Notre Coeur

by Guy de Maupassant

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Title: Notre Coeur; or, A Woman's Pastime: A Novel

Author: Guy de Maupassant

Release date: November 18, 2015 [eBook #50477] Most recently updated: October 22, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/50477

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NOTRE CŒUR

OR

A WOMAN'S PASTIME

A NOVEL

By

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

SAINT DUNSTAN SOCIETY AKRON, OHIO 1903

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HENRI RENE GUY DE MAUPASSANT "THEY WERE ALONE ... SHE WAS WEEPING"

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Of the French writers of romance of the latter part of the nineteenth century no one made a reputation as quickly as did Guy de Maupassant. Not one has preserved that reputation with more ease, not only during life, but in death. None so completely hides his personality in his glory. In an epoch of the utmost publicity, in which the

most insignificant deeds of a celebrated man are spied, recorded, and commented on, the author of "Boule de Suif," of "Pierre et Jean," of "Notre Cœur," found a way of effacing his personality in his work.

Of De Maupassant we know that he was born in Normandy about 1850; that he was the favorite pupil, if one may so express it, the literary protégé, of Gustave Flaubert; that he made his début late in 1880, with a novel inserted in a small collection, published by Emile Zola and his young friends, under the title: "The Soirées of Medan"; that subsequently he did not fail to publish stories and romances every year up to 1891, when a disease of the brain struck him down in the fullness of production; and that he died, finally, in 1893, without having recovered his reason.

We know, too, that he passionately loved a strenuous physical life and long journeys, particularly long journeys upon the sea. He owned a little sailing yacht, named after one of his books, "Bel-Ami," in which he used to sojourn for weeks and months. These meager details are almost the only ones that have been gathered as food for the curiosity of the public.

I leave the legendary side, which is always in evidence in the case of a celebrated man,—that gossip, for example, which avers that Maupassant was a high liver and a worldling. The very number of his volumes is a protest to the contrary. One could not write so large a number of pages in so small a number of years without the virtue of industry, a virtue incompatible with habits of dissipation. This does not mean that the writer of these great romances had no love for pleasure and had not tasted the world, but that for him these were secondary things. The psychology of his work ought, then, to find an interpretation other than that afforded by wholly false or exaggerated anecdotes. I wish to indicate here how this work, illumined by the three or four positive data which I have given, appears to me to demand it.

And first, what does that anxiety to conceal his personality prove, carried as it was to such an extreme degree? The answer rises spontaneously in the minds of those

who have studied closely the history of literature. The absolute silence about himself, preserved by one whose position among us was that of a Tourgenief, or of a Mérimée, and of a Molière or a Shakespeare among the classic great, reveals, to a person of instinct, a nervous sensibility of extreme depth. There are many chances for an artist of his kind, however timid, or for one who has some grief, to show the depth of his emotion. To take up again only two of the names just cited, this was the case with the author of "Terres Vierges," and with the writer of "Colomba."

A somewhat minute analysis of the novels and romances of Maupassant would suffice to demonstrate, even if we did not know the nature of the incidents which prompted them, that he also suffered from an excess of nervous emotionalism. Nine times out of ten, what is the subject of these stories to which freedom of style gives the appearance of health? A tragic episode. I cite, at random, "Mademoiselle Fifi," "La Petite Roque," "Inutile Beauté," "Le Masque," "Le Horla," "L'Épreuve," "Le Champ d'Oliviers," among the novels, and among the romances, "Une Vie," "Pierre et Jean," "Fort comme la Mort," "Notre Cœur." His imagination aims to represent the human being as imprisoned in a situation at once insupportable and inevitable. The spell of this grief and trouble exerts such a power upon the writer that he ends stories commenced in pleasantry with some sinister drama. Let me instance "Saint-Antonin," "A Midnight Revel," "The Little Cask," and "Old Amable." You close the book at the end of these vigorous sketches, and feel how surely they point to constant suffering on the part of him who executed them.

This is the leading trait in the literary physiognomy of Maupassant, as it is the leading and most profound trait in the psychology of his work, viz., that human life is a snare laid by nature, where joy is always changed to misery, where noble words and the highest professions of faith serve the lowest plans and the most cruel egoism, where chagrin, crime, and folly are forever on hand to pursue implacably our hopes, nullify our virtues, and annihilate our wisdom. But this is not the whole.

Maupassant has been called a literary nihilist—but (and this is the second trait of his singular genius) in him nihilism finds itself coexistent with an animal energy so fresh and so intense that for a long time it deceives the closest observer. In an eloquent discourse, pronounced over his premature grave, Emile Zola well defined this illusion: "We congratulated him," said he, "upon that health which seemed unbreakable, and justly credited him with the soundest constitution of our band, as well as with the clearest mind and the sanest reason. It was then that this frightful thunderbolt destroyed him."

It is not exact to say that the lofty genius of De Maupassant was that of an absolutely sane man. We comprehend it to-day, and, on re-reading him, we find traces everywhere of his final malady. But it is exact to say that this wounded genius was, by a singular circumstance, the genius of a robust man. A physiologist would without doubt explain this anomaly by the coexistence of a nervous lesion, light at first, with a muscular, athletic temperament. Whatever the cause, the effect is undeniable. The skilled and dainty pessimism of De Maupassant was accompanied by a vigor and physique very unusual. His sensations are in turn those of a hunter and of a sailor, who have, as the old French saying expressively puts it, "swift foot, eagle eye," and who are attuned to all the whisperings of nature.

The only confidences that he has ever permitted his pen to tell of the intoxication of a free, animal existence are in the opening pages of the story entitled "Mouche," where he recalls, among the sweetest memories of his youth, his rollicking canoe parties upon the Seine, and in the description in "La Vie Errante" of a night spent on the sea,—"to be alone upon the water under the sky, through a warm night,"—in which he speaks of the happiness of those "who receive sensations through the whole surface of their flesh, as they do through their eyes, their mouth, their ears, and sense of smell."

His unique and too scanty collection of verses, written in early youth, contains the

two most fearless, I was going to say the most ingenuous, paeans, perhaps, that have been written since the Renaissance: "At the Water's Edge" (Au Bord de l'Eau) and the "Rustic Venus" (La Venus Rustique). But here is a paganism whose ardor, by a contrast which brings up the ever present duality of his nature, ends in an inexpressible shiver of scorn:

"We look at each other, astonished, immovable, And both are so pale that it makes us fear." * * * * * * * * "Alas! through all our senses slips life itself away."

This ending of the "Water's Edge" is less sinister than the murder and the vision of horror which terminate the pantheistic hymn of the "Rustic Venus." Considered as documents revealing the cast of mind of him who composed them, these two lyrical essays are especially significant, since they were spontaneous. They explain why De Maupassant, in the early years of production, voluntarily chose, as the heroes of his stories, creatures very near to primitive existence, peasants, sailors, poachers, girls of the farm, and the source of the vigor with which he describes these rude figures. The robustness of his animalism permits him fully to imagine all the simple sensations of these beings, while his pessimism, which tinges these sketches of brutal customs with an element of delicate scorn, preserves him from coarseness. It is this constant and involuntary antithesis which gives unique value to those Norman scenes which have contributed so much to his glory. It corresponds to those two contradictory tendencies in literary art, which seek always to render life in motion with the most intense coloring, and still to make more and more subtle the impression of this life. How is one ambition to be satisfied at the same time as the other, since all gain in color and movement brings about a diminution of sensibility, and conversely? The paradox of his constitution permitted to Maupassant this seemingly impossible accord, aided as he was by an intellect whose influence was all powerful upon his development—the writer I mention above, Gustave Flaubert.

These meetings of a pupil and a master, both great, are indeed rare. They present, in

fact, some troublesome conditions, the first of which is a profound analogy between two types of thought. There must have been, besides, a reciprocity of affection, which does not often obtain between a renowned senior who is growing old and an obscure junior, whose renown is increasing. From generation to generation, envy reascends no less than she redescends. For the honor of French men of letters, let us add that this exceptional phenomenon has manifested itself twice in the nineteenth century. Mérimée, whom I have also named, received from Stendhal, at twenty, the same benefits that Maupassant received from Flaubert.

The author of "Une Vie" and the writer of "Clara Jozul" resemble each other, besides, in a singular and analogous circumstance. Both achieved renown at the first blow, and by a masterpiece which they were able to equal but never surpass. Both were misanthropes early in life, and practised to the end the ancient advice that the disciple of Beyle carried upon his seal: μεμνήσο απιστεῖν—"Remember to distrust." And, at the same time, both had delicate, tender hearts under this affectation of cynicism, both were excellent sons, irreproachable friends, indulgent masters, and both were idolized by their inferiors. Both were worldly, yet still loved a wanderer's life; both joined to a constant taste for luxury an irresistible desire for solitude. Both belonged to the extreme left of the literature of their epoch, but kept themselves from excess and used with a judgment marvelously sure the sounder principles of their school. They knew how to remain lucid and classic, in taste as much as in form—Mérimée through all the audacity of a fancy most exotic, and Maupassant in the realism of the most varied and exact observation. At a little distance they appear to be two patterns, identical in certain traits, of the same family of minds, and Tourgenief, who knew and loved the one and the other, never failed to class them as brethren.

They are separated, however, by profound differences, which perhaps belong less to their nature than to that of the masters from whom they received their impulses: Stendhal, so alert, so mobile, after a youth passed in war and a ripe age spent in

vagabond journeys, rich in experiences, immediate and personal; Flaubert so poor in direct impressions, so paralyzed by his health, by his family, by his theories even, and so rich in reflections, for the most part solitary.

Among the theories of the anatomist of "Madame Bovary," there are two which appear without ceasing in his Correspondence, under one form or another, and these are the ones which are most strongly evident in the art of De Maupassant. We now see the consequences which were inevitable by reason of them, endowed as Maupassant was with a double power of feeling life bitterly, and at the same time with so much of animal force. The first theory bears upon the choice of personages and the story of the romance, the second upon the character of the style. The son of a physician, and brought up in the rigors of scientific method, Flaubert believed this method to be efficacious in art as in science. For instance, in the writing of a romance, he seemed to be as scientific as in the development of a history of customs, in which the essential is absolute exactness and local color. He therefore naturally wished to make the most scrupulous and detailed observation of the environment.

Thus is explained the immense labor in preparation which his stories cost him—the story of "Madame Bovary," of "The Sentimental Education," and "Bouvard and Pécuchet," documents containing as much minutiæ as his historical stories. Beyond everything he tried to select details that were eminently significant. Consequently he was of the opinion that the romance writer should discard all that lessened this significance, that is, extraordinary events and singular heroes. The exceptional personage, it seemed to him, should be suppressed, as should also high dramatic incident, since, produced by causes less general, these have a range more restricted. The truly scientific romance writer, proposing to paint a certain class, will attain his end more effectively if he incarnate personages of the middle order, and, consequently, paint traits common to that class. And not only middle-class traits, but middle-class adventures.

From this point of view, examine the three great romances of the Master from Rouen, and you will see that he has not lost sight of this first and greatest principle of his art, any more than he has of the second, which was that these documents should be drawn up in prose of absolutely perfect technique. We know with what passionate care he worked at his phrases, and how indefatigably he changed them over and over again. Thus he satisfied that instinct of beauty which was born of his romantic soul, while he gratified the demand of truth which inhered from his scientific training by his minute and scrupulous exactness.

The theory of the mean of truth on one side, as the foundation of the subject,—"the humble truth," as he termed it at the beginning of "Une Vie,"—and of the agonizing of beauty on the other side, in composition, determines the whole use that Maupassant made of his literary gifts. It helped to make more intense and more systematic that dainty yet dangerous pessimism which in him was innate. The middle-class personage, in wearisome society like ours, is always a caricature, and the happenings are nearly always vulgar. When one studies a great number of them, one finishes by looking at humanity from the angle of disgust and despair. The philosophy of the romances and novels of De Maupassant is so continuously and profoundly surprising that one becomes overwhelmed by it. It reaches limitation; it seems to deny that man is susceptible to grandeur, or that motives of a superior order can uplift and ennoble the soul, but it does so with a sorrow that is profound. All that portion of the sentimental and moral world which in itself is the highest remains closed to it.

In revenge, this philosophy finds itself in a relation cruelly exact with the half-civilization of our day. By that I mean the poorly educated individual who has rubbed against knowledge enough to justify a certain egoism, but who is too poor in faculty to conceive an ideal, and whose native grossness is corrupted beyond redemption. Under his blouse, or under his coat—whether he calls himself Renardet, as does the foul assassin in "Petite Roque," or Duroy, as does the sly hero of

"Bel-Ami," or Bretigny, as does the vile seducer of "Mont Oriol," or Césaire, the son of Old Amable in the novel of that name,—this degraded type abounds in Maupassant's stories, evoked with a ferocity almost jovial where it meets the robustness of temperament which I have pointed out, a ferocity which gives them a reality more exact still because the half-civilized person is often impulsive and, in consequence, the physical easily predominates. There, as elsewhere, the degenerate is everywhere a degenerate who gives the impression of being an ordinary man.

There are quantities of men of this stamp in large cities. No writer has felt and expressed this complex temperament with more justice than De Maupassant, and, as he was an infinitely careful observer of milieu and landscape and all that constitutes a precise middle distance, his novels can be considered an irrefutable record of the social classes which he studied at a certain time and along certain lines. The Norman peasant and the Provençal peasant, for example; also the small officeholder, the gentleman of the provinces, the country squire, the clubman of Paris, the journalist of the boulevard, the doctor at the spa, the commercial artist, and, on the feminine side, the servant girl, the working girl, the demi-grisette, the street girl, rich or poor, the gallant lady of the city and of the provinces, and the society woman—these are some of the figures that he has painted at many sittings, and whom he used to such effect that the novels and romances in which they are painted have come to be history. Just as it is impossible to comprehend the Rome of the Cæsars without the work of Petronius, so is it impossible to fully comprehend the France of 1850-90 without these stories of Maupassant. They are no more the whole image of the country than the "Satyricon" was the whole image of Rome, but what their author has wished to paint, he has painted to the life and with a brush that is graphic in the extreme.

If Maupassant had only painted, in general fashion, the characters and the phase of literature mentioned, he would not be distinguished from other writers of the group called "naturalists." His true glory is in the extraordinary superiority of his art. He

did not invent it, and his method is not alien to that of "Madame Bovary," but he knew how to give it a suppleness, a variety, and a freedom which were always wanting in Flaubert. The latter, in his best pages, is always strained. To use the expressive metaphor of the Greek athletes, he "smells of the oil." When one recalls that when attacked by hysteric epilepsy, Flaubert postponed the crisis of the terrible malady by means of sedatives, this strained atmosphere of labor—I was going to say of stupor—which pervades his work is explained. He is an athlete, a runner, but one who drags at his feet a terrible weight. He is in the race only for the prize of effort, an effort of which every motion reveals the intensity.

Maupassant, on the other hand, if he suffered from a nervous lesion, gave no sign of it, except in his heart. His intelligence was bright and lively, and above all, his imagination, served by senses always on the alert, preserved for some years an astonishing freshness of direct vision. If his art was due to Flaubert, it is no more belittling to him than if one call Raphael an imitator of Perugini.

Like Flaubert, he excelled in composing a story, in distributing the facts with subtle gradation, in bringing in at the end of a familiar dialogue something startlingly dramatic; but such composition, with him, seems easy, and while the descriptions are marvelously well established in his stories, the reverse is true of Flaubert's, which always appear a little veneered. Maupassant's phrasing, however dramatic it may be, remains easy and flowing.

Maupassant always sought for large and harmonious rhythm in his deliberate choice of terms, always chose sound, wholesome language, with a constant care for technical beauty. Inheriting from his master an instrument already forged, he wielded it with a surer skill. In the quality of his style, at once so firm and clear, so gorgeous yet so sober, so supple and so firm, he equals the writers of the seventeenth century. His method, so deeply and simply French, succeeds in giving an indescribable "tang" to his descriptions. If observation from nature imprints upon

his tales the strong accent of reality, the prose in which they are shrined so conforms to the genius of the race as to smack of the soil.

It is enough that the critics of to-day place Guy de Maupassant among our classic writers. He has his place in the ranks of pure French genius, with the Regniers, the La Fontaines, the Molières. And those signs of secret ill divined everywhere under this wholesome prose surround it for those who knew and loved him with a pathos that is inexpressible.

Paul Bourget

INTRODUCTION

Born in the middle year of the nineteenth century, and fated unfortunately never to see its close, Guy de Maupassant was probably the most versatile and brilliant among the galaxy of novelists who enriched French literature between the years 1800 and 1900. Poetry, drama, prose of short and sustained effort, and volumes of travel and description, each sparkling with the same minuteness of detail and brilliancy of style, flowed from his pen during the twelve years of his literary life.

Although his genius asserted itself in youth, he had the patience of the true artist, spending his early manhood in cutting and polishing the facets of his genius under the stern though paternal mentorship of Gustave Flaubert. Not until he had attained the age of thirty did he venture on publication, challenging criticism for the first time with a volume of poems.

Many and various have been the judgments passed upon Maupassant's work. But now that the perspective of time is lengthening, enabling us to form a more deliberate and therefore a juster, view of his complete achievement, we are driven irresistibly to the conclusion that the force that shaped and swayed Maupassant's prose writings was the conviction that in life there could be no phase so noble or so mean, so honorable or so contemptible, so lofty or so low as to be unworthy of chronicling,—no groove of human virtue or fault, success or failure, wisdom or folly

that did not possess its own peculiar psychological aspect and therefore demanded analysis.

To this analysis Maupassant brought a facile and dramatic pen, a penetration as searching as a probe, and a power of psychological vision that in its minute detail, now pathetic, now ironical, in its merciless revelation of the hidden springs of the human heart, whether of aristocrat, bourgeois, peasant, or priest, allow one to call him a Meissonier in words.

The school of romantic realism which was founded by Mérimée and Balzac found its culmination in De Maupassant. He surpassed his mentor, Flaubert, in the breadth and vividness of his work, and one of the greatest of modern French critics has recorded the deliberate opinion, that of all Taine's pupils Maupassant had the greatest command of language and the most finished and incisive style. Robust in imagination and fired with natural passion, his psychological curiosity kept him true to human nature, while at the same time his mental eye, when fixed upon the most ordinary phases of human conduct, could see some new motive or aspect of things hitherto unnoticed by the careless crowd.

It has been said by casual critics that Maupassant lacked one quality indispensable to the production of truly artistic work, viz.: an absolutely normal, that is, moral, point of view. The answer to this criticism is obvious. No dissector of the gamut of human passion and folly in all its tones could present aught that could be called new, if ungifted with a view-point totally out of the ordinary plane. Cold and merciless in the use of this point de vue De Maupassant undoubtedly is, especially in such vivid depictions of love, both physical and maternal, as we find in "L'histoire d'une fille de ferme" and "La femme de Paul." But then the surgeon's scalpel never hesitates at giving pain, and pain is often the road to health and ease. Some of Maupassant's short stories are sermons more forcible than any moral dissertation could ever be.

Of De Maupassant's sustained efforts "Une Vie" may bear the palm. This romance

has the distinction of having changed Tolstoi from an adverse critic into a warm admirer of the author. To quote the Russian moralist upon the book:

"'Une Vie' is a romance of the best type, and in my judgment the greatest that has been produced by any French writer since Victor Hugo penned 'Les Misérables.' Passing over the force and directness of the narrative, I am struck by the intensity, the grace, and the insight with which the writer treats the new aspects of human nature which he finds in the life he describes."

And as if gracefully to recall a former adverse criticism, Tolstoi adds:

"I find in the book, in almost equal strength, the three cardinal qualities essential to great work, viz: moral purpose, perfect style, and absolute sincerity.... Maupassant is a man whose vision has penetrated the silent depths of human life, and from that vantage-ground interprets the struggle of humanity."

"Bel-Ami" appeared almost two years after "Une Vie," that is to say, about 1885. Discussed and criticised as it has been, it is in reality a satire, an indignant outburst against the corruption of society which in the story enables an ex-soldier, devoid of conscience, honor, even of the commonest regard for others, to gain wealth and rank. The purport of the story is clear to those who recognize the ideas that governed Maupassant's work, and even the hasty reader or critic, on reading "Mont Oriol," which was published two years later and is based on a combination of the motifs which inspired "Une Vie" and "Bel-Ami," will reconsider former hasty judgments, and feel, too, that beneath the triumph of evil which calls forth Maupassant's satiric anger there lies the substratum on which all his work is founded, viz: the persistent, ceaseless questioning of a soul unable to reconcile or explain the contradiction between love in life and inevitable death. Who can read in "Bel-Ami" the terribly graphic description of the consumptive journalist's demise, his frantic clinging to life, and his refusal to credit the slow and merciless approach of death, without feeling that the question asked at Naishapur many centuries ago is still waiting for

the solution that is always promised but never comes?

In the romances which followed, dating from 1888 to 1890, a sort of calm despair seems to have settled down upon De Maupassant's attitude toward life. Psychologically acute as ever, and as perfect in style and sincerity as before, we miss the note of anger. Fatality is the keynote, and yet, sounding low, we detect a genuine subtone of sorrow. Was it a prescience of 1893? So much work to be done, so much work demanded of him, the world of Paris, in all its brilliant and attractive phases, at his feet, and yet—inevitable, ever advancing death, with the question of life still unanswered.

This may account for some of the strained situations we find in his later romances. Vigorous in frame and hearty as he was, the atmosphere of his mental processes must have been vitiated to produce the dainty but dangerous pessimism that pervades some of his later work. This was partly a consequence of his honesty and partly of mental despair. He never accepted other people's views on the questions of life. He looked into such problems for himself, arriving at the truth, as it appeared to him, by the logic of events, often finding evil where he wished to find good, but never hoodwinking himself or his readers by adapting or distorting the reality of things to suit a preconceived idea.

Maupassant was essentially a worshiper of the eternal feminine. He was persuaded that without the continual presence of the gentler sex man's existence would be an emotionally silent wilderness. No other French writer has described and analyzed so minutely and comprehensively the many and various motives and moods that shape the conduct of a woman in life. Take for instance the wonderfully subtle analysis of a woman's heart as wife and mother that we find in "Une Vie." Could aught be more delicately incisive? Sometimes in describing the apparently inexplicable conduct of a certain woman he leads his readers to a point where a false step would destroy the spell and bring the reproach of banality and ridicule upon the tale. But the

catastrophe never occurs. It was necessary to stand poised upon the brink of the precipice to realize the depth of the abyss and feel the terror of the fall.

Closely allied to this phase of Maupassant's nature was the peculiar feeling of loneliness that every now and then breaks irresistibly forth in the course of some short story. Of kindly soul and genial heart, he suffered not only from the oppression of spirit caused by the lack of humanity, kindliness, sanity, and harmony which he encountered daily in the world at large, but he had an ever abiding sense of the invincible, unbanishable solitariness of his own Inmost self. I know of no more poignant expression of such a feeling than the cry of despair which rings out in the short story called "Solitude," in which he describes the insurmountable barrier which exists between man and man, or man and woman, however intimate the friendship between them. He could picture but one way of destroying this terrible loneliness, the attainment of a spiritual—a divine—state of love, a condition to which he would give no name utterable by human lips, lest it be profaned, but for which his whole being yearned. How acutely he felt his failure to attain his deliverance may be drawn from his wail that mankind has no universal measure of happiness.

"Each one of us," writes De Maupassant, "forms for himself an illusion through which he views the world, be it poetic, sentimental, joyous, melancholy, or dismal; an illusion of beauty, which is a human convention; of ugliness, which is a matter of opinion; of truth, which, alas, is never immutable." And he concludes by asserting that the happiest artist is he who approaches most closely to the truth of things as he sees them through his own particular illusion.

Salient points in De Maupassant's genius were that he possessed the rare faculty of holding direct communion with his gifts, and of writing from their dictation as it was interpreted by his senses. He had no patience with writers who in striving to present life as a whole purposely omit episodes that reveal the influence of the senses. "As well," he says, "refrain from describing the effect of intoxicating perfumes upon

man as omit the influence of beauty on the temperament of man."

De Maupassant's dramatic instinct was supremely powerful. He seems to select unerringly the one thing in which the soul of the scene is prisoned, and, making that his keynote, gives a picture in words which haunt the memory like a strain of music. The description of the ride of Madame Tellier and her companions in a country cart through a Norman landscape is an admirable example. You smell the masses of the colza in blossom, you see the yellow carpets of ripe corn spotted here and there by the blue coronets of the cornflower, and rapt by the red blaze of the poppy beds and bathed in the fresh greenery of the landscape, you share in the emotions felt by the happy party in the country cart. And yet with all his vividness of description, De Maupassant is always sober and brief. He had the genius of condensation and the reserve which is innate in power, and to his reader could convey as much in a paragraph as could be expressed in a page by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Flaubert not excepted.

Apart from his novels, De Maupassant's tales may be arranged under three heads: Those that concern themselves with Norman peasant life; those that deal with Government employees (Maupassant himself had long been one) and the Paris middle classes, and those that represent the life of the fashionable world, as well as the weird and fantastic ideas of the later years of his career. Of these three groups the tales of the Norman peasantry perhaps rank highest. He depicts the Norman farmer in surprisingly free and bold strokes, revealing him in all his caution, astuteness, rough gaiety, and homely virtue.

The tragic stage of De Maupassant's life may, I think, be set down as beginning just before the drama of "Musotte" was issued, in conjunction with Jacques Normand, in 1891. He had almost given up the hope of interpreting his puzzles, and the struggle between the falsity of the life which surrounded him and the nobler visions which possessed him was wearing him out. Doubtless he resorted to unwise methods for

the dispelling of physical lassitude or for surcease from troubling mental problems. To this period belong such weird and horrible fancies as are contained in the short stories known as "He" and "The Diary of a Madman." Here and there, we know, were rising in him inklings of a finer and less sordid attitude 'twixt man and woman throughout the world and of a purer constitution of existing things which no exterior force should blemish or destroy. But with these yearningly prophetic gleams came a period of mental death. Then the physical veil was torn aside and for Guy de Maupassant the riddle of existence was answered.

Robert Arnot

NOTRE CŒUR

CHAPTER I.

THE INTRODUCTION

One day Massival, the celebrated composer of "Rebecca," who for fifteen years, now, had been known as "the young and illustrious master," said to his friend André Mariolle:

"Why is it that you have never secured a presentation to Mme. Michèle de Burne? Take my word for it, she is one of the most interesting women in new Paris."

"Because I do not feel myself at all adapted to her surroundings."

"You are wrong, my dear fellow. It is a house where there is a great deal of novelty and originality; it is wide-awake and very artistic. There is excellent music, and the conversation is as good as in the best salons of the last century. You would be highly appreciated—in the first place because you play so well on the violin, then because you have been very favorably spoken of in the house, and finally because you have the reputation of being select in your choice of friends."

Flattered, but still maintaining his attitude of resistance, supposing, moreover, that this urgent invitation was not given without the young woman being aware of it,

Mariolle ejaculated a "Bah! I shall not bother my head at all about it," in which, through the disdain that he intended to express, was evident his foregone acceptance.

Massival continued: "Would you like to have me present you some of these days? You are already known to her through all of us who are on terms of intimacy with her, for we talk about you often enough. She is a very pretty woman of twenty-eight, abounding in intelligence, who will never take a second husband, for her first venture was a very unfortunate one. She has made her abode a rendezvous for agreeable men. There are not too many club-men or society-men found there—just enough of them to give the proper effect. She will be delighted to have me introduce you."

Mariolle was vanquished; he replied: "Very well, then; one of these days."

At the beginning of the following week the musician came to his house and asked him: "Are you disengaged to-morrow?"

"Why, yes."

"Very well. I will take you to dine with Mme. de Burne; she requested me to invite you. Besides, here is a line from her."

After a few seconds' reflection, for form's sake, Mariolle answered: "That is settled!"

André Mariolle was about thirty-seven years old, a bachelor without a profession, wealthy enough to live in accordance with his likings, to travel, and even to indulge himself in collecting modern paintings and ancient knickknacks. He had the reputation of being a man of intelligence, rather odd and unsociable, a little capricious and disdainful, who affected the hermit through pride rather than through timidity. Very talented and acute, but indolent, quick to grasp the meaning of things, and capable, perhaps, of accomplishing something great, he had contented himself with enjoying life as a spectator, or rather as a dilettante. Had he been poor, he would doubtless have turned out to be a remarkable or celebrated man; born with a good income, he was eternally reproaching himself that he could never be anything

better than a nobody.

It is true that he had made more than one attempt in the direction of the arts, but they had lacked vigor. One had been in the direction of literature, by publishing a pleasing book of travels, abounding in incident and correct in style; one toward music by his violin-playing, in which he had gained, even among professional musicians, a respectable reputation; and, finally, one at sculpture, that art in which native aptitude and the faculty of rough-hewing striking and deceptive figures atone in the eyes of the ignorant for deficiencies in study and knowledge. His statuette in terra-cotta, "Masseur Tunisien," had even been moderately successful at the Salon of the preceding year. He was a remarkable horseman, and was also, it was said, an excellent fencer, although he never used the foils in public, owing, perhaps, to the same self-distrustful feeling which impelled him to absent himself from society resorts where serious rivalries were to be apprehended.

His friends appreciated him, however, and were unanimous in extolling his merits, perhaps for the reason that they had little to fear from him in the way of competition. It was said of him that in every case he was reliable, a devoted friend, extremely agreeable in manner, and very sympathetic in his personality.

Tall of stature, wearing his black beard short upon the cheeks and trained down to a fine point upon the chin, with hair that was beginning to turn gray but curled very prettily, he looked one straight in the face with a pair of clear, brown, piercing eyes in which lurked a shade of distrust and hardness.

Among his intimates he had an especial predilection for artists of every kind—among them Gaston de Lamarthe the novelist, Massival the musician, and the painters Jobin, Rivollet, De Mandol—who seemed to set a high value on his reason, his friendship, his intelligence, and even his judgment, although at bottom, with the vanity that is inseparable from success achieved, they set him down as a very agreeable and very intelligent man who had failed to score a success.

Mariolle's haughty reserve seemed to say: "I am nothing because I have not chosen to be anything." He lived within a narrow circle, therefore, disdaining gallantry and the great frequented salons, where others might have shone more brilliantly than he, and might have obliged him to take his place among the lay-figures of society. He visited only those houses where appreciation was extended to the solid qualities that he was unwilling to display; and though he had consented so readily to allow himself to be introduced to Mme. Michèle de Burne, the reason was that his best friends, those who everywhere proclaimed his hidden merits, were the intimates of this young woman.

She lived in a pretty entresol in the Rue du Général-Foy, behind the church of Saint Augustin. There were two rooms with an outlook on the street—the dining-room and a salon, the one in which she received her company indiscriminately—and two others that opened on a handsome garden of which the owner of the property had the enjoyment. Of the latter the first was a second salon of large dimensions, of greater length than width, with three windows opening on the trees, the leaves of which brushed against the awnings, a room which was embellished with furniture and ornaments exceptionally rare and simple, in the purest and soberest taste and of great value. The tables, the chairs, the little cupboards or étagères, the pictures, the fans and the porcelain figures beneath glass covers, the vases, the statuettes, the great clock fixed in the middle of a panel, the entire decoration of this young woman's apartment attracted and held attention by its shape, its age, or its elegance. To create for herself this home, of which she was almost as proud as she was of her own person, she had laid under contribution the knowledge, the friendship, the good nature, and the rummaging instinct of every artist of her acquaintance. She was rich and willing to pay well, and her friends had discovered for her many things, distinguished by originality, which the mere vulgar amateur would have passed by with contempt. Thus, with their assistance, she had furnished this dwelling, to which access was obtained with difficulty, and where she imagined that her friends

received more pleasure and returned more gladly than elsewhere.

It was even a favorite hobby of hers to assert that the colors of the curtains and hangings, the comfort of the seats, the beauty of form, and the gracefulness of general effect are of as much avail to charm, captivate, and acclimatize the eye as are pretty smiles. Sympathetic or antipathetic rooms, she would say, whether rich or poor, attract, hold, or repel, just like the people who live in them. They awake the feelings or stifle them, warm or chill the mind, compel one to talk or be silent, make one sad or cheerful; in a word, they give every visitor an unaccountable desire to remain or to go away.

About the middle of this dimly lighted gallery a grand piano, standing between two jardinières filled with flowers, occupied the place of honor and dominated the room. Beyond this a lofty door with two leaves opened gave access to the bedroom, which in turn communicated with a dressing-room, also very large and elegant, hung with chintz like a drawing-room in summer, where Mme. de Burne generally kept herself when she had no company.

Married to a well-mannered good-for-nothing, one of those domestic tyrants before whom everything must bend and yield, she had at first been very unhappy. For five years she had had to endure the unreasonable exactions, the harshness, the jealousy, even the violence of this intolerable master, and terrified, beside herself with astonishment, she had submitted without revolt to this revelation of married life, crushed as she was beneath the despotic and torturing will of the brutal man whose victim she had become.

He died one night, from an aneurism, as he was coming home, and when she saw the body of her husband brought in, covered with a sheet, unable to believe in the reality of this deliverance, she looked at his corpse with a deep feeling of repressed joy and a frightful dread lest she might show it.

Cheerful, independent, even exuberant by nature, very flexible and attractive, with

bright flashes of wit such as are shown in some incomprehensible way in the intellects of certain little girls of Paris, who seem to have breathed from their earliest childhood the stimulating air of the boulevards—where every evening, through the open doors of the theaters, the applause or the hisses that greet the plays come forth, borne on the air—she nevertheless retained from her five years of servitude a strange timidity grafted upon her old-time audacity, a great fear lest she might say too much, do too much, together with a burning desire for emancipation and a stern resolve never again to do anything to imperil her liberty.

Her husband, a man of the world, had trained her to receive like a mute slave, elegant, polite, and well dressed. The despot had numbered among his friends many artists, whom she had received with curiosity and listened to with delight, without ever daring to allow them to see how she understood and appreciated them.

When her period of mourning was ended she invited a few of them to dinner one evening. Two of them sent excuses; three accepted and were astonished to find a young woman of admirable intelligence and charming manners, who immediately put them at their ease and gracefully told them of the pleasure that they had afforded her in former days by coming to her house. From among her old acquaintances who had ignored her or failed to recognize her qualities she thus gradually made a selection according to her inclinations, and as a widow, an enfranchised woman, but one determined to maintain her good name, she began to receive all the most distinguished men of Paris whom she could bring together, with only a few women. The first to be admitted became her intimates, formed a nucleus, attracted others, and gave to the house the air of a small court, to which every habitué contributed either personal merit or a great name, for a few well-selected titles were mingled with the intelligence of the commonalty.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment over hers, served as her chaperon and "sheep-dog." An old beau, very elegant and witty, and extremely

attentive to his daughter, whom he treated rather as a lady acquaintance than as a daughter, he presided at the Thursday dinners that were quickly known and talked of in Paris, and to which invitations were much sought after. The requests for introductions and invitations came in shoals, were discussed, and very frequently rejected by a sort of vote of the inner council. Witty sayings that had their origin in this circle were quoted and obtained currency in the city. Actors, artists, and young poets made their débuts there, and received, as it were, the baptism of their future greatness. Longhaired geniuses, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, seated themselves at the piano and replaced the Hungarian violinists that Massival had presented, and foreign ballet-dancers gave the company a glimpse of their graceful steps before appearing at the Eden or the Folies-Bergères.

Mme. de Burne, over whom her friends kept jealous watch and ward and to whom the recollection of her commerce with the world under the auspices of marital authority was loathsome, was sufficiently wise not to enlarge the circle of her acquaintance to too great an extent. Satisfied and at the same time terrified as to what might be said and thought of her, she abandoned herself to her somewhat Bohemian inclinations with consummate prudence. She valued her good name, and was fearful of any rashness that might jeopardize it; she never allowed her fancies to carry her beyond the bounds of propriety, was moderate in her audacity and careful that no liaison or small love affair should ever be imputed to her.

All her friends had made love to her, more or less; none of them had been successful. They confessed it, admitted it to each other with surprise, for men never acknowledge, and perhaps they are right, the power of resistance of a woman who is her own mistress. There was a story current about her. It was said that at the beginning of their married life her husband had exhibited such revolting brutality toward her that she had been forever cured of the love of men. Her friends would often discuss the case at length. They inevitably arrived at the conclusion that a young girl who has been brought up in the dream of future tenderness and the

expectation of an awe-inspiring mystery must have all her ideas completely upset when her initiation into the new life is committed to a clown. That worldly philosopher, George de Maltry, would give a gentle sneer and add: "Her hour will strike; it always does for women like her, and the longer it is in coming the louder it strikes. With our friend's artistic tastes, she will wind up by falling in love with a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe's ideas upon the subject were quite different. As a novelist, observer, and psychologist, devoted to the study of the inhabitants of the world of fashion, of whom he drew ironical and lifelike portraits, he claimed to analyze and know women with infallible and unique penetration. He put Mme. de Burne down among those flighty creatures of the time, the type of whom he had given in his interesting novel, "Une d'Elles." He had been the first to diagnose this new race of women, distracted by the nerves of reasoning, hysterical patients, drawn this way and that by a thousand contradictory whims which never ripen into desires, disillusioned of everything, without having enjoyed anything, thanks to the times, to the way of living, and to the modern novel, and who, destitute of all ardor and enthusiasm, seem to combine in their persons the capricious, spoiled child and the old, withered sceptic. But he, like the rest of them, had failed in his love-making.

For all the faithful of the group had in turn been lovers of Mme. de Burne, and after the crisis had retained their tenderness and their emotion in different degrees. They had gradually come to form a sort of little church; she was its Madonna, of whom they conversed constantly among themselves, subject to her charm even when she was not present. They praised, extolled, criticised, or disparaged her, according as she had manifested irritation or gentleness, aversion or preference. They were continually displaying their jealousy of each other, played the spy on each other a little, and above all kept their ranks well closed up, so that no rival might get near her who could give them any cause for alarm.

These assiduous ones were few in number: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, big Fresnel, George de Maltry, a fashionable young philosopher, celebrated for his paradoxes, for his eloquent and involved erudition that was always up to date though incomprehensible even to the most impassioned of his female admirers, and for his clothes, which were selected with as much care as his theories. To this tried band she had added a few more men of the world who had a reputation for wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil, and two or three others.

The two privileged characters of this chosen battalion seemed to be Massival and Lamarthe, who, it appears, had the gift of being always able to divert the young woman by their artistic unceremoniousness, their chaff, and the way they had of making fun of everybody, even of herself, a little, when she was in humor to tolerate it. The care, whether natural or assumed, however, that she took never to manifest a marked and prolonged predilection for any one of her admirers, the unconstrained air with which she practiced her coquetry and the real impartiality with which she dispensed her favors maintained between them a friendship seasoned with hostility and an alertness of wit that made them entertaining.

One of them would sometimes play a trick on the others by presenting a friend; but as this friend was never a very celebrated or very interesting man, the rest would form a league against him and quickly send him away.

It was in this way that Massival brought his comrade André Mariolle to the house. A servant in black announced these names: "Monsieur Massival! Monsieur Mariolle!"

Beneath a great rumpled cloud of pink silk, a huge shade that was casting down upon a square table with a top of ancient marble the brilliant light of a lamp supported by a lofty column of gilded bronze, one woman's head and three men's heads were bent over an album that Lamarthe had brought in with him. Standing between them, the novelist was turning the leaves and explaining the pictures.

As they entered the room, one of the heads was turned toward them, and Mariolle, as

he stepped forward, became conscious of a bright, blond face, rather tending to ruddiness, upon the temples of which the soft, fluffy locks of hair seemed to blaze with the flame of burning brushwood. The delicate retroussé nose imparted a smiling expression to this countenance, and the clean-cut mouth, the deep dimples in the cheeks, and the rather prominent cleft chin, gave it a mocking air, while the eyes, by a strange contrast, veiled it in melancholy. They were blue, of a dull, dead blue as if they had been washed out, scoured, used up, and in the center the black pupils shone, round and dilated. The strange and brilliant glances that they emitted seemed to tell of dreams of morphine, or perhaps, more simply, of the coquettish artifice of belladonna.

Mme. de Burne arose, gave her hand, thanked and welcomed them.

"For a long time I have been begging my friends to bring you to my house," she said to Mariolle, "but I always have to tell these things over and over again in order to get them done."

She was tall, elegantly shaped, rather deliberate in her movements, modestly décolletée, scarcely showing the tips of her handsome shoulders, the shoulders of a red-headed woman, that shone out marvelously under the light. And yet her hair was not red, but of the inexpressible color of certain dead leaves that have been burned by the frosts of autumn.

She presented M. Mariolle to her father, who bowed and shook hands.

The men were conversing familiarly together in three groups; they seemed to be at home, in a kind of club that they were accustomed to frequent, to which the presence of a woman imparted a note of refinement.

Big Fresnel was chatting with the Comte de Marantin. Fresnel's frequent visits to this house and the preference that Mme. de Burne evinced for him shocked and often provoked her friends. Still young, but with the proportions of a drayman, always puffing and blowing, almost beardless, his head lost in a vague cloud of

light, soft hair, commonplace, tiresome, ridiculous, he certainly could have but one merit in the young woman's eyes, a merit that was displeasing to the others but indispensable to her,—that of loving her blindly. He had received the nickname of "The Seal." He was married, but never said anything about bringing his wife to the house. It was said that she was very jealous in her seclusion.

Lamarthe and Massival especially evinced their indignation at the evident sympathy of their friend for this windy person, and when they could no longer refrain from reproaching her with this reprehensible inclination, this selfish and vulgar liking, she would smile and answer:

"I love him as I would love a great, big, faithful dog."

George de Maltry was entertaining Gaston de Lamarthe with the most recent discovery, not yet fully developed, of the micro-biologists. M. de Maltry was expatiating on his theme with many subtile and far-reaching theories, and the novelist accepted them enthusiastically, with the facility with which men of letters receive and do not dispute everything that appears to them original and new.

The philosopher of "high life," fair, of the fairness of linen, slender and tall, was incased in a coat that fitted very closely about the hips. Above, his pale, intelligent face emerged from his white collar and was surmounted by smooth, blond hair, which had the appearance of being glued on.

As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe, to whom the particle that divided his name had imparted some of the pretensions of a gentleman and man of the world, he was first, last, and all the time a man of letters, a terrible and pitiless man of letters. Provided with an eye that gathered in images, attitudes, and gestures with the rapidity and accuracy of the photographer's camera, and endowed with penetration and the novelist's instinct, which were as innate in him as the faculty of scent is in a hound, he was busy from morning till night storing away impressions to be used afterward in his profession. With these two very simple senses, a distinct idea of

form and an intuitive one of substance, he gave to his books, in which there appeared none of the ordinary aims of psychological writers, the color, the tone, the appearance, the movement of life itself.

Each one of his novels as it appeared excited in society curiosity, conjecture, merriment, or wrath, for there always seemed to be prominent persons to be recognized in them, only faintly disguised under a torn mask; and whenever he made his way through a crowded salon he left a wake of uneasiness behind him. Moreover, he had published a volume of personal recollections, in which he had given the portraits of many men and women of his acquaintance, without any clearly defined intention of unkindness, but with such precision and severity that they felt sore over it. Some one had applied to him the sobriquet, "Beware of your friends." He kept his secrets close-locked within his breast and was a puzzle to his intimates. He was reputed to have once passionately loved a woman who caused him much suffering, and it was said that after that he wreaked his vengeance upon others of her sex.

Massival and he understood each other very well, although the musician was of a very different disposition, more frank, more expansive, less harassed, perhaps, but manifestly more impressible. After two great successes—a piece performed at Brussels and afterward brought to Paris, where it was loudly applauded at the Opéra-Comique; then a second work that was received and interpreted at the Grand Opéra as soon as offered—he had yielded to that species of cessation of impulse that seems to smite the greater part of our contemporary artists like premature paralysis. They do not grow old, as their fathers did, in the midst of their renown and success, but seem threatened with impotence even when in the very prime of life. Lamarthe was accustomed to say: "At the present day there are in France only great men who have gone wrong."

Just at this time Massival seemed very much smitten with Mme. de Burne, so that

every eye was turned upon him when he kissed her hand with an air of adoration. He inquired:

"Are we late?"

She replied:

"No, I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"Ah, the Marquise! What good luck! We shall have some music this evening, then."

"I hope so."

The two laggards made their appearance. The Marquise, a woman perhaps a little too diminutive, Italian by birth, of a lively disposition, with very black eyes and eyelashes, black eyebrows, and black hair to match, which grew so thick and so low down that she had no forehead to speak of, her eyes even being threatened with invasion, had the reputation of possessing the most remarkable voice of all the women in society.

The Baron, a very gentlemanly man, hollow-chested and with a large head, was never really himself unless he had his violoncello in his hands. He was a passionate melomaniac, and only frequented those houses where music received its due share of honor.

Dinner was announced, and Mme. de Burne, taking André Mariolle's arm, allowed her guests to precede her to the dining-room; then, as they were left together, the last ones in the drawing-room, just as she was about to follow the procession she cast upon him an oblique, swift glance from her pale eyes with their dusky pupils, in which he thought that he could perceive more complexity of thought and more curiosity of interest than pretty women generally bestow upon a strange gentleman when receiving him at dinner for the first time.

The dinner was monotonous and rather dull. Lamarthe was nervous, and seemed ill disposed toward everyone, not openly hostile, for he made a point of his

good-breeding, but displaying that almost imperceptible bad humor that takes the life out of conversation. Massival, abstracted and preoccupied, ate little, and from time to time cast furtive glances at the mistress of the house, who seemed to be in any place rather than at her own table. Inattentive, responding to remarks with a smile and then allowing her face to settle back to its former intent expression, she appeared to be reflecting upon something that seemed greatly to preoccupy her, and to interest her that evening more than did her friends. Still she contributed her share to the conversation—very amply as regarded the Marquise and Mariolle,—but she did it from habit, from a sense of duty, visibly absent from herself and from her abode. Fresnel and M. de Maltry disputed over contemporary poetry. Fresnel held the opinions upon poetry that are current among men of the world, and M. de Maltry the perceptions of the spinners of most complicated verse—verse that is incomprehensible to the general public.

Several times during the dinner Mariolle had again encountered the young woman's inquiring look, but more vague, less intent, less curious. The Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin, and the Baron de Gravil were the only ones who kept up an uninterrupted conversation, and they had quantities of things to say.

After dinner, during the course of the evening, Massival, who had kept growing more and more melancholy, seated himself at the piano and struck a few notes, whereupon Mme. de Burne appeared to awake and quickly organized a little concert, the numbers of which comprised the pieces that she was most fond of.

The Marquise was in voice, and, animated by Massival's presence, she sang like a real artist. The master accompanied her, with that dreamy look that he always assumed when he sat down to play. His long hair fell over the collar of his coat and mingled with his full, fine, shining, curling beard. Many women had been in love with him, and they still pursued him with their attentions, so it was said. Mme. de Burne, sitting by the piano and listening with all her soul, seemed to be

contemplating him and at the same time not to see him, and Mariolle was a little jealous. He was not particularly jealous because of any relation that there was between her and him, but in presence of that look of a woman fixed so intently upon one of the Illustrious he felt himself humiliated in his masculine vanity by the consciousness of the rank that They bestow on us in proportion to the renown that we have gained. Often before this he had secretly suffered from contact with famous men whom he was accustomed to meet in the presence of those beings whose favor is by far the dearest reward of success.

About ten o'clock the Comtesse de Frémines and two Jewesses of the financial community arrived, one after the other. The talk was of a marriage that was on the carpet and a threatened divorce suit. Mariolle looked at Madame de Burne, who was now seated beneath a column that sustained a huge lamp. Her well-formed, tip-tilted nose, the dimples in her cheeks, and the little indentation that parted her chin gave her face the frolicsome expression of a child, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and something in her glance that reminded one of a withering flower cast a shade of melancholy over her countenance. Beneath the light that streamed upon it her skin took on tones of blond velvet, while her hair actually seemed colored by the autumnal sun which dyes and scorches the dead leaves.

She was conscious of the masculine glance that was traveling toward her from the other end of the room, and presently she arose and went to him, smiling, as if in response to a summons from him.

