Pierre and Jean

by Guy de Maupassant

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIERRE AND JEAN ***

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CHAPTER I

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

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

“Well, well! Gérome.”

And the old fellow replied in a fury:

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

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

“You are not very polite to our guest, father.”

M. Roland was abashed, and apologized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh, not many; three or four.”

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

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

“Much the same as Pierre—four or five.”

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

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

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

father’s amusements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mme. Rosémilly was fair, with blue eyes, a mass of light waving hair, fluttering at

the least breath of wind, and an alert, daring, pugnacious little way with her, which did not in the least answer to the sober method of her mind.

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

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

But one evening of the week before, Mme. Rosémilly, who had been dining with them, remarked, "It must be great fun to go out fishing." The jeweller, flattered by her interest and suddenly fired with the wish to share his favourite sport with her, and to make a convert after the manner of priests, exclaimed: "Would you like to come?"

"To be sure I should."

"Next Tuesday?"

"Yes, next Tuesday."

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

She exclaimed in horror:

"No, indeed: that is too much."

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

“At what hour can you be ready?”

“Well—at nine?”

“Not before?”

“No, not before. Even that is very early.”

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

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

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

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

Roland stood up to look out like a captain.

“No wind,” said he. “You will have to pull, young ’uns.”

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

“Here comes the packet from Southampton.”

Away over the level sea, spread out like a blue sheet, vast and sheeny and shot with

flame and gold, an inky cloud was visible against the rosy sky in the quarter to which he pointed, and below it they could make out the hull of the steamer, which looked tiny at such a distance. And to southward other wreaths of smoke, numbers of them, could be seen, all converging towards the Havre pier, now scarcely visible as a white streak with the lighthouse, upright, like a horn, at the end of it.

Roland asked: “Is not the Normandie due to-day?” And Jean replied:

“Yes, to-day.”

“Give me my glass. I fancy I see her out there.”

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

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

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

She said as she returned the glass:

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

Old Roland, much put out, retorted:

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

Then he offered it to his wife.

“Would you like to look?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

When their father gave the word to return, “Come, take your places at the oars!” she smiled to see her sons, her two great boys, take off their jackets and roll up their

shirt-sleeves on their bare arms.

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

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

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

At first Pierre had the advantage. With his teeth set, his brow knit, his legs rigid, his hands clinched on the oar, he made it bend from end to end at every stroke, and the Pearl was veering landward. Father Roland, sitting in the bows, so as to leave the stern seat to the two women, wasted his breath shouting, “Easy, number one; pull harder, number two!” Pierre pulled harder in his frenzy, and “number two” could not keep time with his wild stroke.

At last the skipper cried: “Stop her!” The two oars were lifted simultaneously, and then by his father’s orders Jean pulled alone for a few minutes. But from that moment he had it all his own way; he grew eager and warmed to his work, while Pierre, out of breath and exhausted by his first vigorous spurt, was lax and panting.

Four times running father Roland made them stop while the elder took breath, so as to get the boat into her right course again. Then the doctor, humiliated and fuming, his forehead dropping with sweat, his cheeks white, stammered out:

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

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

“No, thanks, it will go off.”

And their mother, somewhat vexed, said:

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

And he shrugged his shoulders and set to once more.

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

But father Roland presently called out:

“Look, the Prince Albert is catching us up!”

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

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

undulations on the still and glassy surface of the sea.

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

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

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

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

Roland exclaimed:

“Look, there is the Normandie just going in. A big ship, isn’t she?”

Then he described the coast opposite, far, far away, on the other side of the mouth of the Seine—that mouth extended over twenty kilometres, said he. He pointed out Villerville, Trouville, Houlgate, Luc, Arromanches, the little river of Caen, and the rocks of Calvados which make the coast unsafe as far as Cherbourg. Then he enlarged on the question of the sand-banks in the Seine, which shift at every tide so that even the pilots of Quillebœuf are at fault if they do not survey the channel every day. He bid them notice how the town of Havre divided Upper from Lower Normandy. In Lower Normandy the shore sloped down to the sea in pasture-lands, fields, and meadows. The coast of Upper Normandy, on the contrary, was steep, a

high cliff, ravined, cleft and towering, forming an immense white rampart all the way to Dunkirk, while in each hollow a village or a port lay hidden: Étretat, Fécamp, Saint-Valery, Tréport, Dieppe, and the rest.

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

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

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

"Will you dine with us without any sort of ceremony, just that we may end the day

together?" said Mme. Roland to her friend.

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

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

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

"A gentleman called—three times."

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

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

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

"A gentleman from the lawyer's."

"What lawyer?"

"Why, M'sieu 'Canu—who else?"

"And what did this gentleman say?"

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

Maître Lecanu was M. Roland's lawyer, and in a way his friend, managing his business for him. For him to send word that he would call in the evening, something urgent and important must be in the wind; and the four Rolands looked at each other,

disturbed by the announcement as folks of small fortune are wont to be at any intervention of a lawyer, with its suggestions of contracts, inheritance, lawsuits—all sorts of desirable or formidable contingencies. The father, after a few moments of silence, muttered:

“What on earth can it mean?”

Mme. Rosémilly began to laugh.

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

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

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

Before even taking off her bonnet she said:

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

“Yes—a little girl named Dumenil, a stationer’s daughter.”

“Had they any children?”

“I should think so! four or five at least.”

“Not from that quarter, then.”

She was quite eager already in her search; she caught at the hope of some added ease dropping from the sky. But Pierre, who was very fond of his mother, who knew her to be somewhat visionary and feared she might be disappointed, a little grieved, a little saddened if the news were bad instead of good, checked her:

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

Every one was surprised at the suggestion, and Jean was a little ruffled by his

brother's having spoken of it before Mme. Rosémilly.

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

Pierre smiled sneeringly:

"Are you in love, then?"

And the other, much put out, retorted: "Is it necessary that a man should be in love because he does not care to marry yet?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pierre thought it quite natural.

"An immediate decision is required, no doubt; and perhaps there are certain

confidential conditions which it does not do to put into writing."

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

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

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

Mme. Rosémilly rose.

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

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

Mme. Roland did the honours eagerly to their visitor.

"A cup of coffee, monsieur?"

"No, thank you. I have just had dinner."

"A cup of tea, then?"

"Thank you, I will accept one later. First we must attend to business."

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

The lawyer went on:

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

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

"He was a friend of yours?"

Roland replied: "Our best friend, monsieur, but a fanatic for Paris; never to be got away from the boulevard. He was a head clerk in the exchequer office. I have never

seen him since I left the capital, and latterly we had ceased writing to each other. When people are far apart you know——”

The lawyer gravely put in:

“M. Maréchal is deceased.”

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

Maître Lecanu went on:

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

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

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

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

“And what did he die of, poor Maréchal?”

Maître Lecanu did not know in the least.

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

Old Roland could not conceal his delight and exclaimed:

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

The lawyer smiled.

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

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

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

The doctor murmured:

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

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

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

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

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

Maître Lecanu seemed quite easy.

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

“Good. Then—then the fortune is quite clear?”

“Perfectly clear.”

“All the necessary formalities have been gone through?”

“All.”

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

“You understand that I ask all these questions immediately so as to save my son unpleasant consequences which he might not foresee. Sometimes there are debts, embarrassing liabilities, what not! And a legatee finds himself in an inextricable thorn-bush. After all, I am not the heir—but I think first of the little ’un.”

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

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

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

“Yes, madame.”

And she went on simply:

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

Roland had risen.

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

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

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

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

“And now for that cup of tea, Monsieur Lecanu?”

“Now I will accept it with pleasure, madame.”

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

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

“Charming, charming!” the lawyer said again and again.

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

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

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

“Quite so. To-morrow, at two.”

Jean had not spoken a word.

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

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

Then Jean smiled. He embraced his father, saying:

"It had not struck me as indispensable."

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

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

Pierre asked:

"Then you used to know this Maréchal well?"

And his father replied:

"I believe! Why, he used to spend every evening at our house. Surely you remember he used to fetch you from school on half-holidays, and often took you back again after dinner. Why, the very day when Jean was born it was he who went for the doctor. He had been breakfasting with us when your mother was taken ill. Of course we knew at once what it meant, and he set off post-haste. In his hurry he took my hat instead of his own. I remember that because we had a good laugh over it afterward. It is very likely that he may have thought of that when he was dying, and as he had no heir he may have said to himself: 'I remember helping to bring that youngster into the world, so I will leave him my savings.'"

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

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

Jean got up.

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

His father was surprised and tried to keep him; they had much to talk about, plans to

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

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

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

She was quite serious.

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

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

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

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

“No; that again would not be quite just.”

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

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

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

CHAPTER II

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then he put the question to himself, “Can it be Jean’s inheritance?”

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

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

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

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

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

“How absurd!” thought he. “But the Turks are a maritime people, too.”

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

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

moving about in search of moorings.

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

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

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

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

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

“What, is it you, Jean?”

“Pierre! You! What has brought you here?”

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

Jean began to laugh.

“I too came out for fresh air.” And Pierre sat down by his brother’s side.

“Lovely—isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes, lovely.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Back in the town again, he once more wondered what he should do, being disappointed of his walk and deprived of the company of the sea by his brother’s

presence. He had an inspiration. “I will go and take a glass of liqueur with old Marowsko,” and he went off towards the quarter of the town known as Ingouville.

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

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

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

His black frock-coat, streaked with stains of acids and sirups, was much too wide for his lean little person, and looked like a shabby old cassock; and the man spoke with

a strong Polish accent which gave the childlike character to his thin voice, the lisping note and intonations of a young thing learning to speak.

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

“None. Everything as usual, everywhere.”

“You do not look very gay this evening.”

“I am not often gay.”

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

“Yes, I do not mind.”

“Then I will give you something new to try. For these two months I have been trying to extract something from currants, of which only a sirup has been made hitherto—well, and I have done it. I have invented a very good liqueur—very good indeed; very good.”

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

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

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

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

“A fine ruby,” Pierre declared.

“Isn’t it?” Marowsko’s old parrot-face beamed with satisfaction.

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

spoke:

“Very good—capital; and quite new in flavour. It is a find, my dear fellow.”

“Ah, really? Well, I am very glad.”

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

Then the old man had an idea:

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

Then they were silent, and sat for some minutes without a word under the solitary gas-lamp. At last Pierre began, almost in spite of himself:

“A queer thing has happened at home this evening. A friend of my father’s, who is lately dead, has left his fortune to my brother.”

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

“It will not look well.”

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

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

But the cautious old man would not explain further.

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

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

CHAPTER III

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

Nothing could be easier than to achieve this by skilful advertising remarks in the Figaro to the effect that the scientific faculty of Paris had their eye on him, and were

interested in the cures effected by the modest young practitioner of Havre! And he would be richer than his brother, richer and more famous; and satisfied with himself, for he would owe his fortune solely to his own exertions; and liberal to his old parents, who would be justly proud of his fame. He would not marry, would not burden his life with a wife who would be in his way, but he would choose his mistress from the most beautiful of his patients. He felt so sure of success that he sprang out of bed as though to grasp it on the spot, and he dressed to go and search through the town for rooms to suit him.

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

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

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

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

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

Pierre sat down without replying, after kissing his mother and shaking hands with

his father and brother; and he helped himself from the deep dish in the middle of the table to the cutlet which had been kept for him. It was cold and dry, probably the least tempting of them all. He thought that they might have left it on the hot plate till he came in, and not lose their heads so completely as to have forgotten their other son, their eldest.

