The Red Lily

by Anatole France

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Title: The Red Lily — Complete

Author: Anatole France

Release date: October 30, 2004 [eBook #3922] Most recently updated: January 27, 2021

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3922

Credits: Produced by David Widger

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THE RED LILY

By Anatole France

The real name of the subject of this preface is Jacques-Anatole Thibault. He was

born in Paris, April 16, 1844, the son of a bookseller of the Quai Malaquais, in the shadow of the Institute. He was educated at the College Stanislas and published in 1868 an essay upon Alfred de Vigny. This was followed by two volumes of poetry: ‘Les Poemes Dores’ (1873), and ‘Les Noces Corinthiennes’ (1876). With the last mentioned book his reputation became established.

Anatole France belongs to the class of poets known as “Les Parnassiens.” Yet a book like ‘Les Noces Corinthiennes’ ought to be classified among a group of earlier lyrics, inasmuch as it shows to a large degree the influence of Andre Chenier and Alfred de Vigny. France was, and is, also a diligent contributor to many journals and reviews, among others, ‘Le Globe, Les Debats, Le Journal Officiel, L’Echo de Paris, La Revue de Famille, and Le Temps’. On the last mentioned journal he succeeded Jules Claretie. He is likewise Librarian to the Senate, and has been a member of the French Academy since 1896.

The above mentioned two volumes of poetry were followed by many works in prose, which we shall notice. France’s critical writings are collected in four volumes, under the title, ‘La Vie Litteraire’ (1888-1892); his political articles in ‘Opinions Sociales’ (2 vols., 1902). He combines in his style traces of Racine, Voltaire, Flaubert, and Renan, and, indeed, some of his novels, especially ‘Thais’ (1890), ‘Jerome Coignard’ (1893), and Lys Rouge (1894), which was crowned by the Academy, are romances of the first rank.

Criticism appears to Anatole France the most recent and possibly the ultimate evolution of literary expression, “admirably suited to a highly civilized society, rich in souvenirs and old traditions.... It proceeds,” in his opinion, “from philosophy and history, and demands for its development an absolute intellectual liberty..... It is the last in date of all literary forms, and it will end by absorbing them all .... To be perfectly frank the critic should say: ‘Gentlemen, I propose to enlarge upon my own thoughts concerning Shakespeare, Racine, Pascal, Goethe, or any other writer.’”

It is hardly necessary to say much concerning a critic with such pronounced ideas as Anatole France. He gives us, indeed, the full flower of critical Renanism, but so individualized as to become perfection in grace, the extreme flowering of the Latin genius. It is not too much to say that the critical writings of Anatole France recall the Causeries du Lundi, the golden age of Sainte-Beuve!

As a writer of fiction, Anatole France made his debut in 1879 with ‘Jocaste’, and ‘Le Chat Maigre’. Success in this field was yet decidedly doubtful when ‘Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard’ appeared in 1881. It at once established his reputation; ‘Sylvestre Bonnard’, as ‘Le Lys Rouge’ later, was crowned by the French Academy. These novels are replete with fine irony, benevolent scepticism and piquant turns, and will survive the greater part of romances now read in France. The list of Anatole France’s works in fiction is a large one. The titles of nearly all of them, arranged in chronological order, are as follows: ‘Les Desirs de Jean Seyvien (1882); Abeille (1883); Le Livre de mon Ami (1885); Nos Enfants (1886); Balthazar (1889); Thais (1890); L’Etui de Naire (1892); Jerome Coignard, and La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedanque (1893); and Histoire Contemporaine (1897-1900), the latter consisting of four separate works: ‘L’Orme du Mail, Le Mannequin d’Osier, L’Anneau d’Amethyste, and Monsieur Bergeret a Paris’. All of his writings show his delicately critical analysis of passion, at first playfully tender in its irony, but later, under the influence of his critical antagonism to Brunetiere, growing keener, stronger, and more bitter. In ‘Thais’ he has undertaken to show the bond of sympathy that unites the pessimistic sceptic to the Christian ascetic, since both despise the world. In ‘Lys Rouge’, his greatest novel, he traces the perilously narrow line that separates love from hate; in ‘Opinions de M. l’Abbe Jerome Coignard’ he has given us the most radical breviary of scepticism that has appeared since Montaigne. ‘Le Livre de mon Ami’ is mostly autobiographical; ‘Clio’ (1900) contains historical sketches.

To represent Anatole France as one of the undying names in literature would hardly be extravagant. Not that I would endow Ariel with the stature and sinews of a Titan;

this were to miss his distinctive qualities: delicacy, elegance, charm. He belongs to a category of writers who are more read and probably will ever exercise greater influence than some of greater name. The latter show us life as a whole; but life as a whole is too vast and too remote to excite in most of us more than a somewhat languid curiosity. France confines himself to themes of the keenest personal interest, the life of the world we live in. It is herein that he excels! His knowledge is wide, his sympathies are many-sided, his power of exposition is unsurpassed. No one has set before us the mind of our time, with its half-lights, its shadowy vistas, its indefiniteness, its haze on the horizon, so vividly as he.

In Octave Mirbeau's notorious novel, a novel which it would be complimentary to describe as naturalistic, the heroine is warned by her director against the works of Anatole France, "Ne lisez jamais du Voltaire... C'est un peche mortel... ni de Renan... ni de l'Anatole France. Voila qui est dangereux." The names are appropriately united; a real, if not precisely an apostolic, succession exists between the three writers.

JULES LEMAITRE de l'Academie Francais

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BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I. "I NEED LOVE"

She gave a glance at the armchairs placed before the chimney, at the tea-table, which shone in the shade, and at the tall, pale stems of flowers ascending above Chinese vases. She thrust her hand among the flowery branches of the guelder roses to make

their silvery balls quiver. Then she looked at herself in a mirror with serious attention. She held herself sidewise, her neck turned over her shoulder, to follow with her eyes the spring of her fine form in its sheath-like black satin gown, around which floated a light tunic studded with pearls wherein sombre lights scintillated. She went nearer, curious to know her face of that day. The mirror returned her look with tranquillity, as if this amiable woman whom she examined, and who was not unpleasing to her, lived without either acute joy or profound sadness.

On the walls of the large drawing-room, empty and silent, the figures of the tapestries, vague as shadows, showed pallid among their antique games and dying graces. Like them, the terra-cotta statuettes on slender columns, the groups of old Saxony, and the paintings of Sevres, spoke of past glories. On a pedestal ornamented with precious bronzes, the marble bust of some princess royal disguised as Diana appeared about to fly out of her turbulent drapery, while on the ceiling a figure of Night, powdered like a marquise and surrounded by cupids, sowed flowers. Everything was asleep, and only the crackling of the logs and the light rattle of Therese's pearls could be heard.

Turning from the mirror, she lifted the corner of a curtain and saw through the window, beyond the dark trees of the quay, the Seine spreading its yellow reflections. Weariness of the sky and of the water was reflected in her fine gray eyes. The boat passed, the 'Hirondelle', emerging from an arch of the Alma Bridge, and carrying humble travellers toward Grenelle and Billancourt. She followed it with her eyes, then let the curtain fall, and, seating herself under the flowers, took a book from the table. On the straw-colored linen cover shone the title in gold: 'Yseult la Blonde', by Vivian Bell. It was a collection of French verses composed by an Englishwoman, and printed in London. She read indifferently, waiting for visitors, and thinking less of the poetry than of the poetess, Miss Bell, who was perhaps her most agreeable friend, and whom she almost never saw; who, at every one of their meetings, which were so rare, kissed her, calling her "darling," and babbled; who,

plain yet seductive, almost ridiculous, yet wholly exquisite, lived at Fiesole like a philosopher, while England celebrated her as her most beloved poet. Like Vernon Lee and like Mary Robinson, she had fallen in love with the life and art of Tuscany; and, without even finishing her Tristan, the first part of which had inspired in Burne-Jones dreamy aquarelles, she wrote Provencal verses and French poems expressing Italian ideas. She had sent her 'Yseult la Blonde' to "Darling," with a letter inviting her to spend a month with her at Fiesole. She had written: "Come; you will see the most beautiful things in the world, and you will embellish them."

And "darling" was saying to herself that she would not go, that she must remain in Paris. But the idea of seeing Miss Bell in Italy was not indifferent to her. And turning the leaves of the book, she stopped by chance at this line:

Love and gentle heart are one.

And she asked herself, with gentle irony, whether Miss Bell had ever been in love, and what manner of man could be the ideal of Miss Bell. The poetess had at Fiesole an escort, Prince Albertinelli. He was very handsome, but rather coarse and vulgar; too much so to please an aesthete who blended with the desire for love the mysticism of an Annunciation.

"Good-evening, Therese. I am positively worn out."

The Princess Seniavine had entered, supple in her furs, which almost seemed to form a part of her dark beauty. She seated herself brusquely, and, in a voice at once harsh yet caressing, said:

"This morning I walked through the park with General Lariviere. I met him in an alley and made him go with me to the bridge, where he wished to buy from the guardian a learned magpie which performs the manual of arms with a gun. Oh! I am so tired!"

"But why did you drag the General to the bridge?"

"Because he had gout in his toe."

Therese shrugged her shoulders, smiling:

“You squander your wickedness. You spoil things.”

“And you wish me, dear, to save my kindness and my wickedness for a serious investment?”

Therese made her drink some Tokay.

Preceded by the sound of his powerful breathing, General Lariviere approached with heavy state and sat between the two women, looking stubborn and self-satisfied, laughing in every wrinkle of his face.

“How is Monsieur Martin-Belleme? Always busy?”

Therese thought he was at the Chamber, and even that he was making a speech there.

Princess Seniavine, who was eating caviare sandwiches, asked Madame Martin why she had not gone to Madame Meillan’s the day before. They had played a comedy there.

“A Scandinavian play? Was it a success?”

“Yes—I don’t know. I was in the little green room, under the portrait of the Duc d’Orleans. Monsieur Le Menil came to me and did me one of those good turns that one never forgets. He saved me from Monsieur Garain.”

The General, who knew the Annual Register, and stored away all useful information, pricked up his ears.

“Garain,” he asked, “the minister who was in the Cabinet when the princes were exiled?”

“Himself. I was excessively agreeable to him. He talked to me of the yearnings of his heart and he looked at me with alarming tenderness. And from time to time he gazed, with sighs, at the portrait of the Duc d’Orleans. I said to him: ‘Monsieur Garain, you are making a mistake. It is my sister-in-law who is an Orleanist. I am

not.’ At this moment Monsieur Le Menil came to escort me to the buffet. He paid great compliments—to my horses! He said, also, there was nothing so beautiful as the forest in winter. He talked about wolves. That refreshed me.”

The General, who did not like young men, said he had met Le Menil the day before in the forest, galloping, with vast space between himself and his saddle.

He declared that old cavaliers alone retained the traditions of good horsemanship; that people in society now rode like jockeys.

“It is the same with fencing,” he added. “Formerly—”

Princess Seniavine interrupted him:

“General, look and see how charming Madame Martin is. She is always charming, but at this moment she is prettier than ever. It is because she is bored. Nothing becomes her better than to be bored. Since we have been here, we have bored her terribly. Look at her: her forehead clouded, her glance vague, her mouth dolorous. Behold a victim!”

She arose, kissed Therese tumultuously, and fled, leaving the General astonished.

Madame Martin-Belleme prayed him not to listen to what the Princess had said.

He collected himself and asked:

“And how are your poets, Madame?”

It was difficult for him to forgive Madame Martin her preference for people who lived by writing and were not of his circle.

“Yes, your poets. What has become of that Monsieur Choulette, who visits you wrapped in a red muffler?”

“My poets? They forget me, they abandon me. One should not rely on anybody. Men and women—nothing is sure. Life is a continual betrayal. Only that poor Miss Bell does not forget me. She has written to me from Florence and sent her book.”

“Miss Bell? Isn’t she that young person who looks, with her yellow waving hair, like

a little lapdog?”

He reflected, and expressed the opinion that she must be at least thirty.

An old lady, wearing with modest dignity her crown of white hair, and a little vivacious man with shrewd eyes, came in suddenly—Madame Marmet and M. Paul Vence. Then, carrying himself very stiffly, with a square monocle in his eye, appeared M. Daniel Salomon, the arbiter of elegance. The General hurried out.

They talked of the novel of the week. Madame Marmet had dined often with the author, a young and very amiable man. Paul Vence thought the book tiresome.

“Oh,” sighed Madame Martin, “all books are tiresome. But men are more tiresome than books, and they are more exacting.”

Madame Marmet said that her husband, who had much literary taste, had retained, until the end of his days, a horror of naturalism. She was the widow of a member of the ‘Academie des Inscriptions’, and plumed herself upon her illustrious widowhood. She was sweet and modest in her black gown and her beautiful white hair.

Madame Martin said to M. Daniel Salomon that she wished to consult him particularly on the picture of a group of beautiful children.

“You will tell me if it pleases you. You may also give me your opinion, Monsieur Vence, unless you disdain such trifles.”

M. Daniel Salomon looked at Paul Vence through his monocle with disdain. Paul Vence surveyed the drawing-room.

“You have beautiful things, Madame. That would be nothing. But you have only beautiful things, and all serve to set off your own beauty.”

She did not conceal her pleasure at hearing him speak in that way. She regarded Paul Vence as the only really intelligent man she knew. She had appreciated him before his books had made him celebrated. His ill-health, his dark humor, his assiduous

labor, separated him from society. The little bilious man was not very pleasing; yet he attracted her. She held in high esteem his profound irony, his great pride, his talent ripened in solitude, and she admired him, with reason, as an excellent writer, the author of powerful essays on art and on life.

Little by little the room filled with a brilliant crowd. Within the large circle of armchairs were Madame de Wesson, about whom people told frightful stories, and who kept, after twenty years of half-smothered scandal, the eyes of a child and cheeks of virginal smoothness; old Madame de Morlaine, who shouted her witty phrases in piercing cries; Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician; Madame Garain, the wife of the exminister; three other ladies; and, standing easily against the mantelpiece, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, editor of the 'Journal des Debats', a deputy who caressed his white beard while Madame de Morlaine shouted at him:

"Your article on bimetallism is a pearl, a jewel! Especially the end of it."

Standing in the rear of the room, young clubmen, very grave, lisped among themselves:

"What did he do to get the button from the Prince?"

"He, nothing. His wife, everything."

They had their own cynical philosophy. One of them had no faith in promises of men.

"They are types that do not suit me. They wear their hearts on their hands and on their mouths. You present yourself for admission to a club. They say, 'I promise to give you a white ball. It will be an alabaster ball—a snowball! They vote. It's a black ball. Life seems a vile affair when I think of it."

"Then don't think of it."

Daniel Salomon, who had joined them, whispered in their ears spicy stories in a lowered voice. And at every strange revelation concerning Madame Raymond, or

Madame Berthier, or Princess Seniavine, he added, negligently:

“Everybody knows it.”

Then, little by little, the crowd of visitors dispersed. Only Madame Marmet and Paul Vence remained.

The latter went toward Madame Martin, and asked:

“When do you wish me to introduce Dechartre to you?”

It was the second time he had asked this of her. She did not like to see new faces. She replied, unconcernedly:

“Your sculptor? When you wish. I saw at the Champ de Mars medallions made by him which are very good. But he does not work much. He is an amateur, is he not?”

“He is a delicate artist. He does not need to work in order to live. He caresses his figures with loving slowness. But do not be deceived about him, Madame. He knows and he feels. He would be a master if he did not live alone. I have known him since his childhood. People think that he is solitary and morose. He is passionate and timid. What he lacks, what he will lack always to reach the highest point of his art, is simplicity of mind. He is restless, and he spoils his most beautiful impressions. In my opinion he was created less for sculpture than for poetry or philosophy. He knows a great deal, and you will be astonished at the wealth of his mind.”

Madame Marmet approved.

She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it. She listened a great deal and talked little. Very affable, she gave value to her affability by not squandering it. Either because she liked Madame Martin, or because she knew how to give discreet marks of preference in every house she went, she warmed herself contentedly, like a relative, in a corner of the Louis XVI chimney, which suited her beauty. She lacked only her dog.

“How is Toby?” asked Madame Martin. “Monsieur Vence, do you know Toby? He

has long silky hair and a lovely little black nose."

Madame Marmet was relishing the praise of Toby, when an old man, pink and blond, with curly hair, short-sighted, almost blind under his golden spectacles, rather short, striking against the furniture, bowing to empty armchairs, blundering into the mirrors, pushed his crooked nose before Madame Marmet, who looked at him indignantly.

It was M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions. He smiled and turned a madrigal for the Countess Martin with that hereditary harsh, coarse voice with which the Jews, his fathers, pressed their creditors, the peasants of Alsace, of Poland, and of the Crimea. He dragged his phrases heavily. This great philologist knew all languages except French. And Madame Martin enjoyed his affable phrases, heavy and rusty like the iron-work of brica-brac shops, among which fell dried leaves of anthology. M. Schmoll liked poets and women, and had wit.

Madame Marmet feigned not to know him, and went out without returning his bow.

When he had exhausted his pretty madrigals, M. Schmoll became sombre and pitiful. He complained piteously. He was not decorated enough, not provided with sinecures enough, nor well fed enough by the State—he, Madame Schmoll, and their five daughters. His lamentations had some grandeur. Something of the soul of Ezekiel and of Jeremiah was in them.

Unfortunately, turning his golden-spectacled eyes toward the table, he discovered Vivian Bell's book.

"Oh, 'Yseult La Blonde'," he exclaimed, bitterly. "You are reading that book, Madame? Well, learn that Mademoiselle Vivian Bell has stolen an inscription from me, and that she has altered it, moreover, by putting it into verse. You will find it on page 109 of her book: 'A shade may weep over a shade.' You hear, Madame? 'A shade may weep over a shade.' Well, those words are translated literally from a funeral inscription which I was the first to publish and to illustrate. Last year, one

day, when I was dining at your house, being placed by the side of Mademoiselle Bell, I quoted this phrase to her, and it pleased her a great deal. At her request, the next day I translated into French the entire inscription and sent it to her. And now I find it changed in this volume of verses under this title: ‘On the Sacred Way’—the sacred way, that is I.”

And he repeated, in his bad humor:

“I, Madame, am the sacred way.”

He was annoyed that the poet had not spoken to him about this inscription. He would have liked to see his name at the top of the poem, in the verses, in the rhymes. He wished to see his name everywhere, and always looked for it in the journals with which his pockets were stuffed. But he had no rancor. He was not really angry with Miss Bell. He admitted gracefully that she was a distinguished person, and a poet that did great honor to England.

When he had gone, the Countess Martin asked ingenuously of Paul Vence if he knew why that good Madame Marmet had looked at M. Schmoll with such marked though silent anger. He was surprised that she did not know.

“I never know anything,” she said.

“But the quarrel between Schmoll and Marmet is famous. It ceased only at the death of Marmet.

“The day that poor Marmet was buried, snow was falling. We were wet and frozen to the bones. At the grave, in the wind, in the mud, Schmoll read under his umbrella a speech full of jovial cruelty and triumphant pity, which he took afterward to the newspapers in a mourning carriage. An indiscreet friend let Madame Marmet hear of it, and she fainted. Is it possible, Madame, that you have not heard of this learned and ferocious quarrel?

“The Etruscan language was the cause of it. Marmet made it his unique study. He was surnamed Marmet the Etruscan. Neither he nor any one else knew a word of

that language, the last vestige of which is lost. Schmoll said continually to Marmet: ‘You do not know Etruscan, my dear colleague; that is the reason why you are an honorable savant and a fair-minded man.’ Piqued by his ironic praise, Marmet thought of learning a little Etruscan. He read to his colleague a memoir on the part played by flexions in the idiom of the ancient Tuscans.”

Madame Martin asked what a flexion was.

“Oh, Madame, if I explain anything to you, it will mix up everything. Be content with knowing that in that memoir poor Marmet quoted Latin texts and quoted them wrong. Schmoll is a Latinist of great learning, and, after Mommsen, the chief epigraphist of the world.

“He reproached his young colleague—Marmet was not fifty years old—with reading Etruscan too well and Latin not well enough. From that time Marmet had no rest. At every meeting he was mocked unmercifully; and, finally, in spite of his softness, he got angry. Schmoll is without rancor. It is a virtue of his race. He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes. One day, as he went up the stairway of the Institute with Renan and Oppert, he met Marmet, and extended his hand to him. Marmet refused to take it, and said ‘I do not know you.’—‘Do you take me for a Latin inscription?’ Schmoll replied. Marmet died and was buried because of that satire. Now you know the reason why his widow sees his enemy with horror.”

“And I have made them dine together, side by side.”

“Madame, it was not immoral, but it was cruel.”

“My dear sir, I shall shock you, perhaps; but if I had to choose, I should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one.”

A young man, tall, thin, dark, with a long moustache, entered, and bowed with brusque suppleness.

“Monsieur Vence, I think that you know Monsieur Le Menil.”

They had met before at Madame Martin's, and saw each other often at the Fencing Club. The day before they had met at Madame Meillan's.

"Madame Meillan's—there's a house where one is bored," said Paul Vence.

"Yet Academicians go there," said M. Robert Le Menil. "I do not exaggerate their value, but they are the elite."

Madame Martin smiled.

"We know, Monsieur Le Menil, that at Madame Meillan's you are preoccupied by the women more than by the Academicians. You escorted Princess Seniavine to the buffet and talked to her about wolves."

"What wolves?"

"Wolves, and forests blackened by winter. We thought that with so pretty a woman your conversation was rather savage!"

Paul Vence rose.

"So you permit, Madame, that I should bring my friend Dechartre? He has a great desire to know you, and I hope he will not displease you. There is life in his mind. He is full of ideas."

"Oh, I do not ask for so much," Madame Martin said. "People that are natural and show themselves as they are rarely bore me, and sometimes they amuse me."

When Paul Vence had gone, Le Menil listened until the noise of footsteps had vanished; then, coming nearer:

"To-morrow, at three o'clock? Do you still love me?"

He asked her to reply while they were alone. She answered that it was late, that she expected no more visitors, and that no one except her husband would come.

He entreated. Then she said:

"I shall be free to-morrow all day. Wait for me at three o'clock."

He thanked her with a look. Then, placing himself on at the other side of the chimney, he asked who was that Dechartre whom she wished introduced to her.

“I do not wish him to be introduced to me. He is to be introduced to me. He is a sculptor.”

He deplored the fact that she needed to see new faces, adding:

“A sculptor? They are usually brutal.”

“Oh, but this one does so little sculpture! But if it annoys you that I should meet him, I will not do so.”

“I should be sorry if society took any part of the time you might give to me.”

“My friend, you can not complain of that. I did not even go to Madame Meillan’s yesterday.”

“You are right to show yourself there as little as possible. It is not a house for you.”

He explained. All the women that went there had had some spicy adventure which was known and talked about. Besides, Madame Meillan favored intrigue. He gave examples. Madame Martin, however, her hands extended on the arms of the chair in charming restfulness, her head inclined, looked at the dying embers in the grate. Her thoughtful mood had flown. Nothing of it remained on her face, a little saddened, nor in her languid body, more desirable than ever in the quiescence of her mind. She kept for a while a profound immobility, which added to her personal attraction the charm of things that art had created.

He asked her of what she was thinking. Escaping the magic of the blaze in the ashes, she said:

“We will go to-morrow, if you wish, to far distant places, to the odd districts where the poor people live. I like the old streets where misery dwells.”

He promised to satisfy her taste, although he let her know that he thought it absurd. The walks that she led him sometimes bored him, and he thought them dangerous.

People might see them.

“And since we have been successful until now in not causing gossip—”

She shook her head.

“Do you think that people have not talked about us? Whether they know or do not know, they talk. Not everything is known, but everything is said.”

She relapsed into her dream. He thought her discontented, cross, for some reason which she would not tell. He bent upon her beautiful, grave eyes which reflected the light of the grate. But she reassured him.

“I do not know whether any one talks about me. And what do I care? Nothing matters.”

He left her. He was going to dine at the club, where a friend was waiting for him. She followed him with her eyes, with peaceful sympathy. Then she began again to read in the ashes.

She saw in them the days of her childhood; the castle wherein she had passed the sweet, sad summers; the dark and humid park; the pond where slept the green water; the marble nymphs under the chestnut-trees, and the bench on which she had wept and desired death. To-day she still ignored the cause of her youthful despair, when the ardent awakening of her imagination threw her into a troubled maze of desires and of fears. When she was a child, life frightened her. And now she knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope; that it is a very ordinary thing. She should have known this. She thought:

“I saw mamma; she was good, very simple, and not very happy. I dreamed of a destiny different from hers. Why? I felt around me the insipid taste of life, and seemed to inhale the future like a salt and pungent aroma. Why? What did I want, and what did I expect? Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?”

She had been born rich, in the brilliancy of a fortune too new. She was a daughter of

that Montessuy, who, at first a clerk in a Parisian bank, founded and governed two great establishments, brought to sustain them the resources of a brilliant mind, invincible force of character, a rare alliance of cleverness and honesty, and treated with the Government as if he were a foreign power. She had grown up in the historical castle of Joinville, bought, restored, and magnificently furnished by her father. Montessuy made life give all it could yield. An instinctive and powerful atheist, he wanted all the goods of this world and all the desirable things that earth produces. He accumulated pictures by old masters, and precious sculptures. At fifty he had known all the most beautiful women of the stage, and many in society. He enjoyed everything worldly with the brutality of his temperament and the shrewdness of his mind.

Poor Madame Montessuy, economical and careful, languished at Joinville, delicate and poor, under the frowns of twelve gigantic caryatides which held a ceiling on which Lebrun had painted the Titans struck by Jupiter. There, in the iron cot, placed at the foot of the large bed, she died one night of sadness and exhaustion, never having loved anything on earth except her husband and her little drawing-room in the Rue Maubeuge.

She never had had any intimacy with her daughter, whom she felt instinctively too different from herself, too free, too bold at heart; and she divined in Therese, although she was sweet and good, the strong Montessuy blood, the ardor which had made her suffer so much, and which she forgave in her husband, but not in her daughter.

But Montessuy recognized his daughter and loved her. Like most hearty, full-blooded men, he had hours of charming gayety. Although he lived out of his house a great deal, he breakfasted with her almost every day, and sometimes took her out walking. He understood gowns and furbelows. He instructed and formed Therese. He amused her. Near her, his instinct for conquest inspired him still. He

desired to win always, and he won his daughter. He separated her from her mother. Therese admired him, she adored him.

In her dream she saw him as the unique joy of her childhood. She was persuaded that no man in the world was as amiable as her father.

At her entrance in life, she despaired at once of finding elsewhere so rich a nature, such a plenitude of active and thinking forces. This discouragement had followed her in the choice of a husband, and perhaps later in a secret and freer choice.

She had not really selected her husband. She did not know: she had permitted herself to be married by her father, who, then a widower, embarrassed by the care of a girl, had wished to do things quickly and well. He considered the exterior advantages, estimated the eighty years of imperial nobility which Count Martin brought. The idea never came to him that she might wish to find love in marriage.

He flattered himself that she would find in it the satisfaction of the luxurious desires which he attributed to her, the joy of making a display of grandeur, the vulgar pride, the material domination, which were for him all the value of life, as he had no ideas on the subject of the happiness of a true woman, although he was sure that his daughter would remain virtuous.

While thinking of his absurd yet natural faith in her, which accorded so badly with his own experiences and ideas regarding women, she smiled with melancholy irony. And she admired her father the more.

After all, she was not so badly married. Her husband was as good as any other man. He had become quite bearable. Of all that she read in the ashes, in the veiled softness of the lamps, of all her reminiscences, that of their married life was the most vague. She found a few isolated traits of it, some absurd images, a fleeting and fastidious impression. The time had not seemed long and had left nothing behind. Six years had passed, and she did not even remember how she had regained her liberty, so prompt and easy had been her conquest of that husband, cold, sickly,

selfish, and polite; of that man dried up and yellowed by business and politics, laborious, ambitious, and commonplace. He liked women only through vanity, and he never had loved his wife. The separation had been frank and complete. And since then, strangers to each other, they felt a tacit, mutual gratitude for their freedom. She would have had some affection for him if she had not found him hypocritical and too subtle in the art of obtaining her signature when he needed money for enterprises that were more for ostentation than real benefit. The man with whom she dined and talked every day had no significance for her.

With her cheek in her hand, before the grate, as if she questioned a sibyl, she saw again the face of the Marquis de Re. She saw it so precisely that it surprised her. The Marquis de Re had been presented to her by her father, who admired him, and he appeared to her grand and dazzling for his thirty years of intimate triumphs and mundane glories. His adventures followed him like a procession. He had captivated three generations of women, and had left in the heart of all those whom he had loved an imperishable memory. His virile grace, his quiet elegance, and his habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth far beyond the ordinary term of years. He noticed particularly the young Countess Martin. The homage of this expert flattered her. She thought of him now with pleasure. He had a marvellous art of conversation. He amused her. She let him see it, and at once he promised to himself, in his heroic frivolity, to finish worthily his happy life by the subjugation of this young woman whom he appreciated above every one else, and who evidently admired him. He displayed, to capture her, the most learned stratagems. But she escaped him very easily.

She yielded, two years later, to Robert Le Menil, who had desired her ardently, with all the warmth of his youth, with all the simplicity of his mind. She said to herself: “I gave myself to him because he loved me.” It was the truth. The truth was, also, that a dumb yet powerful instinct had impelled her, and that she had obeyed the hidden impulse of her being. But even this was not her real self; what awakened her

nature at last was the fact that she believed in the sincerity of his sentiment. She had yielded as soon as she had felt that she was loved. She had given herself, quickly, simply. He thought that she had yielded easily. He was mistaken. She had felt the discouragement which the irreparable gives, and that sort of shame which comes of having suddenly something to conceal. Everything that had been whispered before her about other women resounded in her burning ears. But, proud and delicate, she took care to hide the value of the gift she was making. He never suspected her moral uneasiness, which lasted only a few days, and was replaced by perfect tranquillity. After three years she defended her conduct as innocent and natural.

Having done harm to no one, she had no regrets. She was content. She was in love, she was loved. Doubtless she had not felt the intoxication she had expected, but does one ever feel it? She was the friend of the good and honest fellow, much liked by women who passed for disdainful and hard to please, and he had a true affection for her. The pleasure she gave him and the joy of being beautiful for him attached her to this friend. He made life for her not continually delightful, but easy to bear, and at times agreeable.

That which she had not divined in her solitude, notwithstanding vague yearnings and apparently causeless sadness, he had revealed to her. She knew herself when she knew him. It was a happy astonishment. Their sympathies were not in their minds. Her inclination toward him was simple and frank, and at this moment she found pleasure in the idea of meeting him the next day in the little apartment where they had met for three years. With a shake of the head and a shrug of her shoulders, coarser than one would have expected from this exquisite woman, sitting alone by the dying fire, she said to herself: “There! I need love!”

CHAPTER II. “ONE CAN SEE THAT YOU ARE YOUNG!”

It was no longer daylight when they came out of the little apartment in the Rue Spontini. Robert Le Menil made a sign to a coachman, and entered the carriage with Therese. Close together, they rolled among the vague shadows, cut by sudden lights, through the ghostly city, having in their minds only sweet and vanishing impressions while everything around them seemed confused and fleeting.

The carriage approached the Pont-Neuf. They stepped out. A dry cold made vivid the sombre January weather. Under her veil Therese joyfully inhaled the wind which swept on the hardened soil a dust white as salt. She was glad to wander freely among unknown things. She liked to see the stony landscape which the clearness of the air made distinct; to walk quickly and firmly on the quay where the trees displayed the black tracery of their branches on the horizon reddened by the smoke of the city; to look at the Seine. In the sky the first stars appeared.

“One would think that the wind would put them out,” she said.

He observed, too, that they scintillated a great deal. He did not think it was a sign of rain, as the peasants believe. He had observed, on the contrary, that nine times in ten the scintillation of stars was an augury of fine weather.

Near the little bridge they found old iron-shops lighted by smoky lamps. She ran into them. She turned a corner and went into a shop in which queer stuffs were hanging. Behind the dirty panes a lighted candle showed pots, porcelain vases, a clarinet, and a bride’s wreath.

He did not understand what pleasure she found in her search.

“These shops are full of vermin. What can you find interesting in them?”

“Everything. I think of the poor bride whose wreath is under that globe. The dinner occurred at Maillot. There was a policeman in the procession. There is one in almost all the bridal processions one sees in the park on Saturdays. Don’t they move you, my friend, all these poor, ridiculous, miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past?”

Among cups decorated with flowers she discovered a little knife, the ivory handle of which represented a tall, thin woman with her hair arranged a la Maintenon. She bought it for a few sous. It pleased her, because she already had a fork like it. Le Menil confessed that he had no taste for such things, but said that his aunt knew a great deal about them. At Caen all the merchants knew her. She had restored and furnished her house in proper style. This house was noted as early as 1690. In one of its halls were white cases full of books. His aunt had wished to put them in order. She had found frivolous books in them, ornamented with engravings so unconventional that she had burned them.

“Is she silly, your aunt?” asked Therese.

For a long time his anecdotes about his aunt had made her impatient. Her friend had in the country a mother, sisters, aunts, and numerous relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her. He talked of them with admiration. It annoyed her that he often visited them. When he came back, she imagined that he carried with him the odor of things that had been packed up for years. He was astonished, naively, and he suffered from her antipathy to them.

He said nothing. The sight of a public-house, the panes of which were flaming, recalled to him the poet Choulette, who passed for a drunkard. He asked her if she still saw that Choulette, who called on her wearing a mackintosh and a red muffler.

It annoyed her that he spoke like General Lariviere. She did not say that she had not seen Choulette since autumn, and that he neglected her with the capriciousness of a man not in society.

“He has wit,” she said, “fantasy, and an original temperament. He pleases me.”

And as he reproached her for having an odd taste, she replied:

“I haven’t a taste, I have tastes. You do not disapprove of them all, I suppose.”

He replied that he did not criticise her. He was only afraid that she might do herself harm by receiving a Bohemian who was not welcome in respectable houses.

She exclaimed:

“Not welcome in respectable houses—Choulette? Don’t you know that he goes every year for a month to the Marquise de Rieu? Yes, to the Marquise de Rieu, the Catholic, the royalist. But since Choulette interests you, listen to his latest adventure. Paul Vence related it to me. I understand it better in this street, where there are shirts and flowerpots at the windows.

“This winter, one night when it was raining, Choulette went into a public-house in a street the name of which I have forgotten, but which must resemble this one, and met there an unfortunate girl whom the waiters would not have noticed, and whom he liked for her humility. Her name was Maria. The name was not hers. She found it nailed on her door at the top of the stairway where she went to lodge. Choulette was touched by this perfection of poverty and infamy. He called her his sister, and kissed her hands. Since then he has not quitted her a moment. He takes her to the coffee-houses of the Latin Quarter where the rich students read their reviews. He says sweet things to her. He weeps, she weeps. They drink; and when they are drunk, they fight. He loves her. He calls her his chaste one, his cross and his salvation. She was barefooted; he gave her yarn and knitting-needles that she might make stockings. And he made shoes for this unfortunate girl himself, with enormous nails. He teaches her verses that are easy to understand. He is afraid of altering her moral beauty by taking her out of the shame where she lives in perfect simplicity and admirable destitution.”

Le Menil shrugged his shoulders.

“But that Choulette is crazy, and Paul Vence has no right to tell you such stories. I am not austere, assuredly; but there are immoralities that disgust me.” They were walking at random. She fell into a dream.

“Yes, morality, I know—duty! But duty—it takes the devil to discover it. I can assure you that I do not know where duty is. It’s like a young lady’s turtle at

Joinville. We spent all the evening looking for it under the furniture, and when we had found it, we went to bed."

He thought there was some truth in what she said. He would think about it when alone.

"I regret sometimes that I did not remain in the army. I know what you are going to say—one becomes a brute in that profession. Doubtless, but one knows exactly what one has to do, and that is a great deal in life. I think that my uncle's life is very beautiful and very agreeable. But now that everybody is in the army, there are neither officers nor soldiers. It all looks like a railway station on Sunday. My uncle knew personally all the officers and all the soldiers of his brigade. Nowadays, how can you expect an officer to know his men?"

She had ceased to listen. She was looking at a woman selling fried potatoes. She realized that she was hungry and wished to eat fried potatoes.

He remonstrated:

"Nobody knows how they are cooked."

But he had to buy two sous' worth of fried potatoes, and to see that the woman put salt on them.

While Therese was eating them, he led her into deserted streets far from the gaslights. Soon they found themselves in front of the cathedral. The moon silvered the roofs.

"Notre Dame," she said. "See, it is as heavy as an elephant yet as delicate as an insect. The moon climbs over it and looks at it with a monkey's maliciousness. She does not look like the country moon at Joinville. At Joinville I have a path—a flat path—with the moon at the end of it. She is not there every night; but she returns faithfully, full, red, familiar. She is a country neighbor. I go seriously to meet her. But this moon of Paris I should not like to know. She is not respectable company. Oh, the things that she has seen during the time she has been roaming around the

roofs!”

He smiled a tender smile.

“Oh, your little path where you walked alone and that you liked because the sky was at the end of it! I see it as if I were there.”

It was at the Joinville castle that he had seen her for the first time, and had at once loved her. It was there, one night, that he had told her of his love, to which she had listened, dumb, with a pained expression on her mouth and a vague look in her eyes.

The reminiscence of this little path where she walked alone moved him, troubled him, made him live again the enchanted hours of his first desires and hopes. He tried to find her hand in her muff and pressed her slim wrist under the fur.

A little girl carrying violets saw that they were lovers, and offered flowers to them. He bought a two-sous’ bouquet and offered it to Therese.

She was walking toward the cathedral. She was thinking: “It is like an enormous beast—a beast of the Apocalypse.”

At the other end of the bridge a flower-woman, wrinkled, bearded, gray with years and dust, followed them with her basket full of mimosas and roses. Therese, who held her violets and was trying to slip them into her waist, said, joyfully:

“Thank you, I have some.”

“One can see that you are young,” the old woman shouted with a wicked air, as she went away.

Therese understood at once, and a smile came to her lips and eyes. They were passing near the porch, before the stone figures that wear sceptres and crowns.

“Let us go in,” she said.

He did not wish to go in. He declared that the door was closed. She pushed it, and slipped into the immense nave, where the inanimate trees of the columns ascended in darkness. In the rear, candles were moving in front of spectre-like priests, under

the last reverberations of the organs. She trembled in the silence, and said:

“The sadness of churches at night moves me; I feel in them the grandeur of nothingness.”

He replied:

“We must believe in something. If there were no God, if our souls were not immortal, it would be too sad.”

She remained for a while immovable under the curtains of shadow hanging from the arches. Then she said:

“My poor friend, we do not know what to do with this life, which is so short, and yet you desire another life which shall never finish.”

In the carriage that took them back he said gayly that he had passed a fine afternoon. He kissed her, satisfied with her and with himself. But his good-humor was not communicated to her. The last moments they passed together were spoiled for her always by the presentiment that he would not say at parting the thing that he should say. Ordinarily, he quitted her brusquely, as if what had happened were not to last. At every one of their partings she had a confused feeling that they were parting forever. She suffered from this in advance and became irritable.

Under the trees he took her hand and kissed her.

“Is it not rare, Therese, to love as we love each other?”

“Rare? I don’t know; but I think that you love me.”

“And you?”

“I, too, love you.”

“And you will love me always?”

“What does one ever know?”

And seeing the face of her lover darken:

“Would you be more content with a woman who would swear to love only you for all time?”

He remained anxious, with a wretched air. She was kind and she reassured him:

“You know very well, my friend, that I am not fickle.”

Almost at the end of the lane they said good-by. He kept the carriage to return to the Rue Royale. He was to dine at the club and go to the theatre, and had no time to lose.

Therese returned home on foot. Opposite the Trocadero she remembered what the old flower-woman had said: “One can see that you are young.” The words came back to her with a significance not immoral but sad. “One can see that you are young!” Yes, she was young, she was loved, and she was bored to death.

CHAPTER III. A DISCUSSION ON THE LITTLE CORPORAL

In the centre of the table flowers were disposed in a basket of gilded bronze, decorated with eagles, stars, and bees, and handles formed like horns of plenty. On its sides winged Victorys supported the branches of candelabra. This centrepiece of the Empire style had been given by Napoleon, in 1812, to Count Martin de l’Aisne, grandfather of the present Count Martin-Belleme. Martin de l’Aisne, a deputy to the Legislative Corps in 1809, was appointed the following year member of the Committee on Finance, the assiduous and secret works of which suited his laborious temperament. Although a Liberal, he pleased the Emperor by his application and his exact honesty. For two years he was under a rain of favors. In 1813 he formed part of the moderate majority which approved the report in which Laine censured power and misfortune, by giving to the Empire tardy advice. January 1, 1814, he went with his colleagues to the Tuileries. The Emperor received them in a terrifying manner.

He charged on their ranks. Violent and sombre, in the horror of his present strength and of his coming fall, he stunned them with his anger and his contempt.

He came and went through their lines, and suddenly took Count Martin by the shoulders, shook him and dragged him, exclaiming: “A throne is four pieces of wood covered with velvet? No! A throne is a man, and that man is I. You have tried to throw mud at me. Is this the time to remonstrate with me when there are two hundred thousand Cossacks at the frontiers? Your Laine is a wicked man. One should wash one’s dirty linen at home.” And while in his anger he twisted in his hand the embroidered collar of the deputy, he said: “The people know me. They do not know you. I am the elect of the nation. You are the obscure delegates of a department.” He predicted to them the fate of the Girondins. The noise of his spurs accompanied the sound of his voice. Count Martin remained trembling the rest of his life, and tremblingly recalled the Bourbons after the defeat of the Emperor. The two restorations were in vain; the July government and the Second Empire covered his oppressed breast with crosses and cordons. Raised to the highest functions, loaded with honors by three kings and one emperor, he felt forever on his shoulder the hand of the Corsican. He died a senator of Napoleon III, and left a son agitated by the same fear.

This son had married Mademoiselle Belleme, daughter of the first president of the court of Bourges, and with her the political glories of a family which gave three ministers to the moderate monarch. The Bellemes, advocates in the time of Louis XV, elevated the Jacobin origins of the Martins. The second Count Martin was a member of all the Assemblies until his death in 1881. His son took without trouble his seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Having married Mademoiselle Therese Montessuy, whose dowry supported his political fortune, he appeared discreetly among the four or five bourgeois, titled and wealthy, who rallied to democracy, and were received without much bad grace by the republicans, whom aristocracy flattered.

