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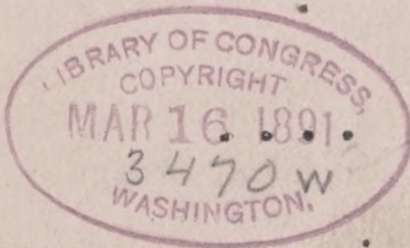
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THE  
WOMAN • OF • ICE.

Translated from the French of  
ADOLPHE BELOT.



ST. PAUL, MINN.  
THE PRICE-MCGILL PUBLISHING CO.  
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PART · ONE.





# THE WOMAN OF ICE.

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## CHAPTER I.

Henri Vandelle, who, from idleness, spent much of his time on the race courses in the environs of Paris, without thinking of hurting his fortune, committed the imprudence, in April, 1875, of interesting himself in a certain yellow jacket with a black cap, whose victory seemed assured. One of his friends, advised by Robert Milton, showed a decided preference for another jockey, very little thought of, and a bet was made between these two gentlemen, a most primitive bet, from which the question of money was barred—a dinner for ten persons, chosen by the winner, and to be given on the day and in the place most convenient to him.

The yellow jacket with a black cap was soon overtaken, passed, then distanced by the favorite of Robert Milton, and Vandelle found himself doomed to pay his debt, that same evening, in his rooms on the rue Laffitte. He had to return quickly to Paris, and, thanks to the able *chef* at the *café Riche*, improvised a dinner which he had not the time to prepare in his own home.

About half past seven the guests arrived. First of all, the winner of the bet, a well known journalist; A. M., one of those speculators who have one foot in the Temple, the other in the best *salons*, and on whom Dame Fortune, seduced by their *savoir-vivre*, their artistic taste, their Parisian gaiety, and, perhaps, by their fidelity to a fallen dynasty, never ceases to smile; Raynal, a rising lawyer, so intimate with the seated magistrates that one surmises

that he will not reach the bench; X——, who, having never done anything himself, lived at the feet of great men, warmed himself in their rays, and thought that he shone. He is the friend of all the celebrities, the satellite of all the stars, the ardent admirer of all those who triumph. If he meets you in the *foyer* of a theater, he takes you aside and says: “I have just come from Alexandre; he read me his latest play; very good! very strong! Victorien told me about his eulogy on Autran; what language! Sarah confided to me her idea of her part in the new play; astonishing woman! it will be a great success! I met Emile, Leon and Victor; they gave me their latest political opinions; very good; Europe has only to wait.”

Vandelle knew all these gentlemen; he welcomed them and thanked his

friend, the journalist, for having selected them. "But," said he, "we are not complete; you said there would be ten." "Here are the tardy ones; they come in a crowd, from timidity, no doubt," answered the journalist.

In fact, you could hear in the antechamber a murmur of voices, bursts of laughter, then light steps, the rustling of dresses, whose trains are being arranged before entering, and the door of the *salon* opened to admit five pretty women, in evening toilettes. Vandelle frowned; he did not expect this feminine element in his private house; although he was a bachelor, the society that was imposed on him would, without doubt, weary him. But, too well bred to show his discontent, too good a player to hesitate to pay his debts, he stepped forward to

meet the new arrivals and received them in the most courteous manner.

To what class of society did these ladies belong? Neither to the swells nor to the arts, nor to the middle class. Were they of the gallant world? Perhaps. But which? That world has, like all others, its aristocrats and its lower class. In that world you salute queens, you jostle common folks; as in politics, you meet some pure and many impure. A large and small business is carried on; wholesale, fluctuating prices; retail, from day to day, fixed prices. The guests of Vandelle turned their attention only to large transactions; they were of the large manufacturers, of the decorated. Were they therefore of that chevroned phalanx, so much in fashion under the Empire and whose exploits have been heard of all over the universe? Are we

in the presence of Adele C., always seductive, in spite of the winters accumulated on her adorable head; of her friend Fidelite, who, after becoming rich in the game of love, ruined herself during the summer at Luchon, during the winter at Monte-Carlo, at games of chance; of Cora P., celebrated for her sales, which were not exactly charity sales; of Caroline H., a setting sun, so successful that she was taken for the aurora of a beautiful morning? No, the guests of Vandelle had nothing in common with those whom a disrespectful dramatic author nicknamed the "Old Guard." Were they then of the "Young Guard?" It did not exist; the survivors of the "Old" adopted no pupils, did not form a company of children; they died as they had lived, unproductive, without descendants. All the great courtesans of the Empire, those who have dis-

appeared like Barucci, Anna Deslions and so many others, and those who have survived their glory, had no school, no imitators.

We do not mean to say that Paris has become a saintly city; but certain customs have entirely changed. They no longer show off so imprudently; they hold less place in the theatres, around the lake and at Longchamps. These women no longer unite to form a *coterie*, with this devise: "*Hors de nous, pas de salut.*" Which means: "With us alone can you make; you pluck on a large scale." They no longer entertain among themselves, at dinners, suppers, balls, *baccarat* parties, to observe each other, to disparage each other, to talk scandal, to pass, from hand to hand, their lovers, together to devour them; and until this was

accomplished they never allowed the victims to escape from their vicious circle.

You no longer see them showing off in the *bois*, in carriages with eight springs, throwing plates from the windows of the *cafe Anglais*, occupying apartments costing twenty thousand francs rent and making a cynical parade of a luxury badly acquired. They live isolated, or two together, scorning their co-religionists, pretending not to know their names. They affect simple manners, preferring a coupon to a diamond necklace, go about on foot, wear simple dresses and they do not paint. It is above all, the fashion, among these women, to replace large, sumptuous apartments with a simple *garconniere*. The most of them make so little noise that you scarcely know them. If some one asks: "Who are the fashionable *cocottes*; where do you meet the new generation;



by whom are our old ones replaced?" the most expert man about town could not answer; he looks in vain for a well known name.

Yes, the great courtesans are dead, and the time is past when women will sing voluntarily: "I am a *cocotte*, a great *cocotte*." They are still *cocottes*, but they try to hide their *cocotterie* under an austere exterior. The bird has no longer a house of its own. They blush at their trade. The operatic theaters, so much in fashion, are their great benefactors; with a slender voice they go to the *Renaissance*, with a slender false voice to the *Folies-Dramatiques*; they get into the chorus, and the game is played; you see them, for the rest of their life, colleagues of Patti, of Nilson, or of Krauss. They write a novel; have it printed, and send it to some paper where they always find some admirer

of their beauty to praise their style and, from women of pleasure, they become women of letters.

This general aspiration, and all for the honor of our epoch, toward an avowable trade, brings likewise other results: the true artist, formerly disdained by these women, or at least relegated to the background, considered as an object of luxury and always sacrificed to the financier, comes forth to live in the light. In speaking of him, the maid says: "*Monsieur* is come," and you do not think of hiding him in the closet when the bell rings. It is true that the artist, the painter above all, has also made progress; he no longer wears his hair long; he has replaced the pipe with the cigarette, learns economy, points out in case of need the good things on the stock exchange, buys objects of art on speculation, and when

he is in *vogue*, makes annually one or two hundred thousand francs. He merits therefore his place in the sun, then, following the slang expression, despised rightly by the Academicians, he himself shines.

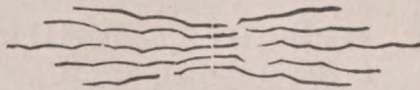
And, since all is connected together, she who is an artist and she who lives with an artist, thinks herself bound to live in a certain way. Her life is very regular; she arises at an early hour, practices hydropathy, takes care of her health, rides on horseback in deserted parts of the park, is always dressed before noon, brings up often her own or an adopted child, goes out with a companion, and is conscientious in all this, for the time is past when we could say with Gavarni, "The man who can make women dreamy, can call himself a great person."

## CHAPTER II.

The five women invited to Vandelle's dinner belonged to the modern generation, to the new regime. They also stood high in the ranks of gallantry, but they were modest and did not wear ostentatiously the marks of their grade. One of them only had a well known name. This one was a remarkably beautiful woman—descended from Philip the Good and his mistress, Marie de Cambrugge, in honor of whom, and to immortalize whose beautiful red hair, he established the order of the Golden Fleece. V—, nicknamed *la Pudeur meme*, because of her extremely innocent air (some good women said she was not so innocent), was graceful and slender,

her shoulders broad and well curved, the veins full, the hips symmetrical, and Francheschi, so they say, had her pose for his Isis. *La Pudeur meme* was an artist from instinct and from right. She had desired to obtain a place and she had acquired it, for she knew what she wanted; on her fragile body was set a little but a very clear head. Her imagination was sometimes extravagant; but in her daily, domestic life, she was an orderly and almost a business woman. To-day she owned a country house as well as a city one; she wrote, painted on porcelain, and shot. Lais and Phryne would not have disowned her as their daughter; but perhaps she did not want them for mothers; she dreamed of resembling the Greek courtesans, only on the plastic and artistic sides, and her dream was realized.

We will designate her companions only by fantastic names; Berthe, whom you would be compelled to call clever if, as they say, beauty is *esprit du corps*. Louise, with a charming head on a slender body; she had been nicknamed, in remembrance of la Guimard, the skeleton of the Graces. Juliette, able from long experience to keep between two ages, it was said of her: "She plays at *trente-et-quarante*." Last of all Blanche, an electric brunette whose heart resembled a mill: "It beats and it turns."