"I am afraid you are somewhat bored," she said. "A person who has not got the run of a house is always bored."

He protested the contrary. She took a chair and seated herself by him, and at once the conversation began to be animated. It was instantaneous with both of them, like a fire that blazes up brightly as soon as a match is applied to it. It seemed as if they had imparted their sensations and their opinions to each other beforehand, as if a

similarity of disposition and education, of tastes and inclinations, had predisposed them to a mutual understanding and fated them to meet.

Perhaps there may have been a little artfulness on the part of the young woman, but the delight that one feels in encountering one who is capable of listening, who can understand you and reply to you and whose answers give scope for your repartees, put Mariolle into a fine glow of spirits. Flattered, moreover, by the reception which she had accorded him, subjugated by the alluring favor that she displayed and by the charm which she knew how to use so adroitly in captivating men, he did his best to exhibit to her that shade of subdued but personal and delicate wit which, when people came to know him well, had gained for him so many and such warm friendships.

She suddenly said to him:

"Really, it is very pleasant to converse with you, Monsieur. I had been told that such was the case, however."

He was conscious that he was blushing, and replied at a venture:

"And I had been told, Madame, that you were——"

She interrupted him:

"Say a coquette. I am a good deal of a coquette with people whom I like. Everyone knows it, and I do not attempt to conceal it from myself, but you will see that I am very impartial in my coquetry, and this allows me to keep or to recall my friends without ever losing them, and to retain them all about me."

She said this with a sly air which was meant to say: "Be easy and don't be too presumptuous. Don't deceive yourself, for you will get nothing more than the others."

He replied:

"That is what you might call warning your guests of the perils that await them here.

Thank you, Madame: I greatly admire your mode of procedure."

She had opened the way for him to speak of herself, and he availed himself of it. He began by paying her compliments and found that she was fond of them; then he aroused her woman's curiosity by telling her what was said of her in the different houses that he frequented. She was rather uneasy and could not conceal her desire for further information, although she affected much indifference as to what might be thought of herself and her tastes. He drew for her a charming portrait of a superior, independent, intelligent, and attractive woman, who had surrounded herself with a court of eminent men and still retained her position as an accomplished member of society. She disclaimed his compliments with smiles, with little disclaimers of gratified egotism, all the while taking much pleasure in the details that he gave her, and in a playful tone kept constantly asking him for more, questioning him artfully, with a sensual appetite for flattery.

As he looked at her, he said to himself, "She is nothing but a child at heart, just like all the rest of them"; and he went on to finish a pretty speech in which he was commending her love for art, so rarely found among women. Then she assumed an air of mockery that he had not before suspected in her, that playfully tantalizing manner that seems inherent in the French. Mariolle had overdone his eulogy; she let him know that she was not a fool.

"Mon Dieu!" she said, "I will confess to you that I am not quite certain whether it is art or artists that I love."

He replied: "How could one love artists without being in love with art?"

"Because they are sometimes more comical than men of the world."

"Yes, but they have more unpleasant failings."

"That is true."

"Then you do not love music?"

She suddenly dropped her bantering tone. "Excuse me! I adore music; I think that I am more fond of it than of anything else. And yet Massival is convinced that I know nothing at all about it."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, but he thinks so."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! we women guess at almost everything that we don't know."

"So Massival thinks that you know nothing of music?"

"I am sure of it. I can see it only by the way that he has of explaining things to me, by the way in which he underscores little niceties of expression, all the while saying to himself: 'That won't be of any use, but I do it because you are so nice.'"

"Still he has told me that you have the best music in your house of any in Paris, no matter whose the other may be."

"Yes, thanks to him."

"And literature, are you not fond of that?"

"I am very fond of it; and I am even so audacious as to claim to have a very good perception of it, notwithstanding Lamarthe's opinion."

"Who also decides that you know nothing at all about it?"

"Of course."

"But who has not told you so in words, any more than the other."

"Pardon me; he is more outspoken. He asserts that certain women are capable of showing a very just and delicate perception of the sentiments that are expressed, of the truthfulness of the characters, of psychology in general, but that they are totally incapable of discerning the superiority that resides in his profession, its art. When he has once uttered this word, Art, all that is left one to do is to show him the door."

Mariolle smiled and asked:

"And you, Madame, what do you think of it?"

She reflected for a few seconds, then looked him straight in the face to see if he was in a frame of mind to listen and to understand her.

"I believe that sentiment, you understand—sentiment—can make a woman's mind receptive of everything; only it is frequently the case that what enters does not remain there. Do you follow me?"

"No, not fully, Madame."

"Very well! To make us comprehensive to the same degree as you, our woman's nature must be appealed to before addressing our intelligence. We take no interest in what a man has not first made sympathetic to us, for we look at all things through the medium of sentiment. I do not say through the medium of love; no,—but of sentiment, which has shades, forms, and manifestations of every sort. Sentiment is something that belongs exclusively to our domain, which you men have no conception of, for it befogs you while it enlightens us. Oh! I know that all this is incomprehensible to you, the more the pity! In a word, if a man loves us and is agreeable to us, for it is indispensable that we should feel that we are loved in order to become capable of the effort—and if this man is a superior being, by taking a little pains he can make us feel, know, and possess everything, everything, I say, and at odd moments and by bits impart to us the whole of his intelligence. That is all often blotted out afterward; it disappears, dies out, for we are forgetful. Oh! we forget as the wind forgets the words that are spoken to it. We are intuitive and capable of enlightenment, but changeable, impressionable, readily swayed by our surroundings. If I could only tell you how many states of mind I pass through that make of me entirely different women, according to the weather, my health, what I may have been reading, what may have been said to me! Actually there are days when I have the feelings of an excellent mother without children, and others when I

almost have those of a cocotte without lovers."

Greatly pleased, he asked: "Is it your opinion that intelligent women generally are gifted with this activity of thought?"

"Yes," she said. "Only they allow it to slumber, and then they have a life shaped for them which draws them in one direction or the other."

Again he questioned: "Then in your heart of hearts it is music that you prefer above all other distractions?"

"Yes! But what I was telling you just now is so true! I should certainly never have enjoyed it as I do enjoy it, adored it as I do adore it, had it not been for that angelic Massival. He seems to have given me the soul of the great masters by teaching me to play their works, of which I was passionately fond before. What a pity that he is married!"

She said these last words with a sprightly air, but so regretfully that they threw everything else into shadow, her theories upon women and her admiration for art.

Massival was, in fact, married. Before the days of his success he had contracted one of those unions that artists make and afterward trail after them through their renown until the day of their death. He never mentioned his wife's name, never presented her in society, which he frequented a great deal; and although he had three children the fact was scarcely known.

Mariolle laughed. She was decidedly nice, was this unconventional woman, pretty, and of a type not often met with. Without ever tiring, with a persistency that seemed in no wise embarrassing to her, he kept gazing upon that face, grave and gay and a little self-willed, with its audacious nose and its sensual coloring of a soft, warm blonde, warmed by the midsummer of a maturity so tender, so full, so sweet that she seemed to have reached the very year, the month, the minute of her perfect flowering. He wondered: "Is her complexion false?" And he looked for the faint telltale line, lighter or darker, at the roots of her hair, without being able to discover

it.

Soft footsteps on the carpet behind him made him start and turn his head. It was two servants bringing in the tea-table. Over the blue flame of the little lamp the water bubbled gently in a great silver receptacle, as shining and complicated as a chemist's apparatus.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" she asked.

Upon his acceptance she arose, and with a firm step in which there was no undulation, but which was rather marked by stiffness, proceeded to the table where the water was simmering in the depths of the machine, surrounded by a little garden of cakes, pastry, candied fruits, and bonbons. Then, as her profile was presented in clear relief against the hangings of the salon, Mariolle observed the delicacy of her form and the thinness of her hips beneath the broad shoulders and the full chest that he had been admiring a moment before. As the train of her light dress unrolled and dragged behind her, seemingly prolonging upon the carpet a body that had no end, this blunt thought arose to his mind: "Behold, a siren! She is altogether promising." She was now going from one to another, offering her refreshments with gestures of exquisite grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes; but Lamarthe, who was walking about with his cup in his hand, came up to him and said:

"Shall we go, you and I?"

"Yes, I think so."

"We will go at once, shall we not? I am tired."

"At once. Come."

They left the house. When they were in the street, the novelist asked:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I think that I will go and spend an hour at the club."

"At the Tambourins?"

"Yes."

"I will go as far as the door with you. Those places are tiresome to me; I never put my foot in them. I join them only because they enable me to economize in hack-hire."

They locked arms and went down the street toward Saint Augustin. They walked a little way in silence; then Mariolle said:

"What a singular woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe began to laugh outright. "It is the commencement of the crisis," he said. "You will have to pass through it, just as we have all done. I have had the malady, but I am cured of it now. My dear friend, the crisis consists of her friends talking of nothing but of her when they are together, whenever they chance to meet, wherever they may happen to be."

"At all events, it is the first time in my case, and it is very natural for me to ask for information, since I scarcely know her."

"Let it be so, then; we will talk of her. Well, you are bound to fall in love with her. It is your fate, the lot that is shared by all."

"She is so very seductive, then?"

"Yes and no. Those who love the women of other days, women who have a heart and a soul, women of sensibility, the women of the old-fashioned novel, cannot endure her and execrate her to such a degree as to speak of her with ignominy. We, on the other hand, who are disposed to look favorably upon what is modern and fresh, are compelled to confess that she is delicious, provided always that we don't fall in love with her. And that is just exactly what everybody does. No one dies of the complaint, however; they do not even suffer very acutely, but they fume because she is not other than she is. You will have to go through it all if she takes the fancy; besides, she is already preparing to snap you up."

Mariolle exclaimed, in response to his secret thought:

"Oh! I am only a chance acquaintance for her, and I imagine that she values acquaintances of all sorts and conditions."

"Yes, she values them, parbleu! and at the same time she laughs at them. The most celebrated, even the most distinguished, man will not darken her door ten times if he is not congenial to her, and she has formed a stupid attachment for that idiotic Fresnel, and that tiresome De Maltry. She inexcusably suffers herself to be carried away by those idiots, no one knows why; perhaps because she gets more amusement out of them than she does out of us, perhaps because their love for her is deeper; and there is nothing in the world that pleases a woman so much as to be loved like that."

And Lamarthe went on talking of her, analyzing her, pulling her to pieces, correcting himself only to contradict himself again, replying with unmistakable warmth and sincerity to Mariolle's questions, like a man who is deeply interested in his subject and carried away by it; a little at sea also, having his mind stored with observations that were true and deductions that were false. He said:

"She is not the only one, moreover; at this minute there are fifty women, if not more, who are like her. There is the little Frémines who was in her drawing-room just now; she is Mme. de Burne's exact counterpart, save that she is more forward in her manners and married to an outlandish kind of fellow, the consequence of which is that her house is one of the most entertaining lunatic asylums in Paris. I go there a great deal."

Without noticing it, they had traversed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and had reached the Arc de Triomphe, when Lamarthe suddenly pulled out his watch.

"My dear fellow," he said, "we have spent an hour and ten minutes in talking of her; that is sufficient for to-day. I will take some other occasion of seeing you to your club. Go home and go to bed; it is what I am going to do."

CHAPTER II.

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?"

The room was large and well lighted, the walls and ceiling hung with admirable hangings of chintz that a friend of hers in the diplomatic service had brought home and presented to her. The ground was yellow, as if it had been dipped in golden cream, and the designs of all colors, in which Persian green was predominant, represented fantastic buildings with curving roofs, about which monstrosities in the shape of beasts and birds were running and flying: lions wearing wigs, antelopes with extravagant horns, and birds of paradise.

The furniture was scanty. Upon three long tables with tops of green marble were arranged all the implements requisite for a pretty woman's toilette. Upon one of them, the central one, were the great basins of thick crystal; the second presented an array of bottles, boxes, and vases of all sizes, surmounted by silver caps bearing her arms and monogram; while on the third were displayed all the tools and appliances of modern coquetry, countless in number, designed to serve various complex and mysterious purposes. The room contained only two reclining chairs and a few low, soft, and luxurious seats, calculated to afford rest to weary limbs and to bodies relieved of the restraint of clothing.

Covering one entire side of the apartment was an immense mirror, composed of three panels. The two wings, playing on hinges, allowed the young woman to view herself at the same time in front, rear, and profile, to envelop herself in her own image. To the right, in a recess that was generally concealed by hanging draperies, was the bath, or rather a deep pool, reached by a descent of two steps. A bronze Love, a charming conception of the sculptor Prédolé, poured hot and cold water into it through the seashells with which he was playing. At the back of this alcove a Venetian mirror, composed of smaller mirrors inclined to each other at varying angles, ascended in a curved dome, shutting in and protecting the bath and its

occupant, and reflecting them in each one of its many component parts. A little beyond the bath was her writing-desk, a plain and handsome piece of furniture of modern English manufacture, covered with a litter of papers, folded letters, little torn envelopes on which glittered gilt initials, for it was in this room that she passed her time and attended to her correspondence when she was alone.

Stretched at full length upon her reclining-chair, enveloped in a dressing-gown of Chinese silk, her bare arms—and beautiful, firm, supple arms they were—issuing forth fearlessly from out the wide folds of silk, her hair turned up and burdening the head with its masses of blond coils, Mme. de Burne was indulging herself with a gentle reverie after the bath. The chambermaid knocked, then entered, bringing a letter. She took it, looked at the writing, tore it open, and read the first lines; then calmly said to the servant: "I will ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with the delight of victory. The first words had sufficed to let her understand that at last she had received a declaration of love from Mariolle. He had held out much longer than she had thought he was capable of doing, for during the last three months she had been besieging him with such attentions, such display of grace and efforts to charm, as she had never hitherto employed for anyone. He had seemed to be distrustful and on his guard against her, against the bait of insatiable coquetry that she was continually dangling before his eyes.

It had required many a confidential conversation, into which she had thrown all the physical seduction of her being and all the captivating efforts of her mind, many an evening of music as well, when, seated before the piano that was ringing still, before the leaves of the scores that were full of the soul of the tuneful masters, they had both thrilled with the same emotion, before she at last beheld in his eyes that avowal of the vanquished man, the mendicant supplication of a love that can no longer be concealed. She knew all this so well, the rouée! Many and many a time, with feline

cunning and inexhaustible curiosity, she had made this secret, torturing plea rise to the eyes of the men whom she had succeeded in beguiling. It afforded her so much amusement to feel that she was gaining them, little by little, that they were conquered, subjugated by her invincible woman's might, that she was for them the Only One, the sovereign Idol whose caprices must be obeyed.

It had all grown up within her almost imperceptibly, like the development of a hidden instinct, the instinct of war and conquest. Perhaps it was that a desire of retaliation had germinated in her heart during her years of married life, a dim longing to repay to men generally that measure of ill which she had received from one of them, to be in turn the strongest, to make stubborn wills bend before her, to crush resistance and to make others, as well as she, feel the keen edge of suffering. Above all else, however, she was a born coquette, and as soon as her way in life was clear before her she applied herself to pursuing and subjugating lovers, just as the hunter pursues the game, with no other end in view than the pleasure of seeing them fall before her.

And yet her heart was not eager for emotion, like that of a tender and sentimental woman; she did not seek a man's undivided love, nor did she look for happiness in passion. All that she needed was universal admiration, homage, prostrations, an incense-offering of tenderness. Whoever frequented her house had also to become the slave of her beauty, and no consideration of mere intellect could attach her for any length of time to those who would not yield to her coquetry, disdainful of the anxieties of love, their affections, perhaps, being placed elsewhere.

In order to retain her friendship it was indispensable to love her, but that point once reached she was infinitely nice, with unimaginable kindnesses and delightful attentions, designed to retain at her side those whom she had captivated. Those who were once enlisted in her regiment of adorers seemed to become her property by right of conquest. She ruled them with great skill and wisdom, according to their

qualities and their defects and the nature of their jealousy. Those who sought to obtain too much she expelled forthwith, taking them back again afterward when they had become wiser, but imposing severe conditions. And to such an extent did this game of bewitchment amuse her, perverse woman that she was, that she found it as pleasurable to befool steady old gentlemen as to turn the heads of the young.

It might even have been said that she regulated her affection by the fervency of the ardor that she had inspired, and that big Fresnel, a dull, heavy companion who was of no imaginable benefit to her, retained her favor thanks to the mad passion by which she felt that he was possessed. She was not entirely indifferent to men's merits, either, and more than once had been conscious of the commencement of a liking that no one divined except herself, and which she quickly ended the moment it became dangerous.

Everyone who had approached her for the first time and warbled in her ear the fresh notes of his hymn of gallantry, disclosing to her the unknown quantity of his nature—artists more especially, who seemed to her to possess more subtile and more delicate shades of refined emotion—had for a time disquieted her, had awakened in her the intermittent dream of a grand passion and a long liaison. But swayed by prudent fears, irresolute, driven this way and that by her distrustful nature, she had always kept a strict watch upon herself until the moment she ceased to feel the influence of the latest lover.

And then she had the sceptical vision of the girl of the period, who would strip the greatest man of his prestige in the course of a few weeks. As soon as they were fully in her toils, and in the disorder of their heart had thrown aside their theatrical posturings and their parade manners, they were all alike in her eyes, poor creatures whom she could tyrannize over with her seductive powers. Finally, for a woman like her, perfect as she was, to attach herself to a man, what inestimable merits he would have had to possess!

She suffered much from ennui, however, and was without fondness for society, which she frequented for the sake of appearances, and the long, tedious evenings of which she endured with heavy eyelids and many a stifled yawn. She was amused only by its refined trivialities, by her own caprices and by her quickly changing curiosity for certain persons and certain things, attaching herself to it in such degree as to realize that she had been appreciated or admired and not enough to receive real pleasure from an affection or a liking—suffering from her nerves and not from her desires. She was without the absorbing preoccupations of ardent or simple souls, and passed her days in an ennui of gaieties, destitute of the simple faith that attends on happiness, constantly on the lookout for something to make the slow hours pass more quickly, and sinking with lassitude, while deeming herself contented.

She thought that she was contented because she was the most seductive and the most sought after of women. Proud of her attractiveness, the power of which she often made trial, in love with her own irregular, odd, and captivating beauty, convinced of the delicacy of her perceptions, which allowed her to divine and understand a thousand things that others were incapable of seeing, rejoicing in the wit that had been appreciated by so many superior men, and totally ignoring the limitations that bounded her intelligence, she looked upon herself as an almost unique being, a rare pearl set in the midst of this common, workaday world, which seemed to her slightly empty and monotonous because she was too good for it.

Not for an instant would she have suspected that in her unconscious self lay the cause of the melancholy from which she suffered so continuously. She laid the blame upon others and held them responsible for her ennui. If they were unable sufficiently to entertain and amuse or even impassion her, the reason was that they were deficient in agreeableness and possessed no real merit in her eyes. "Everyone," she would say with a little laugh, "is tiresome. The only endurable people are those who afford me pleasure, and that solely because they do afford me pleasure."

And the surest way of pleasing her was to tell her that there was no one like her. She was well aware that no success is attained without labor, and so she gave herself up, heart and soul, to her work of enticement, and found nothing that gave her greater enjoyment than to note the homage of the softening glance and of the heart, that unruly organ which she could cause to beat violently by the utterance of a word.

She had been greatly surprised by the trouble that she had had in subjugating André Mariolle, for she had been well aware, from the very first day, that she had found favor in his eyes. Then, little by little, she had fathomed his suspicious, secretly envious, extremely subtile, and concentrated disposition, and attacking him on his weak side, she had shown him so many attentions, had manifested such preference and natural sympathy for him, that he had finally surrendered.

Especially in the last month had she felt that he was her captive; he was agitated in her presence, now taciturn, now feverishly animated, but would make no avowal. Oh, avowals! She really did not care very much for them, for when they were too direct, too expressive, she found herself obliged to resort to severe measures. Twice she had even had to make a show of being angry and close her door to the offender. What she adored were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, discreet allusions, a sort of moral getting-down-on-the-marrow-bones; and she really showed exceptional tact and address in extorting from her admirers this moderation in their expressions.

For a month past she had been watching and waiting to hear fall from Mariolle's lips the words, distinct or veiled, according to the nature of the man, which afford relief to the overburdened heart.

He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter: four pages! A thrill of satisfaction crept over her as she held it in her hands. She stretched herself at length upon her lounge so as to be more comfortable and kicked the little slippers from off her feet upon the carpet; then she proceeded to read. She met with a surprise. In

serious terms he told her that he did not desire to suffer at her hands, and that he already knew her too well to consent to be her victim. With many compliments, in very polite words, which everywhere gave evidence of his repressed love, he let her know that he was apprised of her manner of treating men—that he, too, was in the toils, but that he would release himself from the servitude by taking himself off. He would just simply begin his vagabond life of other days over again. He would leave the country. It was a farewell, an eloquent and firm farewell.

Certainly it was a surprise as she read, re-read, and commenced to read again these four pages of prose that were so full of tender irritation and passion. She arose, put on her slippers, and began to walk up and down the room, her bare arms out of her turned-back sleeves, her hands thrust halfway into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them holding the crumpled letter.

Taken all aback by this unforeseen declaration, she said to herself: "He writes very well, very well indeed; he is sincere, feeling, touching. He writes better than Lamarthe; there is nothing of the novel sticking out of his letter."

She felt like smoking, went to the table where the perfumes were and took a cigarette from a box of Dresden china; then, having lighted it, she approached the great mirror in which she saw three young women coming toward her in the three diversely inclined panels. When she was quite near she halted, made herself a little bow with a little smile, a friendly little nod of the head, as if to say: "Very pretty, very pretty." She inspected her eyes, looked at her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips and turned her profile so as to behold her entire person in the three mirrors, bending her head slightly forward. She stood there amorously facing herself surrounded by the threefold reflection of her own being, which she thought was charming, filled with delight at sight of herself, engrossed by an egotistical and physical pleasure in presence of her own beauty, and enjoying it with a keen satisfaction that was almost as sensual as a man's.

Every day she surveyed herself in this manner, and her maid, who had often caught her at it, used to say, spitefully:

"Madame looks at herself so much that she will end up by wearing out all the looking-glasses in the house."

In this love of herself, however, lay all the secret of her charm and the influence that she exerted over men. Through admiring herself and tenderly loving the delicacy of her features and the elegance of her form, by constantly seeking for and finding means of showing them to the greatest advantage, through discovering imperceptible ways of rendering her gracefulness more graceful and her eyes more fascinating, through pursuing all the artifices that embellished her to her own vision, she had as a matter of course hit upon that which would most please others. Had she been more beautiful and careless of her beauty, she would not have possessed that attractiveness which drew to her everyone who had not from the beginning shown himself unassailable.

Wearying soon a little of standing thus, she spoke to her image that was smiling to her still, and her image in the threefold mirror moved its lips as if to echo: "We will see about it." Then she crossed the room and seated herself at her desk. Here is what she wrote:

"DEAR MONSIEUR MARIOLLE: Come to see me to-morrow at four o'clock. I shall be alone, and hope to be able to reassure you as to the imaginary danger that alarms you.

"I subscribe myself your friend, and will prove to you that I am.....

MICHÈLE DE BURNE."

How plainly she dressed next day to receive André Mariolle's visit! A little gray dress, of a light gray bordering on lilac, melancholy as the dying day and quite unornamented, with a collar fitting closely to the neck, sleeves fitting closely to the arms, corsage fitting closely to the waist and bust, and skirt fitting closely to the hips

and legs.

When he made his appearance, wearing rather a solemn face, she came forward to meet him, extending both her hands. He kissed them, then they seated themselves, and she allowed the silence to last a few moments in order to assure herself of his embarrassment.

He did not know what to say, and was waiting for her to speak. She made up her mind to do so.

"Well! let us come at once to the main question. What is the matter? Are you aware that you wrote me a very insolent letter?"

"I am very well aware of it, and I render my most sincere apology. I am, I have always been with everyone, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without the unnecessary and insulting explanations that I addressed to you. I considered it more loyal to act in accordance with my nature and trust to your understanding, with which I am acquainted."

She resumed with an expression of pitying satisfaction:

"Come, come! What does all this folly mean?"

He interrupted her: "I would prefer not to speak of it."

She answered warmly, without allowing him to proceed further:

"I invited you here to discuss it, and we will discuss it until you are quite convinced that you are not exposing yourself to any danger." She laughed like a little girl, and her dress, so closely resembling that of a boarding-school miss, gave her laughter a character of childish youth.

He hesitatingly said: "What I wrote you was the truth, the sincere truth, the terrifying truth."

Resuming her seriousness, she rejoined: "I do not doubt you: all my friends travel that road. You also wrote that I am a fearful coquette. I admit it, but then no one

ever dies of it; I do not even believe that they suffer a great deal. There is, indeed, what Lamarthe calls the crisis. You are in that stage now, but that passes over and subsides into—what shall I call it?—into the state of chronic love, which does no harm to a body, and which I keep simmering over a slow fire in all my friends, so that they may be very much attached, very devoted, very faithful to me. Am not I, also, sincere and frank and nice with you? Eh? Have you known many women who would dare to talk as I have talked to you?"

She had an air of such drollness, coupled with such decision, she was so unaffected and at the same time so alluring, that he could not help smiling in turn. "All your friends," he said, "are men who have often had their fingers burned in that fire, even before it was done at your hearth. Toasted and roasted already, it is easy for them to endure the oven in which you keep them; but for my part, I, Madame, have never passed through that experience, and I have felt for some time past that it would be a dreadful thing for me to give way to the sentiment that is growing and waxing in my heart."

Suddenly she became familiar, and bending a little toward him, her hands clasped over her knees: "Listen to me," she said, "I am in earnest. I hate to lose a friend for the sake of a fear that I regard as chimerical. You will be in love with me, perhaps, but the men of this generation do not love the women of to-day so violently as to do themselves any actual injury. You may believe me; I know them both." She was silent; then with the singular smile of a woman who utters a truth while she thinks she is telling a fib, she added: "Besides, I have not the necessary qualifications to make men love me madly; I am too modern. Come, I will be a friend to you, a real nice friend, for whom you will have affection, but nothing more, for I will see to it." She went on in a more serious tone: "In any case I give you fair warning that I am incapable of feeling a real passion for anyone, let him be who he may; you shall receive the same treatment as the others, you shall stand on an equal footing with the most favored, but never on any better; I abominate despotism and jealousy. I have

had to endure everything from a husband, but from a friend, a simple friend, I do not choose to accept affectionate tyrannizings, which are the bane of all cordial relations. You see that I am just as nice as nice can be, that I talk to you like a comrade, that I conceal nothing from you. Are you willing loyally to accept the trial that I propose? If it does not work well, there will still be time enough for you to go away if the gravity of the situation demands it. A lover absent is a lover cured."

He looked at her, already vanquished by her voice, her gestures, all the intoxication of her person; and quite resigned to his fate, and thrilling through every fiber at the consciousness that she was sitting there beside him, he murmured:

"I accept, Madame, and if harm comes to me, so much the worse! I can afford to endure a little suffering for your sake."

She stopped him.

"Now let us say nothing more about it," she said; "let us never speak of it again." And she diverted the conversation to topics that might calm his agitation.

In an hour's time he took his leave; in torments, for he loved her; delighted, for she had asked and he had promised that he would not go away.

CHAPTER III.

THE THORNS OF THE ROSE

He was in torments, for he loved her. Differing in this from the common run of lovers, in whose eyes the woman chosen of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, his attachment for her had grown within him while studying her with the clairvoyant eyes of a suspicious and distrustful man who had never been entirely enslaved. His timid and sluggish but penetrating disposition, always standing on the defensive in life, had saved him from his passions. A few intrigues, two brief liaisons that had perished of ennui, and some mercenary loves that had been broken off from disgust, comprised the history of his heart. He regarded women as an object of utility for those who desire a well-kept house and a family, as

an object of comparative pleasure to those who are in quest of the pastime of love.

Before he entered Mme. de Burne's house his friends had confidentially warned him against her. What he had learned of her interested, puzzled, and pleased him, but it was also rather distasteful to him. As a matter of principle he did not like those gamblers who never pay when they lose. After their first few meetings he had decided that she was very amusing, and that she possessed a special charm that had a contagion in it. The natural and artificial beauties of this charming, slender, blond person, who was neither fat nor lean, who was furnished with beautiful arms that seemed formed to attract and embrace, and with legs that one might imagine long and tapering, calculated for flight, like those of a gazelle, with feet so small that they would leave no trace, seemed to him to be a symbol of hopes that could never be realized.

He had experienced, moreover, in his conversation with her a pleasure that he had never thought of meeting with in the intercourse of fashionable society. Gifted with a wit that was full of familiar animation, unforeseen and mocking and of a caressing irony, she would, notwithstanding this, sometimes allow herself to be carried away by sentimental or intellectual influences, as if beneath her derisive gaiety there still lingered the secular shade of poetic tenderness drawn from some remote ancestress. These things combined to render her exquisite.

She petted him and made much of him, desirous of conquering him as she had conquered the others, and he visited her house as often as he could, drawn thither by his increasing need of seeing more of her. It was like a force emanating from her and taking possession of him, a force that lay in her charm, her look, her smile, her speech, a force that there was no resisting, although he frequently left her house provoked at something that she had said or done.

The more he felt working on him that indescribable influence with which a woman penetrates and subjugates us, the more clearly did he see through her, the more did

he understand and suffer from her nature, which he devoutly wished was different. It was certainly true, however, that the very qualities which he disapproved of in her were the qualities that had drawn him toward her and captivated him, in spite of himself, in spite of his reason, and more, perhaps, than her real merits.

Her coquetry, with which she toyed, making no attempt at concealing it, as with a fan, opening and folding it in presence of everybody according as the men to whom she was talking were pleasing to her or the reverse; her way of taking nothing in earnest, which had seemed droll to him upon their first acquaintance, but now seemed threatening; her constant desire for distraction, for novelty, which rested insatiable in her heart, always weary—all these things would so exasperate him that sometimes upon returning to his house he would resolve to make his visits to her more infrequent until such time as he might do away with them altogether. The very next day he would invent some pretext for going to see her. What he thought to impress upon himself, as he became more and more enamored, was the insecurity of this love and the certainty that he would have to suffer for it.

He was not blind; little by little he yielded to this sentiment, as a man drowns because his vessel has gone down under him and he is too far from the shore. He knew her as well as it was possible to know her, for his passion had served to make his mental vision abnormally clairvoyant, and he could not prevent his thoughts from going into indefinite speculations concerning her. With indefatigable perseverance, he was continually seeking to analyze and understand the obscure depths of this feminine soul, this incomprehensible mixture of bright intelligence and disenchantment, of sober reason and childish triviality, of apparent affection and fickleness, of all those ill-assorted inclinations that can be brought together and co-ordinated to form an unnatural, perplexing, and seductive being.

But why was it that she attracted him thus? He constantly asked himself this question, and was unable to find a satisfactory answer to it, for, with his reflective,

observing, and proudly retiring nature, his logical course would have been to look in a woman for those old-fashioned and soothing attributes of tenderness and constancy which seem to offer the most reliable assurance of happiness to a man. In her, however, he had encountered something that he had not expected to find, a sort of early vegetable of the human race, as it were, one of those creatures who are the beginning of a new generation, exciting one by their strange novelty, unlike anything that one has ever known before, and even in their imperfections awakening the dormant senses by a formidable power of attraction.

To the romantic and dreamily passionate women of the Restoration had succeeded the gay triflers of the imperial epoch, convinced that pleasure is a reality; and now, here there was afforded him a new development of this everlasting femininity, a woman of refinement, of indeterminate sensibility, restless, without fixed resolves, her feelings in constant turmoil, who seemed to have made it part of her experience to employ every narcotic that quiets the aching nerves: chloroform that stupefies, ether and morphine that excite to abnormal reverie, kill the senses, and deaden the emotions.

He relished in her that flavor of an artificial nature, the sole object of whose existence was to charm and allure. She was a rare and attractive bauble, exquisite and delicate, drawing men's eyes to her, causing the heart to throb, and desire to awake, as one's appetite is excited when he looks through the glass of the shop-window and beholds the dainty viands that have been prepared and arranged for the purpose of making him hunger for them.

When he was quite assured that he had started on his perilous descent toward the bottom of the gulf, he began to reflect with consternation upon the dangers of his infatuation. What would happen him? What would she do with him? Most assuredly she would do with him what she had done with everyone else: she would bring him to the point where a man follows a woman's capricious fancies as a dog follows his

master's steps, and she would classify him among her collection of more or less illustrious favorites. Had she really played this game with all the others? Was there not one, not a single one, whom she had loved, if only for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those effusions of feeling that she had the faculty of repressing so readily? He talked with them interminably about her as they came forth from her dinners, warmed by contact with her. He felt that they were all uneasy, dissatisfied, unstrung, like men whose dreams have failed of realization.

No, she had loved no one among these paraders before public curiosity. But he, who was a nullity in comparison with them, he, to whom it was not granted that heads should turn and wondering eyes be fixed on him when his name was mentioned in a crowd or in a salon,—what would he be for her? Nothing, nothing; a mere supernumerary upon her scene, a Monsieur, the sort of man that becomes a familiar, commonplace attendant upon a distinguished woman, useful to hold her bouquet, a man comparable to the common grade of wine that one drinks with water. Had he been a famous man he might have been willing to accept this rôle, which his celebrity would have made less humiliating; but unknown as he was, he would have none of it. So he wrote to bid her farewell.

When he received her brief answer he was moved by it as by the intelligence of some unexpected piece of good fortune, and when she had made him promise that he would not go away he was as delighted as a schoolboy released for a holiday.

Several days elapsed without bringing any fresh development to their relations, but when the calm that succeeds the storm had passed, he felt his longing for her increasing within him and burning him. He had promised that he would never again speak to her on the forbidden topic, but he had not promised that he would not write, and one night when he could not sleep, when she had taken possession of all his faculties in the restless vigil of his insomnia of love, he seated himself at his table, almost against his will, and set himself to put down his feelings and his sufferings

upon fair, white paper. It was not a letter; it was an aggregation of notes, phrases, thoughts, throbs of moral anguish, transmuting themselves into words. It soothed him; it seemed to him to give him a little comfort in his suffering, and lying down upon his bed, he was at last able to obtain some sleep.

Upon awaking the next morning he read over these few pages and decided that they were sufficiently harrowing; then he inclosed and addressed them, kept them by him until evening, and mailed them very late so that she might receive them when she arose. He thought that she would not be alarmed by these innocent sheets of paper. The most timorous of women have an infinite kindness for a letter that speaks to them of a sincere love, and when these letters are written by a trembling hand, with tearful eyes and melancholy face, the power that they exercise over the female heart is unbounded.

He went to her house late that afternoon to see how she would receive him and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and conversing with his daughter. He would often pass whole hours with her in this way, for his manner toward her was rather that of a gentleman visitor than of a father. She had brought into their relations and their affection a tinge of that homage of love which she bestowed upon herself and exacted from everyone else.

When she beheld Mariolle her face brightened with delight; she shook hands with him warmly and her smile told him: "You have afforded me much pleasure."

Mariolle was in hopes that the father would go away soon, but M. de Pradon did not budge. Although he knew his daughter thoroughly, and for a long time past had placed the most implicit confidence in her as regarded her relations with men, he always kept an eye on her with a kind of curious, uneasy, somewhat marital attention. He wanted to know what chance of success there might be for this newly discovered friend, who he was, what he amounted to. Would he be a mere bird of passage, like so many others, or a permanent member of their usual circle?

He intrenched himself, therefore, and Mariolle immediately perceived that he was not to be dislodged. The visitor made up his mind accordingly, and even resolved to gain him over if it were possible, considering that his good-will, or at any rate his neutrality, would be better than his hostility. He exerted himself and was brilliant and amusing, without any of the airs of a sighing lover. She said to herself contentedly: "He is not stupid; he acts his part in the comedy extremely well"; and M. de Pradon thought: "This is a very agreeable man, whose head my daughter does not seem to have turned."

When Mariolle decided that it was time for him to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he left that house with sorrow in his soul. In the presence of that woman he felt deeply the bondage in which she held him, realizing that it would be vain to knock at that heart, as a man imprisoned fruitlessly beats the iron door with his fist. He was well assured that he was entirely in her power, and he did not try to free himself. Such being the case, and as he could not avoid this fatality, he resolved that he would be patient, tenacious, cunning, dissembling, that he would conquer by address, by the homage that she was so greedy of, by the adoration that intoxicated her, by the voluntary servitude to which he would suffer himself to be reduced.

His letter had pleased her; he would write. He wrote. Almost every night, when he came home, at that hour when the mind, fresh from the influence of the day's occurrences, regards whatever interests or moves it with a sort of abnormally developed hallucination, he would seat himself at his table by his lamp and exalt his imagination by thoughts of her. The poetic germ, that so many indolent men suffer to perish within them from mere slothfulness, grew and throve under this regimen. He infused a feverish ardor into this task of literary tenderness by means of constantly writing the same thing, the same idea, that is, his love, in expressions that were ever renewed by the constantly fresh-springing, daily renewal of his desire. All

through the long day he would seek for and find those irresistible words that stream from the brain like fiery sparks, compelled by the over-excited emotions. Thus he would breathe upon the fire of his own heart and kindle it into raging flames, for often love-letters contain more danger for him who writes than for her who receives them.

By keeping himself in this continuous state of effervescence, by heating his blood with words and peopling his brain with one solitary thought, his ideas gradually became confused as to the reality of this woman. He had ceased to entertain the opinion of her that he had first held, and now beheld her only through the medium of his own lyrical phrases, and all that he wrote of her night by night became to his heart so many gospel truths. This daily labor of idealization displayed her to him as in a dream. His former resistance melted away, moreover, in presence of the affection that Mme. de Burne undeniably evinced for him. Although no word had passed between them at this time, she certainly showed a preference for him beyond others, and took no pains to conceal it from him. He therefore thought, with a kind of mad hope, that she might finally come to love him.

The fact was that the charm of those letters afforded her a complicated and naïve delight. No one had ever flattered and caressed her in that manner, with such mute reserve. No one had ever had the delicious idea of sending to her bedside, every morning, that feast of sentiment in paper wrapping that her maid presented to her on the little silver salver. And what made it all the dearer in her eyes was that he never mentioned it, that he seemed to be quite unaware of it himself, that when he visited her salon he was the most undemonstrative of her friends, that he never by word or look alluded to those showers of tenderness that he was secretly raining down upon her.

Of course she had had love-letters before that, but they had been pitched in a different key, had been less reserved, more pressing, more like a summons to

surrender. For the three months that his "crisis" had lasted Lamarthe had dedicated to her a very nice correspondence from a much-smitten novelist who maunders in a literary way. She kept in her secretary, in a drawer specially allotted to them, these delicate and seductive epistles from a writer who had shown much feeling, who had caressed her with his pen up to the very day when he saw that he had no hope of success.

Mariolle's letters were quite different; they were so strong in their concentrated desire, so deep in the expression of their sincerity, so humble in their submissiveness, breathing a devotion that promised to be lasting, that she received and read them with a delight that no other writings could have afforded her.

It was natural that her friendly feeling for the man should increase under such conditions. She invited him to her house the more frequently because he displayed such entire reserve in his relations toward her, seeming not to have the slightest recollection in conversation with her that he had ever taken up a sheet of paper to tell her of his adoration. Moreover she looked upon the situation as an original one, worthy of being celebrated in a book; and in the depths of her satisfaction in having at her side a being who loved her thus, she experienced a sort of active fermentation of sympathy which caused her to measure him by a standard other than her usual one.

Up to the present time, notwithstanding the vanity of her coquetry she had been conscious of preoccupations that antagonized her in all the hearts that she had laid waste. She had not held undisputed sovereignty over them, she had found in them powerful interests that were entirely dissociated from her. Jealous of music in Massival's case, of literature in Lamarthe's, always jealous of something, discontented that she only obtained partial successes, powerless to drive all before her in the minds of these ambitious men, men of celebrity, or artists to whom their profession was a mistress from whom nobody could part them, she had now for the

first time fallen in with one to whom she was all in all. Certainly big Fresnel, and he alone, loved her to the same degree. But then he was big Fresnel. She felt that it had never been granted her to exercise such complete dominion over anyone, and her selfish gratitude for the man who had afforded her this triumph displayed itself in manifestations of tenderness. She had need of him now; she had need of his presence, of his glance, of his subjection, of all this domesticity of love. If he flattered her vanity less than the others did, he flattered more those supreme exactions that sway coquettes body and soul—her pride and her instinct of domination, her strong instinct of feminine repose.

Like an invader she gradually assumed possession of his life by a series of small incursions that every day became more numerous. She got up fêtes, theater-parties, and dinners at the restaurant, so that he might be of the party. She dragged him after her with the satisfaction of a conqueror; she could not dispense with his presence, or rather with the state of slavery to which he was reduced. He followed in her train, happy to feel himself thus petted, caressed by her eyes, her voice, by her every caprice, and he lived only in a continuous transport of love and longing that desolated and burned like a wasting fever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BENEFIT OF CHANGE OF SCENE

One day Mariolle had gone to her house. He was awaiting her, for she had not come in, although she had sent him a telegram to tell him that she wanted to see him that morning. Whenever he was alone in this drawing-room which it gave him such pleasure to enter and where everything was so charming to him, he nevertheless was conscious of an oppression of the heart, a slight feeling of affright and breathlessness that would not allow him to remain seated as long as she was not there. He walked about the room in joyful expectation, dashed by the fear that some unforeseen obstacle might intervene to detain her and cause their interview to go

over until next day. His heart gave a hopeful bound when he heard a carriage draw up before the street door, and when the bell of the apartment rang he ceased to doubt.

She came in with her hat on, a thing which she was not accustomed to do, wearing a busy and satisfied look. "I have some news for you," she said.

"What is it, Madame?"

She looked at him and laughed. "Well! I am going to the country for a while."

Her words produced in him a quick, sharp shock of sorrow that was reflected upon his face. "Oh! and you tell me that as if you were glad of it!"

"Yes. Sit down and I will tell you all about it. I don't know whether you are aware that M. Valsaci, my poor mother's brother, the engineer and bridge-builder, has a country-place at Avranches where he spends a portion of his time with his wife and children, for his business lies mostly in that neighborhood. We pay them a visit every summer. This year I said that I did not care to go, but he was greatly disappointed and made quite a time over it with papa. Speaking of scenes, I will tell you confidentially that papa is jealous of you and makes scenes with me, too; he says that I am entangling myself with you. You will have to come to see me less frequently. But don't let that trouble you; I will arrange matters. So papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to Avranches for a visit of ten days, perhaps twelve. We are to start Tuesday morning. What have you got to say about it?"

"I say that it breaks my heart."

"Is that all?"

"What more can I say? There is no way of preventing you from going."

"And nothing presents itself to you?"

"Why, no; I can't say that there does. And you?"

"I have an idea; it is this: Avranches is quite near Mont Saint-Michel. Have you ever

been at Mont Saint-Michel?"

"No, Madame."

"Well, something will tell you next Friday that you want to go and see this wonder. You will leave the train at Avranches; on Friday evening at sunset, if you please, you will take a walk in the public garden that overlooks the bay. We will happen to meet there. Papa will grumble, but I don't care for that. I will make up a party to go and see the abbey next day, including all the family. You must be enthusiastic over it, and very charming, as you can be when you choose; be attentive to my aunt and gain her over, and invite us all to dine at the inn where we alight. We will sleep there, and will have all the next day to be together. You will return by way of Saint Malo, and a week later I shall be back in Paris. Isn't that an ingenious scheme? Am I not nice?"

With an outburst of grateful feeling, he murmured: "You are dearer to me than all the world."

"Hush!" said she.

They looked each other for a moment in the face. She smiled, conveying to him in that smile—very sincere and earnest it was, almost tender—all her gratitude, her thanks for his love, and her sympathy as well. He gazed upon her with eyes that seemed to devour her. He had an insane desire to throw himself down and grovel at her feet, to kiss the hem of her robe, to cry aloud and make her see what he knew not how to tell in words, what existed in all his form from head to feet, in every fiber of his body as well as in his heart, paining him inexpressibly because he could not display it—his love, his terrible and delicious love.

There was no need of words, however; she understood him, as the marksman instinctively feels that his ball has penetrated the bull's-eye of the target. Nothing any longer subsisted within this man, nothing, nothing but her image. He was hers more than she herself was her own. She was satisfied, and she thought he was

charming.

She said to him, in high good-humor: "Then that is settled; the excursion is agreed on."

He answered in a voice that trembled with emotion: "Why, yes, Madame, it is agreed on."

There was another interval of silence. "I cannot let you stay any longer to-day," she said without further apology. "I only ran in to tell you what I have told you, since I am to start day after to-morrow. All my time will be occupied to-morrow, and I have still half-a-dozen things to attend to before dinner-time."

He arose at once, deeply troubled, for the sole desire of his heart was to be with her always; and having kissed her hands, went his way, sore at heart, but hopeful nevertheless.

The four intervening days were horribly long ones to him. He got through them somehow in Paris without seeing a soul, preferring silence to conversation, and solitude to the company of friends.

On Friday morning, therefore, he boarded the eight-o'clock express. The anticipation of the journey had made him feverish, and he had not slept a wink. The darkness of his room and its silence, broken only by the occasional rattling of some belated cab that served to remind him of his longing to be off, had weighed upon him all night long like a prison.

At the earliest ray of light that showed itself between his drawn curtains, the gray, sad light of early morning, he jumped from his bed, opened the window, and looked at the sky. He had been haunted by the fear that the weather might be unfavorable. It was clear. There was a light floating mist, presaging a warm day. He dressed more quickly than was needful, and in his consuming impatience to get out of doors and at last begin his journey he was ready two hours too soon, and nothing would do but his valet must go out and get a cab lest they should all be gone from the stand. As

the vehicle jolted over the stones, its movements were so many shocks of happiness to him, but when he reached the Mont Parnasse station and found that he had fifty minutes to wait before the departure of the train, his spirits fell again.

There was a compartment disengaged; he took it so that he might be alone and give free course to his reveries. When at last he felt himself moving, hurrying along toward her, soothed by the gentle and rapid motion of the train, his eagerness, instead of being appeased, was still further excited, and he felt a desire, the unreasoning desire of a child, to push with all his strength against the partition in front of him, so as to accelerate their speed. For a long time, until midday, he remained in this condition of waiting expectancy, but when they were past Argentan his eyes were gradually attracted to the window by the fresh verdure of the Norman landscape.

The train was passing through a wide, undulating region, intersected by valleys, where the peasant holdings, mostly in grass and apple-orchards, were shut in by great trees, the thick-leaved tops of which seemed to glow in the sunlight. It was late in July, that lusty season when this land, an abundant nurse, gives generously of its sap and life. In all the inclosures, separated from each other by these leafy walls, great light-colored oxen, cows whose flanks were striped with undefined figures of odd design, huge, red, wide-fronted bulls of proud and quarrelsome aspect, with their hanging dewlaps of hairy flesh, standing by the fences or lying down among the pasturage that stuffed their paunches, succeeded each other, until there seemed to be no end to them in this fresh, fertile land, the soil of which appeared to exude cider and fat sirloins. In every direction little streams were gliding in and out among the poplars, partially concealed by a thin screen of willows; brooks glittered for an instant among the herbage, disappearing only to show themselves again farther on, bathing all the scene in their vivifying coolness. Mariolle was charmed at the sight, and almost forgot his love for a moment in his rapid flight through this far-reaching park of apple-trees and flocks and herds.

When he had changed cars at Folligny station, however, he was again seized with an impatient longing to be at his destination, and during the last forty minutes he took out his watch twenty times. His head was constantly turned toward the window of the car, and at last, situated upon a hill of moderate height, he beheld the city where she was waiting for his coming. The train had been delayed, and now only an hour separated him from the moment when he was to come upon her, by chance, on the public promenade.

He was the only passenger that climbed into the hotel omnibus, which the horses began to drag up the steep road of Avranches with slow and reluctant steps. The houses crowning the heights gave to the place from a distance the appearance of a fortification. Seen close at hand it was an ancient and pretty Norman city, with small dwellings of regular and almost similar appearance built closely adjoining one another, giving an aspect of ancient pride and modern comfort, a feudal yet peasant-like air.