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

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

Old Roland, who was peeling a pear, exclaimed:

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

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

“If I were rich wouldn’t I dissect no end of bodies!”

Father Roland shrugged his shoulders.

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

Pierre replied haughtily:

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

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

Pierre sneered.

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

“Are you coming to the lawyer’s?” his mother asked.

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

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

When the family had gone, Pierre, alone once more, resumed his investigations in

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

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

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

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

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

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

He had loafed on the pier at high tide, loafed in the streets, loafed in the cafés, loafed at Marowsko's, loafed everywhere. And on a sudden this life, which he had endured

till now, had become odious, intolerable. If he had had any pocket-money, he would have taken a carriage for a long drive in the country, along by the farm-ditches shaded by beech and elm trees; but he had to think twice of the cost of a glass of beer or a postage-stamp, and such an indulgence was out of his ken. It suddenly struck him how hard it was for a man of past thirty to be reduced to ask his mother, with a blush for a twenty-franc piece every now and then; and he muttered, as he scored the gravel with the ferule of his stick:

“Christi, if I only had money!”

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

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

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

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

Then he began thinking of women. He knew very little of them, never having had any but very transient connections as a medical student, broken off as soon as the month’s allowance was spent, and renewed or replaced by another the following month. And yet there must be some very kind, gentle, and comforting creatures

among them. Had not his mother been the good sense and saving grace of his own home? How glad he would be to know a woman, a true woman!

He started up with a sudden determination to go and call on Mme. Rosémilly. But he promptly sat down again. He did not like that woman. Why not? She had too much vulgar and sordid common sense; besides, did she not seem to prefer Jean? Without confessing it to himself too bluntly, this preference had a great deal to do with his low opinion of the widow's intellect; for, though he loved his brother, he could not help thinking him somewhat mediocre and believing himself the superior. However, he was not going to sit there till nightfall; and as he had done on the previous evening, he anxiously asked himself: "What am I going to do?"

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

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

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

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

"Good-day, monsieur—how are you?"

“Pretty well; and you?”

“I—oh, very well. How scarce you make yourself!”

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

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

“A bock. And you?”

“I will have a bock, too, since you are willing to treat me.”

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

“Why don’t you come here oftener? I like you very much, sweetheart.”

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

Next she asked him:

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

“Yes, he is my brother.”

“Awfully good-looking.”

“Do you think so?”

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

What strange craving impelled him on a sudden to tell this tavern-wench about Jean’s legacy? Why should this thing, which he kept at arm’s length when he was

alone, which he drove from him for fear of the torment it brought upon his soul, rise to his lips at this moment? And why did he allow it to overflow them as if he needed once more to empty out his heart to some one, gorged as it was with bitterness?

He crossed his legs and said:

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

She opened those covetous blue eyes of hers very wide.

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

“No. An old friend of my parents’.”

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

“No. I knew him very slightly.”

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

“Well, he is a lucky dog, that brother of yours, to have friends of this pattern. My word! and no wonder he is so unlike you.”

He longed to slap her, without knowing why; and he asked with pinched lips: “And what do you mean by saying that?”

She had put on a stolid, innocent face.

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

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

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

What had her thought been, what had been her meaning under those words? There was certainly some malice, some spite, something shameful in it. Yes, that hussy must have fancied, no doubt, that Jean was Maréchal’s son. The agitation which came over him at the notion of this suspicion cast at his mother was so violent that he stood still, looking about him for some place where he might sit down. In front of

him was another café. He went in, took a chair, and as the waiter came up, “A bock,” he said.

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

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

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

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

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

But what could Jean do? The simplest thing no doubt, would be to refuse the inheritance, which would then go to the poor, and to tell all friends or acquaintances

who had heard of the bequest that the will contained clauses and conditions impossible to subscribe to, which would have made Jean not inheritor but merely a trustee.

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

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

Roland, whose nautical mania was humoured by the old mariner, laughed heartily, his face flushed already and his eye watery from the absinthe. He had a burly shop-keeping stomach—nothing but stomach—in which the rest of his body seemed to have got stowed away; the flabby paunch of men who spend their lives sitting, and who have neither thighs, nor chest, nor arms, nor neck; the seat of their chairs

having accumulated all their substance in one spot. Beausire, on the contrary, though short and stout, was as tight as an egg and as hard as a cannon-ball.

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

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

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

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

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

“The devil!” exclaimed Pierre as he sat down. “We are celebrating the accession of Jean the rich.”

After the soup, Madeira was passed round, and already every one was talking at once. Beausire was giving the history of a dinner he had eaten at San Domingo at the table of a negro general. Old Roland was listening, and at the same time trying to get in, between the sentences, his account of another dinner, given by a friend of his at Mendon, after which every guest was ill for a fortnight. Mme. Rosémilly, Jean, and his mother were planning an excursion to breakfast at Saint Jouin, from which

they promised themselves the greatest pleasure; and Pierre was only sorry that he had not dined alone in some pot-house by the sea, so as to escape all this noise and laughter and glee which fretted him. He was wondering how he could now set to work to confide his fears to his brother, and induce him to renounce the fortune he had already accepted and of which he was enjoying the intoxicating foretaste. It would be hard on him, no doubt; but it must be done; he could not hesitate; their mother's reputation was at stake.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why?"

He had for some time been complaining of his health, of heaviness, giddiness,

frequent and unaccountable discomfort. The doctor replied:

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

“And what then?”

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

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

But Beausire exclaimed:

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

Pierre answered with some asperity:

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

Mme. Roland, much distressed, now put in her word: “Come, Pierre, what ails you? For once it cannot hurt him. Think of what an occasion it is for him, for all of us. You will spoil his pleasure and make us all unhappy. It is too bad of you to do such a thing.”

He muttered, as he shrugged his shoulders.

“He can do as he pleases. I have warned him.”

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

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

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

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

He bent his head and went on with his dinner.

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

Father Roland meanwhile, to whose head the fumes of the wine were rising once more, had already forgotten his son’s advice and was eyeing a champagne-bottle with a tender leer as it stood, still nearly full, by the side of his plate. He dared not touch it for fear of being lectured again, and he was wondering by what device or trick he could possess himself of it without exciting Pierre’s remark. A ruse occurred to him, the simplest possible. He took up the bottle with an air of indifference, and

holding it by the neck, stretched his arm across the table to fill the doctor's glass, which was empty; then he filled up all the other glasses, and when he came to his own he began talking very loud, so that if he poured anything into it they might have sworn it was done inadvertently. And in fact no one took any notice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jean, who was laughing, spoke in his turn:

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

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

But Beausire cried out:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

brute till nine next morning.

CHAPTER IV

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

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

Under any other circumstances he would certainly not have understood, not have imagined the possibility of such an insinuation against his poor mother, who was so kind, so simple, so excellent. But his spirit seethed with the leaven of jealousy that was fermenting within him. His own excited mind, on the scent, as it were, in spite of himself, for all that could damage his brother, had even perhaps attributed to the tavern barmaid an odious intention of which she was innocent. It was possible that his imagination had, unaided, invented this dreadful doubt—his imagination, which he never controlled, which constantly evaded his will and went off, unfettered, audacious, adventurous, and stealthy, into the infinite world of ideas, bringing back

now and then some which were shameless and repulsive, and which it buried in him, in the depths of his soul, in its most fathomless recesses, like something stolen. His heart, most certainly, his own heart had secrets from him; and had not that wounded heart discerned in this atrocious doubt a means of depriving his brother of the inheritance of which he was jealous? He suspected himself now, cross-examining all the mysteries of his mind as bigots search their consciences.

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

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

His mother, quite delighted, said to him:

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

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

As they drank their coffee he said to his father:

“Are you going out in the Pearl to-day?”

“No, my boy.”

“May I have her with Jean Bart?”

“To be sure, as long as you like.”

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

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

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

“Which way is the wind?” he asked.

“Due east still, M’sieu Pierre. A fine breeze out at sea.”

“Well, then, old man, off we go!”

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

When they reached the open sea, round the nose of the north pier which had sheltered them, the fresher breeze puffed in the doctor’s face and on his hands, like a

somewhat icy caress, filled his chest, which rose with a long sigh to drink it in, and swelling the tawny sail, tilted the Pearl on her beam and made her more lively. Jean Bart hastily hauled up the jib, and the triangle of canvas, full of wind, looked like a wing; then, with two strides to the stern, he let out the spinnaker, which was close-reefed against his mast.

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

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

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

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

He looked up and saw to the northward a gray shade, filmy but dense, blotting out the sky and covering the sea; it was sweeping down on them like a cloud fallen from

above. He tacked for land and made for the pier, scudding before the wind and followed by the flying fog, which gained upon them. When it reached the Pearl, wrapping her in its intangible density, a cold shudder ran over Pierre's limbs, and a smell of smoke and mould, the peculiar smell of a sea-fog, made him close his mouth that he might not taste the cold, wet vapour. By the time the boat was at her usual moorings in the harbour the whole town was buried in this fine mist, which did not fall but yet wetted everything like rain, and glided and rolled along the roofs and streets like the flow of a river. Pierre, with his hands and feet frozen, made haste home and threw himself on his bed to take a nap till dinner-time. When he made his appearance in the dining-room his mother was saying to Jean:

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

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

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

Pierre turned pale. His anger seemed to press on his heart.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Boulevard François."

There was no possibility for doubt. He took his seat in such a state of exasperation that he longed to exclaim: "This is really too much! Is there nothing for any one but him?"

His mother, beaming, went on talking: "And only fancy, I got it for two thousand eight hundred francs a year. They asked three thousand, but I got a reduction of two hundred francs on taking for three, six, or nine years. Your brother will be delightfully housed there. An elegant home is enough to make the fortune of a

lawyer. It attracts clients, charms them, holds them fast, commands respect, and shows them that a man who lives in such good style expects a good price for his words."

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

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

Pierre replied contemptuously:

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

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

About half-way through the meal he suddenly asked:

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

Old Roland looked up and racked his memory:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Roland exclaimed:

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

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

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

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

Pierre, with his shoulders up and his hands in his pockets, not caring to remain out

of doors in the cold, turned into Marowsko's. The druggist was asleep as usual under the gas-light, which kept watch. On recognising Pierre for whom he had the affection of a faithful dog, he shook off his drowsiness, went for two glasses, and brought out the Groseillette.

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

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

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

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

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

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

foggy streets again.

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

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

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

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

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

But he perceived that the slight exertion of walking somewhat disturbed his ideas, dislocated their continuity, weakened their precision, clouded his recollection. To

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

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

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

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

“How are you, my children?” he would say. “Have you any news of your parents? As for me, they never write to me.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then all was silent once more.

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

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

Would she have deceived his father—she?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The Santa Lucia.”

“Where from?”

“Italy.”

“What port?”

“Naples.”

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

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

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

He saw several more come in, one after another, out of the impenetrable vapour. Then, as the damp became quite intolerable, Pierre set out towards the town. He was so cold that he went into a sailors’ tavern to drink a glass of grog, and when the hot and pungent liquor had scorched his mouth and throat he felt a hope revive within him.