### CHAPTER III.

They seated themselves at table in a room furnished with exquisite taste, in pure Louis XIII style. Numerous candles, fixed in candlesticks and some gold candelabras, artistically chased, lighted the table without blinding the guests. The wines of Vandelle, from his own cellar, one of the best in Paris, were plentiful and began to loosen the most discreet tongues, to excite vivid imaginations.

“No, gentlemen,” said Louise, “I do not understand how men are base enough to attack honest women; if they resist, they are honest; if they succumb, they are no longer honest and the men have lost their time.”

“You speak truly,” replied the journalist; “virtue has some good in it; it reposes. I am not sorry, from time to time, to make a little trip to the camp of good society myself.”

“Yes, yes, we understand,” said V—, “the object of your preferences is known. It is a society woman, to be sure, but one who has played with fire so often that you must admit she is now pretty well scorched.”

X— was about to reply when Berthe, to cut short the discussion, raised her glass, saying:

“To the health of our host, to the good dinner he gives us, to those that he intends to give us in the future.”

“Above all, to the last,” added Blanche.

“Permit me, ladies and gentlemen,” said Vandelle, smiling; “drink to the



past if the memory is pleasant, but do not commit yourselves for the future."

"You do not wish to invite us again?" cried V—. "You make us cruelly aware that you are only paying a debt; if fortune had smiled on you today we should not have been here."

As Vandelle did not reply, they insisted that he should explain his remark. He hesitated some minutes, but, as they pressed him on all sides, he ended by saying that this dinner, in fact, would be the last which would be owed to his munificence.

He made this a vowal with reluctance, and it was greeted from all sides of the table with exclamations.

"The last! Why? How?"

"By what right? He does not belong to himself, but to his friends."

"Is he going to become a monk?"

"Has he lost his fortune?"

“Is he going to become a more serious man?”

“Have the factories of his father closed?”

“It is not that at all,” cried Blanche; “a horrible thought strikes me—Vandelle is going to marry.”

“He! it is impossible—he has no right to fool us.”

“He is going to marry, I tell you; what can you expect from a man who hides his mistress?”

“That is certainly true; we have never seen her.”

“Look at him—he is blushing. He looks down; I have guessed it.”

Blanche exaggerated; Vandelle, thirty years old, Parisian to the core, a professed *viveur*, was not a man to be embarrassed so easily. He hesitated to make known a determination which, perhaps, frightened and startled him,

and, in place of regarding all the women with the boldness with which they had never thought to reproach him, he half closed his eyes and appeared to collect his thoughts. At last he seemed to regain his composure, and, leaning on the table, his face in his hands, he said:

“Well, yes, man is not perfect; I am going to marry.”

Louise arose, and, holding her glass, said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, you are invited to assist at the funeral, church service and interment of the youthful folly of Monsieur Henri Vandelle, who died instantly at the residence of the Mayor, provided with the marriage sacrament. Drink to her!”

“Let us drink to her,” repeated all the guests in a chorus.

When the glasses were emptied, new questions were propounded:

“Who are you going to marry?”  
asked Berthe.

“Is it a marriage for money?”

“Is it a love match?”

“Is it the lady of whom we were  
speaking?”

Vandelle, having decided, without  
doubt, to keep quiet, lighted a cigar,  
and, arising, ordered the servant to  
serve the coffee.



## CHAPTER IV.

The conversation grew more general. The unity of the guests was broken. They moved the chairs about, formed little groups around the ends of the table or in the corners of the dining room. Juliette and Louise paired off with Raynal and said to him in a suppliant manner:

“You will give us tickets for the next trial, won't you? We have never seen a criminal.”

“You will never see one, young ladies,” answered the lawyer in a grave voice.

“Why?”

“Because there are none.”

“What! there are no criminals? What are you talking about?”

The wines and liqueurs of Vandelle had affected Raynal; the glances of Juliette and Louise had shaken his equilibrium, and his next remarks showed the result.

“No, ladies,” said he, “criminals are an invention of justice. It is because the judges have to live that culpable ones are found. Judges are not created because of criminals, but criminals were made to occupy the judges.”

“How about the assassins, the poisoners, the forgers?” asked A. M., and the journalist who had drawn near.

“Some accidents, gentlemen, some unhappy circumstances, an unlucky chance, fatality, a question more or less of temperament. There are some who have no show. It is that which we always try

to prove to the jurors. If they would believe us, if we could assure them of the conviction which animates us, society would preserve all its members."

"It is a good thing for society that the judges are deaf to your noble appeals," observed *la Pudeur meme*.

Vandelle who, for an instant, had been walking up and down the room in an agitated manner without anyone noticing him, drew near, and interrupted the lawyer:

"This dissertation is very interesting, but I have some preparations to make, as I leave town tomorrow."

"What! are you going to get married in the country?" asked some one.

"In your manufactory, among the machines?"

Vandelle did not reply.

"Do you intend sending us away?" said Bertha.

“Before the usual little game of *baccarat*?” added Louise.

“Yes, yes,” cried all the women, “let us have a game of *baccarat*!”

The master of the house saw he could not refuse. He rang, gave some orders, and soon a gaming table was prepared in the middle of an adjoining room. But, after attending to the wants of his guests, he did not feel compelled to keep them company; he left the *salon*, passed into his bed-room, arranged his toilet, said a few words to his servant, and went out.

In a few minutes he reached the boulevard des Italiens, and refusing the hacks offered to him by the coachmen, turned, with a quick step, toward the rue de Seze. About the middle of this street he stopped before a *portecoche*, ascended quickly two flights of stairs and rang the bell.



A maid opened the door for him, and as he started to enter the apartment without speaking, she stopped him by these words:

“You know of course, sir, that Madame is out.”

“Madame not here?” repeated Vandelle, paling a little.

“What do you mean? When did she go out?”

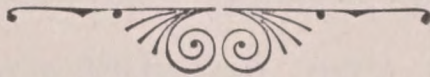
“At least an half hour ago; I understood that she was going to your house.”

“Why did you not tell me that at once?” said Vandelle, his color coming back.

He descended the stairs and retraced his steps.

“Ah! murmured he on the way, “I love her more than I thought and meanwhile——”

All at once, he remembered the slightly mixed society he had left in his *salon*, and, startled, he took a cab and drove rapidly home.



## CHAPTER V.

All the guests of Vandelle were not seated around the *baccarat* table; A. M., Raynal, V—— and Blanche, were talking together in a corner of the *salon*.

“I denounce A. M.,” said Blanche; “he knows the mistress of Vandelle, and he refuses to say anything about her.”

The speculator tried to defend himself, but two pretty arms were thrown around him and at the same time these words were whispered in his ear:

“Come, what have you to fear? What disgrace is there for this woman, as she is going to be married, the situation will soon be legitimate? There is no longer any mystery, relieve

your mind, this secret must have weighed on you for some time.”

“Do you want me to help you,” asked V—, leaning toward him. “I am on the scent, and I will bet that it is a good one.”

“Let us hear about your scent,” cried all in one voice.

“Do you remember that stranger? a Portuguese, I believe. She had a daughter who resembled her in a wonderful manner. Everybody noticed them. You met them everywhere—in the *bois*, at the races, at the theater, at the seaside.”

“Light brunettes, with queer eyes, and startling toilets?”

“That’s it. Everything about them was striking. One of them, the younger, made her horse go the length of the avenue des Champs Elysees backwards one day. Reaching the *rond-point*, the animal, who up to that time had given

in to all her caprices, refused to advance or rather go backwards. The girl at first struggled with him sweetly, then temper got the better of her, and, all at once, drawing a small pistol, which she always carried, she shot the horse and fell with him in the dust."

"Well, well! that was plucky."

"Poor horse," murmured Raynal, who was just drunk enough to be tender hearted.

"The story does not surprise me," replied Blanche; "I have seen her do many eccentric things at the seaside. She always swam way out without troubling herself as to how to return, and it was necessary, at least once a week, to fish her out."

"Nothing frightened her," continued V—. "One day, she left Luchon for the harbor of Venasque, a very respectable climb, you know. She breakfasted,

following the usual custom, near a glacier; got full on champagne and rarified air, and, when the moment for departure arrived, declared that she intended to climb the Maladetta, a superb mountain, but nearly inaccessible. Her mother implored her to renounce the project, but nothing could stop her, and she set out with the guides who were seduced by the promise of a large reward. The next day, no news—extreme anxiety—despair of the mother—searching parties on all sides. At last they found her, half dead from cold, before a glacier, which she did not wish to leave and which she obstinately insisted on crossing.

“What a funny type,” cried Raynal.

“Listen,” continued V———, “my souvenirs carry me still farther back, the mother called herself Madame Sandraz, and the daughter—Esther,

“It is two years since any one has seen them.”

“Madame Sandraz is dead and Mlle. Sandraz must have returned to Portugal,” said A. M.

“Wrong,” replied V—, “the Esther in question is in Paris. She lives in the Madeleine quarter, and she is the mistress of Vandelle.”

“How do you know?”

“A thousand indications, each one more convincing than the former, prove it.”

“I prefer to hear A. M.,” said Raynal, “since he seems to have known her of whom we are talking.”

“A. M., go on.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“What is Mlle. Esther?”

“An honest woman, first of all.”

“An honest woman with a lover?”

“She has but one, and she is going to marry him.”

“She is lucky.”