In the dining-room, Count Martin-Belleme was doing the honors of his table with the good grace, the sad politeness, recently prescribed at the Elysee to represent isolated France at a great northern court. From time to time he addressed vapid phrases to Madame Garain at his right; to the Princess Seniavine at his left, who, loaded with diamonds, felt bored. Opposite him, on the other side of the table, Countess Martin, having by her side General Lariviere and M. Schmoll, member of the Academie des Inscriptions, caressed with her fan her smooth white shoulders. At the two semicircles, whereby the dinner-table was prolonged, were M. Montessuy, robust, with blue eyes and ruddy complexion; a young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom, embarrassed by her long, thin arms; the painter Duviquet; M. Daniel Salomon; then Paul Vence and Garain the deputy; Belleme de Saint-Nom; an unknown senator; and Dechartre, who was dining at the house for the first time. The conversation, at first trivial and insignificant, was prolonged into a confused murmur, above which rose Garain's voice:

"Every false idea is dangerous. People think that dreamers do no harm. They are mistaken: dreamers do a great heal of harm. Even apparently inoffensive utopian ideas really exercise a noxious influence. They tend to inspire disgust at reality."

"It is, perhaps, because reality is not beautiful," said Paul Vence.

M. Garain said that he had always been in favor of all possible improvements. He had asked for the suppression of permanent armies in the time of the Empire, for the separation of church and state, and had remained always faithful to democracy. His device, he said, was "Order and Progress." He thought he had discovered that device.

Montessuy said:

"Well, Monsieur Garain, be sincere. Confess that there are no reforms to be made, and that it is as much as one can do to change the color of postage-stamps. Good or bad, things are as they should be. Yes, things are as they should be; but they change

incessantly. Since 1870 the industrial and financial situation of the country has gone through four or five revolutions which political economists had not foreseen and which they do not yet understand. In society, as in nature, transformations are accomplished from within."

As to matters of government his ideas were terse and decided. He was strongly attached to the present, heedless of the future, and the socialists troubled him little. Without caring whether the sun and capital should be extinguished some day, he enjoyed them. According to him, one should let himself be carried. None but fools resisted the current or tried to go in front of it.

But Count Martin, naturally sad, had, dark presentiments. In veiled words he announced catastrophes. His timorous phrases came through the flowers, and irritated M. Schmoll, who began to grumble and to prophesy. He explained that Christian nations were incapable, alone and by themselves, of throwing off barbarism, and that without the Jews and the Arabs Europe would be to-day, as in the time of the Crusades, sunk in ignorance, misery, and cruelty.

"The Middle Ages," he said, "are closed only in the historical manuals that are given to pupils to spoil their minds. In reality, barbarians are always barbarians. Israel's mission is to instruct nations. It was Israel which, in the Middle Ages, brought to Europe the wisdom of ages. Socialism frightens you. It is a Christian evil, like priesthood. And anarchy? Do you not recognize in it the plague of the Albigeois and of the Vaudois? The Jews, who instructed and polished Europe, are the only ones who can save it to-day from the evangelical evil by which it is devoured. But they have not fulfilled their duty. They have made Christians of themselves among the Christians. And God punishes them. He permits them to be exiled and to be despoiled. Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere. From Russia my co-religionists are expelled like savage beasts. In France, civil and military employments are closing against Jews. They have no longer access to aristocratic

circles. My nephew, young Isaac Coblentz, has had to renounce a diplomatic career, after passing brilliantly his admission examination. The wives of several of my colleagues, when Madame Schmoll calls on them, display with intention, under her eyes, anti-Semitic newspapers. And would you believe that the Minister of Public Instruction has refused to give me the cross of the Legion of Honor for which I have applied? There's ingratitude! Anti-Semitism is death—it is death, do you hear? to European civilization."

The little man had a natural manner which surpassed all the art in the world. Grotesque and terrible, he threw the table into consternation by his sincerity. Madame Martin, whom he amused, complimented him on this:

"At least," she said, "you defend your co-religionists. You are not, Monsieur Schmoll, like a beautiful Jewish lady of my acquaintance who, having read in a journal that she received the elite of Jewish society, went everywhere shouting that she had been insulted."

"I am sure, Madame, that you do not know how beautiful and superior to all other moralities is Jewish morality. Do you know the parable of the three rings?"

This question was lost in the murmur of the dialogues wherein were mingled foreign politics, exhibitions of paintings, fashionable scandals, and Academy speeches. They talked of the new novel and of the coming play. This was a comedy. Napoleon was an incidental character in it.

The conversation settled upon Napoleon I, often placed on the stage and newly studied in books—an object of curiosity, a personage in the fashion, no longer a popular hero, a demi-god, wearing boots for his country, as in the days when Norvins and Beranger, Charlet and Raffet were composing his legend; but a curious personage, an amusing type in his living infinity, a figure whose style is pleasant to artists, whose movements attract thoughtless idlers.

Garain, who had founded his political fortune on hatred of the Empire, judged

sincerely that this return of national taste was only an absurd infatuation. He saw no danger in it and felt no fear about it. In him fear was sudden and ferocious. For the moment he was very quiet; he talked neither of prohibiting performances nor of seizing books, of imprisoning authors, or of suppressing anything. Calm and severe, he saw in Napoleon only Taine's 'condottiere' who kicked Volney in the stomach. Everybody wished to define the true Napoleon. Count Martin, in the face of the imperial centrepiece and of the winged Victorys, talked suitably of Napoleon as an organizer and administrator, and placed him in a high position as president of the state council, where his words threw light upon obscure questions. Garain affirmed that in his sessions, only too famous, Napoleon, under pretext of taking snuff, asked the councillors to pass to him their gold boxes ornamented with miniatures and decked with diamonds, which they never saw again. The anecdote was told to him by the son of Mounier himself.

Montessuy esteemed in Napoleon the genius of order. "He liked," he said, "work well done. That is a taste most persons have lost."

The painter Duviquet, whose ideas were those of an artist, was embarrassed. He did not find on the funeral mask brought from St. Helena the characteristics of that face, beautiful and powerful, which medals and busts have consecrated. One must be convinced of this now that the bronze of that mask was hanging in all the old shops, among eagles and sphinxes made of gilded wood. And, according to him, since the true face of Napoleon was not that of the ideal Napoleon, his real soul may not have been as idealists fancied it. Perhaps it was the soul of a good bourgeois. Somebody had said this, and he was inclined to think that it was true. Anyway, Duviquet, who flattered himself with having made the best portraits of the century, knew that celebrated men seldom resemble the ideas one forms of them.

M. Daniel Salomon observed that the fine mask about which Duviquet talked, the plaster cast taken from the inanimate face of the Emperor, and brought to Europe by

Dr. Antommarchi, had been moulded in bronze and sold by subscription for the first time in 1833, under Louis Philippe, and had then inspired surprise and mistrust. People suspected the Italian chemist, who was a sort of buffoon, always talkative and famished, of having tried to make fun of people. Disciples of Dr. Gall, whose system was then in favor, regarded the mask as suspicious. They did not find in it the bumps of genius; and the forehead, examined in accordance with the master's theories, presented nothing remarkable in its formation.

"Precisely," said Princess Seniavine. "Napoleon was remarkable only for having kicked Volney in the stomach and stealing a snuffbox ornamented with diamonds. Monsieur Garain has just taught us."

"And yet," said Madame Martin, "nobody is sure that he kicked Volney."

"Everything becomes known in the end," replied the Princess, gayly. "Napoleon did nothing at all. He did not even kick Volney, and his head was that of an idiot."

General Lariviere felt that he should say something. He hurled this phrase:

"Napoleon—his campaign of 1813 is much discussed."

The General wished to please Garain, and he had no other idea. However, he succeeded, after an effort, in formulating a judgment:

"Napoleon committed faults; in his situation he should not have committed any." And he stopped abruptly, very red.

Madame Martin asked:

"And you, Monsieur Vence, what do you think of Napoleon?"

"Madame, I have not much love for sword-bearers, and conquerors seem to me to be dangerous fools. But in spite of everything, that figure of the Emperor interests me as it interests the public. I find character and life in it. There is no poem or novel that is worth the Memoirs of Saint Helena, although it is written in ridiculous fashion. What I think of Napoleon, if you wish to know, is that, made for glory, he had the

brilliant simplicity of the hero of an epic poem. A hero must be human. Napoleon was human."

"Oh, oh!" every one exclaimed.

But Paul Vence continued:

"He was violent and frivolous; therefore profoundly human. I mean, similar to everybody. He desired, with singular force, all that most men esteem and desire. He had illusions, which he gave to the people. This was his power and his weakness; it was his beauty. He believed in glory. He had of life and of the world the same opinion as any one of his grenadiers. He retained always the infantile gravity which finds pleasure in playing with swords and drums, and the sort of innocence which makes good military men. He esteemed force sincerely. He was a man among men, the flesh of human flesh. He had not a thought that was not in action, and all his actions were grand yet common. It is this vulgar grandeur which makes heroes. And Napoleon is the perfect hero. His brain never surpassed his hand—that hand, small and beautiful, which grasped the world. He never had, for a moment, the least care for what he could not reach."

"Then," said Garain, "according to you, he was not an intellectual genius. I am of your opinion."

"Surely," continued Paul Vence, "he had enough genius to be brilliant in the civil and military arena of the world. But he had not speculative genius. That genius is another pair of sleeves, as Buffon says. We have a collection of his writings and speeches. His style has movement and imagination. And in this mass of thoughts one can not find a philosophic curiosity, not one expression of anxiety about the unknowable, not an expression of fear of the mystery which surrounds destiny. At Saint Helena, when he talks of God and of the soul, he seems to be a little fourteen-year-old school-boy. Thrown upon the world, his mind found itself fit for the world, and embraced it all. Nothing of that mind was lost in the infinite. Himself

a poet, he knew only the poetry of action. He limited to the earth his powerful dream of life. In his terrible and touching naivete he believed that a man could be great, and neither time nor misfortune made him lose that idea. His youth, or rather his sublime adolescence, lasted as long as he lived, because life never brought him a real maturity. Such is the abnormal state of men of action. They live entirely in the present, and their genius concentrates on one point. The hours of their existence are not connected by a chain of grave and disinterested meditations. They succeed themselves in a series of acts. They lack interior life. This defect is particularly visible in Napoleon, who never lived within himself. From this is derived the frivolity of temperament which made him support easily the enormous load of his evils and of his faults. His mind was born anew every day. He had, more than any other person, a capacity for diversion. The first day that he saw the sun rise on his funereal rock at Saint Helena, he jumped from his bed, whistling a romantic air. It was the peace of a mind superior to fortune; it was the frivolity of a mind prompt in resurrection. He lived from the outside."

Garain, who did not like Paul Vence's ingenious turn of wit and language, tried to hasten the conclusion:

"In a word," he said, "there was something of the monster in the man."

"There are no monsters," replied Paul Vence; "and men who pass for monsters inspire horror. Napoleon was loved by an entire people. He had the power to win the love of men. The joy of his soldiers was to die for him."

Countess Martin would have wished Dechartre to give his opinion. But he excused himself with a sort of fright.

"Do you know," said Schmoll again, "the parable of the three rings, sublime inspiration of a Portuguese Jew."

Garain, while complimenting Paul Vence on his brilliant paradox, regretted that wit should be exercised at the expense of morality and justice.

“One great principle,” he said, “is that men should be judged by their acts.”

“And women?” asked Princess Seniavine, brusquely; “do you judge them by their acts? And how do you know what they do?”

The sound of voices was mingled with the clear tintinabulation of silverware. A warm air bathed the room. The roses shed their leaves on the cloth. More ardent thoughts mounted to the brain.

General Lariviere fell into dreams.

“When public clamor has split my ears,” he said to his neighbor, “I shall go to live at Tours. I shall cultivate flowers.”

He flattered himself on being a good gardener; his name had been given to a rose. This pleased him highly.

Schmoll asked again if they knew the parable of the three rings.

The Princess rallied the Deputy.

“Then you do not know, Monsieur Garain, that one does the same things for very different reasons?”

Montessuy said she was right.

“It is very true, as you say, Madame, that actions prove nothing. This thought is striking in an episode in the life of Don Juan, which was known neither to Moliere nor to Mozart, but which is revealed in an English legend, a knowledge of which I owe to my friend James Russell Lowell of London. One learns from it that the great seducer lost his time with three women. One was a bourgeoise: she was in love with her husband; the other was a nun: she would not consent to violate her vows; the third, who had for a long time led a life of debauchery, had become ugly, and was a servant in a den. After what she had done, after what she had seen, love signified nothing to her. These three women behaved alike for very different reasons. An action proves nothing. It is the mass of actions, their weight, their sum total, which

makes the value of the human being."

"Some of our actions," said Madame Martin, "have our look, our face: they are our daughters. Others do not resemble us at all."

She rose and took the General's arm.

On the way to the drawing-room the Princess said:

"Therese is right. Some actions do not express our real selves at all. They are like the things we do in nightmares."

The nymphs of the tapestries smiled vainly in their faded beauty at the guests, who did not see them.

Madame Martin served the coffee with her young cousin, Madame Belleme de Saint-Nom. She complimented Paul Vence on what he had said at the table.

"You talked of Napoleon with a freedom of mind that is rare in the conversations I hear. I have noticed that children, when they are handsome, look, when they pout, like Napoleon at Waterloo. You have made me feel the profound reasons for this similarity."

Then, turning toward Dechartre:

"Do you like Napoleon?"

"Madame, I do not like the Revolution. And Napoleon is the Revolution in boots."

"Monsieur Dechartre, why did you not say this at dinner? But I see you prefer to be witty only in tete-a-tetes."

Count Martin-Belleme escorted the men to the smoking-room. Paul Vence alone remained with the women. Princess Seniavine asked him if he had finished his novel, and what was the subject of it. It was a study in which he tried to reach the truth through a series of plausible conditions.

"Thus," he said, "the novel acquires a moral force which history, in its heavy frivolity, never had."

She inquired whether the book was written for women. He said it was not.

“You are wrong, Monsieur Vence, not to write for women. A superior man can do nothing else for them.”

He wished to know what gave her that idea.

“Because I see that all the intelligent women love fools.”

“Who bore them.”

“Certainly! But superior men would weary them more. They would have more resources to employ in boring them. But tell me the subject of your novel.”

“Do you insist?”

“Oh, I insist upon nothing.”

“Well, I will tell you. It is a study of popular manners; the history of a young workman, sober and chaste, as handsome as a girl, with the mind of a virgin, a sensitive soul. He is a carver, and works well. At night, near his mother, whom he loves, he studies, he reads books. In his mind, simple and receptive, ideas lodge themselves like bullets in a wall. He has no desires. He has neither the passions nor the vices that attach us to life. He is solitary and pure. Endowed with strong virtues, he becomes conceited. He lives among miserable people. He sees suffering. He has devotion without humanity. He has that sort of cold charity which is called altruism. He is not human because he is not sensual.”

“Oh! One must be sensual to be human?”

“Certainly, Madame. True pity, like tenderness, comes from the heart. He is not intelligent enough to doubt. He believes what he has read. And he has read that to establish universal happiness society must be destroyed. Thirst for martyrdom devours him. One morning, having kissed his mother, he goes out; he watches for the socialist deputy of his district, sees him, throws himself on him, and buries a poniard in his breast. Long live anarchy! He is arrested, measured, photographed,

questioned, judged, condemned to death, and guillotined. That is my novel."

"It is not very amusing," said the Princess; "but that is not your fault. Your anarchists are as timid and moderate as other Frenchmen. The Russians have more audacity and more imagination."

Countess Martin asked Paul Vence whether he knew a silent, timid-looking man among the guests. Her husband had invited him. She knew nothing of him, not even his name. Paul Vence could only say that he was a senator. He had seen him one day by chance in the Luxembourg, in the gallery that served as a library.

"I went there to look at the cupola, where Delacroix has painted, in a wood of bluish myrtles, heroes and sages of antiquity. That gentleman was there, with the same wretched and pitiful air. His coat was damp and he was warming himself. He was talking with old colleagues and saying, while rubbing his hands: 'The proof that the Republic is the best of governments is that in 1871 it could kill in a week sixty thousand insurgents without becoming unpopular. After such a repression any other regime would have been impossible.'"

"He is a very wicked man," said Madame Martin. "And to think that I was pitying him!"

Madame Garain, her chin softly dropped on her chest, slept in the peace of her housewifely mind, and dreamed of her vegetable garden on the banks of the Loire, where singing-societies came to serenade her.

Joseph Schmoll and General Lariviere came out of the smoking-room. The General took a seat between Princess Seniavine and Madame Martin.

"I met this morning, in the park, Baronne Warburg, mounted on a magnificent horse. She said, 'General, how do you manage to have such fine horses?' I replied: Madame, to have fine horses, you must be either very wealthy or very clever.'"

He was so well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice.

Paul Vence came near Countess Martin:

“I know that senator’s name: it is Lyer. He is the vice-president of a political society, and author of a book entitled, The Crime of December Second.”

The General continued:

“The weather was horrible. I went into a hut and found Le Menil there. I was in a bad humor. He was making fun of me, I saw, because I sought shelter. He imagines that because I am a general I must like wind and snow. He said that he liked bad weather, and that he was to go foxhunting with friends next week.”

There was a pause; the General continued:

“I wish him much joy, but I don’t envy him. Foxhunting is not agreeable.”

“But it is useful,” said Montessuy.

The General shrugged his shoulders.

“Foxes are dangerous for chicken-coops in the spring when the fowls have to feed their families.”

“Foxes are sly poachers, who do less harm to farmers than to hunters. I know something of this.”

Therese was not listening to the Princess, who was talking to her. She was thinking:

“He did not tell me that he was going away!”

“Of what are you thinking, dear?” inquired the Princess.

“Of nothing interesting,” Therese replied.

CHAPTER IV. THE END OF A DREAM

In the little shadowy room, where sound was deadened by curtains, portieres, cushions, bearskins, and carpets from the Orient, the firelight shone on glittering swords hanging among the faded favors of the cotillons of three winters. The

rosewood chiffonier was surmounted by a silver cup, a prize from some sporting club. On a porcelain plaque, in the centre of the table, stood a crystal vase which held branches of white lilacs; and lights palpitated in the warm shadows. Therese and Robert, their eyes accustomed to obscurity, moved easily among these familiar objects. He lighted a cigarette while she arranged her hair, standing before the mirror, in a corner so dim she could hardly see herself. She took pins from the little Bohemian glass cup standing on the table, where she had kept it for three years. He looked at her, passing her light fingers quickly through the gold ripples of her hair, while her face, hardened and bronzed by the shadow, took on a mysterious expression. She did not speak.

He said to her:

“You are not cross now, my dear?”

And, as he insisted upon having an answer, she said:

“What do you wish me to say, my friend? I can only repeat what I said at first. I think it strange that I have to learn of your projects from General Lariviere.”

He knew very well that she had not forgiven him; that she had remained cold and reserved toward him. But he affected to think that she only pouted.

“My dear, I have explained it to you. I have told you that when I met Lariviere I had just received a letter from Caumont, recalling my promise to hunt the fox in his woods, and I replied by return post. I meant to tell you about it to-day. I am sorry that General Lariviere told you first, but there was no significance in that.”

Her arms were lifted like the handles of a vase. She turned toward him a glance from her tranquil eyes, which he did not understand.

“Then you are going?”

“Next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I shall be away only ten days at most.”

She put on her sealskin toque, ornamented with a branch of holly.

“Is it something that you can not postpone?”

“Oh, yes. Fox-skins would not be worth anything in a month. Moreover, Caumont has invited good friends of mine, who would regret my absence.”

Fixing her toque on her head with a long pin, she frowned.

“Is fox-hunting interesting?”

“Oh, yes, very. The fox has stratagems that one must fathom. The intelligence of that animal is really marvellous. I have observed at night a fox hunting a rabbit. He had organized a real hunt. I assure you it is not easy to dislodge a fox. Caumont has an excellent cellar. I do not care for it, but it is generally appreciated. I will bring you half a dozen skins.”

“What do you wish me to do with them?”

“Oh, you can make rugs of them.”

“And you will be hunting eight days?”

“Not all the time. I shall visit my aunt, who expects me. Last year at this time there was a delightful reunion at her house. She had with her her two daughters and her three nieces with their husbands. All five women are pretty, gay, charming, and irreproachable. I shall probably find them at the beginning of next month, assembled for my aunt’s birthday, and I shall remain there two days.”

“My friend, stay as long as it may please you. I should be inconsolable if you shortened on my account a sojourn which is so agreeable.”

“But you, Therese?”

“I, my friend? I can take care of myself.”

The fire was languishing. The shadows were deepening between them. She said, in a dreamy tone:

“It is true, however, that it is never prudent to leave a woman alone.”

He went near her, trying to see her eyes in the darkness. He took her hand.

“You love me?” he said.

“Oh, I assure you that I do not love another but—”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing. I am thinking—I am thinking that we are separated all through the summer; that in winter you live with your parents and your friends half the time; and that, if we are to see so little of each other, it is better not to see each other at all.”

He lighted the candelabra. His frank, hard face was illuminated. He looked at her with a confidence that came less from the conceit common to all lovers than from his natural lack of dignity. He believed in her through force of education and simplicity of intelligence.

“Therese, I love you, and you love me, I know. Why do you torment me? Sometimes you are painfully harsh.”

She shook her little head brusquely.

“What will you have? I am harsh and obstinate. It is in the blood. I take it from my father. You know Joinville; you have seen the castle, the ceilings, the tapestries, the gardens, the park, the hunting-grounds, you have said that none better were in France; but you have not seen my father’s workshop—a white wooden table and a mahogany bureau. Everything about me has its origin there. On that table my father made figures for forty years; at first in a little room, then in the apartment where I was born. We were not very wealthy then. I am a parvenu’s daughter, or a conqueror’s daughter, it’s all the same. We are people of material interests. My father wanted to earn money, to possess what he could buy—that is, everything. I wish to earn and keep—what? I do not know—the happiness that I have—or that I have not. I have my own way of being exacting. I long for dreams and illusions. Oh, I know very well that all this is not worth the trouble that a woman takes in giving herself to a man; but it is a trouble that is worth something, because my trouble is myself, my life. I like to enjoy what I like, or think what I like. I do not wish to lose.

I am like papa: I demand what is due to me. And then—”

She lowered her voice:

“And then, I have—impulses! Now, my dear, I bore you. What will you have? You shouldn’t have loved me.”

This language, to which she had accustomed him, often spoiled his pleasure. But it did not alarm him. He was sensitive to all that she did, but not at all to what she said; and he attached no importance to a woman’s words. Talking little himself, he could not imagine that often words are the same as actions.

Although he loved her, or, rather, because he loved her with strength and confidence, he thought it his duty to resist her whims, which he judged absurd. Whenever he played the master, he succeeded with her; and, naively, he always ended by playing it.

“You know very well, Therese, that I wish to do nothing except to be agreeable to you. Don’t be capricious with me.”

“And why should I not be capricious? If I gave myself to you, it was not because I was logical, nor because I thought I must. It was because I was capricious.”

He looked at her, astonished and saddened.

“The word is not pleasant to you, my friend? Well let us say that it was love. Truly it was, with all my heart, and because I felt that you loved me. But love must be a pleasure, and if I do not find in it the satisfaction of what you call my capriciousness, but which is really my desire, my life, my love, I do not want it; I prefer to live alone. You are astonishing! My caprices! Is there anything else in life? Your foxhunt, isn’t that capricious?”

He replied, very sincerely:

“If I had not promised, I swear to you, Therese, that I would sacrifice that small pleasure with great joy.”

She felt that he spoke the truth. She knew how exact he was in filling the most trifling engagements, yet realized that if she insisted he would not go. But it was too late: she did not wish to win. She would seek hereafter only the violent pleasure of losing. She pretended to take his reason seriously, and said:

“Ah, you have promised!”

And she affected to yield.

Surprised at first, he congratulated himself at last on having made her listen to reason. He was grateful to her for not having been stubborn. He put his arm around her waist and kissed her on the neck and eyelids as a reward. He said:

“We may meet three or four times before I go, and more, if you wish. I will wait for you as often as you wish to come. Will you meet me here to-morrow?”

She gave herself the satisfaction of saying that she could not come the next day nor any other day.

Softly she mentioned the things that prevented her.

The obstacles seemed light; calls, a gown to be tried on, a charity fair, exhibitions. As she dilated upon the difficulties they seemed to increase. The calls could not be postponed; there were three fairs; the exhibitions would soon close. In fine, it was impossible for her to see him again before his departure.

As he was well accustomed to making excuses of that sort, he failed to observe that it was not natural for Therese to offer them. Embarrassed by this tissue of social obligations, he did not persist, but remained silent and unhappy.

With her left arm she raised the portiere, placed her right hand on the key of the door; and, standing against the rich background of the sapphire and ruby-colored folds of the Oriental draperies, she turned her head toward the friend she was leaving, and said, a little mockingly, yet with a touch of tragic emotion:

“Good-by, Robert. Enjoy yourself. My calls, my errands, your little visits are

nothing. Life is made up of just such trifles. Good-by!”

She went out. He would have liked to accompany her, but he made it a point not to show himself with her in the street, unless she absolutely forced him to do so.

In the street, Therese felt suddenly that she was alone in the world, without joy and without pain. She returned to her house on foot, as was her habit. It was night; the air was frozen, clear, and tranquil. But the avenues through which she walked, in shadows studded with lights, enveloped her with that mild atmosphere of the queen of cities, so agreeable to its inhabitants, which makes itself felt even in the cold of winter. She walked between the lines of huts and old houses, remains of the field-days of Auteuil, which tall houses interrupted here and there. These small shops, these monotonous windows, were nothing to her. Yet she felt that she was under the mysterious spell of the friendship of inanimate things; and it seemed to her that the stones, the doors of houses, the lights behind the windowpanes, looked kindly upon her. She was alone, and she wished to be alone. The steps she was taking between the two houses wherein her habits were almost equal, the steps she had taken so often, to-day seemed to her irrevocable. Why? What had that day brought? Not exactly a quarrel. And yet the words spoken that day had left a subtle, strange, persistent sting, which would never leave her. What had happened? Nothing. And that nothing had effaced everything. She had a sort of obscure certainty that she would never return to that room which had so recently enclosed the most secret and dearest phases of her life. She had loved Robert with the seriousness of a necessary joy. Made to be loved, and very reasonable, she had not lost in the abandonment of herself that instinct of reflection, that necessity for security, which was so strong in her. She had not chosen: one seldom chooses. She had not allowed herself to be taken at random and by surprise. She had done what she had wished to do, as much as one ever does what one wishes to do in such cases. She had nothing to regret. He had been to her what it was his duty to be. She felt, in spite of everything, that all was at an end. She thought, with dry sadness, that three

years of her life had been given to an honest man who had loved her and whom she had loved. “For I loved him. I must have loved him in order to give myself to him.” But she could not feel again the sentiments of early days, the movements of her mind when she had yielded. She recalled small and insignificant circumstances: the flowers on the wall-paper and the pictures in the room. She recalled the words, a little ridiculous and almost touching, that he had said to her. But it seemed to her that the adventure had occurred to another woman, to a stranger whom she did not like and whom she hardly understood. And what had happened only a moment ago seemed far distant now. The room, the lilacs in the crystal vase, the little cup of Bohemian glass where she found her pins—she saw all these things as if through a window that one passes in the street. She was without bitterness, and even without sadness. She had nothing to forgive, alas! This absence for a week was not a betrayal, it was not a fault against her; it was nothing, yet it was everything. It was the end. She knew it. She wished to cease. It was the consent of all the forces of her being. She said to herself: “I have no reason to love him less. Do I love him no more? Did I ever love him?” She did not know and she did not care to know. Three years, during which there had been months when they had seen each other every day—was all this nothing? Life is not a great thing. And what one puts in it, how little that is!

In fine, she had nothing of which to complain. But it was better to end it all. All these reflections brought her back to that point. It was not a resolution; resolutions may be changed. It was graver: it was a state of the body and of the mind.

When she arrived at the square, in the centre of which is a fountain, and on one side of which stands a church of rustic style, showing its bell in an open belfry, she recalled the little bouquet of violets that he had given to her one night on the bridge near Notre Dame. They had loved each other that day—perhaps more than usual. Her heart softened at that reminiscence. But the little bouquet remained alone, a poor little flower skeleton, in her memory.

While she was thinking, passers-by, deceived by the simplicity of her dress, followed her. One of them made propositions to her: a dinner and the theatre. It amused her. She was not at all disturbed; this was not a crisis. She thought: “How do other women manage such things? And I, who promised myself not to spoil my life. What is life worth?”

Opposite the Greek lantern of the Musee des Religions she found the soil disturbed by workmen. There were paving-stones crossed by a bridge made of a narrow flexible plank. She had stepped on it, when she saw at the other end, in front of her, a man who was waiting for her. He recognized her and bowed. It was Dechartre. She saw that he was happy to meet her; she thanked him with a smile. He asked her permission to walk a few steps with her, and they entered into the large and airy space. In this place the tall houses, set somewhat back, efface themselves, and reveal a glimpse of the sky.

He told her that he had recognized her from a distance by the rhythm of her figure and her movements, which were hers exclusively.

“Graceful movements,” he added, “are like music for the eyes.”

She replied that she liked to walk; it was her pleasure, and the cause of her good health.

He, too, liked to walk in populous towns and beautiful fields. The mystery of highways tempted him. He liked to travel. Although voyages had become common and easy, they retained for him their powerful charm. He had seen golden days and crystalline nights, Greece, Egypt, and the Bosporus; but it was to Italy that he returned always, as to the mother country of his mind.

“I shall go there next week,” he said. “I long to see again Ravenna asleep among the black pines of its sterile shore. Have you seen Ravenna, Madame? It is an enchanted tomb where sparkling phantoms appear. The magic of death lies there. The mosaic works of Saint Vitale, with their barbarous angels and their aureolated empresses,

make one feel the monstrous delights of the Orient. Despoiled to-day of its silver lamels, the grave of Galla Placidia is frightful under its crypt, luminous yet gloomy. When one looks through an opening in the sarcophagus, it seems as if one saw the daughter of Theodosius, seated on her golden chair, erect in her gown studded with stones and embroidered with scenes from the Old Testament; her beautiful, cruel face preserved hard and black with aromatic plants, and her ebony hands immovable on her knees. For thirteen centuries she retained this funereal majesty, until one day a child passed a candle through the opening of the grave and burned the body."

Madame Martin-Belleme asked what that dead woman, so obstinate in her conceit, had done during her life.

"Twice a slave," said Dechartre, "she became twice an empress."

"She must have been beautiful," said Madame Martin. "You have made me see her too vividly in her tomb. She frightens me. Shall you go to Venice, Monsieur Dechartre? Or are you tired of gondolas, of canals bordered by palaces, and of the pigeons of Saint Mark? I confess that I still like Venice, after being there three times."

He said she was right. He, too, liked Venice.

Whenever he went there, from a sculptor he became a painter, and made studies. He would like to paint its atmosphere.

"Elsewhere," he said, "even in Florence, the sky is too high. At Venice it is everywhere; it caresses the earth and the water. It envelops lovingly the leaden domes and the marble facades, and throws into the iridescent atmosphere its pearls and its crystals. The beauty of Venice is in its sky and its women. What pretty creatures the Venetian women are! Their forms are so slender and supple under their black shawls. If nothing remained of these women except a bone, one would find in that bone the charm of their exquisite structure. Sundays, at church, they form laughing groups, agitated, with hips a little pointed, elegant necks, flowery smiles,

and inflaming glances. And all bend, with the suppleness of young animals, at the passage of a priest whose head resembles that of Vitellius, and who carries the chalice, preceded by two choir-boys."

He walked with unequal step, following the rhythm of his ideas, sometimes quick, sometimes slow. She walked more regularly, and almost outstripped him. He looked at her sidewise, and liked her firm and supple carriage. He observed the little shake which at moments her obstinate head gave to the holly on her toque.

Without expecting it, he felt a charm in that meeting, almost intimate, with a young woman almost unknown.

They had reached the place where the large avenue unfolds its four rows of trees. They were following the stone parapet surmounted by a hedge of boxwood, which entirely hides the ugliness of the buildings on the quay. One felt the presence of the river by the milky atmosphere which in misty days seems to rest on the water. The sky was clear. The lights of the city were mingled with the stars. At the south shone the three golden nails of the Orion belt. Dechartre continued:

"Last year, at Venice, every morning as I went out of my house, I saw at her door, raised by three steps above the canal, a charming girl, with small head, neck round and strong, and graceful hips. She was there, in the sun and surrounded by vermin, as pure as an amphora, fragrant as a flower. She smiled. What a mouth! The richest jewel in the most beautiful light. I realized in time that this smile was addressed to a butcher standing behind me with his basket on his head."

At the corner of the short street which goes to the quay, between two lines of small gardens, Madame Martin walked more slowly.

"It is true that at Venice," she said, "all women are pretty."

"They are almost all pretty, Madame. I speak of the common girls—the cigar-girls, the girls among the glass-workers. The others are commonplace enough."

"By others you mean society women; and you don't like these?"

“Society women? Oh, some of them are charming. As for loving them, that’s a different affair.”

“Do you think so?”

She extended her hand to him, and suddenly turned the corner.

CHAPTER V. A DINNER ‘EN FAMILLE’

She dined that night alone with her husband. The narrow table had not the basket with golden eagles and winged Victorys. The candelabra did not light Oudry’s paintings. While he talked of the events of the day, she fell into a sad reverie. It seemed to her that she floated in a mist. It was a peaceful and almost sweet suffering. She saw vaguely through the clouds the little room of the Rue Spontini transported by angels to one of the summits of the Himalaya Mountains, and Robert Le Menil—in the quaking of a sort of world’s end—had disappeared while putting on his gloves. She felt her pulse to see whether she were feverish. A rattle of silverware on the table awoke her. She heard her husband saying:

“My dear friend Gavaut delivered to-day, in the Chamber, an excellent speech on the question of the reserve funds. It’s extraordinary how his ideas have become healthy and just. Oh, he has improved a great deal.”

She could not refrain from smiling.

“But Gavaut, my friend, is a poor devil who never thought of anything except escaping from the crowd of those who are dying of hunger. Gavaut never had any ideas except at his elbows. Does anybody take him seriously in the political world? You may be sure that he never gave an illusion to any woman, not even his wife. And yet to produce that sort of illusion a man does not need much.” She added, brusquely:

“You know Miss Bell has invited me to spend a month with her at Fiesole. I have

accepted; I am going."

Less astonished than discontented, he asked her with whom she was going.

At once she answered:

"With Madame Marmet."

There was no objection to make. Madame Marmet was a proper companion, and it was appropriate for her to visit Italy, where her husband had made some excavations. He asked only:

"Have you invited her? When are you going?"

"Next week."

He had the wisdom not to make any objection, judging that opposition would only make her capriciousness firmer, and fearing to give impetus to that foolish idea. He said:

"Surely, to travel is an agreeable pastime. I thought that we might in the spring visit the Caucasus and Turkestan. There is an interesting country. General Annenkoff will place at our disposal carriages, trains, and everything else on his railway. He is a friend of mine; he is quite charmed with you. He will provide us with an escort of Cossacks."

He persisted in trying to flatter her vanity, unable to realize that her mind was not worldly. She replied, negligently, that it might be a pleasant trip. Then he praised the mountains, the ancient cities, the bazaars, the costumes, the armor.

He added:

"We shall take some friends with us—Princess Seniavine, General Lariviere, perhaps Vence or Le Menil."

She replied, with a little dry laugh, that they had time to select their guests.

He became attentive to her wants.

"You are not eating. You will injure your health."

Without yet believing in this prompt departure, he felt some anxiety about it. Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone. He felt that he was himself only when his wife was there. And then, he had decided to give two or three political dinners during the session. He saw his party growing. This was the moment to assert himself, to make a dazzling show. He said, mysteriously:

“Something might happen requiring the aid of all our friends. You have not followed the march of events, Therese?”

“No, my dear.”

“I am sorry. You have judgment, liberality of mind. If you had followed the march of events you would have been struck by the current that is leading the country back to moderate opinions. The country is tired of exaggerations. It rejects the men compromised by radical politics and religious persecution. Some day or other it will be necessary to make over a Casimir-Perier ministry with other men, and that day—”

He stopped: really she listened too inattentively.

She was thinking, sad and disenchanted. It seemed to her that the pretty woman, who, among the warm shadows of a closed room, placed her bare feet in the fur of the brown bear rug, and to whom her lover gave kisses while she twisted her hair in front of a glass, was not herself, was not even a woman that she knew well, or that she desired to know, but a person whose affairs were of no interest to her. A pin badly set in her hair, one of the pins from the Bohemian glass cup, fell on her neck. She shivered.

“Yet we really must give three or four dinners to our good political friends,” said M. Martin-Belleme. “We shall invite some of the ancient radicals to meet the people of our circle. It will be well to find some pretty women. We might invite Madame Berard de la Malle; there has been no gossip about her for two years. What do you think of it?”

“But, my dear, since I am to go next week—”

This filled him with consternation.

They went, both silent and moody, into the drawing-room, where Paul Vence was waiting. He often came in the evening.

She extended her hand to him.

“I am very glad to see you. I am going out of town. Paris is cold and bleak. This weather tires and saddens me. I am going to Florence, for six weeks, to visit Miss Bell.”

M. Martin-Belleme then lifted his eyes to heaven.

Vence asked whether she had been in Italy often.

“Three times; but I saw nothing. This time I wish to see, to throw myself into things. From Florence I shall take walks into Tuscany, into Umbria. And, finally, I shall go to Venice.”

“You will do well. Venice suggests the peace of the Sabbath-day in the grand week of creative and divine Italy.”

“Your friend Dechartre talked very prettily to me of Venice, of the atmosphere of Venice, which sows pearls.”

“Yes, at Venice the sky is a colorist. Florence inspires the mind. An old author has said: ‘The sky of Florence is light and subtle, and feeds the beautiful ideas of men.’ I have lived delicious days in Tuscany. I wish I could live them again.”

“Come and see me there.”

He sighed.

The newspaper, books, and his daily work prevented him.

M. Martin-Belleme said everyone should bow before such reasons, and that one was too happy to read the articles and the fine books written by M. Paul Vence to have any wish to take him from his work.

“Oh, my books! One never says in a book what one wishes to say. It is impossible to express one’s self. I know how to talk with my pen as well as any other person; but, after all, to talk or to write, what futile occupations! How wretchedly inadequate are the little signs which form syllables, words, and phrases. What becomes of the idea, the beautiful idea, which these miserable hieroglyphics hide? What does the reader make of my writing? A series of false sense, of counter sense, and of nonsense. To read, to hear, is to translate. There are beautiful translations, perhaps. There are no faithful translations. Why should I care for the admiration which they give to my books, since it is what they themselves see in them that they admire? Every reader substitutes his visions in the place of ours. We furnish him with the means to quicken his imagination. It is a horrible thing to be a cause of such exercises. It is an infamous profession.”

“You are jesting,” said M. Martin-Belleme.

“I do not think so,” said Therese. “He recognizes that one mind is impenetrable to another mind, and he suffers from this. He feels that he is alone when he is thinking, alone when he is writing. Whatever one may do, one is always alone in the world. That is what he wishes to say. He is right. You may always explain: you never are understood.”

“There are signs—” said Paul Vence.

“Don’t you think, Monsieur Vence, that signs also are a form of hieroglyphics? Give me news of Monsieur Choulette. I do not see him any more.”

Vence replied that Choulette was very busy in forming the Third Order of Saint Francis.

“The idea, Madame, came to him in a marvellous fashion one day when he had gone to call on his Maria in the street where she lives, behind the public hospital—a street always damp, the houses on which are tottering. You must know that he considers Maria the saint and martyr who is responsible for the sins of the people.

“He pulled the bell-rope, made greasy by two centuries of visitors. Either because the martyr was at the wine-shop, where she is familiarly known, or because she was busy in her room, she did not open the door. Choulette rang for a long time, and so violently that the bellrope remained in his hand. Skilful at understanding symbols and the hidden meaning of things, he understood at once that this rope had not been detached without the permission of spiritual powers. He made of it a belt, and realized that he had been chosen to lead back into its primitive purity the Third Order of Saint Francis. He renounced the beauty of women, the delights of poetry, the brightness of glory, and studied the life and the doctrine of Saint Francis. However, he has sold to his editor a book entitled ‘Les Blandices’, which contains, he says, the description of all sorts of loves. He flatters himself that in it he has shown himself a criminal with some elegance. But far from harming his mystic undertakings, this book favors them in this sense, that, corrected by his later work, he will become honest and exemplary; and the gold that he has received in payment, which would not have been paid to him for a more chaste volume, will serve for a pilgrimage to Assisi.”

Madame Martin asked how much of this story was really true. Vence replied that she must not try to learn.

He confessed that he was the idealist historian of the poet, and that the adventures which he related of him were not to be taken in the literal and Judaic sense.

He affirmed that at least Choulette was publishing Les Blandices, and desired to visit the cell and the grave of St. Francis.

“Then,” exclaimed Madame Martin, “I will take him to Italy with me. Find him, Monsieur Vence, and bring him to me. I am going next week.”

M. Martin then excused himself, not being able to remain longer. He had to finish a report which was to be laid before the Chamber the next day.

Madame Martin said that nobody interested her so much as Choulette. Paul Vence

said that he was a singular specimen of humanity.

“He is not very different from the saints of whose extraordinary lives we read. He is as sincere as they. He has an exquisite delicacy of sentiment and a terrible violence of mind. If he shocks one by many of his acts, the reason is that he is weaker, less supported, or perhaps less closely observed. And then there are unworthy saints, just as there are bad angels: Choulette is a worldly saint, that is all. But his poems are true poems, and much finer than those written by the bishops of the seventeenth century.”

She interrupted him:

“While I think of it, I wish to congratulate you on your friend Dechartre. He has a charming mind.”

She added:

“Perhaps he is a little too timid.”

Vence reminded her that he had told her she would find Dechartre interesting.

“I know him by heart; he has been my friend since our childhood.”

“You knew his parents?”

“Yes. He is the only son of Philippe Dechartre.”

“The architect?”

