threads that surround the heads of virgins in the old pictures.—Neither of us spoke and I amused myself by following the little sky-blue veins under the transparent pearly skin of her temples, and the gradual, insensible disappearance of the down at the extremity of her eyebrows.

She seemed to be absorbed in thought and to be cradled in dreams of infinite pleasure; her arms hung beside her body, as soft and flexible as loosened scarfs; her head fell back farther and farther, as if the muscles that held it had been cut or were too weak to hold it longer. She had drawn her little feet under her skirt, and had succeeded in forcing herself well into my corner of the chair, so that, although it was a very narrow affair, there was a considerable vacant space on the other side.

Her supple, yielding body shaped itself to mine like wax and took its whole exterior outline as exactly as possible:—water would not have found its way more scrupulously into every irregularity in the line.—Thus glued to my side, she produced the effect of the double stroke that painters give to the shadow side of their picture in laying on their color.—Only an amorous woman can manage such undulations and entwining.—The ivies and willows are nowhere.

The gentle warmth of her body penetrated through her clothes and mine; a thousand magnetic currents played about her; her whole life seemed to have passed into me and to have abandoned her completely. From moment to moment she languished and sank and yielded more and more: a slight perspiration stood on her lustrous brow: her eyes were swimming in moisture and two or three times she made a movement as if to put up her hands to hide them; but her wearied arms stopped half-way and fell back upon her knees, and she could not do it;—a great tear overflowed and rolled down her burning cheek where it was soon dried.

My situation was becoming very embarrassing and decidedly ridiculous;—I felt that I must seem tremendously stupid and that feeling annoyed me to the last degree, although it was not in my power to change my behavior.—Enterprising conduct on my part was out of the question, and it was the only sort that would have been suited to the occasion. I was too sure of meeting with no resistance, to take the risk, and in truth I did not know which way to turn. To pay compliments and make gallant speeches would have been very well in the beginning, but nothing would have seemed more insipid at the point at which we had arrived;—to rise and go out would have been unspeakably rude; and, indeed, I am not sure that Rosette wouldn't have played the part of Potiphar and held me by the corner of my cloak.—I should have had no virtuous reason to give her for my resistance; and then, I confess it to my shame, this scene, equivocal as it was in respect to myself, did not lack a certain fascination to which I yielded more than I should have done; that ardent passion warmed me with its flame and I was really grieved at my inability to satisfy it; I even longed to be a man, as I seemed to be, in order to crown Rosette's love, and I deeply regretted her mistake. My respiration quickened, I felt a flush rising to my cheeks, and I was hardly less agitated than my poor lovelorn companion.—The idea of the identity of sex gradually faded away, leaving behind only a vague idea of pleasure; a mist came before my eyes, my lips trembled, and if Rosette had been a young man instead of what she was, she would have gained an easy victory over me beyond question.

At last, unable to endure it, she sprang suddenly to her feet with a sort of spasmodic movement and began to walk hurriedly up and down the room; then she stopped before the mirror and adjusted a few locks of hair that were out of place. During that walk of hers I cut but a sorry figure and I hardly knew what face to put upon the matter.

She paused in front of me and seemed to reflect.

She believed that inordinate bashfulness alone held me back, that I was more of a school-boy than she had at first supposed.—Being quite beside herself and stirred to the highest pitch of amorous excitement, she determined to make a supreme effort and to stake all to win all, at the risk of losing the game.

She came to me, seated herself on my knees with lightning-like rapidity, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth clung to mine in a fierce embrace; I felt her breast, half-uncovered, throbbing against mine, and her interlaced fingers moving convulsively in my hair. A shudder ran all over my body and the nipples of my bosom stood erect.

Rosette's mouth did not leave mine; her lips enveloped my lips, her teeth touched my teeth, our breaths mingled.—I recoiled for an instant, and I turned my head away two or three times to avoid the kiss; but an invincible attraction drew me forward again, and I returned it almost as ardently as she had given it to me. I have no very clear idea what would have been the end of it all, had it not been for a tremendous barking out of doors followed by a sound as of feet scratching. The door yielded and a beautiful white greyhound came yelping and bounding into the cabin.



*Chapter XII — She came to me, seated herself on my knees with lightning-like rapidity, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth clung to mine in a fierce embrace; I felt her breast, half-uncovered, throbbing against mine, and her interlaced fingers moving convulsively in my hair.*

Rosette rose abruptly and rushed to the further end of the room: the beautiful white hound leaped joyously around her and tried to reach her hands to lick them; she was so confused that she could hardly arrange her mantle over her shoulders.

The greyhound was her brother Alcibiades's favorite dog; he never left him, and when you saw him you could be sure that his master was not far away;—that was what caused poor Rosette's alarm.

Alcibiades did, in fact, appear a moment later, all booted and spurred, with his whip in his hand:—"Ah! here you are," he said; "I have been looking for you for an hour and I certainly shouldn't have found you if my good old Snug hadn't driven you to earth in your hiding-place."

And he glanced at his sister with a half-serious, half-playful expression that made her blush to the whites of her eyes.

"You apparently had some very knotty subjects to discuss to induce you to seek this profound solitude?—you were talking about theology, I suppose, and the twofold nature of the soul?"

"Oh! *Mon Dieu*, no; our minds were engrossed by subjects much less sublime; we were eating cake and talking fashions—that's all."

"I don't believe a word of it; you looked to me as if you were buried deep in some sentimental discussion;—but, to divert your minds from your vaporish conversation, I think it would be a good idea for you to take a turn on horseback with me.—I have a new mare I want to try.—You shall ride her too, Théodore, and we'll see what we can make of her."

We went out together, I on his arm and Rosette on mine; the expressions on our faces were curiously different.—Alcibiades was pensive, I was altogether content, and Rosette excessively

annoyed.

Alcibiades had arrived most opportunely for me, most inopportunely for Rosette, who thus lost, or thought that she lost, all the fruit of her shrewd attacks and her ingenious tactics.—She had it all to do over again;—a quarter of an hour later, deuce take me if I know what might have been the conclusion of that incident—I can imagine no possible outcome.—Perhaps it would have been better that Alcibiades should not intervene just at the decisive moment like a *deux ex machina*;—then the thing would have had to come to a climax in one way or another.—Two or three times during that scene I was on the point of telling Rosette who I was; but the fear of being taken for an adventuress and of having my secret revealed retained upon my lips the words that were already to take flight.

Such a condition of things could not last.—My departure was the only method of cutting short that issue-less intrigue; and so, at dinner, I formally announced that I must take my leave the very next day.—Rosette, who was sitting beside me, almost fainted at the news, and dropped her glass. A sudden pallor overspread her lovely face; she bestowed upon me a grieved, reproachful glance which made my emotion and trouble almost as great as her own.

The aunt raised her old wrinkled hands with a gesture of painful surprise, and in her shrill, trembling voice, which wavered even more than usual, she said: "Oh! my dear Monsieur Théodore, are you going to leave us like this? That's not right; yesterday you did not show the slightest disposition to go.—The postman has not arrived, so you have received no letters and you have no reason to go. You gave us another fortnight and now you take it back; really you have no right to do it: a thing given cannot be taken back.—You see how Rosette looks at you, and how displeased she is; I warn you that I shall be as displeased as she, and that I will glare at you as fiercely, and the glare of sixty-eight years is a little more terrible than the glare of twenty-three. See to what you voluntarily expose yourself; to the wrath of the aunt and the niece, and all this on account of some whim that has suddenly taken possession of you between the fruit and the cheese."

Alcibiades, bringing his fist down on the table, swore that he would barricade the doors of the chateau and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette gave me another glance, so sad and so supplicating, that one must have been as ferocious as a tiger who has eaten nothing for eight days not to have been touched by it.—I did not resist, and although I was exceedingly loth to do it, I made a solemn promise to remain.—Dear Rosette would gladly have leaped on my neck and kissed my mouth for my complaisance; Alcibiades took my hand in his great hand and shook my arm so violently that he almost tore it out at the shoulder, changed the shape of my rings from round to oval and drove them deep into three of my fingers.

The old lady in her joy took an immense pinch of snuff.

Rosette, however, did not completely recover her cheerfulness;—the idea that I might go and that I was inclined to do so, an idea that had not before presented itself clearly to her mind, threw her into a profound reverie. The color that my announcement of my departure had driven from her cheeks did not return with the same brilliancy as before;—there was still some trace of pallor on her cheeks, and of anxiety deep in her heart.—My conduct toward her surprised her more and more.—After the marked advances she had made, she could not understand my motives for showing so much restraint in my relations with her: what she wanted was to bring me to a decisive engagement before my departure, having no doubt that after that it would be extremely easy to keep me as long as she chose.

Therein she was right, and, if I had not been a woman, her reckoning would have been accurate; for, however satiated one may be with pleasure and filled with the disgust that ordinarily follows possession, every man who has a heart situated at all as it should be and who is not wretchedly *blasé* and beyond redemption, feels his love increase with his good-fortune, and very often the best way to retain a lover who is ready to take flight is to give one's self up to him with entire *abandon*.

Rosette designed to bring me to something decisive before my departure. Knowing how difficult it is to take up a liaison later at the point at which you left it, and, furthermore, being in no wise sure of ever being thrown with me again under such favorable auspices, she would neglect none of the opportunities that might present themselves to place me in a position where I must declare myself in precise terms and abandon the evasive manœuvres behind which I was in the habit of entrenching myself. As I, for my part, had a very decided purpose to avoid any such meeting as that in the rustic pavilion, and as I could not, without making myself ridiculous, treat Rosette too coldly and import a childish prudery into our relations, I did not know just how to behave, and I tried to arrange it so that there would always be a third person with us.—Rosette, on the contrary, did her utmost to be left alone with me, and she succeeded very often, the chateau being at some distance from the town and little frequented by the neighboring nobility.—This sullen resistance saddened and surprised her;—at times she was assailed by doubts and hesitation as to the power of her charms, and, seeing that she made so little impression upon me, she was sometimes not far from believing that she was ugly.—Thereupon she redoubled her attentions and her coquetry, and although her mourning did not permit her to resort to all the devices of the toilet, she knew how to embellish it and vary it in such a way as to be every day two or three times more charming than the day before—which is no small thing to say.—She tried everything: she was playful, melancholy, tender, passionate, gracious, coquettish, even affected; one after another she put on all the fascinating masks that sit so well upon women that we cannot say whether they are real masks or their real faces;—she assumed successively eight or ten

different, strongly-contrasted individualities, to see which pleased me best and settle upon that. She constituted a whole seraglio in herself alone, and I had only to throw down the handkerchief; but, of course, nothing succeeded.

The failure of all these stratagems caused her to fall into a state of profound stupefaction.—Indeed, she would have made old Nestor's brain whirl and melted the ice in chaste Hippolytus himself,—and I resembled no one less than Hippolytus or Nestor: I am young and I had a haughty, resolute mien, was bold in speech and, everywhere except in a tête-à-tête, very self-possessed.

She might well have thought that all the witches of Thrace and Thessaly had cast their charms upon my body, or that, at all events, I had some physical impediment, and so have formed a very contemptuous opinion of my virility, which does not amount to much in truth. However, it seems that that idea did not occur to her and that she attributed my strange reserve solely to my lack of love for her.

The days passed and her affairs made no progress.—She was visibly affected by that fact: an expression of anxious melancholy replaced the bright smile that always played about her lips; the corners of her mouth, once so joyously arched, drooped sensibly and formed a straight, serious line; the small veins in her eyelids stood out more clearly; her cheeks, formerly so like the peach, had retained nothing of that appearance except the imperceptible velvety down. Often I saw her from my window in the morning walking in the flower-garden in her *peignoir*; she hardly lifted her feet, as if she were gliding rather than walking, her arms folded across her breast, her head bent forward, doubled over like a willow branch dragging in the water, and with a swaying, uncertain motion like a drapery that is too long and touches the floor.—At such moments she resembled one of the amorous maidens of old, victims of the anger of Venus, upon whom the pitiless goddess empties all the vials of her wrath:—thus I imagine Psyche must have appeared when she lost Cupid.

On the days when she did not exert herself to overcome my coldness and my hesitation her love appeared in a simple, primitive guise that would have fascinated me; there was a silent, confiding unconstraint, a chaste prodigality of caresses, an inexhaustible abundance and plenitude of affection, all the treasures of a lovely nature displayed without reserve. She had none of the petty meannesses that we see in almost all women, even the most generously endowed; she sought no disguise, but calmly allowed me to see the full extent of her passion. Her self-esteem did not rebel for an instant at my failure to respond to such persistent advances, for pride leaves the heart on the day that love enters; and if ever any one was truly loved, I have been and by Rosette.—She suffered, but without complaint and without bitterness, and she attributed the ill-success of her endeavors to herself alone.—Meanwhile her pallor was increasing every day, and the lilies and roses had fought a pitched battle on the battlefield of her cheeks, resulting in the definitive rout of the latter; that grieved me deeply, but in all conscience I could do less to remedy it than any one.—The more gently and affectionately I spoke to her, the more caressing my manner was to her, the deeper in her heart I buried the barbed arrow of impossible love.—To console her to-day, I exposed her to much greater sorrow in the future; my remedies poisoned her wound while seeming to allay the pain.—I was sorry in a certain sense for all the pleasant things I had succeeded in saying to her, and I would have been glad, on account of my very warm friendship for her, to find a way to make her hate me. Unselfishness can go no farther than that, for I most certainly should have been sorry;—but it would have been better so.

I tried two or three times to say something harsh to her, but I very soon returned to incense, for I dread her smile less than her tears.—On such occasions, although the purity of my purpose absolves me fully in my conscience, I am more touched than I ought to be, and I feel something which is not far from being remorse.—A tear can hardly be dried except by a kiss, and one cannot decently leave that duty to a handkerchief, though it be of the finest lawn imaginable;—I simply undo what I have done, the tear is very soon forgotten, much sooner than the kiss, and the result so far as I am concerned is always increased embarrassment.