“To have only one lover?”

“No, to get married.”

“And what was Madame Sandraz,” asked Raynal.

“A Portuguese, as V—— said, the widow of a Frenchman established at Lisbon; she moved to France after the death of her husband. A charming woman, who had only one idea in her head—to marry her daughter. It was for that very reason that she came to France, counting on the beauty and the eccentricities of Esther, and on the Parisians, who pass for men of good taste. She had only a small fortune, and, risking all for all, she spent it lavishly to make a display and to introduce Esther, always looking for a son-in-law, prince or millionaire, who would



repay the cost of the exhibition, with interest. She died, leaving her daughter on the streets of Paris, where Vandelle picked her up."

"I think many others would have stooped to do as much," said the young lawyer.

"Why has he not presented her to us?" asked Blanche.

"I do not know how you can say that without wounding your modesty," replied A. M., "but you are not exactly of the same world."

"How! what has she more than we?"

"More than you? nothing assuredly;" answered the speculator, "only she has perhaps at least——"

Happily for the *amour-propre* of these women, Raynal, still drunk, threw himself, head foremost, into the conversation.

“It is a question of quantity that is raised” cried he, without knowing very well what he was saying. “That is not offensive to you, ladies.”

“It is a law axiom, *jus romanum*. I will uphold this whenever you wish, I will make a triumph before the jury.”

“Are you sure of it?” asked V——.

“I beg the judge not to allow the public to interrupt me, the other side will answer.”

“Bravo! bravo!”

“A robe is necessary.”

“A cap.”

“A band.”

And following the words, the orator was costumed in an instant with a black shawl, a woman’s hat and a paper band.

“And the traditional glass of water,” said Blanche, placing a glass before him.

“You confound,” observed Raynal, “the lawyers bench with the legislative tribune. All the same I will drink.”

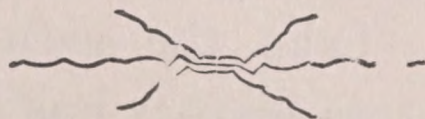
“He is really drunk,” said Blanche in the ear of V——, “he does not see that his glass of water is a glass of kirsch.

Raynal, standing behind a chair, his arms leaning on the back, began:

“What is this about? Concerning the number of lovers these women can have. Well, would you make a crime of their success? Do you pretend to turn to their confusion the *eclat* of their triumphs? Take the great captains whose prowess history has celebrated, would beauty lose its prestige because of its conquests? It would be unjust, monstrous, and if such a system could be brought before the court, I declare—I declare—I declare—”

“What do you declare?”

The orator could not continue; emotion or kirsch cut short his speech; he extended his arms and fell on a sofa which some one had prudently placed behind him.



## CHAPTER VI.

This brilliant and ever changing pleading prevented them from hearing the door bell ring. It was lucky that the servants' room was quiet. Vandelle's valet ran to open the door.

A young woman entirely covered by a long white cloak entered the ante-chamber, and, without asking any questions, turned, as if she was in her own home, toward a little boudoir next to the bed room. As she was about to put her hand on the door knob, the domestic, at first somewhat astonished, recovered himself, and said:

“Madame will be alone; my master has been gone an half hour.”

“What, gone out!” said the young woman turning around, “all your lights are lit. From the street it might be called an illumination.”

At the same time a confused noise reached her ear.

“There is company here,” she said.

“Yes, my master entertained some friends this evening; but,” continued the domestic, “without doubt their society did not please him and he went out soon after dinner.”

“He went to see me,” said she, smiling, “and when he learns that I am here, he will hasten to join me. I will wait for him.”

She entered the boudoir and took off her cloak while the servant lighted the candles. This being done, he was about to withdraw, when she said to him:

“It is a bachelor dinner that Monsieur Vandelle gave this evening?”

“Yes, Madame — bachelors,” stammered the domestic.

“Bachelors accompanied by their—governesses, for I hear women’s voices.”

The faithful Joseph thought he might commit an indiscretion so as to defend his master. In his mind he gained nothing from what he kept. Was she not directly the cause of it?

“Madame won’t be scandalized,” said he pretentiously, “it was a farewell dinner.”

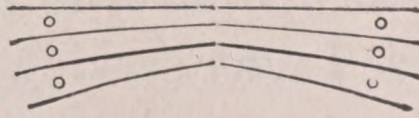
“A farewell dinner? I do not understand.”

“Yes, madame, my master bade adieu this evening to his bachelor life; he announced, while I was serving dinner, to his friends that he was going to marry.”

“Ah!” said she.

And you could have heard her murmur these words: “At last!”

Joseph, having once started, was disposed to be garrulous. He talked with the freedom which the Parisian servants have. Congratulated the young woman on her change of position, and asked her to keep him in her service; but with a gesture she stopped and dismissed him, after ordering him to close the door, so that no indiscrete person could enter the boudoir.





## CHAPTER VII.

Following an evening at the Italian Opera, where Esther Sandraz, whom we have seen enter Vandelle's apartments, was one of the most noticeable figures; the manager of the Opera, observing her, thought that the portrait of the beautiful stranger should be put in *Le Figaro*. It was, if one can use the expression, a descending portrait. He described her from head to foot, telling all that he saw, regretting, possibly, that he could not say more. The manager was not ordinarily so enthusiastic, but Esther Sandraz had completely subjugated him; he had watched her persistently with a pair of glasses, and

had followed her out of the theater. Here is the portrait:

“Black hair, which in certain lights shows a tint of red; a low, broad forehead; thick eyebrows which nearly meet over great, velvety, almond shaped eyes; eyes which have a strange expression and soft bluish circles beneath them. A straight, well formed, though not over small, nose, with large, rosy nostrils which dilate with the slightest emotion; a complexion like the inner petals of a tea rose; full, red lips, with a little down over the upper one, which is short and permits one to see an exquisite set of teeth. A little, dimpled chin; a full, large, but well made throat; graceful, sloping shoulders and a well developed bosom whose perfect contour and firmness can not be doubted. A round waist; an elegant, supple figure with a perfect carriage; feet as small as a

child's—or a Portuguese. An astonishingly splendid woman, who will certainly create a sensation in Paris.”

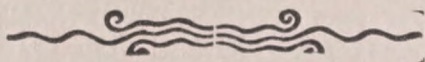
During a year she made a profound sensation. She went everywhere, always surrounded by a veritable court; three Parisians and five foreigners asked for her hand. To the despair of her mother, she dismissed them all, with the pretext that she did not love them. Then, one day, Madame Sandraz died, and Henri Vandelle, who had been on an intimate footing in the household for some time, profited from the despair of Esther, from the great void in her life and from the isolated condition to which her mourning condemned her, to penetrate little by little into the heart up to that time invulnerable. But what sorrow followed!

Vandelle's victory had its cause: Born in the Hautes-Pyrenees, a coun-

try where life is rough and hard, accustomed to difficult paths, perilous ascension, hunting excursions, often dangerous, he had led an active, adventurous youth, during which his muscles had developed, and his body had acquired strength for his after life. When at twenty-one he obtained possession of his mother's fortune, and determined to settle in Paris, he was in perfect condition to withstand dissolute Paris life. He went through everything, and did not die. At thirty, when he met Esther, thanks to his perfect constitution, and the hardiness of his earlier years, he had as yet lost none of the vigor of youth; a too feverish existence, abuse of sensuality, an over-exciting of the nervous system, had even given him a factious force which was added to the other.

But this entirely material development was acquired to the detriment of his moral faculties; he lived too fast to contemplate the future or to learn to know himself; his senses spoke too imperiously; he was too much their slave to listen to the beatings of his heart, and to obey them. What else could he have been, in the world where he lived, in the middle of that easy voluptuousness into which he had thrown himself headlong, on his arrival in Paris, with all the ardor of his twenty years, the impetuosity of his temperament? In the rough mountains where he rarely saw his father, who was absorbed with the business of an important manufactory; deprived of the gentle care of his mother whom he had scarcely known; where could he have learned how to love? Who had told him of tenderness, of sentiment, of true affection? Had he

been told that he must not confound the satisfaction of a material appetite with happiness; that besides the women of pleasure who had helped him to spend his fortune, there were others near whom he could live happily and taste ineffacable joys? He delighted in his ignorance and continued to turn in the whirlpool; proud of his success in the boudoirs; satisfied with his never ceasing *amours*; ignorant of the woman, he confounded her with other women.



## CHAPTER VIII.

Mlle. Sandraz, when she became intimate with Vandelle, aroused in him desire, not love. But Esther was deceived by him: hardy as he was, in spite of his vigorous constitution, his ruddy color, Vandelle had a certain native distinction, an elegance of manner, a little of the dissimulative power of his neighbors, the Bearnais, an intuition of worldly things, and all the tricks of the Parisian. He perceived that Esther was different from the amiable creatures with whom he had up to that time lived; she was their superior as well in education and refinement, as in beauty, and merited being treated with consideration and tact.