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

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

CHAPTER V

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He went down the two flights of stairs; then, as he was coming up again with the water-bottle filled, he sat down, in his night-shirt, on a step of the stairs where there was a draught, and drank, without a tumbler, in long pulls like a runner who is out of breath. When he ceased to move the silence of the house touched his feelings; then, one by one, he could distinguish the faintest sounds. First there was the ticking of the clock in the dining-room which seemed to grow louder every second. Then he heard another snore, an old man's snore, short, laboured, and hard, his father beyond doubt; and he writhed at the idea, as if it had but this moment sprung upon him, that

these two men, sleeping under the same room—father and son—were nothing to each other! Not a tie, not the very slightest, bound them together, and they did not know it! They spoke to each other affectionately, they embraced each other, they rejoiced and lamented together over the same things, just as if the same blood flowed in their veins. And two men born at opposite ends of the earth could not be more alien to each other than this father and son. They believed they loved each other, because a lie had grown up between them. This paternal love, this filial love, were the outcome of a lie—a lie which could not be unmasked, and which no one would ever know but he, the true son.

But yet, but yet—if he were mistaken? How could he make sure? Oh, if only some likeness, however slight, could be traced between his father and Jean, one of those mysterious resemblances which run from an ancestor to the great-great-grandson, showing that the whole race are the offspring of the same embrace. To him, a medical man, so little would suffice to enable him to discern this—the curve of a nostril, the space between the eyes, the character of the teeth or hair; nay less—a gesture, a trick, a habit, an inherited taste, any mark or token which a practised eye might recognise as characteristic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well, he would go over to Trouville to see the swarming crowd on the sands. That would amuse him, change the air of his thoughts, and give him time to inure himself to the horrible thing he had discovered. As soon as morning dawned he made his

toilet and dressed. The fog had vanished and it was fine, very fine. As the boat for Trouville did not start till nine, it struck the doctor that he must greet his mother before starting.

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

"Who is there?"

"I—Pierre."

"What do you want?"

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

"But I am still in bed."

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

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

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

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

"Come in."

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

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

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

“Yes, last evening.”

“Will you return to dinner?”

“I do not know. At any rate do not wait for me.”

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

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

“By the way, I fancy I remember that you used to have, in Paris, a little portrait of Maréchal, in the drawing-room.”

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

“To be sure.”

“What has become of the portrait?”

She might have replied more readily:

“That portrait—stay; I don’t exactly know—perhaps it is in my desk.”

“It would be kind of you to find it.”

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

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

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

And he went out.

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

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

He asked himself:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, as he went, he studied the groups, wandering round them full of a fresh set of ideas. All these many-hued dresses which covered the sands like nosegays, these pretty stuffs, those showy parasols, the fictitious grace of tightened waists, all the ingenious devices of fashion from the smart little shoe to the extravagant hat, the

seductive charm of gesture, voice, and smile, all the coquettish airs in short displayed on this seashore, suddenly struck him as stupendous efflorescences of female depravity. All these bedizened women aimed at pleasing, bewitching, and deluding some man. They had dressed themselves out for men—for all men—all excepting the husband whom they no longer needed to conquer. They had dressed themselves out for the lover of yesterday and the lover of to-morrow, for the stranger they might meet and notice or were perhaps on the lookout for.

And these men sitting close to them, eye to eye and mouth to mouth, invited them, desired them, hunted them like game, coy and elusive notwithstanding that it seemed so near and so easy to capture. This wide shore was, then, no more than a love-market where some sold, others gave themselves—some drove a hard bargain for their kisses while others promised them for love. All these women thought only of one thing, to make their bodies desirable—bodies already given, sold, or promised to other men. And he reflected that it was everywhere the same, all the world over.

His mother had done what others did—that was all. Others? These women he saw about him, rich, giddy, love-seeking, belonged on the whole to the class of fashionable and showy women of the world, some indeed to the less respectable sisterhood, for on these sands, trampled by the legion of idlers, the tribe of virtuous, home-keeping women were not to be seen.

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

bustle, made his escape into the town, and went to get his breakfast at a modest tavern on the skirts of the fields.

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

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

All their faces were beaming.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And you, Pierre, what do you think of the matter?”

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

“Oh, I am quite of Jean’s mind. I like nothing so well as simplicity, which, in matters of taste, is equivalent to rectitude in matters of conduct.”

His mother went on:

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

Pierre replied:

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

Jean began to laugh.

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

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

He sat looking at them as he had looked at his mother in the morning before starting for Trouville; looking at them as a stranger who would study them, and he felt as

though he had really suddenly come into a family of which he knew nothing.

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

His family!

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

And he suddenly broke out:

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

She opened her eyes in surprise.

"What portrait?"

"The portrait of Maréchal."

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

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

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

Roland exclaimed:

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

heard of his legacy? If I believed in presentiments I should think that this was one."

Mme. Roland calmly replied:

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

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

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

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

The love of man and wife is a voluntary compact in which the one who proves weak is guilty only of perfidy; but when the wife is a mother her duty is a higher one, since nature has intrusted her with a race. If she fails, then she is cowardly, worthless, infamous.

"I do not care," said Roland suddenly, stretching out his legs under the table, as he did every evening while he sipped his glass of black-currant brandy. "You may do worse than live idle when you have a snug little income. I hope Jean will have us to

dinner in style now. Hang it all! If I have indigestion now and then I cannot help it."

Then turning to his wife he added:

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

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

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

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

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

"Hand it on to me," said Roland.

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

"Poor fellow! To think that he was like that when we first knew him! Cristi! How time flies! He was a good-looking man, too, in those days, and with such a pleasant

manner—was not he, Louise?”

As his wife made no answer he went on:

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

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

“I do not recognise it at all. I only remember him with white hair.”

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

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

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

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

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

It was as though they were spying on each other; and acute uneasiness, intolerable to

be borne, clutched at Pierre's heart. He was saying to himself—at once tortured and glad:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mme. Rosémilly tried to smooth matters by saying: “Not at all, not at all. He has gone away in the English fashion; people always disappear in that way in fashionable circles if they want to leave early.”

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

CHAPTER VI

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

His father having asked him one evening: “Why the deuce do you always come in with a face as cheerful as a funeral? This is not the first time I have remarked it.”

The doctor replied: “The fact is I am terribly conscious of the burden of life.”

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

“I am in mourning for some one,” said Pierre.

“You are? For whom?”

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

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

“A woman, I suppose.”

“Yes, a woman.”

“Dead?”

“No. Worse. Ruined!”

“Ah!”

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

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

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

She shook her head without a word.

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

“Come, come,” said he, “this will not do at all, my dear old woman. You must take care of yourself.” Then, addressing his son, “You surely must see that your mother is ill. Have you questioned her, at any rate?”

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

At this Roland was angry.

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

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

“She is going to faint.”

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

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

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

“Nothing, nothing—I assure you, nothing.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Roland, quite distracted, asked her:

“Louise, Louise, what is the mater with you? What on earth ails you?”

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

“No, no, no.”

He appealed to his son.

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

“It is nothing,” said Pierre, “she is a little hysterical.”

And he felt as if it were a comfort to him to see her suffering thus, as if this anguish mitigated his resentment and diminished his mother’s load of opprobrium. He

looked at her as a judge satisfied with his day's work.

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

Roland and the doctor were left face to face.

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

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

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

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

Ah! How gladly now would he have forgiven her. But he could not, for he was incapable of forgetting. If only he could have desisted from making her suffer; but this again he could not, suffering as he did himself. He went home to his meals, full of relenting resolutions; then, as soon as he saw her, as soon as he met her eye—formerly so clear and frank, now so evasive, frightened, and bewildered—he struck at her in spite of himself, unable to suppress the treacherous words which would rise to his lips.

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

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

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

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

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

It was harvest-time. Alternating with the dark hue of clover and the raw green of beet-root, the yellow corn lighted up the landscape with gleams of pale gold; the

fields looked as if they had drunk in the sunshine which poured down on them. Here and there the reapers were at work, and in the plots where the scythe had been put in the men might be seen see-sawing as they swept the level soil with the broad, wing-shaped blade.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"First-rate! Suppose we try to catch some after breakfast."

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

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

Roland could not sit still for impatience. He wanted to buy the nets specially

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

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

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

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

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

They went down a little ravine, sloping from the village to the cliff, and the cliff, at the end of this comb, rose about eighty metres above the sea. Framed between the

green slopes to the right and left, a great triangle of silvery blue water could be seen in the distance, and a sail, scarcely visible, looked like an insect out there. The sky, pale with light, was so merged into one with the water that it was impossible to see where one ended and the other began; and the two women, walking in front of the men, stood out against the bright background, their shapes clearly defined in their closely-fitting dresses.

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

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

“That is fine!” exclaimed Mme. Rosémilly, standing still. Jean had come up with

her, and with a beating heart offered his hand to help her down the narrow steps cut in the rock.

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

Roland and Pierre came last, and the doctor had to drag his father down, for his brain reeled so that he could only slip down sitting, from step to step.

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

“Oh, I am so thirsty!” cried Mme. Rosémilly.

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

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

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

“Will you be quiet?”

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

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

For in fact they could see quite near them now Captain Beausire as he came down,

backward, so as to give both hands to Mme. Roland; and further up, further off, Roland still letting himself slip, lowering himself on his hams and clinging on with his hands and elbows at the speed of a tortoise, Pierre keeping in front of him to watch his movements.

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

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

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

“Do you see anything?” she asked.

“Yes, I see your face reflected in the water.”

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

He murmured tenderly in reply:

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

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

“But yet—if you will?”

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

“You are cruel—let us go a little farther, there are none here.”

He gave her his hand to steady her on the slippery rocks. She leaned on him rather timidly, and he suddenly felt himself overpowered by love and insurgent with

passion, as if the fever that had been incubating in him had waited till to-day to declare its presence.

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

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

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

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

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

“Show me,” he kept saying. “Show me how.”

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

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

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

She drew herself up and said gravely:

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

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

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

She went on in a tone of amused annoyance.

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

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

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

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

“My good friend, you are no longer a child, and I am not a young girl. We both know perfectly well what we are about and we can weigh the consequences of our

actions. If you have made up your mind to make love to me to-day I must naturally infer that you wish to marry me."

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

"Why, yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Roland's voice rescued them.

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

The captain had, in fact, had a wonderful haul. Wet above his hips he waded from pool to pool, recognizing the likeliest spots at a glance, and searching all the hollows hidden under sea-weed, with a steady slow sweep of his net. And the beautiful

transparent, sandy-gray prawns skipped in his palm as he picked them out of the net with a dry jerk and put them into his creel. Mme. Rosémilly, surprised and delighted, remained at his side, almost forgetful of her promise to Jean, who followed them in a dream, giving herself up entirely to the childish enjoyment of pulling the creatures out from among the waving sea-grasses.

Roland suddenly exclaimed:

“Ah, here comes Mme. Roland to join us.”

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

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

looking as if they were alone in the middle of the wide horizon, and assuming a sort of symbolic dignity in that vast expanse of sky and sea and cliff.

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

“What is it?”

He spoke with a sneer.

“I am learning. Learning how a man lays himself out to be cozened by his wife.”

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

“In whose name do you say that?”

“In Jean’s, by Heaven! It is immensely funny to see those two.”

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

He laughed aloud, a hard, satirical laugh:

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

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

Seeing her approach, Jean called out:

“Well, mother? So you have made the effort?”

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

He saw her agitation, and greatly surprised he said:

“How pale you are! What is the matter?”

She stammered out:

“I was nearly falling; I was frightened at the rocks.”

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

“Guess what I have done!”

“But—what—I don’t know.”

“Guess.”

“I cannot. I don’t know.”

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

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

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

“Yes, charming. You have done very well.”

“Then you approve?”

“Yes, I approve.”