Rosette, who sees that I am going to escape her, clings obstinately and wretchedly to the remains of her hope, and my position becomes more and more complicated.—The strange sensation that I felt in the little hermitage, and the inconceivable excitement into which I was thrown by the ardor of my beautiful lover, have been repeated several times, although in a less violent form; and often, as I sit beside Rosette, with her hand in mine, listening to her as she talks to me in her soft, cooing voice, I imagine that I am a man as she believes, and that my failure to respond to her love is pure cruelty on my part.

One evening by some chance I found myself alone with the old lady in the green room;—she had in her hand a piece of embroidery, for, notwithstanding her sixty-eight years, she was never idle, being desirous, as she said, to finish before her death a piece of furniture on which she had been at work for a very long time. Feeling a little tired she put aside her work and leaned back in her great easy-chair; she looked at me very attentively and her gray eyes gleamed through her spectacles with strange vivacity; two or three times she passed her thin hand across her wrinkled forehead and seemed to be in deep thought.—The memory of a time that was no more and which she regretted gave to her face an expression of melancholy emotion.—I said nothing for fear of disturbing her thoughts, and the silence lasted some minutes; at last she broke it.

"They are Henri's eyes,—my dear Henri's,—the same bright, melting glance, the same way of carrying the head, the same sweet, proud face;—one would say it was he.—You cannot imagine how striking the resemblance is, Monsieur Théodore;—when I see you, I can no longer believe that Henri is dead; I think that he has been on a long journey from which he has at last returned.

—You have given me much pleasure and much pain, Théodore!—pleasure by reminding me of my poor Henri, pain by showing me how great a loss I have suffered; sometimes I have taken you for his phantom.—I cannot get used to the idea that you are going to leave us; it seems to me that I am losing my Henri once more."

I told her that if it were possible for me to remain longer I would do it with pleasure, but that my stay had already been prolonged far beyond what it should have been; that I looked forward to returning, however, and that my memories of the chateau would be too pleasant to allow me to forget it so quickly.

"Sorry as I am to have you leave us, Monsieur Théodore," she continued, pursuing her thought, "there is some one here who will be more so than I.—You understand whom I refer to, without my telling you. I don't know what we shall do with Rosette when you have gone; but the old chateau is a very dull place. Alcibiades is always hunting, and for a young woman like her the society of a poor helpless old creature like myself is not very entertaining."

"If any one should feel regret, madame, it is neither you nor Rosette, but myself; you lose little, I lose much; you will readily find society more agreeable than mine, but it is more than doubtful if I can ever find any to replace yours and Rosette's."

"I have no wish to quarrel with your modesty, my dear monsieur, but I know what I am saying, and I say what is true: it is probable that we shall not see Madame Rosette in good humor for a long while, for you are the one who makes rain or fair weather on her cheeks now. Her period of mourning is drawing to an end and it would be truly a deplorable thing that she should lay aside her cheerfulness with her last black dress; that would be a very bad example and altogether opposed to ordinary laws. It is something that you can prevent without much trouble, and that you will prevent, I have no doubt," said the old lady, dwelling on the last words.

"Most assuredly I will do my utmost to have your dear niece preserve her cheerfulness, as you credit me with so much influence over her. But I can hardly see how I am to set about it."

"Oh! really, you can hardly see! What are your bright eyes good for?—I didn't know that you were so near-sighted. Rosette is free; she has eighty thousand francs a year absolutely at her own disposal, and some women twice as ugly as she are considered very pretty. You are young, well-favored, and, so far as I know, unmarried; it seems to me the simplest thing in the world, unless you have an insurmountable horror for Rosette, which is difficult to believe."—

"And which is not and cannot be the fact; for her mind is as attractive as her body, and she is one of those who might be ugly without any one noticing it or wishing her otherwise."—

"She might be ugly with impunity and she is charming.—That is what I call being right twice over; I do not doubt what you say, but she has taken the wisest course.—So far as she is concerned, I can readily assure you that there are a thousand people whom she hates worse than you, and that, if she were to be asked the question several times, she would finally confess perhaps that you are not exactly indifferent to her. You have on your finger a ring that would fit her perfectly, for your hand is almost as small as hers, and I am almost sure that she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady paused for a few seconds to see what effect her words produced on me, and I cannot say whether she was likely to be satisfied with the expression of my face.—I was cruelly embarrassed, and I didn't know what to reply. From the beginning of the interview I had seen whither all her hints were tending; and although I almost expected what she had just said, I was surprised and dumfounded; I had no choice but to refuse; but what plausible reasons could I give for such a refusal? I had none except that I was a woman; that was an excellent reason, I agree, but it was precisely the one that I did not choose to give.

I could hardly throw the blame upon intractable, ridiculous relations; all the relations in the world would have welcomed such a match with delirious joy. Even if Rosette had not been what she was, sweet and lovely, and of gentle birth, the eighty thousand francs a year would have removed every obstacle.—To say that I did not love her would have been neither true nor honorable, for I really loved her dearly, more dearly than one woman loves another.

I was too young to pretend to be engaged to somebody else: the best expedient I could invent was to give her to understand that, as I was a younger son, family interests required that I should enter the Order of Malta, and thus made it impossible for me to think of marriage: which fact caused me the greatest sorrow imaginable since I had seen Rosette.

That answer was not worth the breath required to put it into words and I was perfectly conscious of it. The old lady was not deceived by it and did not look upon it as definitive; she thought that I had spoken thus in order to have time to reflect and consult my relations.—In truth, such a marriage was so advantageous and so far beyond my hopes that it was not possible that I should refuse it, even if I had loved Rosette only a little or none at all; it was an opportunity not to be neglected.

I am unable to say whether the aunt opened the subject to me at her niece's instigation, but I am inclined to think that Rosette was not a party to it; she loved me too simple-mindedly and ardently to think of anything else than immediate possession of me, and marriage would certainly have been the last method she would have employed.—The dowager, who had not failed to notice our intimacy, which she probably believed to be much greater than it was, had arranged this plan in her head, in order to keep me with her, and to replace, as far as possible, her dear son Henri, killed in the army, to whom she discovered such a striking resemblance in me. She had taken great pleasure in the idea and had taken advantage of that brief tête-à-tête to come to an

understanding with me. I saw by her manner that she did not consider herself defeated, and that she proposed to return soon to the charge, which vexed me to the last degree.

Rosette, for her part, in the evening of that same day, took a step which had such serious results, that I must tell you the story by itself and not in this letter, which has already exceeded all bounds.—You will see to what extraordinary adventures I am predestined, and that Heaven plainly cut me out for a hero of romance; upon my word, I don't know just what moral can be drawn from all this,—but lives are not like fables, each chapter hasn't a rhymed sentence for a tailpiece.—Very often the meaning of life is that it is not death. Nothing more. Adieu, my dear, I kiss your lovely eyes. You will soon receive the sequel of my triumphant biography.

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### XIII

Théodore—Rosalind—for I know not by what name to call you—I saw you a moment ago and now I am writing to you.—How I wish I might know your woman's name! it must be as sweet as honey and float about the lips softer and more melodious than poetry! I should never have dared to tell you that, and yet I should die not to tell you.—No one knows what I have suffered, no one can know, I myself could give only a faint idea of it; words do not express such agony; I should seem to have twisted my phrases at will, to have made mighty efforts to say strange and novel things and to indulge in the most extravagant exaggeration even if I should describe my feelings in far from adequate terms.

O Rosalind, I love you, I adore you, would that there were a word stronger than that! I have never loved, I have never adored any woman but you;—I prostrate myself, I annihilate myself before you, and I would like to compel all creation to bend the knee before my idol; to me you are more than all nature, more than myself, more than God;—indeed, it seems strange to me that God does not come down from heaven to be your slave. Where you are not, everything is a desert, everything is dead, everything is black; you alone people the world for me; you are my life, my sun;—you are everything.—Your smile makes the day, your sadness makes the night; the spheres follow the movements of your body and the celestial harmonies govern themselves by you, O my beloved queen! O my beautiful real dream! You are arrayed in splendor and you swim always in a flood of radiant beams.

It is hardly three months that I have known you, but I have loved you a long, long time.—Before I ever saw you, I was languishing with love of you; I called you, I sought you, and I was in despair at not meeting you on my road, for I knew that I could never love another woman.—How many times you have appeared to me—at the window of the mysterious chateau, leaning in melancholy mood on the balcony and throwing to the wind the petals of some flower, or galloping through the dark paths of the forest, an impetuous Amazon, on your Turkish horse, whiter than the snow!—There were your proud yet gentle eyes, your transparent hands, your lovely, waving hair and your adorably disdainful half-smile.—But you were less beautiful, for the most ardent, unbridled imagination, the imagination of painter or poet, could not attain the sublime poesy of the original. There is within you an inexhaustible spring of charms, an ever-gushing fountain of irresistible seductions; you are a casket, always open, of the most precious pearls, and in your slightest movements, in your most careless gestures, in your most unstudied poses, you scatter to right and left inestimable treasures of beauty, with royal profusion. If the graceful undulations of a contour, the fleeting outlines of an attitude, could be fixed and preserved in a mirror, the mirrors before which you pass would cause the divinest canvases of Raphael to be despised and looked upon as tavern signs.

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*Chapter XIII — How many times you have appeared to me—at the window of the mysterious chateau, leaning in melancholy mood on the balcony and throwing to the wind the petals of some flower. \*\*\* There were your proud yet gentle eyes, your transparent hands, your lovely, waving hair and your adorably disdainful half smile.*

Every gesture, every motion of the head, every different aspect of your beauty, was engraved on the mirror of my mind with a diamond-point, and nothing in the world could efface its deep impression; I know where the shadow was and where the light, the flat surface illumined by the sunbeam, and the spot where the wandering reflection blended with the softer tints of the neck and cheek.—I could draw you absent; your image is always posing before me.

When I was a child, I stood for whole hours before the pictures of the old masters and gazed eagerly into their dark depths.—I scanned the lovely faces of saints and goddesses whose flesh, of the whiteness of ivory or wax, stood out so marvellously against the dark backgrounds, blackened by the decomposition of the colors; I admired the simplicity and magnificence of their carriage, the strange grace of their hands and feet, the nobility and beauty of their features, at once so delicate and so strong; the magnificence of the draperies which enveloped their divine forms, and whose purple folds seemed to thrust themselves forward like lips to kiss those lovely bodies.—By dint of persistently plunging my eyes beneath the veil of haze thickened by centuries, my sight would become confused, the outlines of objects would lose their precision, and a sort of motionless, inanimate life would seem to inspire all those pale phantoms of vanished beauties; I always ended by discovering that the faces bore a vague resemblance to the fair stranger whom I adored with all my heart; I sighed as I thought that she whom I was destined to love was perhaps one of them and had been dead three hundred years. That thought often affected me so deeply as to make me shed tears, and I would fly into a fierce passion against myself for not having been born in the sixteenth century, when all those beauties lived. I considered that it was unpardonable stupidity and folly on my part.

When I grew older, the pleasing phantom possessed me even more completely. I saw it always between me and the women I had for mistresses, smiling ironically and mocking at their human beauty with all the perfection of its divine beauty. It made women who were really charming



seem ugly to me—women well adapted to make any man happy who was not in love with the adorable shadow, whose body I did not believe to be in existence, but which was only the premonition of your beauty. O Rosalind! how wretched I have been because of you before I knew you! O Théodore! what wretchedness I have endured because of you since I have known you!—If you wish, you can throw open to me the paradise of my dreams. You are standing on the threshold, like a guardian angel enveloped in her wings, and you hold the golden key in your fair hands.—Tell me, Rosalind, tell me, will you do it?

I await only a word from you to live or die;—will you say it?

Are you Apollo driven forth from heaven, or the fair Aphrodite coming from the bosom of the sea? Where did you leave your chariot of precious stones drawn by four fiery steeds? what have you done with your shell of mother-of-pearl, and your dolphins with the sky-blue tails?—what amorous nymph has blended her body with yours in the midst of a kiss, O thou comely youth, more charming than Cyparissus or Adonis, more adorable than all women in the world?

But you are a woman; we are no longer living in the days of the Metamorphoses;—Adonis and Hermaphroditus are dead,—and such a degree of beauty cannot now be attained by a man;—for, since heroes and gods are no more, women alone retain in their marble bodies, as in a Grecian temple, the priceless gift of shape anathematized by Christ, and prove that earth has no reason to envy heaven; you worthily represent the first divinity in the world, the purest symbol of the eternal essence—beauty.

As soon as I saw you, something was torn away within me, a veil fell, a door opened, I felt that I was flooded inwardly with waves of light; I realized that my life was before me, and that I had finally reached the decisive crossroads.—The obscure, lost portions of the half-radiant face I was seeking to distinguish in the shadow were suddenly illuminated; the dark tints in which the background of the picture was enveloped were flooded with a soft light; a delicate rosy flush stole over the ultramarine, slightly tinged with green, of the middle distances; the trees, which formed only confused silhouettes, began to stand out more clearly; the dew-laden flowers made bright spots on the dull green of the turf. I saw the scarlet-breasted bullfinch at the end of an elder branch; the little white rabbit, pink-eyed and with ears erect, putting out his head between two wisps of wild thyme and passing his paw over his nose, and the timid stag coming to drink at the spring and gaze at his branching antlers in the water.—On the morning when the sun of love rose upon my life, everything was changed; where shapes barely outlined and rendered terrible or unnatural by their uncertainty, once vacillated before my eyes, were now graceful groups of trees in blossom, hillsides forming charming amphitheatres, silver palaces, with their terraces covered with urns and statues, bathing their feet in the azure lakes and apparently swimming between two skies; the shape that I took in the obscurity for a gigantic dragon with wings armed with talons, crawling on the darkness with his scaly paws, was simply a felucca with silken sails and oars painted and gilded, filled with women and musicians; and the horrible crab which I fancied that I saw waving his claws and nippers over my head was only a fan-shaped palm whose long, narrow leaves moved gently in the night wind.—My chimeras and my errors have vanished:—I love.