As soon as Mariolle had secured a room and thrown his valise into it, he inquired for the street that led to the Botanical Garden and started off in the direction indicated with rapid strides, although he was ahead of time. But he was in hopes that perhaps she also would be on hand early. When he reached the iron railings, he saw at a glance that the place was empty or nearly so. Only three old men were walking about in it, bourgeois to the manner born, who probably were in the habit of coming there daily to cheer their leisure by conversation, and a family of English children, lean-legged boys and girls, were playing about a fair-haired governess whose wandering looks showed that her thoughts were far away.

Mariolle walked straight ahead with beating heart, looking scrutinizingly up and down the intersecting paths. He came to a great alley of dark green elms which cut the garden in two portions crosswise and stretched away in its center, a dense vault of foliage; he passed through this, and all at once, coming to a terrace that

commanded a view of the horizon, his thoughts suddenly ceased to dwell upon her whose influence had brought him hither.

From the foot of the elevation upon which he was standing spread an illimitable sandy plain that stretched away in the distance and blended with sea and sky. Through it rolled a stream, and beneath the azure, aflame with sunlight, pools of water dotted it with luminous sheets that seemed like orifices opening upon another sky beneath. In the midst of this yellow desert, still wet and glistening with the receding tide, at twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore rose a pointed rock of monumental profile, like some fantastic pyramid, surmounted by a cathedral. Its only neighbor in these immense wastes was a low, round backed reef that the tide had left uncovered, squatting among the shifting ooze: the reef of Tombelaine. Farther still away, other submerged rocks showed their brown heads above the bluish line of the waves, and the eye, continuing to follow the horizon to the right, finally rested upon the vast green expanse of the Norman country lying beside this sandy waste, so densely covered with trees that it had the aspect of a limitless forest. It was all Nature offering herself to his vision at a single glance, in a single spot, in all her might and grandeur, in all her grace and freshness, and the eye turned from those woodland glimpses to the stern apparition of the granite mount, the hermit of the sands, rearing its strange Gothic form upon the far-reaching strand.

The strange pleasure which in other days had often made Mariolle thrill, in the presence of the surprises that unknown lands preserve to delight the eyes of travelers, now took such sudden possession of him that he remained motionless, his feelings softened and deeply moved, oblivious of his tortured heart. At the sound of a striking bell, however, he turned, suddenly repossessed by the eager hope that they were about to meet. The garden was still almost untenanted. The English children had gone; the three old men alone kept up their monotonous promenade. He came down and began to walk about like them.

Immediately—in a moment—she would be there. He would see her at the end of one of those roads that centered in this wondrous terrace. He would recognize her form, her step, then her face and her smile; he would soon be listening to her voice. What happiness! What delight! He felt that she was near him, somewhere, invisible as yet, but thinking of him, knowing that she was soon to see him again.

With difficulty he restrained himself from uttering a little cry. For there, down below, a blue sunshade, just the dome of a sunshade, was visible, gliding along beneath a clump of trees. It must be she; there could be no doubt of it. A little boy came in sight, driving a hoop before him; then two ladies,—he recognized her,—then two men: her father and another gentleman. She was all in blue, like the heavens in springtime. Yes, indeed! he recognized her, while as yet he could not distinguish her features; but he did not dare to go toward her, feeling that he would blush and stammer, that he would be unable to account for this chance meeting beneath M. de Pradon's suspicious glances.

He went forward to meet them, however, keeping his field-glass to his eye, apparently quite intent on scanning the horizon. She it was who addressed him first, not even taking the trouble to affect astonishment.

"Good day, M. Mariolle," she said. "Isn't it splendid?"

He was struck speechless by this reception, and knew not what tone to adopt in reply. Finally he stammered: "Ah, it is you, Madame; how glad I am to meet you! I wanted to see something of this delightful country."

She smiled as she replied: "And you selected the very time when I chanced to be here. That was extremely kind of you." Then she proceeded to make the necessary introductions. "This is M. Mariolle, one of my dearest friends; my aunt, Mme. Valsaci; my uncle, who builds bridges."

When salutations had been exchanged. M. de Pradon and the young man shook hands rather stiffly and the walk was continued.

She had made room for him between herself and her aunt, casting upon him a very rapid glance, one of those glances which seem to indicate a weakening determination.

"How do you like the country?" she asked.

"I think that I have never beheld anything more beautiful," he replied.

"Ah! if you had passed some days here, as I have just been doing, you would feel how it penetrates one. The impression that it leaves is beyond the power of expression. The advance and retreat of the sea upon the sands, that grand movement that is going on unceasingly, that twice a day floods all that you behold before you, and so swiftly that a horse galloping at top speed would scarce have time to escape before it—this wondrous spectacle that Heaven gratuitously displays before us, I declare to you that it makes me forgetful of myself. I no longer know myself. Am I not speaking the truth, aunt?"

Mme. Valsaci, an old, gray-haired woman, a lady of distinction in her province and the respected wife of an eminent engineer, a supercilious functionary who could not divest himself of the arrogance of the school, confessed that she had never seen her niece in such a state of enthusiasm. Then she added reflectively: "It is not surprising, however, when, like her, one has never seen any but theatrical scenery."

"But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year."

The old lady began to laugh. "People only go to Dieppe and Trouville to see their friends. The sea is only there to serve as a cloak for their rendezvous." It was very simply said, perhaps without any concealed meaning.

People were streaming along toward the terrace, which seemed to draw them to it with an irresistible attraction. They came from every quarter of the garden, in spite of themselves, like round bodies rolling down a slope. The sinking sun seemed to be drawing a golden tissue of finest texture, transparent and ethereally light, behind the lofty silhouette of the abbey, which was growing darker and darker, like a gigantic

shrine relieved against a veil of brightness. Mariolle, however, had eyes for nothing but the adored blond form walking at his side, wrapped in its cloud of blue. Never had he beheld her so seductive. She seemed to him to have changed, without his being able to specify in what the change consisted; she was bright with a brightness he had never seen before, which shone in her eyes and upon her flesh, her hair, and seemed to have penetrated her soul as well, a brightness emanating from this country, this sky, this sunlight, this verdure. Never had he known or loved her thus.

He walked at her side and could find no word to say to her. The rustle of her dress, the occasional touch of her arm, the meeting, so mutely eloquent, of their glances, completely overcame him. He felt as if they had annihilated his personality as a man—felt himself suddenly obliterated by contact with this woman, absorbed by her to such an extent as to be nothing; nothing but desire, nothing but appeal, nothing but adoration. She had consumed his being, as one burns a letter.

She saw it all very clearly, understood the full extent of her victory, and thrilled and deeply moved, feeling life throb within her, too, more keenly among these odors of the country and the sea, full of sunlight and of sap, she said to him: "I am so glad to see you!" Close upon this, she asked: "How long do you remain here?"

He replied: "Two days, if to-day counts for a day." Then, turning to the aunt: "Would Mme. Valsaci do me the honor to come and spend the day to-morrow at Mont Saint-Michel with her husband?"

Mme. de Burne made answer for her relative: "I will not allow her to refuse, since we have been so fortunate as to meet you here."

The engineer's wife replied: "Yes, Monsieur, I accept very gladly, upon the condition that you come and dine with me this evening."

He bowed in assent. All at once there arose within him a feeling of delirious delight, such a joy as seizes you when news is brought that the desire of your life is attained. What had come to him? What new occurrence was there in his life? Nothing; and

yet he felt himself carried away by the intoxication of an indefinable presentiment.

They walked upon the terrace for a long time, waiting for the sun to set, so as to witness until the very end the spectacle of the black and battlemented mount drawn in outline upon a horizon of flame. Their conversation now was upon ordinary topics, such as might be discussed in presence of a stranger, and from time to time Mme. de Burne and Mariolle glanced at each other. Then they all returned to the villa, which stood just outside Avranches in a fine garden, overlooking the bay.

Wishing to be prudent, and a little disturbed, moreover, by M. de Pradon's cold and almost hostile attitude toward him, Mariolle withdrew at an early hour. When he took Mme. de Burne's hand to raise it to his lips, she said to him twice in succession, with a peculiar accent: "Till to-morrow! Till to-morrow!"

As soon as he was gone M. and Mme. Valsaci, who had long since habituated themselves to country ways, proposed that they should go to bed.

"Go," said Mme. de Burne. "I am going to take a walk in the garden."

"So am I," her father added.

She wrapped herself in a shawl and went out, and they began to walk side by side upon the white-sanded alleys which the full moon, streaming over lawn and shrubbery, illuminated as if they had been little winding rivers of silver.

After a silence that had lasted for quite a while, M. de Pradon said in a low voice: "My dear child, you will do me the justice to admit that I have never troubled you with my counsels?"

She felt what was coming, and was prepared to meet his attack. "Pardon me, papa," she said, "but you did give me one, at least."

"I did?"

"Yes, yes."

"A counsel relating to your way of life?"

"Yes; and a very bad one it was, too. And so, if you give me any more, I have made up my mind not to follow them."

"What was the advice that I gave you?"

"You advised me to marry M. de Burne. That goes to show that you are lacking in judgment, in clearness of insight, in acquaintance with mankind in general and with your daughter in particular."

"Yes I made a mistake on that occasion; but I am sure that I am right in the very paternal advice that I feel called upon to give you at the present juncture."

"Let me hear what it is. I will accept as much of it as the circumstances call for."

"You are on the point of entangling yourself."

She laughed with a laugh that was rather too hearty, and completing the expression of his idea, said: "With M. Mariolle, doubtless?"

"With M. Mariolle."

"You forget," she rejoined, "the entanglements that I have already had with M. de Maltry, with M. Massival, with M. Gaston de Lamarthe, and a dozen others, of all of whom you have been jealous; for I never fall in with a man who is nice and willing to show a little devotion for me but all my flock flies into a rage, and you first of all, you whom nature has assigned to me as my noble father and general manager."

"No, no, that is not it," he replied with warmth; "you have never compromised your liberty with anyone. On the contrary you show a great deal of tact in your relations with your friends."

"My dear papa, I am no longer a child, and I promise you not to involve myself with M. Mariolle any more than I have done with the rest of them; you need have no fears. I admit, however, that it was at my invitation that he came here. I think that he is delightful, just as intelligent as his predecessors and less egotistical; and you thought so too, up to the time when you imagined that you had discovered that I was

showing some small preference for him. Oh, you are not so sharp as you think you are! I know you, and I could say a great deal more on this head if I chose. As M. Mariolle was agreeable to me, then, I thought it would be very nice to make a pleasant excursion in his company, quite by chance, of course. It is a piece of stupidity to deprive ourselves of everything that can amuse us when there is no danger attending it. And I incur no danger of involving myself, since you are here."

She laughed openly as she finished, knowing well that every one of her words had told, that she had tied his tongue by the adroit imputation of a jealousy of Mariolle that she had suspected, that she had instinctively scented in him for a long time past, and she rejoiced over this discovery with a secret, audacious, unutterable coquetry. He maintained an embarrassed and irritated silence, feeling that she had divined some inexplicable spite underlying his paternal solicitude, the origin of which he himself did not care to investigate.

"There is no cause for alarm," she added. "It is quite natural to make an excursion to Mont Saint-Michel at this time of the year in company with you, my father, my uncle and aunt, and a friend. Besides no one will know it; and even if they do, what can they say against it? When we are back in Paris I will reduce this friend to the ranks again, to keep company with the others."

"Very well," he replied. "Let it be as if I had said nothing."

They took a few steps more; then M. de Pradon asked:

"Shall we return to the house? I am tired; I am going to bed."

"No; the night is so fine. I am going to walk awhile yet."

He murmured meaningly: "Do not go far away. One never knows what people may be around."

"Oh, I will be right here under the windows."

"Good night, then, my dear child."

He gave her a hasty kiss upon the forehead and went in. She took a seat a little way off upon a rustic bench that was set in the ground at the foot of a great oak. The night was warm, filled with odors from the fields and exhalations from the sea and misty light, for beneath the full moon shining brightly in the cloudless sky a fog had come up and covered the waters of the bay. Onward it slowly crept, like white smoke-wreaths, hiding from sight the beach that would soon be covered by the incoming tide.

Michèle de Burne, her hands clasped over her knees and her dreamy eyes gazing into space, sought to look into her heart through a mist that was as impenetrable and pale as that which lay upon the sands. How many times before this, seated before her mirror in her dressing-room at Paris, had she questioned herself:

"What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? What am I?"

Apart from the pleasure of being beautiful, and the imperious necessity which she felt of pleasing, which really afforded her much delight, she had never been conscious of any appeal to her heart beyond some passing fancy that she had quickly put her foot upon. She was not ignorant of herself, for she had devoted too much of her time and attention to watching and studying her face and all her person not to have been observant of her feelings as well. Up to the present time she had contented herself with a vague interest in that which is the subject of emotion in others, but was powerless to impassion her, or capable at best of affording her a momentary distraction.

And yet, whenever she had felt a little warmer liking for anyone arising within her, whenever a rival had tried to take away from her a man whom she valued, and by arousing her feminine instincts had caused an innocuous fever of attachment to simmer gently in her veins, she had discovered that these false starts of love had caused her an emotion that was much deeper than the mere gratification of success. But it never lasted. Why? Perhaps because she was too clear-sighted; because she

allowed herself to become wearied, disgusted. Everything that at first had pleased her in a man, everything that had animated, moved, and attracted her, soon appeared in her eyes commonplace and divested of its charm. They all resembled one another too closely, without ever being exactly similar, and none of them had yet presented himself to her endowed with the nature and the merits that were required to hold her liking sufficiently long to guide her heart into the path of love.

Why was this so? Was it their fault or was it hers? Were they wanting in the qualities which she was looking for, or was it she who was deficient in the attribute that makes one loved? Is love the result of meeting with a person whom one believes to have been created expressly for himself, or is it simply the result of having been born with the faculty of loving? At times it seemed to her that everyone's heart must be provided with arms, like the body, loving, outstretching arms to attract, embrace, and enfold, and that her heart had only eyes and nothing more.

Men, superior men, were often known to become madly infatuated with women who were unworthy of them, women without intelligence, without character, often without beauty. Why was this? Wherein lay the mystery? Was such a crisis in the existence of two beings not to be attributed solely to a providential meeting, but to a kind of seed that everyone carries about within him, and that puts forth its buds when least expected? She had been intrusted with confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even beheld with her own eyes the swift transfiguration that results from the breaking forth of this intoxication of the feelings, and she had reflected deeply upon it.

In society, in the unintermitting whirl of visiting and amusement, in all the small tomfooleries of fashionable existence by which the wealthy beguile their idle hours, a feeling of envious, jealous, and almost incredulous astonishment had sometimes been excited in her at the sight of men and women in whom some extraordinary change had incontestably taken place. The change might not be conspicuously

manifest, but her watchful instinct felt it and divined it as the hound holds the scent of his game. Their faces, their smiles, their eyes especially would betray something that was beyond expression in words, an ecstasy, a delicious, serene delight, a joy of the soul made manifest in the body, illuming look and flesh.

Without being able to account for it she was displeased with them for this. Lovers had always been disagreeable objects to her, and she imagined that the deep and secret feeling of irritation inspired in her by the sight of people whose hearts were swayed by passion was simply disdain. She believed that she could recognize them with a readiness and an accuracy that were exceptional, and it was a fact that she had often divined and unraveled liaisons before society had even suspected their existence.

When she reflected upon all this, upon the fond folly that may be induced in woman by the contact of some neighboring existence, his aspect, his speech, his thought, the inexpressible something in the loved being that robs the heart of tranquillity, she decided that she was incapable of it. And yet, weary of everything, oppressed by ineffable yearnings, tormented by a haunting longing after change and some unknown state, feelings which were, perhaps, only the undeveloped movements of an undefined groping after affection, how often had she desired, with a secret shame that had its origin in her pride, to meet with a man, who, for a time, were it only for a few months, might by his sorceries raise her to an abnormally excited condition of mind and body—for it seemed to her that life must assume strange and attractive forms of ecstasy and delight during these emotional periods. Not only had she desired such an encounter, but she had even sought it a little—only a very little, however—with an indolent activity that never devoted itself for any length of time to one pursuit.

In all her inchoate attachments for the men called "superior," who had dazzled her for a few weeks, the short-lived effervescence of her heart had always died away in

irremediable disappointment. She looked for too much from their dispositions, their characters, their delicacy, their renown, their merits. In the case of everyone of them she had been compelled to open her eyes to the fact that the defects of great men are often more prominent than their merits; that talent is a special gift, like a good digestion or good eyesight, an isolated gift to be exercised, and unconnected with the aggregate of personal charm that makes one's relations cordial and attractive.

Since she had known Mariolle, however, she was otherwise attached to him. But did she love him, did she love him with the love of woman for man? Without fame or prestige, he had conquered her affections by his devotedness, his tenderness, his intelligence, by all the real and unassuming attractions of his personality. He had conquered, for he was constantly present in her thoughts; unremittingly she longed for his society; in all the world there was no one more agreeable, more sympathetic, more indispensable to her. Could this be love?

She was not conscious of carrying in her soul that divine flame that everyone speaks of, but for the first time she was conscious of the existence there of a sincere wish to be something more to this man than merely a charming friend. Did she love him? Does love demand that a man appear endowed with exceptional attractions, that he be different from all the world and tower above it in the aureole that the heart places about its elect, or does it suffice that he find favor in your eyes, that he please you to that extent that you scarce know how to do without him? In the latter event she loved him, or at any rate she was very near loving him. After having pondered deeply on the matter with concentrated attention, she at length answered herself: "Yes, I love him, but I am lacking in warmth; that is the defect of my nature."

Still, she had felt some warmth a little while before when she saw him coming toward her upon the terrace in the garden of Avranches. For the first time she had felt that inexpressible something that bears us, impels us, hurries us toward some one; she had experienced great pleasure in walking at his side, in having him near

her, burning with love for her, as they watched the sun sinking behind the shadow of Mont Saint-Michel, like a vision in a legend. Was not love itself a kind of legend of the soul, in which some believe through instinct, and in which others sometimes also come to believe through stress of pondering over it? Would she end by believing in it? She had felt a strange, half-formed desire to recline her head upon the shoulder of this man, to be nearer to him, to seek that closer union that is never found, to give him what one offers vainly and always retains: the close intimacy with one's inner self.

Yes, she had experienced a feeling of warmth toward him, and she still felt it there at the bottom of her heart, at that very moment. Perhaps it would change to passion should she give way to it. She opposed too much resistance to men's powers of attraction; she reasoned on them, combated them too much. How sweet it would be to walk with him on an evening like this along the river-bank beneath the willows, and allow him to taste her lips from time to time in recompense of all the love he had given her!

A window in the villa was flung open. She turned her head. It was her father, who was doubtless looking to see if she were there. She called to him: "You are not asleep yet?"

He replied: "If you don't come in you will take cold."

She arose thereupon and went toward the house. When she was in her room she raised her curtains for another look at the mist over the bay, which was becoming whiter and whiter in the moonlight, and it seemed to her that the vapors in her heart were also clearing under the influence of her dawning tenderness.

For all that she slept soundly, and her maid had to awake her in the morning, for they were to make an early start, so as to have breakfast at the Mount.

A roomy wagonette drew up before the door. When she heard the rolling of the wheels upon the sand she went to her window and looked out, and the first thing that

her eyes encountered was the face of André Mariolle who was looking for her. Her heart began to beat a little more rapidly. She was astonished and dejected as she reflected upon the strange and novel impression produced by this muscle, which palpitates and hurries the blood through the veins merely at the sight of some one. Again she asked herself, as she had done the previous night before going to sleep: "Can it be that I am about to love him?" Then when she was seated face to face with him her instinct told her how deeply he was smitten, how he was suffering with his love, and she felt as if she could open her arms to him and put up her mouth. They only exchanged a look, however, but it made him turn pale with delight.

The carriage rolled away. It was a bright summer morning; the air was filled with the melody of birds and everything seemed permeated by the spirit of youth. They descended the hill, crossed the river, and drove along a narrow, rough, stony road that set the travelers bumping upon their seats. Mme. de Burne began to banter her uncle upon the condition of this road; that was enough to break the ice, and the brightness that pervaded the air seemed to be infused into the spirit of them all.

As they emerged from a little hamlet the bay suddenly presented itself again before them, not yellow as they had seen it the evening before, but sparkling with clear water which covered everything, sands, salt-meadows, and, as the coachman said, even the very road itself a little way further on. Then, for the space of an hour they allowed the horses to proceed at a walk, so as to give this inundation time to return to the deep.

The belts of elms and oaks that inclosed the farms among which they were now passing momentarily hid from their vision the profile of the abbey standing high upon its rock, now entirely surrounded by the sea; then all at once it was visible again between two farmyards, nearer, more huge, more astounding than ever. The sun cast ruddy tones upon the old crenelated granite church, perched on its rocky pedestal. Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle contemplated it, both mingling with

the newborn or acutely sensitive disturbances of their hearts the poetry of the vision that greeted their eyes upon this rosy July morning.

The talk went on with easy friendliness. Mme. Valsaci told tragic tales of the coast, nocturnal dramas of the yielding sands devouring human life. M. Valsaci took up arms for the dike, so much abused by artists, and extolled it for the uninterrupted communication that it afforded with the Mount and for the reclaimed sand-hills, available at first for pasturage and afterward for cultivation.

Suddenly the wagonette came to a halt; the sea had invaded the road. It did not amount to much, only a film of water upon the stony way, but they knew that there might be sink-holes beneath, openings from which they might never emerge, so they had to wait. "It will go down very quickly," M. Valsaci declared, and he pointed with his finger to the road from which the thin sheet of water was already receding, seemingly absorbed by the earth or drawn away to some distant place by a powerful and mysterious force.

They got down from the carriage for a nearer look at this strange, swift, silent flight of the sea, and followed it step by step. Now spots of green began to appear among the submerged vegetation, lightly stirred by the waves here and there, and these spots broadened, rounded themselves out and became islands. Quickly these islands assumed the appearance of continents, separated from each other by miniature oceans, and finally over the whole expanse of the bay it was a headlong flight of the waters retreating to their distant abode. It resembled nothing so much as a long silvery veil withdrawn from the surface of the earth, a great, torn, slashed veil, full of rents, which left exposed the wide meadows of short grass as it was pulled aside, but did not yet disclose the yellow sands that lay beyond.

They had climbed into the carriage again, and everyone was standing in order to obtain a better view. The road in front of them was drying and the horses were sent forward, but still at a walk, and as the rough places sometimes caused them to lose

their equilibrium, André Mariolle suddenly felt Michèle de Burne's shoulder resting against his. At first he attributed this contact to the movement of the vehicle, but she did not stir from her position, and at every jolt of the wheels a trembling started from the spot where she had placed herself and shook all his frame and laid waste his heart. He did not venture to look at the young woman, paralyzed as he was by this unhoped-for familiarity, and with a confusion in his brain such as arises from drunkenness, he said to himself: "Is this real? Can it be possible? Can it be that we are both losing our senses?"

The horses began to trot and they had to resume their seats. Then Mariolle felt some sudden, mysterious, imperious necessity of showing himself attentive to M. de Pradon, and he began to devote himself to him with flattering courtesy. Almost as sensible to compliments as his daughter, the father allowed himself to be won over and soon his face was all smiles.

At last they had reached the causeway and were advancing rapidly toward the Mount, which reared its head among the sands at the point where the long, straight road ended. Pontorson river washed its left-hand slope, while, to the right, the pastures covered with short grass, which the coachman wrongly called "samphire," had given way to sand-hills that were still trickling with the water of the sea. The lofty monument now assumed more imposing dimensions upon the blue heavens, against which, very clear and distinct now in every slightest detail, its summit stood out in bold relief, with all its towers and belfries, bristling with grimacing gargoyles, heads of monstrous beings with which the faith and the terrors of our ancestors crowned their Gothic sanctuaries.

It was nearly one o'clock when they reached the inn, where breakfast had been ordered. The hostess had delayed the meal for prudential reasons; it was not ready. It was late, therefore, when they sat down at table and everyone was very hungry. Soon, however, the champagne restored their spirits. Everyone was in good humor,

and there were two hearts that felt that they were on the verge of great happiness. At dessert, when the cheering effect of the wine that they had drunk and the pleasures of conversation had developed in their frames the feeling of well-being and contentment that sometimes warms us after a good meal, and inclines us to take a rosy view of everything, Mariolle suggested: "What do you say to staying over here until to-morrow? It would be so nice to look upon this scene by moonlight, and so pleasant to dine here together this evening!"

Mme. de Burne gave her assent at once, and the two men also concurred. Mme. Valsaci alone hesitated, on account of the little boy that she had left at home, but her husband reassured her and reminded her that she had frequently remained away before; he at once sat down and dispatched a telegram to the governess. André Mariolle had flattered him by giving his approval to the causeway, expressing his judgment that it detracted far less than was generally reported from the picturesque effect of the Mount, thereby making himself persona grata to the engineer.

Upon rising from table they went to visit the monument, taking the road of the ramparts. The city, a collection of old houses dating back to the Middle Ages and rising in tiers one above the other upon the enormous mass of granite that is crowned by the abbey, is separated from the sands by a lofty crenelated wall. This wall winds about the city in its ascent with many a twist and turn, with abrupt angles and elbows and platforms and watchtowers, all forming so many surprises for the eye, which, at every turn, rests upon some new expanse of the far-reaching horizon. They were silent, for whether they had seen this marvelous edifice before or not, they were equally impressed by it, and the substantial breakfast that they had eaten, moreover, had made them short-winded. There it rose above them in the sky, a wondrous tangle of granite ornamentation, spires, belfries, arches thrown from one tower to another, a huge, light, fairy-like lace-work in stone, embroidered upon the azure of the heavens, from which the fantastic and bestial-faced array of gargoyles seemed to be preparing to detach themselves and wing their flight away. Upon the

northern flank of the Mount, between the abbey and the sea, a wild and almost perpendicular descent that is called the Forest, because it is covered with ancient trees, began where the houses ended and formed a speck of dark green coloring upon the limitless expanse of yellow sands. Mme. de Burne and Mariolle, who headed the little procession, stopped to enjoy the view. She leaned upon his arm, her senses steeped in a rapture such as she had never known before. With light steps she pursued her upward way, willing to keep on climbing forever in his company toward this fabric of a vision, or indeed toward any other end. She would have been glad that the steep way should never have an ending, for almost for the first time in her life she knew what it was to experience a plenitude of satisfaction.

"Heavens! how beautiful it is!" she murmured.

Looking upon her, he answered: "I can think only of you."

She continued, with a smile: "I am not inclined to be very poetical, as a general thing, but this seems to me so beautiful that I am really moved."

He stammered: "I—I love you to distraction."

He was conscious of a slight pressure of her arm, and they resumed the ascent.

They found a keeper awaiting them at the door of the abbey, and they entered by that superb staircase, between two massive towers, which leads to the Hall of the Guards. Then they went from hall to hall, from court to court, from dungeon to dungeon, listening, wondering, charmed with everything, admiring everything, the crypt, with its huge pillars, so beautiful in their massiveness, which sustains upon its sturdy arches all the weight of the choir of the church above, and all of the Wonder, an awe-inspiring edifice of three stories of Gothic monuments rising one above the other, the most extraordinary masterpiece of the monastic and military architecture of the Middle Ages.

Then they came to the cloisters. Their surprise was so great that they involuntarily came to a halt at sight of this square court inclosing the lightest, most graceful, most

charming of colonnades to be seen in any cloisters in the world. For the entire length of the four galleries the slender shafts in double rows, surmounted by exquisite capitals, sustain a continuous garland of flowers and Gothic ornamentation of infinite variety and constantly changing design, the elegant and unaffected fancies of the simple-minded old artists who thus worked out their dreams in stone beneath the hammer.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle walked completely around the inclosure, very slowly, arm in arm, while the others, somewhat fatigued, stood near the door and admired from a distance.

"Heavens! what pleasure this affords me!" she said, coming to a stop.

"For my part, I neither know where I am nor what my eyes behold. I am conscious that you are at my side, and that is all."

Then smiling, she looked him in the face and murmured: "André!"

He saw that she was yielding. No further word was spoken, and they resumed their walk. The inspection of the edifice was continued, but they hardly had eyes to see anything.

Nevertheless their attention was attracted for the space of a moment by the airy bridge, seemingly of lace, inclosed within an arch thrown across space between two belfries, as if to afford a way to scale the clouds, and their amazement was still greater when they came to the "Madman's Path," a dizzy track, devoid of parapet, that encircles the farthest tower nearly at its summit.

"May we go up there?" she asked.

"It is forbidden," the guide replied.

She showed him a twenty-franc piece. All the members of the party, giddy at sight of the yawning gulf and the immensity of surrounding space, tried to dissuade her from the imprudent freak.

She asked Mariolle: "Will you go?"

He laughed: "I have been in more dangerous places than that." And paying no further attention to the others, they set out.

He went first along the narrow cornice that overhung the gulf, and she followed him, gliding along close to the wall with eyes downcast that she might not see the yawning void beneath, terrified now and almost ready to sink with fear, clinging to the hand that he held out to her; but she felt that he was strong, that there was no sign of weakening there, that he was sure of head and foot; and enraptured for all her fears, she said to herself: "Truly, this is a man." They were alone in space, at the height where the sea-birds soar; they were contemplating the same horizon that the white-winged creatures are ceaselessly scouring in their flight as they explore it with their little yellow eyes.

Mariolle felt that she was trembling; he asked: "Do you feel dizzy?"

"A little," she replied in a low voice; "but in your company I fear nothing."

At this he drew near and sustained her by putting his arm about her, and this simple assistance inspired her with such courage that she ventured to raise her head and take a look at the distance. He was almost carrying her and she offered no resistance, enjoying the protection of those strong arms which thus enabled her to traverse the heavens, and she was grateful to him with a romantic, womanly gratitude that he did not mar their sea-gull flight by kisses.

When they had rejoined the others of the party, who were awaiting them with the greatest anxiety, M. de Pradon angrily said to his daughter: "Dieu! what a silly thing to do!"

She replied with conviction: "No, it was not, papa, since it was successfully accomplished. Nothing that succeeds is ever stupid."

He merely gave a shrug of the shoulders, and they descended the stairs. At the porter's lodge there was another stoppage to purchase photographs, and when they

reached the inn it was nearly dinner-time. The hostess recommended a short walk upon the sands, so as to obtain a view of the Mount toward the open sea, in which direction, she said, it presented its most imposing aspect. Although they were all much fatigued, the band started out again and made the tour of the ramparts, picking their way among the treacherous downs, solid to the eye but yielding to the step, where the foot that was placed upon the pretty yellow carpet that was stretched beneath it and seemed solid would suddenly sink up to the calf in the deceitful golden ooze.

Seen from this point the abbey, all at once losing the cathedral-like appearance with which it astounded the beholder on the mainland, assumed, as if in menace of old Ocean, the martial appearance of a feudal manor, with its huge battlemented wall picturesquely pierced with loop-holes and supported by gigantic buttresses that sank their Cyclopean stone foundations in the bosom of the fantastic mountain. Mme. de Burne and André Mariolle, however, were not heedless of all that. They were thinking only of themselves, caught in the meshes of the net that they had set for each other, shut up within the walls of that prison to which no sound comes from the outer world, where the eye beholds only one being.

When they found themselves again seated before their well-filled plates, however, beneath the cheerful light of the lamps, they seemed to awake, and discovered that they were hungry, just like other mortals.

They remained a long time at table, and when the dinner was ended the moonlight was quite forgotten in the pleasure of conversation. There was no one, moreover, who had any desire to go out, and no one suggested it. The broad moon might shed her waves of poetic light down upon the little thin sheet of rising tide that was already creeping up the sands with the noise of a trickling stream, scarcely perceptible to the ear, but sinister and alarming; she might light up the ramparts that crept in spirals up the flanks of the Mount and illumine the romantic shadows of all

the belfries of the old abbey, standing in its wondrous setting of a boundless bay, in the bosom of which were quiveringly reflected the lights that crawled along the downs—no one cared to see more.

It was not yet ten o'clock when Mme. Valsaci, overcome with sleep, spoke of going to bed, and her proposition was received without a dissenting voice. Bidding one another a cordial good night, each withdrew to his chamber.

André Mariolle knew well that he would not sleep; he therefore lighted his two candles and placed them on the mantelpiece, threw open his window, and looked out into the night.

All the strength of his body was giving way beneath the torture of an unavailing hope. He knew that she was there, close at hand, that there were only two doors between them, and yet it was almost as impossible to go to her as it would be to dam the tide that was coming in and submerging all the land. There was a cry in his throat that strove to liberate itself, and in his nerves such an unquenchable and futile torment of expectation that he asked himself what he was to do, unable as he was longer to endure the solitude of this evening of sterile happiness.

Gradually all the sounds had died away in the inn and in the single little winding street of the town. Mariolle still remained leaning upon his window-sill, conscious only that time was passing, contemplating the silvery sheet of the still rising tide and rejecting the idea of going to bed as if he had felt the undefined presentiment of some approaching, providential good fortune.

All at once it seemed to him that a hand was fumbling with the fastening of his door. He turned with a start: the door slowly opened and a woman entered the room, her head veiled in a cloud of white lace and her form enveloped in one of those great dressing-gowns that seem made of silk, cashmere, and snow. She closed the door carefully behind her; then, as if she had not seen him where he stood motionless—as if smitten with joy—in the bright square of moonlight of the window, she went

straight to the mantelpiece and blew out the two candles.

CHAPTER V.

CONSPIRACY

They were to meet next morning in front of the inn to say good-bye to one another. André, the first one down, awaited her coming with a poignant feeling of mixed uneasiness and delight. What would she do? What would she be to him? What would become of her and of him? In what thrice-happy or terrible adventure had he engaged himself? She had it in her power to make of him what she would, a visionary, like an opium-eater, or a martyr, at her will. He paced to and fro beside the two carriages, for they were to separate, he, to continue the deception, ending his trip by way of Saint Malo, they returning to Avranches.

When would he see her again? Would she cut short her visit to her family, or would she delay her return? He was horribly afraid of what she would first say to him, how she would first look at him, for he had not seen her and they had scarcely spoken during their brief interview of the night before. There remained to Mariolle from that strange, fleeting interview the faint feeling of disappointment of the man who has been unable to reap all that harvest of love which he thought was ready for the sickle, and at the same time the intoxication of triumph and, resulting from that, the almost assured hope of finally making himself complete master of her affections.

He heard her voice and started; she was talking loudly, evidently irritated at some wish that her father had expressed, and when he beheld her standing at the foot of the staircase there was a little angry curl upon her lips that bespoke her impatience.

Mariolle took a couple of steps toward her; she saw him and smiled. Her eyes suddenly recovered their serenity and assumed an expression of kindliness which diffused itself over the other features, and she quickly and cordially extended to him her hand, as if in ratification of their new relations.

"So then, we are to separate?" she said to him.

"Alas! Madame, the thought makes me suffer more than I can tell."

"It will not be for long," she murmured. She saw M. de Pradon coming toward them, and added in a whisper: "Say that you are going to take a ten days' trip through Brittany, but do not take it."

Mme. de Valsaci came running up in great excitement. "What is this that your father has been telling me—that you are going to leave us day after to-morrow? You were to stay until next Monday, at least."

Mme. de Burne replied, with a suspicion of ill humor: "Papa is nothing but a bungler, who never knows enough to hold his tongue. The sea-air has given me, as it does every year, a very unpleasant neuralgia, and I did say something or other about going away so as not to have to be ill for a month. But this is no time for bothering over that."

Mariolle's coachman urged him to get into the carriage and be off, so that they might not miss the Pontorson train.

Mme. de Burne asked: "And you, when do you expect to be back in Paris?"

He assumed an air of hesitancy: "Well, I can't say exactly; I want to see Saint Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, the Bay des Trépassés, Cape Raz, Audierne, Penmarch, Morbihan, all this celebrated portion of the Breton country, in a word. That will take me say—" after a silence devoted to feigned calculation, he exceeded her estimate—"fifteen or twenty days."

"That will be quite a trip," she laughingly said. "For my part, if my nerves trouble me as they did last night, I shall be at home before I am two days older."

His emotion was so great that he felt like exclaiming: "Thanks!" He contented himself with kissing, with a lover's kiss, the hand that she extended to him for the last time, and after a profuse exchange of thanks and compliments with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, who seemed to be somewhat reassured by the announcement of his projected trip, he climbed into his vehicle and drove off, turning his head for a

parting look at her.

He made no stop on his journey back to Paris and was conscious of seeing nothing on the way. All night long he lay back in the corner of his compartment with eyes half closed and folded arms, his mind reverting to the occurrences of the last few hours, and all his thoughts concentrated upon the realization of his dream.

Immediately upon his arrival at his own abode, upon the cessation of the noise and bustle of travel, in the silence of the library where he generally passed his time, where he worked and wrote, and where he almost always felt himself possessed by a restful tranquillity in the friendly companionship of his books, his piano, and his violin, there now commenced in him that unending torment of impatient waiting which devours, as with a fever, insatiable hearts like his. He was surprised that he could apply himself to nothing, that nothing served to occupy his mind, that reading and music, the occupations that he generally employed to while away the idle moments of his life, were unavailing, not only to afford distraction to his thoughts, but even to give rest and quiet to his physical being, and he asked himself what he was to do to appease this new disturbance. An inexplicable physical need of motion seemed to have taken possession of him—of going forth and walking the streets, of constant movement, the crisis of that agitation that is imparted by the mind to the body and which is nothing more than an instinctive and unappeasable longing to seek and find some other being.

He put on his hat and overcoat, and as he was descending the stairs he asked himself: "In which direction shall I go?" Thereupon an idea occurred to him that he had not yet thought of: he must procure a pretty and secluded retreat to serve them as a trysting place.

He pursued his investigations in every quarter, ransacking streets, avenues, and boulevards, distrustfully examining concierges with their servile smiles, lodging-house keepers of suspicious appearance and apartments with doubtful

furnishings, and at evening he returned to his house in a state of discouragement. At nine o'clock the next day he started out again, and at nightfall he finally succeeded in discovering at Auteuil, buried in a garden that had three exits, a lonely pavilion which an upholsterer in the neighborhood promised to render habitable in two days. He ordered what was necessary, selecting very plain furniture of varnished pine and thick carpets. A baker who lived near one of the garden gates had charge of the property, and an arrangement was completed with his wife whereby she was to care for the rooms, while a gardener of the quarter also took a contract for filling the beds with flowers.

All these arrangements kept him busy until it was eight o'clock, and when at last he got home, worn out with fatigue, he beheld with a beating heart a telegram lying on his desk. He opened it and read:

"I will be home to-morrow. Await instructions. "MICHE."

He had not written to her yet, fearing that as she was soon to leave Avranches his letter might go astray, and as soon as he had dined he seated himself at his desk to lay before her what was passing in his mind. The task was a long and difficult one, for all the words and phrases that he could muster, and even his ideas, seemed to him weak, mediocre, and ridiculous vehicles in which to convey to her the delicacy and passionateness of his thanks.

The letter that he received from her upon waking next morning confirmed the statement that she would reach home that evening, and begged him not to make his presence known to anyone for a few days, in order that full belief might be accorded to the report that he was traveling. She also requested him to walk upon the terrace of the Tuileries garden that overlooks the Seine the following day at ten o'clock.

He was there an hour before the time appointed, and to kill time wandered about in the immense garden that was peopled only by a few early pedestrians, belated officeholders on their way to the public buildings on the left bank, clerks and toilers

of every condition. It was a pleasure to him to watch the hurrying crowds driven by the necessity of earning their daily bread to brutalizing labors, and to compare his lot with theirs, on this spot, at the minute when he was awaiting his mistress—a queen among the queens of the earth. He felt himself so fortunate a being, so privileged, raised to such a height beyond their petty struggles, that he felt like giving thanks to the blue sky, for to him Providence was but a series of alternations of sunshine and of rain due to Chance, mysterious ruler over weather and over men.

When it wanted a few minutes of ten he ascended to the terrace and watched for her coming. "She will be late!" he thought. He had scarcely more than heard the clock in an adjacent building strike ten when he thought he saw her at a distance, coming through the garden with hurrying steps, like a working-woman in haste to reach her shop. "Can it indeed be she?" He recognized her step but was astonished by her changed appearance, so unassuming in a neat little toilette of dark colors. She was coming toward the stairs that led up to the terrace, however, in a bee-line, as if she had traveled that road many times before.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "she must be fond of this place and come to walk here sometimes." He watched her as she raised her dress to put her foot on the first step and then nimbly flew up the remaining ones, and as he eagerly stepped forward to meet her she said to him as he came near with a pleasant smile, in which there was a trace of uneasiness: "You are very imprudent! You must not show yourself like that; I saw you almost from the Rue de Rivoli. Come, we will go and take a seat on a bench yonder. There is where you must wait for me next time."

He could not help asking her: "So you come here often?"

"Yes, I have a great liking for this place, and as I am an early walker I come here for exercise and to look at the scenery, which is very pretty. And then one never meets anybody here, while the Bois is out of the question on just that account. But you must be careful not to give away my secret."

He laughed: "I shall not be very likely to do that." Discreetly taking her hand, a little hand that was hanging at her side conveniently concealed in the folds of her dress, he sighed: "How I love you! My heart was sick with waiting for you. Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes; I thank you for it. It was very touching."

"Then you have not become angry with me yet?"

"Why no! Why should I? You are just as nice as you can be."

He sought for ardent words, words that would vibrate with his emotion and his gratitude. As none came to him, and as he was too deeply moved to permit of the free expression of the thought that was within him, he simply said again: "How I love you!"

She said to him: "I brought you here because there are water and boats in this place as well as down yonder. It is not at all like what we saw down there; still it is not disagreeable."

They were sitting on a bench near the stone balustrade that runs along the river, almost alone, invisible from every quarter. The only living beings to be seen on the long terrace at that hour were two gardeners and three nursemaids. Carriages were rolling along the quay at their feet, but they could not see them; footsteps were resounding upon the adjacent sidewalk, over against the wall that sustained the promenade; and still unable to find words in which to express their thoughts, they let their gaze wander over the beautiful Parisian landscape that stretches from the Île Saint-Louis and the towers of Nôtre-Dame to the heights of Meudon. She repeated her thought: "None the less, it is very pretty, isn't it?"

But he was suddenly seized by the thrilling remembrance of their journey through space up on the summit of the abbey tower, and with a regretful feeling for the emotion that was past and gone, he said: "Oh, Madame, do you remember our escapade of the 'Madman's Path?'"

"Yes; but I am a little afraid now that I come to think of it when it is all over. Dieu! how my head would spin around if I had it to do over again! I was just drunk with the fresh air, the sunlight, and the sea. Look, my friend, what a magnificent view we have before us. How I do love Paris!"

He was surprised, having a confused feeling of missing something that had appeared in her down there in the country. He murmured: "It matters not to me where I am, so that I am only near you!"

Her only answer was a pressure of the hand. Inspired with greater happiness, perhaps, by this little signal than he would have been by a tender word, his heart relieved of the care that had oppressed it until now, he could at last find words to express his feelings. He told her, slowly, in words that were almost solemn, that he had given her his life forever that she might do with it what she would.

She was grateful; but like the child of modern scepticism that she was and willing captive of her iconoclastic irony, she smiled as she replied: "I would not make such a long engagement as that if I were you!"

He turned and faced her, and, looking her straight in the eyes with that penetrating look which is like a touch, repeated what he had just said at greater length, in a more ardent, more poetical form of expression. All that he had written in so many burning letters he now expressed with such a fervor of conviction that it seemed to her as she listened that she was sitting in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed in every fiber of her feminine nature by his adoring words more deeply than ever before.

When he had ended she simply said: "And I, too, love you dearly!"

They were still holding each other's hand, like young folks walking along a country road, and watching with vague eyes the little steamboats plying on the river. They were alone by themselves in Paris, in the great confused uproar, whether remote or near at hand, that surrounded them in this city full of all the life of all the world, more alone than they had been on the summit of their aerial tower, and for some

seconds they were quite oblivious that there existed on earth any other beings but their two selves.

She was the first to recover the sensation of reality and of the flight of time. "Shall we see each other again to-morrow?" she said.

He reflected for an instant, and abashed by what he had in mind to ask of her: "Yes—yes—certainly," he replied. "But—shall we never meet in any other place? This place is unfrequented. Still—people may come here."

She hesitated. "You are right. Still it is necessary also that you should not show yourself for at least two weeks yet, so that people may think that you are away traveling. It will be very nice and mysterious for us to meet and no one know that you are in Paris. Meanwhile, however, I cannot receive you at my house, so—I don't see——"

He felt that he was blushing, and continued: "Neither can I ask you to come to my house. Is there nothing else—is there no other place?"

Being a woman of practical sense, logical and without false modesty, she was neither surprised nor shocked.

"Why, yes," she said, "only we must have time to think it over."

"I have thought it over."

"What! so soon?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Well?"

"Are you acquainted with the Rue des Vieux-Champs at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It runs into the Rue Tournemine and the Rue Jean-de-Saulge."

"Well?"

"In this street, or rather lane, there is a garden, and in this garden a pavilion that also communicates with the two streets that I mentioned."

"What next?"

"That pavilion awaits you."

She reflected, still with no appearance of embarrassment, and then asked two or three questions that were dictated by feminine prudence. His explanations seemed to be satisfactory, for she murmured as she arose:

"Well, I will go to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three o'clock."

"Seven is the number; I will be waiting for you behind the door. Do not forget. Give a knock as you pass."

"Yes, my friend. Adieu, till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, adieu. Thanks; I adore you."

They had risen to their feet. "Do not come with me," she said. "Stay here for ten minutes, and when you leave go by the way of the quay."

"Adieu!"

"Adieu!"

She started off very rapidly, with such a modest, unassuming air, so hurriedly, that actually she might have been mistaken for one of Paris' pretty working-girls, who trot along the streets in the morning on the way to their honest labors.

He took a cab to Auteuil, tormented by the fear that the house might not be ready against the following day. He found it full of workmen, however; the hangings were all in place upon the walls, the carpets laid upon the floors. Everywhere there was a sound of pounding, hammering, beating, washing. In the garden, which was quite large and rather pretty, the remains of an ancient park, containing a few large old

trees, a thick clump of shrubbery that stood for a forest, two green tables, two grass-plots, and paths twisting about among the beds, the gardener of the vicinity had set out rose-trees, geraniums, pinks, reseda, and twenty other species of those plants, the growth of which is advanced or retarded by careful attention, so that a naked field may be transformed in a day into a blooming flower garden.

Mariolle was as delighted as if he had scored another success with his Michèle, and having exacted an oath from the upholsterer that all the furniture should be in place the next day before noon, he went off to various shops to buy some bric-à-brac and pictures for the adornment of the interior of this retreat. For the walls he selected some of those admirable photographs of celebrated pictures that are produced nowadays, for the tables and mantelshelves some rare pottery and a few of those familiar objects that women always like to have about them. In the course of the day he expended the income of three months, and he did it with great pleasure, reflecting that for the last ten years he had been living very economically, not from penuriousness, but because of the absence of expensive tastes, and this circumstance now allowed him to do things somewhat magnificently.

He returned to the pavilion early in the morning of the following day, presided over the arrival and placing of the furniture, climbed ladders and hung the pictures, burned perfumes and vaporized them upon the hangings and poured them over the carpets. In his feverish joy, in the excited rapture of all his being, it seemed to him that he had never in his life been engaged in such an engrossing, such a delightful labor. At every moment he looked to see what time it was, and calculated how long it would be before she would be there; he urged on the workmen, and stimulated his invention so to arrange the different objects that they might be displayed in their best light.

In his prudence he dismissed everyone before it was two o'clock, and then, as the minute-hand of the clock tardily made its last revolution around the dial, in the

silence of that house where he was awaiting the greatest happiness that ever he could have wished for, alone with his reverie, going and coming from room to room, he passed the minutes until she should be there.