He therefore dissimulated his desire, and appeared, when near her, sincere, tender and discrete, because he knew well that she would neither understand or pardon any audacity. Thanks to this hability, she neither feared him or herself, and allowed him, little by little, to enter into her life. She was lost from that moment. While in their long interviews Vandelle cast longing side glances at Esther; while he at once admired her original beauty, fine and sensual; while he tasted, at a distance, those thick, voluptuous, red lips; while, imagination aiding him, he tried to penetrate the charming mysteries, to construct in his mind a splendid Venus, agitated and palpitating; while he profited from the least occasion to draw nearer to his idol, to breathe the aroma from her hair, to inhale her breath and meanwhile, to covet her; Esther, on her side, was



attracted by him in an entirely different way. Too pure to divine his intentions, to have the least idea of his aspirations, to make a distinction between love and passion, she unwittingly allowed herself to be conquered by his care, his forethought, his discrete kindness, his respect. She was under the charm of a very astute intellect, fit for any change, ready to uphold any point, even the most moral, and sharpened by the wish to please and to triumph. She no longer saw any one but him in this great Paris, where she was a stranger, without family, without friends. It was with him alone that she could speak of the adored mother she had lost; he alone understood her; he alone wept with her; and, one day, to her surprise, she found that she loved him, honestly, chastly, with all her heart.

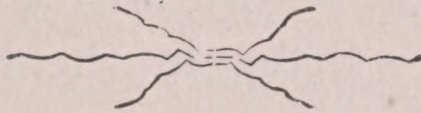
## CHAPTER IX.

Must this love necessarily throw her into the arms of Vandelle? No; a fall is not obligatory because you stand on the brink of a precipice. Religion, education, great self-respect, sometimes preserve women from irredeemable faults. Others, without settled principles, have in themselves, a natural resisting strength; they delight in heroic struggles, they cling to their virtue, and thanks to desperate efforts, never succumb. This last class, of a cold temperament, always guided by reason, triumph over all dangers. With both, the soul or good sense, saves the body.

But Esther was not of either class. Under the tutelage of an adoring, irresponsible mother, she had received more mental than moral training. Her imagination, naturally vivid, was still more excited by a wandering, erratic life, full of unforeseen events, of dangerous dreams. Troubled in the present, disquieted over the future, in the middle of a captious atmosphere, Madame Sandraz had failed in the first duties of a mother—to strengthen her child's moral fibre, and so to arm her against temptation. Besides, Esther was a Portuguese, and the women of her country, whose ancestors colonized Brazil, have a little Indian blood in their veins; their temperament shows the effects of a tropical origin, nearly equatorial. We have been told of Mlle. Sandraz eccentricities: her foolhardy rides, her dangerously long baths in the ocean, her

perilous ascensions; they indicated a fiery nature, with latent forces which must be fought and controlled. Unconsciously and from instinct, she overcame them by excessive fatigue. But these victories over matter were only passing; it asserted sooner or later its rights, more imperious than before, and Esther was soon powerless to conquer it. Her love for Vandelle had, to some extent, softened her, had swept away her former uneasiness, had given her a taste for domestic life, for long *tete-a-tetes*. As long as her heart was free, her senses slept, or, if they spoke, she did not understand their language; from the moment she loved, all her ardor was aroused and the fire was kindled. She was, from then on, in the power of Vandelle, morally and physically disarmed for the combat. Two forces were present: one, simply

natural, coming from Vandelle; the other, emanating from Esther, more ideal, which were about to materialize. An electric current was established between these two forces, and, following a shock, a spark flashed forth.



## CHAPTER X.

Esther had made no conditions, exacted no promises. Would she acknowledge her fall? Ardent glances had shot over their faces, passionate smiles had been exchanged, two looks had blended into one, two hands had been crushed in an embrace, lips had mingled in a kiss. The victory of the one, the defeat of the other, written in the future, was that day, due to chance.

After that, what could she demand of Vandelle? That he should marry her? She doubt his intentions! Was he not as free as she? Had he not always treated her with tenderness, with respect? Had he not been pre-

sented, while her mother was alive, as a suitor for her hand? Now that she was an orphan, without a protector, was she less worthy in his eyes? Was he not aware of her good birth, nearly noble, and of an irreproachable past? Would a Parisian like Vandelle, habituated to so many strange things, reproach her for her eccentricities? Besides, the time of folly had passed and would not return; the existence of Esther was now as simple, and quiet, as it had previously been noisy and full of motion. She lived the life of a recluse in the apartments on the rue de Seze, where her mother had died, she received only Henri Vandelle, went out only with him, and always veiled, always mysterious, so that their *liaison* was not suspected.

This seclusion, this hidden existence could only last for a time. Vandelle

evidently expected to marry her, when she should be forgotten by the Parisian world; he wished to make for her an existence which, if not *bourgeoise*, should be calm and tranquil; he wished above all that his father, one of the richest manufacturers in the Midi, a proprietor of marble and slate quarries which he worked himself, in the Haute-Garonne, near Montrejeau, should make no objection to his marriage, and be happy to call Esther his daughter.

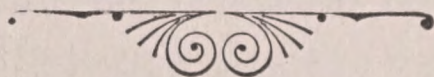
But Vandelle's father had now been dead for six months, and his suffrage became useless: on another side, Paris bowed down to new idols, without thinking any more of the beautiful Portuguese whom, just a short time before, it had adored. All the reasons, therefore, for delaying the union of the two lovers had disappeared, and Mlle. Sandraz, who, from delicate



feeling, thought that nothing should be urged, nevertheless awaited with some impatience the time when the only man she had ever loved, he whom she had chosen above all, would give her the position in the world to which she aspired, would dissipate the shadows which now surrounded her and allow her to live, not as before, in the middle of the noisy crowd, not in the whirl of society—she no longer desired that—but lawfully, as his acknowledged wife.

The desired moment seemed at last to have arrived. Henri Vandelle had made in the Haute-Garonne, a fifteen days' journey to arrange his business and prepare for his marriage. On his return, he had sent Esther some charming presents which could only be bridal gifts. Besides, this farwell dinner to his bachelor life, this declaration made at

table, all indicated that the end of an illegal union and of passionate but unavowed *amours* was near, and that new *amours*, just as passionate but more legitimate, were to succeed.



## CHAPTER XI.

The sweet thoughts to which Esther Sandraz had given herself up, in the boudoir where we left her, were soon interrupted by a noise and a voice at the door.

She got up quickly and ran to open it. It was useless to parley; she had recognized the master of the house.

“I beg your pardon, my dear Esther, for keeping you waiting,” said Vandelle on entering, “but I went to your apartments; that is my excuse. What possessed you to come here this evening? I swear I did not hope—”

“I doubt it, and if I had supposed that you would have company, believe

me— I was bored at home, I feared I would not see you. I was sad and I came. Once here, although our nest was occupied, I did not wish to leave. I never retrace my steps.”

While speaking, she had thrown off a large Spanish mantilla, which she was accustomed to wear, and she appeared superb in evening toilet, her shoulders bare.

“Where are you going or where have you been?” asked Vandelle, surprised to see her so magnificently appareled.

“From no where,” answered she, “and I am going no where.”

“Then, it is for me?”

“No, sir; said she regarding him tenderly while she smiled, “it is simply a caprice. I told you that I was bored at home. I dressed for distraction. I am ornamented like a goddess with all your presents. It was a way of

thinking of you. Seeing myself so handsome, I did not wish my beauty to be wasted and so I came to receive homage. Do you blame me?"

He looked at her and found her, this evening, more radiant, more lovely than ever. Then, as he was about to reply, she added:

"Take care, your friends are in the the next room."

"I will send them away," said he quickly.

"Later. Sit down and let us talk."

He obeyed, and sat down beside her on the sofa. She was silent for several minutes, then, leaning toward him, asked:

"Do you still love me?"

"Do I love you!"

He tried to take her in his arms, but she gently pushed him away, saying:

“Then, if you love me, why have you any secrets from me?”

“Secrets?” replied he, paling.

She did not notice his trouble and continued:

“It appears you are going to marry, and all the world knows it, except me.”

“Esther!”

She laid her head on Vandelle’s shoulder, murmuring these words:

“For what moment are you reserving this surprise?”

“Who told you?” stammered he.

He wished to draw away, but she had taken his hands and pressed them to her bosom, saying in the slow voice, which the women of her country have:

“Am I wrong? This dinner, was it not a farewell one to those nights of folly, of which I have never been jealous, as you are well aware? Have I not proved to you, Henri, from the day

when, trusting to your honor, I gave myself to you, that I renounced my *mondaine* existence so that I could devote every minute of my life to you?"

He had succeeded in quietly drawing away from her; first of all he made a backward movement so that, having no support on his shoulder, she would have to raise her head. Then, in order that he might not be touched by her, might not notice the captivating perfumes which arose from her, might not be enthralled by her magnetic glance, might no longer see her delicious mouth, her tempting lips, those adorable shoulders which shone in their nakedness, he arose, and going over to the chimney, he took from the *Maryland* a piece of paper and pretended to be absorbed in rolling a cigarette.

"What is the matter?" asked she, astonished. "You seem annoyed. Ah!

I understand; you wished to tell me this good news yourself. Well, tell it, I know nothing about it. Tell me everything! You have overcome the difficulties which stood in the way of our marriage? That then is the secret of the trip you made, of the fifteen days' absence, during which you wrote me but once. I am not reproaching you, sir, I have never done such a thing."

She left her place on the sofa, and, rejoining him, stood before him, took his hands in hers and leaning her head on his breast, she asked:

"When will we marry?"

"Never," answered he, without trying this time to avoid her glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I love you too much to marry you."

And he tried to draw her to him, to soften his words with a kiss.



She resisted his efforts, and said:

“Come, let us talk seriously, I beg of you.”