Despairing of ever finding you, I accused my dream of falsehood, and reviled fate bitterly;—I said to myself that I was very foolish to seek such a type, or that nature was very unfruitful and the Creator very unskilful, not to be able to realize the simple thought of my heart.—Prometheus had the noble aspiration to make a man and enter into rivalry with God; I had created a woman, and I believed that, to punish me for my audacity, a longing always unsatisfied would gnaw at my liver like another vulture; I expected to be bound with diamond chains upon a hoary rock on the shore of the wild ocean,—but the lovely sea-nymphs with long green hair, lifting their snow-white, swelling breasts above the waves and showing the sun their mother-of-pearl bodies all dripping with the tears of the sea, would not have come and reclined upon the bank to converse with me and comfort me in my agony, as they do in old Æschylus's play.

It did not turn out so.

You came and I was fain to reproach my imagination with its impotence.—I have not suffered the torture that I dreaded, of being chained forever upon a sterile rock, the victim of an idea; but I have suffered none the less. I had seen that you did, in fact, exist; that my presentiments had not lied to me in that respect; but you appeared to me with the ambiguous, and terrifying beauty of the sphinx. Like Isis, the mysterious goddess, you were enveloped in a veil which I dared not raise for fear of falling dead.

If you knew with what panting, anxious scrutiny, under my apparent indifference, I watched you and followed your slightest movements! Nothing escaped me; how earnestly I gazed at the little flesh that appeared at your neck or your wrists, trying to determine your sex! Your hands were the subject of profound study on my part, and I can fairly say that I know every detail of their shape, every imperceptible vein, and the tiniest dimple; you might be enveloped from head to foot in the most impenetrable domino, and I would recognize you simply by looking at one of your fingers. I analyzed the undulations of your gait, the way in which you put your foot to the ground, your manner of pushing back your hair; I tried to surprise your secret in the management of your body.—I watched you particularly in your hours of relaxation when the bones seem to be removed from the body, and when the limbs relax and bend as if they were unstrung, to see if the feminine lines would declare themselves more boldly in that careless, forgetful attitude. No one was ever the object of such ardent scrutiny as you.

I forgot myself in contemplating you for hours at a time. Withdrawing to some corner of the salon, with a book that I did not read in my hand, or crouching behind the curtains in my

bedroom, when you were in yours and the blinds at your window were raised,—at such times, deeply penetrated by the marvellous beauty that emanates from you and creates a luminous atmosphere about you, I said to myself: "Surely it is a woman;"—then suddenly an abrupt, decided gesture, a virile tone, or some cavalierish action would destroy in a moment my frail edifice of probabilities, and throw me back into my former irresolution.

I would be sailing before the wind over the boundless ocean of amorous reverie, and you would come to ask me to fence or to play tennis with you; the young woman, transformed into a young gallant, would deal me terrific truncheon-like blows and send the foil flying out of my hands as deftly and quickly as the most expert bravo in the trade; every minute in the day I had some such disappointment.

I would be on the point of approaching you, to say: "My dear lady, I adore you," and I would see you lean over and whisper tenderly to some fair dame, and blow madrigals and compliments through her hair in puffs.—Judge of my position.—Or else some woman, whom, in my mad jealousy, I would have flayed alive with the greatest pleasure on earth, would hang upon your arm, would lead you aside to confide her paltry secrets to you, and detain you for whole hours in a window recess.

It made me furious to see women speak to you, for that forced me to believe that you were a man, and, even if you had been, I could not have endured it without intense suffering.—When the men approached you and addressed you freely and familiarly, I was even more jealous, because I thought this—that you were a woman, and perhaps they suspected it as I did; I was tortured by the most contrary passions, and I did not know what to believe.

I became angry with myself, I reproached myself most bitterly for being so tormented by such a love, and for not having the strength to tear from my heart the noxious plant that had sprung up there in one night like a poisonous mushroom; I cursed you, I called you my evil genius; I believed for an instant that you were Beelzebub in person, for I could not explain the sensation to which I was a prey when in your presence.

When I was thoroughly convinced that you were in reality nothing else than a woman in disguise, the improbability of the motives with which I sought to justify such a whim plunged me into my uncertainty once more, and I began anew to deplore that the figure I had dreamed of for the love of my soul, should prove to belong to a person of the same sex as myself;—I blamed the chance that had arrayed a man in such a charming exterior, and, to my everlasting misery, had thrown him in my way when I had ceased to hope for the realization of the ideal of pure beauty which I cherished so long in my heart.

But now, Rosalind, I am profoundly certain that you are the loveliest of women; I have seen you in the costume of your sex, I have seen your pure, perfectly-rounded shoulders and arms. The upper part of your breast, which your neckerchief disclosed, can belong only to a young woman; neither Meleager, the beautiful huntsman, nor the effeminate Bacchus, with their uncertain figures, had such purity of outline or such fineness of skin, although they were both made of Parian marble and polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries.—I am no longer worried in that direction—But that is not all: you are a woman, and my love is no longer reprehensible; I can give myself up to it without remorse, and abandon myself to the current that draws me toward you; however ardent and unruly my passion, it is legitimate and I can avow it; but you, Rosalind, for whom I have burned in silence and who knew nothing of the immensity of my love, you in whom this tardy disclosure will perhaps arouse no sentiment but surprise—do you hate me, do you love me, can you love me? I do not know—and I tremble and am unhappier than before.

At times it seems to me that you do not hate me;—when we played *As You Like It*, you gave to certain passages in your part a special intonation that emphasized their meaning, and urged me, in some sense, to declare myself.—I fancied that I could see in your eyes and your smile gracious promises of indulgent treatment, and could feel your hand respond to the pressure of mine.—If I am mistaken—O God! that is a contingency on which I dare not reflect.—Encouraged by all that, and impelled by my love, I have written to you, for the garb you wear is not propitious to such avowals in words, and a thousand times my voice has died upon my lips; although I believe, yes, was firmly convinced that I was speaking to a woman, that masculine costume frightened away all my tender, amorous thoughts, and prevented them from winging their way to you.

I implore you, Rosalind, if you do not love me yet, try to love me, who have loved you in spite of everything, beneath the veil in which you enveloped yourself, through pity for us, I doubt not; do not condemn me for the rest of my life to the most frightful despair and hopeless discouragement; consider that I have adored you since the first ray of thought shone in upon my brain, that you were revealed to me before I saw you, and that, when I was a little fellow, you appeared to me in a dream with a crown of dew-drops, two rain-bow-like wings, and the tiny blue flower in your hand; that you are the end, the means and the meaning of my life; that, without you, I am nothing but a vain shadow, and that, if you breathe upon the flame you have kindled, naught will remain of me but a pinch of dust, finer and more impalpable than that which is sprinkled upon the wings of Death itself.—Rosalind, do you, who have so many receipts for the cure of love, cure me, for I am very sick; play your part to the end, lay aside the garb of the fair page Ganymede, and extend your white hand to the youngest son of the gallant knight, Sir Rowland des Bois.

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I was at my window busily watching the stars that bloomed joyously in the garden of the sky, and inhaling the sweet perfume of the mirabilis wafted to my nostrils by a dying breeze.—The wind blowing through the open window had extinguished my lamp, the last that remained lighted in the chateau. My thoughts degenerated into vague musing, and a sort of drowsiness began to steal over me; I remained, however, with my elbows resting on the stone balustrade, either because I was fascinated by the charm of the night, or through indifference and forgetfulness.—Rosette, seeing that my lamp was out, and being unable to distinguish my form because of a great wedge of shadow that fell exactly upon the window, had concluded, I presume, that I had gone to bed, and that was what she was waiting for, to risk one last, desperate attempt.—She opened the door so softly that I did not hear her come in, and she was within two steps of me before I discovered her. She was tremendously surprised to find me still up; but she soon recovered from her astonishment, came to me and grasped my arm, calling me twice by my name:—"Théodore, Théodore!"

"What! you, Rosette, here, at this hour, all alone, without a light, in such complete *déshabillé!*"

I must tell you that she had nothing on but a *peignoir* of the finest linen, and the glorious lace-trimmed chemise which I did not choose to see on the day of the famous scene in the little kiosk in the park. Her arms, as cold and smooth as marble, were entirely bare, and the garment that covered her body was so clinging and transparent that you could see her nipples through it, as in the statues of bathers covered with damp drapery.

"Do you mean that for a reproach, Théodore? or is it simply an exclamation? Yes, I, Rosette, *la belle dame*, here in your bedroom, not in my own where I should be, at eleven o'clock at night, perhaps midnight, without duenna or chaperone or maid, almost naked, in a simple night *peignoir*;—that is very surprising, is it not?—I am as surprised as you, and I hardly know what explanation to give you."

As she spoke, she put one arm around my body and sank down on the foot of my bed in such a way as to drag me with her.

"Rosette," I said to her, struggling to release myself, "I will try to light the lamp; nothing is so depressing as a dark room; and then, it is downright murder not to be able to see when you are here, and so be deprived of the sight of your charms.—Allow me, with the help of a bit of tinder and a match, to make a little portable sun which will put in relief all that the jealous darkness blots out beneath its shadow."

"It isn't worthwhile; I prefer that you should not see my blushes; I feel that my cheeks are burning hot, for it is quite enough to make me die of shame."

She put her face against my breast and remained some moments so, as if suffocated by her emotion.

Meanwhile, I was mechanically running my fingers through the long floating curls of her hair; I was cudgelling my brain in search of some honorable means of extricating myself from the scrape, but I could find none, for I was driven into my last entrenchments, and Rosette seemed firmly resolved not to leave the room as she had entered it.—There was a formidable negligence about her dress which promised nothing good. I had on an open *robe-de-chambre* myself, which would have defended my *incognito* but feebly, so that I was disturbed beyond measure concerning the result of the battle.

"Listen to me, Théodore," said Rosette, standing up and throwing the hair back from both sides of her face, as well as I could judge by the feeble light which the stars and a very slender crescent moon, just appearing above the horizon, cast into the room, the window being still open;—"this is a strange step I have taken; everybody would blame me for it.—But you are going away soon, and I love you! I cannot let you go thus without having an explanation with you.—Perhaps you will never come back; perhaps this is the first and last time that I am to see you.—Who knows where you will go? But wherever you go you will carry my heart and my life with you.—If you had remained, I should not have resorted to this extreme measure. The happiness I felt on seeing you, of listening to your voice, of living beside you, would have been enough for me; I would have asked for nothing more. I would have confined my love in my heart; you would have thought that you had simply a kind and affectionate friend in me; but that cannot be. You say that you absolutely must go.—It bores you, Théodore, to see me clinging to your footsteps like an amorous shadow which can only follow you, but would like to be blended with your body; it must annoy you always to find behind you imploring eyes and hands stretched out to grasp the hem of your cloak.—I know it, but I cannot refrain from doing it.—You cannot complain, however; it is your fault.—I was calm, peaceful, almost happy before I knew you.—You appeared, handsome, young, and smiling, like Phœbus, the charming god.—You paid me most marked, most gallant attention; never was cavalier more courteous and clever. Rubies and roses fell from your lips every moment; everything became for you an opportunity to turn a compliment, and you knew how to transform the most insignificant words into charming flattery.—A woman who had hated you mortally at first, would have ended by loving you, and for my part, I loved you the moment I saw you. Why, having made yourself so agreeable, do you seem surprised to be so loved? Isn't it a perfectly natural consequence? I am neither mad nor empty-headed, nor a romantic child who falls in love with the first sword she sees. I have seen society, and I know what life is. Any woman, even the most virtuous or the most prudish, would have done as much as I am doing.—What was your idea or your purpose? to please me, I imagine, for I cannot attribute any other to you. How does it happen, then, that you seem in some measure sorry because you have

succeeded so well? Have I unintentionally done anything to displease you?—I ask your pardon.—Do you no longer think me beautiful, or have you discovered in me some defect that repels you?—You have the right to be exacting in the matter of beauty, but either you have lied outrageously, or I am beautiful!—I am young like yourself and I love you; why do you disdain me now? You used to be so attentive to me, you held my arm with such unflinching solicitude, you pressed so tenderly the hand I abandoned to you, your eyes were so languorous when you raised them to mine: if you did not love me, why all that manœuvring? Can it be that you are cruel enough to kindle love in a heart in order to laugh at it afterward? Ah! that would be a ghastly joke, impious and sacrilegious! only a wicked soul could be amused by it, and I cannot believe it of you, however inexplicable your conduct toward me. What is the cause, then, of this sudden change? As for me, I can imagine none.—What mystery is hidden by such coldness?—I cannot believe that you feel repugnance for me; what you have done proves that you do not, for a man does not pay court so earnestly to a woman for whom he has a feeling of disgust, though he were the greatest scoundrel on earth. O Théodore, what have you against me? what has changed you so? what have I done to you?—If the love you seemed to have for me has vanished, mine, alas! has remained, and I cannot tear it from my heart.—Have pity on me, Théodore, for I am very unhappy.—At least pretend to love me a little, and say a few kind words to me; they will not cost you much, unless you have an insurmountable horror of me."

At that pathetic point in her discourse, sobs completely choked her voice; she clasped her hands on my shoulder and rested her forehead upon them in an attitude of utter despair. All that she said was absolutely true, and I had nothing to say in reply.—I could not treat the matter as a jest. That would not have been decent.—Rosette was not one of the creatures one can treat so lightly; besides, I was too deeply touched to be able to do it. I felt guilty for having thus made a plaything of a charming woman's heart, and I was seized with the deepest and most sincere remorse.

Seeing that I made no reply, the dear child drew a long breath and made a movement as if to rise, but she fell back, crushed by her emotion; then she threw her arms about me—I could feel their cool touch through my doublet—laid her face against mine and began to weep silently.

It produced a strange effect upon me to feel that exhaustless current of tears that did not flow from my own eyes, rolling down my cheeks.—Mine were soon mingling with them, and there was a veritable rain of bitter tears, violent enough to cause another deluge, if it had lasted forty days.

At that instant the moon shone fairly on the window; a pale beam shot into the room and cast a bluish gleam upon our silent group.

With her white *peignoir*, her bare arms, her uncovered throat and breast, of almost the same color as the linen, her dishevelled hair and her sorrowful expression, Rosette had the aspect of an alabaster figure of Melancholy sitting on a tomb. As for myself, I have no very clear idea what I may have looked like, as I could not see myself and there was no mirror to reflect my image, but I fancy that I might very well have posed for a statue of Uncertainty personified.