Finally he went out into the garden. The sunlight was streaming through the foliage upon the grass and falling with especially charming brilliancy upon a bed of roses. The very heavens were contributing their aid to embellish this trysting-place. Then he went and stood by the gate, partially opening it to look out from time to time for fear she might mistake the house.

Three o'clock rang out from some belfry, and forthwith the sounds were echoed from a dozen schools and factories. He stood waiting now with watch in hand, and gave a start of surprise when two little, light knocks were given against the door, to which his ear was closely applied, for he had heard no sound of footsteps in the street.

He opened: it was she. She looked about her with astonishment. First of all she examined with a distrustful glance the neighboring houses, but her inspection reassured her, for certainly she could have no acquaintances among the humble bourgeois who inhabited the quarter. Then she examined the garden with pleased curiosity, and finally placed the backs of her two hands, from which she had drawn her gloves, against her lover's mouth; then she took his arm. At every step she kept repeating: "My! how pretty it is! how unexpected! how attractive!" Catching sight of the rose-bed that the sun was shining upon through the branches of the trees, she exclaimed: "Why, this is fairyland, my friend!"

She plucked a rose, kissed it, and placed it in her corsage. Then they entered the pavilion, and she seemed so pleased with everything that he felt like going down on his knees to her, although he may have felt at the bottom of his heart that perhaps she might as well have shown more attention to him and less to the surroundings. She looked about her with the pleasure of a child who has received a new plaything,

and admired and appreciated the elegance of the place with the satisfaction of a connoisseur whose tastes have been gratified. She had feared that she was coming to some vulgar, commonplace resort, where the furniture and hangings had been contaminated by other rendezvous, whereas all this, on the contrary, was new, unforeseen, and alluring, prepared expressly for her, and must have cost a lot of money. Really he was perfect, this man. She turned to him and extended her arms, and their lips met in one of those long kisses that have the strange, twofold sensation of self-effacement and unadulterated bliss.

When, at the end of three hours, they were about to separate, they walked through the garden and seated themselves in a leafy arbor where no eye could reach them. André addressed her with an exuberance of feeling, as if she had been an idol that had come down for his sake from her sacred pedestal, and she listened to him with that fatigued languor which he had often seen reflected in her eyes after people had tired her by too long a visit. She continued affectionate, however, her face lighted up by a tender, slightly constrained smile, and she clasped the hand that she held in hers with a continuous pressure that perhaps was more studied than spontaneous.

She could not have been listening to him, for she interrupted one of his sentences to say: "Really, I must be going. I was to be at the Marquise de Bratiane's at six o'clock, and I shall be very late."

He conducted her to the gate by which she had obtained admission. They gave each other a parting kiss, and after a furtive glance up and down the street, she hurried away, keeping close to the walls.

When he was alone he felt within him that sudden void that is ever left by the disappearance of the woman whose kiss is still warm upon your lips, the queer little laceration of the heart that is caused by the sound of her retreating footsteps. It seemed to him that he was abandoned and alone, that he was never to see her again, and he betook himself to pacing the gravel-walks, reflecting upon this never-ceasing

contrast between anticipation and realization. He remained there until it was dark, gradually becoming more tranquil and yielding himself more entirely to her influence, now that she was away, than if she had been there in his arms. Then he went home and dined without being conscious of what he was eating, and sat down to write to her.

The next day was a long one to him, and the evening seemed interminable. Why had she not answered his letter, why had she sent him no word? The morning of the second day he received a short telegram appointing another rendezvous at the same hour. The little blue envelope speedily cured him of the heart-sickness of hope deferred from which he was beginning to suffer.

She came, as she had done before, punctual, smiling, and affectionate, and their second interview in the little house was in all respects similar to the first. André Mariolle, surprised at first and vaguely troubled that the ecstatic passion he had dreamed of had not made itself felt between them, but more and more overmastered by his senses, gradually forgot his visions of anticipation in the somewhat different happiness of possession. He was becoming attached to her by reason of her caresses, an invincible tie, the strongest tie of all, from which there is no deliverance when once it has fully possessed you and has penetrated through your flesh, into your veins.

Twenty days rolled by, such sweet, fleeting days. It seemed to him that there was to be no end to it, that he was to live forever thus, nonexistent for all and living for her alone, and to his mental vision there presented itself the seductive dream of an unlimited continuance of this blissful, secret way of living.

She continued to make her visits at intervals of three days, offering no objections, attracted, it would seem, as much by the amusement she derived from their clandestine meetings—by the charm of the little house that had now been transformed into a conservatory of rare exotics and by the novelty of the situation,

which could scarcely be called dangerous, since she was her own mistress, but still was full of mystery—as by the abject and constantly increasing tenderness of her lover.

At last there came a day when she said to him: "Now, my dear friend, you must show yourself in society again. You will come and pass the afternoon with me to-morrow. I have given out that you are at home again."

He was heartbroken. "Oh, why so soon?" he said.

"Because if it should leak out by any chance that you are in Paris your absence would be too inexplicable not to give rise to gossip."

He saw that she was right and promised that he would come to her house the next day. Then he asked her: "Do you receive to-morrow?"

"Yes," she replied. "It will be quite a little solemnity."

He did not like this intelligence. "Of what description is your solemnity?"

She laughed gleefully. "I have prevailed upon Massival, by means of the grossest sycophancy, to give a performance of his 'Dido,' which no one has heard yet. It is the poetry of antique love. Mme. de Bratiane, who considered herself Massival's sole proprietor, is furious. She will be there, for she is to sing. Am I not a sly one?"

"Will there be many there?"

"Oh, no, only a few intimate friends. You know them nearly all."

"Won't you let me off? I am so happy in my solitude."

"Oh! no, my friend. You know that I count on you more than all the rest."

His heart gave a great thump. "Thank you," he said; "I will come."

CHAPTER VI.

QUESTIONINGS

Good day, M. Mariolle."

Mariolle noticed that it was no longer the "dear friend" of Auteuil, and the clasp of the hand was a hurried one, the hasty pressure of a busy woman wholly engrossed in her social functions. As he entered the salon Mme. de Burne was advancing to speak to the beautiful Mme. le Prieur, whose sculpturesque form, and the audacious way that she had of dressing to display it, had caused her to be nicknamed, somewhat ironically, "The Goddess." She was the wife of a member of the Institute, of the section of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres.

"Ah, Mariolle!" exclaimed Lamarthe, "where do you come from? We thought that you were dead."

"I have been making a trip through Finistère."

He was going on to relate his impressions when the novelist interrupted him: "Are you acquainted with the Baronne de Frémines?"

"Only by sight; but I have heard a good deal of her. They say that she is queer."

"The very queen of crazy women, but with an exquisite perfume of modernness. Come and let me present you to her." Taking him by the arm he led him toward a young woman who was always compared to a doll, a pale and charming little blond doll, invented and created by the devil himself for the damnation of those larger children who wear beards on their faces. She had long, narrow eyes, slightly turned up toward the temples, apparently like the eyes of the Chinese; their soft blue glances stole out between lids that were seldom opened to their full extent, heavy, slowly-moving lids, designed to veil and hide this creature's mysterious nature.

Her hair, very light in color, shone with silky, silvery reflections, and her delicate mouth, with its thin lips, seemed to have been cut by the light hand of a sculptor from the design of a miniature-painter. The voice that issued from it had bell-like intonations, and the audacity of her ideas, of a biting quality that was peculiar to herself, smacking of wickedness and drollery, their destructive charm, their cold, corrupting seductiveness, all the complicated nature of this full-grown, mentally

diseased child acted upon those who were brought in contact with her in such a way as to produce in them violent passions and disturbances.

She was known all over Paris as being the most extravagant of the mondaines of the real monde, and also the wittiest, but no one could say exactly what she was, what were her ideas, what she did. She exercised an irresistible sway over mankind in general. Her husband, also, was quite as much of an enigma as she. Courteous and affable and a great nobleman, he seemed quite unconscious of what was going on. Was he indifferent, or complaisant, or was he simply blind? Perhaps, after all, there was nothing in it more than those little eccentricities which doubtless amused him as much as they did her. All sorts of opinions, however, were prevalent in regard to him, and some very ugly reports were circulated. Rumor even went so far as to insinuate that his wife's secret vices were not unprofitable to him.

Between her and Mme. de Burne there were natural attractions and fierce jealousies, spells of friendship succeeded by crises of furious enmity. They liked and feared each other and mutually sought each other's society, like professional duelists, who appreciate at the same time that they would be glad to kill each other.

It was the Baronne de Frémines who was having the upper hand at this moment. She had just scored a victory, an important victory: she had conquered Lamarthe, had taken him from her rival and borne him away ostentatiously to domesticate him in her flock of acknowledged followers. The novelist seemed to be all at once smitten, puzzled, charmed, and stupefied by the discoveries he had made in this creature sui generis, and he could not help talking about her to everybody that he met, a fact which had already given rise to much gossip.

Just as he was presenting Mariolle he encountered Mme. de Burne's look from the other end of the room; he smiled and whispered in his friend's ear: "See, the mistress of the house is angry."

André raised his eyes, but Madame had turned to meet Massival, who just then made

his appearance beneath the raised portière. He was followed almost immediately by the Marquise de Bratiane, which elicited from Lamarthe: "Ah! we shall only have a second rendition of 'Dido'; the first has just been given in the Marquise's coupé."

Mme. de Frémines added: "Really, our friend De Burne's collection is losing some of its finest jewels."

Mariolle felt a sudden impulse of anger rising in his heart, a kind of hatred against this woman, and a brusque sensation of irritation against these people, their way of life, their ideas, their tastes, their aimless inclinations, their childish amusements. Then, as Lamarthe bent over the young woman to whisper something in her ear, he profited by the opportunity to slip away.

Handsome Mme. le Prieur was sitting by herself only a few steps away; he went up to her to make his bow. According to Lamarthe she stood for the old guard among all this irruption of modernism. Young, tall, handsome, with very regular features and chestnut hair through which ran threads of gold, extremely affable, captivating by reason of her tranquil, kindly charm of manner, by reason also of a calm, well-studied coquetry and a great desire to please that lay concealed beneath an outward appearance of simple and sincere affection, she had many firm partisans, whom she took good care should never be exposed to dangerous rivalries. Her house had the reputation of being a little gathering of intimate friends, where all the habitués, moreover, concurred in extolling the merits of the husband.

She and Mariolle now entered into conversation. She held in high esteem this intelligent and reserved man, who gave people so little cause to talk about him and who was perhaps of more account than all the rest.

The remaining guests came dropping in: big Fresnel, puffing and giving a last wipe with his handkerchief to his shining and perspiring forehead, the philosophic George de Maltry, finally the Baron de Gravil accompanied by the Comte de Marantin. M. de Pradon assisted his daughter in doing the honors of the house; he was extremely

attractive to Mariolle.

But Mariolle, with a heavy heart, saw her going and coming and bestowing her attentions on everyone there more than on him.

Twice, it is true, she had thrown him a swift look from a distance which seemed to say, "I am not forgetting you," but they were so fleeting that perhaps he had failed to catch their meaning. And then he could not be unconscious to the fact that Lamarthe's aggressive assiduities to Mme. de Frémines were displeasing to Mme. de Burne. "That is only her coquettish feeling of spite," he said to himself, "a woman's irritation from whose salon some valuable trinket has been spirited away." Still it made him suffer, and his suffering was the greater since he saw that she was constantly watching them in a furtive, concealed kind of way, while she did not seem to trouble herself a bit at seeing him sitting beside Mme. le Prieur.

The reason was that she had him in her power, she was sure of him, while the other was escaping her. What, then, could be to her that love of theirs, that love which was born but yesterday, and which in him had banished and killed every other idea?

M. de Pradon had called for silence, and Massival was opening the piano, which Mme. de Bratiane was approaching, removing her gloves meanwhile, for she was to sing the woes of "Dido," when the door again opened and a young man appeared upon whom every eye was immediately fixed. He was tall and slender, with curling side-whiskers, short, blond, curly hair, and an air that was altogether aristocratic. Even Mme. le Prieur seemed to feel his influence.

"Who is it?" Mariolle asked her.

"What! is it possible that you do not know him?"

"No, I do not."

"It is Comte Rudolph de Bernhaus."

"Ah! the man who fought a duel with Sigismond Fabre."

"Yes."

The story had made a great noise at the time. The Comte de Bernhaus, attached to the Austrian embassy and a diplomat of the highest promise, an elegant Bismarck, so it was said, having heard some words spoken in derogation of his sovereign at an official reception, had fought the next day with the man who uttered them, a celebrated fencer, and killed him. After this duel, in respect to which public opinion had been divided, the Comte acquired between one day and the next a notoriety after the manner of Sarah Bernhardt, but with this difference, that his name appeared in an aureole of poetic chivalry. He was in addition a man of great charm, an agreeable conversationalist, a man of distinction in every respect. Lamarthe used to say of him: "He is the one to tame our pretty wild beasts."

He took his seat beside Mme. de Burne with a very gallant air, and Massival sat down before the keyboard and allowed his fingers to run over the keys for a few moments.

Nearly all the audience changed their places and drew their chairs nearer so as to hear better and at the same time have a better view of the singer. Thus Mariolle and Lamarthe found themselves side by side.

There was a great silence of expectation and respectful attention; then the musician began with a slow, a very slow succession of notes, something like a musical recitative. There were pauses, then the air would be lightly caught up in a series of little phrases, now languishing and dying away, now breaking out in nervous strength, indicative, it would seem, of distressful emotion, but always characterized by originality of invention. Mariolle gave way to reverie. He beheld a woman, a woman in the fullness of her mature youth and ripened beauty, walking slowly upon a shore that was bathed by the waves of the sea. He knew that she was suffering, that she bore a great sorrow in her soul, and he looked at Mme. de Bratiane.

Motionless, pale beneath her wealth of thick black hair that seemed to have been

dipped in the shades of night, the Italian stood waiting, her glance directed straight before her. On her strongly marked, rather stern features, against which her eyes and eyebrows stood out like spots of ink, in all her dark, powerful, and passionate beauty, there was something that struck one, something like the threat of the coming storm that we read in the blackening sky.

Massival, slightly nodding his head with its long hair in cadence with the rhythm, kept on relating the affecting tale that he was drawing from the resonant keys of ivory.

A shiver all at once ran through the singer; she partially opened her mouth, and from it there proceeded a long-drawn, heartrending wail of agony. It was not one of those outbursts of tragic despair that divas give utterance to upon the stage, with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those pitiful laments for love betrayed that bring a storm of bravos from an audience; it was a cry of supreme passion, coming from the body and not from the soul, wrung from her like the roar of a wounded animal, the cry of the feminine animal betrayed. Then she was silent, and Massival again began to relate, more animatedly, more stormily, the moving story of the miserable queen who was abandoned by the man she loved. Then the woman's voice made itself heard again. She used articulate language now; she told of the intolerable torture of solitude, of her unquenchable thirst for the caresses that were hers no more, and of the grief of knowing that he was gone from her forever.

Her warm, ringing voice made the hearts of her audience beat beneath the spell. This somber Italian, with hair like the darkness of the night, seemed to be suffering all the sorrows that she was telling, she seemed to love, or to have the capacity of loving, with furious ardor. When she ceased her eyes were full of tears, and she slowly wiped them away. Lamarthe leaned over toward Mariolle and said to him in a quiver of artistic enthusiasm: "Good heavens! how beautiful she is just now! She is a woman, the only one in the room." Then he added, after a moment of reflection:

"After all, who can tell? Perhaps there is nothing there but the mirage of the music, for nothing has real existence except our illusions. But what an art to produce illusions is that of hers!"

There was a short intermission between the first and the second parts of the musical poem, and warm congratulations were extended to the composer and his interpreter. Lamarthe in particular was very earnest in his felicitations, and he was really sincere, for he was endowed with the capacity to feel and comprehend, and beauty of all kinds appealed strongly to his nature, under whatever form expressed. The manner in which he told Mme. de Bratiane what his feelings had been while listening to her was so flattering that it brought a slight blush to her face and excited a little spiteful feeling among the other women who heard it. Perhaps he was not altogether unaware of the feeling that he had produced.

When he turned around to resume his chair, he perceived Comte de Bernhaus just in the act of seating himself beside Mme. de Frémines. She seemed at once to be on confidential terms with him, and they smiled at each other as if this close conversation was particularly agreeable to them both. Mariolle, whose gloom was momentarily increasing, stood leaning against a door; the novelist came and stationed himself at his side. Big Fresnel, George de Maltry, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin formed a circle about Mme. de Burne, who was going about offering tea. She seemed imprisoned in a crown of adorers. Lamarthe ironically called his friend's attention to it and added: "A crown without jewels, however, and I am sure that she would be glad to give all those rhinestones for the brilliant that she would like to see there."

"What brilliant do you mean?" inquired Mariolle.

"Why, Bernhaus, handsome, irresistible, incomparable Bernhaus, he in whose honor this fête is given, for whom the miracle was performed of inducing Massival to bring out his 'Dido' here."

André, though incredulous, was conscious of a pang of regret as he heard these words. "Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no; ten days at most. But she put her best foot foremost during this brief campaign, and her tactics have been those of a conqueror. If you had been here you would have had a good laugh."

"How so?"

"She met him for the first time at Mme. de Frémines's; I happened to be dining there that evening. Bernhaus stands very well in the good graces of the lady of that house, as you may see for yourself; all that you have to do is to look at them at the present moment; and behold, in the very minute that succeeded the first salutation that they ever made each other, there is our pretty friend De Burne taking the field to effect the conquest of the Austrian phœnix. And she is succeeding, and will succeed, although the little Frémines is more than a match for her in coquetry, real indifference, and perhaps perversity. But our friend De Burne uses her weapons more scientifically, she is more of a woman, by which I mean a modern woman, that is to say, irresistible by reason of that artificial seductiveness which takes the place in the modern woman of the old-fashioned natural charm of manner. And it is not her artificiality alone that is to be taken into account, but her æstheticism, her profound comprehension of feminine æsthetics; all her strength lies therein. She knows herself thoroughly, because she takes more delight in herself than in anything else, and she is never at fault as to the best means of subjugating a man and making the best use of her gifts in order to captivate men."

Mariolle took exception to this. "I think that you put it too strongly," he said. "She has always been very simple with me."

"Because simplicity is the right thing to meet the requirements of your case. I do not wish to speak ill of her, however. I think that she is better than most of her set. But they are not women."

Massival, striking a few chords on the piano, here reduced them to silence, and Mme. de Bratiane proceeded to sing the second part of the poem, in which her delineation of the title-role was a magnificent study of physical passion and sensual regret.

Lamarthe, however, never once took his eyes from Mme. de Frémines and the Comte de Bernhaus, where they were enjoying their tête-à-tête, and as soon as the last vibrations of the piano were lost in the murmurs of applause, he again took up his theme as if in continuation of an argument, or as if he were replying to an adversary: "No, they are not women. The most honest of them are coquettes without being aware of it. The more I know them the less do I find in them that sensation of mild exhilaration that it is the part of a true woman to inspire in us. They intoxicate, it is true, but the process wears upon our nerves, for they are too sophisticated. Oh, it is very good as a liqueur to sip now and then, but it is a poor substitute for the good wine that we used to have. You see, my dear fellow, woman was created and sent to dwell on earth for two objects only, and it is these two objects alone that can avail to bring out her true, great, and noble qualities—love and the family. I am talking like M. Prudhomme. Now the women of to-day are incapable of loving, and they will not bear children. When they are so inexpert as to have them, it is a misfortune in their eyes; then a burden. Truly, they are not women; they are monsters."

Astonished by the writer's violent manner and by the angry look that glistened in his eye, Mariolle asked him: "Why, then, do you spend half your time hanging to their skirts?"

Lamarthe hotly replied: "Why? Why? Because it interests me—parbleu! And then—and then—Would you prevent a physician from going to the hospitals to watch the cases? Those women constitute my clinic."

This reflection seemed to quiet him a little: he proceeded: "Then, too, I adore them for the very reason that they are so modern. At bottom I am really no more a man

than they are women. When I am at the point of becoming attached to one of them, I amuse myself by investigating and analyzing all the resulting sensations and emotions, just like a chemist who experiments upon himself with a poison in order to ascertain its properties." After an interval of silence, he continued: "In this way they will never succeed in getting me into their clutches. I can play their game as well as they play it themselves, perhaps even better, and that is of use to me for my books, while their proceedings are not of the slightest bit of use to them. What fools they are! Failures, every one of them—charming failures, who will be ready to die of spite as they grow older and see the mistake that they have made."

Mariolle, as he listened, felt himself sinking into one of those fits of depression that are like the humid gloom with which a long-continued rain darkens everything about us. He was well aware that the man of letters, as a general thing, was not apt to be very far out of the way, but he could not bring himself to admit that he was altogether right in the present case. With a slight appearance of irritation, he argued, not so much in defense of women as to show the causes of the position that they occupy in contemporary literature. "In the days when poets and novelists exalted them, and endowed them with poetic attributes," he said, "they looked for in life, and seemed to find, that which their heart had discovered in their reading. Nowadays you persist in suppressing everything that has any savor of sentiment and poetry, and in its stead give them only naked, undeceiving realities. Now, my dear sir, the more love there is in books, the more love there is in life. When you invented the ideal and laid it before them, they believed in the truth of your inventions. Now that you give them nothing but stern, unadorned realism, they follow in your footsteps and have come to measure everything by that standard of vulgarity."

Lamarthe, who was always ready for a literary discussion, was about to commence a dissertation when Mme. de Burne came up to them. It was one of the days when she looked at her best, with a toilette that delighted the eye and with that aggressive and alluring air that denoted that she was ready to try conclusions with anyone. She took

a chair. "That is what I like," she said; "to come upon two men and find that they are not talking about me. And then you are the only men here that one can listen to with any interest. What was the subject that you were discussing?"

Lamarthe, quite without embarrassment and in terms of elegant raillery, placed before her the question that had arisen between himself and Mariolle. Then he resumed his reasoning with a spirit that was inflamed by that desire of applause which, in the presence of women, always excites men who like to intoxicate themselves with glory.

She at once interested herself in the discussion, and, warming to the subject, took part in it in defense of the women of our day with a good deal of wit and ingenuity. Some remarks upon the faithfulness and the attachment that even those who were looked on with most suspicion might be capable of, incomprehensible to the novelist, made Mariolle's heart beat more rapidly, and when she left them to take a seat beside Mme. de Frémines, who had persistently kept the Comte de Bernhaus near her, Lamarthe and Mariolle, completely vanquished by her display of feminine tact and grace, were united in declaring that, beyond all question, she was exquisite.

"And just look at them!" said the writer.

The grand duel was on. What were they talking about now, the Austrian and those two women? Mme. de Burne had come up just at the right moment to interrupt a tête-à-tête which, however agreeable the two persons engaged in it might be to each other, was becoming monotonous from being too long protracted, and she broke it up by relating with an indignant air the expressions that she had heard from Lamarthe's lips. To be sure, it was all applicable to Mme. de Frémines, it all resulted from her most recent conquest, and it was all related in the hearing of an intelligent man who was capable of understanding it in all its bearings. The match was applied, and again the everlasting question of love blazed up, and the mistress of the house beckoned to Mariolle and Lamarthe to come to them; then, as their voices grew loud

in debate, she summoned the remainder of the company.

A general discussion ensued, bright and animated, in which everyone had something to say. Mme. de Burne was witty and entertaining beyond all the rest, shifting her ground from sentiment, which might have been factitious, to droll paradox. The day was a triumphant one for her, and she was prettier, brighter, and more animated than she had ever been.

CHAPTER VII.

DEPRESSION

When André Mariolle had parted from Mme. de Burne and the penetrating charm of her presence had faded away, he felt within him and all about him, in his flesh, in his heart, in the air, and in all the surrounding world a sensation as if the delight of life which had been his support and animating principle for some time past had been taken from him.

What had happened? Nothing, or almost nothing. Toward the close of the reception she had been very charming in her manner toward him, saying to him more than once: "I am not conscious of anyone's presence here but yours." And yet he felt that she had revealed something to him of which he would have preferred always to remain ignorant. That, too, was nothing, or almost nothing; still he was stupefied, as a man might be upon hearing of some unworthy action of his father or his mother, to learn that during those twenty days which he had believed were absolutely and entirely devoted by her as well as by him, every minute of them, to the sentiment of their newborn love, so recent and so intense, she had resumed her former mode of life, had made many visits, formed many plans, recommenced those odious flirtations, had run after men and disputed them with her rivals, received compliments, and showed off all her graces.

So soon! All this she had done so soon! Had it happened later he would not have been surprised. He knew the world, he knew women and their ways of looking at

things, he was sufficiently intelligent to understand it all, and would never have been unduly exacting or offensively jealous. She was beautiful; she was born—it was her allotted destiny—to receive the homage of men and listen to their soft nothings. She had selected him from among them all, and had bestowed herself upon him courageously, royally. It was his part to remain, he would remain in any event, a grateful slave to her caprices and a resigned spectator of her triumphs as a pretty woman. But it was hard on him; something suffered within him, in that obscure cavern down at the bottom of the heart where the delicate sensibilities have their dwelling.

No doubt he had been in the wrong; he had always been in the wrong since he first came to know himself. He carried too much sentimental prudence into his commerce with the world; his feelings were too thin-skinned. This was the cause of the isolated life that he had always led, through his dread of contact with the world and of wounded susceptibilities. He had been wrong, for this supersensitiveness is almost always the result of our not admitting the existence of a nature essentially different from our own, or else not tolerating it. He knew this, having often observed it in himself, but it was too late to modify the constitution of his being.

He certainly had no right to reproach Mme. de Burne, for if she had forbidden him her salon and kept him in hiding during those days of happiness that she had afforded him, she had done it to blind prying eyes and be more fully his in the end. Why, then, this trouble that had settled in his heart? Ah! why? It was because he had believed her to be wholly his, and now it had been made clear to him that he could never expect to seize and hold this woman of a many-sided nature who belonged to all the world.

He was well aware, moreover, that all our life is made up of successes relative in degree to the "almost," and up to the present time he had borne this with philosophic resignation, dissembling his dissatisfaction and his unsatisfied yearnings under the

mask of an assumed unsociability. This time he had thought that he was about to obtain an absolute success—the "entirely" that he had been waiting and hoping for all his life. The "entirely" is not to be attained in this world.

His evening was a dismal one, spent in analyzing the painful impression that he had received. When he was in bed this impression, instead of growing weaker, took stronger hold of him, and as he desired to leave nothing unexplored, he ransacked his mind to ascertain the remotest causes of his new troubles. They went, and came, and returned again like little breaths of frosty air, exciting in his love a suffering that was as yet weak and indistinct, like those vague neuralgic pains that we get by sitting in a draft, presages of the horrible agonies that are to come.

He understood in the first place that he was jealous, no longer as the ardent lover only but as one who had the right to call her his own. As long as he had not seen her surrounded by men, her men, he had not allowed himself to dwell upon this sensation, at the same time having a faint prevision of it, but supposing that it would be different, very different, from what it actually was. To find the mistress whom he believed had cared for none but him during those days of secret and frequent meetings—during that early period that should have been entirely devoted to isolation and tender emotion—to find her as much, and even more, interested and wrapped up in her former and frivolous flirtations than she was before she yielded herself to him, always ready to fritter away her time and attention on any chance comer, thus leaving but little of herself to him whom she had designated as the man of her choice, caused him a jealousy that was more of the flesh than of the feelings, not an undefined jealousy, like a fever that lies latent in the system, but a jealousy precise and well defined, for he was doubtful of her.

At first his doubts were instinctive, arising in a sensation of distrust that had intruded itself into his veins rather than into his thoughts, in that sense of dissatisfaction, almost physical, of the man who is not sure of his mate. Then,

having doubted, he began to suspect.

What was his position toward her after all? Was he her first lover, or was he the tenth? Was he the successor of M. de Burne, or was he the successor of Lamarthe, Massival, George de Maltry, and the predecessor as well, perhaps, of the Comte de Bernhaus? What did he know of her? That she was surprisingly beautiful, stylish beyond all others, intelligent, discriminating, witty, but at the same time fickle, quick to weary, readily fatigued and disgusted with anyone or anything, and, above all else, in love with herself and an insatiable coquette. Had she had a lover—or lovers—before him? If not, would she have offered herself to him as she did? Where could she have got the audacity that made her come and open his bedroom door, at night, in a public inn? And then after that, would she have shown such readiness to visit the house at Auteuil? Before going there she had merely asked him a few questions, such questions as an experienced and prudent woman would naturally ask. He had answered like a man of circumspection, not unaccustomed to such interviews, and immediately she had confidingly said "Yes," entirely reassured, probably benefiting by her previous experiences.

And then her knock at that little door, behind which he was waiting, with a beating heart, almost ready to faint, how discreetly authoritative it had been! And how she had entered without any visible display of emotion, careful only to observe whether she might be recognized from the adjacent houses! And the way that she had made herself at home at once in that doubtful lodging that he had hired and furnished for her! Would a woman who was a novice, how daring soever she might be, how superior to considerations of morality and regardless of social prejudices, have penetrated thus calmly the mystery of a first rendezvous? There is a trouble of the mind, a hesitation of the body, an instinctive fear in the very feet, which know not whither they are tending; would she not have felt all that unless she had had some experience in these excursions of love and unless the practice of these things had dulled her native sense of modesty?

Burning with this persistent, irritating fever, which the warmth of his bed seemed to render still more unendurable, Mariolle tossed beneath the coverings, constantly drawn on by his chain of doubts and suppositions; like a man that feels himself irrecoverably sliding down the steep descent of a precipice. At times he tried to call a halt and break the current of his thoughts; he sought and found, and was glad to find, reflections that were more just to her and reassuring to him, but the seeds of distrust had been sown in him and he could not help their growing.

And yet, with what had he to reproach her? Nothing, except that her nature was not entirely similar to his own, that she did not look upon life in the same way that he did and that she had not in her heart an instrument of sensibility attuned to the same key as his.

Immediately upon awaking next morning the longing to see her and to re-enforce his confidence in her developed itself within him like a ravening hunger, and he awaited the proper moment to go and pay her the visit demanded by custom. The instant that she saw him at the door of the little drawing-room devoted to her special intimates, where she was sitting alone occupied with her correspondence, she came to him with her two hands outstretched.

"Ah! Good day, dear friend!" she said, with so pleased and frank an air that all his odious suspicions, which were still floating indeterminately in his brain, melted away beneath the warmth of her reception.

He seated himself at her side and at once began to tell her of the manner in which he loved her, for their love was now no longer what it had been. He gently gave her to understand that there are two species of the race of lovers upon earth: those whose desire is that of madmen and whose ardor disappears when once they have achieved a triumph, and those whom possession serves to subjugate and capture, in whom the love of the senses, blending with the inarticulate and ineffable appeals that the heart of man at times sends forth toward a woman, gives rise to the servitude of a

complete and torturing love.

Torturing it is, certainly, and forever so, however happy it may be, for nothing, even in the moments of closest communion, ever sates the need of her that rules our being.

Mme. de Burne was charmed and gratified as she listened, carried away, as one is carried away at the theater when an actor gives a powerful interpretation of his rôle and moves us by awaking some slumbering echo in our own life. It was indeed an echo, the disturbing echo of a real passion; but it was not from her bosom that this passion sent forth its cry. Still, she felt such satisfaction that she was the object of so keen a sentiment, she was so pleased that it existed in a man who was capable of expressing it in such terms, in a man of whom she was really very fond, for whom she was really beginning to feel an attachment and whose presence was becoming more and more a necessity to her—not for her physical being but for that mysterious feminine nature which is so greedy of tenderness, devotion, and subjection—that she felt like embracing him, like offering him her mouth, her whole being, only that he might keep on worshiping her in this way.

She answered him frankly and without prudery, with that profound artfulness that certain women are endowed with, making it clear to him that he too had made great progress in her affections, and they remained tête-à-tête in the little drawing-room, where it so happened that no one came that day until twilight, talking always upon the same theme and caressing each other with words that to them did not have the common significance.

The servants had just brought in the lamps, when Mme. de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle withdrew, and as Mme. de Burne was accompanying him to the door through the main drawing-room, he asked her: "When shall I see you down yonder?"

"Will Friday suit you?"

"Certainly. At what hour?"

"The same, three o'clock."

"Until Friday, then. Adieu. I adore you!"

During the two days that passed before this interview, he experienced a sensation of loneliness that he had never felt before in the same way. A woman was wanting in his life—she was the only existent object for him in the world, and as this woman was not far away and he was prevented by social conventions alone from going to her, and from passing a lifetime with her, he chafed in his solitude, in the interminable lapse of the moments that seemed at times to pass so slowly, at the absolute impossibility of a thing that was so easy.

He arrived at the rendezvous on Friday three hours before the time, but it was pleasing to him—it comforted his anxiety—to wait there where she was soon to come, after having already suffered so much in awaiting her mentally in places where she was not to come.

He stationed himself near the door long before the clock had struck the three strokes that he was expecting so eagerly, and when at last he heard them he began to tremble with impatience. The quarter struck. He looked out into the street, cautiously protruding his head between the door and the casing; it was deserted from one end to the other. The minutes seemed to stretch out in aggravating slowness. He was constantly drawing his watch from his pocket, and at last when the hand marked the half-hour it appeared to him that he had been standing there for an incalculable length of time. Suddenly he heard a faint sound upon the pavement outside, and the summons upon the door of the little gloved hand quickly made him forget his disappointment and inspired in him a feeling of gratitude toward her.

She seemed a little out of breath as she asked: "I am very late, am I not?"

"No, not very."

"Just imagine, I was near not being able to come at all. I had a houseful, and I was at my wits' end to know what to do to get rid of all those people. Tell me, do you go

under your own name here?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"So that I may send you a telegram if I should ever be prevented from coming."

"I am known as M. Nicolle."

"Very well; I won't forget. My! how nice it is here in this garden!"

There were five great splashes of perfumed, many-hued brightness upon the grass-plots of the flowers, which were carefully tended and constantly renewed, for the gardener had a customer who paid liberally.

Halting at a bench in front of a bed of heliotrope: "Let us sit here for a while," she said; "I have something funny to tell you."

She proceeded to relate a bit of scandal that was quite fresh, and from the effect of which she had not yet recovered. The story was that Mme. Massival, the ex-mistress whom the artist had married, had come to Mme. de Bratiane's, furious with jealousy, right in the midst of an entertainment in which the Marquise was singing to the composer's accompaniment, and had made a frightful scene: results, rage of the fair Italian, astonishment and laughter of the guests. Massival, quite beside himself, tried to take away his wife, who kept striking him in the face, pulling his hair and beard, biting him and tearing his clothes, but she clung to him with all her strength and held him so that he could not stir, while Lamarthe and two servants, who had hurried to them at the noise, did what they could to release him from the teeth and claws of this fury.

Tranquillity was not restored until after the pair had taken their departure. Since then the musician had remained invisible, and the novelist, witness of the scene, had been repeating it everywhere in a very witty and amusing manner. The affair had produced a deep impression upon Mme. de Burne; it preoccupied her thoughts to such an extent that she hardly knew what she was doing. The constant recurrence of the names of Massival and Lamarthe upon her lips annoyed Mariolle.

"You just heard of this?" he said.

"Yes, hardly an hour ago."

"And that is the reason why she was late," he said to himself with bitterness. Then he asked aloud, "Shall we go in?"

"Yes," she absently murmured.

When, an hour later, she had left him, for she was greatly hurried that day, he returned alone to the quiet little house and seated himself on a low chair in their apartment. The feeling that she had been no more his than if she had not come there left a sort of black cavern in his heart, in all his being, that he tried to probe to the bottom. He could see nothing there, he could not understand; he was no longer capable of understanding. If she had not abstracted herself from his kisses, she had at all events escaped from the immaterial embraces of his tenderness by a mysterious absence of the will of being his. She had not refused herself to him, but it seemed as if she had not brought her heart there with her; it had remained somewhere else, very far away, idly occupied, distracted by some trifle.

Then he saw that he already loved her with his senses as much as with his feelings, even more perhaps. The deprivation of her soulless caresses inspired him with a mad desire to run after her and bring her back, to again possess himself of her. But why? What was the use—since the thoughts of that fickle mind were occupied elsewhere that day? So he must await the days and the hours when, to this elusive mistress of his, there should come the caprice, like her other caprices, of being in love with him.

He returned wearily to his house, with heavy footsteps, his eyes fixed on the sidewalk, tired of life, and it occurred to him that he had made no appointment with her for the future, either at her house or elsewhere.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW HOPES

Until the setting in of winter she was pretty faithful to their appointments; faithful, but not punctual. During the first three months her tardiness on these occasions ranged between three-quarters of an hour and two hours. As the autumnal rains compelled Mariolle to await her behind the garden gate with an umbrella over his head, shivering, with his feet in the mud, he caused a sort of little summer-house to be built, a covered and inclosed vestibule behind the gate, so that he might not take cold every time they met.

The trees had lost their verdure, and in the place of the roses and other flowers the beds were now filled with great masses of white, pink, violet, purple, and yellow chrysanthemums, exhaling their penetrating, balsamic perfume—the saddening perfume by which these noble flowers remind us of the dying year—upon the moist atmosphere, heavy with the odor of the rain upon the decaying leaves. In front of the door of the little house the inventive genius of the gardener had devised a great Maltese cross, composed of rarer plants arranged in delicate combinations of color, and Mariolle could never pass this bed, bright with new and constantly changing varieties, without the melancholy reflection that this flowery cross was very like a grave.

He was well acquainted now with those long watches in the little summer-house behind the gate. The rain would fall sullenly upon the thatch with which he had had it roofed and trickle down the board siding, and while waiting in this receiving-vault he would give way to the same unvarying reflections, go through the same process of reasoning, be swayed in turn by the same hopes, the same fears, the same discouragements. It was an incessant battle that he had to fight; a fierce, exhausting mental struggle with an elusive force, a force that perhaps had no real existence: the tenderness of that woman's heart.

What strange things they were, those interviews of theirs! Sometimes she would come in with a smile upon her face, full to overflowing with the desire of

conversation, and would take a seat without removing her hat and gloves, without raising her veil, often without so much as giving him a kiss. It never occurred to her to kiss him on such occasions; her head was full of a host of captivating little preoccupations, each of them more captivating to her than the idea of putting up her lips to the kiss of her despairing lover. He would take a seat beside her, heart and mouth overrunning with burning words which could find no way of utterance; he would listen to her and answer, and while apparently deeply interested in what she was saying would furtively take her hand, which she would yield to him calmly, amicably, without an extra pulsation in her veins.

At other times she would appear more tender, more wholly his; but he, who was watching her with anxious and clear-sighted eyes, with the eyes of a lover powerless to achieve her entire conquest, could see and divine that this relative degree of affection was owing to the fact that nothing had occurred on such occasions of sufficient importance to divert her thoughts from him.

Her persistent unpunctuality, moreover, proved to Mariolle with how little eagerness she looked forward to these interviews. When we love, when anything pleases and attracts us, we hasten to the anticipated meeting, but once the charm has ceased to work, the appointed time seems to come too quickly and everything serves as a pretext to delay our loitering steps and put off the moment that has become indefinably distasteful to us. An odd comparison with a habit of his own kept incessantly returning to his mind. In summer-time the anticipation of his morning bath always made him hasten his toilette and his visit to the bathing establishment, while in the frosty days of winter he always found so many little things to attend to at home before going out that he was invariably an hour behind his usual time. The meetings at Auteuil were to her like so many winter shower-baths.

For some time past, moreover, she had been making these interviews more infrequent, sending telegrams at the last hour, putting them off until the following

day and apparently seeking for excuses for dispensing with them. She always succeeded in discovering excuses of a nature to satisfy herself, but they caused him mental and physical worries and anxieties that were intolerable. If she had manifested any coolness, if she had shown that she was tiring of this passion of his that she felt and knew was constantly increasing in violence, he might at first have been irritated and then in turn offended, discouraged, and resigned, but on the contrary she manifested more affection for him than ever, she seemed more flattered by his love, more desirous of retaining it, while not responding to it otherwise than by friendly marks of preference which were beginning to make all her other admirers jealous.

She could never see enough of him in her own house, and the same telegram that would announce to André that she could not come to Auteuil would convey to him her urgent request to dine with her or come and spend an hour in the evening. At first he had taken these invitations as her way of making amends to him, but afterward he came to understand that she liked to have him near her and that she really experienced the need of him, more so than of the others. She had need of him as an idol needs prayers and faith in order to make it a god; standing in the empty shrine it is but a bit of carved wood, but let a believer enter the sanctuary, and kneel and prostrate himself and worship with fervent prayers, drunk with religion, it becomes the equal of Brahma or of Allah, for every loved being is a kind of god. Mme. de Burne felt that she was adapted beyond all others to play this rôle of fetich, to fill woman's mission, bestowed on her by nature, of being sought after and adored, and of vanquishing men by the arms of her beauty, grace, and coquetry.

In the meantime she took no pains to conceal her affection and her strong liking for Mariolle, careless of what folks might say about it, possibly with the secret desire of irritating and inflaming the others. They could hardly ever come to her house without finding him there, generally installed in the great easy-chair that Lamarthe had come to call the "pulpit of the officiating priest," and it afforded her sincere

pleasure to remain alone in his company for an entire evening, talking and listening to him. She had taken a liking to this kind of family life that he had revealed to her, to this constant contact with an agreeable, well-stored mind, which was hers and at her command just as much as were the little trinkets that littered her dressing-table. In like manner she gradually came to yield to him much of herself, of her thoughts, of her deeper mental personality, in the course of those affectionate confidences that are as pleasant in the giving as in the receiving. She felt herself more at ease, more frank and familiar with him than with the others, and she loved him the more for it. She also experienced the sensation, dear to womankind, that she was really bestowing something, that she was confiding to some one all that she had to give, a thing that she had never done before.

In her eyes this was much, in his it was very little. He was still waiting and hoping for the great final breaking up of her being which should give him her soul beneath his caresses.

Caresses she seemed to regard as useless, annoying, rather a nuisance than otherwise. She submitted to them, not without returning them, but tired of them quickly, and this feeling doubtless engendered in her a shade of dislike to them. The slightest and most insignificant of them seemed to be irksome to her. When in the course of conversation he would take her hand and carry it to his lips and hold it there a little, she always seemed desirous of withdrawing it, and he could feel the movement of the muscles in her arm preparatory to taking it away.

He felt these things like so many thrusts of a knife, and he carried away from her presence wounds that bled unintermittently in the solitude of his love. How was it that she had not that period of unreasoning attraction toward him that almost every woman has when once she has made the entire surrender of her being? It may be of short duration, frequently it is followed quickly by weariness and disgust, but it is seldom that it is not there at all, for a day, for an hour! This mistress of his had made

of him, not a lover, but a sort of intelligent companion of her life.

Of what was he complaining? Those who yield themselves entirely perhaps have less to give than she!

He was not complaining; he was afraid. He was afraid of that other one, the man who would spring up unexpectedly whenever she might chance to fall in with him, to-morrow, may be, or the day after, whoever he might be, artist, actor, soldier, or man of the world, it mattered not what, born to find favor in her woman's eyes and securing her favor for no other reason, because he was the man, the one destined to implant in her for the first time the imperious desire of opening her arms to him.

He was now jealous of the future as before he had at times been jealous of her unknown past, and all the young woman's intimates were beginning to be jealous of him. He was the subject of much conversation among them; they even made dark and mysterious allusions to the subject in her presence. Some said that he was her lover, while others, guided by Lamarthe's opinion, decided that she was only making a fool of him in order to irritate and exasperate them, as it was her habit to do, and that this was all there was to it. Her father took the matter up and made some remarks to her which she did not receive with good grace, and the more conscious she became of the reports that were circulating among her acquaintance, the more, by an odd contradiction to the prudence that had ruled her life, did she persist in making an open display of the preference that she felt for Mariolle.

He, however, was somewhat disturbed by these suspicious mutterings. He spoke to her of it.

"What do I care?" she said.

"If you only loved me, as a lover!"

"Do I not love you, my friend?"

"Yes and no; you love me well enough in your own house, but very badly elsewhere. I should prefer it to be just the opposite, for my sake, and even, indeed, for your

own."

She laughed and murmured: "We can't do more than we can."

"If you only knew the mental trouble that I experience in trying to animate your love. At times I seem to be trying to grasp the intangible, to be clasping an iceberg in my arms that chills me and melts away within my embrace."

She made no answer, not fancying the subject, and assumed the absent manner that she often wore at Auteuil. He did not venture to press the matter further. He looked upon her a good deal as amateurs look upon the precious objects in a museum that tempt them so strongly and that they know they cannot carry away with them.

His days and nights were made up of hours of suffering, for he was living in the fixed idea, and still more in the sentiment than in the idea, that she was his and yet not his, that she was conquered and still at liberty, captured and yet impregnable. He was living at her side, as near her as could be, without ever reaching her, and he loved her with all the unsatiated longings of his body and his soul. He began to write to her again, as he had done at the commencement of their liaison. Once before with ink he had vanquished her early scruples; once again with ink he might be victorious over this later and obstinate resistance. Putting longer intervals between his visits to her, he told her in almost daily letters of the fruitlessness of his love. Now and then, when he had been very eloquent and impassioned and had evinced great sorrow, she answered him. Her letters, dated for effect midnight, or one, two, or three o'clock in the morning, were clear and precise, well considered, encouraging, and afflicting. She reasoned well, and they were not destitute of wit and even fancy, but it was in vain that he read them and re-read them, it was in vain that he admitted that they were to the point, well turned, intelligent, graceful, and satisfactory to his masculine vanity; they had in them nothing of her heart, they satisfied him no more than did the kisses that she gave him in the house at Auteuil.

He asked himself why this was so, and when he had learned them by heart he came

to know them so well that he discovered the reason, for a person's writings always afford the surest clue to his nature. Spoken words dazzle and deceive, for lips are pleasing and eyes seductive, but black characters set down upon white paper expose the soul in all its nakedness.

Man, thanks to the artifices of rhetoric, to his professional address and his habit of using the pen to discuss all the affairs of life, often succeeds in disguising his own nature by his impersonal prose style, literary or business, but woman never writes unless it is of herself and something of her being goes into her every word. She knows nothing of the subtilities of style and surrenders herself unreservedly in her ignorance of the scope and value of words. Mariolle called to mind the memoirs and correspondence of celebrated women that he had read; how distinctly their characters were all set forth there, the précieuses, the witty, and the sensible! What struck him most in Mme. de Burne's letters was that no trace of sensibility was to be discovered in them. This woman had the faculty of thought but not of feeling. He called to mind letters that he had received from other persons; he had had many of them. A little bourgeoise that he had met while traveling and who had loved him for the space of three months had written delicious, thrilling notes, abounding in fresh and unexpected terms of sentiment; he had been surprised by the flexibility, the elegant coloring, and the variety of her style. Whence had she obtained this gift? From the fact that she was a woman of sensibility; there could be no other answer. A woman does not elaborate her phrases; they come to her intelligence straight from her emotions; she does not rummage the dictionary for fine words. What she feels strongly she expresses justly, without long and labored consideration, in the adaptive sincerity of her nature.

He tried to test the sincerity of his mistress's nature by means of the lines which she wrote him. They were well written and full of amiability, but how was it that she could find nothing better for him? Ah! for her he had found words that burned as living coals!

When his valet brought in his mail he would look for an envelope bearing the longed-for handwriting, and when he recognized it an involuntary emotion would arise in him, succeeded by a beating of the heart. He would extend his hand and grasp the bit of paper; again he would scrutinize the address, then tear it open. What had she to say to him? Would he find the word "love" there? She had never written or uttered this word without qualifying it by the adverb "well": "I love you well"; "I love you much"; "Do I not love you?" He knew all these formulas, which are inexpressive by reason of what is tacked on to them. Can there be such a thing as a comparison between the degrees of love when one is in its toils? Can one decide whether he loves well or ill? "To love much," what a dearth of love that expression manifests! One loves, nothing more, nothing less; nothing can be said, nothing expressed, nothing imagined that means more than that one simple sentence. It is brief, it is everything. It becomes body, soul, life, the whole of our being. We feel it as we feel the warm blood in our veins, we inhale it as we do the air, we carry it within us as we carry our thoughts, for it becomes the atmosphere of the mind. Nothing has existence beside it. It is not a word, it is an inexpressible state of being, represented by a few letters. All the conditions of life are changed by it; whatever we do, there is nothing done or seen or tasted or enjoyed or suffered just as it was before. Mariolle had become the victim of this small verb, and his eye would run rapidly over the lines, seeking there a tenderness answering to his own. He did in fact find there sufficient to warrant him in saying to himself: "She loves me very well," but never to make him exclaim: "She loves me!" She was continuing in her correspondence the pretty, poetical romance that had had its inception at Mont Saint-Michel. It was the literature of love, not of the love.