“I am speaking seriously,” replied Vandelle, in a voice which he tried hard to make firm but which trembled in spite of his efforts. “Do you not know that marriage is the death of love? I am not weary of loving you, Esther; I wish to adore you all my life.”

She drew still farther away, saying:

“You are punishing me for having come here when you did not invite me, for having divined the projects which you wished to reveal yourself; I am wrong— Adieu, sir; I leave you with your friends, and will wait till you feel inclined to take me into your confidence.”

She took from the sofa the lace mantilla which she had thrown there, and was about to throw it over her shoul-

ders, when suddenly Vandelle sprang forward, seized her by the arm, and, riveting her, so to speak, to the place where she stood, cried:

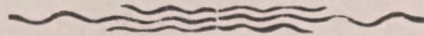
“Remain, since you are here. As well today as tomorrow.”

“I do not understand you,” said she frightened. “What is it you have to tell me? Speak! speak!”

“On one condition. That you hear me calmly to the end.”

“Calmly? So be it. I am ready.”

Withdrawing from his grasp she sank into a chair, and resting her elbows on her knees, her head in her hands, she regarded him intently.



## CHAPTER XII.

Henri Vandelle had returned to his place before the chimney, and, lighting a cigarette to give himself countenance, he asked :

“Do you take marriage seriously, my dear Esther? Do you care for the opinions, prejudices, the foolish conventionalities of the world?”

She did not answer; still seated, she contented herself with fixing him with an astonished gaze.

“Have you not told me an hundred times,” continued he more and more troubled by her silence, “that there was only one true thing in life—love.”

“Well!” said she, dryly.

“There is another thing about which I have not worried, because I thought it assured—wealth.”

“Wealth! its true, I had not thought of that. Well?”

“Well! my father, when he died, left his business matters in an inextricable disorder. If a liquidation is made, and the works are sold, I am ruined.”

“And then?”

“I have been offered a means of saving myself. The largest stockholder, the heaviest creditor of the business, is a young girl whose father died previous to mine. Her guardian is an old family friend.”

“And he proposes that you shall marry his ward?” asked she, in a calm manner.

“Yes.”

“And your answer?”

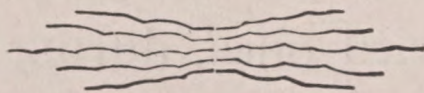
“I consented.”

Esther sprang up with a bound, and, drawing near him, said:

“It is not true! You are lying! It cannot be possible! Are we not united? Do you not belong to me as well as I to you? Can anything part us? Ah! you wish to try me, to see if I am capable of doubting. No, I do not doubt, Henri, I believe in your love as I do in my own. You, marry another! Ah! the bonds which hold us would have to be broken first, the memories which rivet us together would have to be effaced from our hearts! You, marry another! So you would like to kill me, to see me die! Do you think you could leave me? you tried once, during the beginning of our *liaison*; you were afraid of loving me too much, you said, and you went away. You came back quickly, repentant and remorseful. And I, could I live without you? Stop! the

idea alone makes me shiver. Tell once again that nothing can separate us, that you love me!"

"Oh! yes, I adore you!" replied he, catching her in his arms, holding her close to him, covering her forehead, her eyes and her hair, with kisses, not knowing what he was about, forgetting the words he had just said, conscious of but one thing—that she was there, near him, trembling and beautiful.



## CHAPTER XIII.

“You marry another!” continued she, already reassured. Ah! the idea is truly pleasant. The unhappy woman! I should pity her! and I should pity you most of all. Do you think that I would allow you to peacefully enjoy your good fortune? You Frenchmen can so sacrifice yourselves, but we Portuguese, we demand revenge.”

While thus speaking, she had once more moved from his side, and, when he was no longer under her immediate influence, he regained his courage and resolved, since he had commenced, to finish the matter once for all and put an end to a painful situation.

“To think,” said he, “of your seeking revenge. You must, in the first place, become jealous, and how could you become so of a woman whom I do not love?”

He stopped, then added, in a lower voice, for he was conscious of the enormity of the speech he was about to make:

“The marriage in question is only a business matter.”

“Come! a truce to joking,” said she, impatiently. “I have already asked you to talk seriously.”

“I am serious,” replied he, resolutely. “Alas! my poor Esther! it is too true, I am going to marry.”

“Repeat that.”

“I say that I am forced to marry. But that is no reason why I should lose you. I will never cease to care for you, I will never cease loving you. I also



wish your future to be assured, so that you may be safe from misfortune; and from tomorrow—”

She bounded toward him.

“It is true then!” she cried. “You do not lie, wretch!”

“Esther!”

“Yes, wretch! miserable wretch! For you are not satisfied with having betrayed me, you must insult me. You offer me money! Have I ever asked anything of you? Have I lived on your bounty? Am I a woman to sell myself? I believed in your love, in your honor. I depended on the loyalty of a Frenchman. I thought myself nobly united to the man of my choice. You told me to wait and I waited, simply, patiently, as sure of you as I was of myself. Have you not told me, that I was the one woman you loved, your wife before God, and that I would be so, some day,

in the sight of man? Have I failed, have I doubted, have I lost favor in your eyes? Have I ceased to be worthy of your love, of your esteem?"

It was Vandelle who now kept silent. What could he answer? What had he to say?

"That's like men!" continued she, pale, agitated and feverish; "that's like life! that's the soul, the heart, the uprightness of him to whom I confided my honor. You have sacrificed me; you have sold me, and you have the courage, the audacity, in this infamous sale, to offer me a share, to me—Esther Sandraz!"

He was no longer listening to her, he was looking at her. Never had he seen her more beautiful. She walked about the boudoir with long steps, her body swaying and undulating voluptuously.

Suddenly she stopped and stood

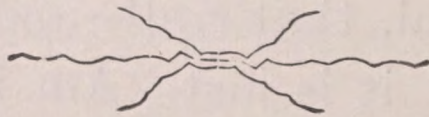
squarely before him. He fixed his gaze on her superb shoulders; he felt the contact of her heaving bosom, he was overpowered by her proximity.

“How lovely you are!” murmured he, loosing his senses.

“Ah! be silent,” cried she, drawing away, “you make me blush with shame! You saw in me, and you see still, only an instrument for satisfying your passion. And I who thought, who dreamt— Ah! wretch! coward! And I am united to you in whose love, up to today, I believed. Your love! I am beautiful, that’s all—and you offer me money! it is just. Am I anything to you different from the courtesans whom you picked up on the streets before you knew me?”

“Strike me, crush me, overwhelm me,” said he, devouring her with his eyes, “you are ever more beautiful.”

“Coward!” replied she, “your adoration sickens me! You did not have the courage to face my resistance, to say to my face: This is what I wished to do. You decided furtively, in haste, away from me, you have struck me a cowardly blow. I despise you, but there is some one whom I despise more—myself.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

At that moment a knocking was heard on the door of the boudoir leading into the *salon*, and at the same instant a voice cried out:

“Vandelle, Vandelle, open the door, we know you are there shut up with a woman; it is not fair, it is not polite! We are your guests; you have no right to desert us.”

One of the women, at the same time, struck the door with her fist and, imitating the stern voice of a *commissaire de police* in the exercise of his duty, cried:

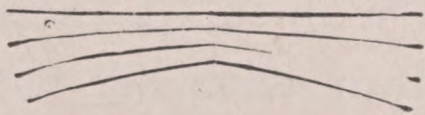
“Open in the name of the law.”

“I will not open,” answered Vandelle.

“Why will you not?” exclaimed Esther Sandraz. “Why cannot these ladies enter? Because I am here? Am I not one of them now? Am I not like them?”

She violently pushed aside Vandelle, who was trying to hold her, ran to the door, turned the key, and opening it wide, said:

“Come in, ladies, enter, I beg of you.”



## CHAPTER XV.

All the women rushed headlong into the boudoir as soon as the door was opened. But they stopped on seeing Esther. They perceived that they were not in the presence of a woman of their world. The paleness and attitude of Vandelle, the useless efforts Esther Sandraz made to regain her composure, the nervous trembling which shook her and her flashing eyes, all showed that they had come upon a very exciting scene, broken in on a most trying situation. The striking beauty of Esther impressed them, in spite of their feminine *amour-propre*, their confidence in their own charms, to which so many had

paid homage, they grew small and diminished at sight of this splendid stranger.

Mlle. Sandraz, far from wishing to measure the distance which separated her from these women, had resolved, on the contrary, to descend to their level, and to overturn all the material and moral barriers that lay between them. Leaning against the mantle-piece, she said, in a sarcastic voice:

“Ladies, I have an apology to offer you. Monsieur Vandelle’s valet thought it right to close the door communicating between the boudoir and the *salon*, to hinder you from entering this room. Why? Are you not in Monsieur Vandelle’s house under the same conditions as myself? Should a line of demarkation exist between us; should I find myself out of place in your society? No, truly! for that which has happened to



me has happened to you all. You have loved. You have thought—”

She stopped. The silence which reigned around her was uninterrupted; the women all looked at each other, then at her.

She continued, turning from one to another:

“You are beautiful, very beautiful, ladies; I also. Some one has deigned to find you pretty—his admiration lasted some weeks, did it not? and then he resolved to marry. You remember, he redoubled his caresses, his kind attentions—perhaps also, to fool you better, to lull your suspicions, your vigilance—he made you presents!”