“But how strangely you say so! I could fancy that—that you were not glad.”

“Yes, indeed, I am—very glad.”

“Really and truly?”

“Really and truly.”

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

At this she led her little Jean farther away, quite to the edge of the waves, and there

they talked for a long time of this marriage on which he had set his heart.

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

CHAPTER VII

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

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

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

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

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

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

The glass gallery, lighted by a chandelier and little coloured lamps hidden among palms, india-rubber plants, and flowers, was first seen like a scene on the stage.

There was a spasm of surprise. Roland, dazzled by such luxury, muttered an oath, and felt inclined to clap his hands as if it were a pantomime scene. They then went into the first drawing-room, a small room hung with dead gold and furnished to match. The larger drawing-room—the lawyer's consulting-room, very simple, hung with light salmon-colour—was dignified in style.

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

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

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

And he declaimed:

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

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

Mme. Roland opened a door on the right.

"This is the bed-room," said she.

She had devoted herself to its decoration with all her mother's love. The hangings were of Rouen cretonne imitating old Normandy chintz, and the Louis XV.

design—a shepherdess, in a medallion held in the beaks of a pair of doves—gave the walls, curtains, bed, and arm-chairs a festive, rustic style that was extremely pretty!

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

“Do you like it?” asked Jean.

“Immensely.”

“You cannot imagine how glad I am.”

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

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

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

Pyramids of fruit stood on the table and monuments of cakes. No one was hungry;

they picked at the fruit and nibbled at the cakes rather than ate them. Then, at the end of about an hour, Mme. Rosémilly begged to take leave. It was decided that old Roland should accompany her home and set out with her forthwith; while Mme. Roland, in the maid's absence, should cast a maternal eye over the house and see that her son had all he needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pierre turned on him haughtily:

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

Jean had pulled himself up.

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

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

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

Pierre laughed the louder.

“Ah! ha! very good. I understand now why I should no longer speak of her as ‘the widow.’ But you have taken a strange way of announcing your engagement.”

“I forbid any jesting about it. Do you hear? I forbid it.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jean went on:

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

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

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

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

“With respect—you?”

“Yes—me.”

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

“You say—? Say it again—again.”

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

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

“What? Repeat that once more.”

“I say—what everybody is muttering, what every gossip is blabbing—that you are the son of the man who left you his fortune. Well, then—a decent man does not take the money which brings dishonour on his mother.”

“Pierre! Pierre! Pierre! Think what you are saying. You? Is it you who give utterance to this infamous thing?”

“Yes, I. It is I. Have you not seen me crushed with woe this month past, spending my nights without sleep and my days in lurking out of sight like an animal? I hardly know what I am doing or what will become of me, so miserable am I, so crazed with shame and grief; for first I guessed—and now I know it.”

“Pierre! Be silent. Mother is in the next room. Remember she may hear—she must hear.”

But Pierre felt that he must unburden his heart. He told Jean all his suspicions, his arguments, his struggles, his assurance, and the history of the portrait—which had again disappeared. He spoke in short broken sentences almost without coherence—the language of a sleep-walker.

He seemed to have quite forgotten Jean, and his mother in the adjoining room. He talked as if no one were listening, because he must talk, because he had suffered too much and smothered and closed the wound too tightly. It had festered like an abscess and the abscess had burst, splashing every one. He was pacing the room in

the way he almost always did, his eyes fixed on vacancy, gesticulating in a frenzy of despair, his voice choked with tearless sobs and revulsions of self-loathing; he spoke as if he were making a confession of his own misery and that of his nearest kin, as though he were casting his woes to the deaf, invisible winds which bore away his words.

Jean, distracted and almost convinced on a sudden by his brother's blind vehemence, was leaning against the door behind which, as he guessed, their mother had heard them.

She could not get out, she must come through his room. She had not come; then it was because she dare not.

Suddenly Pierre stamped his foot.

"I am a brute," he cried, "to have told you this."

And he fled, bare-headed, down the stairs.

The noise of the front-door closing with a slam roused Jean from the deep stupor into which he had fallen. Some seconds had elapsed, longer than hours, and his spirit had sunk into the numb torpor of idiocy. He was conscious, indeed, that he must presently think and act, but he would wait, refusing to understand, to know, to remember, out of fear, weakness, cowardice. He was one of those procrastinators who put everything off till to-morrow; and when he was compelled to come to a decision then and there, still he instinctively tried to gain a few minutes.

But the perfect silence which now reigned, after Pierre's vociferations, the sudden stillness of walls and furniture, with the bright light of six wax candles and two lamps, terrified him so greatly that he suddenly longed to make his escape too.

Then he roused his brain, roused his heart, and tried to reflect.

Never in his life had he had to face a difficulty. There are men who let themselves glide onward like running water. He had been duteous over his tasks for fear of

punishment, and had got through his legal studies with credit because his existence was tranquil. Everything in the world seemed to him quite natural and never aroused his particular attention. He loved order, steadiness, and peace, by temperament, his nature having no complications; and face to face with this catastrophe, he found himself like a man who has fallen into the water and cannot swim.

At first he tried to be incredulous. His brother had told a lie, out of hatred and jealousy. But yet, how could he have been so vile as to say such a thing of their mother if he had not himself been distraught by despair? Besides, stamped on Jean's ear, on his sight, on his nerves, on the inmost fibres of his flesh, were certain words, certain tones of anguish, certain gestures of Pierre's, so full of suffering that they were irresistibly convincing; as incontrovertible as certainty itself.

He was too much crushed to stir or even to will. His distress became unbearable; and he knew that behind the door was his mother who had heard everything and was waiting.

What was she doing? Not a movement, not a shudder, not a breath, not a sigh revealed the presence of a living creature behind that panel. Could she have run away? But how? If she had run away—she must have jumped out of the window into the street. A shock of terror roused him—so violent and imperious that he drove the door in rather than opened it, and flung himself into the bed-room.

It was apparently empty, lighted by a single candle standing on the chest of drawers.

Jean flew to the window; it was shut and the shutters bolted. He looked about him, peering into the dark corners with anxious eyes, and he then noticed that the bed-curtains were drawn. He ran forward and opened them. His mother was lying on the bed, her face buried in the pillow which she had pulled up over her ears that she might hear no more.

At first he thought she had smothered herself. Then, taking her by the shoulders, he turned her over without her leaving go of the pillow, which covered her face, and in

which she had set her teeth to keep herself from crying out.

But the mere touch of this rigid form, of those arms so convulsively clinched, communicated to him the shock of her unspeakable torture. The strength and determination with which she clutched the linen case full of feathers with her hands and teeth, over her mouth and eyes and ears, that he might neither see her nor speak to her, gave him an idea, by the turmoil it roused in him, of the pitch suffering may rise to, and his heart, his simple heart, was torn with pity. He was no judge, not he; not even a merciful judge; he was a man full of weakness and a son full of love. He remembered nothing of what his brother had told him; he neither reasoned nor argued, he merely laid his two hands on his mother's inert body, and not being able to pull the pillow away, he exclaimed, kissing her dress:

"Mother, mother, my poor mother, look at me!"

She would have seemed to be dead but that an almost imperceptible shudder ran through all her limbs, the vibration of a strained cord. And he repeated:

"Mother, mother, listen to me. It is not true. I know that it is not true."

A spasm seemed to come over her, a fit of suffocation; then she suddenly began to sob into the pillow. Her sinews relaxed, her rigid muscles yielded, her fingers gave way and left go of the linen; and he uncovered her face.

She was pale, quite colourless; and from under her closed lids tears were stealing. He threw his arms round her neck and kissed her eyes, slowly, with long heart-broken kisses, wet with her tears; and he said again and again:

"Mother, my dear mother, I know it is not true. Do not cry; I know it. It is not true."

She raised herself, she sat up, looked in his face, and with an effort of courage such as it must cost in some cases to kill one's self, she said:

"No, my child; it is true."

And they remained speechless, each in the presence of the other. For some minutes

she seemed again to be suffocating, craning her throat and throwing back her head to get breath; then she once more mastered herself and went on:

“It is true, my child. Why lie about it? It is true. You would not believe me if I denied it.”

She looked like a crazy creature. Overcome by alarm, he fell on his knees by the bedside, murmuring:

“Hush, mother, be silent.” She stood up with terrible determination and energy.

“I have nothing more to say, my child. Good-bye.” And she went towards the door.

He threw his arms about her exclaiming:

“What are you doing, mother; where are you going?”

“I do not know. How should I know—There is nothing left for me to do, now that I am alone.”

She struggled to be released. Holding her firmly, he could find only words to say again and again:

“Mother, mother, mother!” And through all her efforts to free herself she was saying:

“No, no. I am not your mother now, poor boy—good-bye.”

It struck him clearly that if he let her go now he should never see her again; lifting her up in his arms he carried her to an arm-chair, forced her into it, and kneeling down in front of her barred her in with his arms.

“You shall not quit this spot, mother. I love you and I will keep you! I will keep you always—I love you and you are mine.”

She murmured in a dejected tone:

“No, my poor boy, it is impossible. You weep to-night, but to-morrow you would turn me out of the house. You, even you, could not forgive me.”

He replied: “I? I? How little you know me!” with such a burst of genuine affection that, with a cry, she seized his head by the hair with both hands, and dragging him violently to her kissed him distractedly all over his face.

Then she sat still, her cheek against his, feeling the warmth of his skin through his beard, and she whispered in his ear: “No, my little Jean, you would not forgive me to-morrow. You think so, but you deceive yourself. You have forgiven me this evening, and that forgiveness has saved my life; but you must never see me again.”

And he repeated, clasping her in his arms:

“Mother, do not say that.”

“Yes, my child, I must go away. I do not know where, nor how I shall set about it, nor what I shall do; but it must be done. I could never look at you, nor kiss you, do you understand?”

Then he in his turn spoke into her ear:

“My little mother, you are to stay, because I insist, because I want you. And you must pledge your word to obey me, now, at once.”

“No, my child.”

“Yes, mother, you must; do you hear? You must.”

“No, my child, it is impossible. It would be condemning us all to the tortures of hell. I know what that torment is; I have known it this month past. Your feelings are touched now, but when that is over, when you look on me as Pierre does, when you remember what I have told you—oh, my Jean, think—think—I am your mother!”

“I will not let you leave me, mother. I have no one but you.”

“But think, my son, we can never see each other again without both of us blushing, without my feeling that I must die of shame, without my eyes falling before yours.”

“But it is not so, mother.”

“Yes, yes, yes, it is so! Oh, I have understood all your poor brother’s struggles,

believe me! All—from the very first day. Now, when I hear his step in the house my heart beats as if it would burst, when I hear his voice I am ready to faint. I still had you; now I have you no longer. Oh, my little Jean! Do you think I could live between you two?"

"Yes, I should love you so much that you would cease to think of it."

"As if that were possible!"

"But it is possible."

"How do you suppose that I could cease to think of it, with your brother and you on each hand? Would you cease to think of it, I ask you?"

"I? I swear I should."

"Why you would think of it at every hour of the day."

"No, I swear it. Besides, listen, if you go away I will enlist and get killed."

This boyish threat quite overcame her; she clasped Jean in a passionate and tender embrace. He went on:

"I love you more than you think—ah, much more, much more. Come, be reasonable. Try to stay for only one week. Will you promise me one week? You cannot refuse me that?"