I was moved, and I bestowed upon Rosette a caress or two rather more affectionate than usual; from her hair my hand descended to her velvety neck and thence to her round, smooth shoulder which I patted softly as I followed its shivering contour. The child quivered under my touch like a harpsichord under a musician's fingers; her flesh shuddered and leaped, and amorous thrills ran all over her body.

I myself was conscious of a sort of vague, confused desire, the object of which I could not make out, and I took a keen delight in running my hand over those pure, delicate lines.—I left her shoulder, and, taking advantage of an opening in the folds of her *peignoir*, I suddenly closed my hand upon her little, frightened breast, which palpitated madly like a turtle-dove surprised in its nest;—from the extreme edge of her cheek, upon which I breathed a hardly perceptible kiss, I arrived at her half-open mouth: we remained in that position for some time.—Upon my word, I have no idea whether it was two minutes or a quarter of an hour or an hour; for I had lost all idea of time, and I did not know whether I was in heaven or on earth, here or elsewhere, dead or alive. The heady wine of lust had so intoxicated me at the first mouthful I swallowed, that all the reason I possessed had fled.—Rosette wound her arms more and more tightly about me and enveloped me with her body; she leaned convulsively toward me and pressed me against her bare, palpitating breast; at every kiss all her life seemed to rush to the spot kissed and to abandon the rest of her person.—Strange ideas passed through my head; if I had not feared to betray my *incognito*, I would have given full scope to Rosette's passionate impulses, and perhaps I should have made some vain, mad attempt to impart a semblance of reality to the shadow of pleasure which my beautiful lover embraced so ardently; I had not yet had a lover; and those fierce attacks, those reiterated caresses, the touch of that lovely body, those sweet names drowned in kisses, excited me to the last degree—although they proceeded from a woman;—and then that nocturnal visit, that romantic passion, the moonlight, all had for me the refreshing charm of novelty, and made me forget that, after all, I was not a man.

However, making a great effort to control myself, I told Rosette that she was compromising herself terribly by coming to my room at such an hour and remaining there so long, that her women might notice her absence and see that she had not passed the night in her own room.

I said this in such a mild tone that Rosette's only reply was to let her *peignoir* and slippers fall to the floor and glide into my bed like a snake into a bowl of milk; for she fancied that my clothes alone prevented me from coming to more definite demonstrations, and that they were the only obstacle that held me back.

She believed, poor child, that the happy hour, so laboriously led up to, was about to strike for

her; but the clock struck two instead.—I was in a most critical position, when suddenly the door turned on its hinges and gave passage to the Chevalier Alcibiades in person; he held a candlestick in one hand and his sword in the other.

He went straight to the bed and threw back the clothes, and, putting the light under poor, speechless Rosette's nose, said to her in a bantering tone:—"Good-morning, sister." Little Rosette had not the strength to say a word in reply.

"So it seems, my very dear and most virtuous sister, that, having considered in your wisdom that Seigneur Théodore's bed was more downy than your own, you came here to sleep in it? or perhaps there are ghosts in your room and you thought that you would be safer here, under the protection of the aforesaid seigneur?—It is very well thought of.—Aha! Monsieur le Chevalier de Sérannes, you have made soft eyes at Madame our sister, and you think that will be the end of it.—In my opinion, it would not be unhealthy for us to slash at each other a little, and if you would oblige me to that extent I should be infinitely grateful to you.—Théodore, you have abused my friendship for you, and you make me repent the good opinion I formed at first of the loyalty of your character; this is bad, very bad."

I could not defend myself in any valid way; appearances were against me. Who would have believed me if I had said, as the fact was, that Rosette had come to my room against my will, and that, far from trying to attract her, I was doing all I possibly could to turn her away from me.—There was but one thing for me to say, and I said it:—"Seigneur Alcibiades, we will slash at each other all you wish."

During this colloquy, Rosette had not failed to faint according to the most approved rules of the pathetic;—I went to a goblet filled with water which contained a great white rose, half withered, and I threw a few drops on her face, which restored her to consciousness at once.

Not knowing just what to do, she vanished in the passage beside the bed and buried her pretty head in the bedclothes, like a bird preparing to sleep.—She had piled cushions and clothes about her so that it would have been very hard to discover what was under the heap; a musical sigh that issued therefrom, now and then, was the only thing that denoted that it was naught but a repentant young sinner, or rather one who was excessively annoyed to be a sinner in intention only, not in fact: which was the unfortunate Rosette's plight.

Monsieur the brother, having no further anxiety concerning his sister, resumed the dialogue, and said to me in the sweetest of tones:—"It is not absolutely indispensable for us to cut each other's throats on the spot; that is an extreme method to which there is always time to resort.—Listen:—The game is not equal between us. You are very young and much less strong than I; if we should fight, I should kill you or maim you at the very least—and I am not anxious either to kill or disfigure you—it would be a great pity; Rosette, who is down there under the clothes and hasn't a word to say, would bear me a grudge for it all her life; for she is as unforgiving and wicked as a tigress when she puts her mind to it, the dear little dove. You, who are her Prince Galaor and receive only sweet words from her, know nothing about that; but it isn't pleasant. Rosette is free, so are you; it seems that you are not irreconcilable enemies; her widowhood is at an end and the thing turns out as well as possible. Marry her; she will not need to go back to her own room to sleep, and in that way, you see, I shall be relieved of the necessity of taking you for a sheath for my sword, which would be agreeable to neither of us;—what do you say?"

I must have made a horrible grimace, for what he proposed was of all things in the world the most impossible of execution by me; I would rather have crawled on all fours on the ceiling like the flies, or have unhooked the sun from the sky without taking anything to stand on, than do what he asked me, and yet the last proposition was incontestably more agreeable than the first.

He seemed surprised that I did not accept with transports of delight, and he repeated what he had said, as if to give me time to reply.

"An alliance with you would be most honorable for me, and I should never have dared to aspire to it; I know that it is an unheard-of good fortune for a young man who has as yet no position or footing in society, and that the most illustrious men would esteem themselves very fortunate;—but I can only persist in my refusal, and as I am free to choose between marriage and a duel, I prefer the duel.—It is a strange choice, and one which few people would make—but it is mine."

At that point Rosette uttered the most heart-broken sigh you can imagine, put her head out from behind the pillow, and instantly drew it back again, like a snail when you strike its horns, when she saw my impassive and determined countenance.

"It is not that I do not love Madame Rosette, I love her very dearly; but I have reasons for not marrying, reasons which you would consider satisfactory if it were possible for me to tell you what they are.—By the way, matters have not gone as far as you might judge from appearances; beyond a kiss or two which a very warm friendship is sufficient to explain and justify, there is nothing between us to which exception can be taken, and your sister's virtue is as pure and unsullied as virtue can be.—I owe her that testimony.—Now, when shall we fight, Monsieur Alcibiades, and where?"

"Here, and instantly!" cried Alcibiades, drunk with rage.

"Can you think of such a thing? before Rosette!"

"Draw your sword, villain, or I will murder you," he continued, brandishing his sword and whirling it around his head.

"At least, let us go out of the room."

"If you don't stand on guard, I will nail you to the wall like a bat, my handsome Celadon, and you will flap your wings in vain, for you won't release yourself, I warn you."—And he rushed at me with his sword in the air.



*Chapter XIV — Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for both combatants were equally dear to her; but her strength failed her and she fell unconscious across the foot of the bed.*

*Our blades struck fire, and made a noise like a hammer striking an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposals compelled us to fight at very close quarters.*

I drew my rapier, for he would have done as he said, and contented myself at first with parrying the thrusts he aimed at me.

Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for both combatants were equally dear to her; but her strength failed her and she fell unconscious across the foot of the bed.

Our blades struck fire, and made a noise like a hammer striking an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposals compelled us to fight at very close quarters.

Alcibiades came very near wounding me two or three times, and if I had not been a most expert fencer, my life would have been in the greatest danger; for his address was quite astonishing and his strength prodigious. He exhausted all the ruses and feints of the trade trying to touch me. Furious at his failure, he uncovered himself two or three times; I declined to take advantage of the opportunity; but he returned to the charge with such desperate, savage fury that I was forced to make the most of such openings as he gave me; and then the clashing of the steel and the whirl of sparks excited and dazzled me. I did not think of death, I was not in the least afraid; that keen, deadly blade that flashed in front of my eyes every second had no more effect on me than if we had been fighting with buttoned foils; but I was, however, indignant at Alcibiades's brutality, and my consciousness of perfect innocence increased my indignation. I determined just to prick him in the arm or shoulder so as to make him drop his sword, for I had tried in vain to knock it

out of his hand.—He had a wrist of iron, and the devil himself could not have turned it.

At last he came at me with such a sharp, well-directed thrust that I could only half parry it; it passed through my sleeve, and I felt the cold steel against my arm; but I was not wounded. At that I became really angry, and instead of defending myself I assumed the offensive in my turn;—I forgot that he was Rosette's brother, and I rushed at him as if he were my mortal enemy. Taking advantage of a false position of his sword, I delivered a thrust in *quarte* so well directed that I pierced his side; he made an exclamation and fell back.

I thought that he was dead, but he was really only wounded, and his fall was caused by a misstep which he made in trying to parry.—I cannot describe the sensation I felt, Graciosa; certainly it is not difficult to understand that, if you stick a fine, sharp point into the flesh, you will make a hole and blood will flow from it. And yet I was stupefied when I saw the red stream trickling down Alcibiades's doublet.—Of course I did not imagine that bran would come out, as it does when you burst open a doll; but I know that I never was so surprised in my life, and it seemed to me as if something incredible had happened to me.

The incredible thing was not, as it seemed to me, that blood should flow from a wound, but that the wound should have been made by me, and that a girl of my age—I was going to write a young man, I have entered so fully into the spirit of my part—should have laid low a lusty captain, an expert in fencing, like Seigneur Alcibiades;—and all for the crime of seduction and refusing to marry a very rich woman, and a very charming one too!

I was really in a state of cruel embarrassment with the fainting sister, the wounded brother whom I believed to be dead, and I myself, who was not far from being dead or fainting, like one or the other of them.—I seized the bell-rope and I jangled the bell in a way to wake the dead, so long as the rope remained in my hand; and leaving to the unconscious Rosette and the disemboweled Alcibiades the duty of explaining matters to the servants and the old aunt, I went straight to the stable.—The air restored my self-possession instantly; I led out my horse, saddled and bridled him myself, made sure that the straps were all right, the curb in good condition, and the stirrup leathers of the same length, and took up a hole in the girth; in short, I harnessed him completely, with a care that was at least remarkable at such a moment, and a tranquillity that was almost inconceivable after a combat with such an ending.

I mounted my steed and rode away through the park by a bridle-path that I was familiar with. The branches of the trees, all laden with dew, lashed me and wet my face; you would have said that the old trees were putting out their arms to detain me and keep me for love of their chatelaine.—If I had been in any other frame of mind, or in the least degree superstitious, it would have been easy for me to believe that they were ghosts trying to seize me and shaking their fists at me.

But the truth is that I had no idea at all, neither that nor any other; a leaden stupor, so heavy that I was hardly conscious of it, was pressing on my brain, like a helmet that was too small; but I had a vague feeling that I had killed some one and that that was why I was going away. I had an intense longing to sleep, whether because it was so late or because the violent emotions of the night had reacted on me physically and wearied my body.

I reached a small postern gate, which opened into the fields by a secret spring that Rosette had shown me during our rides. I dismounted, touched the button and opened the gate: after leading, my horse through, I remounted and galloped as far as the high road to C—, where I arrived at daybreak.

This is a true and circumstantial account of my first love-affair and my first duel.

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## XV

It was five o'clock in the morning when I rode into the town.—The houses were beginning to put their noses out of the window; the worthy natives showed their benignant faces behind the glass, surmounted by pyramidal nightcaps.—At the clatter of my horse's shoes ringing on the uneven, stony pavement, the curiously red faces and the matutinally uncovered breasts of the Venuses of the town issued from their respective casements, while their owners exhausted themselves in conjectures concerning the unusual apparition of a traveller in C— at such an hour and in such a rig, for I was very scantily dressed, and in a costume that was suspicious, to say the least. I inquired the way to an inn, of a little rascal with hair over his eyes, who cocked up his little spaniel's nose to look at me at his ease; I gave him a few sous for his trouble, and a conscientious rap with my crop which sent him away squeaking like a jay plucked alive. I threw myself on a bed and fell into a sound sleep. When I awoke, it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and even that was hardly enough to rest me completely. Indeed, it was none too much for a sleepless night, an intrigue, a duel, and a very rapid, although triumphant, flight.

I was very anxious about Alcibiades's wound; but a few days later my mind was set at rest, for I learned that it had had no serious consequences and that he was convalescent. That knowledge relieved me of a heavy weight, for the idea that I had killed a man troubled me strangely, although it was strictly in self-defence and against my own wish. I had not yet attained that sublime indifference to the life of my fellow-men at which I have since arrived.

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*Chapter XV — It was five o'clock in the morning when I rode into the town.—The houses were beginning to put their noses out of the window—\*\* I inquired the way to an inn, of a little rascal with hair over his eyes, who cocked up his little spaniel's nose to look at me at his ease; I gave him a few sous for his trouble.*

I found at C— several of the young men with whom we had previously journeyed, and I was very glad; I became very intimate with them, and they introduced me into several pleasant houses.—I was perfectly accustomed to my clothes, and the rough, active life I had led, the violent exercises to which I had devoted much time, had made me twice as robust as I was before. I went everywhere with those young scatterbrains: I rode and hunted and drank with them, for I had gradually accustomed myself to the bottle; without attaining the genuine Teutonic capacity of some of them, I could empty two or three bottles for my share without getting too tipsy—very satisfactory progress. I made verse in great abundance like a god and kissed all the maid-servants in due form.—In short, I became an accomplished young gentleman, conforming in every respect to the latest fashionable pattern.—I cast off certain provincial ideas that I had concerning virtue and other nonsense of that kind; on the other hand, I became so prodigiously punctilious on points of honor, that I fought a duel almost every day: indeed, it became a necessity to me, a sort of indispensable exercise, without which I should have felt ill all day. And so, when no one had stared at me or trodden on my foot, when I had no excuse for fighting, rather than remain idle and fold my hands, I acted as second for my comrades, or even for people whom I did not know by name.