“The architect who, under Napoleon III, restored so many castles and churches in Touraine and the Orleanais. He had taste and knowledge. Solitary and quiet in his life, he had the imprudence to attack Viollet-le-Duc, then all-powerful. He reproached him with trying to reestablish buildings in their primitive plan, as they had been, or as they might have been, at the beginning. Philippe Dechartre, on the contrary, wished that everything which the lapse of centuries had added to a church, an abbey, or a castle should be respected. To abolish anachronisms and restore a building to its primitive unity, seemed to him to be a scientific barbarity as culpable

as that of ignorance. He said: ‘It is a crime to efface the successive imprints made in stone by the hands of our ancestors. New stones cut in old style are false witnesses.’ He wished to limit the task of the archaeologic architect to that of supporting and consolidating walls. He was right. Everybody said that he was wrong. He achieved his ruin by dying young, while his rival triumphed. He bequeathed an honest fortune to his widow and his son. Jacques Dechartre was brought up by his mother, who adored him. I do not think that maternal tenderness ever was more impetuous. Jacques is a charming fellow; but he is a spoiled child.”

“Yet he appears so indifferent, so easy to understand, so distant from everything.”

“Do not rely on this. He has a tormented and tormenting imagination.”

“Does he like women?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Oh, it isn’t with any idea of match-making.”

“Yes, he likes them. I told you that he was an egoist. Only selfish men really love women. After the death of his mother, he had a long liaison with a well-known actress, Jeanne Tancrede.”

Madame Martin remembered Jeanne Tancrede; not very pretty, but graceful with a certain slowness of action in playing romantic roles.

“They lived almost together in a little house at Auteuil,” Paul Vence continued. “I often called on them. I found him lost in his dreams, forgetting to model a figure drying under its cloths, alone with himself, pursuing his idea, absolutely incapable of listening to anybody; she, studying her roles, her complexion burned by rouge, her eyes tender, pretty because of her intelligence and her activity. She complained to me that he was inattentive, cross, and unreasonable. She loved him and deceived him only to obtain roles. And when she deceived him, it was done on the spur of the moment. Afterward she never thought of it. A typical woman! But she was imprudent; she smiled upon Joseph Springer in the hope that he would make her a

member of the Comedie Francaise. Dechartre left her. Now she finds it more practical to live with her managers, and Jacques finds it more agreeable to travel."

"Does he regret her?"

"How can one know the things that agitate a mind anxious and mobile, selfish and passionate, desirous to surrender itself, prompt in disengaging itself, liking itself most of all among the beautiful things that it finds in the world?"

Brusquely she changed the subject.

"And your novel, Monsieur Vence?"

"I have reached the last chapter, Madame. My little workingman has been guillotined. He died with that indifference of virgins without desire, who never have felt on their lips the warm taste of life. The journals and the public approve the act of justice which has just been accomplished. But in another garret, another workingman, sober, sad, and a chemist, swears to himself that he will commit an expiatory murder."

He rose and said good-night.

She called him back.

"Monsieur Vence, you know that I was serious. Bring Choulette to me."

When she went up to her room, her husband was waiting for her, in his red-brown plush robe, with a sort of doge's cap framing his pale and hollow face. He had an air of gravity. Behind him, by the open door of his workroom, appeared under the lamp a mass of documents bound in blue, a collection of the annual budgets. Before she could reach her room he motioned that he wished to speak to her.

"My dear, I can not understand you. You are very inconsequential. It does you a great deal of harm. You intend to leave your home without any reason, without even a pretext. And you wish to run through Europe with whom? With a Bohemian, a drunkard—that man Choulette."

She replied that she should travel with Madame Marmet, in which there could be nothing objectionable.

“But you announce your going to everybody, yet you do not even know whether Madame Marmet can accompany you.”

“Oh, Madame Marmet will soon pack her boxes. Nothing keeps her in Paris except her dog. She will leave it to you; you may take care of it.”

“Does your father know of your project?”

It was his last resource to invoke the authority of Montessuy. He knew that his wife feared to displease her father. He insisted:

“Your father is full of sense and tact. I have been happy to find him agreeing with me several times in the advices which I have permitted myself to give you. He thinks as I do, that Madame Meillan’s house is not a fit place for you to visit. The company that meets there is mixed, and the mistress of the house favors intrigue. You are wrong, I must say, not to take account of what people think. I am mistaken if your father does not think it singular that you should go away with so much frivolity, and the absence will be the more remarked, my dear, since circumstances have made me eminent in the course of this legislature. My merit has nothing to do with the case, surely. But if you had consented to listen to me at dinner I should have demonstrated to you that the group of politicians to which I belong has almost reached power. In such a moment you should not renounce your duties as mistress of the house. You must understand this yourself.”

She replied “You annoy me.” And, turning her back to him, she shut the door of her room between them. That night in her bed she opened a book, as she always did before going to sleep. It was a novel. She was turning the leaves with indifference, when her eyes fell on these lines:

“Love is like devotion: it comes late. A woman is hardly in love or devout at twenty, unless she has a special disposition to be either, a sort of native sanctity. Women

who are predestined to love, themselves struggle a long time against that grace of love which is more terrible than the thunderbolt that fell on the road to Damascus. A woman oftenest yields to the passion of love only when age or solitude does not frighten her. Passion is an arid and burning desert. Passion is profane asceticism, as harsh as religious asceticism. Great woman lovers are as rare as great penitent women. Those who know life well know that women do not easily bind themselves in the chains of real love. They know that nothing is less common than sacrifice among them. And consider how much a worldly woman must sacrifice when she is in love—liberty, quietness, the charming play of a free mind, coquetry, amusement, pleasure—she loses everything.

“Coquetry is permissible. One may conciliate that with all the exigencies of fashionable life. Not so love. Love is the least mundane of passions, the most anti-social, the most savage, the most barbarous. So the world judges it more severely than mere gallantry or looseness of manners. In one sense the world is right. A woman in love betrays her nature and fails in her function, which is to be admired by all men, like a work of art. A woman is a work of art, the most marvellous that man’s industry ever has produced. A woman is a wonderful artifice, due to the concourse of all the arts mechanical and of all the arts liberal. She is the work of everybody, she belongs to the world.”

Therese closed the book and thought that these ideas were only the dreams of novelists who did not know life. She knew very well that there was in reality neither a Carmel of passion nor a chain of love, nor a beautiful and terrible vocation against which the predestined one resisted in vain; she knew very well that love was only a brief intoxication from which one recovered a little sadder. And yet, perhaps, she did not know everything; perhaps there were loves in which one was deliciously lost. She put out her lamp. The dreams of her first youth came back to her.

CHAPTER VI. A DISTINGUISHED RELICT

It was raining. Madame Martin-Belleme saw confusedly through the glass of her coupe the multitude of passing umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies. She was thinking. Her thoughts were gray and indistinct, like the aspect of the streets and the squares.

She no longer knew why the idea had come to her to spend a month with Miss Bell. Truly, she never had known. The idea had been like a spring, at first hidden by leaves, and now forming the current of a deep and rapid stream. She remembered that Tuesday night at dinner she had said suddenly that she wished to go, but she could not remember the first flush of that desire. It was not the wish to act toward Robert Le Menil as he was acting toward her. Doubtless she thought it excellent to go travelling in Italy while he went fox-hunting. This seemed to her a fair arrangement. Robert, who was always pleased to see her when he came back, would not find her on his return. She thought this would be right. She had not thought of it at first. And since then she had thought little of it, and really she was not going for the pleasure of making him grieve. She had against him a thought less piquant, and more harsh. She did not wish to see him soon. He had become to her almost a stranger. He seemed to her a man like others—better than most others—good-looking, estimable, and who did not displease her; but he did not preoccupy her. Suddenly he had gone out of her life. She could not remember how he had become mingled with it. The idea of belonging to him shocked her. The thought that they might meet again in the small apartment of the Rue Spontini was so painful to her that she discarded it at once. She preferred to think that an unforeseen event would prevent their meeting again—the end of the world, for example. M. Lagrange, member of the Academie des Sciences, had told her the day before of a comet which some day might meet the earth, envelop it with its flaming hair, imbue animals and plants with unknown poisons, and make all men die in a

frenzy of laughter. She expected that this, or something else, would happen next month. It was not inexplicable that she wished to go. But that her desire to go should contain a vague joy, that she should feel the charm of what she was to find, was inexplicable to her.

Her carriage left her at the corner of a street.

There, under the roof of a tall house, behind five windows, in a small, neat apartment, Madame Marmet had lived since the death of her husband.

Countess Martin found her in her modest drawing-room, opposite M. Lagrange, half asleep in a deep armchair. This worldly old savant had remained ever faithful to her. He it was who, the day after M. Marmet's funeral, had conveyed to the unfortunate widow the poisoned speech delivered by Schmoll. She had fainted in his arms. Madame Marmet thought that he lacked judgment, but he was her best friend. They dined together often with rich friends.

Madame Martin, slender and erect in her zibeline corsage opening on a flood of lace, awakened with the charming brightness of her gray eyes the good man, who was susceptible to the graces of women. He had told her the day before how the world would come to an end. He asked her whether she had not been frightened at night by pictures of the earth devoured by flames or frozen to a mass of ice. While he talked to her with affected gallantry, she looked at the mahogany bookcase. There were not many books in it, but on one of the shelves was a skeleton in armor. It amazed one to see in this good lady's house that Etruscan warrior wearing a green bronze helmet and a cuirass. He slept among boxes of bonbons, vases of gilded porcelain, and carved images of the Virgin, picked up at Lucerne and on the Righi. Madame Marmet, in her widowhood, had sold the books which her husband had left. Of all the ancient objects collected by the archaeologist, she had retained nothing except the Etruscan. Many persons had tried to sell it for her. Paul Vence had obtained from the administration a promise to buy it for the Louvre, but the good widow would not

part with it. It seemed to her that if she lost that warrior with his green bronze helmet she would lose the name that she wore worthily, and would cease to be the widow of Louis Marmet of the Academie des Inscriptions.

“Do not be afraid, Madame; a comet will not soon strike the earth. Such a phenomenon is very improbable.”

Madame Martin replied that she knew no serious reason why the earth and humanity should not be annihilated at once.

Old Lagrange exclaimed with profound sincerity that he hoped the cataclysm would come as late as possible.

She looked at him. His bald head could boast only a few hairs dyed black. His eyelids fell like rags over eyes still smiling; his cheeks hung in loose folds, and one divined that his body was equally withered. She thought, “And even he likes life!”

Madame Marmet hoped, too, that the end of the world was not near at hand.

“Monsieur Lagrange,” said Madame Martin, “you live, do you not, in a pretty little house, the windows of which overlook the Botanical Gardens? It seems to me it must be a joy to live in that garden, which makes me think of the Noah’s Ark of my infancy, and of the terrestrial paradises in the old Bibles.”

But he was not at all charmed with his house. It was small, unimproved, infested with rats.

She acknowledged that one seldom felt at home anywhere, and that rats were found everywhere, either real or symbolical, legions of pests that torment us. Yet she liked the Botanical Gardens; she had always wished to go there, yet never had gone. There was also the museum, which she was curious to visit.

Smiling, happy, he offered to escort her there. He considered it his house. He would show her rare specimens, some of which were superb.

She did not know what a bolide was. She recalled that some one had said to her that

at the museum were bones carved by primitive men, and plaques of ivory on which were engraved pictures of animals, which were long ago extinct. She asked whether that were true. Lagrange ceased to smile. He replied indifferently that such objects concerned one of his colleagues.

“Ah!” said Madame Martin, “then they are not in your showcase.”

She observed that learned men were not curious, and that it is indiscreet to question them on things that are not in their own showcases. It is true that Lagrange had made a scientific fortune in studying meteors. This had led him to study comets. But he was wise. For twenty years he had been preoccupied by nothing except dining out.

When he had left, Countess Martin told Madame Marmet what she expected of her.

“I am going next week to Fiesole, to visit Miss Bell, and you are coming with me.”

The good Madame Marmet, with placid brow yet searching eyes, was silent for a moment; then she refused gently, but finally consented.

CHAPTER VII. MADAME HAS HER WAY

The Marseilles express was ready on the quay, where the postmen ran, and the carriages rolled amid smoke and noise, under the light that fell from the windows. Through the open doors travellers in long cloaks came and went. At the end of the station, blinding with soot and dust, a small rainbow could be discerned, not larger than one’s hand. Countess Martin and the good Madame Marniet were already in their carriage, under the rack loaded with bags, among newspapers thrown on the cushions. Choulette had not appeared, and Madame Martin expected him no longer. Yet he had promised to be at the station. He had made his arrangements to go, and had received from his publisher the price of Les Blandices. Paul Vence had brought him one evening to Madame Martin’s house. He had been sweet, polished, full of witty gayety and naive joy. She had promised herself much pleasure in travelling with a man of genius, original, picturesquely ugly, with an amusing simplicity; like a

child prematurely old and abandoned, full of vices, yet with a certain degree of innocence. The doors closed. She expected him no longer. She should not have counted on his impulsive and vagabondish mind. At the moment when the engine began to breathe hoarsely, Madame Marmet, who was looking out of the window, said, quietly:

“I think that Monsieur Choulette is coming.”

He was walking along the quay, limping, with his hat on the back of his head, his beard unkempt, and dragging an old carpet-bag. He was almost repulsive; yet, in spite of his fifty years of age, he looked young, so clear and lustrous were his eyes, so much ingenuous audacity had been retained in his yellow, hollow face, so vividly did this old man express the eternal adolescence of the poet and artist. When she saw him, Therese regretted having invited so strange a companion. He walked along, throwing a hasty glance into every carriage—a glance which, little by little, became sullen and distrustful. But when he recognized Madame Martin, he smiled so sweetly and said good-morning to her in so caressing a voice that nothing was left of the ferocious old vagabond walking on the quay, nothing except the old carpet-bag, the handles of which were half broken.

He placed it in the rack with great care, among the elegant bags enveloped with gray cloth, beside which it looked conspicuously sordid. It was studded with yellow flowers on a blood-colored background.

He was soon perfectly at ease, and complimented Madame Martin on the elegance of her travelling attire.

“Excuse me, ladies,” he added, “I was afraid I should be late. I went to six o’clock mass at Saint Severin, my parish, in the Virgin Chapel, under those pretty, but absurd columns that point toward heaven though frail as reeds-like us, poor sinners that we are.”

“Ah,” said Madame Martin, “you are pious to-day.”

And she asked him whether he wore the cordon of the order which he was founding. He assumed a grave and penitent air.

“I am afraid, Madame, that Monsieur Paul Vence has told you many absurd stories about me. I have heard that he goes about circulating rumors that my ribbon is a bell-rope—and of what a bell! I should be pained if anybody believed so wretched a story. My ribbon, Madame, is a symbolical ribbon. It is represented by a simple thread, which one wears under one’s clothes after a pauper has touched it, as a sign that poverty is holy, and that it will save the world. There is nothing good except in poverty; and since I have received the price of Les Blandices, I feel that I am unjust and harsh. It is a good thing that I have placed in my bag several of these mystic ribbons.”

And, pointing to the horrible carpet-bag:

“I have also placed in it a host which a bad priest gave to me, the works of Monsieur de Maistre, shirts, and several other things:”

Madame Martin lifted her eyebrows, a little ill at ease. But the good Madame Marmet retained her habitual placidity.

As the train rolled through the homely scenes of the outskirts, that black fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city, Choulette took from his pocket an old book which he began to fumble. The writer, hidden under the vagabond, revealed himself. Choulette, without wishing to appear to be careful of his papers, was very orderly about them. He assured himself that he had not lost the pieces of paper on which he noted at the coffeehouse his ideas for poems, nor the dozen of flattering letters which, soiled and spotted, he carried with him continually, to read them to his newly-made companions at night. After assuring himself that nothing was missing, he took from the book a letter folded in an open envelope. He waved it for a while, with an air of mysterious impudence, then handed it to the Countess Martin. It was a letter of introduction from the Marquise de Rieu to a princess of the House of

France, a near relative of the Comte de Chambord, who, old and a widow, lived in retirement near the gates of Florence. Having enjoyed the effect which he expected to produce, he said that he should perhaps visit the Princess; that she was a good person, and pious.

“A truly great lady,” he added, “who does not show her magnificence in gowns and hats. She wears her chemises for six weeks, and sometimes longer. The gentlemen of her train have seen her wear very dirty white stockings, which fell around her heels. The virtues of the great queens of Spain are revived in her. Oh, those soiled stockings, what real glory there is in them!”

He took the letter and put it back in his book. Then, arming himself with a horn-handled knife, he began, with its point, to finish a figure sketched in the handle of his stick. He complimented himself on it:

“I am skilful in all the arts of beggars and vagabonds. I know how to open locks with a nail, and how to carve wood with a bad knife.”

The head began to appear. It was the head of a thin woman, weeping.

Choulette wished to express in it human misery, not simple and touching, such as men of other times may have felt it in a world of mingled harshness and kindness; but hideous, and reflecting the state of ugliness created by the free-thinking bourgeois and the military patriots of the French Revolution. According to him the present regime embodied only hypocrisy and brutality.

“Their barracks are a hideous invention of modern times. They date from the seventeenth century. Before that time there were only guard-houses where the soldiers played cards and told tales. Louis XIV was a precursor of Bonaparte. But the evil has attained its plenitude since the monstrous institution of the obligatory enlistment. The shame of emperors and of republics is to have made it an obligation for men to kill. In the ages called barbarous, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries, who fought prudently. In a great battle only five or six men

were killed. And when knights went to the wars, at least they were not forced to do it; they died for their pleasure. They were good for nothing else. Nobody in the time of Saint Louis would have thought of sending to battle a man of learning. And the laborer was not torn from the soil to be killed. Nowadays it is a duty for a poor peasant to be a soldier. He is exiled from his house, the roof of which smokes in the silence of night; from the fat prairies where the oxen graze; from the fields and the paternal woods. He is taught how to kill men; he is threatened, insulted, put in prison and told that it is an honor; and, if he does not care for that sort of honor, he is fusilladed. He obeys because he is terrorized, and is of all domestic animals the gentlest and most docile. We are warlike in France, and we are citizens. Another reason to be proud, this being a citizen! For the poor it consists in sustaining and preserving the wealthy in their power and their laziness. The poor must work for this, in presence of the majestic quality of the law which prohibits the wealthy as well as the poor from sleeping under the bridges, from begging in the streets, and from stealing bread. That is one of the good effects of the Revolution. As this Revolution was made by fools and idiots for the benefit of those who acquired national lands, and resulted in nothing but making the fortune of crafty peasants and financiering bourgeois, the Revolution only made stronger, under the pretence of making all men equal, the empire of wealth. It has betrayed France into the hands of the men of wealth. They are masters and lords. The apparent government, composed of poor devils, is in the pay of the financiers. For one hundred years, in this poisoned country, whoever has loved the poor has been considered a traitor to society. A man is called dangerous when he says that there are wretched people. There are laws against indignation and pity, and what I say here could not go into print."

Choulette became excited and waved his knife, while under the wintry sunlight passed fields of brown earth, trees despoiled by winter, and curtains of poplars beside silvery rivers.

He looked with tenderness at the figure carved on his stick.

“Here you are,” he said, “poor humanity, thin and weeping, stupid with shame and misery, as you were made by your masters—soldiers and men of wealth.”

The good Madame Marmet, whose nephew was a captain in the artillery, was shocked at the violence with which Choulette attacked the army. Madame Martin saw in this only an amusing fantasy. Choulette’s ideas did not frighten her. She was afraid of nothing. But she thought they were a little absurd. She did not think that the past had ever been better than the present.

“I believe, Monsieur Choulette, that men were always as they are to-day, selfish, avaricious, and pitiless. I believe that laws and manners were always harsh and cruel to the unfortunate.”

Between La Roche and Dijon they took breakfast in the dining-car, and left Choulette in it, alone with his pipe, his glass of benedictine, and his irritation.

In the carriage, Madame Marmet talked with peaceful tenderness of the husband she had lost. He had married her for love; he had written admirable verses to her, which she had kept, and never shown to any one. He was lively and very gay. One would not have thought it who had seen him later, tired by work and weakened by illness. He studied until the last moment. Two hours before he died he was trying to read again. He was affectionate and kind. Even in suffering he retained all his sweetness. Madame Martin said to her:

“You have had long years of happiness; you have kept the reminiscence of them; that is a share of happiness in this world.”

But good Madame Marmet sighed; a cloud passed over her quiet brow.

“Yes,” she said, “Louis was the best of men and the best of husbands. Yet he made me very miserable. He had only one fault, but I suffered from it cruelly. He was jealous. Good, kind, tender, and generous as he was, this horrible passion made him unjust, ironical, and violent. I can assure you that my behavior gave not the least cause for suspicion. I was not a coquette. But I was young, fresh; I passed for

beautiful. That was enough. He would not let me go out alone, and would not let me receive calls in his absence. Whenever we went to a reception, I trembled in advance with the fear of the scene which he would make later in the carriage."

And the good Madame Marmet added, with a sigh:

"It is true that I liked to dance. But I had to renounce going to balls; it made him suffer too much."

Countess Martin expressed astonishment. She had always imagined Marmet as an old man, timid, and absorbed by his thoughts; a little ridiculous, between his wife, plump, white, and amiable, and the skeleton wearing a helmet of bronze and gold. But the excellent widow confided to her that, at fifty-five years of age, when she was fifty-three, Louis was just as jealous as on the first day of their marriage.

And Therese thought that Robert had never tormented her with jealousy. Was it on his part a proof of tact and good taste, a mark of confidence, or was it that he did not love her enough to make her suffer? She did not know, and she did not have the heart to try to know. She would have to look through recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open.

She murmured carelessly:

"We long to be loved, and when we are loved we are tormented or worried."

The day was finished in reading and thinking. Choulette did not reappear. Night covered little by little with its gray clouds the mulberry-trees of the Dauphine. Madame Marmet went to sleep peacefully, resting on herself as on a mass of pillows. Therese looked at her and thought:

"She is happy, since she likes to remember."

The sadness of night penetrated her heart. And when the moon rose on the fields of olive-trees, seeing the soft lines of plains and of hills pass, Therese, in this landscape wherein everything spoke of peace and oblivion, and nothing spoke of her, regretted

the Seine, the Arc de Triomphe with its radiating avenues, and the alleys of the park where, at least, the trees and the stones knew her.

Suddenly Choulette threw himself into the carriage. Armed with his knotty stick, his face and head enveloped in red wool and a fur cap, he almost frightened her. It was what he wished to do. His violent attitudes and his savage dress were studied. Always seeking to produce effects, it pleased him to seem frightful.

He was a coward himself, and was glad to inspire the fears he often felt. A moment before, as he was smoking his pipe, he had felt, while seeing the moon swallowed up by the clouds, one of those childish frights that tormented his light mind. He had come near the Countess to be reassured.

“Arles,” he said. “Do you know Arles? It is a place of pure beauty. I have seen, in the cloister, doves resting on the shoulders of statues, and I have seen the little gray lizards warming themselves in the sun on the tombs. The tombs are now in two rows on the road that leads to the church. They are formed like cisterns, and serve as beds for the poor at night. One night, when I was walking among them, I met a good old woman who was placing dried herbs in the tomb of an old maid who had died on her wedding-day. We said goodnight to her. She replied: ‘May God hear-you! but fate wills that this tomb should open on the side of the northwest wind. If only it were open on the other side, I should be lying as comfortably as Queen Jeanne.’”

Therese made no answer. She was dozing. And Choulette shivered in the cold of the night, in the fear of death.

CHAPTER VIII. THE LADY OF THE BELLS

In her English cart, which she drove herself, Miss Bell had brought over the hills, from the railway station at Florence, the Countess Martin-Belleme and Madame Marmet to her pink-tinted house at Fiesole, which, crowned with a long balustrade, overlooked the incomparable city. The maid followed with the luggage. Choulette,

lodged, by Miss Bell's attention, in the house of a sacristan's widow, in the shadow of the cathedral of Fiesole, was not expected until dinner. Plain and gentle, wearing short hair, a waistcoat, a man's shirt on a chest like a boy's, almost graceful, with small hips, the poetess was doing for her French friends the honors of the house, which reflected the ardent delicacy of her taste. On the walls of the drawing-room were pale Virgins, with long hands, reigning peacefully among angels, patriarchs, and saints in beautiful gilded frames. On a pedestal stood a Magdalena, clothed only with her hair, frightful with thinness and old age, some beggar of the road to Pistoia, burned by the suns and the snows, whom some unknown precursor of Donatello had moulded. And everywhere were Miss Bell's chosen arms-bells and cymbals. The largest lifted their bronze clappers at the angles of the room; others formed a chain at the foot of the walls. Smaller ones ran along the cornices. There were bells over the hearth, on the cabinets, and on the chairs. The shelves were full of silver and golden bells. There were big bronze bells marked with the Florentine lily; bells of the Renaissance, representing a lady wearing a white gown; bells of the dead, decorated with tears and bones; bells covered with symbolical animals and leaves, which had rung in the churches in the time of St. Louis; table-bells of the seventeenth century, having a statuette for a handle; the flat, clear cow-bells of the Ruth Valley; Hindu bells; Chinese bells formed like cylinders—they had come from all countries and all times, at the magic call of little Miss Bell.

"You look at my speaking arms," she said to Madame Martin. "I think that all these Misses Bell are pleased to be here, and I should not be astonished if some day they all began to sing together. But you must not admire them all equally. Reserve your purest and most fervent praise for this one."

And striking with her finger a dark, bare bell which gave a faint sound:

"This one," she said, "is a holy village-bell of the fifth century. She is a spiritual daughter of Saint Paulin de Nole, who was the first to make the sky sing over our

heads. The metal is rare. Soon I will show to you a gentle Florentine, the queen of bells. She is coming. But I bore you, darling, with my babble. And I bore, too, the good Madame Marmet. It is wrong."

She escorted them to their rooms.

An hour later, Madame Martin, rested, fresh, in a gown of foulard and lace, went on the terrace where Miss Bell was waiting for her. The humid air, warmed by the sun, exhaled the restless sweetness of spring. Therese, resting on the balustrade, bathed her eyes in the light. At her feet, the cypress-trees raised their black distaffs, and the olive-trees looked like sheep on the hills. In the valley, Florence extended its domes, its towers, and the multitudes of its red roofs, through which the Arno showed its undulating line. Beyond were the soft blue hills.

She tried to recognize the Boboli Gardens, where she had walked at her first visit; the Cascine, which she did not like; the Pitti Palace. Then the charming infinity of the sky attracted her. She looked at the forms in the clouds.

After a long silence, Vivian Bell extended her hand toward the horizon.

"Darling, I do not know how to say what I wish. But look, darling, look again. What you see there is unique in the world. Nature is nowhere else so subtle, elegant, and fine. The god who made the hills of Florence was an artist. Oh, he was a jeweller, an engraver, a sculptor, a bronze-founder, and a painter; he was a Florentine. He did nothing else in the world, darling. The rest was made by a hand less delicate, whose work was less perfect. How can you think that that violet hill of San Miniato, so firm and so pure in relief, was made by the author of Mont Blanc? It is not possible. This landscape has the beauty of an antique medal and of a precious painting. It is a perfect and measured work of art. And here is another thing that I do not know how to say, that I can not even understand, but which is a real thing. In this country I feel—and you will feel as I do, darling—half alive and half dead; in a condition which is sad, noble, and very sweet. Look, look again; you will realize the

melancholy of those hills that surround Florence, and see a delicious sadness ascend from the land of the dead."

The sun was low over the horizon. The bright points of the mountain-peaks faded one by one, while the clouds inflamed the sky. Madame Marmet sneezed.

Miss Bell sent for some shawls, and warned the French women that the evenings were fresh and that the night-air was dangerous.

Then suddenly she said:

"Darling, you know Monsieur Jacques Dechartre? Well, he wrote to me that he would be at Florence next week. I am glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre is to meet you in our city. He will accompany us to the churches and to the museums, and he will be a good guide. He understands beautiful things, because he loves them. And he has an exquisite talent as a sculptor. His figures in medallions are admired more in England than in France. Oh, I am so glad Monsieur Jacques Dechartre and you are to meet at Florence, darling!"

CHAPTER IX. CHOULETTE FINDS A NEW FRIEND

She next day, as they were traversing the square where are planted, in imitation of antique amphitheatres, two marble pillars, Madame Marmet said to the Countess Martin:

"I think I see Monsieur Choulette."

Seated in a shoemaker's shop, his pipe in his hand, Choulette was making rhythmic gestures, and appeared to be reciting verses. The Florentine cobbler listened with a kind smile. He was a little, bald man, and represented one of the types familiar to Flemish painters. On a table, among wooden lasts, nails, leather, and wax, a basilic plant displayed its round green head. A sparrow, lacking a leg, which had been replaced by a match, hopped on the old man's shoulder and head.

Madame Martin, amused by this spectacle, called Choulette from the threshold. He was softly humming a tune, and she asked him why he had not gone with her to visit the Spanish chapel.

He arose and replied:

“Madame, you are preoccupied by vain images; but I live in life and in truth.”

He shook the cobbler’s hand and followed the two ladies.

“While going to church,” he said, “I saw this old man, who, bending over his work, and pressing a last between his knees as in a vise, was sewing coarse shoes. I felt that he was simple and kind. I said to him, in Italian: ‘My father, will you drink with me a glass of Chianti?’ He consented. He went for a flagon and some glasses, and I kept the shop.”

And Choulette pointed to two glasses and a flagon placed on a stove.

“When he came back we drank together; I said vague but kind things to him, and I charmed him by the sweetness of sounds. I will go again to his shop; I will learn from him how to make shoes, and how to live without desire. After which, I shall not be sad again. For desire and idleness alone make us sad.”

The Countess Martin smiled.

“Monsieur Choulette, I desire nothing, and, nevertheless, I am not joyful. Must I make shoes, too?”

Choulette replied, gravely:

“It is not yet time for that.”

When they reached the gardens of the Oricellari, Madame Marmet sank on a bench. She had examined at Santa Maria-Novella the frescoes of Ghirlandajo, the stalls of the choir, the Virgin of Cimabue, the paintings in the cloister. She had done this carefully, in memory of her husband, who had greatly liked Italian art. She was tired. Choulette sat by her and said:

“Madame, could you tell me whether it is true that the Pope’s gowns are made by Worth?”

Madame Marmet thought not. Nevertheless, Choulette had heard people say this in cafes. Madame Marmet was astonished that Choulette, a Catholic and a socialist, should speak so disrespectfully of a pope friendly to the republic. But he did not like Leo XIII.

“The wisdom of princes is shortsighted,” he said; “the salvation of the Church must come from the Italian republic, as Leo XIII believes and wishes; but the Church will not be saved in the manner which this pious Machiavelli thinks. The revolution will make the Pope lose his last sou, with the rest of his patrimony. And it will be salvation. The Pope, destitute and poor, will then become powerful. He will agitate the world. We shall see again Peter, Lin, Clet, Anaclet, and Clement; the humble, the ignorant; men like the early saints will change the face of the earth. If to-morrow, in the chair of Peter, came to sit a real bishop, a real Christian, I would go to him, and say: ‘Do not be an old man buried alive in a golden tomb; quit your noble guards and your cardinals; quit your court and its similacrums of power. Take my arm and come with me to beg for your bread among the nations. Covered with rags, poor, ill, dying, go on the highways, showing in yourself the image of Jesus. Say, “I am begging my bread for the condemnation of the wealthy.” Go into the cities, and shout from door to door, with a sublime stupidity, “Be humble, be gentle, be poor!” Announce peace and charity to the cities, to the dens, and to the barracks. You will be disdained; the mob will throw stones at you. Policemen will drag you into prison. You shall be for the humble as for the powerful, for the poor as for the rich, a subject of laughter, an object of disgust and of pity. Your priests will dethrone you, and elevate against you an anti-pope, or will say that you are crazy. And it is necessary that they should tell the truth; it is necessary that you should be crazy; the lunatics have saved the world. Men will give to you the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre, and they will spit in your face, and it is by that sign that you

will appear as Christ and true king; and it is by such means that you will establish Christian socialism, which is the kingdom of God on earth.'"

Having spoken in this way, Choulette lighted one of those long and tortuous Italian cigars, which are pierced with a straw. He drew from it several puffs of infectious vapor, then he continued, tranquilly:

"And it would be practical. You may refuse to acknowledge any quality in me except my clear view of situations. Ah, Madame Marmet, you will never know how true it is that the great works of this world were always achieved by madmen. Do you think, Madame Martin, that if Saint Francis of Assisi had been reasonable, he would have poured upon the earth, for the refreshment of peoples, the living water of charity and all the perfumes of love?"

"I do not know," replied Madame Martin; "but reasonable people have always seemed to me to be bores. I can say this to you, Monsieur Choulette."

They returned to Fiesole by the steam tramway which goes up the hill. The rain fell. Madame Marmet went to sleep and Choulette complained. All his ills came to attack him at once: the humidity in the air gave him a pain in the knee, and he could not bend his leg; his carpet-bag, lost the day before in the trip from the station to Fiesole, had not been found, and it was an irreparable disaster; a Paris review had just published one of his poems, with typographical errors as glaring as Aphrodite's shell.

He accused men and things of being hostile to him. He became puerile, absurd, odious. Madame Martin, whom Choulette and the rain saddened, thought the trip would never end. When she reached the house she found Miss Bell in the drawing-room, copying with gold ink on a leaf of parchment, in a handwriting formed after the Aldine italics, verses which she had composed in the night. At her friend's coming she raised her little face, plain but illuminated by splendid eyes.

"Darling, permit me to introduce to you the Prince Albertinelli."

The Prince possessed a certain youthful, godlike beauty, that his black beard intensified. He bowed.

“Madame, you would make one love France, if that sentiment were not already in our hearts.”

The Countess and Choulette asked Miss Bell to read to them the verses she was writing. She excused herself from reciting her uncertain cadence to the French poet, whom she liked best after Francois Villon. Then she recited in her pretty, hissing, birdlike voice.

“That is very pretty,” said Choulette, “and bears the mark of Italy softly veiled by the mists of Thule.”

“Yes,” said the Countess Martin, “that is pretty. But why, dear Vivian, did your two beautiful innocents wish to die?”

“Oh, darling, because they felt as happy as possible, and desired nothing more. It was discouraging, darling, discouraging. How is it that you do not understand that?”

“And do you think that if we live the reason is that we hope?”

“Oh, yes. We live in the hope of what to-morrow, tomorrow, king of the land of fairies, will bring in his black mantle studded with stars, flowers, and tears. Oh, bright king, To-morrow!”

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER X. DECHARTRE ARRIVES IN FLORENCE

They had dressed for dinner. In the drawing-room Miss Bell was sketching monsters in imitation of Leonard. She created them, to know what they would say afterward, sure that they would speak and express rare ideas in odd rhythms, and that she would listen to them. It was in this way that she often found her inspiration.

Prince Albertinelli strummed on the piano the Sicilian ‘O Lola’! His soft fingers hardly touched the keys.

Choulette, even harsher than was his habit, asked for thread and needles that he might mend his clothes. He grumbled because he had lost a needle-case which he had carried for thirty years in his pocket, and which was dear to him for the sweetness of the reminiscences and the strength of the good advice that he had received from it. He thought he had lost it in the hall devoted to historic subjects in the Pitti Palace; and he blamed for this loss the Medicis and all the Italian painters.

Looking at Miss Bell with an evil eye, he said:

“I compose verses while mending my clothes. I like to work with my hands. I sing songs to myself while sweeping my room; that is the reason why my songs have gone to the hearts of men, like the old songs of the farmers and artisans, which are even more beautiful than mine, but not more natural. I have pride enough not to want any other servant than myself. The sacristan’s widow offered to repair my clothes. I would not permit her to do it. It is wrong to make others do servilely for us work which we can do ourselves with noble pride.”

The Prince was nonchalantly playing his nonchalant music. Therese, who for eight days had been running to churches and museums in the company of Madame Marmet, was thinking of the annoyance which her companion caused her by discovering in the faces of the old painters resemblances to persons she knew. In the morning, at the Ricardi Palace, on the frescoes of Gozzoli, she had recognized M. Gamin, M. Lagrange, M. Schmoll, the Princess Seniavine as a page, and M. Renan on horseback. She was terrified at finding M. Renan everywhere. She led all her ideas back to her little circle of academicians and fashionable people, by an easy turn, which irritated her friend. She recalled in her soft voice the public meetings at the Institute, the lectures at the Sorbonne, the evening receptions where shone the worldly and the spiritualist philosophers. As for the women, they were all charming

and irreproachable. She dined with all of them. And Therese thought: “She is too prudent. She bores me.” And she thought of leaving her at Fiesole and visiting the churches alone. Employing a word that Le Menil had taught her, she said to herself:

“I will ‘plant’ Madame Marmet.”

A lithe old man came into the parlor. His waxed moustache and his white imperial made him look like an old soldier; but his glance betrayed, under his glasses, the fine softness of eyes worn by science and voluptuousness. He was a Florentine, a friend of Miss Bell and of the Prince, Professor Arrighi, formerly adored by women, and now celebrated in Tuscany for his studies of agriculture. He pleased the Countess Martin at once. She questioned him on his methods, and on the results he obtained from them. He said that he worked with prudent energy. “The earth,” he said, “is like women. The earth does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality.” The Ave Maria rang in all the campaniles, seeming to make of the sky an immense instrument of religious music. “Darling,” said Miss Bell, “do you observe that the air of Florence is made sonorous and silvery at night by the sound of the bells?”

“It is singular,” said Choulette, “we have the air of people who are waiting for something.”

Vivian Bell replied that they were waiting for M. Dechartre. He was a little late; she feared he had missed the train.

Choulette approached Madame Marmet, and said, gravely “Madame Marmet, is it possible for you to look at a door—a simple, painted, wooden door like yours, I suppose, or like mine, or like this one, or like any other—without being terror-stricken at the thought of the visitor who might, at any moment, come in? The door of one’s room, Madame Marmet, opens on the infinite. Have you ever thought of that? Does one ever know the true name of the man or woman, who, under a human guise, with a known face, in ordinary clothes, comes into one’s house?”

He added that when he was closeted in his room he could not look at the door without feeling his hair stand on end. But Madame Marmet saw the doors of her rooms open without fear. She knew the name of every one who came to see her—charming persons.

Choulette looked at her sadly, and said, shaking his head: “Madame Marmet, those whom you call by their terrestrial names have other names which you do not know, and which are their real names.”

Madame Martin asked Choulette if he thought that misfortune needed to cross the threshold in order to enter one’s life.

“Misfortune is ingenious and subtle. It comes by the window, it goes through walls. It does not always show itself, but it is always there. The poor doors are innocent of the coming of that unwelcome visitor.”

Choulette warned Madame Martin severely that she should not call misfortune an unwelcome visitor.

“Misfortune is our greatest master and our best friend. Misfortune teaches us the meaning of life. Madame, when you suffer, you know what you must know; you believe what you must believe; you do what you must do; you are what you must be. And you shall have joy, which pleasure expels. True joy is timid, and does not find pleasure among a multitude.”

Prince Albertinelli said that Miss Bell and her French friends did not need to be unfortunate in order to be perfect, and that the doctrine of perfection reached by suffering was a barbarous cruelty, held in horror under the beautiful sky of Italy. When the conversation languished, he prudently sought again at the piano the phrases of the graceful and banal Sicilian air, fearing to slip into an air of Trovatore, which was written in the same manner.

Vivian Bell questioned the monsters she had created, and complained of their absurd replies.

“At this moment,” she said, “I should like to hear speak only figures on tapestries which should say tender things, ancient and precious as themselves.”

And the handsome Prince, carried away by the flood of melody, sang. His voice displayed itself like a peacock’s plumage, and died in spasms of “ohs” and “ahs.”

The good Madame Marmet, her eyes fixed on the door, said:

“I think that Monsieur Dechartre is coming.”

He came in, animated, with joy on his usually grave face.

Miss Bell welcomed him with birdlike cries.

“Monsieur Dechartre, we were impatient to see you. Monsieur Choulette was talking evil of doors—yes, of doors of houses; and he was saying also that misfortune is a very obliging old gentleman. You have lost all these beautiful things. You have made us wait very long, Monsieur Dechartre. Why?”

He apologized; he had taken only the time to go to his hotel and change his dress. He had not even gone to bow to his old friend the bronze San Marco, so imposing in his niche on the San Michele wall. He praised the poetess and saluted the Countess Martin with joy hardly concealed.

“Before quitting Paris I went to your house, where I was told you had gone to wait for spring at Fiesole, with Miss Bell. I then had the hope of finding you in this country, which I love now more than ever.”

She asked him whether he had gone to Venice, and whether he had seen again at Ravenna the empresses wearing aureolas, and the phantoms that had formerly dazzled him.

No, he had not stopped anywhere.

She said nothing. Her eyes remained fixed on the corner of the wall, on the St. Paulin bell.

He said to her:

“You are looking at the Nolette.”

Vivian Bell laid aside her papers and her pencils.

“You shall soon see a marvel, Monsieur Dechartre. I have found the queen of small bells. I found it at Rimini, in an old building in ruins, which is used as a warehouse. I bought it and packed it myself. I am waiting for it. You shall see. It bears a Christ on a cross, between the Virgin and Saint John, the date of 1400, and the arms of Malatesta—Monsieur Dechartre, you are not listening enough. Listen to me attentively. In 1400 Lorenzo Ghiberti, fleeing from war and the plague, took refuge at Rimini, at Paola Malatesta’s house. It was he that modelled the figures of my bell. And you shall see here, next week, Ghiberti’s work.”

The servant announced that dinner was served.

Miss Bell apologized for serving to them Italian dishes. Her cook was a poet of Fiesole.

At table, before the fiascani enveloped with corn straw, they talked of the fifteenth century, which they loved. Prince Albertinelli praised the artists of that epoch for their universality, for the fervent love they gave to their art, and for the genius that devoured them. He talked with emphasis, in a caressing voice.

Dechartre admired them. But he admired them in another way.

“To praise in a becoming manner,” he said, “those men, who worked so heartily, the praise should be modest and just. They should be placed in their workshops, in the shops where they worked as artisans. It is there that one may admire their simplicity and their genius. They were ignorant and rude. They had read little and seen little. The hills that surround Florence were the boundary of their horizon. They knew only their city, the Holy Scriptures, and some fragments of antique sculptures, studied and caressed lovingly.”

“You are right,” said Professor Arrighi. “They had no other care than to use the best processes. Their minds bent only on preparing varnish and mixing colors. The one

who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel, in order that the painting should not be broken when the wood was split, passed for a marvellous man. Every master had his secret formulae."

"Happy time," said Dechartre, "when nobody troubled himself about that originality for which we are so avidly seeking to-day. The apprentice tried to work like the master. He had no other ambition than to resemble him, and it was without trying to be that he was different from the others. They worked not for glory, but to live."

"They were right," said Choulette. "Nothing is better than to work for a living."