All at once she caught sight of the bracelets which encircled her arms, the necklace of black pearls with its large medallion set in diamonds which hung around her neck.

“Ah! these jewels! When I think that I adorned myself for *him!*” and tearing the ornaments from her neck and arms she dashed them to the floor, crying to Vandelle:

“Come, pick them up, and keep them for your bride!”

As Vandelle remained silent, motionless, abashed, in the corner, where he had taken refuge; Esther again turned towards the women, saying:

“Since he will not have them, permit me, ladies, to offer you these ornaments as a souvenir of my coming amongst you; I am now your equal, your companion; and among friends one can make presents.”

Nobody stirred, nobody spoke; so tired of talking, and weary of the scene, she took her lace mantilla, threw it over her head, and, taking in her hand the *burnous* with which she had entered

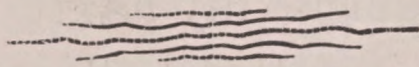
the room, she marched towards the door which communicated with the ante-chamber.

On the threshold she stopped, turned, and, fixing her gaze on Vandelle, said:

“Good bye, sir; may you be happy in your married life!”

For an instant she walked firmly; then, suddenly, she tottered. All sprang toward her, but when they reached her side, she had already recovered, and murmured:

“No, no—I need no one—I am strong, I am brave—and I wish to live.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

An instant later the outer door closed.

“What a magnificent departure!” said Blanche.

“Yes, but the scene has thrown a chill over us,” replied Louise; “I am going home; besides it is two o’clock in the morning.”

“Two o’clock!” cried Raynal, who had been asleep for some time and had just wakened, “two o’clock, and I have to plead tomorrow before the court. My hat! quick! my hat!”

“Ladies, gentlemen,” continued he, “if you ever have need of a lawyer to defend you, call on me. I will see you acquitted.”

“Thanks, thanks,” cried all the women.

“I trust I shall never need your services,” said Berthe.

“You cannot tell what might happen, my dear,” retorted Raynal; “love, and passion, leads even the most temperate natures into crime. It is always best to have a lawyer. My hat! Where is my hat?”

“You have been holding it in your hand for the last fifteen minutes,” observed Louise.

“Why, so I have.”

He groped his way to the door and disappeared.

As for Juliette, like a prudent woman who knows how to appreciate a good thing, she gathered up the jewelry which still lay on the floor; and you might have heard her murmur:

“It is not right to allow anything to be wasted.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

Was the reason given by Henri Vandelle to Esther Sandraz, for not marrying her, the true one? Had he really dissipated his fortune? Yes, the ruin was complete; not a vestige of his maternal inheritance remained. Vandelle consoled himself for a season in thinking, that after all he had lived merrily for ten years, and that he must have put much order in the disorder to have lasted so long. If you are astonished that Parisian life should have been so disastrous to a young fellow such as we have depicted, handsome, in robust health, intelligent, and not lacking in knowledge of the *demi-monde*, we beg

you to glance at the charming study of Eugene Chavette: "*Les Petites comedies du vice.*" There were two cousins of equal fortune, but totally dissimilar appearance; the first conscious of his ugliness, made his mistress a generous monthly allowance; the second, a handsome fellow, fancied he could be loved for himself alone. One day they compared notes, and figured up their accounts; the one neglected by nature, had never spent his income and yet, he found himself beloved by his mistress, overwhelmed with kindness, treated with attention and respect. She deceived him, doubtless, but she did it when he was away on his vacations and in such fashion as not to wound his pride. Adonis, on the contrary, had been continually sacrificed by his loved one, who, wise in her generation, believed in attending to business before pleasure. She rarely had

time to receive him, and his calls were apt to be inopportunately interrupted; she adored him, intermittently, when her capitalist was not in the ascendent. In spite of this life of mortification, of continual privations and sacrifices, he was completely ruined, by champagne suppers, country parties, dressmakers' bills, jewelers' bills, flowers etc. The conclusion is, that one must know how to regulate one's life, curb one's vices, and conduct even a life of gallantry, on something like business principles. Among the *demi-monde*, the role of a capitalist is more advantageous, more agreeable to play than that of the young lover.

Vandelle, liked for himself, in his quality of a handsome fellow, had seen his heritage nibbled at by many white teeth, pretty teeth, but sharp, and used to biting out large pieces.



Nothing had ever been asked of him; on the contrary, it was always said: "There is no question of money between us." But so much disinterestedness merited some return; he had made it in the form of jewelry, and disinterestedness was so often shown that the contents of several shops had gone in that way.

Besides he loved to live well; his robust health and his country appetite did not hinder him from being sensible to the refinements of the table. He liked strawberries in January, and preferred fine wines to only fair ones. A mountaineer turned into a man of the world, a Spartan into an Athenian! Neither did he disdain a large, well situated apartment, with luxurious furniture, expensive bric-a-brac, a saddle horse in the summer, a coupe in the winter, and

a hunting box in remembrance of his first love.

The day on which the greater part of his valuables was sold and all accounts settled, he found there was only about fifty thousand francs left. The situation made him thoughtful, but he was not a man to hesitate long; his temperament would not permit it. He imagined that fifty thousand francs in his experienced hands, represented millions in those of others. Gaming had been for him up to this date a passtime; he resolved to make a *coup*. Could he not cite from the people about him, from among his acquaintances, more than ten persons who, without any visible means of support, without being either *rentiers*, or proprietors, or hard workers, had, thanks to Dame Fortune, led a very comfortable life. He did not reflect perhaps that these

persons, numerous as they are, were exceptions, however, in the world of gamblers. That world can be divided into two distinct classes, the lucky and the clever ones.

The first, arriving at Monte-Carlo, approach a roulette table and throw several *louis* on a number; the number turns up and they receive the maximum. They pass to the trente-et-quarante, look for a series, run against the red a dozen times or so, receive a handful of bank notes and, the *coup* finished, return to Paris.

The clever ones proceed differently; lymphatic, with a nervous system which leaves them in repose—they obey no other force—trace for themselves a line of action and never turn aside from it. For them gambling is a business as much as any other, a little more difficult than another, that's all; some of

them open an establishment of their own. With their reasoning, the man who risks a small sum to gain a large one deserves no pity; for it always happens that with a small amount he will loose a large one. Following this principle, they seat themselves every day at their club, before a *baccarat* table. They take twenty-five *louis*, wisely divide it into little heaps, and knowingly handle it; they play with skill, with only the expectation of winning five. They do so in several minutes if Fortune smiles on them, in an hour or two if she is sulky, and if it is necessary on that day to entreat her. Five *louis* a day is three thousand francs a month; thirty-six thousand a year, let us say thirty thousand, admitting a very rare loss of twenty-five *louis*. Such is their income; it is assured under any condition. Tenants and farmers can be refractory

on pay day, the phylloxera can destroy the vines, yet there will always be clubs, casinos and some players to furnish them with an income.

Vandelle, however, did not belong to the first category, the lucky ones. He could play one number for three hours, without seeing it turn up. He could take a *baccarat* bank and leave it just at the moment it would have been profitable; at *trente-et-quarante*, the series which he played would never turn up while he was playing it, but as soon as he stopped it would win. Every one is not born with a silver spoon in his mouth!

He belonged still less, because of his temperament to the other class of gamblers, the clever ones. His blood ran too rapidly, his nerves were too high strung, his nature too ardent, his disposition too brutal to await patiently a

return of luck, and even after all his efforts, to be contented with a small winning. So he lost, in a few weeks, his outlay; his last bank notes joined the first which had been calling them for some time.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was at this point in his final ruin that he first met Esther Sandraz. She brought a useful diversion; she allowed him to forget his situation and above all to have a less imperious need of money. This new *liaison* cost him nothing, she really saved money for him; absorbed by the assiduous courtship which he paid to Mlle. Sandraz, later by their honeymoon, little by little, he did away with his horses, his carriages, gambling and other costly luxuries. The last remnants of his fortune, the credit which for sometime remains attached to a brilliant existence, like the long twilight which succeeds a beautiful sun-

set, sufficed him to pay his rent, to dress, and to offer from time to time, a bouquet of violets to an honest woman.

One day, his father died. This was a new inheritance for him to gather in, and the fortune of Vandelle, had a fresh start. There was nothing of it; whilst the son ruined himself with amiable manufacturesses, the father was doing badly in his legitimate business. New slate quarries, better than his own, were opened in the department of Haute-Garonne and all the government contracts had been bought up. He struggled a long time. He was a hard, pig-headed, tenacious worker, as severe on others as on himself; he took a partner, gave him a superb interest, the lion's share, made him work as he did himself, wore him out and one fine day buried him. Then he died in his turn, and as



his partner had a daughter, she inherited the greater part of the property.

Vandelle learned all this while he was at Montrejeau. He abandoned himself to despair in the arms of his notary, an old friend of the family and an able man, who told him that nothing would be easier than to restore the former magnificence of the business and build up a new fortune. He had only to surround himself with good engineers, to keep track of the progress of science, and to get married — that is to say, to marry Henriette de Loustal, daughter of his father's old partner. Henri Vandelle would bring as a *dot* that part of the business still belonging to him, his activity, his work, his name, while Mlle. de Loustal would bring the rest of the property left by her father.