I soon had a tremendous reputation for courage, and nothing less than that would have sufficed to check the jocose remarks which my beardless face and effeminate manner would infallibly have called forth. But by dint of opening three or four extra buttonholes in doublets, and very delicately puncturing some recalcitrant skins, I came to be generally considered as having a more virile air than Mars himself or Priapus, and you might have found men who would have sworn that they had been godfathers to my bastards.

Throughout all this apparent dissipation, in this reckless, disorderly life, I did not cease to follow out my original idea,—that is to say, the conscientious study of man and the solution of the great problem of a perfect lover, a problem rather more difficult of solution than that of the



philosopher's stone.

It is the same with certain ideas as with the horizon, which certainly exists because you see it in front of you in whatever direction you turn, but which obstinately eludes you and is always just so far away, whether you walk or gallop toward it; for a certain fixed distance is an indispensable condition of its manifestation; it vanishes as you go toward it to take shape again farther away with its fleeting, intangible azure, and you try in vain to stop it by grasping at the hem of its waving cloak.

The farther I advanced in knowledge of the animal, the more plainly I saw how impossible was the realization of my desire and how certain it was that what I sought in order to love happily was outside the conditions of its nature.—I became convinced that the man who was most sincerely in love with me would find a way, although with the best will in the world, to make me the most miserable of women, and yet I had already laid aside many of the requirements that as a girl I had thought essential.—I had descended from the sublime clouds, not exactly into the street and the gutter, but to the top of a hill of moderate height, accessible, although a little steep.

The ascent was decidedly rough, it is true; but I was conceited enough to believe that I was worth the trouble of making the effort, and that I should be a sufficient reward for the labor of reaching me.—I could never have made up my mind to take a step forward; I waited patiently, perched upon my hilltop.

This was my plan:—in my masculine attire I would make the acquaintance of some young man whose exterior attracted me; I would live on familiar terms with him; by shrewd questions and false confidences which would call forth true ones, I would soon obtain full knowledge of his thoughts and his sentiments; and if I found him to be the kind of man I wanted, I would pretend that I had to make a journey, and would remain away from him three or four months to give him a little time to forget my features; then I would return dressed as a woman, I would furnish luxuriously a little house in some retired suburb, buried among trees and flowers; I would arrange matters so that he would meet me and pay court to me; and if he showed that he loved me truly and faithfully, I would give myself to him without reserve and without precaution—the title of his mistress would seem to me an honorable one and I would ask for no other.

But that plan is certain never to be carried out, for it is a peculiarity of the plans we make that they are not carried out, and therein the weakness of man's will and his pure nullity are principally apparent.—The proverb—what woman wills, God wills—is no truer than any other proverb, which is equivalent to saying that it is not true at all.

So long as I saw them only at a distance and through the veil of my desire, men seemed noble creatures to me, and my eyes created an illusion.—Now I find that they are horrible to the last degree, and I do not understand how a woman can take one of them into her bed.

As for myself, my gorge would rise and I could not make up my mind to it.

How coarse and mean and unrefined their features are! what broken, ungraceful curves! what rough, black, furrowed skin!—Some are as dark as if they had been hanged six months ago, sallow, bony, hairy, with violin-strings on their hands, great sprawling feet, a filthy moustache always full of food and turned up toward the ears like hooks, hair as coarse as a horse's tail, a chin ending in a wild-boar's jowl, lips chapped and hardened by strong liquors, eyes surrounded by four or five black circles, a neck all twisted veins, huge muscles and protruding cartilage.—Others are enveloped in red flesh, and carry in front of them paunches that their belts will hardly go around; they wink their little sea-green eyes inflamed with lust and look more like hippopotami in breeches than human beings. They always smell of wine or brandy or tobacco or their own natural odor, which is far worse than all the others.—As for those whose exterior is a little less disgusting, they resemble ill-made women.—That's the whole story.

I had not noticed all this. I was living in a cloud, as it were, and my feet hardly touched the ground.—The smell of the roses and lilacs in the spring went to my head like a too powerful perfume. I dreamed only of accomplished heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, passions worthy of the altar, marvellous devotion and self-sacrifice, and I should have expected to find them all in the first blackguard who bade me good-morning.—However, that first, vulgar intoxication lasted only a short time; strange suspicions entered my mind, and I had no rest until I had investigated them.

In the beginning, my horror of men was carried to the last degree of exaggeration and I looked upon them as horrible monstrosities. Their ways of thinking, their bearing, and their carelessly cynical language, their brutal manners and their contempt for women, offended and revolted me beyond endurance, the idea that I had conceived of them corresponded so little with the reality.—They are not monsters, if you choose, but far worse than that, on my word! they are excellent fellows of most jovial disposition, who drink and eat heartily, who will do you all sorts of favors, clever and brave, good painters and good musicians, adapted for a thousand things, but not for the one for which they were created, which is to serve as male to the animal called woman, with whom they have not the slightest connection, moral or physical.

I had difficulty at first in concealing the contempt they inspired in me, but gradually I became accustomed to their manner of life. I felt no more annoyed at the mocking remarks they made concerning women than if I had myself been of their sex.—On the contrary, I made some very amusing ones myself, and their success greatly flattered my pride; indeed, none of my comrades went so far as I in the matter of sarcasm and jests upon that subject. My perfect familiarity with the ground gave me a great advantage, and aside from such piquant meaning as they might have, my epigrams excelled in the matter of accuracy, which theirs often lacked.—For, although all the

evil things they say of women have some foundation in fact, it is difficult, nevertheless, for men to preserve the necessary self-possession to make sport of them successfully, for there is often much love in their invectives.

I noticed that the most tenderly-inclined men and those who thought most of women were the ones who abused them worse than all the others and who returned to the subject with particular persistency, as if they were mortally aggrieved with them for not being such as they would like them to be, and thus falsifying the good opinion they had formed of them at first.

What I wanted before everything was not physical beauty, but beauty of the heart, love; but love as I understand it may not be within the bounds of human possibilities.—And yet it seems to me that I could love so and that I would give more than I demand.

What magnificent folly! what sublime prodigality!

To deliver yourself absolutely, keeping nothing at all of yourself, to renounce control of yourself and your free-will, to place your will in another's hands, to see only with his eyes, to hear only with his ears, to be but one in two bodies, to mingle and blend your hearts in such a way that you do not know whether you are yourself or the other, to absorb and radiate continually, to be now the moon and now the sun, to see the whole world and all creation in a single being, to displace the centre of life, to be ready, at any moment, for the greatest sacrifices and the most absolute self-abnegation; to suffer the pangs of your beloved as if they were your own; O prodigy! to make yourself double by giving yourself away;—that is love as I understand it.

The fidelity of ivy, the twining of a young vine, the cooing of the turtle-dove, all those go without saying, they are the first and simplest conditions.

If I had remained at home, in the costume of my own sex, listlessly turning my spinning-wheel or making tapestry in a window recess behind the glass, this thing that I have sought the world over would perhaps have found me out unaided. Love is like fortune, it does not like to be run after. It visits by preference those who sleep on well-curbs, and the kisses of queens and goddesses often descend upon closed eyes.—It blinds and deceives you to think that all adventures and all good fortune exist only in the places where you are not, and it is a bad plan to order your horse saddled or to post off in search of your ideal. Many people have made that mistake, many more will make it.—The horizon is always of the loveliest azure, although, when you arrive there, the hills that compose it are usually only bare, seamed, rain-swept fields of yellow clay.

I fancied that the world was full of adorable young men, and that I should meet on the roads whole tribes of Esplandians, Amadis and Launcelots of the Lake in search of their Dulcineas, and I was greatly amazed to find that the world paid but little heed to that sublime search and was content to lie with the first strumpet that came to hand; I am severely punished for my curiosity and my suspicion. I am the most horribly *blasé* creature in the world without ever having enjoyed anything. In my case, knowledge has gone before experience; there is nothing worse than such premature knowledge which is not the fruit of action.—The most absolute ignorance would be a hundred thousand times better, it would at least make you do many foolish things which would serve to instruct you and rectify your ideas; for, under this disgust of which I spoke just now, there is always an active, rebellious element which produces the most extraordinary confusion; the mind is convinced, the body is not, and will not subscribe to this superb disdain. The young and robust body plunges and rears under the mind like a lusty stallion ridden by a feeble old man whom he cannot unseat, for the nose-band holds his head and the bit tears his mouth.

Since I have lived with men, I have seen so many women shamefully betrayed, so many secret *liaisons* imprudently divulged, the purest passions recklessly dragged in the wind, young men hurrying off to vile harlots from the arms of the most charming mistresses, the most firmly-established intrigues broken off suddenly and for no plausible reason, that it is no longer possible for me to make up my mind to take a lover.—It would be like throwing myself into a bottomless abyss in broad daylight with my eyes open.—However, it is still the secret longing of my heart to have one. The voice of nature stifles the voice of reason.—I feel sure that I shall never be happy if I do not love and am not loved; but the unfortunate part of it is that I can have none but a man for a lover, and if men are not devils altogether, they are certainly very far from being angels. It would not avail them to glue wings to their shoulder-blades and put crowns of gold paper on their heads; I know them too well to allow myself to be deceived.—All the fine speeches they might make me would do no good. I know in advance what they will say and I could finish them by myself. I have seen them study their rôles and read them over before going on the stage; I know all their principal harangues for effect and the passages they rely upon.—Neither the pallor of the face nor the distortion of the features would convince me. I know that those things prove nothing.—A night's debauch, a few bottles of wine and two or three girls are enough to make up the face very nicely. I have seen that cunning trick played by a young marquis, naturally very fresh and rosy, with whom it worked exceedingly well, and who owed to that touching pallor, so worthily earned, the crowning of his flame.—I also know how the most lackadaisical Celadons console themselves for the cruelty of their Astreas and find a way to possess their souls in patience, awaiting their hour of bliss.—I have seen the drabs who acted as understudies for modest Ariadnes.

In truth, after that, man does not tempt me much; for he hasn't beauty like woman—beauty, that magnificent garment which so well conceals the imperfections of the soul, that divine drapery which God has cast over the nudity of the world, and which in some sort makes one excusable for loving the vilest courtesan in the gutter, if she possesses that royal, magnificent gift.

In default of mental virtues, I would like to have at least the exquisite perfection of form, the satiny flesh, the roundness of outline, the graceful curves, the fine texture of the skin, everything that tends to make women charming.—Since I cannot have love, I would at least have sensual pleasure, and fill the brother's place with the sister as far as possible.—But all the men I have seen seem to me horribly ugly. My horse is a hundred times handsomer, and I could kiss him with less repugnance than some dandies who deem themselves extremely fascinating. Certain it is that the genus fop, as I know it, would be by no means a brilliant theme for me to embroider with variations of pleasure.—A man of the sword would suit me no better; soldiers have something mechanical in their gait, and bestial in their faces, which causes me to consider them as something less than human beings; nor do men of the robe attract me much more, for they are dirty, greasy, unkempt, threadbare creatures, with a green eye and a mouth without lips; they smell terribly of must and mould, and I should not enjoy putting my face against their wolf's or badger's muzzle. As for poets, they have no thought for anything on earth except the ends of words, they go back no farther than the penultimate, and it is no exaggeration to say that it is hard to put them to any suitable use; they are greater bores than the others, and they are quite as ugly too, and have not the least distinction or refinement in their manners or their clothes, which is really strange enough:—people who think all day of nothing but form and beauty do not notice that their boots are ill-made and their hats absurd! They look like country apothecaries or exhibitors of trained dogs out of work, and would disgust you with poesy and poetry for several eternities.

As for painters, they are tremendously stupid; they see nothing outside of the seven colors.—One of them, with whom I passed several days at R—, when he was asked what he thought of me, made this ingenious reply: "He's of a decidedly warm tone, and in the shaded parts, I should have to use, instead of white, pure Naples yellow with a little Cassel earth and some red-brown."—That was his opinion, and, furthermore, his nose was crooked and his eyes were like his nose, which did not improve his case.—Whom shall I take? a soldier with swelling chest, a round-shouldered limb of the law, a poet or painter who looks frightened to death, or a little thin-flanked, hollow-chested popinjay? Which cage shall I choose in that menagerie? I have no idea at all, and I feel no more inclined in one direction than another, for they are as equal as possible in stupidity and ugliness.

After that, if there still remained anything for me to do, it would be to take some one I loved, whether it were a porter or a horse-jockey; but I do not love even a porter. O wretched heroine that I am! an unmated turtle-dove, condemned to coo forever in elegiacs!

Oh! how many times I have longed to be really a man as I seemed to be! How many women there are with whom I could have come to an understanding, whose hearts would have understood my heart!—how perfectly happy the refined pleasures of love, the noble outbursts of pure passion to which I could have responded, would have made me! What bliss, what ecstasy! how freely all the sensitive chords of my heart could have relaxed without being constantly obliged to contract and close under coarse handling! What a charming harvest of invisible flowers that will never open, whose mysterious fragrance would have filled the fraternal union of our hearts with sweet perfume! It seems to me that that would have been a life of enchantment, of infinite ecstasy on wings always open; walking with hands inseparably clasped, through avenues of golden gravel, through thickets of ever-smiling rose-bushes, through parks with many ponds over which swans glide gently, with alabaster urns standing out in sharp relief against the foliage.

If I had been a young man, how I would have loved Rosette! what adoration I would have poured out upon her! Our hearts were really made for each other, two pearls destined to be melted together and to make but a single one! How perfectly I would have realized the ideas she had formed of love! Her disposition suited me exactly, and her type of beauty pleased me. It is a pity that our love was absolutely condemned to inevitable platonism!

I had an adventure recently.