"The desire to attain fame," continued Dechartre, "did not trouble them. As they did not know the past, they did not conceive the future; and their dream did not go beyond their lives. They exercised a powerful will in working well. Being simple, they made few mistakes, and saw the truth which our intelligence conceals from us."

Choulette began to relate to Madame Marmet the incidents of a call he had made during the day on the Princess of the House of France to whom the Marquise de Rieu had given him a letter of introduction. He liked to impress upon people the fact that he, the Bohemian and vagabond, had been received by that royal Princess, at whose house neither Miss Bell nor the Countess Martin would have been admitted, and whom Prince Albertinelli prided himself on having met one day at some ceremony.

"She devotes herself," said the Prince, "to the practices of piety."

"She is admirable for her nobility, and her simplicity," said Choulette. "In her house, surrounded by her gentlemen and her ladies, she causes the most rigorous etiquette to be observed, so that her grandeur is almost a penance, and every morning she scrubs the pavement of the church. It is a village church, where the chickens roam, while the 'cure' plays briscola with the sacristan."

And Choulette, bending over the table, imitated, with his napkin, a servant scrubbing; then, raising his head, he said, gravely:

“After waiting in consecutive anterooms, I was at last permitted to kiss her hand.”

And he stopped.

Madame Martin asked, impatiently:

“What did she say to you, that Princess so admirable for her nobility and her simplicity?”

“She said to me: ‘Have you visited Florence? I am told that recently new and handsome shops have been opened which are lighted at night.’ She said also ‘We have a good chemist here. The Austrian chemists are not better. He placed on my leg, six months ago, a porous plaster which has not yet come off.’ Such are the words that Maria Therese deigned to address to me. O simple grandeur! O Christian virtue! O daughter of Saint Louis! O marvellous echo of your voice, holy Elizabeth of Hungary!”

Madame Martin smiled. She thought that Choulette was mocking. But he denied the charge, indignantly, and Miss Bell said that Madame Martin was wrong. It was a fault of the French, she said, to think that people were always jesting.

Then they reverted to the subject of art, which in that country is inhaled with the air.

“As for me,” said the Countess Martin, “I am not learned enough to admire Giotto and his school. What strikes me is the sensuality of that art of the fifteenth century which is said to be Christian. I have seen piety and purity only in the images of Fra Angelico, although they are very pretty. The rest, those figures of Virgins and angels, are voluptuous, caressing, and at times perversely ingenuous. What is there religious in those young Magian kings, handsome as women; in that Saint Sebastian, brilliant with youth, who seems merely the dolorous Bacchus of Christianity?”

Dechartre replied that he thought as she did, and that they must be right, she and he; since Savonarola was of the same opinion, and, finding no piety in any work of art, wished to burn them all.

“There were at Florence, in the time of the superb Manfred, who was half a Mussulman, men who were said to be of the sect of Epicurus, and who sought for arguments against the existence of God. Guido Cavalcanti disdained the ignorant folk who believed in the immortality of the soul. The following phrase by him was quoted: ‘The death of man is exactly similar to that of brutes.’ Later, when antique beauty was excavated from ruins, the Christian style of art seemed sad. The painters that worked in the churches and cloisters were neither devout nor chaste. Perugino was an atheist, and did not conceal it.”

“Yes,” said Miss Bell; “but it was said that his head was hard, and that celestial truths, could not penetrate his thick cranium. He was harsh and avaricious, and quite embedded in material interests. He thought only of buying houses.”

Professor Arrighi defended Pietro Vanucci of Perugia.

“He was,” he said, “an honest man. And the prior of the Gesuati of Florence was wrong to mistrust him. That monk practised the art of manufacturing ultramarine blue by crushing stones of burned lapis-lazuli. Ultramarine was then worth its weight in gold; and the prior, who doubtless had a secret, esteemed it more precious than rubies or sapphires. He asked Pietro Vanucci to decorate the two cloisters of his convent, and he expected marvels, less from the skilfulness of the master than from the beauty of that ultramarine in the skies. During all the time that the painter worked in the cloisters at the history of Jesus Christ, the prior kept by his side and presented to him the precious powder in a bag which he never quitted. Pietro took from it, under the saintly man’s eyes, the quantity he needed, and dipped his brush, loaded with color, in a cupful of water, before rubbing the wall with it. He used in that manner a great quantity of the powder. And the good father, seeing his bag getting thinner, sighed: ‘Jesus! How that lime devours the ultramarine!’ When the frescoes were finished, and Perugino had received from the monk the agreed price, he placed in his hand a package of blue powder: ‘This is for you, father. Your

ultramarine which I took with my brush fell to the bottom of my cup, whence I gathered it every day. I return it to you. Learn to trust honest people."

"Oh," said Therese, "there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Perugino was avaricious yet honest. Interested people are not always the least scrupulous. There are many misers who are honest."

"Naturally, darling," said Miss Bell. "Misers do not wish to owe anything, and prodigal people can bear to have debts. They do not think of the money they have, and they think less of the money they owe. I did not say that Pietro Vanucci of Perugia was a man without property. I said that he had a hard business head and that he bought houses. I am very glad to hear that he returned the ultramarine to the prior of the Gesuati."

"Since your Pietro was rich," said Choulette, "it was his duty to return the ultramarine. The rich are morally bound to be honest; the poor are not."

At this moment, Choulette, to whom the waiter was presenting a silver bowl, extended his hands for the perfumed water. It came from a vase which Miss Bell passed to her guests, in accordance with antique usage, after meals.

"I wash my hands," he said, "of the evil that Madame Martin does or may do by her speech, or otherwise."

And he rose, awkwardly, after Miss Bell, who took the arm of Professor Arrighi.

In the drawing-room she said, while serving the coffee:

"Monsieur Choulette, why do you condemn us to the savage sadness of equality? Why, Daphnis's flute would not be melodious if it were made of seven equal reeds. You wish to destroy the beautiful harmonies between masters and servants, aristocrats and artisans. Oh, I fear you are a sad barbarian, Monsieur Choulette. You are full of pity for those who are in need, and you have no pity for divine beauty, which you exile from this world. You expel beauty, Monsieur Choulette; you repudiate her, nude and in tears. Be certain of this: she will not remain on earth

when the poor little men shall all be weak, delicate, and ignorant. Believe me, to abolish the ingenious grouping which men of diverse conditions form in society, the humble with the magnificent, is to be the enemy of the poor and of the rich, is to be the enemy of the human race."

"Enemies of the human race!" replied Choulette, while stirring his coffee. "That is the phrase the harsh Roman applied to the Christians who talked of divine love to him."

Dechartre, seated near Madame Martin, questioned her on her tastes about art and beauty, sustained, led, animated her admirations, at times prompted her with caressing brusquerie, wished her to see all that he had seen, to love all that he loved.

He wished that she should go in the gardens at the first flush of spring. He contemplated her in advance on the noble terraces; he saw already the light playing on her neck and in her hair; the shadow of laurel-trees falling on her eyes. For him the land and the sky of Florence had nothing more to do than to serve as an adornment to this young woman.

He praised the simplicity with which she dressed, the characteristics of her form and of her grace, the charming frankness of the lines which every one of her movements created. He liked, he said, the animated and living, subtle, and free gowns which one sees so rarely, which one never forgets.

Although she had been much lauded, she had never heard praise which had pleased her more. She knew she dressed well, with bold and sure taste. But no man except her father had made to her on the subject the compliments of an expert. She thought that men were capable of feeling only the effect of a gown, without understanding the ingenious details of it. Some men who knew gowns disgusted her by their effeminate air. She was resigned to the appreciation of women only, and these had in their appreciation narrowness of mind, malignity, and envy. The artistic admiration of Dechartre astonished and pleased her. She received agreeably the praise he gave

her, without thinking that perhaps it was too intimate and almost indiscreet.

“So you look at gowns, Monsieur Dechartre?”

No, he seldom looked at them. There were so few women well dressed, even now, when women dress as well as, and even better, than ever. He found no pleasure in seeing packages of dry-goods walk. But if a woman having rhythm and line passed before him, he blessed her.

He continued, in a tone a little more elevated:

“I can not think of a woman who takes care to deck herself every day, without meditating on the great lesson which she gives to artists. She dresses for a few hours, and the care she has taken is not lost. We must, like her, ornament life without thinking of the future. To paint, carve, or write for posterity is only the silliness of conceit.”

“Monsieur Dechartre,” asked Prince Albertinelli, “how do you think a mauve waist studded with silver flowers would become Miss Bell?”

“I think,” said Choulette, “so little of a terrestrial future, that I have written my finest poems on cigarette paper. They vanished easily, leaving to my verses only a sort of metaphysical existence.”

He had an air of negligence for which he posed. In fact, he had never lost a line of his writing. Dechartre was more sincere. He was not desirous of immortality. Miss Bell reproached him for this.

“Monsieur Dechartre, that life may be great and complete, one must put into it the past and the future. Our works of poetry and of art must be accomplished in honor of the dead and with the thought of those who are to come after us. Thus we shall participate in what has been, in what is, and in what shall be. You do not wish to be immortal, Monsieur Dechartre? Beware, for God may hear you.”

Dechartre replied:

“It would be enough for me to live one moment more.”

And he said good-night, promising to return the next day to escort Madame Martin to the Brancacci chapel.

An hour later, in the aesthetic room hung with tapestry, whereon citron-trees loaded with golden fruit formed a fairy forest, Therese, her head on the pillow, and her handsome bare arms folded under her head, was thinking, seeing float confusedly before her the images of her new life: Vivian Bell and her bells, her pre-Raphaelite figures, light as shadows, ladies, isolated knights, indifferent among pious scenes, a little sad, and looking to see who was coming; she thought also of the Prince Albertinelli, Professor Arrighi, Choulette, with his odd play of ideas, and Dechartre, with youthful eyes in a careworn face.

She thought he had a charming imagination, a mind richer than all those that had been revealed to her, and an attraction which she no longer tried to resist. She had always recognized his gift to please. She discovered now that he had the will to please. This idea was delightful to her; she closed her eyes to retain it. Then, suddenly, she shuddered. She had felt a deep blow struck within her in the depth of her being. She had a sudden vision of Robert, his gun under his arm, in the woods. He walked with firm and regular step in the shadowy thicket. She could not see his face, and that troubled her. She bore him no ill-will. She was not discontented with him, but with herself. Robert went straight on, without turning his head, far, and still farther, until he was only a black point in the desolate wood. She thought that perhaps she had been capricious and harsh in leaving him without a word of farewell, without even a letter. He was her lover and her only friend. She never had had another. “I do not wish him to be unfortunate because of me,” she thought.

Little by little she was reassured. He loved her, doubtless; but he was not susceptible, not ingenious, happily, in tormenting himself. She said to herself:

“He is hunting and enjoying the sport. He is with his aunt, whom he admires.” She

calmed her fears and returned to the charming gayety of Florence. She had seen casually, at the Offices, a picture that Dechartre liked. It was a decapitated head of the Medusa, a work wherein Leonardo, the sculptor said, had expressed the minute profundity and tragic refinement of his genius. She wished to see it again, regretting that she had not seen it better at first. She extinguished her lamp and went to sleep.

She dreamed that she met in a deserted church Robert Le Menil enveloped in furs which she had never seen him wear. He was waiting for her, but a crowd of priests had separated them. She did not know what had become of him. She had not seen his face, and that frightened her. She awoke and heard at the open window a sad, monotonous cry, and saw a humming-bird darting about in the light of early dawn. Then, without cause, she began to weep in a passion of self-pity, and with the abandon of a child.

CHAPTER XI. “THE DAWN OF FAITH AND LOVE”

She took pleasure in dressing early, with delicate and subtle taste. Her dressing-room, an aesthetic fantasy of Vivian Bell, with its coarsely varnished pottery, its tall copper pitchers, and its faience pavement, like a chess-board, resembled a fairy’s kitchen. It was rustic and marvellous, and the Countess Martin could have in it the agreeable surprise of mistaking herself for a fairy. While her maid was dressing her hair, she heard Dechartre and Choulette talking under her windows. She rearranged all the work Pauline had done, and uncovered the line of her nape, which was fine and pure. She looked at herself in the glass, and went into the garden.

Dechartre was there, reciting verses of Dante, and looking at Florence: “At the hour when our mind, a greater stranger to the flesh...”

Near him, Choulette, seated on the balustrade of the terrace, his legs hanging, and his nose in his beard, was still at work on the figure of Misery on his stick.

Dechartre resumed the rhymes of the canticle: “At the hour when our mind, a greater stranger to the flesh; and less under the obsession of thoughts, is almost divine in its visions,...”

She approached beside the boxwood hedge, holding a parasol and dressed in a straw-colored gown. The faint sunlight of winter enveloped her in pale gold.

Dechartre greeted her joyfully.

She said:

“You are reciting verses that I do not know. I know only Metastasio. My teacher liked only Metastasio. What is the hour when the mind has divine visions?”

“Madame, that hour is the dawn of the day. It may be also the dawn of faith and of love.”

Choulette doubted that the poet meant dreams of the morning, which leave at awakening vivid and painful impressions, and which are not altogether strangers to the flesh. But Dechartre had quoted these verses in the pleasure of the glorious dawn which he had seen that morning on the golden hills. He had been, for a long time, troubled about the images that one sees in sleep, and he believed that these images were not related to the object that preoccupies one the most, but, on the contrary, to ideas abandoned during the day.

Therese recalled her morning dream, the hunter lost in the thicket.

“Yes,” said Dechartre, “the things we see at night are unfortunate remains of what we have neglected the day before. Dreams avenge things one has disdained. They are reproaches of abandoned friends. Hence their sadness.”

She was lost in dreams for a moment, then she said:

“That is perhaps true.”

Then, quickly, she asked Choulette if he had finished the portrait of Misery on his stick. Misery had now become a figure of Piety, and Choulette recognized the

Virgin in it. He had even composed a quatrain which he was to write on it in spiral form—a didactic and moral quatrain. He would cease to write, except in the style of the commandments of God rendered into French verses. The four lines expressed simplicity and goodness. He consented to recite them.

Therese rested on the balustrade of the terrace and sought in the distance, in the depth of the sea of light, the peaks of Vallambrosa, almost as blue as the sky. Jacques Dechartre looked at her. It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time, such was the delicacy that he discovered in her face, which tenderness and intelligence had invested with thoughtfulness without altering its young, fresh grace. The daylight which she liked, was indulgent to her. And truly she was pretty, bathed in that light of Florence, which caresses beautiful forms and feeds noble thoughts. A fine, pink color rose to her well-rounded cheeks; her eyes, bluish-gray, laughed; and when she talked, the brilliancy of her teeth set off her lips of ardent sweetness. His look embraced her supple bust, her full hips, and the bold attitude of her waist. She held her parasol with her left hand, the other hand played with violets. Dechartre had a mania for beautiful hands. Hands presented to his eyes a physiognomy as striking as the face—a character, a soul. These hands enchanted him. They were exquisite. He adored their slender fingers, their pink nails, their palms soft and tender, traversed by lines as elegant as arabesques, and rising at the base of the fingers in harmonious mounts. He examined them with charmed attention until she closed them on the handle of her umbrella. Then, standing behind her, he looked at her again. Her bust and arms, graceful and pure in line, her beautiful form, which was like that of a living amphora, pleased him.

“Monsieur Dechartre, that black spot over there is the Boboli Gardens, is it not? I saw the gardens three years ago. There were not many flowers in them. Nevertheless, I liked their tall, sombre trees.”

It astonished him that she talked, that she thought. The clear sound of her voice

amazed him, as if he never had heard it.

He replied at random. He was awkward. She feigned not to notice it, but felt a deep inward joy. His low voice, which was veiled and softened, seemed to caress her. She said ordinary things:

“That view is beautiful, The weather is fine.”

CHAPTER XII. HEARTS AWAKENED

In the morning, her head on the embroidered pillow, Therese was thinking of the walks of the day before; of the Virgins, framed with angels; of the innumerable children, painted or carved, all beautiful, all happy, who sing ingenuously the Alleluia of grace and of beauty. In the illustrious chapel of the Brancacci, before those frescoes, pale and resplendent as a divine dawn, he had talked to her of Masaccio, in language so vivid that it had seemed to her as if she had seen him, the adolescent master of the masters, his mouth half open, his eyes dark and blue, dying, enchanted. And she had liked these marvels of a morning more charming than a day. Dechartre was for her the soul of those magnificent forms, the mind of those noble things. It was by him, it was through him, that she understood art and life. She took no interest in things that did not interest him. How had this affection come to her? She had no precise remembrance of it. In the first place, when Paul Vence wished to introduce him to her, she had no desire to know him, no presentiment that he would please her. She recalled elegant bronze statuettes, fine waxworks signed with his name, that she had remarked at the Champ de Mars salon or at Durand-Ruel’s. But she did not imagine that he could be agreeable to her, or more seductive than many artists and lovers of art at whom she laughed with her friends. When she saw him, he pleased her; she had a desire to attract him, to see him often. The night he dined at her house she realized that she had for him a noble and elevating affection. But soon after he irritated her a little; it made her impatient to see him closeted within himself

and too little preoccupied by her. She would have liked to disturb him. She was in that state of impatience when she met him one evening, in front of the grille of the Musee des Religions, and he talked to her of Ravenna and of the Empress seated on a gold chair in her tomb. She had found him serious and charming, his voice warm, his eyes soft in the shadow of the night, but too much a stranger, too far from her, too unknown. She had felt a sort of uneasiness, and she did not know, when she walked along the boxwood bordering the terrace, whether she desired to see him every day or never to see him again.

Since then, at Florence, her only pleasure was to feel that he was near her, to hear him. He made life for her charming, diverse, animated, new. He revealed to her delicate joys and a delightful sadness; he awakened in her a voluptuousness which had been always dormant. Now she was determined never to give him up. But how? She foresaw difficulties; her lucid mind and her temperament presented them all to her. For a moment she tried to deceive herself; she reflected that perhaps he, a dreamer, exalted, lost in his studies of art, might remain assiduous without being exacting. But she did not wish to reassure herself with that idea. If Dechartre were not a lover, he lost all his charm. She did not dare to think of the future. She lived in the present, happy, anxious, and closing her eyes.

She was dreaming thus, in the shade traversed by arrows of light, when Pauline brought to her some letters with the morning tea. On an envelope marked with the monogram of the Rue Royale Club she recognized the handwriting of Le Menil. She had expected that letter. She was only astonished that what was sure to come had come, as in her childhood, when the infallible clock struck the hour of her piano lesson.

In his letter Robert made reasonable reproaches. Why did she go without saying anything, without leaving a word of farewell? Since his return to Paris he had expected every morning a letter which had not come. He was happier the year

before, when he had received in the morning, two or three times a week, letters so gentle and so well written that he regretted not being able to print them. Anxious, he had gone to her house.

“I was astounded to hear of your departure. Your husband received me. He said that, yielding to his advice, you had gone to finish the winter at Florence with Miss Bell. He said that for some time you had looked pale and thin. He thought a change of air would do you good. You had not wished to go, but, as you suffered more and more, he succeeded in persuading you.

“I had not noticed that you were thin. It seemed to me, on the contrary, that your health was good. And then Florence is not a good winter resort. I cannot understand your departure. I am much tormented by it. Reassure me at once, I pray you.

“Do you think it is agreeable for me to get news of you from your husband and to receive his confidences? He is sorry you are not here; it annoys him that the obligations of public life compel him to remain in Paris. I heard at the club that he had chances to become a minister. This astonishes me, because ministers are not usually chosen among fashionable people.”

Then he related hunting tales to her. He had brought for her three fox-skins, one of which was very beautiful; the skin of a brave animal which he had pulled by the tail, and which had bitten his hand.

In Paris he was worried. His cousin had been presented at the club. He feared he might be blackballed. His candidacy had been posted. Under these conditions he did not dare advise him to withdraw; it would be taking too great a responsibility. If he were blackballed it would be very disagreeable. He finished by praying her to write and to return soon.

Having read this letter, she tore it up gently, threw it in the fire, and calmly watched it burn.

Doubtless, he was right. He had said what he had to say; he had complained, as it

was his duty to complain. What could she answer? Should she continue her quarrel? The subject of it had become so indifferent to her that it needed reflection to recall it. Oh, no; she had no desire to be tormented. She felt, on the contrary, very gentle toward him! Seeing that he loved her with confidence, in stubborn tranquillity, she became sad and frightened. He had not changed. He was the same man he had been before. She was not the same woman. They were separated now by imperceptible yet strong influences, like essences in the air that make one live or die. When her maid came to dress her, she had not begun to write an answer.

Anxious, she thought: “He trusts me. He suspects nothing.” This made her more impatient than anything. It irritated her to think that there were simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others.

She went into the parlor, where she found Vivian Bell writing. The latter said:

“Do you wish to know, darling, what I was doing while waiting for you? Nothing and everything. Verses. Oh, darling, poetry must be our souls naturally expressed.”

Therese kissed Miss Bell, rested her head on her friend’s shoulder, and said:

“May I look?”

“Look if you wish, dear. They are verses made on the model of the popular songs of your country.”

“Is it a symbol, Vivian? Explain it to me.”

“Oh, darling, why explain, why? A poetic image must have several meanings. The one that you find is the real one. But there is a very clear meaning in them, my love; that is, that one should not lightly disengage one’s self from what one has taken into the heart.”

The horses were harnessed. They went, as had been agreed, to visit the Albertinelli gallery. The Prince was waiting for them, and Dechartre was to meet them in the palace. On the way, while the carriage rolled along the wide highway, Vivian Bell

talked with her usual transcendentalism. As they were descending among houses pink and white, gardens and terraces ornamented with statues and fountains, she showed to her friend the villa, hidden under bluish pines, where the ladies and the cavaliers of the Decameron took refuge from the plague that ravaged Florence, and diverted one another with tales frivolous, facetious, or tragic. Then she confessed the thought which had come to her the day before.

"You had gone, darling, to Carmine with Monsieur Dechartre, and you had left at Fiesole Madame Marmet, who is an agreeable person, a moderate and polished woman. She knows many anecdotes about persons of distinction who live in Paris. And when she tells them, she does as my cook Pompaloni does when he serves eggs: he does not put salt in them, but he puts the salt-cellar next to them. Madame Marmet's tongue is very sweet, but the salt is near it, in her eyes. Her conversation is like Pompaloni's dish, my love—each one seasons to his taste. Oh, I like Madame Marmet a great deal. Yesterday, after you had gone, I found her alone and sad in a corner of the drawing-room. She was thinking mournfully of her husband. I said to her: 'Do you wish me to think of your husband, too? I will think of him with you. I have been told that he was a learned man, a member of the Royal Society of Paris. Madame Marmet, talk to me of him.' She replied that he had devoted himself to the Etruscans, and that he had given to them his entire life. Oh, darling, I cherished at once the memory of that Monsieur Marmet, who lived for the Etruscans. And then a good idea came to me. I said to Madame Marmet, 'We have at Fiesole, in the Pretorio Palace, a modest little Etruscan museum. Come and visit it with me. Will you?' She replied it was what she most desired to see in Italy. We went to the Pretorio Palace; we saw a lioness and a great many little bronze figures, grotesque, very fat or very thin. The Etruscans were a seriously gay people. They made bronze caricatures. But the monkeys—some afflicted with big stomachs, others astonished to show their bones—Madame Marmet looked at them with reluctant admiration. She contemplated them like—there is a beautiful French word that escapes me—like

the monuments and the trophies of Monsieur Marmet."

Madame Martin smiled. But she was restless. She thought the sky dull, the streets ugly, the passers-by common.

"Oh, darling, the Prince will be very glad to receive you in his palace."

"I do not think so."

"Why, darling, why?"

"Because I do not please him much."

Vivian Bell declared that the Prince, on the contrary, was a great admirer of the Countess Martin.

The horses stopped before the Albertinelli palace. On the sombre facade were sealed those bronze rings which formerly, on festival nights, held rosin torches. These bronze rings mark, in Florence, the palaces of the most illustrious families. The palace had an air of lofty pride. The Prince hastened to meet them, and led them through the empty salons into the gallery. He, apologized for showing canvases which perhaps had not an attractive aspect. The gallery had been formed by Cardinal Giulio Albertinelli at a time when the taste for Guido and Caraccio, now fallen, had predominated. His ancestor had taken pleasure in gathering the works of the school of Bologna. But he would show to Madame Martin several paintings which had not displeased Miss Bell, among others a Mantegna.

The Countess Martin recognized at once a banal and doubtful collection; she felt bored among the multitude of little Parrocels, showing in the darkness a bit of armor and a white horse.

A valet presented a card.

The Prince read aloud the name of Jacques Dechartre. At that moment he was turning his back on the two visitors. His face wore the expression of cruel displeasure one finds on the marble busts of Roman emperors. Dechartre was on the

staircase.

The Prince went toward him with a languid smile. He was no longer Nero, but Antinous.

“I invited Monsieur Dechartre to come to the Albertinelli palace,” said Miss Bell. “I knew it would please you. He wished to see your gallery.”

And it is true that Dechartre had wished to be there with Madame Martin. Now all four walked among the Guidos and the Albanos.

Miss Bell babbled to the Prince—her usual prattle about those old men and those Virgins whose blue mantles were agitated by an immovable tempest. Dechartre, pale, enervated, approached Therese, and said to her, in a low tone:

“This gallery is a warehouse where picture dealers of the entire world hang the things they can not sell. And the Prince sells here things that Jews could not sell.”

He led her to a Holy Family exhibited on an easel draped with green velvet, and bearing on the border the name of Michael-Angelo.

“I have seen that Holy Family in the shops of picture-dealers of London, of Basle, and of Paris. As they could not get the twenty-five louis that it is worth, they have commissioned the last of the Albertinellis to sell it for fifty thousand francs.”

The Prince, divining what they were saying, approached them gracefully.

“There is a copy of this picture almost everywhere. I do not affirm that this is the original. But it has always been in the family, and old inventories attribute it to Michael-Angelo. That is all I can say about it.”

And the Prince turned toward Miss Bell, who was trying to find pictures by the pre-Raphaelites.

Dechartre felt uneasy. Since the day before he had thought of Therese. He had all night dreamed and yearned over her image. He saw her again, delightful, but in another manner, and even more desirable than he had imagined in his insomnia; less

visionary, of a more vivid piquancy, and also of a mind more mysteriously impenetrable. She was sad; she seemed cold and indifferent. He said to himself that he was nothing to her; that he was becoming importunate and ridiculous. This irritated him. He murmured bitterly in her ear: “I have reflected. I did not wish to come. Why did I come?” She understood at once what he meant, that he feared her now, and that he was impatient, timid, and awkward. It pleased her that he was thus, and she was grateful to him for the trouble and the desires he inspired in her. Her heart throbbed faster. But, affecting to understand that he regretted having disturbed himself to come and look at bad paintings, she replied that in truth this gallery was not interesting. Already, under the terror of displeasing her, he felt reassured, and believed that, really indifferent, she had not perceived the accent nor the significance of what he had said. He said “No, nothing interesting.” The Prince, who had invited the two visitors to breakfast, asked their friend to remain with them. Dechartre excused himself. He was about to depart when, in the large empty salon, he found himself alone with Madame Martin. He had had the idea of running away from her. He had no other wish now than to see her again. He recalled to her that she was the next morning to visit the Bargello. “You have permitted me to accompany you.” She asked him if he had not found her moody and tiresome. Oh, no; he had not thought her tiresome, but he feared she was sad.

“Alas,” he added, “your sadness, your joys, I have not the right to know them.” She turned toward him a glance almost harsh. “You do not think that I shall take you for a confidante, do you?” And she walked away brusquely.

CHAPTER XIII. “YOU MUST TAKE ME WITH MY OWN SOUL!”

After dinner, in the salon of the bells, under the lamps from which the great shades permitted only an obscure light to filter, good Madame Marmet was warming herself

by the hearth, with a white cat on her knees. The evening was cool. Madame Martin, her eyes reminiscent of the golden light, the violet peaks, and the ancient trees of Florence, smiled with happy fatigue. She had gone with Miss Bell, Dechartre, and Madame Marmet to the Chartrist convent of Ema. And now, in the intoxication of her visions, she forgot the care of the day before, the importunate letters, the distant reproaches, and thought of nothing in the world but cloisters chiselled and painted, villages with red roofs, and roads where she saw the first blush of spring. Dechartre had modelled for Miss Bell a waxen figure of Beatrice. Vivian was painting angels. Softly bent over her, Prince Albertinelli caressed his beard and threw around him glances that appeared to seek admiration.

Replying to a reflection of Vivian Bell on marriage and love:

“A woman must choose,” he said. “With a man whom women love her heart is not quiet. With a man whom the women do not love she is not happy.”

“Darling,” asked Miss Bell, “what would you wish for a friend dear to you?”

“I should wish, Vivian, that my friend were happy. I should wish also that she were quiet. She should be quiet in hatred of treason, humiliating suspicions, and mistrust.”

“But, darling, since the Prince has said that a woman can not have at the same time happiness and security, tell me what your friend should choose.”

“One never chooses, Vivian; one never chooses. Do not make me say what I think of marriage.”

At this moment Choulette appeared, wearing the magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud. He had played briscola with peasants in a coffeehouse of Fiesole.

“Here is Monsieur Choulette,” said Miss Bell. “He will teach what we are to think of marriage. I am inclined to listen to him as to an oracle. He does not see the things that we see, and he sees things that we do not see. Monsieur Choulette, what do you think of marriage?”

He took a seat and lifted in the air a Socratic finger:

“Are you speaking, Mademoiselle, of the solemn union between man and woman? In this sense, marriage is a sacrament. But sometimes, alas! it is almost a sacrilege. As for civil marriage, it is a formality. The importance given to it in our society is an idiotic thing which would have made the women of other times laugh. We owe this prejudice, like many others, to the bourgeois, to the mad performances of a lot of financiers which have been called the Revolution, and which seem admirable to those that have profited by it. Civil marriage is, in reality, only registry, like many others which the State exacts in order to be sure of the condition of persons: in every well organized state everybody must be indexed. Morally, this registry in a big ledger has not even the virtue of inducing a wife to take a lover. Who ever thinks of betraying an oath taken before a mayor? In order to find joy in adultery, one must be pious.”

“But, Monsieur,” said Therese, “we were married at the church.”

Then, with an accent of sincerity:

“I can not understand how a man ever makes up his mind to marry; nor how a woman, after she has reached an age when she knows what she is doing, can commit that folly.”

The Prince looked at her with distrust. He was clever, but he was incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object, disinterestedly, and to express general ideas. He imagined that Countess Martin-Belleme was suggesting to him projects that she wished him to consider. And as he was thinking of defending himself and also avenging himself, he made velvet eyes at her and talked with tender gallantry:

“You display, Madame, the pride of the beautiful and intelligent French women whom subjection irritates. French women love liberty, and none of them is as worthy of liberty as you. I have lived in France a little. I have known and admired

the elegant society of Paris, the salons, the festivals, the conversations, the plays. But in our mountains, under our olive-trees, we become rustic again. We assume golden-age manners, and marriage is for us an idyl full of freshness."

Vivian Bell examined the statuette which Dechartre had left on the table.

"Oh! it was thus that Beatrice looked, I am sure. And do you know, Monsieur Dechartre, there are wicked men who say that Beatrice never existed?"

Choulette declared he wished to be counted among those wicked men. He did not believe that Beatrice had any more reality than other ladies through whom ancient poets who sang of love represented some scholastic idea, ridiculously subtle.

Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself, jealous of Dante as of the universe, a refined man of letters, Choulette continued:

"I suspect that the little sister of the angels never lived, except in the imagination of the poet. It seems a pure allegory, or, rather, an exercise in arithmetic or a theme of astrology. Dante, who was a good doctor of Bologna and had many moons in his head, under his pointed cap—Dante believed in the virtue of numbers. That inflamed mathematician dreamed of figures, and his Beatrice is the flower of arithmetic, that is all."

And he lighted his pipe.

Vivian Bell exclaimed:

"Oh, do not talk in that way, Monsieur Choulette. You grieve me much, and if our friend Monsieur Gebhart heard you, he would not be pleased with you. To punish you, Prince Albertinelli will read to you the canticle in which Beatrice explains the spots on the moon. Take the Divine Comedy, Eusebio. It is the white book which you see on the table. Open it and read it."

During the Prince's reading, Dechartre, seated on the couch near Countess Martin, talked of Dante with enthusiasm as the best sculptor among the poets. He recalled to

Therese the painting they had seen together two days before, on the door of the Servi, a fresco almost obliterated, where one hardly divined the presence of the poet wearing a laurel wreath, Florence, and the seven circles. This was enough to exalt the artist. But she had distinguished nothing, she had not been moved. And then she confessed that Dante did not attract her. Dechartre, accustomed to her sharing all his ideas of art and poetry, felt astonishment and some discontent. He said, aloud:

“There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel.”

Miss Bell, lifting her head, asked what were these things that “darling” did not feel; and when she learned that it was the genius of Dante, she exclaimed, in mock anger:

“Oh, do you not honor the father, the master worthy of all praise, the god? I do not love you any more, darling. I detest you.”

And, as a reproach to Choulette and to the Countess Martin, she recalled the piety of that citizen of Florence who took from the altar the candles that had been lighted in honor of Christ, and placed them before the bust of Dante.

The Prince resumed his interrupted reading. Dechartre persisted in trying to make Therese admire what she did not know. Certainly he would have easily sacrificed Dante and all the poets of the universe for her. But near him, tranquil, and an object of desire, she irritated him, almost without his realizing it, by the charm of her laughing beauty. He persisted in imposing on her his ideas, his artistic passions, even his fantasy, and his capriciousness. He insisted in a low tone, in phrases concise and quarrelsome. She said:

“Oh, how violent you are!”

Then he bent to her ear, and in an ardent voice, which he tried to soften:

“You must take me with my own soul!”

Therese felt a shiver of fear mingled with joy.

CHAPTER XIV. THE AVOWAL

She next day she said to herself that she would reply to Robert. It was raining. She listened languidly to the drops falling on the terrace. Vivian Bell, careful and refined, had placed on the table artistic stationery, sheets imitating the vellum of missals, others of pale violet powdered with silver dust; celluloid pens, white and light, which one had to manage like brushes; an iris ink which, on a page, spread a mist of azure and gold. Therese did not like such delicacy. It seemed to her not appropriate for letters which she wished to make simple and modest. When she saw that the name of "friend," given to Robert on the first line, placed on the silvery paper, tinted itself like mother-of-pearl, a half smile came to her lips. The first phrases were hard to write. She hurried the rest, said a great deal of Vivian Bell and of Prince Albertinelli, a little of Choulette, and that she had seen Dechartre at Florence. She praised some pictures of the museums, but without discrimination, and only to fill the pages. She knew that Robert had no appreciation of painting; that he admired nothing except a little cuirassier by Detaille, bought at Goupil's.

She saw again in her mind this cuirassier, which he had shown to her one day, with pride, in his bedroom, near the mirror, under family portraits. All this, at a distance, seemed to her petty and tiresome. She finished her letter with words of friendship, the sweetness of which was not feigned. Truly, she had never felt more peaceful and gentle toward her lover. In four pages she had said little and explained less. She announced only that she should stay a month in Florence, the air of which did her good. Then she wrote to her father, to her husband, and to Princess Seniavine. She went down the stairway with the letters in her hand. In the hall she threw three of them on the silver tray destined to receive papers for the post-office. Mistrusting Madame Marmet, she slipped into her pocket the letter to Le Menil, counting on chance to throw it into a post-box.

Almost at the same time Dechartre came to accompany the three friends in a walk

through the city. As he was waiting he saw the letters on the tray.

Without believing that characters could be divined through penmanship, he was susceptible to the form of letters as to elegance of drawing. The writing of Therese charmed him, and he liked its openness, the bold and simple turn of its lines. He looked at the addresses without reading them, with an artist's admiration.

They visited, that morning, Santa Maria Novella, where the Countess Martin had already gone with Madame Marmet. But Miss Bell had reproached them for not observing the beautiful Ginevra of Benci on a fresco of the choir. "You must visit that figure of the morning in a morning light," said Vivian. While the poetess and Therese were talking together, Dechartre listened patiently to Madame Marmet's conversation, filled with anecdotes, wherein academicians dined with elegant women, and shared the anxiety of that lady, much preoccupied for several days by the necessity to buy a tulle veil. She could find none to her taste in the shops of Florence.

As they came out of the church they passed the cobbler's shop. The good man was mending rustic shoes. Madame Martin asked the old man whether he was well, whether he had enough work for a living, whether he was happy. To all these questions he replied with the charming affirmative of Italy, the musical si, which sounded melodious even in his toothless mouth. She made him tell his sparrow's story. The poor bird had once dipped its leg in burning wax.

"I have made for my little companion a wooden leg out of a match, and he hops upon my shoulder as formerly," said the cobbler.

"It is this good old man," said Miss Bell, "who teaches wisdom to Monsieur Choulette. There was at Athens a cobbler named Simon, who wrote books on philosophy, and who was the friend of Socrates. I have always thought that Monsieur Choulette resembled Socrates."

Therese asked the cobbler to tell his name and his history. His name was Serafino

Stoppini, and he was a native of Stia. He was old. He had had much trouble in his life.

He lifted his spectacles to his forehead, uncovering blue eyes, very soft, and almost extinguished under their red lids.

“I have had a wife and children; I have none now. I have known things which I know no more.”

Miss Bell and Madame Marmet went to look for a veil.

“He has nothing in the world,” thought Therese, “but his tools, a handful of nails, the tub wherein he dips his leather, and a pot of basilick, yet he is happy.”

She said to him:

“This plant is fragrant, and it will soon be in bloom.”

He replied:

“If the poor little plant comes into bloom it will die.”

Therese, when she left him, placed a coin on the table.

Dechartre was near her. Gravely, almost severely, he said to her:

“You know...”

She looked at him and waited.

He finished his phrase:

“... that I love you?”

She continued to fix on him, silently, the gaze of her clear eyes, the lids of which were trembling. Then she made a motion with her head that meant Yes. And, without his trying to stop her, she rejoined Miss Bell and Madame Marmet, who were waiting for her at the corner.

CHAPTER XV. THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

Therese, after quitting Dechartre, took breakfast with her friend and Madame Marmet at the house of an old Florentine lady whom Victor Emmanuel had loved when he was Duke of Savoy. For thirty years she had not once gone out of her palace on the Arno, where, she painted, and wearing a wig, she played the guitar in her spacious white salon. She received the best society of Florence, and Miss Bell often called on her. At table this recluse, eighty-seven years of age, questioned the Countess Martin on the fashionable world of Paris, whose movement was familiar to her through the journals. Solitary, she retained respect and a sort of devotion for the world of pleasure.

As they came out of the palazzo, in order to avoid the wind which was blowing on the river, Miss Bell led her friends into the old streets with black stone houses and a view of the distant horizon, where, in the pure air, stands a hill with three slender trees. They walked; and Vivian showed to her friend, on facades where red rags were hanging, some marble masterpiece—a Virgin, a lily, a St. Catherine. They walked through these alleys of the antique city to the church of Or San Michele, where it had been agreed that Dechartre should meet them. Therese was thinking of him now with deepest interest. Madame Marmet was thinking of buying a veil; she hoped to find one on the Corso. This affair recalled to her M. Lagrange, who, at his regular lecture one day, took from his pocket a veil with gold dots and wiped his forehead with it, thinking it was his handkerchief. The audience was astonished, and whispered to one another. It was a veil that had been confided to him the day before by his niece, Mademoiselle Jeanne Michot, whom he had accompanied to the theatre, and Madame Marmet explained how, finding it in the pocket of his overcoat, he had taken it to return it to his niece.

At Lagrange’s name, Therese recalled the flaming comet announced by the savant, and said to herself, with mocking sadness, that it was time for that comet to put an end to the world and take her out of her trouble. But above the walls of the old church she saw the sky, which, cleared of clouds by the wind from the sea, shone

pale blue and cold. Miss Bell showed to her one of the bronze statues which, in their chiselled niches, ornament the facade of the church.

“See, darling, how young and proud is Saint George. Saint George was formerly the cavalier about whom young girls dreamed.”

But “darling” said that he looked precise, tiresome, and stubborn. At this moment she recalled suddenly the letter that was still in her pocket.

“Ah! here comes Monsieur Dechartre,” said the good Madame Marmet.

He had looked for them in the church, before the tabernacle. He should have recalled the irresistible attraction which Donatello’s St. George held for Miss Bell. He too admired that famous figure. But he retained a particular friendship for St. Mark, rustic and frank, whom they could see in his niche at the left.

When Therese approached the statue which he was pointing out to her, she saw a post-box against the wall of the narrow street opposite the saint. Dechartre, placed at the most convenient point of view, talked of his St. Mark with abundant friendship.

“It is to him I make my first visit when I come to Florence. I failed to do this only once. He will forgive me; he is an excellent man. He is not appreciated by the crowd, and does not attract attention. I take pleasure in his society, however. He is vivid. I understand that Donatello, after giving a soul to him, exclaimed: ‘Mark, why do you not speak?’”

Madame Marmet, tired of admiring St. Mark, and feeling on her face the burning wind, dragged Miss Bell toward Calzaioli Street in search of a veil.

Therese and Dechartre remained.

“I like him,” continued the sculptor; “I like Saint Mark because I feel in him, much more than in the Saint George, the hand and mind of Donatello, who was a good workman. I like him even more to-day, because he recalls to me, in his venerable and touching candor, the old cobbler to whom you were speaking so kindly this

morning."

"Ah," she said, "I have forgotten his name. When we talk with Monsieur Choulette we call him Quentin Matsys, because he resembles the old men of that painter."

As they were turning the corner of the church to see the facade, she found herself before the post-box, which was so dusty and rusty that it seemed as if the postman never came near it. She put her letter in it under the ingenuous gaze of St. Mark.

Dechartre saw her, and felt as if a heavy blow had been struck at his heart. He tried to speak, to smile; but the gloved hand which had dropped the letter remained before his eyes. He recalled having seen in the morning Therese's letters on the hall tray. Why had she not put that one with the others? The reason was not hard to guess. He remained immovable, dreamy, and gazed without seeing. He tried to be reassured; perhaps it was an insignificant letter which she was trying to hide from the tiresome curiosity of Madame Marmet.

"Monsieur Dechartre, it is time to rejoin our friends at the dressmaker's."

Perhaps it was a letter to Madame Schmoll, who was not a friend of Madame Marmet, but immediately he realized that this idea was foolish.

All was clear. She had a lover. She was writing to him. Perhaps she was saying to him: "I saw Dechartre to-day; the poor fellow is deeply in love with me." But whether she wrote that or something else, she had a lover. He had not thought of that. To know that she belonged to another made him suffer profoundly. And that hand, that little hand dropping the letter, remained in his eyes and made them burn.