She laid her two hands on Jean's shoulders, and holding him at arm's length she said:

"My child, let us try and be calm and not give way to emotions. First, listen to me. If I were ever to hear from your lips what I have heard for this month past from your brother, if I were once to see in your eyes what I read in his, if I could fancy from a word or a look that I was as odious to you as I am to him—within one hour, mark me—within one hour I should be gone forever."

"Mother, I swear to you—"

"Let me speak. For a month past I have suffered all that any creature can suffer.

From the moment when I perceived that your brother, my other son, suspected me, that as the minutes went by, he guessed the truth, every moment of my life has been a martyrdom which no words could tell you."

Her voice was so full of woe that the contagion of her misery brought the tears to Jean's eyes.

He tried to kiss her, but she held him off.

"Leave me—listen; I still have so much to say to make you understand. But you never can understand. You see, if I stayed—I must—no, no. I cannot."

"Speak on, mother, speak."

"Yes, indeed, for at least I shall not have deceived you. You want me to stay with you? For what—for us to be able to see each other, speak to each other, meet at any hour of the day at home, for I no longer dare open a door for fear of finding your brother behind it. If we are to do that, you must not forgive me—nothing is so wounding as forgiveness—but you must owe me no grudge for what I have done. You must feel yourself strong enough, and so far unlike the rest of the world, as to be able to say to yourself that you are not Roland's son without blushing for the fact or despising me. I have suffered enough—I have suffered too much; I can bear no more, no indeed, no more! And it is not a thing of yesterday, mind you, but of long, long years. But you could never understand that; how should you! If you and I are to live together and kiss each other, my little Jean, you must believe that though I was your father's mistress I was yet more truly his wife, his real wife; that, at the bottom of my heart, I cannot be ashamed of it; that I have no regrets; that I love him still even in death; that I shall always love him and never loved any other man; that he was my life, my joy, my hope, my comfort, everything—everything in the world to me for so long! Listen, my boy, before God, who hears me, I should never have had a joy in my existence if I had not met him; never anything—not a touch of tenderness or kindness, not one of those hours which make us regret growing

old—nothing. I owe everything to him! I had but him in the world, and you two boys, your brother and you. But for you, all would have been empty, dark, and void as the night. I should never have loved, or known, or cared for anything—I should not even have wept—for I have wept, my little Jean; oh, yes, and bitter tears, since we came to Havre. I was his wholly and forever; for ten years I was as much his wife as he was my husband before God who created us for each other. And then I began to see that he loved me less. He was always kind and courteous, but I was not what I had been to him. It was all over! Oh, how I have cried! How dreadful and delusive life is! Nothing lasts. Then we came here—I never saw him again; he never came. He promised it in every letter. I was always expecting him, and I never saw him again—and now he is dead! But he still cared for us since he remembered you. I shall love him to my latest breath, and I never will deny him, and I love you because you are his child, and I could never be ashamed of him before you. Do you understand? I could not. So if you wish me to remain you must accept the situation as his son, and we will talk of him sometimes; and you must love him a little and we must think of him when we look at each other. If you will not do this—if you cannot—then good-bye, my child; it is impossible that we should live together. Now, I will act by your decision."

Jean replied gently:

"Stay, mother."

She clasped him in her arms, and her tears flowed again; then, with her face against his, she went on:

"Well, but Pierre. What can we do about Pierre?"

Jean answered:

"We will find some plan! You cannot live with him any longer."

At the thought of her elder son she was convulsed with terror.

"No, I cannot; no, no!" And throwing herself on Jean's breast she cried in distress of

mind:

“Save me from him, you, my little one. Save me; do something—I don’t know what. Think of something. Save me.”

“Yes, mother, I will think of something.”

“And at once. You must, this minute. Do not leave me. I am so afraid of him—so afraid.”

“Yes, yes; I will hit on some plan. I promise you I will.”

“But at once; quick, quick! You cannot imagine what I feel when I see him.”

Then she murmured softly in his ear: “Keep me here, with you.”

He paused, reflected, and with his blunt good-sense saw at once the dangers of such an arrangement. But he had to argue for a long time, combating her scared, terror-stricken insistence.

“Only for to-night,” she said. “Only for to-night. And to-morrow morning you can send word to Roland that I was taken ill.”

“That is out of the question, as Pierre left you here. Come, take courage. I will arrange everything, I promise you, to-morrow; I will be with you by nine o’clock. Come, put on your bonnet. I will take you home.”

“I will do just what you desire,” she said with a childlike impulse of timidity and gratitude.

She tried to rise, but the shock had been too much for her; she could not stand.

He made her drink some sugared water and smell at some salts, while he bathed her temples with vinegar. She let him do what he would, exhausted, but comforted, as after the pains of child-birth. At last she could walk and she took his arm. The town hall struck three as they went past.

Outside their own door Jean kissed her, saying:

“Good-night, mother, keep up your courage.”

She stealthily crept up the silent stairs, and into her room, undressed quickly, and slipped into bed with a reawakened sense of that long-forgotten sin. Roland was snoring. In all the house Pierre alone was awake, and had heard her come in.

CHAPTER VIII

When he got back to his lodgings Jean dropped on a sofa; for the sorrows and anxieties which made his brother long to be moving, and to flee like a hunted prey, acted differently on his torpid nature and broke the strength of his arms and legs. He felt too limp to stir a finger, even to get to bed; limp body and soul, crushed and heart-broken. He had not been hit, as Pierre had been, in the purity of filial love, in the secret dignity which is the refuge of a proud heart; he was overwhelmed by a stroke of fate which, at the same time, threatened his own nearest interests.

When at last his spirit was calmer, when his thoughts had settled like water that has been stirred and lashed, he could contemplate the situation which had come before him. If he had learned the secret of his birth through any other channel he would assuredly have been very wroth and very deeply pained, but after his quarrel with his brother, after the violent and brutal betrayal which had shaken his nerves, the agonizing emotion of his mother’s confession had so bereft him of energy that he could not rebel. The shock to his feeling had been so great as to sweep away in an irresistible tide of pathos, all prejudice, and all the sacred delicacy of natural morality. Besides, he was not a man made for resistance. He did not like contending against any one, least of all against himself, so he resigned himself at once; and by instinctive tendency, a congenital love of peace, and of an easy and tranquil life, he began to anticipate the agitations which must surge up around him and at once be his ruin. He foresaw that they were inevitable, and to avert them he made up his mind to superhuman efforts of energy and activity. The knot must be cut immediately, this very day; for even he had fits of that imperious demand for a swift solution which is

the only strength of weak natures, incapable of a prolonged effort of will. His lawyer's mind, accustomed as it was to disentangling and studying complicated situations and questions of domestic difficulties in families that had got out of gear, at once foresaw the more immediate consequences of his brother's state of mind. In spite of himself, he looked at the issue from an almost professional point of view, as though he had to legislate for the future relations of certain clients after a moral disaster. Constant friction against Pierre had certainly become unendurable. He could easily evade it, no doubt, by living in his own lodgings; but even then it was not possible that their mother should live under the same roof with her elder son. For a long time he sat meditating, motionless, on the cushions, devising and rejecting various possibilities, and finding nothing that satisfied him.

But suddenly an idea took him by storm. This fortune which had come to him. Would an honest man keep it?

"No," was the first immediate answer, and he made up his mind that it must go to the poor. It was hard, but it could not be helped. He would sell his furniture and work like any other man, like any other beginner. This manful and painful resolution spurred his courage; he rose and went to the window, leaning his forehead against the pane. He had been poor; he could become poor again. After all he should not die of it. His eyes were fixed on the gas lamp burning at the opposite side of the street. A woman, much belated, happened to pass; suddenly he thought of Mme. Rosémilly with a pang at his heart, the shock of deep feeling which comes of a cruel suggestion. All the dire results of his decision rose up before him together. He would have to renounce his marriage, renounce happiness, renounce everything. Could he do such a thing after having pledged himself to her? She had accepted him knowing him to be rich. She would take him still if he were poor; but had he any right to demand such a sacrifice? Would it not be better to keep this money in trust, to be restored to the poor at some future date.

And in his soul, where selfishness put on a guise of honesty, all these specious interests were struggling and contending. His first scruples yielded to ingenious reasoning, then came to the top again, and again disappeared.

He sat down again, seeking some decisive motive, some all-sufficient pretext to solve his hesitancy and convince his natural rectitude. Twenty times over had he asked himself this question: “Since I am this man’s son, since I know and acknowledge it, is it not natural that I should also accept the inheritance?”

But even this argument could not suppress the “No” murmured by his inmost conscience.

Then came the thought: “Since I am not the son of the man I always believed to be my father, I can take nothing from him, neither during his lifetime nor after his death. It would be neither dignified nor equitable. It would be robbing my brother.”

This new view of the matter having relieved him and quieted his conscience, he went to the window again.

“Yes,” he said to himself, “I must give up my share of the family inheritance. I must let Pierre have the whole of it, since I am not his father’s son. That is but just. Then is it not just that I should keep my father’s money?”

Having discerned that he could take nothing of Roland’s savings, having decided on giving up the whole of this money, he agreed; he resigned himself to keeping Maréchal’s; for if he rejected both he would find himself reduced to beggary.

This delicate question being thus disposed of he came back to that of Pierre’s presence in the family. How was he to be got rid of? He was giving up his search for any practical solution when the whistle of a steam-vessel coming into port seemed to blow him an answer by suggesting a scheme.

Then he threw himself on his bed without undressing, and dozed and dreamed till daybreak.

At a little before nine he went out to ascertain whether his plans were feasible. Then, after making sundry inquiries and calls, he went to his old home. His mother was waiting for him in her room.

“If you had not come,” she said, “I should never have dared to go down.”

In a minute Roland’s voice was heard on the stairs: “Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all?”

There was no answer, and he roared out, with a thundering oath this time: “Joséphine, what the devil are you about?”

The girl’s voice came up from the depths of the basement.

“Yes, M’sieu—what is it?”

“Where is your Miss’es?”

“Madame is upstairs with M’sieu Jean.”

Then he shouted, looking up at the higher floor: “Louise!”

Mme. Roland half opened her door and answered:

“What is it, my dear?”

“Are we to have nothing to eat to-day, hang it all?”

“Yes, my dear, I am coming.”

And she went down, followed by Jean.

Roland, as soon as he saw him, exclaimed:

“Hallo! There you are! Sick of your home already?”

“No, father, but I had something to talk over with mother this morning.”

Jean went forward holding out his hand, and when he felt his fingers in the old man’s fatherly clasp, a strange, unforeseen emotion thrilled through him, and a sense as of parting and farewell without return.

Mme. Roland asked:

“Pierre is not come down?”

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

“No, but never mind him; he is always behind-hand. We will begin without him.”

She turned to Jean:

“You had better go to call him, my child; it hurts his feelings if we do not wait for him.”

“Yes, mother. I will go.”

And the young man went. He mounted the stairs with the fevered determination of a man who is about to fight a duel and who is in a fright. When he knocked at the door Pierre said:

“Come in.”

He went in. The elder was writing, leaning over his table.

“Good-morning,” said Jean.

Pierre rose.

“Good-morning!” and they shook hands as if nothing had occurred.

“Are you not coming down to breakfast?”

“Well—you see—I have a good deal to do.” The elder brother’s voice was tremulous, and his anxious eye asked his younger brother what he meant to do.

“They are waiting for you.”

“Oh! There is—is my mother down?”

“Yes, it was she who sent me to fetch you.”

“Ah, very well; then I will come.”