I frequented a house where there was a fascinating little girl, fifteen years old at most: I had never seen a more adorable miniature.—She was fair, but her complexion was so delicate and transparent that ordinary blondes would have seemed like brunettes, black as moles, beside her; one would have said that she had golden hair powdered with silver; her eyebrows were of such a delicate shade, and so blended with the flesh, that they could hardly be distinguished; her light-blue eyes had the softest expression and the silkiest lashes it is possible to imagine; her tiny mouth, so small that you could hardly put the end of your finger in it, added to the childish, dainty character of her beauty, and the soft curves and dimples in her cheeks had an indescribable charm of artless innocence.—Her whole dear little person delighted me beyond expression; I loved her little slender white hands through which the light shone, her bird's foot which hardly touched the ground, her waist which a breath would have snapped, and her pearly shoulders, hardly formed as yet, which her scarf, placed awry, happily disclosed.—Her childish prattle, whose *naïveté* added a new charm to her naturally gay manner, kept me absorbed for hours at a time, and I took a singular pleasure in making her talk; she said a thousand deliciously amusing things, sometimes with an extraordinary shrewdness of purpose, sometimes as if she had not the slightest idea of their meaning, which made her infinitely more attractive. I gave her bonbons and pastilles, which I kept expressly for her in a box of light tortoise-shell, which pleased her extremely, for she is a dainty creature like the genuine kitten she is. As soon as I arrived, she would run to meet me and feel my pockets to see if the blessed bonbonnière was there; I would pass it from one hand to the other, and that would lead to a little battle in which she necessarily ended by gaining the upper hand and stripping me completely.

One day, however, she contented herself by saluting me very gravely, and did not come as usual

to see if the fountain of sweetmeats was still playing in my pocket; she sat haughtily upright in her chair, her elbows back.

"Well, Ninon," I said, "are you fond of salt now or are you afraid that bonbons will make your teeth fall out?"—And, as I spoke, I tapped my box, which gave forth, under my waistcoat, the sweetest and most sugary sound in the world.

She put her little tongue to her lips, as if to enjoy the sweet ideal of the absent bonbon, but she did not budge.

Thereupon I took the box from my pocket, opened it and began religiously to devour the almonds, which she loved above everything: the instinct of gluttony was, for an instant, stronger than her resolution; she put out her hand to take some, but instantly drew it back, saying: "I am too big to eat bonbons!" And she sighed.

"I hadn't noticed that you have grown much since last week; are you like the mushrooms that grow in one night? Come and let me measure you."

"Laugh as much as you please," she continued with a charming pout; "I am not a little girl any longer; and I am going to be very big."

"Those are excellent resolutions, in which you must persevere;—and might I know, my dear young lady, what has put these noble ideas into your head? For, a week ago, you seemed to be very well pleased to be a little girl, and you crunched almonds without a thought of compromising your dignity."

The little lady looked at me with a curious expression, cast her eyes around the room, and, when she had made certain that no one could overhear us, leaned toward me with a mysterious air and said:

"I have a lover."

"The devil! I no longer wonder that you don't want pastilles; but you were unwise not to take some; you could have played at having dinner with him, or you could have exchanged them for a shuttlecock."

The child shrugged her shoulders disdainfully and seemed to be profoundly sorry for me.—As she retained the attitude of an offended queen, I continued:

"What is this victorious person's name? Arthur, I suppose, or Henri."—They were two little boys with whom she was in the habit of playing, and whom she called her husbands.

"No, not Arthur or Henri," she said, fixing her bright, clear eye on me—"a gentleman."—She put her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"As tall as that? Why, this is becoming serious.—Pray, who is this tall lover?"

"Monsieur Théodore, I would like to tell you, but you mustn't mention it to anybody, not to mamma or to Polly"—her governess—"or to your friends who think I'm a child and would make fun of me."

I promised inviolable secrecy, for I was very curious to know who this gallant gentleman might be, and the little one, seeing that I was inclined to treat the affair as a joke, hesitated to give me her full confidence.

Reassured by my solemn undertaking to hold my peace scrupulously, she left her chair, leaned over the back of mine, and whispered very softly in my ear the name of the cherished prince.

I was confounded: it was the Chevalier de G—, a filthy, uncivilized animal, with the morals of a school-master and the physique of a drum-major, the most sottish, debauched creature imaginable—a veritable satyr, minus the cloven foot and pointed ears. That aroused serious apprehensions for my dear Ninon in my mind, and I promised myself that I would straighten matters out.

Somebody came in and the conversation dropped.

I withdrew into a corner and cudgelled my brains for the means of preventing the affair from going any farther, for it would have been downright murder for such a sweet creature to fall to such an arrant knave.

The little one's mother was a rather dissolute woman, who gave card-parties and kept a sort of bureau of wit. People read wretched verses at her house and lost good crowns, which was a compensation.—She cared little for her daughter, who was a living certificate of baptism, so to speak, and embarrassed her in the matter of falsifying her chronology.—Besides, she was growing apace and her nascent charms occasioned comparisons which were not to the advantage of her prototype, who was already a little defaced by the action of years and men. The child was rather neglected, therefore, and left defenceless against the blackguardly habitués of the house.—If her mother had bestowed any attention upon her, it would have been for no other purpose probably than to sell her youth at a good bargain and farm out her beauty and her innocence.—In one way or another the fate in store for her was not doubtful.—That grieved me, for she was a fascinating little thing, deserving surely of something better, a pearl of the fairest water lost in that noxious pest-hole; the idea affected me so strongly that I determined to rescue her from the horrible place at any price.

The first thing to do was to prevent the chevalier from pursuing his design.—What seemed to me the best and simplest way was to pick a quarrel with him and make him fight me, and I had the utmost difficulty in arranging it, for he is the most arrant poltroon and fears blows more than any

other man on earth.—At last I said so many and such cutting things to him, that he had to make up his mind to go out with me, although decidedly against his inclination.—I even threatened to have him horse-whipped by my servants, if he did not show himself more of a man.—He knew how to handle a sword very well, by the way, but fright disturbed him so that our blades had no sooner crossed than I found a way to administer a pretty little thrust that put him to bed for a fortnight.—That was enough for me; I had no wish to kill him, and I much preferred to let him live so that he might be hanged later; a touching attention for which he ought to be most grateful to me!—My rascal stretched out between two sheets and duly trussed and bandaged, it only remained to persuade the little one to leave the house, which was not a very difficult matter.

I told her a tale about her lover's disappearance, as she was tremendously concerned about him. I told her that he had gone with an actress of the troupe then playing at C—; which angered her, as you can imagine.—But I consoled her, telling her all sorts of evil of the chevalier, who was ugly, besotted, and old, and I ended by asking her if she would not prefer to have me for her sweetheart.—She answered that she would indeed, because I was handsomer and my clothes were new.—This naïve remark, uttered with perfect seriousness, made me laugh until the tears came.—I excited the little one's imagination and worked to such good purpose that I persuaded her to leave the house.—A bouquet or two, as many kisses, and a pearl necklace which I gave her, delighted her to a point difficult to describe, and she assumed an air of importance before her little friends that was as laughable as you can imagine.

I ordered a very rich and elegant page's costume made to fit her, for I could not take her away in her girl's clothes, unless I dressed as a woman myself, which I did not choose to do.—I purchased a small horse of a gentle disposition and easy gait, and yet with speed enough to follow my horse when I chose to ride fast. Then I told the little beauty to try and come down to the door just at dusk and that I would be there to meet her; which she did most punctually.—I found her doing sentry duty in front of the half-open door.—I rode very close to the house; she came out, I gave her my hand, she placed her foot on my toe and leaped quickly to a seat behind me, for she was wonderfully agile in her movements. I spurred my horse and succeeded in returning unnoticed to my own quarters through seven or eight deserted, winding lanes.

I made her take off her clothes and put on her disguise and I myself acted as her maid; she made some objections at first and wanted to dress alone; but I made her understand that that would waste much time, and that, being my mistress, there was not the slightest impropriety, and that it was the way lovers always did.—Less than that would have convinced her, and she bowed to circumstances with the best grace in the world.

Her body was a little marvel of delicacy.—Her arms, which were rather thin, like those of every young girl, had an indescribable smoothness of outline, and her immature bosom gave such charming promise for the future, that no fully-developed bosom could have sustained a comparison with it.—She had all the graces of the child and all the charm of the woman; she was in the adorable period of transition from girl to young woman; a fleeting, intangible, delicious period when beauty is full of hope, and each succeeding day, instead of taking anything away from your love, adds new elements of perfection.

Her costume could not have been more becoming. It gave her a saucy air, very curious and very amusing, which made her roar with laughter when I handed her the mirror so that she could judge of the effect of her toilet. Then I made her eat some biscuit dipped in Spanish wine, in order to give her courage and enable her better to endure the fatigue of the journey.

The horses were waiting, all saddled, in the court-yard;—she coolly mounted hers, I leaped upon the other, and we set off.—It was quite dark, and a few lights, which went out one after another, showed that the good town of C— was virtuously occupied in sleeping, as every provincial town should be on the stroke of nine.

We could not go very fast, for Ninon was not the best horsewoman that ever was, and when her horse trotted she clung with all her strength to the mane.—However, when morning came we were so far away that no one could overtake us except by using great diligence; but we were not pursued, or, if we were, our pursuers took the opposite direction from that which we had taken.

I became singularly attached to the little beauty.—I no longer had you with me, my dear Graciosa, and I felt a pressing need of loving some one or something, of having with me a dog or a child to caress familiarly.—Ninon was just that to me;—she lay in my bed and slept with her little arms around my body;—she believed herself my mistress in all seriousness, and did not suspect that I was not a man; her extreme youth and her absolute innocence confirmed her in that error, which I was very careful not to correct.—The kisses I gave her rounded out her illusion perfectly, for her ideas did not yet go beyond kisses, and her desires did not speak loud enough to make her suspect anything else. However, she was only half deceived.

Really there was the same difference between her and myself as between myself and men.—She was so transparent, so slender, so light and airy, and her nature was so refined and exceptional, that she seemed like a woman even to me, who am myself a woman, but who look like a Hercules beside her. I am tall and dark, she is small and fair; her features are so soft that they make mine seem almost hard and stern, and her voice is such a melodious hum that my voice seems harsh beside it. Any man who had her would break her in pieces, and I am always afraid that the wind will blow her away some fine morning.—I would like to shut her up in a box of cotton wool and wear it around my neck.—You can't imagine, my dear friend, how graceful and bright she is, what fascinating, cajoling, dainty little childish ways she has. She is the most adorable creature that ever was, and it really would have been a pity for her to stay with her unworthy mother.

I took malicious delight in thus rescuing that treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the griffin who prevented them from approaching it, and if I did not enjoy it myself, at all events no one else enjoyed it: an idea that never fails to console one, whatever all the absurd decriers of selfishness may say.

I proposed to keep her as long as possible in the same ignorance, and to keep her with me until she was unwilling to stay any longer or until I had found some way of assuring her future.

I took her with me in her boy's costume on all my journeys, east and west; that kind of life pleased her immensely, and the delight she took in it helped her to endure the fatigue.—I was complimented on all sides on the exquisite beauty of my page, and I doubt not that it caused a great many people to form an idea exactly contrary to the truth. Indeed, several persons tried to solve the problem; I did not allow the little one to speak to any one, and the inquisitive ones were altogether disappointed.

Every day I discovered in the dear child some new quality which made her dearer to me than ever, and caused me to congratulate myself on the resolution I had taken.—Most assuredly no man was worthy to possess her, and it would have been a deplorable thing that such charms of body and mind should have been abandoned to their brutal appetites and their cynical depravity.

Only a woman could love her with proper delicacy and tender affection.—One side of my character, which might not have been developed in a *liaison* of another sort, but which suddenly manifested itself in this, is the imperative longing to have some one under my protection, which is usually characteristic of men. If I had taken a lover, it would have annoyed me intensely to have him assume to defend me, for the reason that that is something I love to do myself for people whom I am fond of, and my pride is much better suited with the first rôle than the second, although the second may be more agreeable.—So I was very well content to bestow upon my dear little girl all the attentions I ought to have wanted to receive, such as assisting her over difficult places in the road, holding her rein and her stirrup, waiting on her at table, undressing her and putting her to bed, defending her if any one insulted her, in short, doing everything for her that the most passionate and attentive lover does for an adored mistress.

I gradually lost all idea of my sex, and I barely remembered, now and then, that I was a woman. In the beginning I often let slip, unthinkingly, "I am tired," or some remark that did not accord with the coat I wore. Now that never happens, and even when I am writing to you, who are in my confidence, I sometimes retain an unnecessary amount of virility in my adjectives. If I ever take a fancy to go and look for my skirts in the drawer where I left them, which I very much doubt unless I fall in love with some fine young man, I shall have difficulty in accustoming myself to them, and I shall look like a man disguised as a woman, instead of a woman disguised as a man. The truth is, that I belong to neither sex; I have not the idiotic resignation, the timidity nor the pettiness of the woman; I have not men's vices, their disgusting sottishness and their brutal inclinations:—I am of a third distinct sex which has no name as yet: above or below the others, more imperfect or superior; I have the body and soul of a woman, the mind and strength of a man, and I have too much or not enough of either to enable me to mate with one or the other.

O Graciosa, I shall never love any one, either man or woman, with all my heart; there is always something unsatisfied grumbling within me, and the lover or the friend fills the need of only one side of my character. If I had a lover, such feminine qualities as I have would dominate the virile part of me, I doubt not, but that would last but a short time, and I feel that I should be only half content; if I have a friend of my own sex, the thought of sensual pleasure prevents me from enjoying to the full the pure pleasure of the mind; so that I do not know where to stop, and am forever hesitating between the two.

My ideal of happiness would be to have the two sexes turn and turn about to satisfy this twofold nature:—a man to-day, a woman to-morrow, I would reserve for my lovers my languishing tenderness, my submissive, devoted manners, my softest caresses, my little melancholy, long-drawn sighs, whatever there is of the cat and the woman in my character; then, with my mistresses, I would be froward, enterprising, impassioned, with victorious manners, my hat cocked over my ear and the bearing of a swash-buckling adventurer. Thus my whole nature would come to light, and I should be perfectly happy, for true happiness consists in the ability to develop one's nature freely in every direction, and to be everything that one can be.