She did not know why he had become suddenly dumb and sombre. When she saw him throw an anxious glance back at the post-box, she guessed the reason. She thought it odd that he should be jealous without having the right to be jealous; but this did not displease her.

When they reached the Corso, they saw Miss Bell and Madame Marmet coming out of the dressmaker's shop.

Dechartre said to Therese, in an imperious and supplicating voice:

“I must speak to you. I must see you alone tomorrow; meet me at six o’clock at the Lungarno Acciaoli.”

She made no reply.

CHAPTER XVI. “TO-MORROW?”

When, in her Carmelite mantle, she came to the Lungarno Acciaoli, at about half-past six, Dechartre greeted her with a humble look that moved her. The setting sun made the Arno purple. They remained silent for a moment. While they were walking past the monotonous line of palaces to the old bridge, she was the first to speak.

“You see, I have come. I thought I ought to come. I do not think I am altogether innocent of what has happened. I know: I have done what was my fate in order that you should be to me what you are now. My attitude has put thoughts into your head which you would not have had otherwise.”

He looked as if he did not understand. She continued:

“I was selfish, I was imprudent. You were agreeable to me; I liked your wit; I could not get along without you. I have done what I could to attract you, to retain you. I was a coquette—not coldly, nor perfidiously, but a coquette.”

He shook his head, denying that he ever had seen a sign of this.

“Yes, I was a coquette. Yet it was not my habit. But I was a coquette with you. I do not say that you have tried to take advantage of it, as you had the right to do, nor that you are vain about it. I have not remarked vanity in you. It may be possible that you had not noticed. Superior men sometimes lack cleverness. But I know very well that I was not as I should have been, and I beg your pardon. That is the reason why I came. Let us be good friends, since there is yet time.”

He repeated, with sombre softness, that he loved her. The first hours of that love had been easy and delightful. He had only desired to see her, and to see her again. But soon she had troubled him. The evil had come suddenly and violently one day on the terrace of Fiesole. And now he had not the courage to suffer and say nothing. He had not come with a fixed design. If he spoke of his passion he spoke by force and in spite of himself; in the strong necessity of talking of her to herself, since she was for him the only being in the world. His life was no longer in himself, it was in her. She should know it, then, that he was in love with her, not with vague tenderness, but with cruel ardor. Alas! his imagination was exact and precise. He saw her continually, and she tortured him.

And then it seemed to him that they might have joys which should make life worth living. Their existence might be a work of art, beautiful and hidden. They would think, comprehend, and feel together. It would be a marvellous world of emotions and ideas.

“We could make of life a delightful garden.”

She feigned to think that the dream was innocent.

“You know very well that I am susceptible to the charm of your mind. It has become a necessity to see you and hear you. I have allowed this to be only too plain to you. Count upon my friendship and do not torment yourself.” She extended her hand to him. He did not take it, but replied, brusquely:

“I do not desire your friendship. I will not have it. I must have you entirely or never see you again. You know that very well. Why do you extend your hand to me with derisive phrases? Whether you wished it or not, you have made me desperately in love with you. You have become my evil, my suffering, my torture, and you ask me to be an agreeable friend. Now you are coquettish and cruel. If you can not love me, let me go; I will go, I do not know where, to forget and hate you. For I have against you a latent feeling of hatred and anger. Oh, I love you, I love you!”

She believed what he was saying, feared that he might go, and feared the sadness of living without him. She replied:

“I found you in my path. I do not wish to lose you. No, I do not wish to lose you.”

Timid yet violent, he stammered; the words were stifled in his throat. Twilight descended from the far-off mountains, and the last reflections of the sun became pallid in the east. She said:

“If you knew my life, if you had seen how empty it was before I knew you, you would know what you are to me, and would not think of abandoning me.”

But, with the tranquil tone of her voice and with the rustle of her skirts on the pavement, she irritated him.

He told her how he suffered. He knew now the divine malady of love.

“The grace of your thoughts, your magnificent courage, your superb pride, I inhale them like a perfume. It seems to me when you speak that your mind is floating on your lips. Your mind is for me only the odor of your beauty. I have retained the instincts of a primitive man; you have reawakened them. I feel that I love you with savage simplicity.”

She looked at him softly and said nothing. They saw the lights of evening, and heard lugubrious songs coming toward them. And then, like spectres chased by the wind, appeared the black penitents. The crucifix was before them. They were Brothers of Mercy, holding torches, singing psalms on the way to the cemetery. In accordance with the Italian custom, the cortege marched quickly. The crosses, the coffin, the banners, seemed to leap on the deserted quay. Jacques and Therese stood against the wall in order that the funeral train might pass.

The black avalanche had disappeared. There were women weeping behind the coffin carried by the black phantoms, who wore heavy shoes.

Therese sighed:

“What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world?”

He looked as if he had not heard, and said:

“Before I knew you I was not unhappy. I liked life. I was retained in it by dreams. I liked forms, and the mind in forms, the appearances that caress and flatter. I had the joy of seeing and of dreaming. I enjoyed everything and depended upon nothing. My desires, abundant and light, I gratified without fatigue. I was interested in everything and wished for nothing. One suffers only through the will. Without knowing it, I was happy. Oh, it was not much, it was only enough to live. Now I have no joy in life. My pleasures, the interest that I took in the images of life and of art, the vivid amusement of creating with my hands the figures of my dreams—you have made me lose everything and have not left me even regret. I do not want my liberty and tranquillity again. It seems to me that before I knew you I did not live; and now that I feel that I am living, I can not live either far from you or near you. I am more wretched than the beggars we saw on the road to Ema. They had air to breathe, and I can breathe only you, whom I have not. Yet I am glad to have known you. That alone counts in my existence. A moment ago I thought I hated you. I was wrong; I adore you, and I bless you for the harm you have done me. I love all that comes to me from you.”

They were nearing the black trees at the entrance to San Niccola bridge. On the other side of the river the vague fields displayed their sadness, intensified by night. Seeing that he was calm and full of a soft languor, she thought that his love, all imagination, had fled in words, and that his desires had become only a reverie. She had not expected so prompt a resignation. It almost disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared.

She extended her hand to him, more boldly this time than before.

“Then, let us be friends. It is late. Let us return. Take me to my carriage. I shall be what I have been to you, an excellent friend. You have not displeased me.”

But he led her to the fields, in the growing solitude of the shore.

“No, I will not let you go without having told you what I wish to say. But I know no longer how to speak; I can not find the words. I love you. I wish to know that you are mine. I swear to you that I will not live another night in the horror of doubting it.”

He pressed her in his arms; and seeking the light of her eyes through the obscurity of her veil, said “You must love me. I desire you to love me, and it is your fault, for you have desired it too. Say that you are mine. Say it.”

Having gently disengaged herself, she replied, faintly and slowly “I can not! I can not! You see I am acting frankly with you. I said to you a moment ago that you had not displeased me. But I can not do as you wish.”

And recalling to her thought the absent one who was waiting for her, she repeated: “I can not!” Bending over her he anxiously questioned her eyes, the double stars that trembled and veiled themselves. “Why? You love me, I feel it, I see it. You love me. Why will you do me this wrong?”

He drew her to him, wishing to lay his soul, with his lips, on her veiled lips. She escaped him swiftly, saying: “I can not. Do not ask more. I can not be yours.”

His lips trembled, his face was convulsed. He exclaimed “You have a lover, and you love him. Why do you mock me?”

“I swear to you I have no desire to mock you, and that if I loved any one in the world it would be you.” But he was not listening to her.

“Leave me, leave me!” And he ran toward the dark fields. The Arno formed lagoons, upon which the moon, half veiled, shone fitfully. He walked through the water and the mud, with a step rapid, blind, like that of one intoxicated. She took fright and shouted. She called him. But he did not turn his head and made no answer. He fled with alarming recklessness. She ran after him. Her feet were hurt by the stones, and her skirt was heavy with water, but soon she overtook him.

“What were you about to do?”

He looked at her, and saw her fright in her eyes. “Do not be afraid,” he said. “I did not see where I was going. I assure you I did not intend to kill myself. I am desperate, but I am calm. I was only trying to escape from you. I beg your pardon. But I could not see you any longer. Leave me, I pray you. Farewell!”

She replied, agitated and trembling: “Come! We shall do what we can.”

He remained sombre and made no reply. She repeated “Come!”

She took his arm. The living warmth of her hand animated him. He said:

“Do you wish it?”

“I can not leave you.”

“You promise?”

“I must.”

And, in her anxiety and anguish, she almost smiled, in thinking that he had succeeded so quickly by his folly.

“To-morrow?” said he, inquiringly.

She replied quickly, with a defensive instinct:

“Oh, no; not to-morrow!”

“You do not love me; you regret that you have promised.”

“No, I do not regret, but—”

He implored, he supplicated her. She looked at him for a moment, turned her head, hesitated, and said, in a low tone:

“Saturday.”

CHAPTER XVII. MISS BELL ASKS A QUESTION

After dinner, Miss Bell was sketching in the drawing-room. She was tracing, on

canvas, profiles of bearded Etruscans for a cushion which Madame Marmet was to embroider. Prince Albertinelli was selecting the wool with an almost feminine knowledge of shades. It was late when Choulette, having, as was his habit, played briscola with the cook at the caterer's, appeared, as joyful as if he possessed the mind of a god. He took a seat on a sofa, beside Madame Martin, and looked at her tenderly. Voluptuousness shone in his green eyes. He enveloped her, while talking to her, with poetic and picturesque phrases. It was like the sketch of a lovesong that he was improvising for her. In oddly involved sentences, he told her of the charm that she exhaled.

"He, too!" said she to herself.

She amused herself by teasing him. She asked whether he had not found in Florence, in the low quarters, one of the kind of women whom he liked to visit. His preferences were known. He could deny it as much as he wished: no one was ignorant of the door where he had found the cordon of his Third Order. His friends had met him on the boulevard. His taste for unfortunate women was evident in his most beautiful poems.

"Oh, Monsieur Choulette, so far as I am able to judge, you like very bad women."

He replied with solemnity:

"Madame, you may collect the grain of calumny sown by Monsieur Paul Vence and throw handfuls of it at me. I will not try to avoid it. It is not necessary you should know that I am chaste and that my mind is pure. But do not judge lightly those whom you call unfortunate, and who should be sacred to you, since they are unfortunate. The disdained and lost girl is the docile clay under the finger of the Divine Potter: she is the victim and the altar of the holocaust. The unfortunates are nearer God than the honest women: they have lost conceit. They do not glorify themselves with the untried virtue the matron prides herself on. They possess humility, which is the cornerstone of virtues agreeable to heaven. A short repentance

will be sufficient for them to be the first in heaven; for their sins, without malice and without joy, contain their own forgiveness. Their faults, which are pains, participate in the merits attached to pain; slaves to brutal passion, they are deprived of all voluptuousness, and in this they are like the men who practise continence for the kingdom of God. They are like us, culprits; but shame falls on their crime like a balm, suffering purifies it like fire. That is the reason why God will listen to the first voice which they shall send to him. A throne is prepared for them at the right hand of the Father. In the kingdom of God, the queen and the empress will be happy to sit at the feet of the unfortunate; for you must not think that the celestial house is built on a human plan. Far from it, Madame."

Nevertheless, he conceded that more than one road led to salvation. One could follow the road of love.

"Man's love is earthly," he said, "but it rises by painful degrees, and finally leads to God."

The Prince had risen. Kissing Miss Bell's hand, he said:

"Saturday."

"Yes, the day after to-morrow, Saturday," replied Vivian.

Therese started. Saturday! They were talking of Saturday quietly, as of an ordinary day. Until then she had not wished to think that Saturday would come so soon or so naturally.

The guests had been gone for half an hour. Therese, tired, was thinking in her bed, when she heard a knock at the door of her room. The panel opened, and Vivian's little head appeared.

"I am not intruding, darling? You are not sleepy?"

No, Therese had no desire to sleep. She rose on her elbow. Vivian sat on the bed, so light that she made no impression on it.

“Darling, I am sure you have a great deal of reason. Oh, I am sure of it. You are reasonable in the same way that Monsieur Sadler is a violinist. He plays a little out of tune when he wishes. And you, too, when you are not quite logical, it is for your own pleasure. Oh, darling, you have a great deal of reason and of judgment, and I come to ask your advice.”

Astonished, and a little anxious, Therese denied that she was logical. She denied this very sincerely. But Vivian would not listen to her.

“I have read Francois Rabelais a great deal, my love. It is in Rabelais and in Villon that I studied French. They are good old masters of language. But, darling, do you know the ‘Pantagruel?’ ‘Pantagruel’ is like a beautiful and noble city, full of palaces, in the resplendent dawn, before the street-sweepers of Paris have come. The sweepers have not taken out the dirt, and the maids have not washed the marble steps. And I have seen that French women do not read the ‘Pantagruel.’ You do not know it? Well, it is not necessary. In the ‘Pantagruel,’ Panurge asks whether he must marry, and he covers himself with ridicule, my love. Well, I am quite as laughable as he, since I am asking the same question of you.”

Therese replied with an uneasiness she did not try to conceal:

“As for that, my dear, do not ask me. I have already told you my opinion.”

“But, darling, you have said that only men are wrong to marry. I can not take that advice for myself.”

Madame Martin looked at the little boyish face and head of Miss Bell, which oddly expressed tenderness and modesty.

Then she embraced her, saying:

“Dear, there is not a man in the world exquisite and delicate enough for you.”

She added, with an expression of affectionate gravity:

“You are not a child. If some one loves you, and you love him, do what you think

you ought to do, without mingling interests and combinations that have nothing to do with sentiment. This is the advice of a friend."

Miss Bell hesitated a moment. Then she blushed and arose. She had been a little shocked.

CHAPTER XVIII. "I KISS YOUR FEET BECAUSE THEY HAVE COME!"

Saturday, at four o'clock, Therese went, as she had promised, to the gate of the English cemetery. There she found Dechartre. He was serious and agitated; he spoke little. She was glad he did not display his joy. He led her by the deserted walls of the gardens to a narrow street which she did not know. She read on a signboard: Via Alfieri. After they had taken fifty steps, he stopped before a sombre alley:

"It is in there," he said.

She looked at him with infinite sadness.

"You wish me to go in?"

She saw he was resolute, and followed him without saying a word, into the humid shadow of the alley. He traversed a courtyard where the grass grew among the stones. In the back was a pavilion with three windows, with columns and a front ornamented with goats and nymphs. On the moss-covered steps he turned in the lock a key that creaked and resisted. He murmured,

"It is rusty."

She replied, without thought "All the keys are rusty in this country."

They went up a stairway so silent that it seemed to have forgotten the sound of footsteps. He pushed open a door and made Therese enter the room. She went straight to a window opening on the cemetery. Above the wall rose the tops of pine-trees, which are not funereal in this land where mourning is mingled with joy

without troubling it, where the sweetness of living extends to the city of the dead. He took her hand and led her to an armchair. He remained standing, and looked at the room which he had prepared so that she would not find herself lost in it. Panels of old print cloth, with figures of Comedy, gave to the walls the sadness of past gayeties. He had placed in a corner a dim pastel which they had seen together at an antiquary's, and which, for its shadowy grace, she called the shade of Rosalba. There was a grandmother's armchair; white chairs; and on the table painted cups and Venetian glasses. In all the corners were screens of colored paper, whereon were masks, grotesque figures, the light soul of Florence, of Bologna, and of Venice in the time of the Grand Dukes and of the last Doges. A mirror and a carpet completed the furnishings.

He closed the window and lighted the fire. She sat in the armchair, and as she remained in it erect, he knelt before her, took her hands, kissed them, and looked at her with a wondering expression, timorous and proud. Then he pressed his lips to the tip of her boot.

"What are you doing?"

"I kiss your feet because they have come."

He rose, drew her to him softly, and placed a long kiss on her lips. She remained inert, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. Her toque fell, her hair dropped on her shoulders.

Two hours later, when the setting sun made immeasurably longer the shadows on the stones, Therese, who had wished to walk alone in the city, found herself in front of the two obelisks of Santa Maria Novella without knowing how she had reached there. She saw at the corner of the square the old cobbler drawing his string with his eternal gesture. He smiled, bearing his sparrow on his shoulder.

She went into the shop, and sat on a chair. She said in French:

"Quentin Matsys, my friend, what have I done, and what will become of me?"

He looked at her quietly, with laughing kindness, not understanding nor caring. Nothing astonished him. She shook her head.

“What I did, my good Quentin, I did because he was suffering, and because I loved him. I regret nothing.”

He replied, as was his habit, with the sonorous syllable of Italy:

“Si! si!”

“Is it not so, Quentin? I have not done wrong? But, my God! what will happen now?”

She prepared to go. He made her understand that he wished her to wait. He culled carefully a bit of basilick and offered it to her.

“For its fragrance, signora!”

CHAPTER XIX. CHOULETTE TAKES A JOURNEY

It was the next day.

Having carefully placed on the drawing-room table his knotty stick, his pipe, and his antique carpet-bag, Choulette bowed to Madame Martin, who was reading at the window. He was going to Assisi. He wore a sheepskin coat, and resembled the old shepherds in pictures of the Nativity.

“Farewell, Madame. I am quitting Fiesole, you, Dechartre, the too handsome Prince Albertinelli, and that gentle ogress, Miss Bell. I am going to visit the Assisi mountain, which the poet says must be named no longer Assisi, but the Orient, because it is there that the sun of love rose. I am going to kneel before the happy crypt where Saint Francis is resting in a stone manger, with a stone for a pillow. For he would not even take out of this world a shroud—out of this world where he left the revelation of all joy and of all kindness.”

“Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Bring me a medal of Saint Clara. I like Saint Clara a great deal.”

“You are right, Madame; she was a woman of strength and prudence. When Saint Francis, ill and almost blind, came to spend a few days at Saint Damien, near his friend, she built with her own hands a hut for him in the garden. Pain, languor, and burning eyelids deprived him of sleep. Enormous rats came to attack him at night. Then he composed a joyous canticle in praise of our splendid brother the Sun, and our sister the Water, chaste, useful, and pure. My most beautiful verses have less charm and splendor. And it is just that it should be thus, for Saint Francis’s soul was more beautiful than his mind. I am better than all my contemporaries whom I have known, yet I am worth nothing. When Saint Francis had composed his Song of the Sun he rejoiced. He thought: ‘We shall go, my brothers and I, into the cities, and stand in the public squares, with a lute, on the market-day. Good people will come near us, and we shall say to them: “We are the jugglers of God, and we shall sing a lay to you. If you are pleased, you will reward us.” They will promise, and when we shall have sung, we shall recall their promise to them. We shall say to them: “You owe a reward to us. And the one that we ask of you is that you love one another.” Doubtless, to keep their word and not injure God’s poor jugglers, they will avoid doing ill to others.’”

Madame Martin thought St. Francis was the most amiable of the saints.

“His work,” replied Choulette, “was destroyed while he lived. Yet he died happy, because in him was joy with humility. He was, in fact, God’s sweet singer. And it is right that another poor poet should take his task and teach the world true religion and true joy. I shall be that poet, Madame, if I can despoil myself of reason and of conceit. For all moral beauty is achieved in this world through the inconceivable wisdom that comes from God and resembles folly.”

“I shall not discourage you, Monsieur Choulette. But I am anxious about the fate

which you reserve for the poor women in your new society. You will imprison them all in convents."

"I confess," replied Choulette, "that they embarrass me a great deal in my project of reform. The violence with which one loves them is harsh and injurious. The pleasure they give is not peaceful, and does not lead to joy. I have committed for them, in my life, two or three abominable crimes of which no one knows. I doubt whether I shall ever invite you to supper, Madame, in the new Saint Mary of the Angels." He took his pipe, his carpet-bag, and his stick:

"The crimes of love shall be forgiven. Or, rather, one can not do evil when one loves purely. But sensual love is formed of hatred, selfishness, and anger as much as of passion. Because I found you beautiful one night, on this sofa, I was assailed by a cloud of violent thoughts. I had come from the Albergo, where I had heard Miss Bell's cook improvise magnificently twelve hundred verses on Spring. I was inundated by a celestial joy which the sight of you made me lose. It must be that a profound truth is enclosed in the curse of Eve. For, near you, I felt reckless and wicked. I had soft words on my lips. They were lies. I felt that I was your adversary and your enemy; I hated you. When I saw you smile, I felt a desire to kill you."

"Truly?"

"Oh, Madame, it is a very natural sentiment, which you must have inspired more than once. But common people feel it without being conscious of it, while my vivid imagination represents me to myself incessantly. I contemplate my mind, at times splendid, often hideous. If you had been able to read my mind that night you would have screamed with fright."

Therese smiled:

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Do not forget my medal of Saint Clara."

He placed his bag on the floor, raised his arm, and pointed his finger:

"You have nothing to fear from me. But the one whom you will love and who will

love you will harm you. Farewell, Madame."

He took his luggage and went out. She saw his long, rustic form disappear behind the bushes of the garden.

In the afternoon she went to San Marco, where Dechartre was waiting for her. She desired yet she feared to see him again so soon. She felt an anguish which an unknown sentiment, profoundly soft, appeased. She did not feel the stupor of the first time that she had yielded for love; she did not feel the brusque vision of the irreparable. She was under influences slower, more vague, and more powerful. This time a charming reverie bathed the reminiscence of the caresses which she had received. She was full of trouble and anxiety, but she felt no regret. She had acted less through her will than through a force which she divined to be higher. She absolved herself because of her disinterestedness. She counted on nothing, having calculated nothing.

Doubtless, she had been wrong to yield, since she was not free; but she had exacted nothing. Perhaps she was for him only a violent caprice. She did not know him. She had not one of those vivid imaginations that surpass immensely, in good as in evil, common mediocrity. If he went away from her and disappeared she would not reproach him for it; at least, she thought not. She would keep the reminiscence and the imprint of the rarest and most precious thing one may find in the world. Perhaps he was incapable of real attachment. He thought he loved her. He had loved her for an hour. She dared not wish for more, in the embarrassment of the false situation which irritated her frankness and her pride, and which troubled the lucidity of her intelligence. While the carriage was carrying her to San Marco, she persuaded herself that he would say nothing to her of the day before, and that the room from which one could see the pines rise to the sky would leave to them only the dream of a dream.

He extended his hand to her. Before he had spoken she saw in his look that he loved

her as much now as before, and she perceived at the same time that she wished him to be thus.

“You—” he said, “I have been here since noon. I was waiting, knowing that you would not come so soon, but able to live only at the place where I was to see you. It is you! Talk; let me see and hear you.”

“Then you still love me?”

“It is now that I love you. I thought I loved you when you were only a phantom. Now, you are the being in whose hands I have put my soul. It is true that you are mine! What have I done to obtain the greatest, the only, good of this world? And those men with whom the earth is covered think they are living! I alone live! Tell me, what have I done to obtain you?”

“Oh, what had to be done, I did. I say this to you frankly. If we have reached that point, the fault is mine. You see, women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault. So, whatever may happen, I never will reproach you for anything.”

An agile troupe of yelling beggars, guides, and coachmen surrounded them with an importunity wherein was mingled the gracefulness which Italians never lose. Their subtlety made them divine that these were lovers, and they knew that lovers are prodigal. Dechartre threw coin to them, and they all returned to their happy laziness.

A municipal guard received the visitors. Madame Martin regretted that there was no monk. The white gown of the Dominicans was so beautiful under the arcades of the cloister!

They visited the cells where, on the bare plaster, Fra Angelico, aided by his brother Benedetto, painted innocent pictures for his companions.

“Do you recall the winter night when, meeting you before the Guimet Museum, I accompanied you to the narrow street bordered by small gardens which leads to the Billy Quay? Before separating we stopped a moment on the parapet along which runs a thin boxwood hedge. You looked at that boxwood, dried by winter. And when

you went away I looked at it for a long time."

They were in the cell wherein Savonarola lived. The guide showed to them the portrait and the relics of the martyr.

"What could there have been in me that you liked that day? It was dark."

"I saw you walk. It is in movements that forms speak. Each one of your steps told me the secrets of your charming beauty. Oh! my imagination was never discreet in anything that concerned you. I did not dare to speak to you. When I saw you, it frightened me. It frightened me because you could do everything for me. When you were present, I adored you tremblingly. When you were far from me, I felt all the impieties of desire."

"I did not suspect this. But do you recall the first time we saw each other, when Paul Vence introduced you? You were seated near a screen. You were looking at the miniatures. You said to me: 'This lady, painted by Siccardi, resembles Andre Chenier's mother.' I replied to you: 'She is my husband's great-grandmother. How did Andre Chenier's mother look?' And you said: 'There is a portrait of her: a faded Levantine.'"

He excused himself and thought that he had not spoken so impertinently.

"You did. My memory is better than yours."

They were walking in the white silence of the convent. They saw the cell which Angelico had ornamented with the loveliest painting. And there, before the Virgin who, in the pale sky, receives from God the Father the immortal crown, he took Therese in his arms and placed a kiss on her lips, almost in view of two Englishwomen who were walking through the corridors, consulting their Baedeker. She said to him:

"We must not forget Saint Anthony's cell."

"Therese, I am suffering in my happiness from everything that is yours and that

escapes me. I am suffering because you do not live for me alone. I wish to have you wholly, and to have had you in the past."

She shrugged her shoulders a little.

"Oh, the past!"

"The past is the only human reality. Everything that is, is past."

She raised toward him her eyes, which resembled bits of blue sky full of mingled sun and rain.

"Well, I may say this to you: I never have felt that I lived except with you."

When she returned to Fiesole, she found a brief and threatening letter from Le Menil. He could not understand, her prolonged absence, her silence. If she did not announce at once her return, he would go to Florence for her.

She read without astonishment, but was annoyed to see that everything disagreeable that could happen was happening, and that nothing would be spared to her of what she had feared. She could still calm him and reassure him: she had only to say to him that she loved him; that she would soon return to Paris; that he should renounce the foolish idea of rejoining her here; that Florence was a village where they would be watched at once. But she would have to write: "I love you." She must quiet him with caressing phrases.

She had not the courage to do it. She would let him guess the truth. She accused herself in veiled terms. She wrote obscurely of souls carried away by the flood of life, and of the atom one is on the moving ocean of events. She asked him, with affectionate sadness, to keep of her a fond reminiscence in a corner of his soul.

She took the letter to the post-office box on the Fiesole square. Children were playing in the twilight. She looked from the top of the hill to the beautiful cup which carried beautiful Florence like a jewel. And the peace of night made her shiver. She dropped the letter into the box. Then only she had the clear vision of what she had

done and of what the result would be.

CHAPTER XX. WHAT IS FRANKNESS?

In the square, where the spring sun scattered its yellow roses, the bells at noon dispersed the rustic crowd of grain-merchants assembled to sell their wares. At the foot of the Lanzi, before the statues, the venders of ices had placed, on tables covered with red cotton, small castles bearing the inscription: ‘Bibite ghiacciate’. And joy descended from heaven to earth. Therese and Jacques, returning from an early promenade in the Boboli Gardens, were passing before the illustrious loggia. Therese looked at the Sabine by John of Bologna with that interested curiosity of a woman examining another woman. But Dechartre looked at Therese only. He said to her:

“It is marvellous how the vivid light of day flatters your beauty, loves you, and caresses the mother-of-pearl on your cheeks.”

“Yes,” she said. “Candle-light hardens my features. I have observed this. I am not an evening woman, unfortunately. It is at night that women have a chance to show themselves and to please. At night, Princess Seniavine has a fine blond complexion; in the sun she is as yellow as a lemon. It must be owned that she does not care. She is not a coquette.”

“And you are?”

“Oh, yes. Formerly I was a coquette for myself, now I am a coquette for you.”

She looked at the Sabine woman, who with her waving arms, long and robust, tried to avoid the Roman’s embraces.

“To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form and that length of limb? I am not shaped in that way.”

He took pains to reassure her. But she was not disturbed about it. She was looking

now at the little castle of the ice-vender. A sudden desire had come to her to eat an ice standing there, as the working-girls of the city stood.

“Wait a moment,” said Dechartre.

He ran toward the street that follows the left side of the Lanzi, and disappeared.

After a moment he came back, and gave her a little gold spoon, the handle of which was finished in a lily of Florence, with its chalice enamelled in red.

“You must eat your ice with this. The man does not give a spoon with his ices. You would have had to put out your tongue. It would have been pretty, but you are not accustomed to it.”

She recognized the spoon, a jewel which she had remarked the day before in the showcase of an antiquarian.

They were happy; they disseminated their joy, which was full and simple, in light words which had no sense. And they laughed when the Florentine repeated to them passages of the old Italian writers. She enjoyed the play of his face, which was antique in style and jovial in expression. But she did not always understand what he said. She asked Jacques:

“What did he say?”

“Do you really wish to know?”

Yes, she wished to know.

“Well, he said he should be happy if the fleas in his bed were shaped like you!”

When she had eaten the ice, he asked her to return to San Michele. It was so near! They would cross the square and at once discover the masterpiece in stone. They went. They looked at the St. George and at the bronze St. Mark. Dechartre saw again on the wall the post-box, and he recalled with painful exactitude the little gloved hand that had dropped the letter. He thought it hideous, that copper mouth which had swallowed Therese’s secret. He could not turn his eyes away from it. All his gayety

had fled. She admired the rude statue of the Evangelist.

“It is true that he looks honest and frank, and it seems that, if he spoke, nothing but words of truth would come out of his mouth.”

He replied bitterly:

“It is not a woman’s mouth.”

She understood his thought, and said, in her soft tone:

“My friend, why do you say this to me? I am frank.”

“What do you call frank? You know that a woman is obliged to lie.”

She hesitated. Then she said:

“A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly.”

CHAPTER XXI. “I NEVER HAVE LOVED ANY ONE BUT YOU!”

Therese was dressed in sombre gray. The bushes on the border of the terrace were covered with silver stars and on the hillsides the laurel-trees threw their odoriferous flame. The cup of Florence was in bloom.

Vivian Bell walked, arrayed in white, in the fragrant garden.

“You see, darling, Florence is truly the city of flowers, and it is not inappropriate that she should have a red lily for her emblem. It is a festival to-day, darling.”

“A festival, to-day?”

“Darling, do you not know this is the first day of May? You did not wake this morning in a charming fairy spectacle? Do you not celebrate the Festival of Flowers? Do you not feel joyful, you who love flowers? For you love them, my love, I know it: you are very good to them. You said to me that they feel joy and pain; that they suffer as we do.”

“Ah! I said that they suffer as we do?”

“Yes, you said it. It is their festival to-day. We must celebrate it with the rites consecrated by old painters.”

Therese heard without understanding. She was crumpling under her glove a letter which she had just received, bearing the Italian postage-stamp, and containing only these two lines:

“I am staying at the Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli. I shall expect you to-morrow morning. No. 18.”

“Darling, do you not know it is the custom of Florence to celebrate spring on the first day of May every year? Then you did not understand the meaning of Botticelli’s picture consecrated to the Festival of Flowers. Formerly, darling, on the first day of May the entire city gave itself up to joy. Young girls, crowned with sweetbrier and other flowers, made a long cortege through the Corso, under arches, and sang choruses on the new grass. We shall do as they did. We shall dance in the garden.”

“Ah, we shall dance in the garden?”

“Yes, darling; and I will teach you Tuscan steps of the fifteenth century which have been found in a manuscript by Mr. Morrison, the oldest librarian in London. Come back soon, my love; we shall put on flower hats and dance.”

“Yes, dear, we shall dance,” said Therese.

And opening the gate, she ran through the little pathway that hid its stones under rose-bushes. She threw herself into the first carriage she found. The coachman wore forget-me-nots on his hat and on the handle of his whip:

“Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli.”

She knew where that was, Lungarno Acciaoli. She had gone there at sunset, and she had seen the rays of the sun on the agitated surface of the river. Then night had

come, the murmur of the waters in the silence, the words and the looks that had troubled her, the first kiss of her lover, the beginning of incomparable love. Oh, yes, she recalled Lungarno Acciaoli and the river-side beyond the old bridge—Great Britain Hotel—she knew: a big stone facade on the quay. It was fortunate, since he would come, that he had gone there. He might as easily have gone to the Hotel de la Ville, where Dechartre was. It was fortunate they were not side by side in the same corridor. Lungarno Acciaoli! The dead body which they had seen pass was at peace somewhere in the little flowery cemetery.

"Number 18."

It was a bare hotel room, with a stove in the Italian fashion, a set of brushes displayed on the table, and a time-table. Not a book, not a journal. He was there; she saw suffering on his bony face, a look of fever. This produced on her a sad impression. He waited a moment for a word, a gesture; but she dared do nothing. He offered a chair. She refused it and remained standing.

"Therese, something has happened of which I do not know. Speak."

After a moment of silence, she replied, with painful slowness:

"My friend, when I was in Paris, why did you go away from me?"

By the sadness of her accent he believed, he wished to believe, in the expression of an affectionate reproach. His face colored. He replied, ardently:

"Ah, if I could have foreseen! That hunting party—I cared little for it, as you may think! But you—your letter, that of the twenty-seventh"—he had a gift for dates—"has thrown me into a horrible anxiety. Something has happened. Tell me everything."

"My friend, I believed you had ceased to love me."

"But now that you know the contrary?"

"Now—"

She paused, her arms fell before her and her hands were joined.

Then, with affected tranquillity, she continued:

“Well, my friend, we took each other without knowing. One never knows. You are young; younger than I, since we are of the same age. You have, doubtless, projects for the future.”

He looked at her proudly. She continued:

“Your family, your mother, your aunts, your uncle the General, have projects for you. That is natural. I might have become an obstacle. It is better that I should disappear from your life. We shall keep a fond remembrance of each other.”

She extended her gloved hand. He folded his arms:

“Then, you do not want me? You have made me happy, as no other man ever was, and you think now to brush me aside? Truly, you seem to think you have finished with me. What have you come to say to me? That it was a liaison, which is easily broken? That people take each other, quit each other—well, no! You are not a person whom one can easily quit.”

“Yes,” said Therese, “you had perhaps given me more of your heart than one does ordinarily in such 180 cases. I was more than an amusement for you. But, if I am not the woman you thought I was, if I have deceived you, if I am frivolous—you know people have said so—well, if I have not been to you what I should have been—”

She hesitated, and continued in a brave tone, contrasting with what she said:

“If, while I was yours, I have been led astray; if I have been curious; if I say to you that I was not made for serious sentiment—”

He interrupted her:

“You are not telling the truth.”

“No, I am not telling the truth. And I do not know how to lie. I wished to spoil our past. I was wrong. It was—you know what it was. But—”

“But?”

“I have always told you I was not sure of myself. There are women, it is said, who are sure of themselves. I warned you that I was not like them.”

He shook his head violently, like an irritated animal.

“What do you mean? I do not understand. I understand nothing. Speak clearly. There is something between us. I do not know what. I demand to know what it is. What is it?”

“There is the fact that I am not a woman sure of herself, and that you should not rely on me. No, you should not rely on me. I had promised nothing—and then, if I had promised, what are words?”

“You do not love me. Oh, you love me no more! I can see it. But it is so much the worse for you! I love you. You should not have given yourself to me. Do not think that you can take yourself back. I love you and I shall keep you. So you thought you could get out of it very quietly? Listen a moment. You have done everything to make me love you, to attach me to you, to make it impossible for me to live without you.

“Six weeks ago you asked for nothing better. You were everything for me, I was everything for you. And now you desire suddenly that I should know you no longer; that you should be to me a stranger, a lady whom one meets in society. Ah, you have a fine audacity! Have I dreamed? All the past is a dream? I invented it all? Oh, there can be no doubt of it. You loved me. I feel it still. Well, I have not changed. I am what I was; you have nothing to complain of. I have not betrayed you for other women. It isn’t credit that I claim. I could not have done it. When one has known you, one finds the prettiest women insipid. I never have had the idea of deceiving you. I have always acted well toward you. Why should you not love me? Answer! Speak! Say you love me still. Say it, since it is true. Come, Therese, you will feel at once that you love as you loved me formerly in the little nest where we were so

happy. Come!”

He approached her ardently. She, her eyes full of fright, pushed him away with a kind of horror.

He understood, stopped, and said:

“You have a lover.”

She bent her head, then lifted it, grave and dumb.

Then he made a gesture as if to strike her, and at once recoiled in shame. He lowered his eyes and was silent. His fingers to his lips, and biting his nails, he saw that his hand had been pricked by a pin on her waist, and bled. He threw himself in an armchair, drew his handkerchief to wipe off the blood, and remained indifferent and without thought.

She, with her back to the door, her face calm and pale, her look vague, arranged her hat with instinctive care. At the noise, formerly delicious, that the rustle of her skirts made, he started, looked at her, and asked furiously:

“Who is he? I will know.”

She did not move. She replied with soft firmness:

“I have told you all I can. Do not ask more; it would be useless.”

He looked at her with a cruel expression which she had never seen before.

“Oh, do not tell me his name. It will not be difficult for me to find it.”

She said not a word, saddened for him, anxious for another, full of anguish and fear, and yet without regret, without bitterness, because her real soul was elsewhere.

He had a vague sensation of what passed in her mind. In his anger to see her so sweet and so serene, to find her beautiful, and beautiful for another, he felt a desire to kill her, and he shouted at her:

“Go!”

Then, weakened by this effort of hatred, which was not natural to him, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

His pain touched her, gave her the hope of quieting him. She thought she might perhaps console him for her loss. Amicably and comfortably she seated herself beside him.

“My friend, blame me. I am to blame, but more to be pitied. Disdain me, if you wish, if one can disdain an unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life. In fine, judge me as you wish. But keep for me a little friendship in your anger, a little bitter-sweet reminiscence, something like those days of autumn when there is sunlight and strong wind. That is what I deserve. Do not be harsh to the agreeable but frivolous visitor who passed through your life. Bid good-by to me as to a traveller who goes one knows not where, and who is sad. There is so much sadness in separation! You were irritated against me a moment ago. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I only suffer for it. Reserve a little sympathy for me. Who knows? The future is always unknown. It is very gray and obscure before me. Let me say to myself that I have been kind, simple, frank with you, and that you have not forgotten it. In time you will understand, you will forgive; to-day have a little pity.”

He was not listening to her words. He was appeased simply by the caress of her voice, of which the tone was limpid and clear. He exclaimed:

“You do not love him. I am the one whom you love. Then—”

She hesitated:

“Ah, to say whom one loves or loves not is not an easy thing for a woman, or at least for me. I do not know how other women do. But life is not good to me. I am tossed to and fro by force of circumstances.”

He looked at her calmly. An idea came to him. He had taken a resolution; he forgave, he forgot, provided she returned to him at once.

“Therese, you do not love him. It was an error, a moment of forgetfulness, a horrible

and stupid thing that you did through weakness, through surprise, perhaps in spite. Swear to me that you never will see him again."

He took her arm:

"Swear to me!"

She said not a word, her teeth were set, her face was sombre. He wrenched her wrist. She exclaimed:

"You hurt me!"

However, he followed his idea; he led her to the table, on which, near the brushes, were an ink-stand, and several leaves of letter-paper ornamented with a large blue vignette, representing the facade of the hotel, with innumerable windows.

"Write what I am about to dictate to you. I will call somebody to take the letter."

And as she resisted, he made her fall on her knees. Proud and determined, she said:

"I can not, I will not."

"Why?"

"Because—do you wish to know?—because I love him."

Brusquely he released her. If he had had his revolver at hand, perhaps he would have killed her. But almost at once his anger was dampened by sadness; and now, desperate, he was the one who wished to die.

"Is what you say true? Is it possible?"

"How do I know? Can I say? Do I understand? Have I an idea, a sentiment, about anything?"

With an effort she added:

"Am I at this moment aware of anything except my sadness and your despair?"

"You love him, you love him! What is he, who is he, that you should love him?"

His surprise made him stupid; he was in an abyss of astonishment. But what she had

said separated them. He dared not complain. He only repeated:

“You love him, you love him! But what has he done to you, what has he said, to make you love him? I know you. I have not told you every time your ideas shocked me. I would wager he is not even a man in society. And you believe he loves you? You believe it? Well, you are deceiving yourself. He does not love you. You flatter him, simply. He will quit you at the first opportunity. When he shall have compromised you, he will abandon you. Next year people will say of you: ‘She is not at all exclusive.’ I am sorry for your father; he is one of my friends, and will know of your behavior. You can not expect to deceive him.”

She listened, humiliated but consoled, thinking how she would have suffered had she found him generous.

In his simplicity he sincerely disdained her. This disdain relieved him.

“How did the thing happen? You can tell me.”

She shrugged her shoulders with so much pity that he dared not continue. He became contemptuous again.

“Do you imagine that I shall aid you in saving appearances, that I shall return to your house, that I shall continue to call on your husband?”

“I think you will continue to do what a gentleman should. I ask nothing of you. I should have liked to preserve of you the reminiscence of an excellent friend. I thought you might be indulgent and kind to, me, but it is not possible. I see that lovers never separate kindly. Later, you will judge me better. Farewell!”

He looked at her. Now his face expressed more pain than anger. She never had seen his eyes so dry and so black. It seemed as if he had grown old in an hour.

“I prefer to tell you in advance. It will be impossible for me to see you again. You are not a woman whom one may meet after one has been loved by her. You are not like others. You have a poison of your own, which you have given to me, and which

I feel in me, in my veins. Why have I known you?”

She looked at him kindly.

“Farewell! Say to yourself that I am not worthy of being regretted so much.”

Then, when he saw that she placed her hand on the latch of the door, when he felt at that gesture that he was to lose her, that he should never have her again, he shouted. He forgot everything. There remained in him only the dazed feeling of a great misfortune accomplished, of an irreparable calamity. And from the depth of his stupor a desire ascended. He desired to possess again the woman who was leaving him and who would never return. He drew her to him. He desired her, with all the strength of his animal nature. She resisted with all the force of her will, which was free and on the alert. She disengaged herself, crumpled, torn, without even having been afraid.

He understood that everything was useless; he realized she was no longer for him, because she belonged to another. As his suffering returned, he pushed her out of the door.

She remained a moment in the corridor, proudly waiting for a word.

But he shouted again, “Go!” and shut the door violently.