At the door of the dining-room he paused, doubtful about going in first; then he abruptly opened the door and saw his father and mother seated at the table opposite each other.

He went straight up to her without looking at her or saying a word, and bending over her, offered his forehead for her to kiss, as he had done for some time past, instead of kissing her on both cheeks as of old. He supposed that she put her lips near but he did not feel them on his brow, and he straightened himself with a throbbing heart after this feint of a caress. And he wondered:

“What did they say to each other after I had left?”

Jean constantly addressed her tenderly as “mother,” or “dear mother,” took care of her, waited on her, and poured out her wine.

Then Pierre understood that they had wept together, but he could not read their minds. Did Jean believe in his mother’s guilt, or think his brother a base wretch?

And all his self-reproach for having uttered the horrible thing came upon him again, choking his throat and his tongue, and preventing his either eating or speaking.

He was now a prey to an intolerable desire to fly, to leave the house which was his home no longer, and these persons who were bound to him by such imperceptible ties. He would gladly have been off that moment, no matter whither, feeling that everything was over, that he could not endure to stay with them, that his presence was torture to them, and that they would bring on him incessant suffering too great to endure. Jean was talking, chatting with Roland. Pierre, as he did not listen, did not hear. But he presently was aware of a pointed tone in his brother’s voice and paid more attention to his words. Jean was saying:

“She will be the finest ship in their fleet. They say she is of 6,500 tons. She is to make her first trip next month.”

Roland was amazed.

“So soon? I thought she was not to be ready for sea this summer.”

“Yes. The work has been pushed forward very vigorously, to get her through her first voyage before the autumn. I looked in at the Company’s office this morning,

and was talking to one of the directors."

"Indeed! Which of them?"

"M. Marchand, who is a great friend of the Chairman of the Board."

"Oh! Do you know him?"

"Yes. And I wanted to ask him a favour."

"Then you will get me leave to go over every part of the Lorraine as soon as she comes into port?"

"To be sure; nothing could be easier."

Then Jean seemed to hesitate, to be weighing his words, and to want to lead up to a difficult subject. He went on:

"On the whole, life is very endurable on board those great Transatlantic liners. More than half the time is spent on shore in two splendid cities—New York and Havre; and the remainder at sea with delightful company. In fact, very pleasant acquaintances are sometimes made among the passengers, and very useful in after-life—yes, really very useful. Only think, the captain, with his perquisites on coal, can make as much as twenty-five thousand francs a year or more."

Roland muttered an oath followed by a whistle, which testified to his deep respect for the sum and the captain.

Jean went on:

"The purser makes as much as ten thousand, and the doctor has a fixed salary of five thousand, with lodgings, keep, light, firing, service, and everything, which makes it up to ten thousand at least. That is very good pay."

Pierre raising his eyes met his brother's and understood.

Then, after some hesitation, he asked:

"Is it very hard to get a place as medical man on board a Transatlantic liner?"

“Yes—and no. It all depends on circumstances and recommendation.”

There was a long pause; then the doctor began again.

“Next month, you say, the Lorraine is to sail?”

“Yes. On the 7th.”

And they said nothing more.

Pierre was considering. It certainly would be a way out of many difficulties if he could embark as medical officer on board the steamship. By-and-by he could see; he might perhaps give it up. Meanwhile he would be gaining a living, and asking for nothing from his parents. Only two days since he had been forced to sell his watch, for he would no longer hold out his hand to beg of his mother. So he had no other resource left, no opening to enable him to eat the bread of any house but this which had become uninhabitable, or sleep in any other bed, or under any other roof. He presently said, with some little hesitation:

“If I could, I would very gladly sail in her.”

Jean asked:

“What should hinder you?”

“I know no one in the Transatlantic Shipping Company.”

Roland was astounded.

“And what has become of all your fine schemes for getting on?”

Pierre replied in a low voice:

“There are times when we must bring ourselves to sacrifice everything and renounce our fondest hopes. And after all it is only to make a beginning, a way of saving a few thousand francs to start fair with afterward.”

His father was promptly convinced.

“That is very true. In a couple of years you can put by six or seven thousand francs,

and that well laid out, will go a long way. What do you think of the matter, Louise?”

She replied in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible:

“I think Pierre is right.”

Roland exclaimed:

“I will go and talk it over with M. Poulin: I know him very well. He is assessor of the Chamber of Commerce and takes an interest in the affairs of the Company. There is M. Lenient, too, the ship-owner, who is intimate with one of the vice-chairmen.”

Jean asked his brother:

“Would you like me to feel my way with M. Marchand at once?”

“Yes, I should be very glad.”

After thinking a few minutes Pierre added:

“The best thing I can do, perhaps, will be to write to my professors at the college of Medicine, who had a great regard for me. Very inferior men are sometimes shipped on board those vessels. Letters of strong recommendation from such professors as Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flanche, and Borriquel would do more for me in an hour than all the doubtful introductions in the world. It would be enough if your friend M. Marchand would lay them before the board.”

Jean approved heartily.

“Your idea is really capital.” And he smiled, quite reassured, almost happy, sure of success and incapable of allowing himself to be unhappy for long.

“You will write to-day?” he said.

“Directly. Now; at once. I will go and do so. I do not care for any coffee this morning; I am too nervous.”

He rose and left the room.

Then Jean turned to his mother:

“And you, mother, what are you going to do?”

“Nothing. I do not know.”

“Will you come with me to call on Mme. Rosémilly?”

“Why, yes—yes.”

“You know I must positively go to see her to-day.”

“Yes, yes. To be sure.”

“Why must you positively?” asked Roland, whose habit it was never to understand what was said in his presence.

“Because I promised her I would.”

“Oh, very well. That alters the case.” And he began to fill his pipe, while the mother and son went upstairs to make ready.

When they were in the street Jean said:

“Will you take my arm, mother?”

He was never accustomed to offer it, for they were in the habit of walking side by side. She accepted and leaned on him.

For some time they did not speak; then he said:

“You see that Pierre is quite ready and willing to go away.”

She murmured:

“Poor boy!”

“But why ‘poor boy’? He will not be in the least unhappy on board the Lorraine.”

“No—I know. But I was thinking of so many things.”

And she thought for a long time, her head bent, accommodating her step to her son’s; then, in the peculiar voice in which we sometimes give utterance to the conclusion of long and secret meditations, she exclaimed:

“How horrible life is! If by any chance we come across any sweetness in it, we sin in letting ourselves be happy, and pay dearly for it afterward.”

He said in a whisper:

“Do not speak of that any more, mother.”

“Is that possible? I think of nothing else.”

“You will forget it.”

Again she was silent; then with deep regret she said:

“How happy I might have been, married to another man!”

She was visiting it on Roland now, throwing all the responsibility of her sin on his ugliness, his stupidity, his clumsiness, the heaviness of his intellect, and the vulgarity of his person. It was to this that it was owing that she had betrayed him, had driven one son to desperation, and had been forced to utter to the other the most agonizing confession that can make a mother’s heart bleed. She muttered: “It is so frightful for a young girl to have to marry such a husband as mine.”

Jean made no reply. He was thinking of the man he had hitherto believed to be his father; and possibly the vague notion he had long since conceived, of that father’s inferiority, with his brother’s constant irony, the scornful indifference of others, and the very maid-servant’s contempt for Roland, had somewhat prepared his mind for his mother’s terrible avowal. It had all made it less dreadful to him to find that he was another man’s son; and if, after the great shock and agitation of the previous evening, he had not suffered the reaction of rage, indignation, and rebellion which Mme. Roland had feared, it was because he had long been unconsciously chafing under the sense of being the child of this well-meaning lout.

They had now reached the dwelling of Mme. Rosémilly.

She lived on the road to Sainte-Adresse, on the second floor of a large tenement which she owned. The windows commanded a view of the whole roadstead.

On seeing Mme. Roland, who entered first, instead of merely holding out her hands as usual, she put her arms round her and kissed her, for she divined the purpose of her visit.

The furniture of this drawing-room, all in stamped velvet, was always shrouded in chair-covers. The walls, hung with flowered paper, were graced by four engravings, the purchase of her late husband, the captain. They represented sentimental scenes of seafaring life. In the first a fisherman's wife was seen, waving a handkerchief on shore, while the vessel which bore away her husband vanished on the horizon. In the second the same woman, on her knees on the same shore, under a sky shot with lightning, wrung her arms as she gazed into the distance at her husband's boat which was going to the bottom amid impossible waves.

The others represented similar scenes in a higher rank of society. A young lady with fair hair, resting her elbows on the ledge of a large steamship quitting the shore, gazed at the already distant coast with eyes full of tears and regret. Whom is she leaving behind?

Then the same young lady sitting by an open widow with a view of the sea, had fainted in an arm-chair; a letter she had dropped lay at her feet. So he is dead! What despair!

Visitors were generally much moved and charmed by the commonplace pathos of these obvious and sentimental works. They were at once intelligible without question or explanation, and the poor women were to be pitied, though the nature of the grief of the more elegant of the two was not precisely known. But this very doubt contributed to the sentiment. She had, no doubt, lost her lover. On entering the room the eye was immediately attracted to these four pictures, and riveted as if fascinated. If it wandered it was only to return and contemplate the four expressions on the faces of the two women, who were as like each other as two sisters. And the very style of these works, in their shining frames, crisp, sharp, and highly finished,

with the elegance of a fashion plate, suggested a sense of cleanliness and propriety which was confirmed by the rest of the fittings. The seats were always in precisely the same order, some against the wall and some round the circular centre-table. The immaculately white curtains hung in such straight and regular pleats that one longed to crumple them a little; and never did a grain of dust rest on the shade under which the gilt clock, in the taste of the first empire—a terrestrial globe supported by Atlas on his knees—looked like a melon left there to ripen.

The two women as they sat down somewhat altered the normal position of their chairs.

“You have not been out this morning?” asked Mme. Roland.

“No. I must own to being rather tired.”

And she spoke as if in gratitude to Jean and his mother, of all the pleasure she had derived from the expedition and the prawn-fishing.

“I ate my prawns this morning,” she added, “and they were excellent. If you felt inclined we might go again one of these days.”

The young man interrupted her:

“Before we start on a second fishing excursion, suppose we complete the first?”

“Complete it? It seems to me quite finished.”

“Nay, madame, I, for my part, caught something on the rocks of Saint Jouain which I am anxious to carry home with me.”

She put on an innocent and knowing look.

“You? What can it be? What can you have found?”

“A wife. And my mother and I have come to ask you whether she had changed her mind this morning.”

She smiled: “No, monsieur. I never change my mind.”

And then he held out his hand, wide open, and she put hers into it with a quick,

determined movement. Then he said: “As soon as possible, I hope.”

“As soon as you like.”

“In six weeks?”

“I have no opinion. What does my future mother-in-law say?”

Mme. Roland replied with a rather melancholy smile:

“I? Oh, I can say nothing. I can only thank you for having accepted Jean, for you will make him very happy.”

“We will do our best, mamma.”

Somewhat overcome, for the first time, Mme. Rosémilly rose, and throwing her arms round Mme. Roland, kissed her a long time as a child of her own might have done; and under this new embrace the poor woman’s sick heart swelled with deep emotion. She could not have expressed the feeling; it was at once sad and sweet. She had lost her son, her big boy, but in return she had found a daughter, a grown-up daughter.

When they faced each other again, and were seated, they took hands and remained so, looking at each and smiling, while they seemed to have forgotten Jean.