But these are impossibilities and I mustn't think about them.

I had kidnapped the little one with the idea of fooling my inclinations, and diverting upon some one all the vague affection that was floating about in my heart, and inundating it; I had taken her as a sort of safety-valve for my faculty of loving; but I soon realized, notwithstanding all my affection for her, what an immense void, what a bottomless abyss, she left in my heart, how little her fondest caresses satisfied me!—I resolved to try a lover, but a long time passed, and still I met no one who was not disagreeable to me. I have forgotten to tell you that Rosette, having discovered where I had gone, had written me a most imploring letter, begging me to come and see her; I could not refuse, and I visited her at a country estate she has.—I have been there several times since, very recently in fact.—Rosette, in despair at her inability to have me for her lover, had plunged into the whirlpool of society and into dissipation, like all loving souls who are not religious and who have been disappointed in their first love;—she had had many adventures in a short time, and the list of her conquests was already very long, for not everybody had the same reasons for resisting her that I had.

She had with her a young man named D'Albert, who was for the moment her titular lover.—I seemed to make a deep impression on him, and he conceived a very warm friendship for me at

once.

Although he treated her with much consideration and his manner toward her was affectionate enough, he did not love Rosette,—not because he was satiated or disgusted with women, but because she did not respond to certain conceptions, true or false, which he had formed of love and beauty. An ideal cloud floated between her and him, and prevented him from being happy as he would have been but for that.—Evidently his dream was not fulfilled and he was sighing for something else.—But he was not seeking it, and remained faithful to bonds that were irksome to him; for he has in his soul a little more delicacy and honor than most men have, and his heart is very far from being as corrupt as his mind.—Not being aware that Rosette had never been in love with any one but me, and was still, through all her love-affairs and follies, he feared to give her pain by letting her see that he did not love her; that consideration restrained him, and he sacrificed himself in the most generous way imaginable.

The character of my features pleased him extraordinarily,—for he attaches undue importance to exterior form—to such a point, in fact, that he fell in love with me, notwithstanding my male attire and the formidable rapier I wear at my side.—I confess that I am obliged to him for the shrewdness of his instinct, and that I esteem him somewhat for having detected me under those deceptive appearances.—In the beginning he fancied that he was blessed with a much more depraved taste than he really was, and I laughed in my sleeve to see him torment himself so.—Sometimes when he approached me he had a frightened look that diverted me beyond measure, and the very natural inclination that drew him toward me seemed to him a diabolical impulsion which one could not resist too sturdily.—At such times he fell back on Rosette in a frenzy, and strove to resume more orthodox methods of love; then he would come back to me, naturally more inflamed than before. At last the illuminating idea that I might be a woman stole into his mind. To convince himself of it, he set about watching and studying me with the most minute attention; he must have an intimate acquaintance with each hair on my head and know just how many lashes I have on my eyelids; my feet, my hands, my neck, my cheeks, the suspicion of down at the corner of my mouth,—he examined them all, compared and analyzed them, and the result of that investigation, in which the artist aided the lover, was the conviction, clear as the day—when it is clear—that I was in very truth a woman, and, what was more, his ideal, his type of beauty, the realization of his dream;—a marvellous discovery!

Nothing remained except to make an impression on me and to induce me to grant him the lover's gift of gratitude, to establish my sex beyond doubt.—A comedy that we acted, and in which I appeared as a woman, convinced him completely. I bestowed some equivocal glances upon him, and used certain passages in my part that bore some analogy to our situation to embolden him and induce him to declare himself.—For, even if I did not love him passionately, I was sufficiently attracted by him not to let him pine away with love where he stood; and as he was the first one since my transformation to suspect that I was a woman, it was no more than fair that I should enlighten him on that important point, and I determined not to leave a shadow of doubt in his mind.

He came to my room several times with his declaration on his lips, but he dared not put it in words; for after all it is hard to talk of love to some one who wears the same kind of clothes that you do, and affects top-boots. At last, being unable to bring himself to the point, he wrote me a long letter, a most Pindaric production, in which he explained at great length what I knew better than he.

I don't quite know what I had better do.—Grant his request, or reject it,—that would be immoderately virtuous;—moreover, it would grieve him too much to be refused; if we make those who love us unhappy, what shall we do to those who hate us?—Perhaps it would be more in accordance with strict propriety to play the cruel for some time, and to wait at least a month before unclasping the tigress's skin to don the civilized chemise.—But, as I am determined to yield to him, it is quite as well to do it at once as later;—I don't think very much of the noble resistance, mathematically graduated, which abandons one hand to-day, the other to-morrow, then the foot, then the leg and the knee as far as the garter only,—or the intractable virtue that is always ready to clutch the bell-rope if you go a hair's breadth beyond the limit of the territory they have decided to surrender on that day.—It makes me laugh to see these methodical Lucreces walking backward with signs of the most maidenly terror, and casting a furtive glance over their shoulder from time to time to see if the sofa on which they are to fall is directly behind them.—I could not take so much trouble.

I do not love D'Albert, at least in the sense in which I understand the word, but I certainly have a liking and inclination for him;—his wit pleases me and his person does not repel me; there are not many people of whom I can say as much. He hasn't everything, but he has something;—what pleases me, in him is that he does not try to slake his thirst brutally, like other men; he has a constant aspiration and a sustained impulse toward the beautiful—toward material beauty only, it is true, but that is a noble tendency, and sufficient to keep him within the limits of the pure.—His behavior to Rosette proves honesty of heart,—honesty, that is more rare than the other kind, if that be possible.

And then, if I must tell you, I am possessed by the most violent desires,—I am languishing and dying with lust;—for the coat I wear, while it leads me into all sorts of adventures with women, protects me too perfectly against the enterprises of men; an idea of pleasure that is never realized floats vaguely in my brain, and the dull, colorless dream fatigues and bores me.—So many women lead the life of prostitutes amid the most chaste surroundings! and I, in most ridiculous contrast to them, remain as chaste and unspotted as the cold Diana herself, in the midst of the most reckless dissipation and surrounded by the greatest rakes of the age.—This

ignorance of the body, unaccompanied by ignorance of the mind, is the most wretched thing imaginable. In order that my flesh may not put on airs before my mind, I propose to inflict an equal stain upon it—if indeed it is any more of a stain than eating and drinking, which I doubt.—In a word, I propose to know what a man is, and what sort of pleasure he affords. As D'Albert recognized me through my disguise, it is no more than fair that he should be rewarded for his penetration; he was the first person to guess that I was a woman, and I will do my best to prove to him that his suspicions were well founded.—It would be most uncharitable to let him believe that he has developed an unnatural taste.

D'Albert then will solve my doubts, and give me my first lesson in love; it only remains now to bring the thing about in poetic fashion. I am inclined not to answer his letter, and to be cold to him for a few days. When I see that he is very depressed and desperate, cursing the gods, shaking his fist at all creation, and looking into wells to see if they are too deep to throw himself into—then I will withdraw, like Peau d'Ane, to the end of the corridor, and will don my multi-colored dress—that is to say, my Rosalind costume, for my feminine wardrobe is decidedly limited. Then I will go to him, as radiant as a peacock spreading his feathers, showing ostentatiously what I generally conceal with the greatest care, and wearing only a little lace tucker, very low and very coquettish, and I will say to him in the most pathetic tone I can command:

"O most poetic and most perspicacious of young men, I am in very truth naught but a young and modest beauty, who, over and above all, adores you, and whose only wish is to give pleasure to you and to herself.—Tell me if that is agreeable to you, and if you still retain any scruple, touch this, go in peace, and sin all you can."

That eloquent harangue concluded, I will sink, half-fainting, into his arms, and while I heave a melancholy sigh or two, I will adroitly unfasten the clasp of my dress and appear in the conventional costume, that is to say, half naked.—D'Albert will do the rest, and I hope that, on the following morning, I shall know what to believe about all the fine things that have been troubling my brain so long.—While gratifying my curiosity, I shall have the additional pleasure of making a fellow-creature happy.

I propose also to pay Rosette a visit in the same costume, and to prove to her that my failure to respond to her love was due neither to coldness nor dislike.—I do not want her to retain that bad opinion of me, and she deserves, no less than D'Albert, that I should betray my *incognito* in her favor.—How will she take that disclosure?—Her pride will be comforted, but her love will groan.

Adieu, my loveliest and best; pray God that pleasure may not seem to me so small a matter as they who dispense it. I have written flippantly throughout this letter, and yet this that I am going to do is a serious thing, and all the rest of my life may feel its effects.

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## XVI

More than a fortnight had passed since D'Albert placed his amorous epistle on Théodore's table, and yet there was no perceptible change in the latter's demeanor.—D'Albert did not know to what to attribute that silence;—it seemed as if Théodore had no knowledge of the letter; the pitiable D'Albert believed that it had been destroyed or lost; and yet it was difficult to see how that could be, for Théodore had returned to the room a moment after, and it would have been a most extraordinary thing if he had failed to notice a large paper lying by itself in the middle of the table, in such a way as to attract the most absent-minded glance.

Or was it that Théodore was really a man and not a woman, as D'Albert had imagined—or, in case she was a woman, had she such a pronounced aversion for him, such contempt, that she would not even deign to take the trouble to reply to him?—The poor fellow, who had not had, like ourselves, the privilege of looking through the portfolio of *la belle* Maupin's confidante, Graciosa, was not in a condition to decide affirmatively or negatively any of these important questions, and he wavered sadly in the most wretched irresolution.

One evening he was in his room, with his forehead pressed against the window, gazing gloomily, without seeing them, at the chestnut-trees in the park, already partly bare of leaves and bright red in spots. The horizon was swimming in a thick haze, night was already descending, rather gray than black, and cautiously placing its velvet feet on the tree-tops;—a large swan amorously dipped her neck and shoulders again and again in the steaming water of the stream, and her white body resembled in the shadow a large star of snow.—She was the only living creature that gave life to that dull landscape.

D'Albert was musing as sadly as a disappointed man can muse at five o'clock on a cloudy autumn afternoon, with no music but the whistling of a shrill north wind and no other outlook than the skeleton of a leafless forest.

He was thinking of throwing himself into the river, but the water seemed very black and cold, and the swan's example only half persuaded him; of blowing out his brains, but he had neither pistol nor powder, and he would have been sorry if he had; of taking a new mistress, or even two—an ominous resolution! but he knew nobody who suited him, or, for that matter, who did not suit him.—He carried his despair so far as to think of renewing his relations with women who were perfectly unendurable to him and whom he had had his lackeys drive out of his house with horse-whips. He ended by deciding upon something even more ghastly—writing a second letter.



O sextuple idiot!

He was at that point in his meditations when he felt upon his shoulder—a hand—like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree.—The simile halts a little in that D'Albert's shoulder bore but slight resemblance to a palm; no matter, we retain it from a sentiment of pure Orientalism.

The hand was attached to the end of an arm which corresponded with a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was nothing more nor less than Théodore-Rosalind, Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, or Madelaine de Maupin, to give her her true name.

Who was surprised?—Neither you nor I, for you and I were fully prepared for this visit; but D'Albert, who had not the slightest expectation of it.—He gave a little cry of surprise half-way between oh! and ah! However, I have the best of reasons for thinking that it was nearer an ah! than an oh!



*Chapter XVI — He was at that point in his meditations when he felt upon his shoulder—a hand—like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree.— \*\*\* The hand was attached to the end of an arm which corresponded with a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was nothing more nor less than Théodore-Rosalind, Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, or Madelaine de Maupin, to give her her true name.*

It was Rosalind herself, so fair and radiant that she lighted up the whole room,—with the strings of pearls in her hair, her prismatic dress, her ample lace sleeves, her red-heeled shoes, her lovely peacock's-feather fan,—in a word, just as she was on the day of the play. But there was this important and decisive difference, that she had neither neckerchief nor wimple nor ruff nor anything at all to conceal from his eyes those two charming hostile twin brothers,—who, alas! are only too often inclined to be reconciled.

A breast entirely bare, as white and transparent as antique marble, of the purest and most exquisite form, protruded boldly from a very scanty corsage and seemed to challenge kisses. It was a very reassuring sight; and D'Albert was quickly reassured, and gave way in all confidence to his wildest emotions.

"Well, Orlando, do you not recognize your Rosalind?" said the fair one, with the most charming smile; "or have you left your love hanging with your sonnets on the bushes in the forest of Arden? Are you really cured of the disease for which you asked me so persistently for a remedy? I am very much afraid so."

"Oh, no! Rosalind, I am sicker than ever. I am in the death-agony; I am dead, or nearly so."

"You look very well for a corpse, and many living men have not so good a color as you."

"What a week I have passed!—You can't imagine it, Rosalind. I hope that it will be worth at least a thousand years of purgatory to me in the other world.—But, if I may venture to ask you, why did you not answer sooner?"

"Why?—I am not quite sure, unless it was just because.—If that reason doesn't strike you as satisfactory, here are three others not so good; you can take your choice: first, because, in the excitement of your passion, you forgot to write legibly and it took me more than a week to guess what your letter was about;—secondly, because my modesty could not accustom itself in less time to the ridiculous idea of taking a dithyrambic poet for a lover; and thirdly, because I was not sorry to find out if you would blow out your brains, poison yourself with opium, or hang yourself with your garter.—There you are."

"You wicked jester!—You did well to come to-day, I assure you, for you might not have found me to-morrow."

"Really! poor boy!—Don't put on such a disconsolate expression, for I shall be touched too, and that would make me stupider in my single person than all the animals that were in the ark with the late Noah.—If I once open the flood-gates of my sentimentality, you will be submerged, I warn you.—Just now I gave you three bad reasons, I offer you now three good kisses; will you accept, on condition that you are to forget the reasons for the kisses?—I owe you that much, and more."