On the Via Alfieri, she saw again the pavilion in the rear of the courtyard where pale grasses grew. She found it silent and tranquil, faithful, with its goats and nymphs, to the lovers of the time of the Grand Duchess Eliza. She felt at once freed from the painful, brutal world, and transported to ages wherein she had not known the sadness of life. At the foot of the stairs, the steps of which were covered with roses, Dechartre was waiting. She threw herself in his arms. He carried her inert, like a precious trophy before which he had become pallid and trembling. She enjoyed, her eyelids half closed, the superb humiliation of being a beautiful prey. Her fatigue, her sadness, her disgust with the day, the reminiscence of violence, her regained liberty, the need of forgetting, remains of fright, everything vivified, awakened her

tenderness. She threw her arms around the neck of her lover.

They were as gay as children. They laughed, said tender nothings, played, ate lemons, oranges, and other fruits piled up near-them on painted plates. Her lips, half-open, showed her brilliant teeth. She asked, with coquettish anxiety, if he were not disillusioned after the beautiful dream he had made of her.

In the caressing light of the day, for the enjoyment of which he had arranged, he contemplated her with youthful joy. He lavished praise and kisses upon her. They forgot themselves in caresses, in friendly quarrels, in happy glances.

He asked her how a little red mark on her temple had come there. She replied that she had forgotten; that it was nothing. She hardly lied; she had really forgotten.

They recalled to each other their short but beautiful history, all their life, which began upon the day when they had met.

“You know, on the terrace, the day after your arrival, you said vague things to me. I guessed that you loved me.”

“I was afraid to seem stupid to you.”

“You were, a little. It was my triumph. It made me impatient to see you so little troubled near me. I loved you before you loved me. Oh, I do not blush for it!”

He gave her a glass of Asti. But there was a bottle of Trasimene. She wished to taste it, in memory of the lake which she had seen silent and beautiful at night in its opal cup. That was when she had first visited Italy, six years before.

He chided her for having discovered the beauty of things without his aid.

She said:

“Without you, I did not know how to see anything. Why did you not come to me before?”

He closed her lips with a kiss. Then she said:

“Yes, I love you! Yes, I never have loved any one but you!”

CHAPTER XXII. A MEETING AT THE STATION

Le Menil had written: “I leave tomorrow evening at seven o’clock. Meet me at the station.”

She had gone to meet him. She saw him in long coat and cape, precise and calm, in front of the hotel stages. He said only:

“Ah, you have come.”

“But, my friend, you called me.”

He did not confess that he had written in the absurd hope that she would love him again and that the rest would be forgotten, or that she would say to him: “It was only a trial of your love.”

If she had said so he would have believed her, however.

Astonished because she did not speak, he said, dryly:

“What have you to say to me? It is not for me to speak, but for you. I have no explanations to give you. I have not to justify a betrayal.”

“My friend, do not be cruel, do not be ungrateful. This is what I had to say to you. And I must repeat that I leave you with the sadness of a real friend.”

“Is that all? Go and say this to the other man. It will interest him more than it interests me.”

“You called me, and I came; do not make me regret it.”

“I am sorry to have disturbed you. You could doubtless find a better employment for your time. I will not detain you. Rejoin him, since you are longing to do so.”

At the thought that his unhappy words expressed a moment of eternal human pain, and that tragedy had illustrated many similar griefs, she felt all the sadness and irony of the situation, which a curl of her lips betrayed. He thought she was laughing.

“Do not laugh; listen to me. The other day, at the hotel, I wanted to kill you. I came

so near doing it that now I know what I escaped. I will not do it. You may rest secure. What would be the use? As I wish to keep up appearances, I shall call on you in Paris. It will grieve me to learn that you can not receive me. I shall see your husband, I shall see your father also. It will be to say good-by to them, as I intend to go on a long voyage. Farewell, Madame!”

At the moment when he turned his back to her, Therese saw Miss Bell and Prince Albertinelli coming out of the freight-station toward her. The Prince was very handsome. Vivian was walking by his side with the lightness of chaste joy.

“Oh, darling, what a pleasant surprise to find you here! The Prince, and I have seen, at the customhouse, the new bell, which has just come.”

“Ah, the bell has come?”

“It is here, darling, the Ghiberti bell. I saw it in its wooden cage. It did not ring, because it was a prisoner. But it will have a campanile in my Fiesole house.

“When it feels the air of Florence, it will be happy to let its silvery voice be heard. Visited by the doves, it will ring for all our joys and all our sufferings. It will ring for you, for me, for the Prince, for good Madame Marmet, for Monsieur Choulette, for all our friends.”

“Dear, bells never ring for real joys and for real sufferings. Bells are honest functionaries, who know only official sentiments.”

“Oh, darling, you are much mistaken. Bells know the secrets of souls; they know everything. But I am very glad to find you here. I know, my love, why you came to the station. Your maid betrayed you. She told me you were waiting for a pink gown which was delayed in coming and that you were very impatient. But do not let that trouble you. You are always beautiful, my love.”

She made Madame Martin enter her wagon.

“Come, quick, darling; Monsieur Jacques Dechartre dines at the house to-night, and

I should not like to make him wait."

And while they were driving through the silence of the night, through the pathways full of the fresh perfume of wildflowers, she said:

"Do you see over there, darling, the black distaffs of the Fates, the cypresses of the cemetery? It is there I wish to sleep."

But Therese thought anxiously: "They saw him. Did they recognize him? I think not. The place was dark, and had only little blinding lights. Did she know him? I do not recall whether she saw him at my house last year."

What made her anxious was a sly smile on the Prince's face.

"Darling, do you wish a place near me in that rustic cemetery? Shall we rest side by side under a little earth and a great deal of sky? But I do wrong to extend to you an invitation which you can not accept. It will not be permitted to you to sleep your eternal sleep at the foot of the hill of Fiesole, my love. You must rest in Paris, in a handsome tomb, by the side of Count Martin-Belleme."

"Why? Do you think, dear, that the wife must be united to her husband even after death?"

"Certainly she must, darling. Marriage is for time and for eternity. Do you not know the history of a young pair who loved each other in the province of Auvergne? They died almost at the same time, and were placed in two tombs separated by a road. But every night a sweetbrier bush threw from one tomb to the other its flowery branches. The two coffins had to be buried together."

When they had passed the Badia, they saw a procession coming up the side of the hill. The wind blew on the candles borne in gilded wooden candlesticks. The girls of the societies, dressed in white and blue, carried painted banners. Then came a little St. John, blond, curly-haired, nude, under a lamb's fleece which showed his arms and shoulders; and a St. Mary Magdalene, seven years old, crowned only with her waving golden hair. The people of Fiesole followed. Countess Martin recognized

Choulette among them. With a candle in one hand, a book in the other, and blue spectacles on the end of his nose, he was singing. His unkempt beard moved up and down with the rhythm of the song. In the harshness of light and shade that worked in his face, he had an air that suggested a solitary monk capable of accomplishing a century of penance.

“How amusing he is!” said Therese. “He is making a spectacle of himself for himself. He is a great artist.”

“Darling, why will you insist that Monsieur Choulette is not a pious man? Why? There is much joy and much beauty in faith. Poets know this. If Monsieur Choulette had not faith, he could not write the admirable verses that he does.”

“And you, dear, have you faith?”

“Oh, yes; I believe in God and in the word of Christ.”

Now the banners and the white veils had disappeared down the road. But one could see on the bald cranium of Choulette the flame of the candle reflected in rays of gold.

Dechartre, however, was waiting alone in the garden. Therese found him resting on the balcony of the terrace where he had felt the first sufferings of love. While Miss Bell and the Prince were trying to fix upon a suitable place for the campanile, Dechartre led his beloved under the trees.

“You promised me that you would be in the garden when I came. I have been waiting for you an hour, which seemed eternal. You were not to go out. Your absence has surprised and grieved me.”

She replied vaguely that she had been compelled to go to the station, and that Miss Bell had brought her back in the wagon.

He begged her pardon for his anxiety, but everything alarmed him. His happiness made him afraid.

They were already at table when Choulette appeared, with the face of an antique satyr. A terrible joy shone in his phosphorous eyes. Since his return from Assisi, he lived only among paupers, drank chianti all day with girls and artisans to whom he taught the beauty of joy and innocence, the advent of Jesus Christ, and the imminent abolition of taxes and military service. At the beginning of the procession he had gathered vagabonds in the ruins of the Roman theatre, and had delivered to them in a macaronic language, half French and half Tuscan, a sermon, which he took pleasure in repeating:

"Kings, senators, and judges have said: 'The life of nations is in us.' Well, they lie; and they are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle.'

"The life of nations is in the crops of the fields yellowing under the eye of the Lord. It is in the vines, and in the smiles and tears with which the sky bathes the fruits on the trees.

"The life of nations is not in the laws, which were made by the rich and powerful for the preservation of riches and power.

"The chiefs of kingdoms and of republics have said in their books that the right of peoples is the right of war, and they have glorified violence. And they render honors unto conquerors, and they raise in the public squares statues to the victorious man and horse. But one has not the right to kill; that is the reason why the just man will not draw from the urn a number that will send him to the war. The right is not to pamper the folly and crimes of a prince raised over a kingdom or over a republic; and that is the reason why the just man will not pay taxes and will not give money to the publicans. He will enjoy in peace the fruit of his work, and he will make bread with the wheat that he has sown, and he will eat the fruits of the trees that he has cut."

"Ah, Monsieur Choulette," said Prince Albertinelli, gravely, "you are right to take interest in the state of our unfortunate fields, which taxes exhaust. What fruit can be

drawn from a soil taxed to thirty-three per cent. of its net income? The master and the servants are the prey of the publicans."

Dechartre and Madame Martin were struck by the unexpected sincerity of his accent.

He added:

"I like the King. I am sure of my loyalty, but the misfortunes of the peasants move me."

The truth was, he pursued with obstinacy a single aim: to reestablish the domain of Casentino that his father, Prince Carlo, an officer of Victor Emmanuel, had left devoured by usurers. His affected gentleness concealed his stubbornness. He had only useful vices. It was to become a great Tuscan landowner that he had dealt in pictures, sold the famous ceilings of his palace, made love to rich old women, and, finally, sought the hand of Miss Bell, whom he knew to be skilful at earning money and practised in the art of housekeeping. He really liked peasants. The ardent praises of Choulette, which he understood vaguely, awakened this affection in him. He forgot himself enough to express his mind:

"In a country where master and servants form one family, the fate of the one depends on that of the others. Taxes despoil us. How good are our farmers! They are the best men in the world to till the soil."

Madame Martin confessed that she should not have believed it. The country of Lombardy alone seemed to her to be well cultivated. Tuscany appeared a beautiful, wild orchard.

The Prince replied, smilingly, that perhaps she would not speak in that way if she had done him the honor of visiting his farms of Casentino, although these had suffered from long and ruinous lawsuits. She would have seen there what an Italian landscape really is.

"I take a great deal of care of my domain. I was coming from it to-night when I had

the double pleasure of finding at the station Miss Bell, who had gone there to find her Ghiberti bell, and you, Madame, who were talking with a friend from Paris."

He had the idea that it would be disagreeable to her to hear him speak of that meeting. He looked around the table, and saw the expression of anxious surprise which Dechartre could not restrain. He insisted:

"Forgive, Madame, in a rustic, a certain pretension to knowing something about the world. In the man who was talking to you I recognized a Parisian, because he had an English air; and while he affected stiffness, he showed perfect ease and particular vivacity."

"Oh," said Therese, negligently, "I have not seen him for a long time. I was much surprised to meet him at Florence at the moment of his departure."

She looked at Dechartre, who affected not to listen.

"I know that gentleman," said Miss Bell. "It is Monsieur Le Menil. I dined with him twice at Madame Martin's, and he talked to me very well. He said he liked football; that he introduced the game in France, and that now football is quite the fashion. He also related to me his hunting adventures. He likes animals. I have observed that hunters like animals. I assure you, darling, that Monsieur Le Menil talks admirably about hares. He knows their habits. He said to me it was a pleasure to look at them dancing in the moonlight on the plains. He assured me that they were very intelligent, and that he had seen an old hare, pursued by dogs, force another hare to get out of the trail so as to deceive the hunters. Darling, did Monsieur Le Menil ever talk to you about hares?"

Therese replied she did not know, and that she thought hunters were tiresome.

Miss Bell exclaimed. She did not think M. Le Menil was ever tiresome when talking of the hares that danced in the moonlight on the plains and among the vines. She would like to raise a hare, like Phanion.

"Darling, you do not know Phanion. Oh, I am sure that Monsieur Dechartre knows

her. She was beautiful, and dear to poets. She lived in the Island of Cos, beside a dell which, covered with lemon-trees, descended to the blue sea. And they say that she looked at the blue waves. I related Phanion's history to Monsieur Le Menil, and he was very glad to hear it. She had received from some hunter a little hare with long ears. She held it on her knees and fed it on spring flowers. It loved Phanion and forgot its mother. It died before having eaten too many flowers. Phanion lamented over its loss. She buried it in the lemon-grove, in a grave which she could see from her bed. And the shade of the little hare was consoled by the songs of the poets."

The good Madame Marmet said that M. Le Menil pleased by his elegant and discreet manners, which young men no longer practise. She would have liked to see him. She wanted him to do something for her.

"Or, rather, for my nephew," she said. "He is a captain in the artillery, and his chiefs like him. His colonel was for a long time under orders of Monsieur Le Menil's uncle, General La Briche. If Monsieur Le Menil would ask his uncle to write to Colonel Faure in favor of my nephew I should be grateful to him. My nephew is not a stranger to Monsieur Le Menil. They met last year at the masked ball which Captain de Lassay gave at the hotel at Caen."

Madame Marmet cast down her eyes and added:

"The invited guests, naturally, were not society women. But it is said some of them were very pretty. They came from Paris. My nephew, who gave these details to me, was dressed as a coachman. Monsieur Le Menil was dressed as a Hussar of Death, and he had much success."

Miss Bell said that she was sorry not to have known that M. Le Menil was in Florence. Certainly, she should have invited him to come to Fiesole.

Dechartre remained sombre and distant during the rest of the dinner: and when, at the moment of leaving, Therese extended her hand to him, she felt that he avoided pressing it in his.

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIII. “ONE IS NEVER KIND WHEN ONE IS IN LOVE”

The next day, in the hidden pavilion of the Via Alfieri, she found him preoccupied. She tried to distract him with ardent gayety, with the sweetness of pressing intimacy, with superb humility. But he remained sombre. He had all night meditated, labored over, and recognized his sadness. He had found reasons for suffering. His thought had brought together the hand that dropped a letter in the post-box before the bronze San Marco and the dreadful unknown who had been seen at the station. Now Jacques Dechartre gave a face and a name to the cause of his suffering. In the grandmother’s armchair where Therese had been seated on the day of her welcome, and which she had this time offered to him, he was assailed by painful images; while she, bent over one of his arms, enveloped him with her warm embrace and her loving heart. She divined too well what he was suffering to ask it of him simply.

In order to bring him back to pleasanter ideas, she recalled the secrets of the room where they were and reminiscences of their walks through the city. She was gracefully familiar.

“The little spoon you gave me, the little red lily spoon, I use for my tea in the morning. And I know by the pleasure I feel at seeing it when I wake how much I love you.”

Then, as he replied only in sentences sad and evasive, she said:

“I am near you, but you do not care for me. You are preoccupied by some idea that I do not fathom. Yet I am alive, and an idea is nothing.”

“An idea is nothing? Do you think so? One may be wretched or happy for an idea; one may live and one may die for an idea. Well, I am thinking.”

“Of what are you thinking?”

“Why do you ask? You know very well I am thinking of what I heard last night, which you had concealed from me. I am thinking of your meeting at the station, which was not due to chance, but which a letter had caused, a letter dropped—remember!—in the postbox of San Michele. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I have not the right. But why did you give yourself to me if you were not free?”

She thought she must tell an untruth.

“You mean some one whom I met at the station yesterday? I assure you it was the most ordinary meeting in the world.”

He was painfully impressed with the fact that she did not dare to name the one she spoke of. He, too, avoided pronouncing that name.

“Therese, he had not come for you? You did not know he was in Florence? He is nothing more to you than a man whom you meet socially? He is not the one who, when absent, made you say to me, ‘I can not?’ He is nothing to you?”

She replied resolutely:

“He comes to my house at times. He was introduced to me by General Lariviere. I have nothing more to say to you about him. I assure you he is of no interest to me, and I can not conceive what may be in your mind about him.”

She felt a sort of satisfaction at repudiating the man who had insisted against her; with so much harshness and violence, upon his rights of ownership. But she was in haste to get out of her tortuous path. She rose and looked at her lover, with beautiful, tender, and grave eyes.

“Listen to me: the day when I gave my heart to you, my life was yours wholly. If a doubt or a suspicion comes to you, question me. The present is yours, and you know well there is only you, you alone, in it. As for my past, if you knew what nothingness it was you would be glad. I do not think another woman made as I was,

to love, would have brought to you a mind newer to love than is mine. That I swear to you. The years that were spent without you—I did not live! Let us not talk of them. There is nothing in them of which I should be ashamed. To regret them is another thing. I regret to have known you so late. Why did you not come sooner? You could have known me five years ago as easily as to-day. But, believe me, we should not tire ourselves with speaking of time that has gone. Remember Lohengrin. If you love me, I am for you like the swan's knight. I have asked nothing of you. I have wanted to know nothing. I have not chided you about Mademoiselle Jeanne Tancrede. I saw you loved me, that you were suffering, and it was enough—because I loved you."

"A woman can not be jealous in the same manner as a man, nor feel what makes us suffer."

"I do not know that. Why can not she?"

"Why? Because there is not in the blood, in the flesh of a woman that absurd and generous fury for ownership, that primitive instinct of which man has made a right. Man is the god who wants his mate to himself. Since time immemorial woman is accustomed to sharing men's love. It is the past, the obscure past, that determines our passions. We are already so old when we are born! Jealousy, for a woman, is only a wound to her own self-love. For a man it is a torture as profound as moral suffering, as continuous as physical suffering. You ask the reason why? Because, in spite of my submission and of my respect, in spite of the alarm you cause me, you are matter and I am the idea; you are the thing and I am the mind; you are the clay and I am the artisan. Do not complain of this. Near the perfect amphora, surrounded with garlands, what is the rude and humble potter? The amphora is tranquil and beautiful; he is wretched; he is tormented; he wills; he suffers; for to will is to suffer. Yes, I am jealous. I know what there is in my jealousy. When I examine it, I find in it hereditary prejudices, savage conceit, sickly susceptibility, a mingling of rudest

violence and cruel feebleness, imbecile and wicked revolt against the laws of life and of society. But it does not matter that I know it for what it is: it exists and it torments me. I am the chemist who, studying the properties of an acid which he has drunk, knows how it was combined and what salts form it. Nevertheless the acid burns him, and will burn him to the bone."

"My love, you are absurd."

"Yes, I am absurd. I feel it better than you feel it yourself. To desire a woman in all the brilliancy of her beauty and her wit, mistress of herself, who knows and who dares; more beautiful in that and more desirable, and whose choice is free, voluntary, deliberate; to desire her, to love her for what she is, and to suffer because she is not puerile candor nor pale innocence, which would be shocking in her if it were possible to find them there; to ask her at the same time that she be herself and not be herself; to adore her as life has made her, and regret bitterly that life, which has made her so beautiful, has touched her—Oh, this is absurd! I love you! I love you with all that you bring to me of sensations, of habits, with all that comes of your experiences, with all that comes from him-perhaps, from them-how do I know? These things are my delight and they are my torture. There must be a profound sense in the public idiocy which says that love like ours is guilty. Joy is guilty when it is immense. That is the reason why I suffer, my beloved."

She knelt before him, took his hands, and drew him to her.

"I do not wish you to suffer; I will not have it. It would be folly. I love you, and never have loved any one but you. You may believe me; I do not lie."

He kissed her forehead.

"If you deceived me, my dear, I should not reproach you for that; on the contrary, I should be grateful to you. Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain. What would become of us if women had not for us the pity of untruth? Lie, my beloved, lie for the sake of charity. Give me the dream that colors black sorrow. Lie;

have no scruples. You will only add another illusion to the illusion of love and beauty."

He sighed:

"Oh, common-sense, common wisdom!"

She asked him what he meant, and what common wisdom was. He said it was a sensible proverb, but brutal, which it was better not to repeat.

"Repeat it all the same."

"You wish me to say it to you: 'Kissed lips do not lose their freshness.'"

And he added:

"It is true that love preserves beauty, and that the beauty of women is fed on caresses as bees are fed on flowers."

She placed on his lips a pledge in a kiss.

"I swear to you I never loved any one but you. Oh, no, it is not caresses that have preserved the few charms which I am happy to have in order to offer them to you. I love you! I love you!"

But he still remembered the letter dropped in the post-box, and the unknown person met at the station.

"If you loved me truly, you would love only me."

She rose, indignant:

"Then you believe I love another? What you are saying is monstrous. Is that what you think of me? And you say you love me! I pity you, because you are insane."

"True, I am insane."

She, kneeling, with the supple palms of her hands enveloped his temples and his cheeks. He said again that he was mad to be anxious about a chance and commonplace meeting. She forced him to believe her, or, rather, to forget. He no

longer saw or knew anything. His vanished bitterness and anger left him nothing but the harsh desire to forget everything, to make her forget everything.

She asked him why he was sad.

“You were happy a moment ago. Why are you not happy now?”

And as he shook his head and said nothing:

“Speak! I like your complaints better than your silence.”

Then he said:

“You wish to know? Do not be angry. I suffer now more than ever, because I know now what you are capable of giving.”

She withdrew brusquely from his arms and, with eyes full of pain and reproach, said:

“You can believe that I ever was to another what I am to you! You wound me in my most susceptible sentiment, in my love for you. I do not forgive you for this. I love you! I never have loved any one except you. I never have suffered except through you. Be content. You do me a great deal of harm. How can you be so unkind?”

“Therese, one is never kind when one is in love.”

She remained for a long time immovable and dreamy. Her face flushed, and a tear rose to her eyes.

“Therese, you are weeping!”

“Forgive me, my heart, it is the first time that I have loved and that I have been really loved. I am afraid.”

CHAPTER XXIV. CHOULETTE’S AMBITION

While the rolling of arriving boxes filled the Bell villa; while Pauline, loaded with parcels, lightly came down the steps; while good Madame Marmet, with tranquil

vigilance, supervised everything; and while Miss Bell finished dressing in her room, Therese, dressed in gray, resting on the terrace, looked once again at the Flower City.

She had decided to return home. Her husband recalled her in every one of his letters. If, as he asked her to do, she returned to Paris in the first days of May, they might give two or three dinners, followed by receptions. His political group was supported by public opinion. The tide was pushing him along, and Garain thought the Countess Martin's drawing-room might exercise an excellent influence on the future of the country. These reasons moved her not; but she felt a desire to be agreeable to her husband. She had received the day before a letter from her father, Monsieur Montessuy, who, without sharing the political views of his son-in-law and without giving any advice to his daughter, insinuated that society was beginning to gossip of the Countess Martin's mysterious sojourn at Florence among poets and artists. The Bell villa took, from a distance, an air of sentimental fantasy. She felt herself that she was too closely observed at Resole. Madame Marmet annoyed her. Prince Albertinelli disquieted her. The meetings in the pavilion of the Via Alfieri had become difficult and dangerous. Professor Arrighi, whom the Prince often met, had seen her one night as she was walking through the deserted streets leaning on Dechartre. Professor Arrighi, author of a treatise on agriculture, was the most amiable of wise men. He had turned his beautiful, heroic face, and said, only the next day, to the young woman "Formerly, I could discern from a long distance the coming of a beautiful woman. Now that I have gone beyond the age to be viewed favorably by women, heaven has pity on me. Heaven prevents my seeing them. My eyes are very bad. The most charming face I can no longer recognize." She had understood, and heeded the warning. She wished now to conceal her joy in the vastness of Paris.

Vivian, to whom she had announced her departure, had asked her to remain a few days longer. But Therese suspected that her friend was still shocked by the advice

she had received one night in the lemon-decorated room; that, at least, she did not enjoy herself entirely in the familiarity of a confidante who disapproved of her choice, and whom the Prince had represented to her as a coquette, and perhaps worse. The date of her departure had been fixed for May 5th.

The day shone brilliant, pure, and charming on the Arno valley. Therese, dreamy, saw from the terrace the immense morning rose placed in the blue cup of Florence. She leaned forward to discover, at the foot of the flowery hills, the imperceptible point where she had known infinite joys. There the cemetery garden made a small, sombre spot near which she divined the Via Alfieri. She saw herself again in the room wherein, doubtless, she never would enter again. The hours there passed had for her the sadness of a dream. She felt her eyes becoming veiled, her knees weaken, and her soul shudder. It seemed to her that life was no longer in her, and that she had left it in that corner where she saw the black pines raise their immovable summits. She reproached herself for feeling anxiety without reason, when, on the contrary, she should be reassured and joyful. She knew she would meet Jacques Dechartre in Paris. They would have liked to arrive there at the same time, or, rather, to go there together. They had thought it indispensable that he should remain three or four days longer in Florence, but their meeting would not be retarded beyond that. They had appointed a rendezvous, and she rejoiced in the thought of it. She wore her love mingled with her being and running in her blood. Still, a part of herself remained in the pavilion decorated with goats and nymphs a part of herself which never would return to her. In the full ardor of life, she was dying for things infinitely delicate and precious. She recalled that Dechartre had said to her: “Love likes charms. I gathered from the terrace the leaves of a tree that you had admired.” Why had she not thought of taking a stone of the pavilion wherein she had forgotten the world?

A shout from Pauline drew her from her thoughts. Choulette, jumping from a bush, had suddenly kissed the maid, who was carrying overcoats and bags into the carriage. Now he was running through the alleys, joyful, his ears standing out like

horns. He bowed to the Countess Martin.

“I have, then, to say farewell to you, Madame.”

He intended to remain in Italy. A lady was calling him, he said: it was Rome. He wanted to see the cardinals. One of them, whom people praised as an old man full of sense, would perhaps share the ideas of the socialist and revolutionary church. Choulette had his aim: to plant on the ruins of an unjust and cruel civilization the Cross of Calvary, not dead and bare, but vivid, and with its flowery arms embracing the world. He was founding with that design an order and a newspaper. Madame Martin knew the order. The newspaper was to be sold for one cent, and to be written in rhythmic phrases. It was a newspaper to be sung. Verse, simple, violent, or joyful, was the only language that suited the people. Prose pleased only people whose intelligence was very subtle. He had seen anarchists in the taverns of the Rue Saint Jacques. They spent their evenings reciting and listening to romances.

And he added:

“A newspaper which shall be at the same time a song-book will touch the soul of the people. People say I have genius. I do not know whether they are right. But it must be admitted that I have a practical mind.”

Miss Bell came down the steps, putting on her gloves:

“Oh, darling, the city and the mountains and the sky wish you to lament your departure. They make themselves beautiful to-day in order to make you regret quitting them and desire to see them again.”

But Choulette, whom the dryness of the Tuscan climate tired, regretted green Umbria and its humid sky. He recalled Assisi. He said:

“There are woods and rocks, a fair sky and white clouds. I have walked there in the footsteps of good Saint Francis, and I transcribed his canticle to the sun in old French rhymes, simple and poor.”

Madame Martin said she would like to hear it. Miss Bell was already listening, and her face wore the fervent expression of an angel sculptured by Mino.

Choulette told them it was a rustic and artless work. The verses were not trying to be beautiful. They were simple, although uneven, for the sake of lightness. Then, in a slow and monotonous voice, he recited the canticle.

“Oh, Monsieur Choulette,” said Miss Bell, “this canticle goes up to heaven, like the hermit in the Campo Santo of Pisa, whom some one saw going up the mountain that the goats liked. I will tell you. The old hermit went up, leaning on the staff of faith, and his step was unequal because the crutch, being on one side, gave one of his feet an advantage over the other. That is the reason why your verses are unequal. I have understood it.”

The poet accepted this praise, persuaded that he had unwittingly deserved it.

“You have faith, Monsieur Choulette,” said Therese. “Of what use is it to you if not to write beautiful verses?”

“Faith serves me to commit sin, Madame.”

“Oh, we commit sins without that.”

Madame Marmet appeared, equipped for the journey, in the tranquil joy of returning to her pretty apartment, her little dog Toby, her old friend Lagrange, and to see again, after the Etruscans of Fiesole, the skeleton warrior who, among the bonbon boxes, looked out of the window.

Miss Bell escorted her friends to the station in her carriage.

CHAPTER XXV. “WE ARE ROBBING LIFE”

Dechartre came to the carriage to salute the two travellers. Separated from him, Therese felt what he was to her: he had given to her a new taste of life, delicious and so vivid, so real, that she felt it on her lips. She lived under a charm in the dream of

seeing him again, and was surprised when Madame Marmet, along the journey, said: “I think we are passing the frontier,” or “Rose-bushes are in bloom by the seaside.” She was joyful when, after a night at the hotel in Marseilles, she saw the gray olive-trees in the stony fields, then the mulberry-trees and the distant profile of Mount Pilate, and the Rhone, and Lyons, and then the familiar landscapes, the trees raising their summits into bouquets clothed in tender green, and the lines of poplars beside the rivers. She enjoyed the plenitude of the hours she lived and the astonishment of profound joys. And it was with the smile of a sleeper suddenly awakened that, at the station in Paris, in the light of the station, she greeted her husband, who was glad to see her. When she kissed Madame Marmet, she told her that she thanked her with all her heart. And truly she was grateful to all things, like M. Choulette’s St. Francis.

In the coupe, which followed the quays in the luminous dust of the setting sun, she listened without impatience to her husband confiding to her his successes as an orator, the intentions of his parliamentary groups, his projects, his hopes, and the necessity to give two or three political dinners. She closed her eyes in order to think better. She said to herself: “I shall have a letter to-morrow, and shall see him again within eight days.” When the coupe passed on the bridge, she looked at the water, which seemed to roll flames; at the smoky arches; at the rows of trees; at the heads of the chestnut-trees in bloom on the Cours-la-Reine; all these familiar aspects seemed to be clothed for her in novel magnificence. It seemed to her that her love had given a new color to the universe. And she asked herself whether the trees and the stones recognized her. She was thinking; “How is it that my silence, my eyes, and heaven and earth do not tell my dear secret?”

M. Martin-Belleme, thinking she was a little tired, advised her to rest. And at night, closeted in her room, in the silence wherein she heard the palpitations of her heart, she wrote to the absent one a letter full of these words, which are similar to flowers in their perpetual novelty: “I love you. I am waiting for you. I am happy. I feel you

are near me. There is nobody except you and me in the world. I see from my window a blue star which trembles, and I look at it, thinking that you see it in Florence. I have put on my table the little red lily spoon. Come! Come!" And she found thus, fresh in her mind, the eternal sensations and images.

For a week she lived an inward life, feeling within her the soft warmth which remained of the days passed in the Via Alfieri, breathing the kisses which she had received, and loving herself for being loved. She took delicate care and displayed attentive taste in new gowns. It was to herself, too, that she was pleasing. Madly anxious when there was nothing for her at the postoffice, trembling and joyful when she received through the small window a letter wherein she recognized the large handwriting of her beloved, she devoured her reminiscences, her desires, and her hopes. Thus the hours passed quickly.

The morning of the day when he was to arrive seemed to her to be odiously long. She was at the station before the train arrived. A delay had been signalled. It weighed heavily upon her. Optimist in her projects, and placing by force, like her father, faith on the side of her will, that delay which she had not foreseen seemed to her to be treason. The gray light, which the three-quarters of an hour filtered through the window-panes of the station, fell on her like the rays of an immense hour-glass which measured for her the minutes of happiness lost. She was lamenting her fate, when, in the red light of the sun, she saw the locomotive of the express stop, monstrous and docile, on the quay, and, in the crowd of travellers coming out of the carriages, Jacques approached her. He was looking at her with that sort of sombre and violent joy which she had often observed in him. He said:

"At last, here you are. I feared to die before seeing you again. You do not know, I did not know myself, what torture it is to live a week away from you. I have returned to the little pavilion of the Via Alfieri. In the room you know, in front of the old pastel, I have wept for love and rage."

She looked at him tenderly.

“And I, do you not think that I called you, that I wanted you, that when alone I extended my arms toward you? I had hidden your letters in the chiffonier where my jewels are. I read them at night: it was delicious, but it was imprudent. Your letters were yourself—too much and not enough.”

They traversed the court where fiacres rolled away loaded with boxes. She asked whether they were to take a carriage.

He made no answer. He seemed not to hear. She said:

“I went to see your house; I did not dare go in. I looked through the grille and saw windows hidden in rose-bushes in the rear of a yard, behind a tree, and I said: ‘It is there!’ I never have been so moved.”

He was not listening to her nor looking at her. He walked quickly with her along the paved street, and through a narrow stairway reached a deserted street near the station. There, between wood and coal yards, was a hotel with a restaurant on the first floor and tables on the sidewalk. Under the painted sign were white curtains at the windows. Dechartre stopped before the small door and pushed Therese into the obscure alley. She asked:

“Where are you leading me? What is the time? I must be home at half-past seven. We are mad.”

When they left the house, she said:

“Jacques, my darling, we are too happy; we are robbing life.”

CHAPTER XXVI. IN DECHARTRE’S STUDIO

A fiacre brought her, the next day, to a populous street, half sad, half gay, with walls of gardens in the intervals of new houses, and stopped at the point where the sidewalk passes under the arcade of a mansion of the Regency, covered now with

dust and oblivion, and fantastically placed across the street. Here and there green branches lent gayety to that city corner. Therese, while ringing at the door, saw in the limited perspective of the houses a pulley at a window and a gilt key, the sign of a locksmith. Her eyes were full of this picture, which was new to her. Pigeons flew above her head; she heard chickens cackle. A servant with a military look opened the door. She found herself in a yard covered with sand, shaded by a tree, where, at the left, was the janitor's box with bird-cages at the windows. On that side rose, under a green trellis, the mansard of the neighboring house. A sculptor's studio backed on it its glass-covered roof, which showed plaster figures asleep in the dust. At the right, the wall that closed the yard bore debris of monuments, broken bases of columnettes. In the rear, the house, not very large, showed the six windows of its facade, half hidden by vines and rosebushes.

Philippe Dechartre, infatuated with the architecture of the fifteenth century in France, had reproduced there very cleverly the characteristics of a private house of the time of Louis XII. That house, begun in the middle of the Second Empire, had not been finished. The builder of so many castles died without being able to finish his own house. It was better thus. Conceived in a manner which had then its distinction and its value, but which seems to-day banal and outlandish, having lost little by little its large frame of gardens, cramped now between the walls of the tall buildings, Philippe Dechartre's little house, by the roughness of its stones, by the naive heaviness of its windows, by the simplicity of the roof, which the architect's widow had caused to be covered with little expense, by all the lucky accidents of the unfinished and unpremeditated, corrected the lack of grace of its new and affected antiquity and archeologic romanticism, and harmonized with the humbleness of a district made ugly by progress of population.

In fine, notwithstanding its appearance of ruin and its green drapery, that little house had its charm. Suddenly and instinctively, Therese discovered in it other harmonies. In the elegant negligence which extended from the walls covered with vines to the

darkened panes of the studio, and even in the bent tree, the bark of which studded with its shells the wild grass of the courtyard, she divined the mind of the master, nonchalant, not skilful in preserving, living in the long solitude of passionate men. She had in her joy a sort of grief at observing this careless state in which her lover left things around him. She found in it a sort of grace and nobility, but also a spirit of indifference contrary to her own nature, opposite to the interested and careful mind of the Montessuys. At once she thought that, without spoiling the pensive softness of that rough corner, she would bring to it her well-ordered activity; she would have sand thrown in the alley, and in the angle wherein a little sunlight came she would put the gayety of flowers. She looked sympathetically at a statue which had come there from some park, a Flora, lying on the earth, eaten by black moss, her two arms lying by her sides. She thought of raising her soon, of making of her a centrepiece for a fountain. Dechartre, who for an hour had been watching for her coming, joyful, anxious, trembling in his agitated happiness, descended the steps. In the fresh shade of the vestibule, wherein she divined confusedly the severe splendor of bronze and marble statues, she stopped, troubled by the beatings of her heart, which throbbed with all its might in her chest. He pressed her in his arms and kissed her. She heard him, through the tumult of her temples, recalling to her the short delights of the day before. She saw again the lion of the Atlas on the carpet, and returned to Jacques his kisses with delicious slowness. He led her, by a wooden stairway, into the vast hall which had served formerly as a workshop, where he designed and modelled his figures, and, above all, read; he liked reading as if it were opium.

Pale-tinted Gothic tapestries, which let one perceive in a marvellous forest a lady at the feet of whom a unicorn lay on the grass, extended above cabinets to the painted beams of the ceiling. He led her to a large and low divan, loaded with cushions covered with sumptuous fragments of Spanish and Byzantine cloaks; but she sat in an armchair. “You are here! You are here! The world may come to an end.”

She replied “Formerly I thought of the end of the world, but I was not afraid of it.

Monsieur Lagrange had promised it to me, and I was waiting for it. When I did not know you, I felt so lonely." She looked at the tables loaded with vases and statuettes, the tapestries, the confused and splendid mass of weapons, the animals, the marbles, the paintings, the ancient books. "You have beautiful things."

"Most of them come from my father, who lived in the golden age of collectors. These histories of the unicorn, the complete series of which is at Cluny, were found by my father in 1851 in an inn."

But, curious and disappointed, she said: "I see nothing that you have done; not a statue, not one of those wax figures which are prized so highly in England, not a figurine nor a plaque nor a medal."

"If you think I could find any pleasure in living among my works! I know my figures too well—they weary me. Whatever is without secret lacks charm." She looked at him with affected spite.

"You had not told me that one had lost all charm when one had no more secrets."

He put his arm around her waist.

"Ah! The things that live are only too mysterious; and you remain for me, my beloved, an enigma, the unknown sense of which contains the light of life. Do not fear to give yourself to me. I shall desire you always, but I never shall know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses, caresses, anything else than the effort of a delightful despair? When I embrace you, I am still searching for you, and I never have you; since I want you always, since in you I expect the impossible and the infinite. What you are, the devil knows if I shall ever know! Because I have modelled a few bad figures I am not a sculptor; I am rather a sort of poet and philosopher who seeks for subjects of anxiety and torment in nature. The sentiment of form is not sufficient for me. My colleagues laugh at me because I have not their simplicity. They are right. And that brute Choulette is right too, when he says we ought to live without thinking and without desiring. Our friend the cobbler of Santa

Maria Novella, who knows nothing of what might make him unjust and unfortunate, is a master of the art of living. I ought to love you naively, without that sort of metaphysics which is passional and makes me absurd and wicked. There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget. Come, come, I have thought of you too cruelly in the tortures of your absence; come, my beloved! I must forget you with you. It is with you only that I can forget you and lose myself."

He took her in his arms and, lifting her veil, kissed her on the lips.

A little frightened in that vast, unknown hall, embarrassed by the look of strange things, she drew the black tulle to her chin.

"Here! You can not think of it."

He said they were alone.

"Alone? And the man with terrible moustaches who opened the door?"

He smiled:

"That is Fusellier, my father's former servant. He and his wife take charge of the house. Do not be afraid. They remain in their box. You shall see Madame Fusellier; she is inclined to familiarity. I warn you."

"My friend, why has Monsieur Fusellier, a janitor, moustaches like a Tartar?"

"My dear, nature gave them to him. I am not sorry that he has the air of a sergeant-major and gives me the illusion of being a country neighbor."

Seated on the corner of the divan, he drew her to his knees and gave to her kisses which she returned.

She rose quickly.

"Show me the other rooms. I am curious. I wish to see everything."

He escorted her to the second story. Aquarelles by Philippe Dechartre covered the walls of the corridor. He opened the door and made her enter a room furnished with white mahogany:

It was his mother's room. He kept it intact in its past. Uninhabited for nine years, the room had not the air of being resigned to its solitude. The mirror waited for the old lady's glance, and on the onyx clock a pensive Sappho was lonely because she did not hear the noise of the pendulum.

There were two portraits on the walls. One by Ricard represented Philippe Dechartre, very pale, with rumpled hair, and eyes lost in a romantic dream. The other showed a middle-aged woman, almost beautiful in her ardent slightness. It was Madame Philippe Dechartre.

"My poor mother's room is like me," said Jacques; "it remembers."

"You resemble your mother," said Therese; "you have her eyes. Paul Vence told me she adored you."

"Yes," he replied, smilingly. "My mother was excellent, intelligent, exquisite, marvellously absurd. Her madness was maternal love. She did not give me a moment of rest. She tormented herself and tormented me."

Therese looked at a bronze figure by Carpeaux, placed on the chiffonier.

"You recognize," said Dechartre, "the Prince Imperial by his ears, which are like the wings of a zephyr, and which enliven his cold visage. This bronze is a gift of Napoleon III. My parents went to Compiegne. My father, while the court was at Fontainebleau, made the plan of the castle, and designed the gallery. In the morning the Emperor would come, in his frock-coat, and smoking his meerschaum pipe, to sit near him like a penguin on a rock. At that time I went to day-school. I listened to his stories at table, and I have not forgotten them. The Emperor stayed there, peaceful and quiet, interrupting his long silence with few words smothered under his big moustache; then he roused himself a little and explained his ideas of machinery. He was an inventor. He would draw a pencil from his pocket and make drawings on my father's designs. He spoiled in that way two or three studies a week. He liked my father a great deal, and promised works and honors to him which never came. The

Emperor was kind, but he had no influence, as mamma said. At that time I was a little boy. Since then a vague sympathy has remained in me for that man, who was lacking in genius, but whose mind was affectionate and beautiful, and who carried through great adventures a simple courage and a gentle fatalism. Then he is sympathetic to me because he has been combated and insulted by people who were eager to take his place, and who had not, as he had, in the depths of their souls, a love for the people. We have seen them in power since then. Heavens, how ugly they are! Senator Loyer, for instance, who at your house, in the smoking-room, filled his pockets with cigars, and invited me to do likewise. That Loyer is a bad man, harsh to the unfortunate, to the weak, and to the humble. And Garain, don't you think his mind is disgusting? Do you remember the first time I dined at your house and we talked of Napoleon? Your hair, twisted above your neck, and shot through by a diamond arrow, was adorable. Paul Vence said subtle things. Garain did not understand. You asked for my opinion."

"It was to make you shine. I was already conceited for you."

"Oh, I never could say a single phrase before people who are so serious. Yet I had a great desire to say that Napoleon III pleased me more than Napoleon I; that I thought him more touching; but perhaps that idea would have produced a bad effect. But I am not so destitute of talent as to care about politics."

He looked around the room, and at the furniture with familiar tenderness. He opened a drawer:

"Here are mamma's eye-glasses. How she searched for these eye-glasses! Now I will show you my room. If it is not in order you must excuse Madame Fusellier, who is trained to respect my disorder."