When he had finished reading and re-reading them, he would lock the precious and disappointing sheets in a drawer and seat himself in his easy-chair. He had passed many a bitter hour in it before this.

After a while her answers to his letters became less frequent; doubtless she was

somewhat weary of manufacturing phrases and ringing the changes on the same stale theme. And then, besides, she was passing through a period of unwonted fashionable excitement, of which André had presaged the approach with that increment of suffering that such insignificant, disagreeable incidents can bring to troubled hearts.

It was a winter of great gaiety. A mad intoxication had taken possession of Paris and shaken the city to its depths; all night long cabs and coupés were rolling through the streets and through the windows were visible white apparitions of women in evening toilette. Everyone was having a good time; all the conversation was on plays and balls, matinées and soirées. The contagion, an epidemic of pleasure, as it were, had quickly extended to all classes of society, and Mme. de Burne also was attacked by it.

It had all been brought about by the effect that her beauty had produced at a dance at the Austrian embassy. The Comte de Bernhaus had made her acquainted with the ambassadress, the Princess de Malten, who had been immediately and entirely delighted with Mme. de Burne. Within a very short time she became the Princess's very intimate friend and thereby extended with great rapidity her relations among the most select diplomatic and aristocratic circles. Her grace, her elegance, her charming manners, her intelligence and wit quickly achieved a triumph for her and made her la mode, and many of the highest titles among the women of France sought to be presented to her. Every Monday would witness a long line of coupés with arms on their panels drawn up along the curb of the Rue du Général-Foy, and the footmen would lose their heads and make sad havoc with the high-sounding names that they bellowed into the drawing-room, confounding duchesses with marquises, countesses with baronnes.

She was entirely carried off her feet. The incense of compliments and invitations, the feeling that she was become one of the elect to whom Paris bends the knee in

worship as long as the fancy lasts, the delight of being thus admired, made much of, and run after, were too much for her and gave rise within her soul to an acute attack of snobbishness.

Her artistic following did not submit to this condition of affairs without a struggle, and the revolution produced a close alliance among her old friends. Fresnel, even, was accepted by them, enrolled on the regimental muster and became a power in the league, while Mariolle was its acknowledged head, for they were all aware of the ascendency that he had over her and her friendship for him. He, however, watched her as she was whirled away in this flattering popularity as a child watches the vanishing of his red balloon when he has let go the string. It seemed to him that she was eluding him in the midst of this elegant, motley, dancing throng and flying far, far away from that secret happiness that he had so ardently desired for both of them, and he was jealous of everybody and everything, men, women, and inanimate objects alike. He conceived a fierce detestation for the life that she was leading, for all the people that she associated with, all the fêtes that she frequented, balls, theaters, music, for they were all in a league to take her from him by bits and absorb her days and nights, and only a few scant hours were now accorded to their intimacy. His indulgence of this unreasoning spite came near causing him a fit of sickness, and when he visited her he brought with him such a wan face that she said to him:

"What ails you? You have changed of late, and are very thin."

"I have been loving you too much," he replied.

She gave him a grateful look: "No one ever loves too much, my friend."

"Can you say such a thing as that?"

"Why, yes."

"And you do not see that I am dying of my vain love for you."

"In the first place it is not true that you love in vain; then no one ever dies of that

complaint, and finally all our friends are jealous of you, which proves pretty conclusively that I am not treating you badly, all things considered."

He took her hand: "You do not understand me!"

"Yes, I understand very well."

"You hear the despairing appeal that I am incessantly making to your heart?"

"Yes, I have heard it."

"And——"

"And it gives me much pain, for I love you enormously."

"And then?"

"Then you say to me: 'Be like me; think, feel, express yourself as I do.' But, my poor friend, I can't. I am what I am. You must take me as God made me, since I gave myself thus to you, since I have no regrets for having done so and no desire to withdraw from the bargain, since there is no one among all my acquaintance that is dearer to me than you are."

"You do not love me!"

"I love you with all the power of loving that exists in me. If it is not different or greater, is that my fault?"

"If I was certain of that I might content myself with it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I believe you capable of loving otherwise, but that I do not believe that it lies in me to inspire you with a genuine passion."

"My friend, you are mistaken. You are more to me than anyone has ever been hitherto, more than anyone will ever be in the future; at least that is my honest conviction. I may lay claim to this great merit: that I do not wear two faces with you, I do not feign to be what you so ardently desire me to be, when many women would act quite differently. Be a little grateful to me for this, and do not allow yourself to

be agitated and unstrung; trust in my affection, which is yours, sincerely and unreservedly."

He saw how wide the difference was that parted them. "Ah!" he murmured, "how strangely you look at love and speak of it! To you, I am some one that you like to see now and then, whom you like to have beside you, but to me, you fill the universe: in it I know but you, feel but you, need but you."

She smiled with satisfaction and replied: "I know that; I understand. I am delighted to have it so, and I say to you: Love me always like that if you can, for it gives me great happiness, but do not force me to act a part before you that would be distressing to me and unworthy of us both. I have been aware for some time of the approach of this crisis; it is the cause of much suffering to me, for I am deeply attached to you, but I cannot bend my nature or shape it in conformity with yours. Take me as I am."

Suddenly he asked her: "Have you ever thought, have you ever believed, if only for a day, only for an hour, either before or after, that you might be able to love me otherwise?"

She was at a loss for an answer and reflected for a few seconds. He waited anxiously for her to speak, and continued: "You see, don't you, that you have had other dreams as well?"

"I may have been momentarily deceived in myself," she murmured, thoughtfully.

"Oh! how ingenious you are!" he exclaimed; "how psychological! No one ever reasons thus from the impulse of the heart."

She was reflecting still, interested in her thoughts, in this self-investigation; finally she said: "Before I came to love you as I love you now, I may indeed have thought that I might come to be more—more—more captivated with you, but then I certainly should not have been so frank and simple with you. Perhaps later on I should have been less sincere."

"Why less sincere later on?"

"Because all of love, according to your idea, lies in this formula: 'Everything or nothing,' and this 'everything or nothing' as far as I can see means: 'Everything at first, nothing afterward.' It is when the reign of nothing commences that women begin to be deceitful."

He replied in great distress: "But you do not see how wretched I am—how I am tortured by the thought that you might have loved me otherwise. You have felt that thought: therefore it is some other one that you will love in that manner."

She unhesitatingly replied: "I do not believe it."

"And why? Yes, why, I ask you? Since you have had the foreknowledge of love, since you have felt in anticipation the fleeting and torturing hope of confounding soul and body with the soul and body of another, of losing your being in his and taking his being to be portion of your own, since you have perceived the possibility of this ineffable emotion, the day will come, sooner or later, when you will experience it."

"No; my imagination deceived me, and deceived itself. I am giving you all that I have to give you. I have reflected deeply on this subject since I have been your mistress. Observe that I do not mince matters, not even my words. Really and truly, I am convinced that I cannot love you more or better than I do at this moment. You see that I talk to you just as I talk to myself. I do that because you are very intelligent, because you understand and can read me like a book, and the best way is to conceal nothing from you; it is the only way to keep us long and closely united. And that is what I hope for, my friend."

He listened to her as a man drinks when he is thirsty, then kneeled before her and laid his head in her lap. He took her little hands and pressed them to his lips, murmuring: "Thanks! thanks!" When he raised his eyes to look at her, he saw that there were tears standing in hers; then placing her arms in turn about André's neck,

she gently drew him toward her, bent over and kissed him upon the eyelids.

"Take a chair," she said; "it is not prudent to be kneeling before me here."

He seated himself, and when they had contemplated each other in silence for a few moments, she asked him if he would take her some day to visit the exhibition that the sculptor Prédolé, of whom everyone was talking enthusiastically, was then giving of his works. She had in her dressing-room a bronze Love of his, a charming figure pouring water into her bath-tub, and she had a great desire to see the complete collection of the eminent artist's works which had been delighting all Paris for a week past at the Varin gallery. They fixed upon a date and then Mariolle arose to take leave.

"Will you be at Auteuil to-morrow?" she asked him in a whisper.

"Oh! Yes!"

He was very joyful on his way homeward, intoxicated by that "Perhaps?" which never dies in the heart of a lover.

CHAPTER IX.

DISILLUSION

Mme. de Burne's coupé was proceeding at a quick trot along the Rue de Grenelle. It was early April, and the hailstones of a belated storm beat noisily against the glasses of the carriage and rattled off upon the roadway which was already whitened by the falling particles. Men on foot were hurrying along the sidewalk beneath their umbrellas, with coat-collars turned up to protect their necks and ears. After two weeks of fine weather a detestable cold spell had set in, the farewell of winter, freezing up everything and bringing chapped hands and chilblains.

With her feet resting upon a vessel filled with hot water and her form enveloped in soft furs that warmed her through her dress with a velvety caress that was so deliciously agreeable to her sensitive skin, the young woman was sadly reflecting

that in an hour at farthest she would have to take a cab to go and meet Mariolle at Auteuil. She was seized by a strong desire to send him a telegram, but she had promised herself more than two months ago that she would not again have recourse to this expedient unless compelled to, for she had been making a great effort to love him in the same manner that he loved her. She had seen how he suffered, and had commiserated him, and after that conversation when she had kissed him upon the eyes in an outburst of genuine tenderness, her sincere affection for him had, in fact, assumed a warmer and more expansive character. In her surprise at her involuntary coldness she had asked herself why, after all, she could not love him as other women love their lovers, since she knew that she was deeply attached to him and that he was more pleasing to her than any other man. This indifference of her love could only proceed from a sluggish action of the heart, which could be cured like any other sluggishness.

She tried it. She endeavored to arouse her feelings by thoughts of him, to be more demonstrative in his presence. She was successful now and then, just as one excites his fears at night by thinking of ghosts or robbers. Fired a little herself by this pretense of passion, she even forced herself to be more caressing; she succeeded very well at first, and delighted him to the point of intoxication.

She thought that this was the beginning in her of a fever somewhat similar to that with which she knew that he was consuming. Her old intermittent hopes of love, that she had dimly seen the possibility of realizing the night that she had dreamed her dreams among the white mists of Saint-Michel's Bay, took form and shape again, not so seductive as then, less wrapped in clouds of poetry and idealism, but more clearly defined, more human, stripped of illusion after the experience of her liaison. Then she had summoned up and watched for that irresistible impulse of all the being toward another being that arises, she had heard, when the emotions of the soul act upon two physical natures. She had watched in vain; it had never come.

She persisted, however, in feigning ardor, in making their interviews more frequent, in saying to him: "I feel that I am coming to love you more and more." But she became weary of it at last, and was powerless longer to impose upon herself or deceive him. She was astonished to find that the kisses that he gave her were becoming distasteful to her after a while, although she was not by any means entirely insensible to them.

This was made manifest to her by the vague lassitude that took possession of her from the early morning of those days when she had an appointment with him. Why was it that on those mornings she did not feel, as other women feel, all her nature troubled by the desire and anticipation of his embraces? She endured them, indeed she accepted them, with tender resignation, but as a woman conquered, brutally subjugated, responding contrary to her own will, never voluntarily and with pleasure. Could it be that her nature, so delicate, so exceptionally aristocratic and refined, had in it depths of modesty, the modesty of a superior and sacred animality, that were as yet unfathomed by modern perceptions?

Mariolle gradually came to understand this; he saw her factitious ardor growing less and less. He divined the nature of her love-inspired attempt, and a mortal, inconsolable sorrow took possession of his soul.

She knew now, as he knew, that the attempt had been made and that all hope was gone. The proof of this was that this very day, wrapped as she was in her warm furs and with her feet on her hot-water bottle, glowing with a feeling of physical comfort as she watched the hail beating against the windows of her coupé, she could not find in her the courage to leave this luxurious warmth to get into an ice-cold cab to go and meet the poor fellow.

The idea of breaking with him, of avoiding his caresses, certainly never occurred to her for a moment. She was well aware that to completely captivate a man who is in love and keep him as one's own peculiar private property in the midst of feminine

rivalries, a woman must surrender herself to him body and soul. That she knew, for it is logical, fated, indisputable. It is even the loyal course to pursue, and she wanted to be loyal to him in all the uprightness of her nature as his mistress. She would go to him then, she would go to him always; but why so often? Would not their interviews even assume a greater charm for him, an attraction of novelty, if they were granted more charily, like rare and inestimable gifts presented to him by her and not to be used too prodigally?

Whenever she had gone to Auteuil she had had the impression that she was bearing to him a priceless gift, the most precious of offerings. In giving in this way, the pleasure of giving is inseparable from a certain sensation of sacrifice; it is the pride that one feels in being generous, the satisfaction of conferring happiness, not the transports of a mutual passion.

She even calculated that André's love would be more likely to be enduring if she abated somewhat of her familiarity with him, for hunger always increases by fasting, and desire is but an appetite. Immediately that this resolution was formed she made up her mind that she would go to Auteuil that day, but would feign indisposition. The journey, which a minute ago had seemed to her so difficult through the inclement weather, now appeared to her quite easy, and she understood, with a smile at her own expense and at this sudden revelation, why she made such a difficulty about a thing that was quite natural. But a moment ago she would not, now she would. The reason why she would not a moment ago was that she was anticipating the thousand petty disagreeable details of the rendezvous! She would prick her fingers with pins that she handled very awkwardly, she would be unable to find the articles that she had thrown at random upon the bedroom floor as she disrobed in haste, already looking forward to the hateful task of having to dress without an attendant.

She paused at this reflection, dwelling upon it and weighing it carefully for the first

time. After all, was it not rather repugnant, rather vulgarizing, this idea of a rendezvous for a stated time, settled upon a day or two days in advance, just like a business appointment or a consultation with your doctor? There is nothing more natural, after a long and charming tête-à-tête, than that the lips which have been uttering warm, seductive words should meet in a passionate kiss; but how different that was from the premeditated kiss that she went there to receive, watch in hand, once a week. There was so much truth in this that on those days when she was not to see André she had frequently felt a vague desire of being with him, while this desire was scarcely perceptible at all when she had to go to him in foul cabs, through squalid streets, with the cunning of a hunted thief, all her feelings toward him quenched and deadened by these considerations.

Ah! that appointment at Auteuil! She had calculated the time on all the clocks of all her friends; she had watched the minutes that brought her nearer to it slip away at Mme. de Frémines's, at Mme. de Bratiane's, at pretty Mme. le Prieur's, on those afternoons when she killed time by roaming about Paris so as not to remain in her own house, where she might be detained by an inopportune visit or some other unforeseen obstacle.

She suddenly said to herself: "I will make to-day a day of rest; I will go there very late." Then she opened a little cupboard in the front of the carriage, concealed among the folds of black silk that lined the coupé, which was fitted up as luxuriously as a pretty woman's boudoir. The first thing that presented itself when she had thrown open the doors of this secret receptacle was a mirror playing on hinges that she moved so that it was on a level with her face. Behind the mirror, in their satin-lined niches, were various small objects in silver: a box for her rice-powder, a pencil for her lips, two crystal scent-bottles, an inkstand and penholder, scissors, a pretty paper-cutter to tear the leaves of the last novel with which she amused herself as she rolled along the streets. The exquisite clock, of the size and shape of a walnut, told her that it was four o'clock. Mme. de Burne reflected: "I have an hour yet, at all

events," and she touched a spring that had the effect of making the footman who was seated beside the coachman stoop and take up the speaking-tube to receive her order. She pulled out the other end from where it was concealed in the lining of the carriage, and applying her lips to the mouthpiece of rock-crystal: "To the Austrian embassy!" she said.

Then she inspected herself in the mirror. The look that she gave herself expressed, as it always did, the delight that one feels in looking upon one's best beloved; then she threw back her furs to judge of the effect of her corsage. It was a toilette adapted to the chill days of the end of winter. The neck was trimmed with a bordering of very fine white down that shaded off into a delicate gray as it fell over the shoulders, like the wing of a bird. Upon her hat—it was a kind of toque—there towered an aigret of more brightly colored feathers, and the general effect that her costume inspired was to make one think that she had got herself up in this manner in preparation for a flight through the hail and the gray sky in company with Mother Carey's chickens.

She was still complacently contemplating herself when the carriage suddenly wheeled into the great court of the embassy.

Thereupon she arranged her wrap, lowered the mirror to its place, closed the doors of the little cupboard, and when the coupé had come to a halt said to her coachman: "You may go home; I shall not need you any more." Then she asked the footman who came forward from the entrance of the hotel: "Is the Princess at home?"

"Yes, Madame."

She entered and ascended the stairs and came to a small drawing-room where the Princess de Malten was writing letters.

The ambassadress arose with an appearance of much satisfaction when she perceived her friend, and they kissed each other twice in succession upon the cheek, close to the corner of the lips. Then they seated themselves side by side upon two low chairs in front of the fire. They were very fond of each other, took great delight

in each other's society and understood each other thoroughly, for they were almost counterparts in nature and disposition, belonging to the same race of femininity, brought up in the same atmosphere and endowed with the same sensations, although Mme. de Malten was a Swede and had married an Austrian. They had a strange and mysterious attraction for each other, from which resulted a profound feeling of unmixed well-being and contentment whenever they were together. Their babble would run on for half a day on end, without once stopping, trivial, futile talk, interesting to them both by reason of their similarity of tastes.

"You see how I love you!" said Mme. de Burne. "You are to dine with me this evening, and still I could not help coming to see you. It is a real passion, my dear."

"A passion that I share," the Swede replied with a smile.

Following the habit of their profession, they put each her best foot foremost for the benefit of the other; coquettish as if they had been dealing with a man, but with a different style of coquetry, for the strife was different, and they had not before them the adversary, but the rival.

Madame de Burne had kept looking at the clock during the conversation. It was on the point of striking five. He had been waiting there an hour. "That is long enough," she said to herself as she arose.

"So soon?" said the Princess.

"Yes," the other unblushingly replied. "I am in a hurry; there is some one waiting for me. I would a great deal rather stay here with you."

They exchanged kisses again, and Mme. de Burne, having requested the footman to call a cab for her, drove away.

The horse was lame and dragged the cab after him wearily, and the animal's halting and fatigue seemed to have infected the young woman. Like the broken-winded beast, she found the journey long and difficult. At one moment she was comforted by the pleasure of seeing André, at the next she was in despair at the thought of the

discomforts of the interview.

She found him waiting for her behind the gate, shivering. The biting blasts roared through the branches of the trees, the hailstones rattled on their umbrella as they made their way to the house, their feet sank deep into the mud. The garden was dead, dismal, miry, melancholy, and André was very pale. He was enduring terrible suffering.

When they were in the house: "Gracious, how cold it is!" she exclaimed.

And yet a great fire was blazing in each of the two rooms, but they had not been lighted until past noon and had not had time to dry the damp walls, and shivers ran through her frame. "I think that I will not take off my furs just yet," she added. She only unbuttoned her outer garment and threw it open, disclosing her warm costume and her plume-decked corsage, like a bird of passage that never remains long in one place.

He seated himself beside her.

"There is to be a delightful dinner at my house to-night," she said, "and I am enjoying it in anticipation."

"Who are to be there?"

"Why, you, in the first place; then Prédolé, whom I have so long wanted to know."

"Ah! Prédolé is to be there?"

"Yes; Lamarthe is to bring him."

"But Prédolé is not the kind of a man to suit you, not a bit! Sculptors in general are not so constituted as to please pretty women, and Prédolé less so than any of them."

"Oh, my friend, that cannot be. I have such an admiration for him!"

The sculptor Prédolé had gained a great success and had captivated all Paris some two months before by his exhibition at the Varin gallery. Even before that he had been highly appreciated; people had said of him, "His figurines are delicious"; but

when the world of artists and connoisseurs had assembled to pass judgment upon his collected works in the rooms of the Rue Varin, the outburst of enthusiasm had been explosive. They seemed to afford the revelation of such an unlooked-for charm, they displayed such a peculiar gift in the translation of elegance and grace, that it seemed as if a new manner of expressing the beauty of form had been born to the world. His specialty was statuettes in extremely abbreviated costumes, in which his genius displayed an unimaginable delicacy of form and airy lightness. His dancing girls, especially, of which he had made many studies, displayed in the highest perfection, in their pose and the harmony of their attitude and motion, the ideal of female beauty and suppleness.

For a month past Mme. de Burne had been unceasing in her efforts to attract him to her house, but the artist was unsociable, even something of a bear, so the report ran. At last she had succeeded, thanks to the intervention of Lamarthe, who had made a touching, almost frantic appeal to the grateful sculptor.

"Whom have you besides?" Mariolle inquired.

"The Princess de Malten."

He was displeased; he did not fancy that woman. "Who else?"

"Massival, Bernhaus, and George de Maltry. That is all: only my select circle. You are acquainted with Prédolé, are you not?"

"Yes, slightly."

"How do you like him?"

"He is delightful; I never met a man so enamored of his art and so interesting when he holds forth on it."

She was delighted and again said: "It will be charming."

He had taken her hand under her fur cloak; he gave it a little squeeze, then kissed it. Then all at once it came to her mind that she had forgotten to tell him that she was

ill, and casting about on the spur of the moment for another reason, she murmured: "Gracious! how cold it is!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am chilled to my very marrow."

He arose to take a look at the thermometer, which was, in fact, pretty low; then he resumed his seat at her side.

She had said: "Gracious! how cold it is!" and he believed that he understood her. For three weeks, now, at every one of their interviews, he had noticed that her attempt to feign tenderness was gradually becoming fainter and fainter. He saw that she was weary of wearing this mask, so weary that she could continue it no longer, and he himself was so exasperated by the little power that he had over her, so stung by his vain and unreasoning desire of this woman, that he was beginning to say to himself in his despairing moments of solitude: "It will be better to break with her than to continue to live like this."

He asked her, by way of fathoming her intentions: "Won't you take off your cloak now?"

"Oh, no," she said; "I have been coughing all the morning; this fearful weather has given me a sore throat. I am afraid that I may be ill." She was silent a moment, then added: "If I had not wanted to see you very much indeed I would not have come to-day." As he did not reply, in his grief and anger, she went on: "This return of cold weather is very dangerous, coming as it does after the fine days of the past two weeks."

She looked out into the garden, where the trees were already almost green despite the clouds of snow that were driving among their branches. He looked at her and thought: "So that is the kind of love that she feels for me!" and for the first time he began to feel a sort of jealous hatred of her, of her face, of her elusive affection, of her form, so long pursued, so subtle to escape him. "She pretends that she is cold,"

he said to himself. "She is cold only because I am here. If it were a question of some party of pleasure, some of those idiotic caprices that go to make up the useless existence of these frivolous creatures, she would brave everything and risk her life. Does she not ride about in an open carriage on the coldest days to show her fine clothes? Ah! that is the way with them all nowadays!"

He looked at her as she sat there facing him so calmly, and he knew that in that head, that dear little head that he adored so, there was one wish paramount, the wish that their tête-à-tête might not be protracted; it was becoming painful to her.

Was it true that there had ever existed, that there existed now, women capable of passion, of emotion, who weep, suffer, and bestow themselves in a transport, loving with heart and soul and body, with mouth that speaks and eyes that gaze, with heart that beats and hand that caresses; women ready to brave all for the sake of their love, and to go, by day or by night, regardless of menaces and watchful eyes, fearlessly, tremorously, to him who stands with open arms waiting to receive them, mad, ready to sink with their happiness?

Oh, that horrible love that which now held him in its fetters!—love without issue, without end, joyless and triumphless, eating away his strength and devouring him with its anxieties; love in which there was no charm and no delight, cause to him only of suffering, sorrow, and bitter tears, where he was constantly pursued by the intolerable regret of the impossibility of awaking responsive kisses upon lips that are as cold and dry and sterile as dead trees!

He looked at her as she sat there, so charming in her feathery dress. Were not her dresses the great enemy that he had to contend against, more than the woman herself, jealous guardians, coquettish and costly barriers, that kept him from his mistress?

"Your toilette is charming," he said, not caring to speak of the subject that was torturing him so cruelly.

She replied with a smile: "You must see the one that I shall wear to-night." Then she coughed several times in succession and said: "I am really taking cold. Let me go, my friend. The sun will show himself again shortly, and I will follow his example."

He made no effort to detain her, for he was discouraged, seeing that nothing could now avail to overcome the inertia of this sluggish nature, that his romance was ended, ended forever, and that it was useless to hope for ardent words from those tranquil lips, or a kindling glance from those calm eyes. All at once he felt rising with gathering strength within him the stern determination to end this torturing subserviency. She had nailed him upon a cross; he was bleeding from every limb, and she watched his agony without feeling for his suffering, even rejoicing that she had had it in her power to effect so much. But he would tear himself from his deathly gibbet, leaving there bits of his body, strips of his flesh, and all his mangled heart. He would flee like a wild animal that the hunters have wounded almost unto death, he would go and hide himself in some lonely place where his wounds might heal and where he might feel only those dull pangs that remain with the mutilated until they are released by death.

"Farewell, then," he said.

She was struck by the sadness of his voice and rejoined: "Until this evening, my friend."

"Until this evening," he re-echoed. "Farewell."

He saw her to the garden gate, and came back and seated himself, alone, before the fire.

Alone! How cold it was; how cold, indeed! How sad he was, how lonely! It was all ended! Ah, what a horrible thought! There was an end of hoping and waiting for her, dreaming of her, with that fierce blazing of the heart that at times brings out our existence upon this somber earth with the vividness of fireworks displayed against the blackness of the night. Farewell those nights of solitary emotion when, almost

until the dawn, he paced his chamber thinking of her; farewell those wakings when, upon opening his eyes, he said to himself: "Soon I shall see her at our little house."

How he loved her! how he loved her! What a long, hard task it would be to him to forget her! She had left him because it was cold! He saw her before him as but now, looking at him and bewitching him, bewitching him the better to break his heart. Ah, how well she had done her work! With one single stroke, the first and last, she had cleft it asunder. He felt the old gaping wound begin to open, the wound that she had dressed and now had made incurable by plunging into it the knife of death-dealing indifference. He even felt that from this broken heart there was something distilling itself through his frame, mounting to his throat and choking him; then, covering his eyes with his hands, as if to conceal this weakness even from himself, he wept.

She had left him because it was cold! He would have walked naked through the driving snow to meet her, no matter where; he would have cast himself from the house top, only to fall at her feet. An old tale came to his mind, that has been made into a legend: that of the Côte des Deux Amans, a spot which the traveler may behold as he journeys toward Rouen. A maiden, obedient to her father's cruel caprice, which prohibited her from marrying the man of her choice unless she accomplished the task of carrying him, unassisted, to the summit of the steep mountain, succeeded in dragging him up there on her hands and knees, and died as she reached the top. Love, then, is but a legend, made to be sung in verse or told in lying romances!

Had not his mistress herself, in one of their earliest interviews, made use of an expression that he had never forgotten: "Men nowadays do not love women so as really to harm themselves by it. You may believe me, for I know them both." She had been wrong in his case, but not in her own, for on another occasion she had said: "In any event, I give you fair warning that I am incapable of being really smitten with anyone, be he who he may."

Be he who he may? Was that quite a sure thing? Of him, no; of that he was quite well assured now, but of another?

Of him? She could not love him. Why not?

Then the feeling that his life had been a wasted one, which had haunted him for a long time past, fell upon him as if it would crush him. He had done nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing, succeeded in nothing. When he had felt an attraction toward the arts he had not found in himself the courage that is required to devote one's self exclusively to one of them, nor the persistent determination that they demand as the price of success. There had been no triumph to cheer him; no elevated taste for some noble career to ennoble and aggrandize his mind. The only strenuous effort that he had ever put forth, the attempt to conquer a woman's heart, had proved ineffectual like all the rest. Take him all in all, he was only a miserable failure.

He was weeping still beneath his hands which he held pressed to his eyes. The tears, trickling down his cheeks, wet his mustache and left a salty taste upon his lips, and their bitterness increased his wretchedness and his despair.

When he raised his head at last he saw that it was night. He had only just sufficient time to go home and dress for her dinner.

CHAPTER X.

FLIGHT

André Mariolle was the first to arrive at Mme. de Burne's. He took a seat and gazed about him upon the walls, the furniture, the hangings, at all the small objects and trinkets that were so dear to him from their association with her—at the familiar apartment where he had first known her, where he had come to her so many times since then, and where he had discovered in himself the germs of that ill-starred passion that had kept on growing, day by day, until the hour of his barren victory. With what eagerness had he many a time awaited her coming in this charming spot

which seemed to have been made for no one but her, an exquisite setting for an exquisite creature! How well he knew the pervading odor of this salon and its hangings; a subdued odor of iris, so simple and aristocratic. He grasped the arms of the great armchair, from which he had so often watched her smile and listened to her talk, as if they had been the hands of some friend that he was parting with forever. It would have pleased him if she could not come, if no one could come, and if he could remain there alone, all night, dreaming of his love, as people watch beside a dead man. Then at daylight he could go away for a long time, perhaps forever.

The door opened, and she appeared and came forward to him with outstretched hand. He was master of himself, and showed nothing of his agitation. She was not a woman, but a living bouquet—an indescribable bouquet of flowers.

A girdle of pinks enclasped her waist and fell about her in cascades, reaching to her feet. About her bare arms and shoulders ran a garland of mingled myosotis and lilies-of-the-valley, while three fairy-like orchids seemed to be growing from her breast and caressing the milk-white flesh with the rosy and red flesh of their supernal blooms. Her blond hair was studded with violets in enamel, in which minute diamonds glistened, and other diamonds, trembling upon golden pins, sparkled like dewdrops among the odorous trimming of her corsage.

"I shall have a headache," she said, "but I don't care; my dress is becoming."

Delicious odors emanated from her, like spring among the gardens. She was more fresh than the garlands that she wore. André was dazzled as he looked at her, reflecting that it would be no less brutal and barbarous to take her in his arms at that moment than it would be to trample upon a blossoming flower-bed. So their bodies were no longer objects to inspire love; they were objects to be adorned, simply frames on which to hang fine clothes. They were like birds, they were like flowers, they were like a thousand other things as much as they were like women. Their mothers, all women of past and gone generations, had used coquettish arts to

enhance their natural beauties, but it had been their aim to please in the first place by their direct physical seductiveness, by the charm of native grace, by the irresistible attraction that the female form exercises over the heart of the males. At the present day coquetry was everything. Artifice was now the great means, and not only the means, but the end as well, for they employed it even more frequently to dazzle the eyes of rivals and excite barren jealousy than to subjugate men.

What end, then, was this toilette designed to serve, the gratification of the eyes of him, the lover, or the humiliation of the Princess de Malten?

The door opened, and the lady whose name was in his thoughts was announced.

Mme. de Burne moved quickly forward to meet her and gave her a kiss, not unmindful of the orchids during the operation, her lips slightly parted, with a little grimace of tenderness. It was a pretty kiss, an extremely desirable kiss, given and returned from the heart by those two pairs of lips.

Mariolle gave a start of pain. Never once had she run to meet him with that joyful eagerness, never had she kissed him like that, and with a sudden change of ideas he said to himself: "Women are no longer made to fulfill our requirements."

Massival made his appearance, then M. de Pradon and the Comte de Bernhaus, then George de Maltry, resplendent with English "chic."

Lamarthe and Prédolé were now the only ones missing. The sculptor's name was mentioned, and every voice was at once raised in praise of him. "He had restored to life the grace of form, he had recovered the lost traditions of the Renaissance, with something additional: the sincerity of modern art!" M. de Maltry maintained that he was the exquisite revealer of the suppleness of the human form. Such phrases as these had been current in the salons for the last two months, where they had been bandied about from mouth to mouth.

At last the great man appeared. Everyone was surprised. He was a large man of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a coal-heaver, a powerful face with

strongly-marked features, surrounded by hair and beard that were beginning to turn white, a prominent nose, thick full lips, wearing a timid and embarrassed air. He held his arms away from his body in an awkward sort of way that was doubtless to be attributed to the immense hands that protruded from his sleeves. They were broad and thick, with hairy and muscular fingers; the hands of a Hercules or a butcher, and they seemed to be conscious of being in the way, embarrassed at finding themselves there and looking vainly for some convenient place to hide themselves. Upon looking more closely at his face, however, it was seen to be illuminated by clear, piercing, gray eyes of extreme expressiveness, and these alone served to impart some degree of life to the man's heavy and torpid expression. They were constantly searching, inquiring, scrutinizing, darting their rapid, shifting glances here, there, and everywhere, and it was plainly to be seen that these eager, inquisitive looks were the animating principle of a deep and comprehensive intellect.

Mme. de Burne was somewhat disappointed; she politely led the artist to a chair which he took and where he remained seated, apparently disconcerted by this introduction to a strange house.

Lamarthe, master of the situation, approached his friend with the intention of breaking the ice and relieving him from the awkwardness of his position. "My dear fellow," he said, "let me make for you a little map to let you know where you are. You have seen our divine hostess; now look at her surroundings." He showed him upon the mantelpiece a bust, authenticated in due form, by Houdon, then upon a cabinet in buhl a group representing two women dancing, with arms about each other's waists, by Clodion, and finally four Tanagra statuettes upon an étagère, selected for their perfection of finish and detail.

Then all at once Prédolé's face brightened as if he had found his children in the desert. He arose and went to the four little earthen figures, and when Mme. de Burne saw him grasp two of them at once in his great hands that seemed made to slaughter

oxen, she trembled for her treasures. When he laid hands on them, however, it appeared that it was only for the purpose of caressing them, for he handled them with wonderful delicacy and dexterity, turning them about in his thick fingers which somehow seemed all at once to have become as supple as a juggler's. It was evident by the gentle way the big man had of looking at and handling them that he had in his soul and his very finger-ends an ideal and delicate tenderness for such small elegancies.

"Are they not pretty?" Lamarthe asked him.

The sculptor went on to extol them as if they had been his own, and he spoke of some others, the most remarkable that he had met with, briefly and in a voice that was rather low but confident and calm, the expression of a clearly defined thought that was not ignorant of the value of words and their uses.

Still under the guidance of the author, he next inspected the other rare bric-à-brac that Mme. de Burne had collected, thanks to the counsels of her friends. He looked with astonishment and delight at the various articles, apparently agreeably disappointed to find them there, and in every case he took them up and turned them lightly over in his hands, as if to place himself in direct personal contact with them. There was a statuette of bronze, heavy as a cannon-ball, hidden away in a dark corner; he took it up with one hand, carried it to the lamp, examined it at length, and replaced it where it belonged without visible effort. Lamarthe exclaimed: "The great, strong fellow! he is built expressly to wrestle with stone and marble!" while the ladies looked at him approvingly.

Dinner was now announced. The mistress of the house took the sculptor's arm to pass to the dining-room, and when she had seated him in the place of honor at her right hand, she asked him out of courtesy, just as she would have questioned a scion of some great family as to the exact origin of his name: "Your art, Monsieur, has also the additional honor, has it not, of being the most ancient of all?"

He replied in his calm deep voice: "Mon Dieu, Madame, the shepherds in the Bible play upon the flute, therefore music would seem to be the more ancient—although true music, as we understand it, does not go very far back, while true sculpture dates from remote antiquity."

"You are fond of music?"

"I love all the arts," he replied with grave earnestness.

"Is it known who was the inventor of your art?"

He reflected a moment, then replied in tender accents, as if he had been relating some touching tale: "According to Grecian tradition it was Dædalus the Athenian. The most attractive legend, however, is that which attributes the invention to a Sicyonian potter named Dibutades. His daughter Kora having traced her betrothed's profile with the assistance of an arrow, her father filled in the rude sketch with clay and modeled it. It was then that my art was born."

"Charming!" murmured Lamarthe. Then turning to Mme. de Burne, he said: "You cannot imagine, Madame, how interesting this man becomes when he talks of what he loves; what power he has to express and explain it and make people adore it."

But the sculptor did not seem disposed either to pose for the admiration of the guests or to perorate. He had tucked a corner of his napkin between his shirt-collar and his neck and was reverentially eating his soup, with that appearance of respect that peasants manifest for that portion of the meal. Then he drank a glass of wine and drew himself up with an air of greater ease, of making himself more at home. Now and then he made a movement as if to turn around, for he had perceived the reflection in a mirror of a modern group that stood on the mantelshelf behind him. He did not recognize it and was seeking to divine the author. At last, unable longer to resist the impulse, he asked: "It is by Falguière, is it not?"

Mme. de Burne laughed. "Yes, it is by Falguière. How could you tell, in a glass?"

He smiled in turn. "Ah, Madame, I can't explain how it is done, but I can tell at a

glance the sculpture of those men who are painters as well, and the painting of those who also practice sculpture. It is not a bit like the work of a man who devotes himself to one art exclusively."

Lamarthe, wishing to show off his friend, called for explanations, and Prédolé proceeded to give them. In his slow, precise manner of speech he defined and illustrated the painting of sculptors and the sculpture of painters in such a clear and original way that he was listened to as much with eyes as with ears. Commencing his demonstration at the earliest period and pursuing it through the history of art and gathering examples from epoch to epoch, he came down to the time of the early Italian masters who were painters and sculptors at the same time, Nicolas and John of Pisa, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He spoke of Diderot's interesting remarks upon the same subject, and in conclusion mentioned Ghiberti's bronze gates of the baptistry of Saint John at Florence, such living and dramatically forceful bas-reliefs that they seem more like paintings upon canvas. He waved his great hands before him as if he were modeling, with such ease and grace of motion as to delight every eye, calling up above the plates and glasses the pictures that his tongue told of, and reconstructing the work that he mentioned with such conviction that everyone followed the motions of his fingers with breathless attention. Then some dishes that he fancied were placed before him and he ceased talking and began eating.

He scarcely spoke during the remainder of the dinner, not troubling himself to follow the conversation, which ranged from some bit of theatrical gossip to a political rumor; from a ball to a wedding; from an article in the "Revue des Deux Mondes" to the horse-show that had just opened. His appetite was good, and he drank a good deal, without being at all affected by it, having a sound, hard head that good wine could not easily upset.

When they had returned to the drawing-room, Lamarthe, who had not drawn the sculptor out to the extent that he wished to do, drew him over to a glass case to show

him a priceless object, a classic, historic gem: a silver inkstand carved by Benvenuto Cellini. The men listened with extreme interest to his long and eloquent rhapsody as they stood grouped about him, while the two women, seated in front of the fire and rather disgusted to see so much enthusiasm wasted upon the form of inanimate objects, appeared to be a little bored and chatted together in a low voice from time to time. After that conversation became general, but not animated, for it had been somewhat damped by the ideas that had passed into the atmosphere of this pretty room, with its furnishing of precious objects.

Prédolé left early, assigning as a reason that he had to be at work at daybreak every morning. When he was gone Lamarthe enthusiastically asked Mme. de Burne: "Well, how did you like him?"

She replied, hesitatingly and with something of an air of ill nature: "He is quite interesting, but prosy."

The novelist smiled and said to himself: "Parbleu, that is because he did not admire your toilette; and you are the only one of all your pretty things that he hardly condescended to look at." He exchanged a few pleasant remarks with her and went over and took a seat by Mme. de Malten, to whom he began to be very attentive. The Comte de Bernhaus approached the mistress of the house, and taking a small footstool, appeared sunk in devotion at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry, and M. de Pradon continued to talk of the sculptor, who had made a deep impression on their minds. M. de Maltry was comparing him to the old masters, for whom life was embellished and illuminated by an exclusive and consuming love of the manifestations of beauty, and he philosophized upon his theme with many very subtle and very tiresome observations.

Massival, quickly tiring of a conversation which made no reference to his own art, crossed the room to Mme. de Malten and seated himself beside Lamarthe, who soon yielded his place to him and went and rejoined the men.

"Shall we go?" he said to Mariolle.

"Yes, by all means!"

The novelist liked to walk the streets at night with some friend and talk, when the incisive, peremptory tones of his voice seemed to lay hold of the walls of the houses and climb up them. He had an impression that he was very eloquent, witty, and sagacious during these nocturnal tête-à-têtes, which were monologues rather than conversations so far as his part in them was concerned. The approbation that he thus gained for himself sufficed his needs, and the gentle fatigue of legs and lungs assured him a good night's rest.

Mariolle, for his part, had reached the limit of his endurance. The moment that he was outside her door all his wretchedness and sorrow, all his irremediable disappointment, boiled up and overflowed his heart. He could stand it no longer; he would have no more of it. He would go away and never return.

The two men found themselves alone with each other in the street. The wind had changed and the cold that had prevailed during the day had yielded; it was warm and pleasant, as it almost always is two hours after a snowstorm in spring. The sky was vibrating with the light of innumerable stars, as if a breath of summer in the immensity of space had lighted up the heavenly bodies and set them twinkling. The sidewalks were gray and dry again, while in the roadway pools of water reflected the light of the gas-lamps.

Lamarthe said: "What a fortunate man he is, that Prédolé! He lives only for one thing, his art; thinks but of that, loves but that; it occupies all his being; consoles and cheers him, and affords him a life of happiness and comfort. He is really a great artist of the old stock. Ah! he doesn't let women trouble his head, not much, our women of to-day with their frills and furbelows and fantastic disguises! Did you remark how little attention he paid to our two pretty dames? And yet they were rather seductive. But what he is looking for is the plastic—the plastic pure and

simple; he has no use for the artificial. It is true that our divine hostess put him down in her books as an insupportable fool. In her estimation a bust by Houdon, Tanagra statuettes, and an inkstand by Cellini are but so many unconsidered trifles that go to the adornment and the rich and natural setting of a masterpiece, which is Herself; she and her dress, for dress is part and parcel of Herself; it is the fresh accentuation that she places on her beauty day by day. What a trivial, personal thing is woman!"

He stopped and gave the sidewalk a great thump with his cane, so that the noise resounded through the quiet street, then he went on.

"They have a very clear and exact perception of what adds to their attractions: the toilette and the ornaments in which there is an entire change of fashion every ten years; but they are heedless of that attribute which involves rare and constant power of selection, which demands from them keen and delicate artistic penetration and a purely æsthetic exercise of their senses. Their senses, moreover, are extremely rudimentary, incapable of high development, inaccessible to whatever does not touch directly the feminine egotism that absorbs everything in them. Their acuteness is the stratagem of the savage, of the red Indian; of war and ambush. They are even almost incapable of enjoying the material pleasures of the lower order, which require a physical education and the intelligent exercise of an organ, such as good living. When, as they do in exceptional cases, they come to have some respect for decent cookery, they still remain incapable of appreciating our great wines, which speak to masculine palates only, for wine does speak."

He again thumped the pavement with his cane, accenting his last dictum and punctuating the sentence, and continued.

"It won't do, however, to expect too much from them, but this want of taste and appreciation that so frequently clouds their intellectual vision when higher considerations are at stake often serves to blind them still more when our interests are in question. A man may have heart, feeling, intelligence, exceptional merits, and

qualities of all kinds, they will all be unavailing to secure their favor as in bygone days when a man was valued for his worth and his courage. The women of to-day are actresses, second-rate actresses at that, who are merely playing for effect a part that has been handed down to them and in which they have no belief. They have to have actors of the same stamp to act up to them and lie through the rôle just as they do; and these actors are the coxcombs that we see hanging around them; from the fashionable world, or elsewhere."

They walked along in silence for a few moments, side by side. Mariolle had listened attentively to the words of his companion, repeating them in his mind and approving of his sentiments under the influence of his sorrow. He was aware also that a sort of Italian adventurer who was then in Paris giving lessons in swordsmanship, Prince Epilati by name, a gentleman of the fencing-schools, of considerable celebrity for his elegance and graceful vigor that he was in the habit of exhibiting in black-silk tights before the upper ten and the select few of the demimonde, was just then in full enjoyment of the attentions and coquetries of the pretty little Baronne de Frémines.

As Lamarthe said nothing further, he remarked to him:

"It is all our own fault; we make our selections badly; there are other women besides those."

The novelist replied: "The only ones now that are capable of real attachment are the shopgirls and some sentimental little bourgeoises, poor and unhappily married. I have before now carried consolation to one of those distressed souls. They are overflowing with sentiment, but such cheap, vulgar sentiment that to exchange ours against it is like throwing your money to a beggar. Now I assert that in our young, wealthy society, where the women feel no needs and no desires, where all that they require is some mild distraction to enable them to kill time, and where the men regulate their pleasures as scrupulously as they regulate their daily labors, I assert that under such conditions the old natural attraction, charming and powerful as it

was, that used to bring the sexes toward each other, has disappeared."

"You are right," Mariolle murmured.

He felt an increasing desire to fly, to put a great distance between himself and these people, these puppets who in their empty idleness mimicked the beautiful, impassioned, and tender life of other days and were incapable of savoring its lost delights.

"Good night," he said; "I am going to bed." He went home and seated himself at his table and wrote:

"Farewell, Madame. Do you remember my first letter? In it too I said farewell, but I did not go. What a mistake that was! When you receive this I shall have left Paris; need I tell you why? Men like me ought never to meet with women like you. Were I an artist and were my emotions capable of expression in such manner as to afford me consolation, you would have perhaps inspired me with talent, but I am only a poor fellow who was so unfortunate as to be seized with love for you, and with it its accompanying bitter, unendurable sorrow.

"When I met you for the first time I could not have deemed myself capable of feeling and suffering as I have done. Another in your place would have filled my heart with divine joy in bidding it wake and live, but you could do nothing but torture it. It was not your fault, I know; I reproach you with nothing and I bear you no hard feeling; I have not even the right to send you these lines. Pardon me. You are so constituted that you cannot feel as I feel; you cannot even divine what passes in my breast when I am with you, when you speak to me and I look on you.

"Yes, I know; you have accepted me and offered me a rational and tranquil happiness, for which I ought to thank you on my knees all my life long, but I will not have it. Ah, what a horrible, agonizing love is that which is constantly craving a tender word, a warm caress, without ever receiving them! My heart is empty, empty as the stomach of a beggar who has long followed your carriage with outstretched

hand and to whom you have thrown out pretty toys, but no bread. It was bread, it was love, that I hungered for. I am about to go away wretched and in need, in sore need of your love, a few crumbs of which would have saved me. I have nothing left in the world but a cruel memory that clings and will not leave me, and that I must try to kill.

"Adieu, Madame. Thanks, and pardon me. I love you still, this evening, with all the strength of my soul. Adieu.

"ANDRÉ MARIOLLE."

CHAPTER XI.

LONELINESS

The city lay basking in the brightness of a sunny morning. Mariolle climbed into the carriage that stood waiting at his door with a traveling bag and two trunks on top. He had made his valet the night before pack the linen and other necessaries for a long absence, and now he was going away, leaving as his temporary address Fontainebleau post-office. He was taking no one with him, it being his wish to see no face that might remind him of Paris and to hear no voice that he had heard while brooding over certain matters.

He told the driver to go to the Lyons station and the cab started. Then he thought of that other trip of his, last spring, to Mont Saint-Michel; it was a year ago now lacking three months. He looked out into the street to drive the recollection from his mind.

The vehicle turned into the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, which was flooded with the light of the sun of early spring. The green leaves, summoned forth by the grateful warmth that had prevailed for a couple of weeks and not materially retarded by the cold storm of the last two days, were opening so rapidly on this bright morning that they seemed to impregnate the air with an odor of fresh verdure and of sap evaporating on the way to its work of building up new growths. It was one of

those growing mornings when one feels that the dome-topped chestnut-trees in the public gardens and all along the avenues will burst into bloom in a single day through the length and breadth of Paris, like chandeliers that are lighted simultaneously. The earth was thrilling with the movement preparatory to the full life of summer, and the very street was silently stirred beneath its paving of bitumen as the roots ate their way through the soil. He said to himself as he jolted along in his cab: "At last I shall be able to enjoy a little peace of mind. I will witness the birth of spring in solitude deep in the forest."