While these overtures were being made, Vandelle met by chance Mlle. de Loustal, and in place of the country

school girl whom he expected to see, found a young woman, well educated, very pretty, and really elegant. He desired above all things, time for reflection. To pass from the boulevard des Italians to Montrejeau, from a man of the world of pleasure, to the directorship of a quarry, was indeed a brusque transition, but it was not that which tormented him the most. Born in the Haute-Garonne, he had climbed the surrounding mountains in his boyhood and loved the place with all the strength and fervor of first recollections; also the feverish and enervating existence which he had led in Paris for the past ten years, had begun to pall on his satiated senses and had prepared him for a return to the simpler habits of his youth, to hunting excursions, life in the bracing mountain air, and the contemplation of eternal snow.

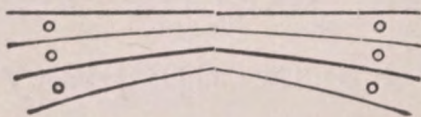
But Esther Sandraz whom he ought to marry! he had promised himself to do so, and had been firm in his intention. What dream in his poverty could have been more beautiful? Would not Esther have helped to encourage him, nearly to the point of forgetting his poverty? Besides, if he did not love Esther as much as she merited—with all his heart—he loved her in his own way—with all the ardor of his passionate nature. It was a love of the head; but the head, like the heart, excites itself; one dies of apoplexy as of an aneurism.

Would he ever have the courage to tear himself away from her, of whom the thought alone made his head burn and his temples throb?

Yes, for on the one side was poverty in Paris, which so long had witnessed his splendor, while on the other hand, he was offered a renewal of his former

pleasures, a new fortune and a pretty wife.

He reflected a long time; we already know the results of his reflections.



## CHAPTER XIX.

The decision that he had come to, and the propositions which he had made to Esther were the results of two things; in the first place the life in Paris during ten years, the abuse of pleasures, had killed all his moral sense; materiality, if one may so express oneself, had abnormally developed to the detriment of morality. In the second place, he had been so absorbed by Esther's physical beauty that he had forgotten to study her heart; she was absolutely incapable of accepting the conditions which he had proposed in his desire to conciliate both love and self interest.

When he found himself alone, after

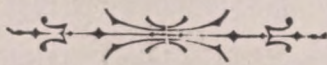
the dramatic exit of Esther, he did not suffer keen regrets for that which had just passed. In short, a painful and terrible confession, which he had long hesitated to make, had at last escaped him. The situation was now clearly defined, Mlle. Sandraz had given him his freedom. He had asked only for partial liberty, she had given it completely; he could start now for the Pyrenees, rejoin his *fiancee*, and become in a few years a millionaire.

The next day and the day after, finding his mind at rest and his pulse regular he arrived at the conclusion that he had been mistaken regarding the strength of his affection for Mlle. Sandraz, and that perhaps this last *liaison* would leave no more impression on his life than the preceding ones. Variable, all blood and nerves, of an emotional nature, he would drive away the image

of Esther with a fascinating reality, which should be Henriette de Loustal. She was charming, the little provincial, with her big dreamy blue eyes, graceful neck and shoulders, and her beautiful figure. What pleasure for a *blase* Parisian to pluck this sweet mountain flower. She was without doubt a little like the glaciers and eternal snows among which she was born; she retained still a little of the chill of the earth where she had blossomed. But what a joy to transport her to a warmer clime, to see her develop under bright sunshine—the sunshine of love! The prosaic Vandelle became poetic, while dreaming of the future.

Without quitting the domain of poetry and continuing his comparison, Vandelle said to himself that Esther also had been a beautiful flower, of which he alone had inhaled the fragrance.

But she was a tropical plant which had sprung into life naturally brilliant under glowing skies. Such flowers do not need cultivation. They shun the shadows and voluntarily lift their heads to the caresses and kisses of the sun. In Esther, Vandelle had found an adorable mistress, one, who in an hour, had passed from innocent maidenhood to passionate womanhood; she required no teaching, her southern nature initiated her into all the mysteries of love. He would find in Henriette, just the opposite type of woman, the virgin troubled and confused before the realities of life, but lovely in her blushes, chaste in her abandon, and always pure in thought.

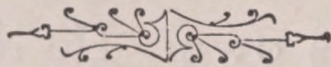




## CHAPTER XX.

Thanks to these happy comparisons which were all to the advantage of Mlle. de Loustal, Vandelle managed during three days, if not to entirely forget Esther, at least to make his regret less poignant. But on the fourth day, the image of Mlle. de Loustal became indistinct, her features faded little by little, as if veiled with a light cloud. He tried to see her in thought but the fog thickened more and more. He searched for the big blue eyes of Henriette and it was the deep, dark burning gaze of Esther which met his own. He looked for the sweet melancholy smile of Mlle. de Loustal, and saw the fresh, red, half-

open lips of Esther Sandraz. He shut his eyes to drive away the vision, he covered his mouth so that those ardent lips, which seemed to reach for his, might not kiss him; useless effort! his arms opened of themselves and Esther Sandraz triumphed. He made a despairing appeal to his old memories and saw again the pure and charming form of Henriette. He arose, sprang towards her, wished to take her in his arms, to press her to his heart, but Henriette escaped him and fled to the skies from which she had descended, and again he held the supple form of Esther and pressed against his shoulders the beautiful head of his lost mistress.



## CHAPTER XXI.

Soon he found it useless to evoke the image of Mlle. de Loustal, she refused to appear even for an instant, and Esther reigned alone in his excited imagination. It was futile to drive her forth, she always returned, supple, caressing, enticing, voluptuous, exquisitely beautiful. Wherever he turned, in his apartment, in their lovers' nest as she had called it, her vision rose before him, he saw her at the piano, heard her sing, in her warm contralto voice, one of the songs of Portugal; an instant after, he saw her on the lounge, her head thrown back, her eyes half closed, her lips smiling, and her thoughts floating between

a memory and a hope. If he closed his eyes to shut out the maddening vision, a delicate perfume, of which she alone knew the secret, escaped through the half-open door of the boudoir, reached him, and unerved him. If he went out to avoid these fancies, she suddenly stood in his path, in front of a shop, where they had often stopped, in a street through which they had frequently passed; in fact every stone in Paris spoke to him of her.

He felt himself vanquished, crushed, overwhelmed, and six days after their rupture, he was again at Esther's door.



## CHAPTER XXII.

The apartment in the rue de Seze was empty.

Mlle. Sandraz had left the night before, alone, without saying where she was going, without leaving a single indication by which to search for her.

Vandelle then fully realized how deeply he had loved her and what a loss he had sustained; he perceived how little this strange girl, met by hazard midst the tumult of Paris, resembled any other woman whom he had ever known. What strong bonds attached him to her! What an ineffacable impression she had made on his heart! She had written her name there as with a

red hot iron, and every day the letters burned deeper and deeper.

He looked for her, made a thousand efforts to find her, went like a crazy man to all the places where he thought she might have taken refuge. Fruitless efforts! She was hidden beyond the possibility of discovery.

During this time Vandelle's business went from bad to worse; he was urged to return to the south and to conclude definitely the proposed marriage.

If he hesitated, it meant ruin and misery.

After loosing Esther should he also loose his last hope of re-establishing his future?

END OF PART ONE.

PART · TWO.





## CHAPTER I.

On the slope of a hill, at the base of which the Garonne joins the Neste, fronting the little village of Montrejeau, which is situated on a high plateau, is a charming estate, well known to all Pyreenian tourists. This is the home of Henri Vandelle. It belongs to the commune of G—— and the principle gate of the park opens out on the road which leads to the railroad station. Near this gate is a Louis XIII pavilion, intended for a keeper's lodge or for the use of a friend who desires solitude; it is composed on the ground floor of one large room with a gothic chimney in sculptured

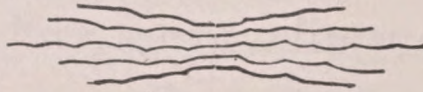
wood, furnished in the same style and hung with old tapestry representing the Queen of Navarre surrounded by her court. The first floor has only two sleeping rooms, with modern furniture. The roof is covered with new slate; it is natural that Henri Vandelle, proprietor and director of the best slate quarry in the department, should maintain his property with care and especially this pavilion where he had passed his youth.

Two paths lead, by an easy ascent, from the pavilion to the main house, which is a modern construction built on the ruins of a little sixteenth century chateau. From an eccentric idea of the former proprietor, these paths, instead of leading directly to the chateau, wind about in an English garden of great beauty, midst beds of rhododendons, of roses, and of privets of great

size. A little pebbly brook, a miniature torrent, shaded by stately pines, flows in and out among the trees and across flower-sprinkled lawns.

A magnificent view may be had from the terrace of the chateau; on the right, in the foreground, the home of Monsieur de Lassus, and the beautiful ruins of a convent. At the back, on a high plateau, Montrejeau (Mont-Royal) which you could easily take for a strongly fortified place; and on the same side, are vast plains reaching to Tarbes. This view of tranquil waters and green fields is restful to the eye after gazing on the grandoise panorama which unrolls itself, on the left, towards Luchon. In this direction the eye is dazzled, when the sky is clear. A background of lofty mountains, piled one above another, loose themselves in infinity; near at hand are the high summits of Car and Cagire,

the peak of Houcheton, Mount Galie,  
the peak of Gar; and still farther off,  
towards Spain, White peak, Alva, and a  
corner of the Maladetta with its  
eternal snows.