The curtains at the windows were down. He did not lift them. After an hour she drew back the red satin draperies; rays of light dazzled her eyes and fell on her floating hair. She looked for a mirror and found only a looking-glass of Venice, dull

in its wide ebony border. Rising on the tips of her toes to see herself in it, she said:

“Is that sombre and far-away spectre I? The women who have looked at themselves in this glass can not have complimented you on it.”

As she was taking pins from the table she noticed a little bronze figure which she had not yet seen. It was an old Italian work of Flemish taste: a nude woman, with short legs and heavy stomach, who apparently ran with an arm extended. She thought the figure had a droll air. She asked what she was doing.

“She is doing what Madame Mundanity does on the portal of the cathedral at Basle.”

But Therese, who had been at Basle, did not know Madame Mundanity. She looked at the figure again, did not understand, and asked:

“Is it something very bad? How can a thing shown on the portal of a church be so difficult to tell here?”

Suddenly an anxiety came to her:

“What will Monsieur and Madame Fusellier think of me?”

Then, discovering on the wall a medallion wherein Dechartre had modelled the profile of a girl, amusing and vicious:

“What is that?”

“That is Clara, a newspaper girl. She brought the Figaro to me every morning. She had dimples in her cheeks, nests for kisses. One day I said to her: ‘I will make your portrait.’ She came, one summer morning, with earrings and rings which she had bought at the Neuilly fair. I never saw her again. I do not know what has become of her. She was too instinctive to become a fashionable demi-mondaine. Shall I take it out?”

“No; it looks very well in that corner. I am not jealous of Clara.”

It was time to return home, and she could not decide to go. She put her arms around her lover’s neck.

“Oh, I love you! And then, you have been to-day good-natured and gay. Gayety becomes you so well. I should like to make you gay always. I need joy almost as much as love; and who will give me joy if you do not?”

CHAPTER XXVII. THE PRIMROSE PATH

After her return to Paris, for six weeks Therese lived in the ardent half sleep of happiness, and prolonged delightfully her thoughtless dream. She went to see Jacques every day in the little house shaded by a tree; and when they had at last parted at night, she took away with her adored reminiscences. They had the same tastes; they yielded to the same fantasies. The same capricious thoughts carried them away. They found pleasure in running to the suburbs that border the city, the streets where the wine-shops are shaded by acacia, the stony roads where the grass grows at the foot of walls, the little woods and the fields over which extended the blue sky striped by the smoke of manufactories. She was happy to feel him near her in this region where she did not know herself, and where she gave to herself the illusion of being lost with him.

One day they had taken the boat that she had seen pass so often under her windows. She was not afraid of being recognized. Her danger was not great, and, since she was in love, she had lost prudence. They saw shores which little by little grew gay, escaping the dusty aridity of the suburbs; they went by islands with bouquets of trees shading taverns, and innumerable boats tied under willows. They debarked at Bas-Meudon. As she said she was warm and thirsty, he made her enter a wine-shop. It was a building with wooden galleries, which solitude made to appear larger, and which slept in rustic peace, waiting for Sunday to fill it with the laughter of girls, the cries of boatmen, the odor of fried fish, and the smoke of stews.

They went up the creaking stairway, shaped like a ladder, and in a first-story room a maid servant brought wine and biscuits to them. On the mantelpiece, at one of the

corners of the room, was an oval mirror in a flower-covered frame. Through the open window one saw the Seine, its green shores, and the hills in the distance bathed with warm air. The trembling peace of a summer evening filled the sky, the earth, and the water.

Therese looked at the running river. The boat passed on the water, and when the wake which it left reached the shore it seemed as if the house rocked like a vessel.

“I like the water,” said Therese. “How happy I am!”

Their lips met.

Lost in the enchanted despair of love, time was not marked for them except by the cool plash of the water, which at intervals broke under the half-open window. To the caressing praise of her lover she replied:

“It is true I was made for love. I love myself because you love me.”

Certainly, he loved her; and it was not possible for him to explain to himself why he loved her with ardent piety, with a sort of sacred fury. It was not because of her beauty, although it was rare and infinitely precious. She had exquisite lines, but lines follow movement, and escape incessantly; they are lost and found again; they cause aesthetic joys and despair. A beautiful line is the lightning which deliciously wounds the eyes. One admires and one is surprised. What makes one love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty. One finds one woman among a thousand whom one wants always. Therese was that woman whom one can not leave or betray.

She exclaimed, joyfully:

“I never shall be forsaken?”

She asked why he did not make her bust, since he thought her beautiful.

“Why? Because I am an ordinary sculptor, and I know it; which is not the faculty of an ordinary mind. But if you wish to think that I am a great artist, I will give you

other reasons. To create a figure that will live, one must take the model like common material from which one will extract the beauty, press it, crush it, and obtain its essence. There is nothing in you that is not precious to me. If I made your bust I should be servilely attached to these things which are everything to me because they are something of you. I should stubbornly attach myself to the details, and should not succeed in composing a finished figure."

She looked at him astonished.

He continued:

"From memory I might. I tried a pencil sketch." As she wished to see it, he showed it to her. It was on an album leaf, a very simple sketch. She did not recognize herself in it, and thought he had represented her with a kind of soul that she did not have.

"Ah, is that the way in which you see me? Is that the way in which you love me?"

He closed the album.

"No; this is only a note. But I think the note is just. It is probable you do not see yourself exactly as I see you. Every human creature is a different being for every one that looks at it."

He added, with a sort of gayety:

"In that sense one may say one woman never belonged to two men. That is one of Paul Vence's ideas."

"I think it is true," said Therese.

It was seven o'clock. She said she must go. Every day she returned home later. Her husband had noticed it. He had said: "We are the last to arrive at all the dinners; there is a fatality about it!" But, detained every day in the Chamber of Deputies, where the budget was being discussed, and absorbed by the work of a subcommittee of which he was the chairman, state reasons excused Therese's lack of punctuality. She recalled smilingly a night when she had arrived at Madame Garain's at half-past

eight. She had feared to cause a scandal. But it was a day of great affairs. Her husband came from the Chamber at nine o'clock only, with Garain. They dined in morning dress. They had saved the Ministry.

Then she fell into a dream.

"When the Chamber shall be adjourned, my friend, I shall not have a pretext to remain in Paris. My father does not understand my devotion to my husband which makes me stay in Paris. In a week I shall have to go to Dinard. What will become of me without you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a sadness infinitely tender. But he, more sombre, said:

"It is I, Therese, it is I who must ask anxiously, What will become of me without you? When you leave me alone I am assailed by painful thoughts; black ideas come and sit in a circle around me."

She asked him what those ideas were.

He replied:

"My beloved, I have already told you: I have to forget you with you. When you are gone, your memory will torment me. I have to pay for the happiness you give me."

CHAPTER XXVIII. NEWS OF LE MENIL

The blue sea, studded with pink shoals, threw its silvery fringe softly on the fine sand of the beach, along the amphitheatre terminated by two golden horns. The beauty of the day threw a ray of sunlight on the tomb of Chateaubriand. In a room where a balcony looked out upon the beach, the ocean, the islands, and the promontories, Therese was reading the letters which she had found in the morning at the St. Malo post-office, and which she had not opened in the boat, loaded with passengers. At once, after breakfast, she had closeted herself in her room, and there,

her letters unfolded on her knees, she relished hastily her furtive joy. She was to drive at two o'clock on the mall with her father, her husband, the Princess Seniavine; Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, the wife of the Deputy, and Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician. She had two letters that day. The first one she read exhaled a tender aroma of love. Jacques had never displayed more simplicity, more happiness, and more charm.

Since he had been in love with her, he said, he had walked so lightly and was supported by such joy that his feet did not touch the earth. He had only one fear, which was that he might be dreaming, and might awake unknown to her. Doubtless he was only dreaming. And what a dream! He was like one intoxicated and singing. He had not his reason, happily. Absent, he saw her continually. "Yes, I see you near me; I see your lashes shading eyes the gray of which is more delicious than all the blue of the sky and the flowers; your lips, which have the taste of a marvellous fruit; your cheeks, where laughter puts two adorable dimples; I see you beautiful and desired, but fleeing and gliding away; and when I open my arms, you have gone; and I see you afar on the long, long beach, not taller than a fairy, in your pink gown, under your parasol. Oh, so small!—small as you were one day when I saw you from the height of the Campanile in the square at Florence. And I say to myself, as I said that day: 'A bit of grass would suffice to hide her from me, yet she is for me the infinite of joy and of pain.'"

He complained of the torments of absence. And he mingled with his complaints the smiles of fortunate love. He threatened jokingly to surprise her at Dinard. "Do not be afraid. They will not recognize me. I shall be disguised as a vender of plaster images. It will not be a lie. Dressed in gray tunic and trousers, my beard and face covered with white dust, I shall ring the bell of the Montessuy villa. You may recognize me, Therese, by the statuettes on the plank placed on my head. They will all be cupids. There will be faithful Love, jealous Love, tender Love, vivid Love; there will be many vivid Loves. And I shall shout in the rude and sonorous language

of the artisans of Pisa or of Florence: ‘Tutti gli Amori per la Signora Teersinal!”

The last page of this letter was tender and grave. There were pious effusions in it which reminded Therese of the prayer-books she read when a child. “I love you, and I love everything in you: the earth that carries you, on which you weigh so lightly, and which you embellish; the light that allows me to see you; the air you breathe. I like the bent tree of my yard because you have seen it. I have walked tonight on the avenue where I met you one winter night. I have culled a branch of the boxwood at which you looked. In this city, where you are not, I see only you.”

He said at the end of his letter that he was to dine out. In the absence of Madame Fusellier, who had gone to the country, he should go to a wine-shop of the Rue Royale where he was known. And there, in the indistinct crowd, he should be alone with her.

Therese, made languid by the softness of invisible caresses, closed her eyes and threw back her head on the armchair. When she heard the noise of the carriage coming near the house, she opened the second letter. As soon as she saw the altered handwriting of it, the lines precipitate and uneven, the distracted look of the address, she was troubled.

Its obscure beginning indicated sudden anguish and black suspicion: “Therese, Therese, why did you give yourself to me if you were not giving yourself to me wholly? How does it serve me that you have deceived me, now that I know what I did not wish to know?”

She stopped; a veil came over her eyes. She thought:

“We were so happy a moment ago. What has happened? And I was so pleased at his joy, when it had already gone; it would be better not to write, since letters show only vanished sentiments and effaced ideas.”

She read further. And seeing that he was full of jealousy, she felt discouraged.

“If I have not proved to him that I love him with all my strength, that I love him with

all there is in me, how am I ever to persuade him of it?"

And she was impatient to discover the cause of his folly. Jacques told it. While taking breakfast in the Rue Royale he had met a former companion who had just returned from the seaside. They had talked together; chance made that man speak of the Countess Martin, whom he knew. And at once, interrupting the narration, Jacques exclaimed: "Therese, Therese, why did you lie to me, since I was sure to learn some day that of which I alone was ignorant? But the error is mine more than yours. The letter which you put into the San Michele post-box, your meeting at the Florence station, would have enlightened me if I had not obstinately retained my illusions and disdained evidence.

"I did not know; I wished to remain ignorant. I did not ask you anything, from fear that you might not be able to continue to lie; I was prudent; and it has happened that an idiot suddenly, brutally, at a restaurant table, has opened my eyes and forced me to know. Oh, now that I know, now that I can not doubt, it seems to me that to doubt would be delicious! He gave the name—the name which I heard at Fiesole from Miss Bell, and he added: 'Everybody knows about that.'

"So you loved him. You love him still! He is near you, doubtless. He goes every year to the Dinard races. I have been told so. I see him. I see everything. If you knew the images that worry me, you would say, 'He is mad,' and you would take pity on me. Oh, how I should like to forget you and everything! But I can not. You know very well I can not forget you except with you. I see you incessantly with him. It is torture. I thought I was unfortunate that night on the banks of the Arno. But I did not know then what it is to suffer. To-day I know."

As she finished reading that letter, Therese thought: "A word thrown haphazard has placed him in that condition, a word has made him despairing and mad." She tried to think who might be the wretched fellow who could have talked in that way. She suspected two or three young men whom Le Menil had introduced to her once,

warning her not to trust them. And with one of the white and cold fits of anger she had inherited from her father she said to herself: “I must know who he is.” In the meanwhile what was she to do? Her lover in despair, mad, ill, she could not run to him, embrace him, and throw herself on him with such an abandonment that he would feel how entirely she was his, and be forced to believe in her. Should she write? How much better it would be to go to him, to fall upon his heart and say to him: “Dare to believe I am not yours only!” But she could only write. She had hardly begun her letter when she heard voices and laughter in the garden. Therese went down, tranquil and smiling; her large straw hat threw on her face a transparent shadow wherein her gray eyes shone.

“How beautiful she is!” exclaimed Princess Seniavine. “What a pity it is we never see her! In the morning she is promenading in the alleys of Saint Malo, in the afternoon she is closeted in her room. She runs away from us.”

The coach turned around the large circle of the beach at the foot of the villas and gardens on the hillside. And they saw at the left the ramparts and the steeple of St. Malo rise from the blue sea. Then the coach went into a road bordered by hedges, along which walked Dinard women, erect under their wide headdresses.

“Unfortunately,” said Madame Raymond, seated on the box by Montessuy’s side, “old costumes are dying out. The fault is with the railways.”

“It is true,” said Montessuy, “that if it were not for the railways the peasants would still wear their picturesque costumes of other times. But we should not see them.”

“What does it matter?” replied Madame Raymond. “We could imagine them.”

“But,” asked the Princess Seniavine, “do you ever see interesting things? I never do.”

Madame Raymond, who had taken from her husband’s books a vague tint of philosophy, declared that things were nothing, and that the idea was everything.

Without looking at Madame Berthier-d’Eyzelles, seated at her right, the Countess

Martin murmured:

“Oh, yes, people see only their ideas; they follow only their ideas. They go along, blind and deaf. One can not stop them.”

“But, my dear,” said Count Martin, placed in front of her, by the Princess’s side, “without leading ideas one would go haphazard. Have you read, Montessuy, the speech delivered by Loyer at the unveiling of the Cadet-Gassicourt statue? The beginning is remarkable. Loyer is not lacking in political sense.”

The carriage, having traversed the fields bordered with willows, went up a hill and advanced on a vast, wooded plateau. For a long time it skirted the walls of the park.

“Is it the Guerric?” asked the Princess Seniavine.

Suddenly, between two stone pillars surmounted by lions, appeared the closed gate. At the end of a long alley stood the gray stones of a castle.

“Yes,” said Montessuy, “it is the Guerric.”

And, addressing Therese:

“You knew the Marquis de Re? At sixty-five he had retained his strength and his youth. He set the fashion and was loved. Young men copied his frockcoat, his monocle, his gestures, his exquisite insolence, his amusing fads. Suddenly he abandoned society, closed his house, sold his stable, ceased to show himself. Do you remember, Therese, his sudden disappearance? You had been married a short time. He called on you often. One fine day people learned that he had quitted Paris. This is the place where he had come in winter. People tried to find a reason for his sudden retreat; some thought he had run away under the influence of sorrow or humiliation, or from fear that the world might see him grow old. He was afraid of old age more than of anything else. For seven years he has lived in retirement from society; he has not gone out of the castle once. He receives at the Guerric two or three old men who were his companions in youth. This gate is opened for them only. Since his retirement no one has seen him; no one ever will see him. He shows the same care to

conceal himself that he had formerly to show himself. He has not suffered from his decline. He exists in a sort of living death."

And Therese, recalling the amiable old man who had wished to finish gloriously with her his life of gallantry, turned her head and looked at the Guerric lifting its four towers above the gray summits of oaks.

On their return she said she had a headache and that she would not take dinner. She locked herself in her room and drew from her jewel casket the lamentable letter. She read over the last page.

"The thought that you belong to another burns me. And then, I did not wish that man to be the one."

It was a fixed idea. He had written three times on the same leaf these words: "I did not wish that man to be the one."

She, too, had only one idea: not to lose him. Not to lose him, she would have said anything, she would have done anything. She went to her table and wrote, under the spur of a tender, and plaintive violence, a letter wherein she repeated like a groan: "I love you, I love you! I never have loved any one but you. You are alone, alone—do you hear?—in my mind, in me. Do not think of what that wretched man said. Listen to me! I never loved any one, I swear, any one, before you."

As she was writing, the soft sigh of the sea accompanied her own sigh. She wished to say, she believed she was saying, real things; and all that she was saying was true of the truth of her love. She heard the heavy step of her father on the stairway. She hid her letter and opened the door. Montessuy asked her whether she felt better.

"I came," he said, "to say good-night to you, and to ask you something. It is probable that I shall meet Le Menil at the races. He goes there every year. If I meet him, darling, would you have any objection to my inviting him to come here for a few days? Your husband thinks he would be agreeable company for you. We might give him the blue room."

“As you wish. But I should prefer that you keep the blue room for Paul Vence, who wishes to come. It is possible, too, that Choulette may come without warning. It is his habit. We shall see him some morning ringing like a beggar at the gate. You know my husband is mistaken when he thinks Le Menil pleases me. And then I must go to Paris next week for two or three days.”

CHAPTER XXIX. JEALOUSY

Twenty-four hours after writing her letter, Therese went from Dinard to the little house in the Ternes. It had not been difficult for her to find a pretext to go to Paris. She had made the trip with her husband, who wanted to see his electors whom the Socialists were working over. She surprised Jacques in the morning, at the studio, while he was sketching a tall figure of Florence weeping on the shore of the Arno.

The model, seated on a very high stool, kept her pose. She was a long, dark girl. The harsh light which fell from the skylight gave precision to the pure lines of her hip and thighs, accentuated her harsh visage, her dark neck, her marble chest, the lines of her knees and feet, the toes of which were set one over the other. Therese looked at her curiously, divining her exquisite form under the miseries of her flesh, poorly fed and badly cared for.

Dechartre came toward Therese with an air of painful tenderness which moved her. Then, placing his clay and the instrument near the easel, and covering the figure with a wet cloth, he said to the model:

“That is enough for to-day.”

She rose, picked up awkwardly her clothing, a handful of dark wool and soiled linen, and went to dress behind the screen.

Meanwhile the sculptor, having dipped in the water of a green bowl his hands, which the tenacious clay made white, went out of the studio with Therese.

They passed under the tree which studded the sand of the courtyard with the shells of its flayed bark. She said:

“You have no more faith, have you?”

He led her to his room.

The letter written from Dinard had already softened his painful impressions. She had come at the moment when, tired of suffering, he felt the need of calm and of tenderness. A few lines of handwriting had appeased his mind, fed on images, less susceptible to things than to the signs of things; but he felt a pain in his heart.

In the room where everything spoke of her, where the furniture, the curtains, and the carpets told of their love, she murmured soft words:

“You could believe—do you not know what you are?—it was folly! How can a woman who has known you care for another after you?”

“But before?”

“Before, I was waiting for you.”

“And he did not attend the races at Dinard?”

She did not think he had, and it was very certain she did not attend them herself. Horses and horsey men bored her.

“Jacques, fear no one, since you are not comparable to any one.”

He knew, on the contrary, how insignificant he was and how insignificant every one is in this world where beings, agitated like grains in a van, are mixed and separated by a shake of the rustic or of the god. This idea of the agricultural or mystical van represented measure and order too well to be exactly applied to life. It seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill. He had had a vivid sensation of this the day before, when he saw Madame Fusellier grinding coffee in her mill.

Therese said to him:

“Why are you not conceited?”

She added few words, but she spoke with her eyes, her arms, the breath that made her bosom rise.

In the happy surprise of seeing and hearing her, he permitted himself to be convinced.

She asked who had said so odious a thing.

He had no reason to conceal his name from her. It was Daniel Salomon.

She was not surprised. Daniel Salomon, who passed for not having been the lover of any woman, wished at least to be in the confidence of all and know their secrets. She guessed the reason why he had talked.

“Jacques, do not be cross at what I say to you. You are not skilful in concealing your sentiments. He suspected you were in love with me, and he wished to be sure of it. I am persuaded that now he has no doubt of our relations. But that is indifferent to me. On the contrary, if you knew better how to dissimulate, I should be less happy. I should think you did not love me enough.”

For fear of disquieting him, she turned to other thoughts:

“I have not told you how much I like your sketch. It is Florence on the Arno. Then it is we?”

“Yes, I have placed in that figure the emotion of my love. It is sad, and I wish it were beautiful. You see, Therese, beauty is painful. That is why, since life is beautiful, I suffer.”

He took out of his flannel coat his cigarette-holder, but she told him to dress. She would take him to breakfast with her. They would not quit each other that day. It would be delightful.

She looked at him with childish joy. Then she became sad, thinking she would have to return to Dinard at the end of the week, later go to Joinville, and that during that time they would be separated.

At Joinville, at her father's, she would cause him to be invited for a few days. But they would not be free and alone there, as they were in Paris.

"It is true," he said, "that Paris is good to us in its confused immensity."

And he added:

"Even in your absence I can not quit Paris. It would be terrible for me to live in countries that do not know you. A sky, mountains, trees, fountains, statues which do not know how to talk of you would have nothing to say to me."

While he was dressing she turned the leaves of a book which she had found on the table. It was The Arabian Nights. Romantic engravings displayed here and there in the text grand viziers, sultanas, black tunics, bazaars, and caravans.

She asked:

"The Arabian Nights-does that amuse you?"

"A great deal," he replied, tying his cravat. "I believe as much as I wish in these Arabian princes whose legs become black marble, and in these women of the harem who wander at night in cemeteries. These tales give me pleasant dreams which make me forget life. Last night I went to bed in sadness and read the history of the Three Calendars."

She said, with a little bitterness:

"You are trying to forget. I would not consent for anything in the world to lose the memory of a pain which came to me from you."

They went down together to the street. She was to take a carriage a little farther on and precede him at her house by a few minutes.

"My husband expects you to breakfast."

They talked, on the way, of insignificant things, which their love made great and charming. They arranged their afternoon in advance in order to put into it the infinity of profound joy and of ingenious pleasure. She consulted him about her

gowns. She could not decide to leave him, happy to walk with him in the streets, which the sun and the gayety of noon filled. When they reached the Avenue des Ternes they saw before them, on the avenue, shops displaying side by side a magnificent abundance of food. There were chains of chickens at the caterer's, and at the fruiterer's boxes of apricots and peaches, baskets of grapes, piles of pears. Wagons filled with fruits and flowers bordered the sidewalk. Under the awning of a restaurant men and women were taking breakfast. Therese recognized among them, alone, at a small table against a laurel-tree in a box, Choulette lighting his pipe.

Having seen her, he threw superbly a five-franc piece on the table, rose, and bowed. He was grave; his long frock-coat gave him an air of decency and austerity.

He said he should have liked to call on Madame Martin at Dinard, but he had been detained in the Vendee by the Marquise de Rieu. However, he had issued a new edition of the Jardin Clos, augmented by the Verger de Sainte-Claire. He had moved souls which were thought to be insensible, and had made springs come out of rocks.

"So," he said, "I was, in a fashion, a Moses."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew from a book a letter, worn and spotted.

"This is what Madame Raymond, the Academician's wife, writes me. I publish what she says, because it is creditable to her."

And, unfolding the thin leaves, he read:

"I have made your book known to my husband, who exclaimed: 'It is pure spiritualism. Here is a closed garden, which on the side of the lilies and white roses has, I imagine, a small gate opening on the road to the Academie.'"

Choulette relished these phrases, mingled in his mouth with the perfume of whiskey, and replaced carefully the letter in its book.

Madame Martin congratulated the poet on being Madame Raymond's candidate.

"You should be mine, Monsieur Choulette, if I were interested in Academic

elections. But does the Institute excite your envy?"

He kept for a few moments a solemn silence, then:

"I am going now, Madame, to confer with divers notable persons of the political and religious worlds who reside at Neuilly. The Marquise de Rieu wishes me to be a candidate, in her country, for a senatorial seat which has become vacant by the death of an old man, who was, they say, a general during his illusory life. I shall consult with priests, women and children—oh, eternal wisdom!—of the Bineau Boulevard. The constituency whose suffrages I shall attempt to obtain inhabits an undulated and wooded land wherein willows frame the fields. And it is not a rare thing to find in the hollow of one of these old willows the skeleton of a Chouan pressing his gun against his breast and holding his beads in his fleshless fingers. I shall have my programme posted on the bark of oaks. I shall say 'Peace to presbyteries! Let the day come when bishops, holding in their hands the wooden crook, shall make themselves similar to the poorest servant of the poorest parish! It was the bishops who crucified Jesus Christ. Their names were Anne and Caiph. And they still retain these names before the Son of God. While they were nailing Him to the cross, I was the good thief hanged by His side.'"

He lifted his stick and pointed toward Neuilly:

"Dechartre, my friend, do you not think the Bineau Boulevard is the dusty one over there, at the right?"

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette," said Therese. "Remember me when you are a senator."

"Madame, I do not forget you in any of my prayers, morning and evening. And I say to God: 'Since, in your anger, you gave to her riches and beauty, regard her, Lord, with kindness, and treat her in accordance with your sovereign mercy."

And he went erect, and dragging his leg, along the populous avenue.

CHAPTER XXX. A LETTER FROM ROBERT

Enveloped in a mantle of pink broad cloth, Therese went down the steps with Dechartre. He had come in the morning to Joinville. She had made him join the circle of her intimate friends, before the hunting-party to which she feared Le Menil had been invited, as was the custom. The light air of September agitated the curls of her hair, and the sun made golden darts shine in the profound gray of her eyes. Behind them, the facade of the palace displayed above the three arcades of the first story, in the intervals of the windows, on long tables, busts of Roman emperors. The house was placed between two tall pavilions which their great slate roofs made higher, over pillars of the Ionic order. This style betrayed the art of the architect Leveau, who had constructed, in 1650, the castle of Joinville-sur-Oise for that rich Mareuilles, creature of Mazarin, and fortunate accomplice of Fouquet.

Therese and Jacques saw before them the flower-beds designed by Le Notre, the green carpet, the fountain; then the grotto with its five rustic arcades crowned by the tall trees on which autumn had already begun to spread its golden mantle.

“This green geometry is beautiful,” said Dechartre.

“Yes,” said Therese. “But I think of the tree bent in the small courtyard where grass grows among the stones. We shall build a beautiful fountain in it, shall we not, and put flowers in it?”

Leaning against one of the stone lions with almost human faces, that guarded the steps, she turned her head toward the castle, and, looking at one of the windows, said:

“There is your room; I went into it last night. On the same floor, on the other side, at the other end, is my father’s office. A white wooden table, a mahogany portfolio, a decanter on the mantelpiece: his office when he was a young man. Our entire fortune came from that place.”

Through the sand-covered paths between the flowerbeds they walked to the boxwood hedge which bordered the park on the southern side. They passed before the orange-grove, the monumental door of which was surmounted by the Lorraine cross of Mareuilles, and then passed under the linden-trees which formed an alley on the lawn. Statues of nymphs shivered in the damp shade studded with pale lights. A pigeon, posed on the shoulder of one of the white women, fled. From time to time a breath of wind detached a dried leaf which fell, a shell of red gold, where remained a drop of rain. Therese pointed to the nymph and said:

“She saw me when I was a girl and wishing to die. I suffered from dreams and from fright. I was waiting for you. But you were so far away!”

The linden alley stopped near the large basin, in the centre of which was a group of tritons blowing in their shells to form, when the waters played, a liquid diadem with flowers of foam.

“It is the Joinville crown,” she said.

She pointed to a pathway which, starting from the basin, lost itself in the fields, in the direction of the rising sun.

“This is my pathway. How often I walked in it sadly! I was sad when I did not know you.”

They found the alley which, with other lindens and other nymphs, went beyond. And they followed it to the grottoes. There was, in the rear of the park, a semicircle of five large niches of rocks surmounted by balustrades and separated by gigantic Terminus gods. One of these gods, at a corner of the monument, dominated all the others by his monstrous nudity, and lowered on them his stony look.

“When my father bought Joinville,” she said, “the grottoes were only ruins, full of grass and vipers. A thousand rabbits had made holes in them. He restored the Terminus gods and the arcades in accordance with prints by Perrelle, which are preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale. He was his own architect.”

A desire for shade and mystery led them toward the arbor near the grottoes. But the noise of footsteps which they heard, coming from the covered alley, made them stop for a moment, and they saw, through the leaves, Montessuy, with his arm around the Princess Seniavine's waist. Quietly they were walking toward the palace. Jacques and Therese, hiding behind the enormous Terminus god, waited until they had passed.

Then she said to Dechartre, who was looking at her silently:

"That is amazing! I understand now why the Princess Seniavine, this winter, asked my father to advise her about buying horses."

Yet Therese admired her father for having conquered that beautiful woman, who passed for being hard to please, and who was known to be wealthy, in spite of the embarrassments which her mad disorder had caused her. She asked Jacques whether he did not think the Princess was beautiful. He said she had elegance. She was beautiful, doubtless.

Therese led Jacques to the moss-covered steps which, ascending behind the grottoes, led to the Gerbe-de-l'Oise, formed of leaden reeds in the midst of a great pink marble vase. Tall trees closed the park's perspective and stood at the beginning of the forest. They walked under them. They were silent under the faint moan of the leaves.

He pressed her in his arms and placed kisses on her eyelids. Night was descending, the first stars were trembling among the branches. In the damp grass sighed the frog's flutes. They went no farther.

When she took with him, in darkness, the road to the palace, the taste of kisses and of mint remained on her lips, and in her eyes was the image of her lover. She smiled under the lindens at the nymphs who had seen the tears of her childhood. The Swan lifted in the sky its cross of stars, and the moon mirrored its slender horn in the basin of the crown. Insects in the grass uttered appeals to love. At the last turn of the

boxwood hedge, Therese and Jacques saw the triple black mass of the castle, and through the wide bay-windows of the first story distinguished moving forms in the red light. The bell rang.

Therese exclaimed:

“I have hardly time to dress for dinner.”

And she passed swiftly between the stone lions, leaving her lover under the impression of a fairy-tale vision.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, M. Berthier d’Eyzelles read the newspaper, and the Princess Seniavine played solitaire. Therese sat, her eyes half closed over a book.

The Princess asked whether she found what she was reading amusing.

“I do not know. I was reading and thinking. Paul Vence is right: ‘We find only ourselves in books.’”

Through the hangings came from the billiard-room the voices of the players and the click of the balls.

“I have it!” exclaimed the Princess, throwing down the cards.

She had wagered a big sum on a horse which was running that day at the Chantilly races.

Therese said she had received a letter from Fiesole. Miss Bell announced her forthcoming marriage with Prince Eusebia Albertinelli della Spina.

The Princess laughed:

“There’s a man who will render a service to her.”

“What service?” asked Therese.

“He will disgust her with men, of course.”

Montessuy came into the parlor joyfully. He had won the game.

He sat beside Berthier-d'Eyzelles, and, taking a newspaper from the sofa, said:

"The Minister of Finance announces that he will propose, when the Chamber reassembles, his savings-bank bill."

This bill was to give to savings-banks the authority to lend money to communes, a proceeding which would take from Montessuy's business houses their best customers.

"Berthier," asked the financier, "are you resolutely hostile to that bill?"

Berthier nodded.

Montessuy rose, placed his hand on the Deputy's shoulder, and said:

"My dear Berthier, I have an idea that the Cabinet will fall at the beginning of the session."

He approached his daughter.

"I have received an odd letter from Le Menil."

Therese rose and closed the door that separated the parlor from the billiard-room.

She was afraid of draughts, she said.

"A singular letter," continued Montessuy. "Le Menil will not come to Joinville. He has bought the yacht Rosebud. He is on the Mediterranean, and can not live except on the water. It is a pity. He is the only one who knows how to manage a hunt."

At this instant Dechartre came into the room with Count Martin, who, after beating him at billiards, had acquired a great affection for him and was explaining to him the dangers of a personal tax based on the number of servants one kept.

CHAPTER XXXI. AN UNWELCOME APPARITION

A pale winter sun piercing the mists of the Seine, illuminated the dogs painted by Oudry on the doors of the dining room.

Madame Martin had at her right Garain the Deputy, formerly Chancellor, also President of the Council, and at her left Senator Loyer. At Count Martin-Belleme's right was Monsieur Berthier-d'Eyzelles. It was an intimate and serious business gathering. In conformity with Montessuy's prediction, the Cabinet had fallen four days before. Called to the Elysee the same morning, Garain had accepted the task of forming a cabinet. He was preparing, while taking breakfast, the combination which was to be submitted in the evening to the President. And, while they were discussing names, Therese was reviewing within herself the images of her intimate life.

She had returned to Paris with Count Martin at the opening of the parliamentary session, and since that moment had led an enchanted life.

Jacques loved her; he loved her with a delicious mingling of passion and tenderness, of learned experience and curious ingenuity. He was nervous, irritable, anxious. But the uncertainty of his humor made his gayety more charming. That artistic gayety, bursting out suddenly like a flame, caressed love without offending it. And the playful wit of her lover made Therese marvel. She never could have imagined the infallible taste which he exercised naturally in joyful caprice and in familiar fantasy. At first he had displayed only the monotony of passionate ardor. That alone had captured her. But since then she had discovered in him a gay mind, well stored and diverse, as well as the gift of agreeable flattery.

"To assemble a homogeneous ministry," exclaimed Garain, "is easily said. Yet one must be guided by the tendencies of the various factions of the Chamber."

He was uneasy. He saw himself surrounded by as many snares as those which he had laid. Even his collaborators became hostile to him.

Count Martin wished the new ministry to satisfy the aspirations of the new men.

"Your list is formed of personalities essentially different in origin and in tendency," he said. "Yet the most important fact in the political history of recent years is the possibility, I should say the necessity, to introduce unity of views in the government

of the republic. These are ideas which you, my dear Garin, have expressed with rare eloquence."

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles kept silence.

Senator Loyer rolled crumbs with his fingers. He had been formerly a frequenter of beer-halls, and while moulding crumbs or cutting corks he found ideas. He raised his red face. And, looking at Garain with wrinkled eyes wherein red fire sparkled, he said:

"I said it, and nobody would believe it. The annihilation of the monarchical Right was for the chiefs of the Republican party an irreparable misfortune. We governed formerly against it. The real support of a government is the Opposition. The Empire governed against the Orleanists and against us; MacMahon governed against the Republicans. More fortunate, we governed against the Right. The Right—what a magnificent Opposition it was! It threatened, was candid, powerless, great, honest, unpopular! We should have nursed it. We did not know how to do that. And then, of course, everything wears out. Yet it is always necessary to govern against something. There are to-day only Socialists to give us the support which the Right lent us fifteen years ago with so constant a generosity. But they are too weak. We should reenforce them, make of them a political party. To do this at the present hour is the first duty of a State minister."

Garain, who was not cynical, made no answer.

"Garain, do you not yet know," asked Count Martin, "whether with the Premiership you are to take the Seals or the Interior?"

Garain replied that his decision would depend on the choice which some one else would make. The presence of that personage in the Cabinet was necessary, and he hesitated between two portfolios. Garain sacrificed his personal convenience to superior interests.

Senator Loyer made a wry face. He wanted the Seals. It was a long-cherished desire.

A teacher of law under the Empire, he gave, in cafes, lessons that were appreciated. He had the sense of chicanery. Having begun his political fortune with articles skilfully written in order to attract to himself prosecution, suits, and several weeks of imprisonment, he had considered the press as a weapon of opposition which every good government should break. Since September 4, 1870, he had had the ambition to become Keeper of the Seals, so that everybody might see how the old Bohemian who formerly explained the code while dining on sauerkraut, would appear as supreme chief of the magistracy.

Idiots by the dozen had climbed over his back. Now having become aged in the ordinary honors of the Senate, unpolished, married to a brewery girl, poor, lazy, disillusioned, his old Jacobin spirit and his sincere contempt for the people surviving his ambition, made of him a good man for the Government. This time, as a part of the Garain combination, he imagined he held the Department of Justice. And his protector, who would not give it to him, was an unfortunate rival. He laughed, while moulding a dog from a piece of bread.

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, calm and grave, caressed his handsome white beard.

"Do you not think, Monsieur Garain, that it would be well to give a place in the Cabinet to the men who have followed from the beginning the political principles toward which we are directing ourselves to-day?"

"They lost themselves in doing it," replied Garam, impatiently. "The politician never should be in advance of circumstances. It is an error to be in the right too soon. Thinkers are not men of business. And then—let us talk frankly—if you want a Ministry of the Left Centre variety, say so: I will retire. But I warn you that neither the Chamber nor the country will sustain you."

"It is evident," said Count Martin, "that we must be sure of a majority."

"With my list, we have a majority," said Garain. "It is the minority which sustained the Ministry against us. Gentlemen, I appeal to your devotion."

And the laborious distribution of the portfolios began again. Count Martin received, in the first place, the Public Works, which he refused, for lack of competency, and afterward the Foreign Affairs, which he accepted without objection.

But M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, to whom Garain offered Commerce and Agriculture, reserved his decision.

Loyer got the Colonies. He seemed very busy trying to make his bread dog stand on the cloth. Yet he was looking out of the corners of his little wrinkled eyelids at the Countess Martin and thinking that she was desirable. He vaguely thought of the pleasure of meeting her again.

Leaving Garain to his combination, he was preoccupied by his fair hostess, trying to divine her tastes and her habits, asking her whether she went to the theatre, and if she ever went at night to the coffee-house with her husband. And Therese was beginning to think he was more interesting than the others, with his apparent ignorance of her world and his superb cynicism.

Gamin arose. He had to see several persons before submitting his list to the President of the Republic. Count Martin offered his carriage, but Garain had one.

"Do you not think," asked Count Martin, "that the President might object to some names?"

"The President," replied Garain, "will be inspired by the necessities of the situation."

He had already gone out of the door when he struck his forehead with his hand.

"We have forgotten the Ministry of War."

"We shall easily find somebody for it among the generals," said Count Martin.

"Ah," exclaimed Garain, "you believe the choice of a minister of war is easy. It is clear you have not, like me, been a member of three cabinets and President of the Council. In my cabinets, and during my presidency the greatest difficulties came

from the Ministry of War. Generals are all alike. You know the one I chose for the cabinet that I formed. When we took him, he knew nothing of affairs. He hardly knew there were two Chambers. We had to explain to him all the wheels of parliamentary machinery; we had to teach him that there were an army committee, finance committee, subcommittees, presidents of committees, a budget. He asked that all this information be written for him on a piece of paper. His ignorance of men and of things amazed and alarmed us. In a fortnight he knew the most subtle tricks of the trade; he knew personally all the senators and all the deputies, and was intriguing with them against us. If it had not been for President Grevy's help, he would have overthrown us. And he was a very ordinary general, a general like any other. Oh, no; do not think that the portfolio of war may be given hastily, without reflection."

And Garain still shivered at the thought of his former colleague.

Therese rose. Senator Loyer offered his arm to her, with the graceful attitude that he had learned forty years before at Bullier's dancing-hall. She left the politicians in the drawing-room, and hastened to meet Dechartre.

A rosy mist covered the Seine, the stone quays, and the gilded trees. The red sun threw into the cloudy sky the last glories of the year. Therese, as she went out, relished the sharpness of the air and the dying splendor of the day. Since her return to Paris, happy, she found pleasure every morning in the changes of the weather. It seemed to her, in her generous selfishness, that it was for her the wind blew in the trees, or the fine, gray rain wet the horizon of the avenues; for her, so that she might say, as she entered the little house of the Ternes, "It is windy; it is raining; the weather is pleasant;" mingling thus the ocean of things in the intimacy of her love. And every day was beautiful for her, since each one brought her to the arms of her beloved.

While on her way that day to the little house of the Ternes she thought of her

unexpected happiness, so full and so secure. She walked in the last glory of the sun already touched by winter, and said to herself:

“He loves me; I believe he loves me entirely. To love is easier and more natural for him than for other men. They have in life ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests. They believe in God, or in duties, or in themselves. He believes in me only. I am his God, his duty, and his life.”

Then she thought:

“It is true, too, that he needs nobody, not even me. His thoughts alone are a magnificent world in which he could easily live by himself. But I can not live without him. What would become of me if I did not have him?”

She was not alarmed by the violent passion that he had for her. She recalled that she had said to him one day: “Your love for me is only sensual. I do not complain of it; it is perhaps the only true love.” And he had replied: “It is also the only grand and strong love. It has its measure and its weapons. It is full of meaning and of images. It is violent and mysterious. It attaches itself to the flesh and to the soul of the flesh. The rest is only illusion and untruth.” She was almost tranquil in her joy. Suspicions and anxieties had fled like the mists of a summer storm. The worst weather of their love had come when they had been separated from each other. One should never leave the one whom one loves.

At the corner of the Avenue Marceau and of the Rue Galilee, she divined rather than recognized a shadow that had passed by her, a forgotten form. She thought, she wished to think, she was mistaken. The one whom she thought she had seen existed no longer, never had existed. It was a spectre seen in the limbo of another world, in the darkness of a half light. And she continued to walk, retaining of this ill-defined meeting an impression of coldness, of vague embarrassment, and of pain in the heart.

As she proceeded along the avenue she saw coming toward her newspaper carriers

holding the evening sheets announcing the new Cabinet. She traversed the square; her steps followed the happy impatience of her desire. She had visions of Jacques waiting for her at the foot of the stairway, among the marble figures; taking her in his arms and carrying her, trembling from kisses, to that room full of shadows and of delights, where the sweetness of life made her forget life.

But in the solitude of the Avenue MacMahon, the shadow which she had seen at the corner of the Rue Galilee came near her with a directness that was unmistakable.

She recognized Robert Le Menil, who, having followed her from the quay, was stopping her at the most quiet and secure place.

His air, his attitude, expressed the simplicity of motive which had formerly pleased Therese. His face, naturally harsh, darkened by sunburn, somewhat hollowed, but calm, expressed profound suffering.

“I must speak to you.”

She slackened her pace. He walked by her side.

“I have tried to forget you. After what had happened it was natural, was it not? I have done all I could. It was better to forget you, surely; but I could not. So I bought a boat, and I have been travelling for six months. You know, perhaps?”

She made a sign that she knew.

He continued:

“The Rosebud, a beautiful yacht. There were six men in the crew. I manoeuvred with them. It was a pastime.”

He paused. She was walking slowly, saddened, and, above all, annoyed. It seemed to her an absurd and painful thing, beyond all expression, to have to listen to such words from a stranger.

He continued:

“What I suffered on that boat I should be ashamed to tell you.”

She felt he spoke the truth.