The journey seemed long to him. The few hours of sleeplessness that he had spent in bemoaning his fate had broken him down as if he had passed ten nights at the bedside of a dying man. When he reached the village of Fontainebleau he went to a notary to see if there was a small house to be had furnished in the neighborhood of the forest. He was told of several. In looking over the photographs the one that pleased him most was a cottage that had just been given up by a young couple, man and wife, who had resided for almost the entire winter in the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. The notary smiled, notwithstanding that he was a man of serious aspect; he probably scented a love story.

"You are alone, Monsieur!" he inquired.

"I am alone."

"No servants, even?"

"No servants, even; I left them at Paris. I wish to engage some of the residents here. I am coming here to work in complete seclusion."

"You will have no difficulty in finding that, at this season of the year."

A few minutes afterward an open landau was whirling Mariolle and his trunks away to Montigny.

The forest was beginning to awake. The copses at the foot of the great trees, whose heads were covered with a light veil of foliage, were beginning to assume a denser

aspect. The early birches, with their silvery trunks, were the only trees that seemed completely attired for the summer, while the great oaks only displayed small tremulous splashes of green at the ends of their branches and the beeches, more quick to open their pointed buds, were just shedding the dead leaves of the past year.

The grass by the roadside, unobscured as yet by the thick shade of the tree-tops, was growing lush and bright with the influx of new sap, and the odor of new growth that Mariolle had already remarked in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, now wrapped him about and immersed him in a great bath of green life budding in the sunshine of the early season. He inhaled it greedily, like one just liberated from prison, and with the sensation of a man whose fetters have just been broken he luxuriously extended his arms along the two sides of the landau and let his hands hang down over the two wheels.

He passed through Marlotte, where the driver called his attention to the Hotel Corot, then just opened, of the original design of which there was much talk. Then the road continued, with the forest on the left hand and on the right a wide plain with trees here and there and hills bounding the horizon. To this succeeded a long village street, a blinding white street lying between two endless rows of little tile-roofed houses. Here and there an enormous lilac bush displayed its flowers over the top of a wall.

This street followed the course of a narrow valley along which ran a little stream. It was a narrow, rapid, twisting, nimble little stream, on one of its banks laving the foundations of the houses and the garden-walls and on the other bathing the meadows where the small trees were just beginning to put forth their scanty foliage. The sight of it inspired Mariolle with a sensation of delight.

He had no difficulty in finding his house and was greatly pleased with it. It was an old house that had been restored by a painter, who had tired of it after living there five years and offered it for rent. It was directly on the water, separated from the

stream only by a pretty garden that ended in a terrace of lindens. The Loing, which just above this point had a picturesque fall of a foot or two over a dam erected there, ran rapidly by this terrace, whirling in great eddies. From the front windows of the house the meadows on the other bank were visible.

"I shall get well here," Mariolle thought.

Everything had been arranged with the notary in case the house should prove suitable. The driver carried back his acceptance of it. Then the housekeeping details had to be attended to, which did not take much time, the mayor's clerk having provided two women, one to do the cooking, the other to wash and attend to the chamber-work.

Downstairs there were a parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and two small rooms; on the floor above a handsome bedroom and a large apartment that the artist owner had fitted up as a studio. The furniture had all been selected with loving care, as people always furnish when they are enamored of a place, but now it had lost a little of its freshness and was in some disorder, with the air of desolation that is noticeable in dwellings that have been abandoned by their master. A pleasant odor of verbena, however, still lingered in the air, showing that the little house had not been long uninhabited. "Ah!" thought Mariolle, "verbena, that indicates simplicity of taste. The woman that preceded me could not have been one of those complex, mystifying natures. Happy man!"

It was getting toward evening, all these occupations having made the day pass rapidly. He took a seat by an open window, drinking in the agreeable coolness that exhaled from the surrounding vegetation and watching the setting sun as it cast long shadows across the meadows.

The two servants were talking while getting the dinner ready and the sound of their voices ascended to him faintly by the stairway, while through the window came the mingled sounds of the lowing of cows, the barking of dogs, and the cries of men

bringing home the cattle or conversing with their companions on the other bank of the stream. Everything was peaceful and restful.

For the thousandth time since the morning Mariolle asked himself: "What did she think when she received my letter? What will she do?" Then he said to himself: "I wonder what she is doing now?" He looked at his watch; it was half past six. "She has come in from the street. She is receiving."

There rose before his mental vision a picture of the drawing-room, and the young woman chatting with the Princess de Malten, Mme. de Frémines, Massival, and the Comte de Bernhaus.

His soul was suddenly moved with an impulse that was something like anger. He wished that he was there. It was the hour of his accustomed visit to her, almost every day, and he felt within him a feeling of discomfort, not of regret. His will was firm, but a sort of physical suffering afflicted him akin to that of one who is denied his morphine at the accustomed time. He no longer beheld the meadows, nor the sun sinking behind the hills of the horizon; all that he could see was her, among her friends, given over to those cares of the world that had robbed him of her. "I will think of her no more," he said to himself.

He arose, went down to the garden and passed on to the terrace. There was a cool mist there rising from the water that had been agitated in its fall over the dam, and this sensation of chilliness, striking to a heart already sad, caused him to retrace his steps. His dinner was awaiting him in the dining-room. He ate it quickly; then, having nothing to occupy him, and feeling that distress of mind and body, of which he had had the presage, now increasing on him, he went to bed and closed his eyes in an attempt to slumber, but it was to no purpose. His thoughts refused to leave that woman; he beheld her in his thought and he suffered.

On whom would she bestow her favor now? On the Comte de Bernhaus, doubtless! He was just the man, elegant, conspicuous, sought after, to suit that creature of

display. He had found favor with her, for had she not employed all her arts to conquer him even at a time when she was mistress to another man?

Notwithstanding that his mind was beset by these haunting thoughts, it would still keep wandering off into that misty condition of semi-somnolence in which the man and woman were constantly reappearing to his eyes. Of true sleep he got none, and all night long he saw them at his bedside, braving and mocking him, now retiring as if they would at last permit him to snatch a little sleep, then returning as soon as oblivion had begun to creep over him and awaking him with a spasm of jealous agony in his heart. He left his bed at earliest break of day and went away into the forest with a cane in his hand, a stout serviceable stick that the last occupant of the house had left behind him.

The rays of the newly risen sun were falling through the tops of the oaks, almost leafless as yet, upon the ground, which was carpeted in spots by patches of verdant grass, here by a carpet of dead leaves and there by heather reddened by the frosts of winter. Yellow butterflies were fluttering along the road like little dancing flames. To the right of the road was a hill, almost large enough to be called a mountain. Mariolle ascended it leisurely, and when he reached the top seated himself on a great stone, for he was quite out of breath. His legs were overcome with weakness and refused to support him; all his system seemed to be yielding to a sudden breaking down. He was well aware that this languor did not proceed from fatigue; it came from her, from the love that weighed him down like an intolerable burden, and he murmured: "What wretchedness! why does it possess me thus, me, a man who has always taken from existence only that which would enable him to enjoy it without suffering afterward?"

His attention was awakened by the fear of this malady that might prove so hard to cure, and he probed his feelings, went down to the very depths of his nature, endeavoring to know and understand it better, and make clear to his own eyes the

reason of this inexplicable crisis. He said to himself: "I have never yielded to any undue attraction. I am not enthusiastic or passionate by nature; my judgment is more powerful than my instinct, my curiosity than my appetite, my fancy than my perseverance. I am essentially nothing more than a man that is delicate, intelligent, and hard to please in his enjoyments. I have loved the things of this life without ever allowing myself to become greatly attached to them, with the perceptions of an expert who sips and does not suffer himself to become surfeited, who knows better than to lose his head. I submit everything to the test of reason, and generally I analyze my likings too severely to submit to them blindly. That is even my great defect, the only cause of my weakness.

"And now that woman has taken possession of me, in spite of myself, in spite of my fears and of my knowledge of her, and she retains her hold as if she had plucked away one by one all the different aspirations that existed in me. That may be the case. Those aspirations of mine went out toward inanimate objects, toward nature, that entices and softens me, toward music, which is a sort of ideal caress, toward reflection, which is the delicate feasting of the mind, toward everything on earth that is beautiful and agreeable.

"Then I met a creature who collected and concentrated all my somewhat fickle and fluctuating likings, and directing them toward herself, converted them into love. Charming and beautiful, she pleased my eyes; bright, intelligent, and witty, she pleased my mind, and she pleased my heart by the mysterious charm of her contact and her presence and by the secret and irresistible emanation from her personality, until all these things enslaved me as the perfume of certain flowers intoxicates. She has taken the place of everything for me, for I no longer have any aspirations, I no longer wish or care for anything."

"In other days how my feelings would have thrilled and started in this forest that is putting forth its new life! To-day I see nothing of it, I am regardless of it; I am still

at that woman's side, whom I desire to love no more.

"Come! I must kill these ideas by physical fatigue; unless I do I shall never get well."

He arose, descended the rocky hillside and resumed his walk with long strides, but still the haunting presence crushed him as if it had been a burden that he was bearing on his back. He went on, constantly increasing his speed, now and then encountering a brief sensation of comfort at the sight of the sunlight piercing through the foliage or at a breath of perfumed air from some grove of resinous pine-trees, which inspired in him a presentiment of distant consolation.

Suddenly he came to a halt. "I am not walking any longer," he said, "I am flying from something!" Indeed, he was flying, straight ahead, he cared not where, pursued by the agony of his love.

Then he started on again at a more reasonable speed. The appearance of the forest was undergoing a change. The growth was denser and the shadows deeper, for he was coming to the warmer portions of it, to the beautiful region of the beeches. No sensation of winter lingered there. It was wondrous spring, that seemed to have been the birth of a night, so young and fresh was everything.

Mariolle made his way among the thickets, beneath the gigantic trees that towered above him higher and higher still, and in this way he went on for a long time, an hour, two hours, pushing his way through the branches, through the countless multitudes of little shining leaves, bright with their varnish of new sap. The heavens were quite concealed by the immense dome of verdure, supported on its lofty columns, now perpendicular, now leaning, now of a whitish hue, now dark beneath the black moss that drew its nourishment from the bark.

Thus they towered, stretching away indefinitely in the distance, one behind the other, lording it over the bushy young copses that grew in confused tangles at their feet and wrapping them in dense shadow through which in places poured floods of

vivid sunlight. The golden rain streamed down through all this luxuriant growth until the wood no longer remained a wood, but became a brilliant sea of verdure illumined by yellow rays. Mariolle stopped, seized with an ineffable surprise. Where was he? Was he in a forest, or had he descended to the bottom of a sea, a sea of leaves and light, an ocean of green resplendency?

He felt better—more tranquil; more remote, more hidden from his misery, and he threw himself down upon the red carpet of dead leaves that these trees do not cast until they are ready to put on their new garments. Rejoicing in the cool contact of the earth and the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon conscious of a wish, vague at first but soon becoming more defined, not to be alone in this charming spot, and he said to himself: "Ah! if she were only here, at my side!"

He suddenly remembered Mont Saint-Michel, and recollecting how different she had been down there to what she was in Paris, how her affection had blossomed out in the open air before the yellow sands, he thought that on that day she had surely loved him a little for a few hours. Yes, surely, on the road where they had watched the receding tide, in the cloisters where, murmuring his name: "André," she had seemed to say, "I am yours," and on the "Madman's Path," where he had almost borne her through space, she had felt an impulsion toward him that had never returned since she placed her foot, the foot of a coquette, on the pavement of Paris.

He continued to yield himself to his mournful reveries, still stretched at length upon his back, his look lost among the gold and green of the tree-tops, and little by little his eyes closed, weighed down with sleep and the tranquillity that reigned among the trees. When he awoke he saw that it was past two o'clock of the afternoon.

When he arose and proceeded on his way he felt less sad, less ailing. At length he emerged from the thickness of the wood and came to a great open space where six broad avenues converged and then stretched away and lost themselves in the leafy, transparent distance. A signboard told him that the name of the locality was "Le

Bouquet-du-Roi." It was indeed the capital of this royal country of the beeches.

A carriage passed, and as it was empty and disengaged Mariolle took it and ordered the driver to take him to Marlotte, whence he could make his way to Montigny after getting something to eat at the inn, for he was beginning to be hungry.

He remembered that he had seen this establishment, which was only recently opened, the day before: the Hotel Corot, it was called, an artistic public-house in middle-age style of decoration, modeled on the Chat Noir in Paris. His driver set him down there and he passed through an open door into a vast room where old-fashioned tables and uncomfortable benches seemed to be awaiting drinkers of a past century. At the far end a woman, a young waitress, no doubt, was standing on top of a little folding ladder, fastening some old plates to nails that were driven in the wall and seemed nearly beyond her reach. Now raising herself on tiptoe on both feet, now on one, supporting herself with one hand against the wall while the other held the plate, she reached up with pretty and adroit movements; for her figure was pleasing and the undulating lines from wrist to ankle assumed changing forms of grace at every fresh posture. As her back was toward him she had been unaware of Mariolle's entrance, who stopped to watch her. He thought of Prédolé and his figurines; "It is a pretty picture, though!" he said to himself. "She is very graceful, that little girl."

He gave a little cough. She was so startled that she came near falling, but as soon as she had recovered her self-possession, she jumped down from her ladder as lightly as a rope dancer, and came to him with a pleasant smile on her face. "What will Monsieur have?" she inquired.

"Breakfast, Mademoiselle."

She ventured to say: "It should be dinner, rather, for it is half past three o'clock."

"We will call it dinner if you like. I lost myself in the forest."

Then she told him what dishes there were ready; he made his selection and took a

seat. She went away to give the order, returning shortly to set the table for him. He watched her closely as she bustled around the table; she was pretty and very neat in her attire. She had a spry little air that was very pleasant to behold, in her working dress with skirt pinned up, sleeves rolled back, and neck exposed; and her corset fitted closely to her pretty form, of which she had no reason to be ashamed.

Her face was rather red, painted by exposure to the open air, and it seemed somewhat too fat and puffy, but it was as fresh as a new-blown rose, with fine, bright, brown eyes, a large mouth with its complement of handsome teeth, and chestnut hair that revealed by its abundance the healthy vigor of this strong young frame.

She brought radishes and bread and butter and he began to eat, ceasing to pay attention to the attendant. He called for a bottle of champagne and drank the whole of it, as he did two glasses of kummel after his coffee, and as his stomach was empty—he had taken nothing before he left his house but a little bread and cold meat—he soon felt a comforting feeling of tipsiness stealing over him that he mistook for oblivion. His griefs and sorrows were diluted and tempered by the sparkling wine which, in so short a time, had transformed the torments of his heart into insensibility. He walked slowly back to Montigny, and being very tired and sleepy went to bed as soon as it was dark, falling asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

He awoke after a while, however, in the dense darkness, ill at ease and disquieted as if a nightmare that had left him for an hour or two had furtively reappeared at his bedside to murder sleep. She was there, she, Mme. de Burne, back again, roaming about his bed, and accompanied still by M. de Bernhaus. "Come!" he said, "it must be that I am jealous. What is the reason of it?"

Why was he jealous? He quickly told himself why. Notwithstanding all his doubts and fears he knew that as long as he had been her lover she had been faithful to

him—faithful, indeed, without tenderness and without transports, but with a loyal strength of resolution. Now, however, he had broken it all off, and it was ended; he had restored her freedom to her. Would she remain without a liaison? Yes, doubtless, for a while. And then? This very fidelity that she had observed toward him up to the present moment, a fidelity beyond the reach of suspicion, was it not due to the feeling that if she left him, Mariolle, because she was tired of him, she would some day, sooner or later, have to take some one to fill his place, not from passion, but from weariness of being alone?

Is it not true that lovers often owe their long lease of favor simply to the dread of an unknown successor? And then to dismiss one lover and take up with another would not have seemed the right thing to such a woman—she was too intelligent, indeed, to bow to social prejudices, but was gifted with a delicate sense of moral purity that kept her from real indelicacies. She was a worldly philosopher and not a prudish bourgeoise, and while she would not have quailed at the idea of a secret attachment, her nature would have revolted at the thought of a succession of lovers.

He had given her her freedom—and now? Now most certainly she would take up with some one else, and that some one would be the Comte de Bernhaus. He was sure of it, and the thought was now affording him inexpressible suffering. Why had he left her? She had been faithful, a good friend to him, charming in every way. Why? Was it because he was a brutal sensualist who could not separate true love from its physical transports? Was that it? Yes—but there was something besides. He had fled from the pain of not being loved as he loved, from the cruel feeling that he did not receive an equivalent return for the warmth of his kisses, an incurable affliction from which his heart, grievously smitten, would perhaps never recover. He looked forward with dread to the prospect of enduring for years the torments that he had been anticipating for a few months and suffering for a few weeks. In accordance with his nature he had weakly recoiled before this prospect, just as he had recoiled all his life long before any effort that called for resolution. It followed that he was

incapable of carrying anything to its conclusion, of throwing himself heart and soul into such a passion as one develops for a science or an art, for it is impossible, perhaps, to have loved greatly without having suffered greatly.

Until daylight he pursued this train of thought, which tore him like wild horses; then he got up and went down to the bank of the little stream. A fisherman was casting his net near the little dam, and when he withdrew it from the water that flashed and eddied in the sunlight and spread it on the deck of his small boat, the little fishes danced among the meshes like animated silver.

Mariolle's agitation subsided little by little in the balmy freshness of the early morning air. The cool mist that rose from the miniature waterfall, about which faint rainbows fluttered, and the stream that ran at his feet in rapid and ceaseless current, carried off with them a portion of his sorrow. He said to himself: "Truly, I have done the right thing; I should have been too unhappy otherwise!" Then he returned to the house, and taking possession of a hammock that he had noticed in the vestibule, he made it fast between two of the lindens and throwing himself into it, endeavored to drive away reflection by fixing his eyes and thoughts upon the flowing stream.

Thus he idled away the time until the hour of breakfast, in an agreeable torpor, a physical sensation of well-being that communicated itself to the mind, and he protracted the meal as much as possible that he might have some occupation for the dragging minutes. There was one thing, however, that he looked forward to with eager expectation, and that was his mail. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau to have his letters forwarded, but had received nothing, and the sensation of being entirely abandoned was beginning to be oppressive. Why? He had no reason to expect that there would be anything particularly pleasing or comforting for him in the little black box that the carrier bore slung at his side, nothing beyond useless invitations and unmeaning communications. Why, then, should he long for letters of whose contents he knew nothing as if the salvation of his soul depended on

them? Was it not that there lay concealed in his heart the vainglorious expectation that she would write to him?

He asked one of his old women: "At what time does the mail arrive?"

"At noon, Monsieur."

It was just midday, and he listened with increased attention to the noises that reached him from outdoors. A knock at the outer door brought him to his feet; the messenger brought him only the newspapers and three unimportant letters. Mariolle glanced over the journals until he was tired, and went out.

What should he do? He went to the hammock and lay down in it, but after half an hour of that he experienced an uncontrollable desire to go somewhere else. The forest? Yes, the forest was very pleasant, but then the solitude there was even deeper than it was in his house, much deeper than it was in the village, where there were at least some signs of life now and then. And the silence and loneliness of all those trees and leaves filled his mind with sadness and regrets, steeping him more deeply still in wretchedness. He mentally reviewed his long walk of the day before, and when he came to the wide-awake little waitress of the Hotel Corot, he said to himself: "I have it! I will go and dine there." The idea did him good; it was something to occupy him, a means of killing two or three hours, and he set out forthwith.

The long village street stretched straight away in the middle of the valley between two rows of low, white, tile-roofed houses, some of them standing boldly up with their fronts close to the road, others, more retiring, situated in a garden where there was a lilac-bush in bloom and chickens scratching over manure-heaps, where wooden stairways in the open air climbed to doors cut in the wall. Peasants were at work before their dwellings, lazily fulfilling their domestic duties. An old woman, bent with age and with threads of gray in her yellow hair, for country folk rarely have white hair, passed close to him, a ragged jacket upon her shoulders and her

lean and sinewy legs covered by a woolen petticoat that failed to conceal the angles and protuberances of her frame. She was looking aimlessly before her with expressionless eyes, eyes that had never looked on other objects than those that might be of use to her in her poor existence.

Another woman, younger than this one, was hanging out the family wash before her door. The lifting of her skirt as she raised her arms aloft disclosed to view thick, coarse ankles incased in blue knitted stockings, with great, projecting, fleshless bones, while the breast and shoulders, flat and broad as those of a man, told of a body whose form must have been horrible to behold.

Mariolle thought: "They are women! Those scarecrows are women!" The vision of Mme. de Burne arose before his eyes. He beheld her in all her elegance and beauty, the perfection of the human female form, coquettish and adorned to meet the looks of man, and again he smarted with the sorrow of an irreparable loss; then he walked on more quickly to shake himself free of this impression.

When he reached the inn at Marlotte the little waitress recognized him immediately, and accosted him almost familiarly: "Good day, Monsieur."

"Good day, Mademoiselle."

"Do you wish something to drink?"

"Yes, to begin with; then I will have dinner."

They discussed the question of what he should drink in the first place and what he should eat subsequently. He asked her advice for the pleasure of hearing her talk, for she had a nice way of expressing herself. She had a short little Parisian accent, and her speech was as unconstrained as was her movements. He thought as he listened: "The little girl is quite agreeable; she seems to me to have a bit of the cocotte about her."

"Are you a Parisian?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been here long?"

"Two weeks, sir."

"And do you like it?"

"Not very well so far, but it is too soon to tell, and then I was tired of the air of Paris, and the country has done me good; that is why I made up my mind to come here. Then I shall bring you a vermouth, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and tell the cook to be careful and pay attention to my dinner."

"Never fear, Monsieur."

After she had gone away he went into the garden of the hotel, and took a seat in an arbor, where his vermouth was served. He remained there all the rest of the day, listening to a blackbird whistling in its cage, and watching the little waitress in her goings and comings. She played the coquette, and put on her sweetest looks for the gentleman, for she had not failed to observe that he found her to his liking.

He went away as he had done the day before after drinking a bottle of champagne to dispel gloom, but the darkness of the way and the coolness of the night air quickly dissipated his incipient tipsiness, and sorrow again took possession of his devoted soul. He thought: "What am I to do? Shall I remain here? Shall I be condemned for long to drag out this desolate way of living?" It was very late when he got to sleep.

The next morning he again installed himself in the hammock, and all at once the sight of a man casting his net inspired him with the idea of going fishing. The grocer from whom he bought his lines gave him some instructions upon the soothing sport, and even offered to go with him and act as his guide upon his first attempt. The offer was accepted, and between nine o'clock and noon Mariolle succeeded, by dint of vigorous exertion and unintermitting patience, in capturing three small fish.

When he had dispatched his breakfast he took up his march again for Marlotte.

Why? To kill time, of course.

The little waitress began to laugh when she saw him coming. Amused by her recognition of him, he smiled back at her, and tried to engage her in conversation. She was more familiar than she had been the preceding day, and met him halfway.

Her name was Elisabeth Ledru. Her mother, who took in dressmaking, had died the year before; then the husband, an accountant by profession, always drunk and out of work, who had lived on the little earnings of his wife and daughter, disappeared, for the girl could not support two persons, though she shut herself up in her garret room and sewed all day long. Tiring of her lonely occupation after a while, she got a position as waitress in a cook-shop, remained there a year, and as the hard work had worn her down, the proprietor of the Hotel Corot at Marlotte, upon whom she had waited at times, engaged her for the summer with two other girls who were to come down a little later on. It was evident that the proprietor knew how to attract customers.

Her little story pleased Mariolle, and by treating her with respect and asking her a few discriminating questions, he succeeded in eliciting from her many interesting details of this poor dismal home that had been laid in ruins by a drunken father. She, poor, homeless, wandering creature that she was, gay and cheerful because she could not help it, being young, and feeling that the interest that this stranger took in her was unfeigned, talked to him with confidence, with that expansiveness of soul that she could no more restrain than she could restrain the agile movements of her limbs.

When she had finished he asked her: "And—do you expect to be a waitress all your life?"

"I could not answer that question, Monsieur. How can I tell what may happen to me to-morrow?"

"And yet it is necessary to think of the future."

She had assumed a thoughtful air that did not linger long upon her features, then she replied: "I suppose that I shall have to take whatever comes to me. So much the worse!"

They parted very good friends. After a few days he returned, then again, and soon he began to go there frequently, finding a vague distraction in the girl's conversation, and that her artless prattle helped him somewhat to forget his grief.

When he returned on foot to Montigny in the evening, however, he had terrible fits of despair as he thought of Mme. de Burne. His heart became a little lighter with the morning sun, but with the night his bitter regrets and fierce jealousy closed in on him again. He had no intelligence; he had written to no one and had received letters from no one. Then, alone with his thoughts upon the dark road, his imagination would picture the progress of the approaching liaison that he had foreseen between his quondam mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This had now become a settled idea with him and fixed itself more firmly in his mind every day. That man, he thought, will be to her just what she requires; a distinguished, assiduous, unexacting lover, contented and happy to be the chosen one of this superlatively delicious coquette. He compared him with himself. The other most certainly would not behave as he had, would not be guilty of that tiresome impatience and of that insatiable thirst for a return of his affection that had been the destruction of their amorous understanding. He was a very discreet, pliant, and well-posted man of the world, and would manage to get along and content himself with but little, for he did not seem to belong to the class of impassioned mortals.

On one of André Mariolle's visits to Marlotte one day, he beheld two bearded young fellows in the other arbor of the Hotel Corot, smoking pipes and wearing Scotch caps on their heads. The proprietor, a big, broad-faced man, came forward to pay his respects as soon as he saw him, for he had an interested liking for this faithful patron of his dinner-table, and said to him: "I have two new customers since yesterday, two

painters."

"Those gentlemen sitting there?"

"Yes. They are beginning to be heard of. One of them got a second-class medal last year." And having told all that he knew about the embryo artists, he asked: "What will you take to-day, Monsieur Mariolle?"

"You may send me out a vermouth, as usual."

The proprietor went away, and soon Elisabeth appeared, bringing the salver, the glass, the carafe, and the bottle. Whereupon one of the painters called to her: "Well! little one, are we angry still?"

She did not answer and when she approached Mariolle he saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been crying," he said.

"Yes, a little," she simply replied.

"What was the matter?"

"Those two gentlemen there behaved rudely to me."

"What did they do to you?"

"They took me for a bad character."

"Did you complain to the proprietor?"

She gave a sorrowful shrug of the shoulders, "Oh! Monsieur—the proprietor. I know what he is now—the proprietor!"

Mariolle was touched, and a little angry; he said to her: "Tell me what it was all about."

She told him of the brutal conduct of the two painters immediately upon their arrival the night before, and then began to cry again, asking what she was to do, alone in the country and without friends or relatives, money or protection.

Mariolle suddenly said to her: "Will you enter my service? You shall be well treated in my house, and when I return to Paris you will be free to do what you please."

She looked him in the face with questioning eyes, and then quickly replied: "I will, Monsieur.

"How much are you earning here?"

"Sixty francs a month," she added, rather uneasily, "and I have my share of the pourboires besides; that makes it about seventy."

"I will pay you a hundred."

She repeated in astonishment: "A hundred francs a month?"

"Yes. Is that enough?"

"I should think that it was enough!"

"All that you will have to do will be to wait on me, take care of my clothes and linen, and attend to my room."

"It is a bargain, Monsieur."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow, if you wish. After what has happened here I will go to the mayor and will leave whether they are willing or not."

Mariolle took two louis from his pocket and handed them to her. "There's the money to bind our bargain."

A look of joy flashed across her face and she said in a tone of decision: "I will be at your house before midday to-morrow, Monsieur."

CHAPTER XII.

CONSOLATION

Elisabeth came to Montigny next day, attended by a countryman with her trunk on a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had made a generous settlement with one of his old women

and got rid of her, and the newcomer took possession of a small room on the top floor adjoining that of the cook. She was quite different from what she had been at Marlotte, when she presented herself before her new master, less effusive, more respectful, more self-contained; she was now the servant of the gentleman to whom she had been almost an humble friend beneath the arbor of the inn. He told her in a few words what she would have to do. She listened attentively, went and took possession of her room, and then entered upon her new service.

A week passed and brought no noticeable change in the state of Mariolle's feelings. The only difference was that he remained at home more than he had been accustomed to do, for he had nothing to attract him to Marlotte, and his house seemed less dismal to him than at first. The bitterness of his grief was subsiding a little, as all storms subside after a while; but in place of this aching wound there was arising in him a settled melancholy, one of those deep-seated sorrows that are like chronic and lingering maladies, and sometimes end in death. His former liveliness of mind and body, his mental activity, his interests in the pursuits that had served to occupy and amuse him hitherto were all dead, and their place had been taken by a universal disgust and an invincible torpor, that left him without even strength of will to get up and go out of doors. He no longer left his house, passing from the salon to the hammock and from the hammock to the salon, and his chief distraction consisted in watching the current of the Loing as it flowed by the terrace and the fisherman casting his net.

When the reserve of the first few days had begun to wear off, Elisabeth gradually grew a little bolder, and remarking with her keen feminine instinct the constant dejection of her employer, she would say to him when the other servant was not by: "Monsieur finds his time hang heavy on his hands?"

He would answer resignedly: "Yes, pretty heavy."

"Monsieur should go for a walk."

"That would not do me any good."

She quietly did many little unassuming things for his pleasure and comfort. Every morning when he came into his drawing-room, he found it filled with flowers and smelling as sweetly as a conservatory. Elisabeth must surely have enlisted all the boys in the village to bring her primroses, violets, and buttercups from the forest, as well as putting under contribution the small gardens where the peasant girls tended their few plants at evening. In his loneliness and distress he was grateful for her kind thoughtfulness and her unobtrusive desire to please him in these small ways.

It also seemed to him that she was growing prettier, more refined in her appearance, and that she devoted more attention to the care of her person. One day when she was handing him a cup of tea, he noticed that her hands were no longer the hands of a servant, but of a lady, with well-trimmed, clean nails, quite irreproachable. On another occasion he observed that the shoes that she wore were almost elegant in shape and material. Then she had gone up to her room one afternoon and come down wearing a delightful little gray dress, quite simple and in perfect taste. "Hallo!" he exclaimed, as he saw her, "how dressy you are getting to be, Elisabeth!"

She blushed up to the whites of her eyes. "What, I, Monsieur? Why, no. I dress a little better because I have more money."

"Where did you buy that dress that you have on?"

"I made it myself, Monsieur."

"You made it? When? I always see you busy at work about the house during the day."

"Why, during my evenings, Monsieur."

"But where did you get the stuff? and who cut it for you?"

She told him that the shopkeeper at Montigny had brought her some samples from Fontainebleau, that she had made her selection from them, and paid for the goods

out of the two louis that he had paid her as advanced wages. The cutting and fitting had not troubled her at all, for she and her mother had worked four years for a ready-made clothing house. He could not resist telling her: "It is very becoming to you. You look very pretty in it." And she had to blush again, this time to the roots of her hair.

When she had left the room he said to himself: "I wonder if she is beginning to fall in love with me?" He reflected on it, hesitated, doubted, and finally came to the conclusion that after all it might be possible. He had been kind and compassionate toward her, had assisted her, and been almost her friend; there would be nothing very surprising in this little girl being smitten with the master, who had been so good to her. The idea did not strike him very disagreeably, moreover, for she was really very presentable, and retained nothing of the appearance of a servant about her. He experienced a flattering feeling of consolation, and his masculine vanity, that had been so cruelly wounded and trampled on and crushed by another woman, felt comforted. It was a compensation—trivial and unnoteworthy though it might be, it was a compensation—for when love comes to a man unsought, no matter whence it comes, it is because that man possesses the capacity of inspiring it. His unconscious selfishness was also gratified by it; it would occupy his attention and do him a little good, perhaps, to watch this young heart opening and beating for him. The thought never occurred to him of sending the child away, of rescuing her from the peril from which he himself was suffering so cruelly, of having more pity for her than others had showed toward him, for compassion is never an ingredient that enters into sentimental conquests.

So he continued his observations, and soon saw that he had not been mistaken. Petty details revealed it to him more clearly day by day. As she came near him one morning while waiting on him at table, he smelled on her clothing an odor of perfumery—villainous, cheap perfumery, from the village shopkeeper's, doubtless, or the druggist's—so he presented her with a bottle of Cyprus toilette-water that he

had been in the habit of using for a long time, and of which he always carried a supply about with him. He also gave her fine soaps, tooth-washes, and rice-powder. He thus lent his assistance to the transformation that was becoming more apparent every day, watching it meantime with a pleased and curious eye. While remaining his faithful and respectful servant, she was thus becoming a woman in whom the coquettish instincts of her sex were artlessly developing themselves.

He, on his part, was imperceptibly becoming attached to her. She inspired him at the same time with amusement and gratitude. He trifled with this dawning tenderness as one trifles in his hours of melancholy with anything that can divert his mind. He was conscious of no other emotion toward her than that undefined desire which impels every man toward a prepossessing woman, even if she be a pretty servant, or a peasant maiden with the form of a goddess—a sort of rustic Venus. He felt himself drawn to her more than all else by the womanliness that he now found in her. He felt the need of that—an undefined and irresistible need, bequeathed to him by that other one, the woman whom he loved, who had first awakened in him that invincible and mysterious fondness for the nature, the companionship, the contact of women, for the subtle aroma, ideal or sensual, that every beautiful creature, whether of the people or of the upper class, whether a lethargic, sensual native of the Orient with great black eyes, or a blue-eyed, keen-witted daughter of the North, inspires in men in whom still survives the immemorial attraction of femininity.

These gentle, loving, and unceasing attentions that were felt rather than seen, wrapped his wound in a sort of soft, protecting envelope that shielded it to some extent from its recurrent attacks of suffering, which did return, nevertheless, like flies to a raw sore. He was made especially impatient by the absence of all news, for his friends had religiously respected his request not to divulge his address. Now and then he would see Massival's or Lamarthe's name in the newspapers among those who had been present at some great dinner or ceremonial, and one day he saw Mme. de Burne's, who was mentioned as being one of the most elegant, the prettiest, and

best dressed of the women who were at the ball at the Austrian embassy. It sent a trembling through him from head to foot. The name of the Comte de Bernhaus appeared a few lines further down, and that day Mariolle's jealousy returned and wrung his heart until night. The suspected liaison was no longer subject for doubt for him now. It was one of those imaginary convictions that are even more torturing than reality, for there is no getting rid of them and they leave a wound that hardly ever heals.

No longer able to endure this state of ignorance and uncertainty, he determined to write to Lamarthe, who was sufficiently well acquainted with him to divine the wretchedness of his soul, and would be likely to afford him some clew as to the justice of his suspicions, even without being directly questioned on the subject. One evening, therefore, he sat down and by the light of his lamp concocted a long, artful letter, full of vague sadness and poetical allusions to the delights of early spring in the country and veiled requests for information. When he got his mail four days later he recognized at the very first glance the novelist's firm, upright handwriting.

Lamarthe sent him a thousand items of news that were of great importance to his jealous eyes. Without laying more stress upon Mme. de Burne and Bernhaus than upon any other of the crowd of people whom he mentioned, he seemed to place them in the foreground by one of those tricks of style characteristic of him, which led the attention to just the point where he wished to lead it without revealing his design. The impression that this letter, taken as a whole, left upon Mariolle was that his suspicions were at least not destitute of foundation. His fears would be realized to-morrow, if they had not been yesterday. His former mistress was always the same, leading the same busy, brilliant, fashionable life. He had been the subject of some talk after his disappearance, as the world always talks of people who have disappeared, with lukewarm curiosity.

After the receipt of this letter he remained in his hammock until nightfall; then he

could eat no dinner, and after that he could get no sleep; he was feverish through the night. The next morning he felt so tired, so discouraged, so disgusted with his weary, monotonous life, between the deep silent forest that was now dark with verdure on the one hand and the tiresome little stream that flowed beneath his windows on the other, that he did not leave his bed.

When Elisabeth came to his room in response to the summons of his bell, she stood in the doorway pale with surprise and asked him: "Is Monsieur ill?"

"Yes, a little."

"Shall I send for the doctor?"

"No. I am subject to these slight indispositions."

"What can I do for Monsieur?"

He ordered his bath to be got ready, a breakfast of eggs alone, and tea at intervals during the day.

About one o'clock, however, he became so restless that he determined to get up. Elisabeth, whom he had rung for repeatedly during the morning with the fretful irresolution of a man who imagines himself ill and who had always come up to him with a deep desire of being of assistance, now, beholding him so nervous and restless, with a blush for her own boldness, offered to read to him.

He asked her: "Do you read well?"

"Yes, Monsieur; I gained all the prizes for reading when I was at school in the city, and I have read so many novels to mamma that I can't begin to remember the names of them."

He was curious to see how she would do, and he sent her into the studio to look among the books that he had packed up for the one that he liked best of all, "Manon Lescaut."

When she returned she helped him to settle himself in bed, arranged two pillows

behind his back, took a chair, and began to read. She read well, very well indeed, intelligently and with a pleasing accent that seemed a special gift. She evinced her interest in the story from the commencement and showed so much feeling as she advanced in it that he stopped her now and then to ask her a question and have a little conversation about the plot and the characters.

Through the open windows, on the warm breeze loaded with the sweet odors of growing things, came the trills and roulades of the nightingales among the trees saluting their mates with their amorous ditties in this season of awakening love. The young girl, too, was moved beneath André's gaze as she followed with bright eyes the plot unwinding page by page.

She answered the questions that he put to her with an innate appreciation of the things connected with tenderness and passion, an appreciation that was just, but, owing to the ignorance natural to her position, sometimes crude. He thought: "This girl would be very intelligent and bright if she had a little teaching."

Her womanly charm had already begun to make itself felt in him, and really did him good that warm, still, spring afternoon, mingling strangely with that other charm, so powerful and so mysterious, of "Manon," the strangest conception of woman ever evoked by human ingenuity.

When it became dark after this day of inactivity Mariolle sank into a kind of dreaming, dozing state, in which confused visions of Mme. de Burne and Elisabeth and the mistress of Des Grieux rose before his eyes. As he had not left his room since the day before and had taken no exercise to fatigue him he slept lightly and was disturbed by an unusual noise that he heard about the house.

Once or twice before he had thought that he heard faint sounds and footsteps at night coming from the ground floor, not directly underneath his room, but from the laundry and bath-room, small rooms that adjoined the kitchen. He had given the matter no attention, however.

This evening, tired of lying in bed and knowing that he had a long period of wakefulness before him, he listened and distinguished something that sounded like the rustling of a woman's garments and the splashing of water. He decided that he would go and investigate, lighted a candle and looked at his watch; it was barely ten o'clock. He dressed himself, and having slipped a revolver into his pocket, made his way down the stairs on tiptoe with the stealthiness of a cat.

When he reached the kitchen, he was surprised to see that there was a fire burning in the furnace. There was not a sound to be heard, but presently he was conscious of something stirring in the bath-room, a small, whitewashed apartment that opened off the kitchen and contained nothing but the tub. He went noiselessly to the door and threw it open with a quick movement; there, extended in the tub, he beheld the most beautiful form that he had ever seen in his life.

It was Elisabeth.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARIOLLE COPIES MME DE BURNE

When she appeared before him next morning bringing him his tea and toast, and their eyes met, she began to tremble so that the cup and sugar-bowl rattled on the salver. Mariolle went to her and relieved her of her burden and placed it on the table; then, as she still kept her eyes fastened on the floor, he said to her: "Look at me, little one."

She raised her eyes to him; they were full of tears.

"You must not cry," he continued. As he held her in his arms, she murmured: "Oh! mon Dieu!" He knew that it was not regret, nor sorrow, nor remorse that had elicited from her those three agitated words, but happiness, true happiness. It gave him a strange, selfish feeling of delight, physical rather than moral, to feel this small person resting against his heart, to feel there at last the presence of a woman who loved him. He thanked her for it, as a wounded man lying by the roadside would

thank a woman who had stopped to succor him; he thanked her with all his lacerated heart, and he pitied her a little, too, in the depths of his soul. As he watched her thus, pale and tearful, with eyes alight with love, he suddenly said to himself: "Why, she is beautiful! How quickly a woman changes, becomes what she ought to be, under the influence of the desires of her feelings and the necessities of her existence!"

"Sit down," he said to her. He took her hands in his, her poor toiling hands that she had made white and pretty for his sake, and very gently, in carefully chosen phrases, he spoke to her of the attitude that they should maintain toward each other. She was no longer his servant, but she would preserve the appearance of being so for a while yet, so as not to create a scandal in the village. She would live with him as his housekeeper and would read to him frequently, and that would serve to account for the change in the situation. He would have her eat at his table after a little, as soon as she should be permanently installed in her position as his reader.

When he had finished she simply replied: "No, Monsieur, I am your servant, and I will continue to be so. I do not wish to have people learn what has taken place and talk about it."

He could not shake her determination, although he urged her strenuously, and when he had drunk his tea she carried away the salver while he followed her with a softened look.

When she was gone he reflected. "She is a woman," he thought, "and all women are equal when they are pleasing in our eyes. I have made my waitress my mistress. She is pretty, she will be charming! At all events she is younger and fresher than the mondaines and the cocottes. What difference does it make, after all? How many celebrated actresses have been daughters of concierges! And yet they are received as ladies, they are adored like heroines of romance, and princes bow before them as if they were queens. Is this to be accounted for on the score of their talent, which is often doubtful, or of their beauty, which is often questionable? Not at all. But a

woman, in truth, always holds the place that she is able to create for herself by the illusion that she is capable of inspiring."

He took a long walk that day, and although he still felt the same distress at the bottom of his heart and his legs were heavy under him, as if his suffering had loosened all the springs of his energy, there was a feeling of gladness within him like the song of a little bird. He was not so lonely, he felt himself less utterly abandoned; the forest appeared to him less silent and less void.

He returned to his house with the glad thought that Elisabeth would come out to meet him with a smile upon her lips and a look of tenderness in her eyes.

The life that he now led for about a month on the bank of the little stream was a real idyl. Mariolle was loved as perhaps very few men have ever been, as a child is loved by its mother, as the hunter is loved by his dog. He was all in all to her, her Heaven and earth, her charm and delight. He responded to all her ardent and artless womanly advances, giving her in a kiss her fill of ecstasy. In her eyes and in her soul, in her heart and in her flesh there was no object but him; her intoxication was like that of a young man who tastes wine for the first time. Surprised and delighted, he reveled in the bliss of this absolute self-surrender, and he felt that this was drinking of love at its fountain-head, at the very lips of nature.

Nevertheless he continued to be sad, sad, and haunted by his deep, unyielding disenchantment. His little mistress was agreeable, but he always felt the absence of another, and when he walked in the meadows or on the banks of the Loing and asked himself: "Why does this lingering care stay by me so?" such an intolerable feeling of desolation rose within him as the recollection of Paris crossed his mind that he had to return to the house so as not to be alone.

Then he would swing in the hammock, while Elisabeth, seated on a camp-chair, would read to him. As he watched her and listened to her he would recall to mind conversations in the drawing-room of Michèle, in the days when he passed whole

evenings alone with her. Then tears would start to his eyes, and such bitter regret would tear his heart that he felt that he must start at once for Paris or else leave the country forever.

Elisabeth, seeing his gloom and melancholy, asked him: "Are you suffering? Your eyes are full of tears."

"Give me a kiss, little one," he replied; "you could not understand."

She kissed him, anxiously, with a foreboding of some tragedy that was beyond her knowledge. He, forgetting his woes for a moment beneath her caresses, thought: "Oh! for a woman who could be these two in one, who might have the affection of the one and the charm of the other! Why is it that we never encounter the object of our dreams, that we always meet with something that is only approximately like them?"

He continued his vague reflections, soothed by the monotonous sound of the voice that fell unheeded on his ear, upon all the charms that had combined to seduce and vanquish him in the mistress whom he had abandoned. In the besetment of her memory, of her imaginary presence, by which he was haunted as a visionary by a phantom, he asked himself: "Am I condemned to carry her image with me to all eternity?"

He again applied himself to taking long walks, to roaming through the thicknesses of the forest, with the vague hope that he might lose her somewhere, in the depths of a ravine, behind a rock, in a thicket, as a man who wishes to rid himself of an animal that he does not care to kill sometimes takes it away a long distance so that it may not find its way home.

In the course of one of these walks he one day came again to the spot where the beeches grew. It was now a gloomy forest, almost as black as night, with impenetrable foliage. He passed along beneath the immense, deep vault in the damp, sultry air, thinking regretfully of his earlier visit when the little half-opened leaves

resembled a verdant, sunshiny mist, and as he was following a narrow path, he suddenly stopped in astonishment before two trees that had grown together. It was a sturdy beech embracing with two of its branches a tall, slender oak; and there could have been no picture of his love that would have appealed more forcibly and more touchingly to his imagination. Mariolle seated himself to contemplate them at his ease. To his diseased mind, as they stood there in their motionless strife, they became splendid and terrible symbols, telling to him, and to all who might pass that way, the everlasting story of his love.

Then he went on his way again, sadder than before, and as he walked along, slowly and with eyes downcast, he all at once perceived, half hidden by the grass and stained by mud and rain, an old telegram that had been lost or thrown there by some wayfarer. He stopped. What was the message of joy or sorrow that the bit of blue paper that lay there at his feet had brought to some expectant soul?

He could not help picking it up and opening it with a mingled feeling of curiosity and disgust. The words "Come—me—four o'clock—" were still legible; the names had been obliterated by the moisture.

Memories, at once cruel and delightful, thronged upon his mind of all the messages that he had received from her, now to appoint the hour for a rendezvous, now to tell him that she could not come to him. Never had anything caused him such emotion, nor startled him so violently, nor so stopped his poor heart and then set it thumping again as had the sight of those messages, burning or freezing him as the case might be. The thought that he should never receive more of them filled him with unutterable sorrow.

Again he asked himself what her thoughts had been since he left her. Had she suffered, had she regretted the friend whom her coldness had driven from her, or had she merely experienced a feeling of wounded vanity and thought nothing more of his abandonment? His desire to learn the truth was so strong and so persistent that a

strange and audacious, yet only half-formed resolve, came into his head. He took the road to Fontainebleau, and when he reached the city went to the telegraph office, his mind in a fluctuating state of unrest and indecision; but an irresistible force proceeding from his heart seemed to urge him on. With a trembling hand, then, he took from the desk a printed blank and beneath the name and address of Mme. de Burne wrote this dispatch:

"I would so much like to know what you think of me! For my part I can forget nothing. ANDRÉ MARIOLLE."

Then he went out, engaged a carriage, and returned to Montigny, disturbed in mind by what he had done and regretting it already.

He had calculated that in case she condescended to answer him he would receive a letter from her two days later, but the fear and the hope that she might send him a dispatch kept him in his house all the following day. He was in his hammock under the lindens on the terrace, when, about three o'clock, Elisabeth came to tell him that there was a lady at the house who wanted to see him.

The shock was so great that his breath failed him for a moment and his legs bent under him, and his heart beat violently as he went toward the house. And yet he could not dare hope that it was she.

When he appeared at the drawing-room door Mme. de Burne arose from the sofa where she was sitting and came forward to shake hands with a rather reserved smile upon her face, with a slight constraint of manner and attitude, saying: "I came to see how you are, as your message did not give me much information on the subject."

He had become so pale that a flash of delight rose to her eyes, and his emotion was so great that he could not speak, could only hold his lips glued to the hand that she had given him.

"Dieu! how kind of you!" he said at last.

"No; but I do not forget my friends, and I was anxious about you."

She looked him in the face with that rapid, searching woman's look that reads everything, fathoms one's thoughts to their very roots, and unmasks every artifice. She was satisfied, apparently, for her face brightened with a smile. "You have a pretty hermitage here," she continued. "Does happiness reside in it?"

"No, Madame."

"Is it possible? In this fine country, at the side of this beautiful forest, on the banks of this pretty stream? Why, you ought to be at rest and quite contented here."

"I am not, Madame."

"Why not, then?"

"Because I cannot forget."