Then they discussed a number of things which had to be thought of in view of an early marriage, and when everything was settled and decided Mme. Rosémilly seemed suddenly to remember a further detail and asked: “You have consulted M. Roland, I suppose?”

A flush of colour mounted at the same instant on the face of both mother and son. It was the mother who replied:

“Oh, no, it is quite unnecessary!” Then she hesitated, feeling that some explanation was needed, and added: “We do everything without saying anything to him. It is enough to tell him what we have decided on.”

Mme. Rosémilly, not in the least surprised, only smiled, taking it as a matter of

course, for the good man counted for so little.

When Mme. Roland was in the street again with her son she said:

“Suppose we go to your rooms for a little while. I should be glad to rest.”

She felt herself homeless, shelterless, her own house being a terror to her.

They went into Jean’s apartments.

As soon as the door was closed upon her she heaved a deep sigh, as if that bolt had placed her in safety, but then, instead of resting as she had said, she began to open the cupboards, to count the piles of linen, the pocket-handkerchiefs, and socks. She changed the arrangement to place them in more harmonious order, more pleasing to her housekeeper’s eye; and when she had put everything to her mind, laying out the towels, the shirts, and the drawers on their several shelves and dividing all the linen into three principal classes, body-linen, household-linen, and table-linen, she drew back and contemplated the results, and called out:

“Come here, Jean, and see how nice it looks.”

He went and admired it to please her.

On a sudden, when he had sat down again, she came softly up behind his arm-chair, and putting her right arm round his neck she kissed him, while she laid on the chimney-shelf a small packet wrapped in white paper which she held in the other hand.

“What is that?” he asked. Then, as she made no reply, he understood, recognising the shape of the frame.

“Give it me!” he said.

She pretended not to hear him, and went back to the linen cupboards. He got up hastily, took the melancholy relic, and going across the room, put it in the drawer of his writing-table, which he locked and double locked. She wiped away a tear with the tip of her finger, and said in a rather quavering voice: “Now I am going to see

whether your new servant keeps the kitchen in good order. As she is out I can look into everything and make sure."

CHAPTER IX

Letters of recommendation from Professors Mas-Roussel, Rémusot, Flache, and Borriquel, written in the most flattering terms with regard to Dr. Pierre Roland, their pupil, had been submitted by M. Marchand to the directors of the Transatlantic Shipping Co., seconded by M. Poulin, judge of the Chamber of Commerce, M. Lenient, a great ship-owner, and Mr. Marival, deputy to the Mayor of Havre, and a particular friend of Captain Beausires's. It proved that no medical officer had yet been appointed to the Lorraine, and Pierre was lucky enough to be nominated within a few days.

The letter announcing it was handed to him one morning by Joséphine, just as he was dressed. His first feeling was that of a man condemned to death who is told that his sentence is commuted; he had an immediate sense of relief at the thought of his early departure and of the peaceful life on board, cradled by the rolling waves, always wandering, always moving. His life under his father's roof was now that of a stranger, silent and reserved. Ever since the evening when he allowed the shameful secret he had discovered to escape him in his brother's presence, he had felt that the last ties to his kindred were broken. He was harassed by remorse for having told this thing to Jean. He felt that it was odious, indecent, and brutal, and yet it was a relief to him to have uttered it.

He never met the eyes either of his mother or his brother; to avoid his gaze theirs had become surprisingly alert, with the cunning of foes who fear to cross each other. He was always wondering: "What can she have said to Jean? Did she confess or deny it? What does my brother believe? What does he think of her—what does he think of me?" He could not guess, and it drove him to frenzy. And he scarcely ever

spoke to them, excepting when Roland was by, to avoid his questioning.

As soon as he received the letter announcing his appointment he showed it at once to his family. His father, who was prone to rejoicing over everything, clapped his hands. Jean spoke seriously, though his heart was full of gladness: “I congratulate you with all my heart, for I know there were several other candidates. You certainly owe it to your professors’ letters.”

His mother bent her head and murmured:

“I am very glad you have been successful.”

After breakfast he went to the Company’s offices to obtain information on various particulars, and he asked the name of the doctor on board the Picardie, which was to sail next day, to inquire of him as to the details of his new life and any details he might think useful.

Dr. Pirette having gone on board, Pierre went to the ship, where he was received in a little state-room by a young man with a fair beard, not unlike his brother. They talked together a long time.

In the hollow depths of the huge ship they could hear a confused and continuous commotion; the noise of bales and cases pitched down into the hold mingling with footsteps, voices, the creaking of the machinery lowering the freight, the boatswain’s whistle, and the clatter of chains dragged or wound on to capstans by the snorting and panting engine which sent a slight vibration from end to end of the great vessel.

But when Pierre had left his colleague and found himself in the street once more, a new form of melancholy came down on him, enveloping him like the fogs which roll over the sea, coming up from the ends of the world and holding in their intangible density something mysteriously impure, as it were the pestilential breath of a far-away, unhealthy land.

In his hours of greatest suffering he had never felt himself so sunk in a foul pit of

misery. It was as though he had given the last wrench; there was no fibre of attachment left. In tearing up the roots of every affection he had not hitherto had the distressful feeling which now came over him, like that of a lost dog. It was no longer a torturing mortal pain, but the frenzy of a forlorn and homeless animal, the physical anguish of a vagabond creature without a roof for shelter, lashed by the rain, the wind, the storm, all the brutal forces of the universe. As he set foot on the vessel, as he went into the cabin rocked by the waves, the very flesh of the man, who had always slept in a motionless and steady bed, had risen up against the insecurity henceforth of all his morrows. Till now that flesh had been protected by a solid wall built into the earth which held it, by the certainty of resting in the same spot, under a roof which could resist the gale. Now all that, which it was a pleasure to defy in the warmth of home, must become a peril and a constant discomfort. No earth under foot, only the greedy, heaving, complaining sea; no space around for walking, running, losing the way, only a few yards of planks to pace like a convict among other prisoners; no trees, no gardens, no streets, no houses; nothing but water and clouds. And the ceaseless motion of the ship beneath his feet. On stormy days he must lean against the wainscot, hold on to the doors, cling to the edge of the narrow berth to save himself from rolling out. On calm days he would hear the snorting throb of the screw, and feel the swift flight of the ship, bearing him on in its unpausing, regular, exasperating race.

And he was condemned to this vagabond convict’s life solely because his mother had yielded to a man’s caresses.

He walked on, his heart sinking with the despairing sorrow of those who are doomed to exile. He no longer felt a haughty disdain and scornful hatred of the strangers he met, but a woeful impulse to speak to them, to tell them all that he had to quit France, to be listened to and comforted. There was in the very depths of his heart the shame-faced need of a beggar who would fain hold out his hand—a timid but urgent need to feel that some one would grieve at his departing.

He thought of Marowsko. The old Pole was the only person who loved him well enough to feel true and keen emotion, and the doctor at once determined to go and see him.

When he entered the shop, the druggist, who was pounding powders in a marble mortar, started and left his work.

“You are never to be seen nowadays,” said he.

Pierre explained that he had had a great many serious matters to attend to, but without giving the reason, and he took a seat, asking:

“Well, and how is business doing?”

Business was not doing at all. Competition was fearful, and rich folks rare in that workmen’s quarter. Nothing would sell but cheap drugs, and the doctors did not prescribe the costlier and more complicated remedies on which a profit is made of five hundred per cent. The old fellow ended by saying: “If this goes on for three months I shall shut up shop. If I did not count on you, dear good doctor, I should have turned shoe-black by this time.”

Pierre felt a pang, and made up his mind to deal the blow at once, since it must be done.

“I—oh, I cannot be of any use to you. I am leaving Havre early next month.”

Marowsko took off his spectacles, so great was his agitation.

“You! You! What are you saying?”

“I say that I am going away, my poor friend.”

The old man was stricken, feeling his last hope slipping from under him, and he suddenly turned against this man, whom he had followed, whom he loved, whom he had so implicitly trusted, and who forsook him thus.

He stammered out:

“You are surely not going to play me false—you?”

Pierre was so deeply touched that he felt inclined to embrace the old fellow.

“I am not playing you false. I have not found anything to do here, and I am going as medical officer on board a Transatlantic passenger boat.”

“O Monsieur Pierre! And you always promised you would help me to make a living!”

“What can I do? I must make my own living. I have not a farthing in the world.”

Marowsko said: “It is wrong; what you are doing is very wrong. There is nothing for me but to die of hunger. At my age this is the end of all things. It is wrong. You are forsaking a poor old man who came here to be with you. It is wrong.”

Pierre tried to explain, to protest, to give reasons, to prove that he could not have done otherwise; the Pole, enraged by his desertion, would not listen to him, and he ended by saying, with an allusion no doubt to political events:

“You French—you never keep your word!”

At this Pierre rose, offended on his part, and taking rather a high tone he said:

“You are unjust, père Marowsko; a man must have very strong motives to act as I have done and you ought to understand that. Au revoir—I hope I may find you more reasonable.” And he went away.

“Well, well,” he thought, “not a soul will feel a sincere regret for me.”

His mind sought through all the people he knew or had known, and among the faces which crossed his memory he saw that of the girl at the tavern who had led him to doubt his mother.

He hesitated, having still an instinctive grudge against her, then suddenly reflected on the other hand: “After all, she was right.” And he looked about him to find the turning.

The beer-shop, as it happened, was full of people, and also full of smoke. The customers, tradesmen, and labourers, for it was a holiday, were shouting, calling,

laughing, and the master himself was waiting on them, running from table to table, carrying away empty glasses and returning them crowned with froth.

When Pierre had found a seat not far from the desk he waited, hoping that the girl would see him and recognise him. But she passed him again and again as she went to and fro, pattering her feet under her skirts with a smart little strut. At last he rapped a coin on the table, and she hurried up.

“What will you take, sir?”

She did not look at him; her mind was absorbed in calculations of the liquor she had served.

“Well,” said he, “this is a pretty way of greeting a friend.”

She fixed her eyes on his face. “Ah!” said she hurriedly. “Is it you? You are pretty well? But I have not a minute to-day. A bock did you wish for?”

“Yes, a bock!”

When she brought it he said:

“I have come to say good-bye. I am going away.”

And she replied indifferently:

“Indeed. Where are you going?”

“To America.”

“A very fine country, they say.”

And that was all!

Really, he was very ill-advised to address her on such a busy day; there were too many people in the café.

Pierre went down to the sea. As he reached the jetty he descried the Pearl; his father and Beausire were coming in. Papagris was pulling, and the two men, seated in the stern, smoked their pipes with a look of perfect happiness. As they went past the

doctor said to himself: “Blessed are the simple-minded!” And he sat down on one of the benches on the breakwater, to try to lull himself in animal drowsiness.

When he went home in the evening his mother said, without daring to lift her eyes to his face:

“You will want a heap of things to take with you. I have ordered your under-linen, and I went into the tailor’s shop about cloth clothes; but is there nothing else you need—things which I, perhaps, know nothing about?”

His lips parted to say, “No, nothing.” But he reflected that he must accept the means of getting a decent outfit, and he replied in a very calm voice: “I hardly know myself, yet. I will make inquiries at the office.”

He inquired, and they gave him a list of indispensable necessaries. His mother, as she took it from his hand, looked up at him for the first time for very long, and in the depths of her eyes there was the humble expression, gentle, sad, and beseeching, of a dog that has been beaten and begs forgiveness.

On the 1st of October the Lorraine from Saint-Nazaire, came into the harbour of Havre to sail on the 7th, bound for New York, and Pierre Roland was to take possession of the little floating cabin in which henceforth his life was to be confined.