“Oh, I forgive you—I have reflected alone a great deal. I passed many nights and days on the divan of the deckhouse, turning always the same ideas in my mind. For six months I have thought more than I ever did in my life. Do not laugh. There is nothing like suffering to enlarge the mind. I understand that if I have lost you the fault is mine. I should have known how to keep you. And I said to myself: ‘I did not know. Oh; if I could only begin again!’ By dint of thinking and of suffering, I understand. I know now that I did not sufficiently share your tastes and your ideas. You are a superior woman. I did not notice it before, because it was not for that that I loved you. Without suspecting it, I irritated you.”

She shook her head. He insisted.

“Yes, yes, I often wounded your feelings. I did not consider your delicacy. There were misunderstandings between us. The reason was, we have not the same temperament. And then, I did not know how to amuse you. I did not know how to give you the amusement you need. I did not procure for you the pleasures that a woman as intelligent as you requires.”

So simple and so true was he in his regrets and in his pain, she found him worthy of sympathy. She said to him, softly:

“My friend, I never had reason to complain of you.”

He continued:

“All I have said to you is true. I understood this when I was alone in my boat. I have spent hours on it to which I would not condemn my worst enemy. Often I felt like throwing myself into the water. I did not do it. Was it because I have religious principles or family sentiments, or because I have no courage? I do not know. The reason is, perhaps, that from a distance you held me to life. I was attracted by you, since I am here. For two days I have been watching you. I did not wish to reappear at your house. I should not have found you alone; I should not have been able to talk

to you. And then you would have been forced to receive me. I thought it better to speak to you in the street. The idea came to me on the boat. I said to myself: ‘In the street she will listen to me only if she wishes, as she wished four years ago in the park of Joinville, you know, under the statues, near the crown.’”

He continued, with a sigh:

“Yes, as at Joinville, since all is to be begun again. For two days I have been watching you. Yesterday it was raining; you went out in a carriage. I might have followed you and learned where you were going if I wished to do it. I did not do it. I do not wish to do what would displease you.”

She extended her hand to him.

“I thank you. I knew I should not regret the trust I have placed in you.”

Alarmed, impatient, fearing what more he might say, she tried to escape him.

“Farewell! You have all life before you. You should be happy. Appreciate it, and do not torment yourself about things that are not worth the trouble.”

He stopped her with a look. His face had changed to the violent and resolute expression which she knew.

“I have told you I must speak to you. Listen to me for a minute.”

She was thinking of Jacques, who was waiting for her. An occasional passer-by looked at her and went on his way. She stopped under the black branches of a tree, and waited with pity and fright in her soul.

He said:

“I forgive you and forget everything. Take me back. I will promise never to say a word of the past.”

She shuddered, and made a movement of surprise and distaste so natural that he stopped. Then, after a moment of reflection:

“My proposition to you is not an ordinary one, I know it well. But I have reflected. I

have thought of everything. It is the only possible thing. Think of it, Therese, and do not reply at once."

"It would be wrong to deceive you. I can not, I will not do what you say; and you know the reason why."

A cab was passing slowly near them. She made a sign to the coachman to stop. Le Menil kept her a moment longer.

"I knew you would say this to me, and that is the reason why I say to you, do not reply at once."

Her fingers on the handle of the door, she turned on him the glance of her gray eyes.

It was a painful moment for him. He recalled the time when he saw those charming gray eyes gleam under half-closed lids. He smothered a sob, and murmured:

"Listen; I can not live without you. I love you. It is now that I love you. Formerly I did not know."

And while she gave to the coachman, haphazard, the address of a tailor, Le Menil went away.

The meeting gave her much uneasiness and anxiety. Since she was forced to meet him again, she would have preferred to see him violent and brutal, as he had been at Florence. At the corner of the avenue she said to the coachman:

"To the Ternes."

CHAPTER XXXII. THE RED LILY

It was Friday, at the opera. The curtain had fallen on Faust's laboratory. From the orchestra, opera-glasses were raised in a surveying of the gold and purple theatre. The sombre drapery of the boxes framed the dazzling heads and bare shoulders of women. The amphitheatre bent above the parquette its garland of diamonds, hair, gauze, and satin. In the proscenium boxes were the wife of the Austrian Ambassador

and the Duchess Gladwin; in the amphitheatre Berthe d'Osigny and Jane Tulle, the latter made famous the day before by the suicide of one of her lovers; in the boxes, Madame Berard de La Malle, her eyes lowered, her long eyelashes shading her pure cheeks; Princess Seniavine, who, looking superb, concealed under her fan panther—like yawnings; Madame de Morlaine, between two young women whom she was training in the elegances of the mind; Madame Meillan, resting assured on thirty years of sovereign beauty; Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, erect under iron-gray hair sparkling with diamonds. The bloom of her cheeks heightened the austere dignity of her attitude. She was attracting much notice. It had been learned in the morning that, after the failure of Garain's latest combination, M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles had, undertaken the task of forming a Ministry. The papers published lists with the name of Martin-Belleme for the treasury, and the opera-glasses were turned toward the still empty box of the Countess Martin.

A murmur of voices filled the hall. In the third rank of the parquette, General Lariviere, standing at his place, was talking with General de La Briche.

"I will do as you do, my old comrade, I will go and plant cabbages in Touraine."

He was in one of his moments of melancholy, when nothingness appeared to him to be the end of life. He had flattered Garain, and Garain, thinking him too clever, had preferred for Minister of War a shortsighted and national artillery general. At least, the General relished the pleasure of seeing Garain abandoned, betrayed by his friends Berthier-d'Eyzelles and Martin-Belleme. It made him laugh even to the wrinkles of his small eyes. He laughed in profile. Weary of a long life of dissimulation, he gave to himself suddenly the joy of expressing his thoughts.

"You see, my good La Briche, they make fools of us with their civil army, which costs a great deal, and is worth nothing. Small armies are the only good ones. This was the opinion of Napoleon I, who knew."

"It is true, it is very true," sighed General de La Briche, with tears in his eyes.

Montessuy passed before them; Lariviere extended his hand to him.

“They say, Montessuy, that you are the one who checked Garain. Accept my compliments.”

Montessuy denied that he had exercised any political influence. He was not a senator nor a deputy, nor a councillor-general. And, looking through his glasses at the hall:

“See, Lariviere, in that box at the right, a very beautiful woman, a brunette.”

And he took his seat quietly, relishing the sweets of power.

However, in the hall, in the corridors, the names of the new Ministers went from mouth to mouth in the midst of profound indifference: President of the Council and Minister of the Interior, Berthier-d’Eyzelles; justice and Religions, Loyer; Treasury, Martin-Belleme. All the ministers were known except those of Commerce, War, and the Navy, who were not yet designated.

The curtain was raised on the wine-shop of Bacchus. The students were singing their second chorus when Madame Martin appeared in her box. Her white gown had sleeves like wings, and on the drapery of her corsage, at the left breast, shone a large ruby lily.

Miss Bell sat near her, in a green velvet Queen Anne gown. Betrothed to Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina, she had come to Paris to order her trousseau.

In the movement and the noise of the kermess she said:

“Darling, you have left at Florence a friend who retains the charm of your memory. It is Professor Arrighi. He reserves for you the praise-which he says is the most beautiful. He says you are a musical creature. But how could Professor Arrighi forget you, darling, since the trees in the garden have not forgotten you? Their unleaved branches lament your absence. Even they regret you, darling.”

“Tell them,” said Therese, “that I have of Fiesole a delightful reminiscence, which I shall always keep.”

In the rear of the opera-box M. Martin-Belleme was explaining in a low voice his ideas to Joseph Springer and to Duviquet. He was saying: “France’s signature is the best in the world.” He was inclined to prudence in financial matters.

And Miss Bell said:

“Darling, I will tell the trees of Fiesole that you regret them and that you will soon come to visit them on their hills. But I ask you, do you see Monsieur Dechartre in Paris? I should like to see him very much. I like him because his mind is graceful. Darling, the mind of Monsieur Dechartre is full of grace and elegance.”

Therese replied M. Jacques Dechartre was doubtless in the theatre, and that he would not fail to come and salute Miss Bell.

The curtain fell on the gayety of the waltz scene. Visitors crowded the foyers. Financiers, artists, deputies met in the anteroom adjoining the box. They surrounded M. Martin-Belleme, murmured polite congratulations, made graceful gestures to him, and crowded one another in order to shake his hand. Joseph Schmoll, coughing, complaining, blind and deaf, made his way through the throng and reached Madame Martin. He took her hand and said:

“They say your husband is appointed Minister. Is it true?”

She knew they were talking of it, but she did not think he had been appointed yet. Her husband was there, why not ask him?

Sensitive to literal truths only, Schmoll said:

“Your husband is not yet a Minister? When he is appointed, I will ask you for an interview. It is an affair of the highest importance.”

He paused, throwing from his gold spectacles the glances of a blind man and of a visionary, which kept him, despite the brutal exactitude of his temperament, in a sort of mystical state of mind. He asked, brusquely:

“Were you in Italy this year, Madame?”

And, without giving her time to answer:

“I know, I know. You went to Rome. You have looked at the arch of the infamous Titus, that execrable monument, where one may see the seven-branched candlestick among the spoils of the Jews. Well, Madame, it is a shame to the world that that monument remains standing in the city of Rome, where the Popes have subsisted only through the art of the Jews, financiers and money-changers. The Jews brought to Italy the science of Greece and of the Orient. The Renaissance, Madame, is the work of Israel. That is the truth, certain but misunderstood.”

And he went through the crowd of visitors, crushing hats as he passed.

Princess Seniavine looked at her friend from her box with the curiosity that the beauty of women at times excited in her. She made a sign to Paul Vence who was near her:

“Do you not think Madame Martin is extraordinarily beautiful this year?”

In the lobby, full of light and gold, General de La Briche asked Lariviere:

“Did you see my nephew?”

“Your nephew, Le Menil?”

“Yes—Robert. He was in the theatre a moment ago.”

La Briche remained pensive for a moment. Then he said:

“He came this summer to Semanville. I thought him odd. A charming fellow, frank and intelligent. But he ought to have some occupation, some aim in life.”

The bell which announced the end of an intermission between the acts had hushed. In the foyer the two old men were walking alone.

“An aim in life,” repeated La Briche, tall, thin, and bent, while his companion, lightened and rejuvenated, hastened within, fearing to miss a scene.

Marguerite, in the garden, was spinning and singing. When she had finished, Miss Bell said to Madame Martin:

“Darling, Monsieur Choulette has written me a perfectly beautiful letter. He has told me that he is very celebrated. And I am glad to know it. He said also: ‘The glory of other poets reposes in myrrh and aromatic plants. Mine bleeds and moans under a rain of stones and of oyster-shells.’ Do the French, my love, really throw stones at Monsieur Choulette?”

While Therese reassured Miss Bell, Loyer, imperious and somewhat noisy, caused the door of the box to be opened. He appeared wet and spattered with mud.

“I come from the Elysee,” he said.

He had the gallantry to announce to Madame Martin, first, the good news he was bringing:

“The decrees are signed. Your husband has the Finances. It is a good portfolio.”

“The President of the Republic,” inquired M. Martin—Belleme, “made no objection when my name was pronounced?”

“No; Berthier praised the hereditary property of the Martins, your caution, and the links with which you are attached to certain personalities in the financial world whose concurrence may be useful to the government. And the President, in accordance with Garain’s happy expression, was inspired by the necessities of the situation. He has signed.”

On Count Martin’s yellowed face two or three wrinkles appeared. He was smiling.

“The decree,” continued Loyer, “will be published tomorrow. I accompanied myself the clerk who took it to the printer. It was surer. In Grevy’s time, and Grevy was not an idiot, decrees were intercepted in the journey from the Elysee to the Quai Voltaire.”

And Loyer threw himself on a chair. There, enjoying the view of Madame Martin, he continued:

“People will not say, as they did in the time of my poor friend Gambetta, that the

republic is lacking in women. You will give us fine festivals, Madame, in the salons of the Ministry."

Marguerite, looking at herself in the mirror, with her necklace and earrings, was singing the jewel song.

"We shall have to compose the declaration," said Count Martin. "I have thought of it. For my department I have found, I think, a fine formula."

Loyer shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Martin, we have nothing essential to change in the declaration of the preceding Cabinet; the situation is unchanged."

He struck his forehead with his hand.

"Oh, I had forgotten. We have made your friend, old Lariviere, Minister of War, without consulting him. I have to warn him."

He thought he could find him in the boulevard cafe, where military men go. But Count Martin knew the General was in the theatre.

"I must find him," said Loyer.

Bowing to Therese, he said:

"You permit me, Countess, to take your husband?"

They had just gone out when Jacques Dechartre and Paul Vence came into the box.

"I congratulate you, Madame," said Paul Vence.

But she turned toward Dechartre:

"I hope you have not come to congratulate me, too."

Paul Vence asked her if she would move into the apartments of the Ministry.

"Oh, no," she replied.

"At least, Madame," said Paul Vence, "you will go to the balls at the Elysees, and we shall admire the art with which you retain your mysterious charm."

“Changes in cabinets,” said Madame Martin, “inspire you, Monsieur Vence, with very frivolous reflections.”

“Madame,” continued Paul Vence, “I shall not say like Renan, my beloved master: ‘What does Sirius care?’ because somebody would reply with reason ‘What does little Earth care for big Sirius?’ But I am always surprised when people who are adult, and even old, let themselves be deluded by the illusion of power, as if hunger, love, and death, all the ignoble or sublime necessities of life, did not exercise on men an empire too sovereign to leave them anything other than power written on paper and an empire of words. And, what is still more marvellous, people imagine they have other chiefs of state and other ministers than their miseries, their desires, and their imbecility. He was a wise man who said: ‘Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges.’”

“But, Monsieur Vence,” said Madame Martin, laughingly, “you are the man who wrote that. I read it.”

The two Ministers looked vainly in the theatre and in the corridors for the General. On the advice of the ushers, they went behind the scenes.

Two ballet-dancers were standing sadly, with a foot on the bar placed against the wall. Here and there men in evening dress and women in gauze formed groups almost silent.

Loyer and Martin-Belleme, when they entered, took off their hats. They saw, in the rear of the hall, Lariviere with a pretty girl whose pink tunic, held by a gold belt, was open at the hips.

She held in her hand a gilt pasteboard cup. When they were near her, they heard her say to the General:

“You are old, to be sure, but I think you do as much as he does.”

And she was pointing disdainfully to a grinning young man, with a gardenia in his button-hole, who stood near them.

Loyer motioned to the General that he wished to speak to him, and, pushing him against the bar, said:

“I have the pleasure to announce to you that you have been appointed Minister of War.”

Lariviere, distrustful, said nothing. That badly dressed man with long hair, who, under his dusty coat, resembled a clown, inspired so little confidence in him that he suspected a snare, perhaps a bad joke.

“Monsieur Loyer is Keeper of the Seals,” said Count Martin.

“General, you cannot refuse,” Loyer said. “I have said you will accept. If you hesitate, it will be favoring the offensive return of Garain. He is a traitor.”

“My dear colleague, you exaggerate,” said Count Martin; “but Garain, perhaps, is lacking a little in frankness. And the General’s support is urgent.”

“The Fatherland before everything,” replied Lariviere with emotion.

“You know, General,” continued Loyer, “the existing laws are to be applied with moderation.”

He looked at the two dancers who were extending their short and muscular legs on the bar.

Lariviere murmured:

“The army’s patriotism is excellent; the good-will of the chiefs is at the height of the most critical circumstances.”

Loyer tapped his shoulder.

“My dear colleague, there is some use in having big armies.”

“I believe as you do,” replied Lariviere; “the present army fills the superior necessities of national defence.”

“The use of big armies,” continued Loyer, “is to make war impossible. One would be crazy to engage in a war these immeasurable forces, the management of which

surpasses all human faculty. Is not this your opinion, General?”

General Lariviere winked.

“The situation,” he said, “exacts circumspection. We are facing a perilous unknown.”

Then Loyer, looking at his war colleague with cynical contempt, said:

“In the very improbable case of a war, don’t you think, my dear colleague, that the real generals would be the station-masters?”

The three Ministers went out by the private stairway. The President of the Council was waiting for them.

The last act had begun; Madame Martin had in her box only Dechartre and Miss Bell. Miss Bell was saying:

“I rejoice, darling, I am exalted, at the thought that you wear on your heart the red lily of Florence. Monsieur Dechartre, whose soul is artistic, must be very glad, too, to see at your corsage that charming jewel.

“I should like to know the jeweller that made it, darling. This lily is lithe and supple like an iris. Oh, it is elegant, magnificent, and cruel. Have you noticed, my love, that beautiful jewels have an air of magnificent cruelty?”

“My jeweller,” said Therese, “is here, and you have named him; it is Monsieur Dechartre who designed this jewel.”

The door of the box was opened. Therese half turned her head and saw in the shadow Le Menil, who was bowing to her with his brusque suppleness.

“Transmit, I pray you, Madame, my congratulations to your husband.”

He complimented her on her fine appearance. He spoke to Miss Bell a few courteous and precise words.

Therese listened anxiously, her mouth half open in the painful effort to say insignificant things in reply. He asked her whether she had had a good season at

Joinville. He would have liked to go in the hunting time, but could not. He had gone to the Mediterranean, then he had hunted at Semanville.

“Oh, Monsieur Le Menil,” said Miss Bell, “you have wandered on the blue sea. Have you seen sirens?”

No, he had not seen sirens, but for three days a dolphin had swum in the yacht’s wake.

Miss Bell asked him if that dolphin liked music.

He thought not.

“Dolphins,” he said, “are very ordinary fish that sailors call sea-geese, because they have goose-shaped heads.”

But Miss Bell would not believe that the monster which had earned the poet Arion had a goose-shaped head.

“Monsieur Le Menil, if next year a dolphin comes to swim near your boat, I pray you play to him on the flute the Delphic Hymn to Apollo. Do you like the sea, Monsieur Le Menil?”

“I prefer the woods.”

Self-contained, simple, he talked quietly.

“Oh, Monsieur Le Menil, I know you like woods where the hares dance in the moonlight.”

Dechartre, pale, rose and went out.

The church scene was on. Marguerite, kneeling, was wringing her hands, and her head drooped with the weight of her long tresses. The voices of the organ and the chorus sang the death-song.

“Oh, darling, do you know that that death-song, which is sung only in the Catholic churches, comes from a Franciscan hermitage? It sounds like the wind which blows in winter in the trees on the summit of the Alverno.”

Therese did not hear. Her soul had followed Dechartre through the door of her box.

In the anteroom was a noise of overthrown chairs. It was Schmoll coming back. He had learned that M. Martin-Belleme had recently been appointed Minister. At once he claimed the cross of Commander of the Legion of Honor and a larger apartment at the Institute. His apartment was small, narrow, insufficient for his wife and his five daughters. He had been forced to put his workshop under the roof. He made long complaints, and consented to go only after Madame Martin had promised that she would speak to her husband.

“Monsieur Le Menil,” asked Miss Bell, “shall you go yachting next year?”

Le Menil thought not. He did not intend to keep the Rosebud. The water was tiresome.

And calm, energetic, determined, he looked at Therese.

On the stage, in Marguerite’s prison, Mephistopheles sang, and the orchestra imitated the gallop of horses. Therese murmured:

“I have a headache. It is too warm here.”

Le Menil opened the door.

The clear phrase of Marguerite calling the angels ascended to heaven in white sparks.

“Darling, I will tell you that poor Marguerite does not wish to be saved according to the flesh, and for that reason she is saved in spirit and in truth. I believe one thing, darling, I believe firmly we shall all be saved. Oh, yes, I believe in the final purification of sinners.”

Therese rose, tall and white, with the red flower at her breast. Miss Bell, immovable, listened to the music. Le Menil, in the anteroom, took Madame Martin’s cloak, and, while he held it unfolded, she traversed the box, the anteroom, and stopped before the mirror of the half-open door. He placed on her bare shoulders the cape of red

velvet embroidered with gold and lined with ermine, and said, in a low tone, but distinctly:

“Therese, I love you. Remember what I asked you the day before yesterday. I shall be every day, at three o’clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.”

At this moment, as she made a motion with her head to receive the cloak, she saw Dechartre with his hand on the knob of the door. He had heard. He looked at her with all the reproach and suffering that human eyes can contain. Then he went into the dim corridor. She felt hammers of fire beating in her chest and remained immovable on the threshold.

“You were waiting for me?” said Montessuy. “You are left alone to-day. I will escort you and Miss Bell.”

CHAPTER XXXIII. A WHITE NIGHT

In the carriage, and in her room, she saw again the look of her lover, that cruel and dolorous look. She knew with what facility he fell into despair, the promptness of his will not to will. She had seen him run away thus on the shore of the Arno. Happy then in her sadness and in her anguish, she could run after him and say, “Come.” Now, again surrounded, watched, she should have found something to say, and not have let him go from her dumb and desolate. She had remained surprised, stunned. The accident had been so absurd and so rapid! She had against Le Menil the sentiment of simple anger which malicious things cause. She reproached herself bitterly for having permitted her lover to go without a word, without a glance, wherein she could have placed her soul.

While Pauline waited to undress her, Therese walked to and fro impatiently. Then she stopped suddenly. In the obscure mirrors, wherein the reflections of the candles were drowned, she saw the corridor of the playhouse, and her beloved flying from her through it.

Where was he now? What was he saying to himself alone? It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him and see him again at once.

She pressed her heart with her hands; she was smothering.

Pauline uttered a cry. She saw drops of blood on the white corsage of her mistress.

Therese, without knowing it, had pricked her hand with the red lily.

She detached the emblematic jewel which she had worn before all as the dazzling secret of her heart, and, holding it in her fingers, contemplated it for a long time. Then she saw again the days of Florence—the cell of San Marco, where her lover's kiss weighed delicately on her mouth, while, through her lowered lashes, she vaguely perceived again the angels and the sky painted on the wall, and the dazzling fountain of the ice-vender against the bright cloth; the pavilion of the Via Alfieri, its nymphs, its goats, and the room where the shepherds and the masks on the screens listened to her sighs and noted her long silences.

No, all these things were not shadows of the past, spectres of ancient hours. They were the present reality of her love. And a word stupidly cast by a stranger would destroy these beautiful things! Happily, it was not possible. Her love, her lover, did not depend on such insignificant matters. If only she could run to his house! She would find him before the fire, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, sad. Then she would run her fingers through his hair, force him to lift his head, to see that she loved him, that she was his treasure, palpitating with joy and love.

She had dismissed her maid. In her bed she thought of only one thing.

It was an accident, an absurd accident. He would understand it; he would know that their love had nothing to do with anything so stupid. What folly for him to care about another! As if there were other men in the world!

M. Martin-Belleme half opened the bedroom door. Seeing a light he went in.

"You are not asleep, Therese?"

He had been at a conference with his colleagues. He wanted advice from his wife on certain points. He needed to hear sincere words.

“It is done,” he said. “You will help me, I am sure, in my situation, which is much envied, but very difficult and even perilous. I owe it to you somewhat, since it came to me through the powerful influence of your father.”

He consulted her on the choice of a Chief of Cabinet.

She advised him as best she could. She thought he was sensible, calm, and not sillier than many others.

He lost himself in reflections.

“I have to defend before the Senate the budget voted by the Chamber of Deputies. The budget contains innovations which I did not approve. When I was a deputy I fought against them. Now that I am a minister I must support them. I saw things from the outside formerly. I see them from the inside now, and their aspect is changed. And, then, I am free no longer.”

He sighed:

“Ah, if the people only knew the little that we can do when we are powerful!”

He told her his impressions. Berthier was reserved. The others were impenetrable. Loyer alone was excessively authoritative.

She listened to him without attention and without impatience. His pale face and voice marked for her like a clock the minutes that passed with intolerable slowness.

Loyer had odd sallies of wit. Immediately after he had declared his strict adhesion to the Concordat, he said: “Bishops are spiritual prefects. I will protect them since they belong to me. And through them I shall hold the guardians of souls, curates.”

He recalled to her that she would have to meet people who were not of her class and who would shock her by their vulgarity. But his situation demanded that he should not disdain anybody. At all events, he counted on her tact and on her devotion.

She looked at him, a little astonished.

“There is no hurry, my dear. We shall see later.”

He was tired. He said good-night and advised her to sleep. She was ruining her health by reading all night. He left her.

She heard the noise of his footsteps, heavier than usual, while he traversed the library, encumbered with blue books and journals, to reach his room, where he would perhaps sleep. Then she felt the weight on her of the night’s silence. She looked at her watch. It was half-past one.

She said to herself: “He, too, is suffering. He looked at me with so much despair and anger.”

She was courageous and ardent. She was impatient at being a prisoner. When daylight came, she would go, she would see him, she would explain everything to him. It was so clear! In the painful monotony of her thought, she listened to the rolling of wagons which at long intervals passed on the quay. That noise preoccupied, almost interested her. She listened to the rumble, at first faint and distant, then louder, in which she could distinguish the rolling of the wheels, the creaking of the axles, the shock of horses’ shoes, which, decreasing little by little, ended in an imperceptible murmur.

And when silence returned, she fell again into her reverie.

He would understand that she loved him, that she had never loved any one except him. It was unfortunate that the night was so long. She did not dare to look at her watch for fear of seeing in it the immobility of time.

She rose, went to the window, and drew the curtains. There was a pale light in the clouded sky. She thought it might be the beginning of dawn. She looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

She returned to the window. The sombre infinity outdoors attracted her. She looked.

The sidewalks shone under the gas-jets. A gentle rain was falling. Suddenly a voice ascended in the silence; acute, and then grave, it seemed to be made of several voices replying to one another. It—was a drunkard disputing with the beings of his dream, to whom he generously gave utterance, and whom he confounded afterward with great gestures and in furious sentences. Therese could see the poor man walk along the parapet in his white blouse, and she could hear words recurring incessantly: “That is what I say to the government.”

Chilled, she returned to her bed. She thought, “He is jealous, he is madly jealous. It is a question of nerves and of blood. But his love, too, is an affair of blood and of nerves. His love and his jealousy are one and the same thing. Another would understand. It would be sufficient to please his self-love.” But he was jealous from the depth of his soul. She knew this; she knew that in him jealousy was a physical torture, a wound enlarged by imagination. She knew how profound the evil was. She had seen him grow pale before the bronze St. Mark when she had thrown the letter in the box on the wall of the old Florentine house at a time when she was his only in dreams.

She recalled his smothered complaints, his sudden fits of sadness, and the painful mystery of the words which he repeated frequently: “I can forget you only when I am with you.” She saw again the Dinard letter and his furious despair at a word overheard at a wine-shop table. She felt that the blow had been struck accidentally at the most sensitive point, at the bleeding wound. But she did not lose courage. She would tell everything, she would confess everything, and all her avowals would say to him: “I love you. I have never loved any one except you!” She had not betrayed him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed. She had lied so little, as little as possible, and then only not to give him pain. How could he not understand? It was better he should know everything, since everything meant nothing. She represented to herself incessantly the same ideas, repeated to herself the same words.

Her lamp gave only a smoky light. She lighted candles. It was six o'clock. She realized that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and mingled with the earth in a chaos of thick darkness. Then she was curious to know exactly at what hour the sun would rise. She had had no idea of this. She thought only that nights were long in December. She did not think of looking at the calendar. The heavy step of workmen walking in squads, the noise of wagons of milkmen and marketmen, came to her ear like sounds of good augury. She shuddered at this first awakening of the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV. "I SEE THE OTHER WITH YOU ALWAYS!"

At nine o'clock, in the yard of the little house, she observed M. Fusellier sweeping, in the rain, while smoking his pipe. Madame Fusellier came out of her box. Both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"Monsieur Jacques is not at home." And, as Therese remained silent, immovable, Fusellier came near her with his broom, hiding with his left hand his pipe behind his back—

"Monsieur Jacques has not yet come home."

"I will wait for him," said Therese.

Madame Fusellier led her to the parlor, where she lighted the fire. As the wood smoked and would not flame, she remained bent, with her hands on her knees.

"It is the rain," she said, "which causes the smoke."

Madame Martin said it was not worth while to make a fire, that she did not feel cold.

She saw herself in the glass.

She was livid, with glowing spots on her cheeks. Then only she felt that her feet were frozen. She approached the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing her anxious, spoke

softly to her:

“Monsieur Jacques will come soon. Let Madame warm herself while waiting for him.”

A dim light fell with the rain on the glass ceiling.

Upon the wall, the lady with the unicorn was not beautiful among the cavaliers in a forest full of flowers and birds. Therese was repeating to herself the words: “He has not yet come home.” And by dint of saying this she lost the meaning of it. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without a movement, without a thought, for a time the duration of which she did not know; perhaps half an hour. The noise of a footstep came to her, the door was opened. He came in. She saw that he was wet with rain and mud, and burning with fever.

She fixed on him a look so sincere and so frank that it struck him. But almost at once he recalled within himself all his sufferings.

He said to her:

“What do you want of me? You have done me all the harm you could do me.”

Fatigue gave him an air of gentleness. It frightened her.

“Jacques, listen to me!”

He motioned to her that he wished to hear nothing from her.

“Jacques, listen to me. I have not deceived you. Oh, no, I have not deceived you. Was it possible? Was it—”

He interrupted her:

“Have some pity for me. Do not make me suffer again. Leave me, I pray you. If you knew the night I have passed, you would not have the courage to torment me again.”

He let himself fall on the divan. He had walked all night. Not to suffer too much, he had tried to find diversions. On the Bercy Quay he had looked at the moon floating

in the clouds. For an hour he had seen it veil itself and reappear. Then he had counted the windows of houses with minute care. The rain began to fall. He had gone to the market and had drunk whiskey in a wine-room. A big girl who squinted had said to him, “You don’t look happy.” He had fallen half asleep on the leather bench. It had been a moment of oblivion. The images of that painful night passed before his eyes. He said: “I recalled the night of the Arno. You have spoiled for me all the joy and beauty in the world.” He asked her to leave him alone. In his lassitude he had a great pity for himself. He would have liked to sleep—not to die; he held death in horror—but to sleep and never to wake again. Yet, before him, as desirable as formerly, despite the painful fixity of her dry eyes, and more mysterious than ever, he saw her. His hatred was vivified by suffering.

She extended her arms to him. “Listen to me, Jacques.” He motioned to her that it was useless for her to speak. Yet he wished to listen to her, and already he was listening with avidity. He detested and rejected in advance what she would say, but nothing else in the world interested him.

She said:

“You may have believed I was betraying you, that I was not living for you alone. But can you not understand anything? You do not see that if that man were my lover it would not have been necessary for him to talk to me at the play-house in that box; he would have a thousand other ways of meeting me. Oh, no, my friend, I assure you that since the day when I had the happiness to meet you, I have been yours entirely. Could I have been another’s? What you imagine is monstrous. But I love you, I love you! I love only you. I never have loved any one except you.”

He replied slowly, with cruel heaviness:

“‘I shall be every day, at three o’clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.’ It was not a lover, your lover, who said these things? No! it was a stranger, an unknown person.”

She straightened herself, and with painful gravity said:

“Yes, I had been his. You knew it. I have denied it, I have told an untruth, not to irritate or grieve you. I saw you so anxious. But I lied so little and so badly. You knew. Do not reproach me for it. You knew; you often spoke to me of the past, and then one day somebody told you at the restaurant—and you imagined much more than ever happened. While telling an untruth, I was not deceiving you. If you knew the little that he was in my life! There! I did not know you. I did not know you were to come. I was lonely.”

She fell on her knees.

“I was wrong. I should have waited for you. But if you knew how slight a matter that was in my life!”

And with her voice modulated to a soft and singing complaint she said:

“Why did you not come sooner, why?”

She dragged herself to him, tried to take his hands. He repelled her.

“I was stupid. I did not think. I did not know. I did not wish to know.”

He rose and exclaimed, in an explosion of hatred:

“I did not wish him to be that man.”

She sat in the place which he had left, and there, plaintively, in a low voice, she explained the past. In that time she lived in a world horribly commonplace. She had yielded, but she had regretted at once. If he but knew the sadness of her life he would not be jealous. He would pity her. She shook her head and said, looking at him through the falling locks of her hair:

“I am talking to you of another woman. There is nothing in common between that woman and me. I exist only since I have known you, since I have belonged to you.”

He walked about the room madly. He laughed painfully.

“Yes; but while you loved me, the other woman—the one who was not you?”

She looked at him indignantly:

“Can you believe—”

“Did you not see him again at Florence? Did you not accompany him to the station?”

She told him that he had come to Italy to find her; that she had seen him; that she had broken with him; that he had gone, irritated, and that since then he was trying to win her back; but that she had not even paid any attention to him.

“My beloved, I see, I know, only you in the world.” He shook his head.

“I do not believe you.”

She revolted.

“I have told you everything. Accuse me, condemn me, but do not offend me in my love for you.”

He shook his head.

“Leave me. You have harmed me too much. I have loved you so much that all the pain which you could have given me I would have taken, kept, loved; but this is too hideous. I hate it. Leave me. I am suffering too much. Farewell!”

She stood erect.

“I have come. It is my happiness, it is my life, I am fighting for. I will not go.”

And she said again all that she had already said. Violent and sincere, sure of herself, she explained how she had broken the tie which was already loose and irritated her; how since the day when she had loved him she had been his only, without regret, without a wandering look or thought. But in speaking to him of another she irritated him. And he shouted at her:

“I do not believe you.”

She only repeated her declarations.

And suddenly, instinctively, she looked at her watch:

“Oh, it is noon!”

She had often given that cry of alarm when the farewell hour had surprised them. And Jacques shuddered at the phrase which was so familiar, so painful, and was this time so desperate. For a few minutes more she said ardent words and shed tears. Then she left him; she had gained nothing.

At her house she found in the waiting-room the marketwoman, who had come to present a bouquet to her. She remembered that her husband was a State minister. There were telegrams, visiting-cards and letters, congratulations and solicitations. Madame Marmet wrote to recommend her nephew to General Lariviere.

She went into the dining-room and fell in a chair. M. Martin-Belleme was just finishing his breakfast. He was expected at the Cabinet Council and at the former Finance Minister’s, to whom he owed a call.

“Do not forget, my dear friend, to call on Madame Berthier d’Eyzelles. You know how sensitive she is.”

She made no answer. While he was dipping his fingers in the glass bowl, he saw she was so tired that he dared not say any more. He found himself in the presence of a secret which he did not wish to know; in presence of an intimate suffering which one word would reveal. He felt anxiety, fear, and a certain respect.

He threw down his napkin.

“Excuse me, dear.”

He went out.

She tried to eat, but could swallow nothing.

At two o’clock she returned to the little house of the Ternes. She found Jacques in his room. He was smoking a wooden pipe. A cup of coffee almost empty was on the table. He looked at her with a harshness that chilled her. She dared not talk, feeling

that everything that she could say would offend and irritate him, and yet she knew that in remaining discreet and dumb she intensified his anger. He knew that she would return; he had waited for her with impatience. A sudden light came to her, and she saw that she had done wrong to come; that if she had been absent he would have desired, wanted, called for her, perhaps. But it was too late; and, at all events, she was not trying to be crafty.

She said to him:

“You see I have returned. I could not do otherwise. And then it was natural, since I love you. And you know it.”

She knew very well that all she could say would only irritate him. He asked her whether that was the way she spoke in the Rue Spontini.

She looked at him with sadness.

“Jacques, you have often told me that there were hatred and anger in your heart against me. You like to make me suffer. I can see it.”

With ardent patience, at length, she told him her entire life, the little that she had put into it; the sadness of the past; and how, since he had known her, she had lived only through him and in him.

The words fell as limpid as her look. She sat near him. He listened to her with bitter avidity. Cruel with himself, he wished to know everything about her last meetings with the other. She reported faithfully the events of the Great Britain Hotel; but she changed the scene to the outside, in an alley of the Casino, from fear that the image of their sad interview in a closed room should irritate her lover. Then she explained the meeting at the station. She had not wished to cause despair to a suffering man who was so violent. But since then she had had no news from him until the day when he spoke to her on the street. She repeated what she had replied to him. Two days later she had seen him at the opera, in her box. Certainly, she had not encouraged him to come. It was the truth.

It was the truth. But the old poison, slowly accumulating in his mind, burned him. She made the past, the irreparable past, present to him, by her avowals. He saw images of it which tortured him. He said:

“I do not believe you.”

And he added:

“And if I believed you, I could not see you again, because of the idea that you have loved that man. I have told you, I have written to you, you remember, that I did not wish him to be that man. And since—”

He stopped.

She said:

“You know very well that since then nothing has happened.”

He replied, with violence:

“Since then I have seen him.”

They remained silent for a long time. Then she said, surprised and plaintive:

“But, my friend, you should have thought that a woman such as I, married as I was—every day one sees women bring to their lovers a past darker than mine and yet they inspire love. Ah, my past—if you knew how insignificant it was!”

“I know what you can give. One can not forgive to you what one may forgive to another.”

“But, my friend, I am like others.”

“No, you are not like others. To you one can not forgive anything.”

He talked with set teeth. His eyes, which she had seen so large, glowing with tenderness, were now dry, harsh, narrowed between wrinkled lids and cast a new glance at her. He frightened her. She went to the rear of the room, sat on a chair, and there she remained, trembling, for a long time, smothered by her sobs. Then she broke into tears.

He sighed:

“Why did I ever know you?”

She replied, weeping:

“I do not regret having known you. I am dying of it, and I do not regret it. I have loved.”

He stubbornly continued to make her suffer. He felt that he was playing an odious part, but he could not stop.

“It is possible, after all, that you have loved me too.”

She answered, with soft bitterness:

“But I have loved only you. I have loved you too much. And it is for that you are punishing me. Oh, can you think that I was to another what I have been to you?”

“Why not?”

She looked at him without force and without courage.

“It is true that you do not believe me.”

She added softly:

“If I killed myself would you believe me?”

“No, I would not believe you.”

She wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief; then, lifting her eyes, shining through her tears, she said:

“Then, all is at an end!”

She rose, saw again in the room the thousand things with which she had lived in laughing intimacy, which she had regarded as hers, now suddenly become nothing to her, and confronting her as a stranger and an enemy. She saw again the nude woman who made, while running, the gesture which had not been explained to her; the Florentine models which recalled to her Fiesole and the enchanted hours of Italy; the

profile sketch by Dechartre of the girl who laughed in her pretty pathetic thinness. She stopped a moment sympathetically in front of that little newspaper girl who had come there too, and had disappeared, carried away in the irresistible current of life and of events.

She repeated:

“Then all is at an end?”

He remained silent.

The twilight made the room dim.

“What will become of me?” she asked.

“And what will become of me?” he replied.

They looked at each other with sympathy, because each was moved with self-pity.

Therese said again:

“And I, who feared to grow old in your eyes, for fear our beautiful love should end! It would have been better if it had never come. Yes, it would be better if I had not been born. What a presentiment was that which came to me, when a child, under the lindens of Joinville, before the marble nymphs! I wished to die then.”

Her arms fell, and clasping her hands she lifted her eyes; her wet glance threw a light in the shadows.

“Is there not a way of my making you feel that what I am saying to you is true? That never since I have been yours, never—But how could I? The very idea of it seems horrible, absurd. Do you know me so little?”

He shook his head sadly. “I do not know you.”

She questioned once more with her eyes all the objects in the room.

“But then, what we have been to each other was vain, useless. Men and women break themselves against one another; they do not mingle.”

She revolted. It was not possible that he should not feel what he was to her. And, in the ardor of her love, she threw herself on him and smothered him with kisses and tears. He forgot everything, and took her in his arms—sobbing, weak, yet happy—and clasped her close with the fierceness of desire. With her head leaning back against the pillow, she smiled through her tears. Then, brusquely he disengaged himself.

“I do not see you alone. I see the other with you always.” She looked at him, dumb, indignant, desperate. Then, feeling that all was indeed at an end, she cast around her a surprised glance of her unseeing eyes, and went slowly away.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS: A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly A hero must be human. Napoleon was human Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere Brilliancy of a fortune too new Curious to know her face of that day Disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared Do you think that people have not talked about us? Does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality Does one ever possess what one loves? Each had regained freedom, but he did not like to be alone Each was moved with self-pity Everybody knows about that Fringe which makes an unlovely border to the city Gave value to her affability by not squandering it He could not imagine that often words are the same as actions He studied until the last moment He is not intelligent enough to doubt He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes He knew now the divine malady of love Her husband had become quite bearable His habit of pleasing had prolonged his youth (Housemaid) is trained to respect my disorder I love myself because you love me I can forget you only when I am with you I wished to spoil our past I feel in them (churches) the grandeur of nothingness I have to pay for the happiness you give me I gave myself to him because he loved me I haven’t a taste, I have tastes I have known things which I know no more I do not desire your friendship Ideas they think superior to love—faith, habits, interests Immobility of time Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself Incapable of conceiving

that one might talk without an object It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him It is an error to be in the right too soon It was too late: she did not wish to win Jealous without having the right to be jealous Kisses and caresses are the effort of a delightful despair Knew that life is not worth so much anxiety nor so much hope Laughing in every wrinkle of his face Learn to live without desire Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges Life as a whole is too vast and too remote Life is made up of just such trifles Life is not a great thing Little that we can do when we are powerful Love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty Love was only a brief intoxication Lovers never separate kindly Made life give all it could yield Magnificent air of those beggars of whom small towns are proud Miserable beings who contribute to the grandeur of the past Nobody troubled himself about that originality None but fools resisted the current Not everything is known, but everything is said Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain One would think that the wind would put them out: the stars One who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel One is never kind when one is in love One should never leave the one whom one loves Picturesquely ugly Recesses of her mind which she preferred not to open Relatives whom she did not know and who irritated her Seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill She pleased society by appearing to find pleasure in it She is happy, since she likes to remember Should like better to do an immoral thing than a cruel one Simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others Since she was in love, she had lost prudence So well satisfied with his reply that he repeated it twice Superior men sometimes lack cleverness That sort of cold charity which is called altruism That if we live the reason is that we hope That absurd and generous fury for ownership The most radical breviary of scepticism since Montaigne The door of one’s room opens on the infinite The past is the only human reality—Everything that is, is past The one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you The violent pleasure of losing The discouragement which the irreparable gives The real support of a government is the Opposition The

politician never should be in advance of circumstances There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget There are many grand and strong things which you do not feel They are the coffin saying: ‘I am the cradle’ To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form Trying to make Therese admire what she did not know Umbrellas, like black turtles under the watery skies Unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything? We are too happy; we are robbing life What will be the use of having tormented ourselves in this world Whether they know or do not know, they talk Women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault You must take me with my own soul!

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