"Is it indispensable to your happiness that you should forget something?"

"Yes, Madame."

"May one know what?"

"You know."

"And then?"

"And then I am very wretched."

She said to him with mingled fatuity and commiseration: "I thought that was the case when I received your telegram, and that was the reason that I came, with the resolve that I would go back again at once if I found that I had made a mistake." She was silent a moment and then went on: "Since I am not going back immediately, may I go and look around your place? That little alley of lindens yonder has a very charming appearance: it looks as if it might be cooler out there than here in this drawing-room."

They went out. She had on a mauve dress that harmonized so well with the verdure of the trees and the blue of the sky that she appeared to him like some amazing apparition, of an entirely new style of beauty and seductiveness. Her tall and

willowy form, her bright, clean-cut features, the little blaze of blond hair beneath a hat that was mauve, like the dress, and lightly crowned by a long plume of ostrich-feathers rolled about it, her tapering arms with the two hands holding the closed sunshade crosswise before her, the loftiness of her carriage, and the directness of her step seemed to introduce into the humble little garden something exotic, something that was foreign to it. It was a figure from one of Watteau's pictures, or from some fairy-tale or dream, the imagination of a poet's or an artist's fancy, which had been seized by the whim of coming away to the country to show how beautiful it was. As Mariolle looked at her, all trembling with his newly lighted passion, he recalled to mind the two peasant women that he had seen in Montigny village.

"Who is the little person who opened the door for me?" she inquired.

"She is my servant."

"She does not look like a waitress."

"No; she is very good looking."

"Where did you secure her?"

"Quite near here; in an inn frequented by painters, where her innocence was in danger from the customers."

"And you preserved it?"

He blushed and replied: "Yes, I preserved it."

"To your own advantage, perhaps."

"Certainly, to my own advantage, for I would rather have a pretty face about me than an ugly one."

"Is that the only feeling that she inspires in you?"

"Perhaps it was she who inspired in me the irresistible desire of seeing you again, for every woman when she attracts my eyes, even if it is only for the duration of a

second, carries my thoughts back to you."

"That was a very pretty piece of special pleading! And does she love her preserver?"

He blushed more deeply than before. Quick as lightning the thought flashed through his mind that jealousy is always efficacious as a stimulant to a woman's feelings, and decided him to tell only half a lie, so he answered, hesitatingly: "I don't know how that is; it may be so. She is very attentive to me."

Rather pettishly, Mme. de Burne murmured: "And you?"

He fastened upon her his eyes that were aflame with love, and replied: "Nothing could ever distract my thoughts from you."

This was also a very shrewd answer, but the phrase seemed to her so much the expression of an indisputable truth, that she let it pass without noticing it. Could a woman such as she have any doubts about a thing like that? So she was satisfied, in fact, and had no further doubts upon the subject of Elisabeth.

They took two canvas chairs and seated themselves in the shade of the lindens over the running stream. He asked her: "What did you think of me?"

"That you must have been very wretched."

"Was it through my fault or yours?"

"Through the fault of us both."

"And then?"

"And then, knowing how beside yourself you were, I reflected that it would be best to give you a little time to cool down. So I waited."

"What were you waiting for?"

"For a word from you. I received it, and here I am. Now we are going to talk like people of sense. So you love me still? I do not ask you this as a coquette—I ask it as your friend."

"I love you still."

"And what is it that you wish?"

"How can I answer that? I am in your power."

"Oh! my ideas are very clear, but I will not tell you them without first knowing what yours are. Tell me of yourself, of what has been passing in your heart and in your mind since you ran away from me."

"I have been thinking of you; I have had no other occupation." He told her of his resolution to forget her, his flight, his coming to the great forest in which he had found nothing but her image, of his days filled with memories of her, and his long nights of consuming jealousy; he told her everything, with entire truthfulness, always excepting his love for Elisabeth, whose name he did not mention.

She listened, well assured that he was not lying, convinced by her inner consciousness of her power over him, even more than by the sincerity of his manner, and delighted with her victory, glad that she was about to regain him, for she loved him still.

Then he bemoaned himself over this situation that seemed to have no end, and warming up as he told of all that he had suffered after having carried it so long in his thoughts, he again reproached her, but without anger, without bitterness, in terms of impassioned poetry, with that impotency of loving of which she was the victim. He told her over and over: "Others have not the gift of pleasing; you have not the gift of loving."

She interrupted him, speaking warmly, full of arguments and illustrations. "At least I have the gift of being faithful," she said. "Suppose I had adored you for ten months, and then fallen in love with another man, would you be less unhappy than you are?"

He exclaimed: "Is it, then, impossible for a woman to love only one man?"

But she had her answer ready for him: "No one can keep on loving forever; all that one can do is to be constant. Do you believe that that exalted delirium of the senses can last for years? No, no. As for the most of those women who are addicted to

passions, to violent caprices of greater or less duration, they simply transform life into a novel. Their heroes are different, the events and circumstances are unforeseen and constantly changing, the dénouement varies. I admit that for them it is amusing and diverting, for with every change they have a new set of emotions, but for him—when it is ended, that is the last of it. Do you understand me?"

"Yes; what you say has some truth in it. But I do not see what you are getting at."

"It is this: there is no passion that endures a very long time; by that I mean a burning, torturing passion like that from which you are suffering now. It is a crisis that I have made hard, very hard for you to bear—I know it, and I feel it—by—by the aridity of my tenderness and the paralysis of my emotional nature. This crisis will pass away, however, for it cannot last forever."

"And then?" he asked with anxiety.

"Then I think that to a woman who is as reasonable and calm as I am you can make yourself a lover who will be pleasing in every way, for you have a great deal of tact. On the other hand you would make a terrible husband. But there is no such thing as a good husband, there never can be."

He was surprised and a little offended. "Why," he asked, "do you wish to keep a lover that you do not love?"

She answered, impetuously: "I do love him, my friend, after my fashion. I do not love ardently, but I love."

"You require above everything else to be loved and to have your lovers make a show of their love."

"It is true. That is what I like. But beyond that my heart requires a companion apart from the others. My vainglorious passion for public homage does not interfere with my capacity for being faithful and devoted; it does not destroy my belief that I have something of myself that I could bestow upon a lover that no other man should have: my loyal affection, the sincere attachment of my heart, the entire and secret

trustfulness of my soul; in exchange for which I should receive from him, together with all the tenderness of a lover, the sensation, so sweet and so rare, of not being entirely alone upon the earth. That is not love from the way you look at it, but it is not entirely valueless, either."

He bent over toward her, trembling with emotion, and stammered: "Will you let me be that man?"

"Yes, after a little, when you are more yourself. In the meantime, resign yourself to a little suffering once in a while, for my sake. Since you have to suffer in any event, isn't it better to endure it at my side rather than somewhere far from me?" Her smile seemed to say to him: "Why can you not have confidence in me?" and as she eyed him there, his whole frame quivering with passion, she experienced through every fiber of her being a feeling of satisfied well-being that made her happy in her way, in the way that the bird of prey is happy when he sees his quarry lying fascinated beneath him and awaiting the fatal talons.

"When do you return to Paris?" she asked.

"Why—to-morrow!"

"To-morrow be it. You will come and dine with me?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And now I must be going," said she, looking at the watch set in the handle of her parasol.

"Oh! why so soon?"

"Because I must catch the five o'clock train. I have company to dinner to-day, several persons: the Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, De Maltry, and a stranger, M. de Charlaine, the explorer, who is just back from upper Cambodia, after a wonderful journey. He is all the talk just now."

Mariolle's spirits fell; it hurt him to hear these names mentioned one after the other,

as if he had been stung by so many wasps. They were poison to him.

"Will you go now?" he said, "and we can drive through the forest and see something of it."

"I shall be very glad to. First give me a cup of tea and some toast."

When the tea was served, Elisabeth was not to be found. The cook said that she had gone out to make some purchases. This did not surprise Mme. de Burne, for what had she to fear now from this servant? Then they got into the landau that was standing before the door, and Mariolle made the coachman take them to the station by a roundabout way which took them past the Gorge-aux-Loups. As they rolled along beneath the shade of the great trees where the nightingales were singing, she was seized by the ineffable sensation that the mysterious and all-powerful charm of nature impresses on the heart of man. "Dieu!" she said, "how beautiful it is, how calm and restful!"

He accompanied her to the station, and as they were about to part she said to him: "I shall see you to-morrow at eight o'clock, then?"

"To-morrow at eight o'clock, Madame."

She, radiant with happiness, went her way, and he returned to his house in the landau, happy and contented, but uneasy withal, for he knew that this was not the end.

Why should he resist? He felt that he could not. She held him by a charm that he could not understand, that was stronger than all. Flight would not deliver him, would not sever him from her, but would be an intolerable privation, while if he could only succeed in showing a little resignation, he would obtain from her at least as much as she had promised, for she was a woman who always kept her word.

The horses trotted along under the trees and he reflected that not once during that interview had she put up her lips to him for a kiss. She was ever the same; nothing in her would ever change and he would always, perhaps, have to suffer at her hands in

just that same way. The remembrance of the bitter hours that he had already passed, with the intolerable certainty that he would never succeed in rousing her to passion, laid heavy on his heart, and gave him a clear foresight of struggles to come and of similar distress in the future. Still, he was content to suffer everything rather than lose her again, resigned even to that everlasting, ever unappeased desire that rioted in his veins and burned into his flesh.

The raging thoughts that had so often possessed him on his way back alone from Auteuil were now setting in again. They began to agitate his frame as the landau rolled smoothly along in the cool shadows of the great trees, when all at once the thought of Elisabeth awaiting him there at his door, she, too, young and fresh and pretty, her heart full of love and her mouth full of kisses, brought peace to his soul. Presently he would be holding her in his arms, and, closing his eyes and deceiving himself as men deceive others, confounding in the intoxication of the embrace her whom he loved and her by whom he was loved, he would possess them both at once. Even now it was certain that he had a liking for her, that grateful attachment of soul and body that always pervades the human animal as the result of love inspired and pleasure shared in common. This child whom he had made his own, would she not be to his dry and wasting love the little spring that bubbles up at the evening halting place, the promise of the cool draught that sustains our energy as wearily we traverse the burning desert?

When he regained the house, however, the girl had not come in. He was frightened and uneasy and said to the other servant: "You are sure that she went out?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

Thereupon he also went out in the hope of finding her. When he had taken a few steps and was about to turn into the long street that runs up the valley, he beheld before him the old, low church, surmounted by its square tower, seated upon a little knoll and watching the houses of its small village as a hen watches over her chicks.

A presentiment that she was there impelled him to enter. Who can tell the strange glimpses of the truth that a woman's heart is capable of perceiving? What had she thought, how much had she understood? Where could she have fled for refuge but there, if the shadow of the truth had passed before her eyes?

The church was very dark, for night was closing in. The dim lamp, hanging from its chain, suggested in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the divine Consoler. With hushed footsteps Mariolle passed up along the lines of benches. When he reached the choir he saw a woman on her knees, her face hidden in her hands. He approached, recognized her, and touched her on the shoulder. They were alone.

She gave a great start as she turned her head. She was weeping.

"What is the matter?" he said.

She murmured: "I see it all. You came here because she had caused you to suffer. She came to take you away."

He spoke in broken accents, touched by the grief that he in turn had caused: "You are mistaken, little one. I am going back to Paris, indeed, but I shall take you with me."

She repeated, incredulously: "It can't be true, it can't be true."

"I swear to you that it is true."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

She began again to sob and groan: "My God! My God!"

Then he raised her to her feet and led her down the hill through the thick blackness of the night, but when they came to the river-bank he made her sit down upon the grass and placed himself beside her. He heard the beating of her heart and her quick breathing, and clasping her to his heart, troubled by his remorse, he whispered to her gentle words that he had never used before. Softened by pity and burning with

desire, every word that he uttered was true; he did not endeavor to deceive her, and surprised himself at what he said and what he felt, he wondered how it was that, thrilling yet with the presence of that other one whose slave he was always to be, he could tremble thus with longing and emotion while consoling this love-stricken heart.

He promised that he would love her,—he did not say simply "love"—, that he would give her a nice little house near his own and pretty furniture to put in it and a servant to wait on her. She was reassured as she listened to him, and gradually grew calmer, for she could not believe that he was capable of deceiving her, and besides his tone and manner told her that he was sincere. Convinced at length and dazzled by the vision of being a lady, by the prospect—so undreamed of by the poor girl, the servant of the inn—of becoming the "good friend" of such a rich, nice gentleman, she was carried away in a whirl of pride, covetousness, and gratitude that mingled with her fondness for André. Throwing her arms about his neck and covering his face with kisses, she stammered: "Oh! I love you so! You are all in all to me!"

He was touched and returned her caresses. "Darling! My little darling!" he murmured.

Already she had almost forgotten the appearance of the stranger who but now had caused her so much sorrow. There must have been some vague feeling of doubt floating in her mind, however, for presently she asked him in a tremulous voice: "Really and truly, you will love me as you love me now?"

And unhesitatingly he replied: "I will love you as I love you now."

THE OLIVE GROVE

AND

OTHER TALES

THE OLIVE GROVE

When the 'longshoremen of Garandou, a little port of Provence, situated in the bay of Pisca, between Marseilles and Toulon, perceived the boat of the Abbé Vilbois entering the harbor, they went down to the beach to help him pull her ashore.

The priest was alone in the boat. In spite of his fifty-eight years, he rowed with all the energy of a real sailor. He had placed his hat on the bench beside him, his sleeves were rolled up, disclosing his powerful arms, his cassock was open at the neck and turned over his knees, and he wore a round hat of heavy, white canvas. His whole appearance bespoke an odd and strenuous priest of southern climes, better fitted for adventures than for clerical duties.

He rowed with strong and measured strokes, as if to show the southern sailors how the men of the north handle the oars, and from time to time he turned around to look at the landing point.

The skiff struck the beach and slid far up, the bow plowing through the sand; then it stopped abruptly. The five men watching for the abbé drew near, jovial and smiling.

"Well!" said one, with the strong accent of Provence, "have you been successful, Monsieur le Curé?"

The abbé drew in the oars, removed his canvas head-covering, put on his hat, pulled down his sleeves, and buttoned his coat. Then having assumed the usual appearance of a village priest, he replied proudly: "Yes, I have caught three red-snappers, two eels, and five sunfish."

The fishermen gathered around the boat to examine, with the air of experts, the dead fish, the fat red-snappers, the flat-headed eels, those hideous sea-serpents, and the violet sunfish, streaked with bright orange-colored stripes.

Said one: "I'll carry them up to your house, Monsieur le Curé."

"Thank you, my friend."

Having shaken hands all around, the priest started homeward, followed by the man

with the fish; the others took charge of the boat.

The Abbé Vilbois walked along slowly with an air of dignity. The exertion of rowing had brought beads of perspiration to his brow and he uncovered his head each time that he passed through the shade of an olive grove. The warm evening air, freshened by a slight breeze from the sea, cooled his high forehead covered with short, white hair, a forehead far more suggestive of an officer than of a priest.

The village appeared, built on a hill rising from a large valley which descended toward the sea.

It was a summer evening. The dazzling sun, traveling toward the ragged crests of the distant hills, outlined on the white, dusty road the figure of the priest, the shadow of whose three-cornered hat bobbed merrily over the fields, sometimes apparently climbing the trunks of the olive-trees, only to fall immediately to the ground and creep among them.

With every step he took, he raised a cloud of fine, white dust, the invisible powder which, in summer, covers the roads of Provence; it clung to the edge of his cassock turning it grayish white. Completely refreshed, his hands deep in his pockets, he strode along slowly and ponderously, like a mountaineer. His eyes were fixed on the distant village where he had lived twenty years, and where he hoped to die. Its church—his church—rose above the houses clustered around it; the square turrets of gray stone, of unequal proportions and quaint design, stood outlined against the beautiful southern valley; and their architecture suggested the fortifications of some old château rather than the steeples of a place of worship.

The abbé was happy; for he had caught three red-snappers, two eels, and five sunfish. It would enable him to triumph again over his flock, which respected him, no doubt, because he was one of the most powerful men of the place, despite his years. These little innocent vanities were his greatest pleasures. He was a fine marksman; sometimes he practiced with his neighbor, a retired army provost who

kept a tobacco shop; he could also swim better than anyone along the coast.

In his day he had been a well-known society man, the Baron de Vilbois, but had entered the priesthood after an unfortunate love-affair. Being the scion of an old family of Picardy, devout and royalistic, whose sons for centuries had entered the army, the magistracy, or the Church, his first thought was to follow his mother's advice and become a priest. But he yielded to his father's suggestion that he should study law in Paris and seek some high office.

While he was completing his studies his father was carried off by pneumonia; his mother, who was greatly affected by the loss, died soon afterward. He came into a fortune, and consequently gave up the idea of following a profession to live a life of idleness. He was handsome and intelligent, but somewhat prejudiced by the traditions and principles which he had inherited, along with his muscular frame, from a long line of ancestors.

Society gladly welcomed him and he enjoyed himself after the fashion of a well-to-do and seriously inclined young man. But it happened that a friend introduced him to a young actress, a pupil of the Conservatoire, who was appearing with great success at the Odéon. It was a case of love at first sight.

His sentiment had all the violence, the passion of a man born to believe in absolute ideas. He saw her act the romantic rôle in which she had achieved a triumph the first night of her appearance. She was pretty, and, though naturally perverse, possessed the face of an angel.

She conquered him completely; she transformed him into a delirious fool, into one of those ecstatic idiots whom a woman's look will forever chain to the pyre of fatal passions. She became his mistress and left the stage. They lived together four years, his love for her increasing during the time. He would have married her in spite of his proud name and family traditions, had he not discovered that for a long time she had been unfaithful to him with the friend who had introduced them.

The awakening was terrible, for she was about to become a mother, and he was awaiting the birth of the child to make her his wife.

When he held the proof of her transgressions,—some letters found in a drawer,—he confronted her with his knowledge and reproached her with all the savageness of his uncouth nature for her unfaithfulness and deceit. But she, a child of the people, being as sure of this man as of the other, braved and insulted him with the inherited daring of those women, who, in times of war, mounted with the men on the barricades.

He would have struck her to the ground—but she showed him her form. As white as death, he checked himself, remembering that a child of his would soon be born to this vile, polluted creature. He rushed at her to crush them both, to obliterate this double shame. Reeling under his blows, and seeing that he was about to stamp out the life of her unborn babe, she realized that she was lost. Throwing out her hands to parry the blows, she cried:

"Do not kill me! It is his, not yours!"

He fell back, so stunned with surprise that for a moment his rage subsided. He stammered:

"What? What did you say?"

Crazed with fright, having read her doom in his eyes and gestures, she repeated: "It's not yours, it's his."

Through his clenched teeth he stammered:

"The child?"

"Yes."

"You lie!"

And again he lifted his foot as if to crush her, while she struggled to her knees in a vain attempt to rise. "I tell you it's his. If it was yours, wouldn't it have come much

sooner?"

He was struck by the truth of this argument. In a moment of strange lucidity, his mind evolved precise, conclusive, irresistible reasons to disclaim the child of this miserable woman, and he felt so appeased, so happy at the thought, that he decided to let her live.

He then spoke in a calmer voice: "Get up and leave, and never let me see you again."

Quite cowed, she obeyed him and went. He never saw her again.

Then he left Paris and came south. He stopped in a village situated in a valley, near the coast of the Mediterranean. Selecting for his abode an inn facing the sea, he lived there eighteen months in complete seclusion, nursing his sorrow and despair. The memory of the unfaithful one tortured him; her grace, her charm, her perversity haunted him, and withal came the regret of her caresses.

He wandered aimlessly in those beautiful vales of Provence, baring his head, filled with the thoughts of that woman, to the sun that filtered through the grayish-green leaves of the olive-trees.

His former ideas of religion, the abated ardor of his faith, returned to him during his sorrowful retreat. Religion had formerly seemed a refuge from the unknown temptations of life, now it appeared as a refuge from its snares and tortures. He had never given up the habit of prayer. In his sorrow, he turned anew to its consolations, and often at dusk he would wander into the little village church, where in the darkness gleamed the light of the lamp hung above the altar, to guard the sanctuary and symbolize the Divine Presence.

He confided his sorrow to his God, told Him of his misery, asking advice, pity, help, and consolation. Each day, his fervid prayers disclosed stronger faith.

The bleeding heart of this man, crushed by love for a woman, still longed for affection; and soon his prayers, his seclusion, his constant communion with the Savior who consoles and cheers the weary, wrought a change in him, and the mystic

love of God entered his soul, casting out the love of the flesh.

He then decided to take up his former plans and to devote his life to the Church.

He became a priest. Through family connections he succeeded in obtaining a call to the parish of this village which he had come across by chance. Devoting a large part of his fortune to the maintenance of charitable institutions, and keeping only enough to enable him to help the poor as long as he lived, he sought refuge in a quiet life filled with prayer and acts of kindness toward his fellow-men.

Narrow-minded but kind-hearted, a priest with a soldier's temperament, he guided his blind, erring flock forcibly through the mazes of this life in which every taste, instinct, and desire is a pitfall. But the old man in him never disappeared entirely. He continued to love out-of-door exercise and noble sports, but he hated every woman, having an almost childish fear of their dangerous fascination.

II.

The sailor who followed the priest, being a southerner, found it difficult to refrain from talking. But he did not dare start a conversation, for the abbé exerted a great prestige over his flock. At last he ventured a remark: "So you like your lodge, do you, Monsieur le Curé?"

This lodge was one of the tiny constructions that are inhabited during the summer by the villagers and the town people alike. It was situated in a field not far from the parish-house, and the abbé had hired it because the latter was very small and built in the heart of the village next to the church.

During the summer time, he did not live altogether at the lodge, but would remain a few days at a time to practice pistol-shooting and be close to nature.

"Yes, my friend," said the priest, "I like it very well."

The low structure could now be seen; it was painted pink, and the walls were almost hidden under the leaves and branches of the olive-trees that grew in the open field. A

tall woman was passing in and out of the door, setting a small table at which she placed, at each trip, a knife and fork, a glass, a plate, a napkin, and a piece of bread. She wore the small cap of the women of Arles, a pointed cone of silk or black velvet, decorated with a white rosette.

When the abbé was near enough to make himself heard, he shouted:

"Eh! Marguerite!"

She stopped to ascertain whence the voice came, and recognizing her master: "Oh! it's you, Monsieur le Curé!"

"Yes. I have caught some fine fish, and want you to broil this sunfish immediately, do you hear?"

The servant examined, with a critical and approving glance, the fish that the sailor carried.

"Yes, but we are going to have a chicken for dinner," she said.

"Well, it cannot be helped. To-morrow the fish will not be as fresh as it is now. I mean to enjoy a little feast—it does not happen often—and the sin is not great."

The woman picked out a sunfish and prepared to go into the house. "Ah!" she said, "a man came to see you three times while you were out, Monsieur le Curé."

Indifferently he inquired: "A man! What kind of man?"

"Why, a man whose appearance was not in his favor."

"What! a beggar?"

"Perhaps—I don't know. But I think he is more of a 'maoufatan.'"

The abbé smiled at this word, which, in the language of Provence means a highwayman, a tramp, for he was well aware of Marguerite's timidity, and knew that every day and especially every night she fancied they would be murdered.

He handed a few sous to the sailor, who departed. And just as he was saying: "I am going to wash my hands,"—for his past dainty habits still clung to him,—Marguerite

called to him from the kitchen where she was scraping the fish with a knife, thereby detaching its blood-stained, silvery scales:

"There he comes!"

The abbé looked down the road and saw a man coming slowly toward the house; he seemed poorly dressed, indeed, so far as he could distinguish. He could not help smiling at his servant's anxiety, and thought, while he waited for the stranger: "I think, after all, she is right; he does look like a 'maoufatan.'"

The man walked slowly, with his eyes on the priest and his hands buried deep in his pockets. He was young and wore a full, blond beard; strands of curly hair escaped from his soft felt hat, which was so dirty and battered that it was impossible to imagine its former color and appearance. He was clothed in a long, dark overcoat, from which emerged the frayed edge of his trousers; on his feet were bathing shoes that deadened his steps, giving him the stealthy walk of a sneak thief.

When he had come within a few steps of the priest, he doffed, with a sweeping motion, the ragged hat that shaded his brow. He was not bad looking, though his face showed signs of dissipation and the top of his head was bald, an indication of premature fatigue and debauch, for he certainly was not over twenty-five years old.

The priest responded at once to his bow, feeling that this fellow was not an ordinary tramp, a mechanic out of work, or a jail-bird, hardly able to speak any other tongue but the mysterious language of prisons.

"How do you do, Monsieur le Curé?" said the man. The priest answered simply, "I salute you," unwilling to address this ragged stranger as "Monsieur." They considered each other attentively; the abbé felt uncomfortable under the gaze of the tramp, invaded by a feeling of unrest unknown to him.

At last the vagabond continued: "Well, do you recognize me?"

Greatly surprised, the priest answered: "Why, no, you are a stranger to me."

"Ah! you do not know me? Look at me well."

"I have never seen you before."

"Well, that may be true," replied the man sarcastically, "but let me show you some one whom you will know better."

He put on his hat and unbuttoned his coat, revealing his bare chest. A red sash wound around his spare frame held his trousers in place. He drew an envelope from his coat pocket, one of those soiled wrappers destined to protect the sundry papers of the tramp, whether they be stolen or legitimate property, those papers which he guards jealously and uses to protect himself against the too zealous gendarmes. He pulled out a photograph about the size of a folded letter, one of those pictures which were popular long ago; it was yellow and dim with age, for he had carried it around with him everywhere and the heat of his body had faded it.

Pushing it under the abbé's eyes, he demanded:

"Do you know him?"

The priest took a step forward to look and grew pale, for it was his own likeness that he had given Her years ago.

Failing to grasp the meaning of the situation he remained silent.

The tramp repeated:

"Do you recognize him?"

And the priest stammered: "Yes."

"Who is it?"

"It is I."

"It is you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, look at us both,—at me and at your picture!"

Already the unhappy man had seen that these two beings, the one in the picture and the one by his side, resembled each other like brothers; yet he did not understand, and muttered: "Well, what is it you wish?"

Then in an ugly voice, the tramp replied: "What do I wish? Why, first I wish you to recognize me."

"Who are you?"

"Who am I? Ask anybody by the roadside, ask your servant, let's go and ask the mayor and show him this; and he will laugh, I tell you that! Ah! you will not recognize me as your son, papa curé?"

The old man raised his arms above his head, with a patriarchal gesture, and muttered despairingly: "It cannot be true!"

The young fellow drew quite close to him.

"Ah! It cannot be true, you say! You must stop lying, do you hear?" His clenched fists and threatening face, and the violence with which he spoke, made the priest retreat a few steps, while he asked himself anxiously which one of them was laboring under a mistake.

Again he asserted: "I never had a child."

The other man replied: "And no mistress, either?"

The aged priest resolutely uttered one word, a proud admission:

"Yes."

"And was not this mistress about to give birth to a child when you left her?"

Suddenly the anger which had been quelled twenty-five years ago, not quelled, but buried in the heart of the lover, burst through the wall of faith, resignation, and renunciation he had built around it. Almost beside himself, he shouted:

"I left her because she was unfaithful to me and was carrying the child of another man; had it not been for this, I should have killed both you and her, sir!"

The young man hesitated, taken aback at the sincerity of this outburst. Then he replied in a gentler voice:

"Who told you that it was another man's child?"

"She told me herself and braved me."

Without contesting this assertion the vagabond assumed the indifferent tone of a loafer judging a case:

"Well, then, mother made a mistake, that's all!"

After his outburst of rage, the priest had succeeded in mastering himself sufficiently to be able to inquire:

"And who told you that you were my son?"

"My mother, on her deathbed, M'sieur le Curé. And then—this!" And he held the picture under the eyes of the priest.

The old man took it from him; and slowly, with a heart bursting with anguish, he compared this stranger with his faded likeness and doubted no longer—it was his son.

An awful distress wrung his very soul, a terrible, inexpressible emotion invaded him; it was like the remorse of some ancient crime. He began to understand a little, he guessed the rest. He lived over the brutal scene of the parting. It was to save her life, then, that the wretched and deceitful woman had lied to him, her outraged lover. And he had believed her. And a son of his had been brought into the world and had grown up to be this sordid tramp, who exhaled the very odor of vice as a goat exhales its animal smell.

He whispered: "Will you take a little walk with me, so that we can discuss these matters?"

The young man sneered: "Why, certainly! Isn't that what I came for?"

They walked side by side through the olive grove. The sun had gone down and the

coolness of southern twilights spread an invisible cloak over the country. The priest shivered, and raising his eyes with a familiar motion, perceived the trembling gray foliage of the holy tree which had spread its frail shadow over the Son of Man in His great trouble and despondency.

A short, despairing prayer rose within him, uttered by his soul's voice, a prayer by which Christians implore the Savior's aid: "O Lord! have mercy on me."

Turning to his son he said: "So your mother is dead?"

These words, "Your mother is dead," awakened a new sorrow; it was the torment of the flesh which cannot forget, the cruel echo of past sufferings; but mostly the thrill of the fleeting, delirious bliss of his youthful passion.

The young man replied: "Yes, Monsieur le Curé, my mother is dead."

"Has she been dead a long while?"

"Yes, three years."

A new doubt entered the priest's mind. "And why did you not find me out before?"

The other man hesitated.

"I was unable to, I was prevented. But excuse me for interrupting these recollections—I will enter into more details later—for I have not had anything to eat since yesterday morning."

A tremor of pity shook the old man and holding forth both hands: "Oh! my poor child!" he said.

The young fellow took those big, powerful hands in his own slender and feverish palms.

Then he replied, with that air of sarcasm which hardly ever left his lips: "Ah! I'm beginning to think that we shall get along very well together, after all!"

The curé started toward the lodge.

"Let us go to dinner," he said.

He suddenly remembered, with a vague and instinctive pleasure, the fine fish he had caught, which, with the chicken, would make a good meal for the poor fellow.

The servant was in front of the door, watching their approach with an anxious and forbidding face.

"Marguerite," shouted the abbé, "take the table and put it into the dining-room, right away; and set two places, as quick as you can."

The woman seemed stunned at the idea that her master was going to dine with this tramp.

But the abbé, without waiting for her, removed the plate and napkin and carried the little table into the dining-room.

A few minutes later he was sitting opposite the beggar, in front of a soup-tureen filled with savory cabbage soup, which sent up a cloud of fragrant steam.

III.

When the plates were filled, the tramp fell to with ravenous avidity. The abbé had lost his appetite and ate slowly, leaving the bread in the bottom of his plate. Suddenly he inquired:

"What is your name?"

The man smiled; he was delighted to satisfy his hunger.

"Father unknown," he said, "and no other name but my mother's, which you probably remember. But I possess two Christian names, which, by the way, are quite unsuited to me—Philippe-Auguste."

The priest whitened.

"Why were you named thus?" he asked.

The tramp shrugged his shoulders. "I fancy you ought to know. After mother left you, she wished to make your rival believe that I was his child. He did believe it until I was about fifteen. Then I began to look too much like you. And he disclaimed

me, the scoundrel. I had been christened Philippe-Auguste; now, if I had not resembled a soul, or if I had been the son of a third person, who had stayed in the background, to-day I should be the Vicomte Philippe-Auguste de Pravallon, son of the count and senator bearing this name. I have christened myself 'No-luck.'"

"How did you learn all this?"

"They discussed it before me, you know; pretty lively discussions they were, too. I tell you, that's what shows you the seamy side of life!"

Something more distressing than all he had suffered during the last half hour now oppressed the priest. It was a sort of suffocation which seemed as if it would grow and grow till it killed him; it was not due so much to the things he heard as to the manner in which they were uttered by this wayside tramp. Between himself and this beggar, between his son and himself, he was discovering the existence of those moral divergencies which are as fatal poisons to certain souls. Was this his son? He could not yet believe it. He wanted all the proofs, every one of them. He wanted to hear all, to listen to all. Again he thought of the olive-trees that shaded his little lodge, and for the second time he prayed: "O Lord! have mercy upon me."

Philippe-Auguste had finished his soup. He inquired: "Is there nothing else, abbé?"

The kitchen was built in an annex. Marguerite could not hear her master's voice. He always called her by striking a Chinese gong hung on the wall behind his chair. He took the brass hammer and struck the round metal plate. It gave a feeble sound, which grew and vibrated, becoming sharper and louder till it finally died away on the evening breeze.

The servant appeared with a frowning face and cast angry glances at the tramp, as if her faithful instinct had warned her of the misfortune that had befallen her master. She held a platter on which was the sunfish, spreading a savory odor of melted butter through the room. The abbé divided the fish lengthwise, helping his son to the better half: "I caught it a little while ago," he said, with a touch of pride in spite of

his keen distress.

Marguerite had not left the room.

The priest added: "Bring us some wine, the white wine of Cape Corse."

She almost rebelled, and the priest, assuming a severe expression was obliged to repeat: "Now, go, and bring two bottles, remember," for, when he drank with anybody, a very rare pleasure, indeed, he always opened one bottle for himself.

Beaming, Philippe-Auguste remarked: "Fine! A splendid idea! It has been a long time since I've had such a dinner." The servant came back after a few minutes. The abbé thought it an eternity, for now a thirst for information burned his blood like infernal fire.

After the bottles had been opened, the woman still remained, her eyes glued on the tramp.

"Leave us," said the curé.

She intentionally ignored his command.

He repeated almost roughly: "I have ordered you to leave us."

Then she left the room.

Philippe-Auguste devoured the fish voraciously, while his father sat watching him, more and more surprised and saddened at all the baseness stamped on the face that was so like his own. The morsels the abbé raised to his lips remained in his mouth, for his throat could not swallow; so he ate slowly, trying to choose, from the host of questions which besieged his mind, the one he wished his son to answer first. At last he spoke:

"What was the cause of her death?"

"Consumption."

"Was she ill a long time?"

"About eighteen months."

"How did she contract it?"

"We could not tell."

Both men were silent. The priest was reflecting. He was oppressed by the multitude of things he wished to know and to hear, for since the rupture, since the day he had tried to kill her, he had heard nothing. Certainly, he had not cared to know, because he had buried her, along with his happiest days, in forgetfulness; but now, knowing that she was dead and gone, he felt within himself the almost jealous desire of a lover to hear all.

He continued: "She was not alone, was she?"

"No, she lived with him."

The old man started: "With him? With Pravallon?"

"Why, yes."

And the betrayed man rapidly calculated that the woman who had deceived him, had lived over thirty years with his rival.

Almost unconsciously he asked: "Were they happy?"

The young man sneered. "Why, yes, with ups and downs! It would have been better had I not been there. I always spoiled everything."

"How, and why?" inquired the priest.

"I have already told you. Because he thought I was his son up to my fifteenth year. But the old fellow wasn't a fool, and soon discovered the likeness. That created scenes. I used to listen behind the door. He accused mother of having deceived him. Mother would answer: 'Is it my fault? you knew quite well when you took me that I was the mistress of that other man.' You were that other man."

"Ah! They spoke of me sometimes?"

"Yes, but never mentioned your name before me, excepting toward the end, when mother knew she was lost. I think they distrusted me."

"And you—and you learned quite early the irregularity of your mother's position?"

"Why, certainly. I am not innocent and I never was. Those things are easy to guess as soon as one begins to know life."

Philippe-Auguste had been filling his glass repeatedly. His eyes now were beginning to sparkle, for his long fast was favorable to the intoxicating effects of the wine. The priest noticed it and wished to caution him. But suddenly the thought that a drunkard is imprudent and loquacious flashed through him, and lifting the bottle he again filled the young man's glass.

Meanwhile Marguerite had brought the chicken. Having set it on the table, she again fastened her eyes on the tramp, saying in an indignant voice: "Can't you see that he's drunk, Monsieur le Curé?"

"Leave us," replied the priest, "and return to the kitchen."

She went out, slamming the door.

He then inquired: "What did your mother say about me?"

"Why, what a woman usually says of a man she has jilted: that you were hard to get along with, very strange, and that you would have made her life miserable with your peculiar ideas."

"Did she say that often?"

"Yes, but sometimes only in allusions, for fear I would understand; but nevertheless I guessed all."

"And how did they treat you in that house?"

"Me? They treated me very well at first and very badly afterward. When mother saw that I was interfering with her, she shook me."

"How?"

"How? very easily. When I was about sixteen years old, I got into various scrapes, and those blackguards put me into a reformatory to get rid of me." He put his elbows

on the table and rested his cheeks in his palms. He was hopelessly intoxicated, and felt the unconquerable desire of all drunkards to talk and boast about themselves.

He smiled sweetly, with a feminine grace, an arch grace the priest knew and recognized as the hated charm that had won him long ago, and had also wrought his undoing. Now it was his mother whom the boy resembled, not so much because of his features, but because of his fascinating and deceptive glance, and the seductiveness of the false smile that played around his lips, the outlet of his inner ignominy.

Philippe-Auguste began to relate: "Ah! Ah! Ah!—I've had a fine life since I left the reformatory! A great writer would pay a large sum for it! Why, old Père Dumas's Monte Cristo has had no stranger adventures than mine."

He paused to reflect with the philosophical gravity of the drunkard, then he continued slowly:

"When you wish a boy to turn out well, no matter what he has done, never send him to a reformatory. The associations are too bad. Now, I got into a bad scrape. One night about nine o'clock, I, with three companions—we were all a little drunk—was walking along the road near the ford of Folac. All at once a wagon hove in sight, with the driver and his family asleep in it. They were people from Martinon on their way home from town. I caught hold of the bridle, led the horse to the ferryboat, made him walk into it, and pushed the boat into the middle of the stream. This created some noise and the driver awoke. He could not see in the dark, but whipped up the horse, which started on a run and landed in the water with the whole load. All were drowned! My companions denounced me to the authorities, though they thought it was a good joke when they saw me do it. Really, we didn't think that it would turn out that way. We only wanted to give the people a ducking, just for fun. After that I committed worse offenses to revenge myself for the first one, which did not, on my honor, warrant the reformatory. But what's the use of telling them? I will

speak only of the latest one, because I am sure it will please you. Papa, I avenged you!"

The abbé was watching his son with terrified eyes; he had stopped eating.

Philippe-Auguste was preparing to begin. "No, not yet," said the priest, "in a little while."

And he turned to strike the Chinese gong.

Marguerite appeared almost instantly. Her master addressed her in such a rough tone that she hung her head, thoroughly frightened and obedient: "Bring in the lamp and the dessert, and then do not appear until I summon you."

She went out and returned with a porcelain lamp covered with a green shade, and bringing also a large piece of cheese and some fruit.

After she had gone, the abbé turned resolutely to his son.

"Now I am ready to hear you."

Philippe-Auguste calmly filled his plate with dessert and poured wine into his glass. The second bottle was nearly empty, though the priest had not touched it.

His mouth and tongue, thick with food and wine, the man stuttered: "Well, now for the last job. And it's a good one. I was home again,—stayed there in spite of them, because they feared me,—yes, feared me. Ah! you can't fool with me, you know,—I'll do anything, when I'm roused. They lived together on and off. The old man had two residences. One official, for the senator, the other clandestine, for the lover. Still, he lived more in the latter than in the former, as he could not get along without mother. Mother was a sharp one—she knew how to hold a man! She had taken him body and soul, and kept him to the last! Well, I had come back and I kept them down by fright. I am resourceful at times—nobody can match me for sharpness and for strength, too—I'm afraid of no one. Well, mother got sick and the old man took her to a fine place in the country, near Meulan, situated in a park as big as a

wood. She lasted about eighteen months, as I told you. Then we felt the end to be near. He came from Paris every day—he was very miserable—really.

"One morning they chatted a long time, over an hour, I think, and I could not imagine what they were talking about. Suddenly mother called me in and said:

"'I am going to die, and there is something I want to tell you beforehand, in spite of the Count's advice.' In speaking of him she always said 'the Count.' 'It is the name of your father, who is alive.' I had asked her this more than fifty times—more than fifty times—my father's name—more than fifty times—and she always refused to tell. I think I even beat her one day to make her talk, but it was of no use. Then, to get rid of me, she told me that you had died penniless, that you were worthless and that she had made a mistake in her youth, an innocent girl's mistake. She lied so well, I really believed you had died.

"Finally she said: 'It is your father's name.'

"The old man, who was sitting in an armchair, repeated three times, like this: 'You do wrong, you do wrong, you do wrong, Rosette.'

"Mother sat up in bed. I can see her now, with her flushed cheeks and shining eyes; she loved me, in spite of everything; and she said: 'Then you do something for him, Philippe!' In speaking to him she called him 'Philippe' and me 'Auguste.'

"He began to shout like a madman: 'Do something for that loafer—that blackguard, that convict? never!'

"And he continued to call me names, as if he had done nothing else all his life but collect them.

"I was angry, but mother told me to hold my tongue, and she resumed: 'Then you must want him to starve, for you know that I leave no money.'

"Without being deterred, he continued: 'Rosette, I have given you thirty-five thousand francs a year for thirty years,—that makes more than a million. I have

enabled you to live like a wealthy, a beloved, and I may say, a happy woman. I owe nothing to that fellow, who has spoiled our late years, and he will not get a cent from me. It is useless to insist. Tell him the name of his father, if you wish. I am sorry, but I wash my hands of him.'

"Then mother turned toward me. I thought: 'Good! now I'm going to find my real father—if he has money, I'm saved.'

"She went on: 'Your father, the Baron de Vilbois, is to-day the Abbé Vilbois, curé of Garandou, near Toulon. He was my lover before I left him for the Count!'

"And she told me all, excepting that she had deceived you about her pregnancy. But women, you know, never tell the whole truth."

Sneeringly, unconsciously, he was revealing the depths of his foul nature. With beaming face he raised the glass to his lips and continued:

"Mother died two days—two days later. We followed her remains to the grave, he and I—say—wasn't it funny?—he and I—and three servants—that was all. He cried like a calf—we were side by side—we looked like father and son.

"Then he went back to the house alone. I was thinking to myself: 'I'll have to clear out now and without a penny, too.' I owned only fifty francs. What could I do to revenge myself?

"He touched me on the arm and said: 'I wish to speak to you.' I followed him into his office. He sat down in front of the desk and, wiping away his tears, he told me that he would not be as hard on me as he had said he would to mother. He begged me to leave you alone. That—that concerns only you and me. He offered me a thousand-franc note—a thousand—a thousand francs. What could a fellow like me do with a thousand francs?—I saw that there were very many bills in the drawer. The sight of the money made me wild. I put out my hand as if to take the note he offered me, but instead of doing so, I sprang at him, threw him to the ground and choked him till he grew purple. When I saw that he was going to give up the ghost, I

gagged and bound him. Then I undressed him, laid him on his stomach and—ah! ah! ah!—I avenged you in a funny way!"

He stopped to cough, for he was choking with merriment. His ferocious, mirthful smile reminded the priest once more of the woman who had wrought his undoing.

"And then?" he inquired.

"Then,—ah! ah! ah!—There was a bright fire in the fireplace—it was in the winter—in December—mother died—a bright coal fire—I took the poker—I let it get red-hot—and I made crosses on his back, eight or more, I cannot remember how many—then I turned him over and repeated them on his stomach. Say, wasn't it funny, papa? Formerly they marked convicts in this way. He wriggled like an eel—but I had gagged him so that he couldn't scream. I gathered up the bills—twelve in all—with mine it made thirteen—an unlucky number. I left the house, after telling the servants not to bother their master until dinner-time, because he was asleep. I thought that he would hush the matter up because he was a senator and would fear the scandal. I was mistaken. Four days later I was arrested in a Paris restaurant. I got three years for the job. That is the reason why I did not come to you sooner." He drank again, and stuttering so as to render his words almost unintelligible, continued:

"Now—papa—isn't it funny to have one's papa a curé? You must be nice to me, very nice, because, you know, I am not commonplace,—and I did a good job—didn't I—on the old man?"

The anger which years ago had driven the Abbé Vilbois to desperation rose within him at the sight of this miserable man.

He, who in the name of the Lord, had so often pardoned the infamous secrets whispered to him under the seal of confession, was now merciless in his own behalf. No longer did he implore the help of a merciful God, for he realized that no power on earth or in the sky could save those who had been visited by such a terrible

disaster.

All the ardor of his passionate heart and of his violent blood, which long years of resignation had tempered, awoke against the miserable creature who was his son. He protested against the likeness he bore to him and to his mother, the wretched mother who had formed him so like herself; and he rebelled against the destiny that had chained this criminal to him, like an iron ball to a galley-slave.

The shock roused him from the peaceful and pious slumber which had lasted twenty-five years; with a wonderful lucidity he saw all that would inevitably ensue.

Convinced that he must talk loud so as to intimidate this man from the first, he spoke with his teeth clenched with fury:

"Now that you have told all, listen to me. You will leave here to-morrow morning. You will go to a country that I shall designate, and never leave it without my permission. I will give you a small income, for I am poor. If you disobey me once, it will be withdrawn and you will learn to know me."

Though Philippe-Auguste was half dazed with wine, he understood the threat. Instantly the criminal within him rebelled. Between hiccoughs he sputtered: "Ah! papa, be careful what you say—you're a curé, remember—I hold you—and you have to walk straight, like the rest!"

The abbé started. Through his whole muscular frame crept the unconquerable desire to seize this monster, to bend him like a twig, so as to show him that he would have to yield.

Shaking the table, he shouted: "Take care, take care—I am afraid of nobody."

The drunkard lost his balance and seeing that he was going to fall and would forthwith be in the priest's power, he reached with a murderous look for one of the knives lying on the table. The abbé perceived his motion, and he gave the table a terrible shove; his son toppled over and landed on his back. The lamp fell with a crash and went out.

During a moment the clinking of broken glass was heard in the darkness, then the muffled sound of a soft body creeping on the floor, and then all was silent.

With the crashing of the lamp a complete darkness spread over them; it was so prompt and unexpected that they were stunned by it as by some terrible event. The drunkard, pressed against the wall, did not move; the priest remained on his chair in the midst of the night which had quelled his rage. The somber veil that had descended so rapidly, arresting his anger, also quieted the furious impulses of his soul; new ideas, as dark and dreary as the obscurity, beset him.

The room was perfectly silent, like a tomb where nothing draws the breath of life. Not a sound came from outside, neither the rumbling of a distant wagon, nor the bark of a dog, nor even the sigh of the wind passing through the trees.

This lasted a long time, perhaps an hour. Then suddenly the gong vibrated! It rang once, as if it had been struck a short, sharp blow, and was instantly followed by the noise of a falling body and an overturned chair.

Marguerite came running out of the kitchen, but as soon as she opened the door she fell back, frightened by the intense darkness. Trembling, her heart beating as if it would burst, she called in a low, hoarse voice: "M'sieur le Curé! M'sieur le Curé!"

Nobody answered, nothing stirred.

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu," she thought, "what has happened, what have they done?"

She did not dare enter the room, yet feared to go back to fetch a light. She felt as if she would like to run away, to screech at the top of her voice, though she knew her legs would refuse to carry her. She repeated: "M'sieur le Curé! M'sieur le Curé! it is me, Marguerite."

But, notwithstanding her terror, the instinctive desire of helping her master and a woman's courage, which is sometimes heroic, filled her soul with a terrified audacity, and running back to the kitchen she fetched a lamp.

She stopped at the doorsill. First, she caught sight of the tramp lying against the wall, asleep, or simulating slumber; then she saw the broken lamp, and then, under the table, the feet and black-stockinged legs of the priest, who must have fallen backward, striking his head on the gong.

Her teeth chattering and her hands trembling with fright, she kept on repeating: "My God! My God! what is this?"

She advanced slowly, taking small steps, till she slid on something slimy and almost fell.

Stooping, she saw that the floor was red and that a red liquid was spreading around her feet toward the door. She guessed that it was blood. She threw down her light so as to hide the sight of it, and fled from the room out into the fields, running half crazed toward the village. She ran screaming at the top of her voice, and bumping against the trees she did not heed, her eyes fastened on the gleaming lights of the distant town.