As she spoke, the lovely girl stepped up to the doleful lover and threw her beautiful bare arms around his neck.—D'Albert kissed her effusively on both cheeks and on the mouth.—The last kiss lasted longer than the others and might well have counted for four.—Rosalind saw that all that she had done hitherto was mere child's play. Her debt paid, she sat on D'Albert's knee, still deeply moved, and said, passing her hands through his hair:

"All my cruelty is exhausted, my sweet friend; I took this fortnight to satisfy my natural ferocity; I will confess that it seemed very long to me. Don't be conceited because I speak frankly, but that is the truth.—I put myself in your hands, take your revenge for my past rigor.—If you were a fool, I would not say this to you, nor indeed would I say anything else, for I don't care for fools.—It would have been very easy for me to make you believe that I was tremendously incensed by your boldness and that you would not have a sufficient store of platonic sighs and highly concentrated rhapsodies to obtain forgiveness for an offence with which I was well pleased; I might, like other women, have haggled with you for a long while and given you in instalments what I give you freely and all at once; but I do not think you would have loved me a single hair's breadth more.—I do not ask you for an oath of everlasting love nor for any extravagant protestations.—Love me as much as God pleases.—I will do the same for my part.—I will not call you a perfidious villain when you cease to love me.—You will have the kindness also to spare me the odious corresponding titles, if I should happen to leave you.—I shall simply be a woman who has ceased to love you—nothing more.—It isn't necessary for us to hate each other all our lives because we have lain together for a night or two.—Whatever happens, and wherever my destiny may guide me, I swear to you, and this is an oath one can keep, that I will always retain a delightful memory of you, and, even if I am no longer your mistress, that I will always be your friend as I have been your comrade.—For you I have laid aside my man's clothes for to-night; to-morrow morning I shall resume them again for all.—Remember that I am Rosalind only at night, and that through the day I am and can be only plain Théodore de Sérannes—"

The conclusion of the sentence was stifled by a kiss, succeeded by many others, which they ceased to count and of which we will not undertake to furnish an exact reckoning, because it would certainly be a little long and perhaps very immoral—in the eyes of some people—for, so far as we are concerned, we know of nothing more moral and more sacred under heaven than the caresses of a man and a woman, when both are young and beautiful.

As D'Albert's solicitations became more passionate and more earnest, Théodore's lovely face, instead of expanding and beaming, assumed an expression of dignified melancholy which caused her lover some anxiety.

"Why, my dear sovereign, have you the chaste and solemn air of an antique Diana, when you should display the smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea?"

"You see, D'Albert, I resemble the huntress, Diana, more than anything else on earth.—When I was very young, I assumed this masculine costume for reasons which it would be tedious and useless to tell you.—You alone have divined my sex—and if I have made conquests, they have been of women only, superfluous conquests by which I have more than once been embarrassed.—In a word, although it may seem absurd and incredible, I am a virgin—as spotless as the snow of the Himalayas, as the Moon before she had lain with Endymion, as Mary before she made the acquaintance of the heavenly dove, and I am serious like everybody who is about to do something that can never be undone.—I am about to undergo a metamorphosis, a transformation.—To change the name of maiden for the name of woman, to have not that to give to-morrow which I had yesterday; something that I do not know and am going to learn; an important leaf turned in the book of life.—That is why I am sad, my friend, and not because of anything for which you are

to blame."

As she spoke, she put aside the young man's long hair with her two lovely hands, and pressed her softly clinging lips to his pale forehead.

D'Albert, deeply moved by the gentle, solemn tone in which she delivered her speech, took her hands and kissed all the fingers, one after another,—then gently broke the fastenings of her dress so that the corsage opened and the two white treasures appeared in all their splendor: upon that gleaming bosom, as pure as silver, bloomed the two loveliest roses in paradise. He softly pressed his mouth to the blushing points and so ran over the whole surface. Rosalind, with inexhaustible good nature, allowed him to do as he pleased, and tried to return his caresses as exactly as possible.

"You must find me very awkward and very cold, my poor D'Albert; but I hardly know what I am to do;—you will have much trouble to teach me, and really I am putting a very hard task upon you."

D'Albert made the simplest of all replies, he did not reply at all,—and embracing her with increased passion, he covered her bare shoulders and breast with kisses. The half-fainting girl's hair became unfastened, and her dress fell to her feet as if by enchantment. She stood like a white phantom with a simple chemise of the most transparent linen. The happy lover knelt and had soon tossed the two pretty little red-heeled shoes into opposite corners of the room;—the stockings with embroidered clocks followed them close.

The chemise, endowed with a happy spirit of emulation, did not lag behind the dress: first it slipped from the shoulders before she thought of preventing it; then, taking advantage of a moment when the arms were perpendicular, it escaped from them with much address and fell as far as the hips, whose waving contour half stopped it.—Thereupon Rosalind noticed the perfidy of her last garment and raised her knee a little to prevent it from falling altogether.—In that pose she was a perfect copy of the marble statues of goddesses, whose intelligent drapery, grieved to conceal so many charms, regretfully envelops the shapely thighs, and by well-planned treachery stops just below the place it is intended to hide.—But as the chemise was not of marble, and its folds did not sustain it, it continued its triumphal descent, fell upon the dress and lay in a circle at its mistress's feet like a great white greyhound.

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Of course, there was a very simple means of avoiding all this confusion; namely, by holding the fleeing garment with the hand; but that idea, natural as it was, did not occur to our modest heroine.

She was left, therefore, without any veil, her fallen clothing forming a sort of pedestal, in all the transparent splendor of her lovely nudity, in the soft light of an alabaster lamp that D'Albert had lighted.

D'Albert, fairly dazzled, gazed at her in ecstasy.

"I am cold," she said, folding her arms across her breast.

"Oh! one moment more! I pray you!"

Rosalind unfolded her arms, rested the tip of her finger on the back of a chair, and stood perfectly still; she leaned slightly to one side in order to bring out all the grace of the undulating line;—she seemed in no wise embarrassed, and the imperceptible flush on her cheek did not deepen a single shade: but the somewhat hurried beating of her heart made the contour of her left bosom tremble.

The young enthusiast in beauty could not feast his eyes enough on such a spectacle: we must say, to the unbounded praise of Rosalind, that this time the reality surpassed his dream, and that he was not conscious of the slightest disillusionment.

Everything was combined in the lovely body posing before him;—delicacy and strength, form and coloring, the outlines of a Grecian statue of the most glorious days of the art, and the tones of a Titian.—He saw there, palpable and crystallized, the misty chimera he had tried so many times to check in its flight—he was not compelled, as he had complained so bitterly to his friend Silvio, to confine his glances to some special well-formed portion of the body, and not to look beyond it,

under penalty of seeing something horrible, and his amorous eyes descended from the head to the feet and ascended from the feet to the head, always softly caressed by a harmonious, correctly proportioned line.

The knees were wonderfully pure, the ankles slender and shapely, the legs and thighs built upon a noble, superb model, the belly as lustrous as agate, the hips supple and strong, a bosom that might well tempt the gods to come down from heaven to kiss it, arms and shoulders of the most magnificent shape;—a torrent of beautiful brown hair, curling slightly, as in the heads drawn by the old masters, fell in tiny waves along a back of polished ivory, marvellously heightening the effect of its whiteness.

The painter satisfied, the lover gained the upper hand; for, however great one's love of art, there are things which one cannot long remain contented in looking at.

He took the fair one in his arms and carried her to the bed; in a twinkling he had undressed himself and jumped in beside her.

Our fair reader of the gentler sex would surely look askance at her lover if we should disclose the formidable figure attained by D'Albert's love, assisted by Rosalind's curiosity. Let her remember the most completely filled and the most delightful of her own nights, the night when—the night she would remember a hundred thousand days if she did not die long before; let her put the book beside her and count upon her pretty white fingers how many times he who loved her best loved her that night, and thus fill the gap which we leave in this glorious history.

Rosalind was extremely well disposed, and made astonishing progress in that one night.—The artlessness of body which wondered at everything, and the finesse of mind which wondered at nothing, formed a most alluring and fascinating contrast.—D'Albert was enchanted, bewildered, transported, and would have liked the night to last forty-eight hours, like that in which Hercules was conceived.—Toward morning, however, despite an infinity of the most amorous kisses, and caresses, and endearments, well adapted to keep a man awake, he was obliged, after a superhuman effort, to take a little rest. Sweet, luxurious slumber touched his eyelids with the end of its wing, his head sank and he fell asleep between his fair mistress's bosoms.—She gazed at him for some time with an air of profound and melancholy meditation; then, as the dawn cast its first rays through the curtains, she raised him gently, laid him beside her, rose and passed lightly over his body.

She seized her clothes and dressed in haste, then, returning to the bed, leaned over D'Albert, who was still sleeping, and kissed both his eyes on their long silky lashes.—That done, she left the room, walking backward and still looking at him.

Instead of returning to her room, she went to Rosette's.—What she said there, what she did there, I have never been able to learn, although I have striven most conscientiously to do so.—I have not found among Graciosa's papers or D'Albert's or Silvio's anything relating to that visit. But one of Rosette's maids told me of this singular circumstance: although her mistress did not lay with her lover that night, her bed was rumpled and tossed about and bore the impressions of two bodies.—Furthermore, she showed me two pearls exactly like those Théodore wore in his hair when he played Rosalind. She had found them in the bed when she made it. I state the fact and leave the reader to draw whatever deductions he may choose therefrom; for my own part I have made a thousand conjectures each more unreasonable than the last, and so ridiculous that I really do not dare to write them even in the most virtuously periphrastic style.

It was quite noon when Théodore left Rosette's chamber.—He did not appear at dinner or supper.—D'Albert and Rosette did not seem surprised.—He went to bed early, and the next morning, at daybreak, without a word to any one, he saddled his horse and his page's and left the chateau, telling a servant not to expect him at dinner, and that he might not return for some days.

D'Albert and Rosette were greatly astonished, and did not know how to account for this sudden disappearance—especially D'Albert, who, by the prowess he displayed the first night, thought he had well earned a second. Toward the end of the week, the unhappy, disappointed lover received a letter from Théodore which we propose to transcribe. I am afraid it will not satisfy my readers of either sex; but the letter was written so and not otherwise, and this glorious romance shall have no other conclusion.

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## XVII

Doubtless, my dear D'Albert, you are greatly surprised by what I now do after what I have done.—I permit you to be, there is good reason for it.—I will wager that you have already applied to me at least twenty of the epithets we agreed to strike out of our vocabulary: perfidious, inconstant, vile creature—is it not so?—At all events, you will not call me cruel or virtuous, which is so much gained.—You curse me and you are wrong.—You desired me, you loved me, I was your ideal:—very good. I granted you on the spot what you wanted; it was nobody's fault but your own that you hadn't it sooner. I served as body to your dream in the most accommodating way.—I gave you what I certainly shall never again give any one—a surprise upon which you hardly reckoned and for which you certainly ought to be most grateful to me.—Now that I have satisfied you, it pleases me to go away.—What is there so monstrous in that?

You had me absolutely and without reserve a whole night; what more do you want? Another night and then still another; you would even put up with a few days at need.—And so you would go on

until you were disgusted with me.—I can hear you from here crying most politely that I am not one of those with whom men become disgusted. *Mon Dieu!* yes, with me as with others.

It would last six months, two years, even ten years, if you choose, but it must end at some time or other.—You would keep me through a sort of feeling of duty, or because you had not the courage to give me my dismissal. What is the use of waiting until it comes to that?

And then perhaps I should be the one to cease to love you. I have found you charming; perhaps, by virtue of seeing you often, I should have found you detestable.—Forgive that supposition.—By living with you on terms of close intimacy, I should have occasion, I doubt not, to see you in a cotton night-cap or in some absurd or grotesque domestic situation.—You would necessarily have lost the romantic and mysterious side that charms me above all things, and your character, being better understood, would no longer have seemed so unique to me. I should be less engrossed with you, having you near me, just as it happens with books that one never opens because one has them in his library.—Your nose or your mind would no longer seem to me nearly as well turned; I should notice that your coat didn't fit you, or that your stockings weren't drawn tight; I should have a thousand disillusionments of that sort which would have made me very unhappy, and I should have come at last to this conclusion!—that you certainly had neither heart nor soul, and that I was destined not to be understood in the matter of love.

You adore me and I reciprocate the feeling. You have not the slightest reason to reproach me, and I have not the slightest complaint to make of you. I have been perfectly faithful to you throughout our whole *liaison*. I have deceived you in nothing.—I had neither a false bosom nor false virtue; you had the extreme kindness to tell me that I was even more beautiful than you imagined.—In return for the beauty I gave you, you gave me much pleasure; we are quits;—I go my way and you yours, and perhaps we shall meet again at the Antipodes.—Live in that hope.

You think perhaps that I do not love because I leave you. Later you will realize how far that is true.—If I had cared less for you, I would have remained and poured out the insipid draught for you to the dregs. Your love would soon have been dead of ennui; after some time you would have entirely forgotten me, and as you read my name on the list of your conquests, you would have asked yourself: "Who the devil was she?"—I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that you will remember me more than some others.—Your unsatisfied desire will still spread its wings to fly to me; I shall always be to you something desirable to which your fancy will love to return, and I hope that in the bed of the mistresses you may have hereafter, you will think sometimes of the single night you passed with me.

You will never be more lovable than you were on that blessed evening, and even if you should be as much so, that would show a falling-off; for in love, as in poetry, to remain at the same point is to retrograde. Cling to that impression—you will do well.

You have made the task of such lovers as I may have—if I have other lovers—a difficult one, and no one will ever be able to efface my memory of you;—they will be the heirs of Alexander.

If it grieves you too deeply to lose me, burn this letter, which is the only proof that you have had me, and you will think you have had a pleasant dream. What is there to prevent that? The vision vanished before dawn, just at the hour when dreams return home through the doors of horn or ivory.—How many men have died, less fortunate than you, without giving so much as a single kiss to their chimera!

I am neither whimsical nor mad nor prudish.—What I do is the result of profound conviction.—It was not to inflame your passion or from any deep design of coquetry that I left C—; do not try to follow me or to find me: you will not succeed. My precautions to conceal my tracks from you are too well taken; you will always be, in my mind, the man who opened to me a world of novel sensations. Those are things a woman doesn't readily forget. Although absent, I shall think of you often, more often than if you were with me.

Do your best to console poor Rosette, who is likely to be at least as grieved as you at my departure. Love each other well in memory of me, whom you have both loved, and mention my name sometimes in a kiss.

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