Next day as he was going out, he met his mother on the stairs waiting for him, to murmur in an almost inaudible voice:

“You would not like me to help you to put things to rights on board?”

“No, thank you. Everything is done.”

Then she said:

“I should have liked to see your cabin.”

“There is nothing to see. It is very small and very ugly.”

And he went downstairs, leaving her stricken, leaning against the wall with a wan face.

Now Roland, who had gone over the Lorraine that very day, could talk of nothing all dinnertime but this splendid vessel, and wondered that his wife should not care to see it as their son was to sail on board.

Pierre had scarcely any intercourse with his family during the days which followed. He was nervous, irritable, hard, and his rough speech seemed to lash every one indiscriminately. But the day before he left he was suddenly quite changed, and much softened. As he embraced his parents before going to sleep on board for the first time he said:

“You will come to say good-bye to me on board, will you not?”

Roland exclaimed:

“Why, yes, of course—of course, Louise?”

“Certainly, certainly,” she said in a low voice.

Pierre went on: “We sail at eleven precisely. You must be there by half-past nine at the latest.”

“Hah!” cried his father. “A good idea! As soon as we have bid you good-bye, we will make haste on board the Pearl, and look out for you beyond the jetty, so as to see you once more. What do you say, Louise?”

“Certainly.”

Roland went on: “And in that way you will not lose sight of us among the crowd which throngs the breakwater when the great liners sail. It is impossible to distinguish your own friends in the mob. Does that meet your views?”

“Yes, to be sure; that is settled.”

An hour later he was lying in his berth—a little crib as long and narrow as a coffin. There he remained with his eyes wide open for a long time, thinking over all that had happened during the last two months of his life, especially in his own soul. By dint of suffering and making others suffer, his aggressive and revengeful anguish

had lost its edge, like a blunted sword. He scarcely had the heart left in him to owe any one or anything a grudge; he let his rebellious wrath float away down stream, as his life must. He was so weary of wrestling, weary of fighting, weary of hating, weary of everything, that he was quite worn out, and tried to stupefy his heart with forgetfulness as he dropped asleep. He heard vaguely, all about him, the unwonted noises of the ship, slight noises, and scarcely audible on this calm night in port; and he felt no more of the dreadful wound which had tortured him hitherto, but the discomfort and strain of its healing.

He had been sleeping soundly when the stir of the crew roused him. It was day; the tidal train had come down to the pier bringing the passengers from Paris. Then he wandered about the vessel among all these busy, bustling folks inquiring for their cabins, questioning and answering each other at random, in the scare and fuss of a voyage already begun. After greeting the Captain and shaking hands with his comrade the purser, he went into the saloon where some Englishmen were already asleep in the corners. The large low room, with its white marble panels framed in gilt beading, was furnished with looking-glasses, which prolonged, in endless perspective, the long tables, flanked by pivot-seats covered with red velvet. It was fit, indeed, to be the vast floating cosmopolitan dining-hall, where the rich natives of two continents might eat in common. Its magnificent luxury was that of great hotels, and theatres, and public rooms; the imposing and commonplace luxury which appeals to the eye of the millionaire.

The doctor was on the point of turning into the second-class saloon, when he remembered that a large cargo of emigrants had come on board the night before, and he went down to the lower deck. He was met by a sickening smell of dirty, poverty-stricken humanity, an atmosphere of naked flesh (far more revolting than the odour of fur or the skin of wild beasts). There, in a sort of basement, low and dark, like a gallery in a mine, Pierre could discern some hundreds of men, women, and children, stretched on shelves fixed one above another, or lying on the floor in

heaps. He could not see their faces, but could dimly make out this squalid, ragged crowd of wretches, beaten in the struggle for life, worn out and crushed, setting forth, each with a starving wife and weakly children, for an unknown land where they hoped, perhaps, not to die of hunger. And as he thought of their past labour—wasted labour, and barren effort—of the mortal struggle taken up afresh and in vain each day, of the energy expended by this tattered crew who were going to begin again, not knowing where, this life of hideous misery, he longed to cry out to them:

"Tumble yourselves overboard, rather, with your women and your little ones." And his heart ached so with pity that he went away unable to endure the sight.

He found his father, his mother, Jean, and Mme. Rosémilly waiting for him in his cabin.

"So early!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mme. Roland in a trembling voice. "We wanted to have a little time to see you."

He looked at her. She was dressed all in black as if she were in mourning, and he noticed that her hair, which only a month ago had been gray, was now almost white. It was very difficult to find space for four persons to sit down in the little room, and he himself got on to his bed. The door was left open, and they could see a great crowd hurrying by, as if it were a street on a holiday, for all the friends of the passengers and a host of inquisitive visitors had invaded the huge vessel. They pervaded the passages, the saloons, every corner of the ship; and heads peered in at the doorway while a voice murmured outside: "That is the doctor's cabin."

Then Pierre shut the door; but no sooner was he shut in with his own party than he longed to open it again, for the bustle outside covered their agitation and want of words.

Mme. Rosémilly at last felt she must speak.

“Very little air comes in through those little windows.”

“Port-holes,” said Pierre. He showed her how thick the glass was, to enable it to resist the most violent shocks, and took a long time explaining the fastening. Roland presently asked: “And you have your doctor’s shop here?”

The doctor opened a cupboard and displayed an array of phials ticketed with Latin names on white paper labels. He took one out and enumerated the properties of its contents; then a second and a third, a perfect lecture on therapeutics, to which they all listened with great attention. Roland, shaking his head, said again and again: “How very interesting!” There was a tap at the door.

“Come in,” said Pierre, and Captain Beausire appeared.

“I am late,” he said as he shook hands, “I did not want to be in the way.” He, too, sat down on the bed and silence fell once more.

Suddenly the Captain pricked his ears. He could hear the orders being given, and he said:

“It is time for us to be off if we mean to get on board the Pearl to see you once more outside, and bid you good-bye out on the open sea.”

Old Roland was very eager about this, to impress the voyagers on board the Lorraine, no doubt, and he rose in haste.

“Good-bye, my boy.” He kissed Pierre on the whiskers and then opened the door.

Mme. Roland had not stirred, but sat with downcast eyes, very pale. Her husband touched her arm.

“Come,” he said, “we must make haste, we have not a minute to spare.”

She pulled herself up, went to her son and offered him first one and then another cheek of white wax which he kissed without saying a word. Then he shook hands with Mme. Rosémilly and his brother, asking:

“And when is the wedding to be?”

“I do not know yet exactly. We will make it fit in with one of your return voyages.”

At last they were all out of the cabin, and up on deck among the crowd of visitors, porters, and sailors. The steam was snorting in the huge belly of the vessel, which seemed to quiver with impatience.

“Good-bye,” said Roland in a great bustle.

“Good-bye,” replied Pierre, standing on one of the landing-planks lying between the deck of the Lorraine and the quay. He shook hands all round once more, and they were gone.

“Make haste, jump into the carriage,” cried the father.

A fly was waiting for them and took them to the outer harbour, where Papagris had the Pearl in readiness to put out to sea.

There was not a breath of air; it was one of those crisp, still autumn days, when the sheeny sea looks as cold and hard as polished steel.

Jean took one oar, the sailor seized the other and they pulled off. On the breakwater, on the piers, even on the granite parapets, a crowd stood packed, hustling, and noisy, to see the Lorraine come out. The Pearl glided down between these two waves of humanity and was soon outside the mole.

Captain Beausire, seated between the two women, held the tiller, and he said:

“You will see, we shall be close in her way—close.”

And the two oarsmen pulled with all their might to get out as far as possible. Suddenly Roland cried out:

“Here she comes! I see her masts and her two funnels! She is coming out of the inner harbour.”

“Cheerily, lads!” cried Beausire.

Mme. Roland took out her handkerchief and held it to her eyes.

Roland stood up, clinging to the mast, and answered:

“At this moment she is working round in the outer harbour. She is standing still—now she moves again! She is taking the tow-rope on board no doubt. There she goes. Bravo! She is between the piers! Do you hear the crowd shouting? Bravo! The Neptune has her in tow. Now I see her bows—here she comes—here she is! Gracious Heavens, what a ship! Look! Look!”

Mme. Rosémilly and Beausire looked behind them, the oarsmen ceased pulling; only Mme. Roland did not stir.

The immense steamship, towed by a powerful tug, which, in front of her, looked like a caterpillar, came slowly and majestically out of the harbour. And the good people of Havre, who crowded the piers, the beach, and the windows, carried away by a burst of patriotic enthusiasm, cried: “Vive la Lorraine!” with acclamations and applause for this magnificent beginning, this birth of the beautiful daughter given to the sea by the great maritime town.

She, as soon as she had passed beyond the narrow channel between the two granite walls, feeling herself free at last, cast off the tow-ropes and went off alone, like a monstrous creature walking on the waters.

“Here she is—here she comes, straight down on us!” Roland kept shouting; and Beausire, beaming, exclaimed: “What did I promise you! Heh! Do I know the way?”

Jean in a low tone said to his mother: “Look, mother, she is close upon us!” And Mme. Roland uncovered her eyes, blinded with tears.

The Lorraine came on, still under the impetus of her swift exit from the harbour, in the brilliant, calm weather. Beausire, with his glass to his eye, called out:

“Look out! M. Pierre is at the stern, all alone, plainly to be seen! Look out!”

The ship was almost touching the Pearl now, as tall as a mountain and as swift as a train. Mme. Roland, distraught and desperate, held out her arms towards it; and she saw her son, her Pierre, with his officer’s cap on, throwing kisses to her with both hands.

But he was going away, flying, vanishing, a tiny speck already, no more than an imperceptible spot on the enormous vessel. She tried still to distinguish him, but she could not.

Jean took her hand.

“You saw?” he said.

“Yes, I saw. How good he is!”

And they turned to go home.

“Cristi! How fast she goes!” exclaimed Roland with enthusiastic conviction.

The steamer, in fact, was shrinking every second, as though she were melting away in the ocean. Mme. Roland, turning back to look at her, watched her disappearing on the horizon, on her way to an unknown land at the other side of the world.

In that vessel which nothing could stay, that vessel which she soon would see no more, was her son, her poor son. And she felt as though half her heart had gone with him; she felt, too, as if her life were ended; yes, and she felt as though she would never see the child again.

“Why are you crying?” asked her husband, “when you know he will be back again within a month.”

She stammered out: “I don’t know; I cry because I am hurt.”

When they had landed, Beausire at once took leave of them to go to breakfast with a friend. Then Jean led the way with Mme. Rosémilly, and Roland said to his wife:

“A very fine fellow, all the same, is our Jean.”

“Yes,” replied the mother.

And her mind being too much bewildered to think of what she was saying, she went on:

“I am very glad that he is to marry Mme. Rosémilly.”

The worthy man was astounded.

“Heh? What? He is to marry Mme. Rosémilly?”

“Yes, we meant to ask your opinion about it this very day.”

“Bless me! And has this engagement been long in the wind?”

“Oh, no, only a very few days. Jean wished to make sure that she would accept him before consulting you.”

Roland rubbed his hands.

“Very good. Very good. It is capital. I entirely approve.”

As they were about to turn off from the quay down the Boulevard François, his wife once more looked back to cast a last look at the high seas, but she could see nothing now but a puff of gray smoke, so far away, so faint that it looked like a film of haze.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIERRE AND JEAN ***

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