Her shrill voice rang out like the gloomy cry of the night-owl, repeating continuously, "The maoufatan—the maoufatan—the maoufatan——"

When she reached the first house, some excited men came out and surrounded her; but she could not answer them and struggled to escape, for the fright had turned her head.

After a while they guessed that something must have happened to the curé, and a little rescuing party started for the lodge.

The little pink house standing in the middle of the olive grove had grown black and invisible in the dark, silent night. Since the gleam of the solitary window had faded, the cabin was plunged in darkness, lost in the grove, and unrecognizable for anyone but a native of the place.

Soon lights began to gleam near the ground, between the trees, streaking the dried grass with long, yellow reflections. The twisted trunks of the olive-trees assumed

fantastic shapes under the moving lights, looking like monsters or infernal serpents. The projected reflections suddenly revealed a vague, white mass, and soon the low, square wall of the lodge grew pink from the light of the lanterns. Several peasants were carrying the latter, escorting two gendarmes with revolvers, the mayor, the garde-champêtre, and Marguerite, supported by the men, for she was almost unable to walk.

The rescuing party hesitated a moment in front of the open, grewsome door. But the brigadier, snatching a lantern from one of the men, entered, followed by the rest.

The servant had not lied, blood covered the floor like a carpet. It had spread to the place where the tramp was lying, bathing one of his hands and legs.

The father and son were asleep, the one with a severed throat, the other in a drunken stupor. The two gendarmes seized the latter and before he awoke they had him handcuffed. He rubbed his eyes, stunned, stupefied with liquor, and when he saw the body of the priest, he appeared terrified, unable to understand what had happened.

"Why did he not escape?" said the mayor.

"He was too drunk," replied the officer.

And every man agreed with him, for nobody ever thought that perhaps the Abbé Vilbois had taken his own life.

REVENGE

As they were still speaking of Pranzini, M. Maloureau, who had been Attorney-General under the Empire, said:

"I knew another case like that, a very curious affair, curious from many points, as you shall see.

"I was at that time Imperial attorney in the province, and stood very well at Court, thanks to my father, who was first President at Paris. I had charge of a still celebrated case, called 'The Affair of Schoolmaster Moiron.'

"M. Moiron, a schoolmaster in the north of France, bore an excellent reputation in all the country thereabout. He was an intelligent, reflective, very religious man, and had married in the district of Boislinot, where he practiced his profession. He had had three children, who all died in succession from weak lungs. After the loss of his own little ones, he seemed to lavish upon the urchins confided to his care all the tenderness concealed in his heart. He bought, with his own pennies, playthings for his best pupils, the diligent and good. He allowed them to have play dinners, and gorged them with dainties of candies and cakes. Everybody loved and praised this brave man, this brave heart, and it was like a blow when five of his pupils died of the same disease that had carried off his children. It was believed that an epidemic prevailed, caused by the water being made impure from drought. They looked for the cause, without discovering it, more than they did at the symptoms, which were very strange. The children appeared to be taken with a languor, could eat nothing, complained of pains in the stomach, and finally died in most terrible agony.

"An autopsy was made of the last to die, but nothing was discovered. The entrails were sent to Paris and analyzed, but showed no sign of any toxic substance.

"For one year no further deaths occurred; then two little boys, the best pupils in the class, favorites of father Moiron, expired in four days' time. An examination was ordered, and in each body fragments of pounded glass were found imbedded in the organs. They concluded that the two children had eaten imprudently of something carelessly prepared. Sufficient broken glass remained in the bottom of a bowl of milk to have caused this frightful accident, and the matter would have rested there had not Moiron's servant been taken ill in the interval. The physician found the same morbid signs that he observed in the preceding attacks of the children, and, upon questioning her, finally obtained the confession that she had stolen and eaten some bonbons, bought by the master for his pupils.

"Upon order of the court, the schoolhouse was searched and a closet was found, full

of sweetmeats and dainties for the children. Nearly all these edibles contained fragments of glass or broken needles.

"Moiron was immediately arrested. He was so indignant and stupefied at the weight of suspicion upon him that he was nearly overcome. Nevertheless, the indications of his guilt were so apparent that they fought hard in my mind against my first conviction, which was based upon his good reputation, his entire life of truthfulness, and the absolute absence of any motive for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple religious man kill children, and the children whom he seemed to love best? Why should he select those he had feasted with dainties, for whom he had spent in playthings and bonbons half his stipend?

"To admit this, it must be concluded that he was insane. But Moiron seemed so reasonable, so calm, so full of judgment and good sense! It was impossible to prove insanity in him.

"Proofs accumulated, nevertheless! Bonbons, cakes, pâtés of marshmallow, and other things seized at the shops where the schoolmaster got his supplies were found to contain no suspected fragment.

"He pretended that some unknown enemy had opened his closet with a false key and placed the glass and needles in the eatables. And he implied a story of heritage dependent on the death of a child, sought out and discovered by a peasant, and so worked up as to make the suspicion fall upon the schoolmaster. This brute, he said, was not interested in the other poor children who had to die also.

"This theory was plausible. The man appeared so sure of himself and so pitiful, that we should have acquitted him without doubt, if two overwhelming discoveries had not been made at one blow. The first was a snuffbox full of ground glass! It was his own snuffbox, in a secret drawer of his secretary, where he kept his money.

"He explained this in a manner not acceptable, by saying that it was the last ruse of an unknown guilty one. But a merchant of Saint-Marlouf presented himself at the

house of the judge, telling him that Moiron had bought needles of him many times, the finest needles he could find, breaking them to see whether they suited him.

"The merchant brought as witnesses a dozen persons who recognized Moiron at first glance. And the inquest revealed the fact that the schoolmaster was at Saint-Marlouf on the days designated by the merchant.

"I pass over the terrible depositions of the children upon the master's choice of dainties, and his care in making the little ones eat in his presence and destroying all traces of the feast.

"Public opinion, exasperated, recalled capital punishment, and took on a new force from terror which permitted no delays or resistance.

"Moiron was condemned to death. His appeal was rejected. No recourse remained to him for pardon. I knew from my father that the Emperor would not grant it.

"One morning, as I was at work in my office, the chaplain of the prison was announced. He was an old priest who had a great knowledge of men and a large acquaintance among criminals. He appeared troubled and constrained. After talking a few moments of other things, he said abruptly, on rising:

"'If Moiron is decapitated, Monsieur Attorney-General, you will have allowed the execution of an innocent man.'

"Then, without bowing, he went out, leaving me under the profound effect of his words. He had pronounced them in a solemn, affecting fashion, opening lips, closed and sealed by confession, in order to save a life.

"An hour later I was on my way to Paris, and my father, at my request, asked an immediate audience with the Emperor.

"I was received the next day. Napoleon III. was at work in a little room when we were introduced. I exposed the whole affair, even to the visit of the priest, and, in the midst of the story, the door opened behind the chair of the Emperor, and the

Empress, who believed in him alone, entered. His Majesty consulted her. When she had run over the facts, she exclaimed:

"'This man must be pardoned! He must, because he is innocent.'

"Why should this sudden conviction of a woman so pious throw into my mind a terrible doubt?

"Up to that time I had ardently desired a commutation of the sentence. And now I felt myself the puppet, the dupe of a criminal ruse, which had employed the priest and the confession as a means of defense.

"I showed some hesitation to their Majesties. The Emperor remained undecided, solicited on one hand by his natural goodness, and on the other held back by the fear of allowing himself to play a miserable part; but the Empress, convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine call, repeated: 'What does it matter? It is better to spare a guilty man than to kill an innocent one.' Her advice prevailed. The penalty of death was commuted, and that of hard labor was substituted.

"Some years after I heard that Moiron, whose exemplary conduct at Toulon had been made known again to the Emperor, was employed as a domestic by the director of the penitentiary. And then I heard no word of this man for a long time.

"About two years after this, when I was passing the summer at the house of my cousin, De Larielle, a young priest came to me one evening, as we were sitting down to dinner, and wished to speak to me.

"I told them to let him come in, and he begged me to go with him to a dying man, who desired, before all else, to see me. This had happened often, during my long career as judge, and, although I had been put aside by the Republic, I was still called upon from time to time in like circumstances.

"I followed the ecclesiastic, who made me mount into a little miserable lodging, under the roof of a high house. There, upon a pallet of straw, I found a dying man, seated with his back against the wall, in order to breathe. He was a sort of grimacing

skeleton, with deep, shining eyes.

"When he saw me he murmured: 'You do not know me?'

"'No.'

"'I am Moiron.'

"I shivered, but said: 'The schoolmaster?'

"'Yes.'

"'How is it you are here?'

"'That would be too long—I haven't time—I am going to die—They brought me this curate—and as I knew you were here, I sent him for you—It is to you that I wish to confess—since you saved my life before—the other time——'

"He seized with his dry hands the straw of his bed, and continued, in a rasping, bass voice:

"'Here it is—I owe you the truth—to you, because it is necessary to tell it to some one before leaving the earth.

"'It was I who killed the children—all—it was I—for vengeance!

"'Listen. I was an honest man, very honest—very honest—very pure—adoring God—the good God—the God that they teach us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth—I had never done wrong, never committed a villainous act. I was pure as one unborn.

"'After I was married I had some children, and I began to love them as never father or mother loved their own. I lived only for them. I was foolish. They died, all three of them! Why? Why? What had I done? I? I had a change of heart, a furious change. Suddenly I opened my eyes as of one awakening; and I learned that God is wicked. Why had He killed my children? I opened my eyes and I saw that He loved to kill. He loves only that, Monsieur. He exists only to destroy! God is a murderer! Some death is necessary to Him every day. He causes them in all fashions, the better to

amuse Himself. He has invented sickness and accident in order to divert Himself through all the long months and years. And, when He is weary, He has epidemics, pests, the cholera, quinsy, smallpox.

"'How do I know all that this monster has imagined? All these evils are not enough to suffice. From time to time He sends war, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers laid low, bruised in blood and mire, with arms and legs torn off, heads broken by bullets, like eggs that fall along the road.

"'That is not all. He has made men who eat one another. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts to see the men chase them, slaughter, and nourish themselves with them. That is not all. He has made all the little animals that live for a day, flies which increase by myriads in an hour, ants, that one crushes, and others, many, so many that we cannot even imagine them. And all kill one another, chase one another, devour one another, murdering without ceasing. And the good God looks on and is amused, because He sees all for Himself, the largest as well as the smallest, those which are in drops of water, as well as those in the stars. He looks at them all and is amused! Ugh! Beast!

"'So I, Monsieur, I also have killed some children. I acted the part for Him. It was not He who had them. It was not He, it was I. And I would have killed still more, but you took me away. That's all!

"'I was going to die, guillotined. I! How He would have laughed, the reptile! Then I asked for a priest, and lied to him. I confessed. I lied, and I lived.

"'Now it is finished. I can no longer escape Him. But I have no fear of Him, Monsieur, I understand Him too well.'

"It was frightful to see this miserable creature, hardly able to breathe, talking in hiccoughs, opening an enormous mouth to eject some words scarcely heard, pulling up the cloth of his straw bed, and, under a cover nearly black, moving his meager limbs as if to save himself.

"Oh! frightful being and frightful remembrance!

"I asked him: 'You have nothing more to say?'

"'No, Monsieur.'

"'Then, farewell.'

"'Farewell, sir, one day or the other.'

"I turned toward the priest, whose somber silhouette was on the wall.

"'You will remain, M. Abbé?'

"'I will remain.'

"Then the dying man sneered: 'Yes, yes, he sends crows to dead bodies.'

"As for me, I had seen enough. I opened the door and went away in self-protection."

AN OLD MAID

In Argenteuil they called her Queen Hortense. No one ever knew the reason why. Perhaps because she spoke firmly, like an officer in command. Perhaps because she was large, bony, and imperious. Perhaps because she governed a multitude of domestic animals, hens, dogs, cats, canaries, and parrots,—those animals so dear to old maids. But she gave these familiar subjects neither dainties, nor pretty words, nor those tender puerilities which seem to slip from the lips of a woman to the velvety coat of the cat she is fondling. She governed her beasts with authority. She ruled.

She was an old maid, one of those old maids with cracked voice, and awkward gesture, whose soul seems hard. She never allowed contradiction from any person, nor argument, nor would she tolerate hesitation, or indifference, or idleness, or fatigue. No one ever heard her complain, or regret what was, or desire what was not. "Each to his part," she said, with the conviction of a fatalist. She never went to church, cared nothing for the priests, scarcely believed in God, and called all religious things "mourning merchandise."

For thirty years she had lived in her little house, with its tiny garden in front, extending along the street, never modifying her garments, changing only maids, and that mercilessly, when they became twenty-one years old.

She replaced, without tears and without regrets, her dogs or cats or birds, when they died of old age, or by accident, and she buried trespassing animals in a flower-bed, heaping the earth above them and treading it down with perfect indifference.

She had in the town some acquaintances, the families of employers, whose men went to Paris every day. Sometimes they would invite her to go to the theater with them. She inevitably fell asleep on these occasions, and they were obliged to wake her when it was time to go home. She never allowed anyone to accompany her, having no fear by night or day. She seemed to have no love for children.

She occupied her time with a thousand masculine cares, carpentry, gardening, cutting or sawing wood, repairing her old house, even doing mason's work when it was necessary.

She had some relatives who came to see her twice a year. Her two sisters, Madame Cimme and Madame Columbel, were married, one to a florist, the other to a small householder. Madame Cimme had no children; Madame Columbel had three: Henry, Pauline, and Joseph. Henry was twenty-one, Pauline and Joseph were three, having come when one would have thought the mother past the age. No tenderness united this old maid to her kinsfolk.

In the spring of 1882, Queen Hortense became suddenly ill. The neighbors went for a physician, whom she drove away. When the priest presented himself she got out of bed, half naked, and put him out of doors. The little maid, weeping, made gruel for her.

After three days in bed, the situation became so grave that the carpenter living next door, after counsel with the physician (now reinstated with authority), took it upon himself to summon the two families.

They arrived by the same train, about ten o'clock in the morning; the Columbels having brought their little Joseph.

When they approached the garden gate, they saw the maid seated in a chair against the wall, weeping. The dog lay asleep on the mat before the door, under a broiling sun; two cats, that looked as if dead, lay stretched out on the window-sills, with eyes closed and paws and tails extended at full length. A great glossy hen was promenading before the door, at the head of a flock of chickens, covered with yellow down, and in a large cage hung against the wall, covered with chickweed, were several birds, singing themselves hoarse in the light of this hot spring morning.

Two others, inseparable, in a little cage in the form of a cottage, remained quiet, side by side on their perch.

M. Cimme, a large, wheezy personage, who always entered a room first, putting aside men and women when it was necessary, remarked to the maid: "Eh, Celeste! Is it so bad as that?"

The little maid sobbed through her tears:

"She doesn't know me any more. The doctor says it is the end."

They all looked at one another.

Madame Cimme and Madame Columbel embraced each other instantly, not saying a word.

They resembled each other much, always wearing braids of hair and shawls of red cashmere, as bright as hot coals.

Cimme turned toward his brother-in-law, a pale man, yellow and thin, tormented by indigestion, who limped badly, and said to him in a serious tone:

"Gad! It was time!"

But no one dared to go into the room of the dying woman situated on the ground floor. Cimme himself stopped at that step. Columbel was the first to decide upon it;

he entered, balancing himself like the mast of a ship, making a noise on the floor with the iron of his cane.

The two women ventured to follow, and M. Cimme brought up the line.

Little Joseph remained outside, playing with the dog.

A ray of sunlight fell on the bed, lighting up the hands which moved nervously, opening and shutting without ceasing. The fingers moved as if a thought animated them, as if they would signify something, indicate some idea, obey some intelligence. The rest of the body remained motionless under the covers. The angular figure gave no start. The eyes remained closed.

The relatives arranged themselves in a semicircle and, without saying a word, regarded the heaving breast and the short breathing. The little maid had followed them, still shedding tears.

Finally, Cimme asked: "What was it the doctor said?"

The servant whispered: "He said we should leave her quiet, that nothing more could be done."

Suddenly the lips of the old maid began to move. She seemed to pronounce some silent words, concealed in her dying brain, and her hands quickened their singular movement.

Then she spoke in a little, thin voice, quite unlike her own, an utterance that seemed to come from far off, perhaps from the bottom of that heart always closed.

Cimme walked upon tiptoe, finding this spectacle painful. Columbel, whose lame leg wearied him, sat down.

The two women remained standing.

Queen Hortense muttered something quickly, which they were unable to understand. She pronounced some names, called tenderly some imaginary persons:

"Come here, my little Philip, kiss your mother. You love mamma, don't you, my

child? You, Rose, you will watch your little sister while I am out. Especially, don't leave her alone, do you hear? And I forbid you to touch matches."

She was silent some seconds; then, in a loud tone, as if she would call, she said: "Henrietta!" She waited a little and continued: "Tell your father to come and speak to me before going to his office." Then suddenly: "I am suffering a little to-day, dear; promise me you will not return late; you will tell your chief that I am ill. You know it is dangerous to leave the children alone when I am in bed. I am going to make you a dish of rice and sugar for dinner. The little ones like it so much. Claire will be the happy one!"

She began to laugh, a young and noisy laugh, as she had never laughed before. "Look, John," she said, "what a droll head he has. He has smeared himself with the sugarplums, the dirty thing! Look! my dear, how funny he looks!"

Columbel, who changed the position of his lame leg every moment, murmured: "She is dreaming that she has children and a husband; the end is near."

The two sisters did not move, but seemed surprised and stupid.

The little maid said: "Will you take off your hats and your shawls, and go into the other room?"

They went out without having said a word. And Columbel followed them limping, leaving the dying woman alone again.

When they were relieved of their outer garments, the women seated themselves. Then one of the cats left the window, stretched herself, jumped into the room, then upon the knees of Madame Cimme, who began to caress her.

They heard from the next room the voice of agony, living, without doubt, in this last hour, the life she had expected, living her dreams at the very moment when all would be finished for her.

Cimme, in the garden, played with the little Joseph and the dog, amusing himself

much, with the gaiety of a great man in the country, without thought of the dying woman.

But suddenly he entered, addressing the maid: "Say, then, my girl, are you going to give us some luncheon? What are you going to eat, ladies?"

They decided upon an omelet of fine herbs, a piece of fillet with new potatoes, a cheese, and a cup of coffee.

And as Madame Columbel was fumbling in her pocket for her purse: Cimme stopped her, and turning to the maid said, "You need money?" and she answered: "Yes, sir."

"How much?"

"Fifteen francs."

"Very well. Make haste, now, my girl, because I am getting hungry."

Madame Cimme, looking out at the climbing flowers bathed in the sunlight, and at two pigeons making love on the roof opposite, said, with a wounded air: "It is unfortunate to have come for so sad an event. It would be nice in the country, to-day."

Her sister sighed without response, and Columbel murmured, moved perhaps by the thought of a walk:

"My leg plagues me awfully."

Little Joseph and the dog made a terrible noise, one shouting with joy and the other barking violently. They played at hide-and-seek around the three flower-beds, running after each other like mad.

The dying woman continued to call her children, chatting with each, imagining that she was dressing them, that she caressed them, that she was teaching them to read: "Come, Simon, repeat, A, B, C, D. You do not say it well; see, D, D, D, do you hear? Repeat, then——"

Cimme declared: "It is curious what she talks about at this time."

Then said Madame Columbel: "It would be better, perhaps, to go in there."

But Cimme dissuaded her from it:

"Why go in, since we are not able to do anything for her? Besides we are as well off here."

No one insisted. Madame observed the two green birds called inseparable. She remarked pleasantly upon this singular fidelity, and blamed men for not imitating these little creatures. Cimme looked at his wife and laughed, singing with a bantering air, "Tra-la-la, Tra-la-la," as if to say he could tell some things about her fidelity to him.

Columbel, taken with cramps in his stomach, struck the floor with his cane. The other cat entered, tail in the air. They did not sit down at table until one o'clock.

When he had tasted the wine, Columbel, whom some one had recommended to drink only choice Bordeaux, called the servant:

"Say, is there nothing better than this in the cellar?"

"Yes, sir; there is some of the wine that was served to you when you were here before."

"Oh, well, go and bring three bottles."

They tasted this wine, which seemed excellent. Not that it proved to be remarkable, but it had been fifteen years in the cellar. Cimme declared it was just the wine for sickness.

Columbel, seized with a desire of possessing some of it, asked of the maid: "How much is left of it, my girl?"

"Oh, nearly all, sir; Miss never drinks any of it. It is the heap at the bottom."

Then Columbel turned toward his brother-in-law: "If you wish, Cimme, I will take this wine instead of anything else; it agrees with my stomach wonderfully."

The hen, in her turn, had entered with her troop of chickens; the two women amused themselves by throwing crumbs to them. Joseph and the dog, who had eaten enough, returned to the garden.

Queen Hortense spoke continually, but the voice was lower now, so that it was no longer possible to distinguish the words.

When they had finished the coffee, they all went in to learn the condition of the sick one. She seemed calm.

They went out and seated themselves in a circle in the garden, to aid digestion.

Presently the dog began to run around the chairs with all speed, carrying something in his mouth. The child ran after him violently. Both disappeared into the house. Cimme fell asleep, with his stomach in the sun.

The dying one began to speak loud again. Then suddenly she shouted.

The two women and Columbel hastened in to see what had happened. Cimme awakened but did not move, liking better things as they were.

The dying woman was sitting up, staring with haggard eyes. Her dog, to escape the pursuit of little Joseph, had jumped upon the bed, startling her from the death agony. The dog was intrenched behind the pillow, peeping at his comrade with eyes glistening, ready to jump again at the least movement. He held in his mouth one of the slippers of his mistress, shorn of its heel in the hour he had played with it.

The child, intimidated by the woman rising so suddenly before him, remained motionless before the bed.

The hen, having just entered, had jumped upon a chair, frightened by the noise. She called desperately to her chickens, which peeped, frightened, from under the four legs of the seat.

Queen Hortense cried out with a piercing tone: "No, no, I do not wish to die! I am not willing! Who will bring up my children? Who will care for them? Who will love

them? No, I am not willing! I am not——"

She turned on her back. All was over.

The dog, much excited, jumped into the room and skipped about.

Columbel ran to the window and called his brother-in-law: "Come quickly! come quickly! I believe she is gone."

Then Cimme got up and resolutely went into the room, muttering: "It was not as long as I should have believed."

COMPLICATION

After swearing for a long time that he would never marry, Jack Boudillère suddenly changed his mind. It happened one summer at the seashore, quite unexpectedly.

One morning, as he was extended on the sand, watching the women come out of the water, a little foot caught his attention, because of its slimness and delicacy. Raising his eyes higher, the entire person seemed attractive. Of this entire person he had, however, seen only the ankles and the head, emerging from a white flannel bathing suit, fastened with care. He may be called sensuous and impressionable, but it was by grace of form alone that he was captured. Afterward, he was held by the charm and sweet spirit of the young girl, who was simple and good and fresh, like her cheeks and her lips.

Presented to the family, he was pleased, and straightway became love-mad. When he saw Bertha Lannis at a distance, on the long stretch of yellow sand, he trembled from head to foot. Near her he was dumb, incapable of saying anything or even of thinking, with a kind of bubbling in his heart, a humming in his ears, and a frightened feeling in his mind. Was this love?

He did not know, he understood nothing of it, but the fact remained that he was fully decided to make this child his wife.

Her parents hesitated a long time, deterred by the bad reputation of the young man.

He had a mistress, it was said,—an old mistress, an old and strong entanglement, one of those chains that is believed to be broken, but which continues to hold, nevertheless. Beyond this, he had loved, for a longer or shorter period, every woman who had come within reach of his lips.

But he withdrew from the woman with whom he had lived, not even consenting to see her again. A friend arranged her pension, assuring her a subsistence. Jack paid, but he did not wish to speak to her, pretending henceforth that he did not know her name. She wrote letters which he would not open. Each week brought him a new disguise in the handwriting of the abandoned one. Each week a greater anger developed in him against her, and he would tear the envelope in two, without opening it, without reading a line, knowing beforehand the reproaches and complaints of the contents.

One could scarcely credit her perseverance, which lasted the whole winter long, and it was not until spring that her demand was satisfied.

The marriage took place in Paris during the early part of May. It was decided that they should not take the regular wedding journey. After a little ball, composed of a company of young cousins who would not stay past eleven o'clock, and would not prolong forever the cares of the day of ceremony, the young couple intended to pass their first night at the family home and to set out the next morning for the seaside, where they had met and loved.

The night came, and they were dancing in the great drawing-room. The newly-married pair had withdrawn from the rest into a little Japanese boudoir shut off by silk hangings, and scarcely lighted this evening, except by the dim rays from a colored lantern in the shape of an enormous egg, which hung from the ceiling. The long window was open, allowing at times a fresh breath of air from without to blow upon their faces, for the evening was soft and warm, full of the odor of springtime.

They said nothing, but held each other's hands, pressing them from time to time with

all their force. She was a little dismayed by this great change in her life, but smiling, emotional, ready to weep, often ready to swoon from joy, believing the entire world changed because of what had come to her, a little disturbed without knowing the reason why, and feeling all her body, all her soul, enveloped in an indefinable, delicious lassitude.

Her husband she watched persistently, smiling at him with a fixed smile. He wished to talk but found nothing to say, and remained quiet, putting all his ardor into the pressure of the hand. From time to time he murmured "Bertha!" and each time she raised her eyes to his with a sweet and tender look. They would look at each other a moment, then his eyes, fascinated by hers, would fall.

They discovered no thought to exchange. But they were alone, except as a dancing couple would sometimes cast a glance at them in passing, a furtive glance, as if it were the discreet and confidential witness of a mystery.

A door at the side opened, a domestic entered, bearing upon a tray an urgent letter which a messenger had brought. Jack trembled as he took it, seized with a vague and sudden fear, the mysterious, abrupt fear of misfortune.

He looked long at the envelope, not knowing the handwriting, nor daring to open it, wishing not to read, not to know the contents, desiring to put it in his pocket and to say to himself: "To-morrow, to-morrow, I shall be far away and it will not matter!" But upon the corner were two words underlined: very urgent, which frightened him. "You will permit me, my dear," said he, and he tore off the wrapper. He read the letter, growing frightfully pale, running over it at a glance, and then seeming to spell it out.

When he raised his head his whole countenance was changed. He stammered: "My dear little one, a great misfortune has happened to my best friend. He needs me immediately, in a matter of—of life and death. Allow me to go for twenty minutes. I will return immediately."

She, trembling and affrighted, murmured: "Go, my friend!" not yet being enough of a wife to dare to ask or demand to know anything. And he disappeared. She remained alone, listening to the dance music in the next room.

He had taken a hat, the first he could find, and descended the staircase upon the run. As soon as he was mingled with the people on the street, he stopped under a gaslight in a vestibule and re-read the letter. It said:

"SIR: The Ravet girl, your old mistress, has given birth to a child which she asserts is yours. The mother is dying and implores you to visit her. I take the liberty of writing to you to ask whether you will grant the last wish of this woman, who seems to be very unhappy and worthy of pity. "Your servant, D. BONNARD."

When he entered the chamber of death, she was already in the last agony. He would not have known her. The physician and the two nurses were caring for her, dragging across the room some buckets full of ice and linen.

Water covered the floor, two tapers were burning on a table; behind the bed, in a little wicker cradle, a child was crying, and, with each of its cries, the mother would try to move, shivering under the icy compresses.

She was bleeding, wounded to death, killed by this birth. Her life was slipping away; and, in spite of the ice, in spite of all care, the hemorrhage continued, hastening her last hour.

She recognized Jack, and tried to raise her hand. She was too weak for that, but the warm tears began to glide down her cheeks.

He fell on his knees beside the bed, seized one of her hands and kissed it frantically; then, little by little, he approached nearer to the wan face which strained to meet him. One of the nurses, standing with a taper in her hand, observed them, and the doctor looked at them from the remote corner of the room.

With a far-off voice, breathing hard, she said: "I am going to die, my dear; promise me you will remain till the end. Oh! do not leave me now, not at the last moment!"

He kissed her brow, her hair with a groan. "Be tranquil!" he murmured, "I will stay."

It was some minutes before she was able to speak again, she was so weak and overcome. Then she continued: "It is yours, the little one. I swear it before God, I swear it to you upon my soul, I swear it at the moment of death. I have never loved any man but you—promise me not to abandon it——" He tried to take in his arms the poor, weak body, emptied of its life blood. He stammered, excited by remorse and chagrin: "I swear to you I will bring it up and love it. It shall never be separated from me." Then she held Jack in an embrace. Powerless to raise her head, she held up her blanched lips in an appeal for a kiss. He bent his mouth to receive this poor, suppliant caress.

Calmed a little, she murmured in a low tone: "Take it, that I may see that you love it."

He went to the cradle and took up the child.

He placed it gently on the bed between them. The little creature ceased to cry. She whispered: "Do not stir!" And he remained motionless. There he stayed, holding in his burning palms a hand that shook with the shiver of death, as he had held, an hour before, another hand that had trembled with the shiver of love. From time to time he looked at the hour, with a furtive glance of the eye, watching the hand as it passed midnight, then one o'clock, then two.

The doctor retired. The two nurses, after roaming around for some time with light step, slept now in their chairs. The child slept, and the mother, whose eyes were closed, seemed to be resting also.

Suddenly, as the pale daylight began to filter through the torn curtains, she extended her arms with so startling and violent a motion that she almost threw the child upon the floor. There was a rattling in her throat; then she turned over motionless, dead.

The nurses hastened to her side, declaring: "It is over."

He looked once at this woman he had loved, then at the hand that marked four

o'clock, and, forgetting his overcoat, fled in his evening clothes with the child in his arms.

After she had been left alone, his young bride had waited calmly at first, in the Japanese boudoir. Then, seeing that he did not return, she went back to the drawing-room, indifferent and tranquil in appearance, but frightfully disturbed. Her mother, perceiving her alone, asked where her husband was. She replied: "In his room; he will return presently."

At the end of an hour, as everybody asked about him, she told of the letter, of the change in Jack's face, and her fears of some misfortune.

They still waited. The guests had gone; only the parents and near relatives remained. At midnight, they put the bride in her bed, shaking with sobs. Her mother and two aunts were seated on the bed listening to her weeping. Her father had gone to the police headquarters to make inquiries. At five o'clock a light sound was heard in the corridor. The door opened and closed softly. Then suddenly a cry, like the miauling of a cat, went through the house, breaking the silence.

All the women of the house were out with one bound, and Bertha was the first to spring forward, in spite of her mother and her aunts, clothed only in her night-robe.

Jack, standing in the middle of the room, livid, breathing hard, held the child in his arms.

The four women looked at him frightened; but Bertha suddenly became rash, her heart wrung with anguish, and ran to him saying: "What is it? What have you there?"

He had a foolish air, and answered in a husky voice: "It is—it is—I have here a child, whose mother has just died." And he put into her arms the howling little marmot.

Bertha, without saying a word, seized the child and embraced it, straining it to her heart. Then, turning toward her husband with her eyes full of tears, she said: "The

mother is dead, you say?" He answered: "Yes, just died—in my arms—I had broken with her since last summer—I knew nothing about it—only the doctor sent for me and——"

Then Bertha murmured: "Well, we will bring up this little one."

FORGIVENESS

She had been brought up in one of those families who live shut up within themselves, entirely apart from the rest of the world. They pay no attention to political events, except to chat about them at table, and changes in government seem so far, so very far away that they are spoken of only as a matter of history—like the death of Louis XVI., or the advent of Napoleon.

Customs change, fashions succeed each other, but changes are never perceptible in this family, where old traditions are always followed. And if some impossible story arises in the neighborhood, the scandal of it dies at the threshold of this house.

The father and mother, alone in the evening, sometimes exchange a few words on such a subject, but in an undertone, as if the walls had ears.

With great discretion, the father says: "Do you know about this terrible affair in the Rivoil family?"

And the mother replies: "Who would have believed it? It is frightful!"

The children doubt nothing, but come to the age of living, in their turn, with a bandage over their eyes and minds, without a suspicion of any other kind of existence, without knowing that one does not always think as he speaks, nor speak as he acts, without knowing that it is necessary to live at war with the world, or at least, in armed peace, without surmising that the ingenuous are frequently deceived, the sincere trifled with, and the good wronged.

Some live until death in this blindness of probity, loyalty, and honor; so upright that nothing can open their eyes. Others, undeceived, without knowing much, are

weighed down with despair, and die believing that they are the puppets of an exceptional fatality, the miserable victims of unlucky circumstance or particularly bad men.

The Savignols arranged a marriage for their daughter when she was eighteen. She married a young man from Paris, George Barton, whose business was on the Exchange. He was an attractive youth, with a smooth tongue, and he observed all the outward proprieties necessary. But at the bottom of his heart he sneered a little at his guileless parents-in-law, calling them, among his friends, "My dear fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the young girl was rich. He took her to live in Paris.

She became one of the provincials of Paris, of whom there are many. She remained ignorant of the great city, of its elegant people, of its pleasures and its customs, as she had always been ignorant of the perfidy and mystery of life.

Shut up in her own household, she scarcely knew the street she lived in, and when she ventured into another quarter, it seemed to her that she had journeyed far, into an unknown, strange city. She would say in the evening:

"I crossed the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year, her husband took her to the theater. These were feast-days not to be forgotten, which she recalled continually.

Sometimes at table, three months afterward, she would suddenly burst out laughing and exclaim:

"Do you remember that ridiculous actor who imitated the cock's crowing?"

All her interests were within the boundaries of the two allied families, who represented the whole of humanity to her. She designated them by the distinguishing prefix "the," calling them respectively "the Martinets," or "the Michelins."

Her husband lived according to his fancy, returning whenever he wished, sometimes

at daybreak, pretending business, and feeling in no way constrained, so sure was he that no suspicion would ruffle this candid soul.

But one morning she received an anonymous letter. She was too much astonished and dismayed to scorn this letter, whose author declared himself to be moved by interest in her happiness, by hatred of all evil and love of truth. Her heart was too pure to understand fully the meaning of the accusations.

But it revealed to her that her husband had had a mistress for two years, a young widow, Mrs. Rosset, at whose house he passed his evenings.

She knew neither how to pretend, nor to spy, nor to plan any sort of ruse. When he returned for luncheon, she threw him the letter, sobbing, and then fled to her room.

He had time to comprehend the matter and prepare his response before he rapped at his wife's door. She opened it immediately, without looking at him. He smiled, sat down, and drew her to his knee. In a sweet voice, and a little jocosely, he said:

"My dear little one, Mrs. Rosset is a friend of mine. I have known her for ten years and like her very much. I may add that I know twenty other families of whom I have not spoken to you, knowing that you care nothing for the world or for forming new friendships. But in order to finish, once for all, these infamous lies, I will ask you to dress yourself, after luncheon, and we will go to pay a visit to this young lady, who will become your friend at once, I am sure." She embraced her husband eagerly; and, from feminine curiosity, which no sooner sleeps than wakes again, she did not refuse to go to see this unknown woman, of whom, in spite of all, she was still suspicious. She felt by instinct that a known danger is sooner overcome.

They were ushered into a little apartment on the fourth floor of a handsome house. It was a coquettish little place, full of bric-à-brac and ornamented with works of art. After about five minutes' waiting, in a drawing-room where the light was dimmed by its generous window draperies and portières, a door opened and a young woman appeared. She was very dark, small, rather plump, and looked astonished, although

she smiled. George presented them. "My wife, Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a little cry of astonishment and joy, and came forward with both hands extended. She had not hoped for this happiness, she said, knowing that Madame Barton saw no one. But she was so happy! She was so fond of George! (She said George quite naturally, with sisterly familiarity.) And she had had great desire to know his young wife, and to love her, too.

At the end of a month these two friends were never apart from each other. They met every day, often twice a day, and nearly always dined together, either at one house or at the other. George scarcely ever went out now, no longer pretended delay on account of business, but said he loved his own chimney corner.

Finally, an apartment was left vacant in the house where Madame Rosset resided. Madame Barton hastened to take it in order to be nearer her new friend.

During two whole years there was a friendship between them without a cloud, a friendship of heart and soul, tender, devoted, and delightful. Bertha could not speak without mentioning Julie's name, for to her Julie represented perfection. She was happy with a perfect happiness, calm and secure.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Bertha never left her. She passed nights of despair; her husband, too, was broken-hearted.

One morning, in going out from his visit the doctor took George and his wife aside, and announced that he found the condition of their friend very grave.

When he had gone out, the young people, stricken down, looked at each other and then began to weep. They both watched that night near the bed. Bertha would embrace the sick one tenderly, while George, standing silently at the foot of her couch, would look at them with dogged persistence. The next day she was worse.

Finally, toward evening, she declared herself better, and persuaded her friends to go home to dinner.

They were sitting sadly at table, scarcely eating anything, when the maid brought George an envelope. He opened it, turned pale, and rising, said to his wife, in a constrained way: "Excuse me, I must leave you for a moment. I will return in ten minutes. Please don't go out." And he ran into his room for his hat.

Bertha waited, tortured by a new fear. But, yielding in all things, she would not go up to her friend's room again until he had returned.

As he did not re-appear, the thought came to her to look in his room to see whether he had taken his gloves, which would show whether he had really gone somewhere.

She saw them there, at first glance. Near them lay a rumpled paper.

She recognized it immediately; it was the one that had called George away.

And a burning temptation took possession of her, the first of her life, to read—to know. Her conscience struggled in revolt, but curiosity lashed her on and grief directed her hand. She seized the paper, opened it, recognized the trembling handwriting as that of Julie, and read:

"Come alone and embrace me, my poor friend; I am going to die."

She could not understand it all at once, but stood stupefied, struck especially by the thought of death. Then, suddenly, the familiarity of it seized upon her mind. This came like a great light, illuminating her whole life, showing her the infamous truth, all their treachery, all their perfidy. She saw now their cunning, their sly looks, her good faith played with, her confidence turned to account. She saw them looking into each other's faces, under the shade of her lamp at evening, reading from the same book, exchanging glances at the end of certain pages.

And her heart, stirred with indignation, bruised with suffering, sunk into an abyss of despair that had no boundaries.

When she heard steps, she fled and shut herself in her room.

Her husband called her: "Come quickly, Madame Rosset is dying!"

Bertha appeared at her door and said with trembling lip:

"Go alone to her; she has no need of me."

He looked at her sheepishly, careless from anger, and repeated:

"Quick, quick! She is dying!"

Bertha answered: "You would prefer it to be I."

Then he understood, probably, and left her to herself, going up again to the dying one.

There he wept without fear, or shame, indifferent to the grief of his wife, who would no longer speak to him, nor look at him, but who lived shut in with her disgust and angry revolt, praying to God morning and evening.

They lived together, nevertheless, eating together face to face, mute and hopeless.

After a time, he tried to appease her a little. But she would not forget. And so the life continued, hard for them both.

For a whole year they lived thus, strangers one to the other. Bertha almost became mad.

Then one morning, having set out at dawn, she returned toward eight o'clock carrying in both hands an enormous bouquet of roses, of white roses, all white.

She sent word to her husband that she would like to speak to him. He came in disturbed, troubled.

"Let us go out together," she said to him. "Take these flowers, they are too heavy for me."

He took the bouquet and followed his wife. A carriage awaited them, which started as soon as they were seated.

It stopped before the gate of a cemetery. Then Bertha, her eyes full of tears, said to George: "Take me to her grave."

He trembled, without knowing why, but walked on before, holding the flowers in his arms. Finally he stopped before a shaft of white marble and pointed to it without a word.

She took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling, placed it at the foot of the grave. Then her heart was raised in suppliant, silent prayer.

Her husband stood behind her, weeping, haunted by memories.

She arose and put out her hands to him.

"If you wish, we will be friends," she said.

THE WHITE WOLF

This is the story the old Marquis d'Arville told us after a dinner in honor of Saint-Hubert, at the house of Baron des Ravels. They had run down a stag that day. The Marquis was the only one of the guests who had not taken part in the chase. He never hunted.

During the whole of the long repast, they had talked of scarcely anything but the massacre of animals. Even the ladies interested themselves in the sanguinary and often unlikely stories, while the orators mimicked the attacks and combats between man and beast, raising their arms and speaking in thunderous tones.

M. d'Arville talked much, with a certain poesy, a little flourish, but full of effect. He must have repeated this story often, it ran so smoothly, never halting at a choice of words in which to clothe an image.

"Gentlemen, I never hunt, nor did my father, nor my grandfather, nor my great-great-grandfather. The last named was the son of a man who hunted more than all of you. He died in 1764. I will tell you how. He was named John, and was married, and became the father of the man who was my great-great-grandfather. He lived with his younger brother, Francis d'Arville, in our castle, in the midst of a deep forest in Lorraine.

"Francis d'Arville always remained a boy through his love for hunting. They both hunted from one end of the year to the other without cessation or weariness. They loved nothing else, understood nothing else, talked only of this, and lived for this alone.

"They were possessed by this terrible, inexorable passion. It consumed them, having taken entire control of them, leaving no place for anything else. They had agreed not to put off the chase for any reason whatsoever. My great-great-grandfather was born while his father was following a fox, but John d'Arville did not interrupt his sport, and swore that the little beggar might have waited until after the death-cry! His brother Francis showed himself still more hot-headed than he. The first thing on rising, he would go to see the dogs, then the horses; then he would shoot some birds about the place, even when about to set out hunting big game.

"They were called in the country Monsieur the Marquis and Monsieur the Cadet, noblemen then not acting as do those of our time, who wish to establish in their titles a descending scale of rank, for the son of a marquis is no more a count, or the son of a viscount a baron, than the son of a general is a colonel by birth. But the niggardly vanity of the day finds profit in this arrangement. To return to my ancestors:

"They were, it appears, immoderately large, bony, hairy, violent, and vigorous. The younger one was taller than the elder, and had such a voice that, according to a legend he was very proud of, all the leaves of the forest moved when he shouted.

"And when mounted, ready for the chase, it must have been a superb sight to see these two giants astride their great horses.

"Toward the middle of the winter of that year, 1764, the cold was excessive and the wolves became ferocious.

"They even attacked belated peasants, roamed around houses at night, howled from sunset to sunrise, and ravaged the stables.

"At one time a rumor was circulated. It was said that a colossal wolf, of

grayish-white color, which had eaten two children, devoured the arm of a woman, strangled all the watchdogs of the country, was now coming without fear into the house inclosures and smelling around the doors. Many inhabitants affirmed that they had felt his breath, which made the lights flicker. Shortly a panic ran through all the province. No one dared to go out after nightfall. The very shadows seemed haunted by the image of this beast.

"The brothers D'Arville resolved to find and slay him. So they called together for a grand chase all the gentlemen of the country.

"It was in vain. They had beaten the forests and scoured the thickets, but had seen nothing of him. They killed wolves, but not that one. And each night after such a chase, the beast, as if to avenge himself, attacked some traveler, or devoured some cattle, always far from the place where they had sought him.

"Finally, one night he found a way into the swine-house of the castle D'Arville and ate two beauties of the best breed.

"The two brothers were furious, interpreting the attack as one of bravado on the part of the monster—a direct injury, a defiance. Therefore, taking all their best-trained hounds, they set out to run down the beast, with courage excited by anger.

"From dawn until the sun descended behind the great nut-trees, they beat about the forests with no result.

"At last, both of them, angry and disheartened, turned their horses' steps into a bypath bordered by brushwood. They were marveling at the baffling power of this wolf, when suddenly they were seized with a mysterious fear.

"The elder said:

"'This can be no ordinary beast. One might say he can think like a man.'

"The younger replied:

"'Perhaps we should get our cousin, the Bishop, to bless a bullet for him, or ask a

priest to pronounce some words to help us.'

"Then they were silent.

"John continued: 'Look at the sun, how red it is. The great wolf will do mischief to-night.'

"He had scarcely finished speaking when his horse reared. Francis's horse started to run at the same time. A large bush covered with dead leaves rose before them, and a colossal beast, grayish white, sprang out, scampering away through the wood.

"Both gave a grunt of satisfaction, and bending to the necks of their heavy horses, they urged them on with the weight of their bodies, exciting them, hastening with voice and spur, until these strong riders seemed to carry the weight of their beasts between their knees, carrying them by force as if they were flying.

"Thus they rode, crashing through forests, crossing ravines, climbing up the sides of steep gorges, and sounding the horn, at frequent intervals, to arouse the people and the dogs of the neighborhood.

"But suddenly, in the course of this breakneck ride, my ancestor struck his forehead against a large branch and fractured his skull. He fell to the ground as if dead, while his frightened horse disappeared in the surrounding thicket.

"The younger D'Arville stopped short, sprang to the ground, seized his brother in his arms, and saw that he had lost consciousness.

"He sat down beside him, took his disfigured head upon his knees, looking earnestly at the lifeless face. Little by little a fear crept over him, a strange fear that he had never before felt, fear of the shadows, of the solitude, of the lonely woods, and also of the chimerical wolf, which had now come to be the death of his brother.

"The shadows deepened, the branches of the trees crackled in the sharp cold. Francis arose shivering, incapable of remaining there longer, and already feeling his strength fail. There was nothing to be heard, neither the voice of dogs nor the sound of a

horn; all within this invisible horizon was mute. And in this gloomy silence and the chill of evening there was something strange and frightful.

"With his powerful hands he seized John's body and laid it across the saddle to take it home; then mounted gently behind it, his mind troubled by horrible, supernatural images, as if he were possessed.

"Suddenly, in the midst of these fears, a great form passed. It was the wolf. A violent fit of terror seized upon the hunter; something cold, like a stream of ice-water seemed to glide through his veins, and he made the sign of the cross, like a monk haunted with devils, so dismayed was he by the reappearance of the frightful wanderer. Then, his eyes falling upon the inert body before him, his fear was quickly changed to anger, and he trembled with inordinate rage.

"He pricked his horse and darted after him.

"He followed him through copses, over ravines, and around great forest trees, traversing woods that he no longer recognized, his eye fixed upon a white spot, which was ever flying from him as night covered the earth.

"His horse also seemed moved by an unknown force. He galloped on with neck extended, crashing over small trees and rocks, with the body of the dead stretched across him on the saddle. Brambles caught in his mane; his head, where it had struck the trunks of trees, was spattered with blood; the marks of the spurs were over his flanks.

"Suddenly the animal and its rider came out of the forest, rushing through a valley as the moon appeared above the hills. This valley was stony and shut in by enormous rocks, over which it was impossible to pass; there was no other way for the wolf but to turn on his steps.

"Francis gave such a shout of joy and revenge that the echo of it was like the roll of thunder. He leaped from his horse, knife in hand.

"The bristling beast, with rounded back, was awaiting him; his eyes shining like two

stars. But before joining in battle, the strong hunter, grasping his brother, seated him upon a rock, supporting his head, which was now but a mass of blood, with stones, and cried aloud to him, as to one deaf: 'Look, John! Look here!'

"Then he threw himself upon the monster. He felt himself strong enough to overthrow a mountain, to crush the very rocks in his hands. The beast meant to kill him by sinking his claws in his vitals; but the man had seized him by the throat, without even making use of his weapon, and strangled him gently, waiting until his breath stopped and he could hear the death-rattle at his heart. And he laughed, with the joy of dismay, clutching more and more with a terrible hold, and crying out in his delirium: 'Look, John! Look!' All resistance ceased. The body of the wolf was limp. He was dead.

"Then Francis, taking him in his arms, threw him down at the feet of his elder brother, crying out in expectant voice: 'Here, here, my little John, here he is!'

"Then he placed upon the saddle the two bodies, the one above the other, and started on his way.

"He returned to the castle laughing and weeping, like Gargantua at the birth of Pantagruel, shouting in triumph and stamping with delight in relating the death of the beast, and moaning and tearing at his beard in calling the name of his brother.

"Often, later, when he recalled this day, he would declare, with tears in his eyes: 'If only poor John had seen me strangle the beast, he would have died content, I am sure!'

"The widow of my ancestor inspired in her son a horror of the chase, which was transmitted from father to son down to myself."

The Marquis d'Arville was silent. Some one asked: "Is the story a legend or not?"

And the narrator replied:

"I swear to you it is true from beginning to end."

Then a lady, in a sweet little voice, declared:

"It is beautiful to have passions like that."

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