## CHAPTER II.

Seated on the terrace, before his chateau, one beautiful afternoon in August, we again meet Henri Vandelle. Two years have passed since we last saw him, and time has wrought many changes. He is surrounded by several persons, the lawyer Raynal, appointed six months previously solicitor-general to Saint Gaudens, and the mayor of G——, Monsieur Fourcanade, accompanied by his wife and daughter. This municipal trinity does not lack eccentricity; the husband, short and stout, with thin legs and great flat feet; bald-headed save for a few grey hairs on the temples; has big fat red cheeks veined with blue; a beardless double-chin, sun-

burned neck, and prominent eyes, but a good kind smile, which discloses two rows of handsome, strong white teeth. The wife, tall, dried up, flat, a stick dressed in an umbrella cover. Has a yellow complexion, and jet black hair (bought for three francs from some mountain girl); a nose like a bird's beak; thin dry lips which she keeps pressed closely together as if to conceal the absence of her teeth. She is a beautiful talker, smooth spoken though pretentious and dictatorial to excess, in reality it is she who wears her husband's scarf. The daughter, who is only eighteen years old, looks thirty. Nature was in a joking mood on the day of her birth, and gave her the good big head of her father, and the long rickerty body of her mother, which made her resemble an apple on an asparagus stalk. Alas! she was the unfortunate result of the

union of a fat man and a thin woman.

As for Raynal, the lawyer, now become solicitor-general, he had cultivated an expression and manner appropriate to his new position; smooth shaven like a priest, with a serious mouth, and a piercing eye; he wears a white cravat, and a high, stiffly starched collar; and tightly buttoned in his frock coat, he is as straight as a poplar, with nothing about him of the old Raynal who was so easily intoxicated, so loquacious, so anxious to succeed with the fair sex.

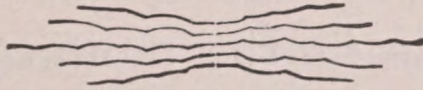
Vandelle, also, seems altered; the mountain air, instead of renewing his youth and giving him a new lease of life, had painted circles beneath his eyes and taken the color from his cheeks. He is still a fine looking fellow, broad shouldered and deep chested, but youth had departed. Hard rides, long walks, dangerous hunting, and the caresses of

the wind and sun, no longer agree with him; this is not astonishing, for many Parisians cannot prudently leave their boulevards and change their habits. He grew old and emaciated in the healthy country where others regained their strength and rejuvenated; transplanting is as fatal to some men as to some plants.

It is fair to say, however, that nature is not wholly to blame for the change in Vandelle: she asked nothing better than to smile on him, to spread all her beauties before his eyes from thankfulness for his return; but he had not the contented spirit which she exacts from those who would profit from her bounty. It is not sufficient that the feet of the prodigal child should be on the life-giving earth to which he has returned, but it is also necessary that he should not feverishly long for the life



he has left, or be constantly tormented  
by unhealthy desires and morbid  
thoughts.



### CHAPTER III.

Raynal, dignified and grave, chatted with, and questioned the mayor. "Have you many poachers in this part of the country Monsieur Fourcanade?"

"Very few, sir," responded the mayor. "The poor devils don't dare hunt the chamois in the mountains; occasionally one spreads a net in the valley to procure a luxury for himself and—the keepers shut their eyes."

"They are wrong," answered the solicitor-general severely. "It is encouraging idleness, vagabondage and theft. I can't understand why poaching is not a criminal offense. The man who takes your game is as culpable as he who

takes your purse. Our laws are too lenient."

"Well, you can't send a man to the gallows for poaching a rabbit," observed Fourcanade.

"Why not, sir? They hung them in olden times."

"The devil! but you are severe, Solicitor-General!"

"Severity is the beginning of justice. I recognize but two classes: honest people and criminals. Society must defend itself. Repeat that maxim to your keepers, Mayor. The police is very badly organized at Saint-Gaudens. One of my colleagues, appointed at the same time as myself, in the Central department, has already condemned two criminals to hard-labor, while I have done nothing here, absolutely nothing; not the least little crime to punish.

How can one expect promotion under such circumstances?"

At this point, Henri Vandelle joined them.

"Happy mortal!" said he to Raynal, "you are ambitious."

"Certainly" responded Raynal, "one does not enter the magistracy to remain there all one's life. Since I became a member of the bar, I perceived in myself, the stuff of which an attorney-general is made. But some occasion, some circumstance, some complicated crime must present itself before I become distinguished myself. Furnish me with that, and you will see. What a devil of a country it is which has no criminals!"

"I assure you," sighed the mayor, "that we produce very few."

Fourcanade then withdrew to rejoin his wife and daughter who had been

calling him for some minutes, and whom he feared to displease.

Left alone with Raynal, Vandelle, remembering the former theories upheld by his guest, could not restrain himself from saying, with a smile:

“What a complete change two years has made in your opinions on crimes and criminals!”

“Two years ago,” responded the young magistrate, “I was only a lawyer. To-day I am solicitor-general, and it is reasonable that with my change in position, my opinions should have likewise altered. You also, my dear Vandelle, must acknowledge that your character, your habits, your manner of living have changed.”

“You can well say that. My habits are like your opinions; they have changed with the rest. Hunting, eating, drinking—there is no other way to pass life

here, and very naturally I have become, from the force of these things, a great hunter, eater and drinker. I never did anything by halves."

"But you must have some occupation?"

"What?"

"Your quarries, for instance."

"My business? That takes care of itself. The machines run by steam, the workmen run like the machines. Every Saturday, pay-day; every month, notes to be met; every year, an inventory to be taken."

"And millions follow."

"Well! After that?" asked Vandelle.

"Afterwards—ambition to become consul-general, deputy or minister."

"All that lacks one condition."

"What is it?"

"The desire to be something," replied Vandelle.

“What! you desire nothing?”

“Yes, I have an ideal.”

“Let's hear it.”

“It comes from the happiness of the brute, like the mayor who is sleeping over there.”

“You are joking!”

“That is the sublimity of existence. Man has two enemies, his senses and his conscience. He must overcome the body by fatigue and kill the spirit by sleep.”

“You mean to banish sad memories, do you not?” said Raynal with a knowing air.

“Do you think that I suffer from my souvenirs? Which ones!”

Raynal stopped to cast a steady glance on Vandelle, then answered:

“Those which Mlle. Esther Sandraz left you.”

“Esther!” said Vandelle trembling.  
“Do you know her?”

“I ought to know her,” answered Raynal, renouncing his grand magisterial air and becoming what he really was: a charming fellow. “But, alas! the day I met her at your house, your dinner was so good, your wines so exquisite, that—shall I acknowledge it?—I was drowsy. Come, let us not become retrospective.”

“Permit me to observe,” said Vandelle, “that it was you who started this subject; however, you can safely evoke mine: they are dulled by time.”

“They should be,” said Raynal gallantly. “Madame Vandelle, whom I see approaching us, is so charming. *Apropos*, who is that young man with her? It is the first time that I have seen him in these parts, and as a magistrate, you understand—”

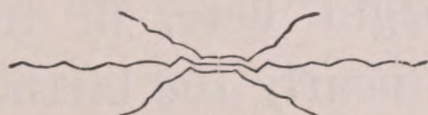
“You must know everybody. Well! that young man is a distant relation of



my wife and a friend from infancy, if I am not mistaken. His name is Olivier Deschamps, and he is looking for a position in these parts.”

“Will you take him in with you?”

“No; I have no need of him.”



## CHAPTER IV.

This last remark would have pained Henriette if she had heard it. She formed, at this time, the project of placing the young engineer in the factory of her husband.

“I would like, my friend,” she said to him, while walking in the garden, “to see you begin here, in this country which was nearly the birth-place of us both, your career which I prophecy will be great and useful. I would like to assist you on your start in life.”

“Oh! my dear Henriette,” answered Olivier, “if you knew how happy your words made me feel! How pleasant it is to know that one is not alone in the

world! Often I said to myself, at Paris: Have I still a sister, and how long will I have her? She will marry, and will forget me."

"You will never fade from either my memory or my heart. You are the living souvenir of my infancy. You were the first protector, the first support, the first affection that I had besides the maternal one. Your hand was the first to sustain me after leaving my mother's. You were four years older than I, you were already a young man when I was only a little girl. I remember everything; our games and scampers in the country, where you kicked aside the stones which lay in my path; when you took me in your arms, already strong, to help me over the hedges and ditches; everything, even to the day when you threw yourself so bravely before me, to protect me from a frightened horse."

“Do you remember all that?”

“It is not so long ago, and I have not yet had sufficient pain or joy, to efface those memories from my heart.”

She said all this in a sweetly modulated voice; her large blue eyes, veiled with long lashes regarded Olivier frankly; her mouth smiled on him sadly but charmingly. Two years of married life had perfected this beauty, which the Parisian Vandelle, spoilt as he was by too much good fortune, had himself formerly admired. The young girl, immature in some respects, had become a perfect woman; her features were less sharp and more delicate; her lips more moist; the blood circulated more actively under a skin of extreme fineness. The flower had nearly blossomed and the stalk itself had participated in this gracious development; the shoulders were exquisitely rounded; the bust had

developed; the waist was supple and *svelt*; and without having lost any of the modesty of the young girl, Henriette de Loustal had acquired the assured manner of the married women.

Her companion, Olivier Deschamps, was about twenty-five; of medium height, slender but elegant; wore a full brown beard, and a moustache which parted so as to show a fine set of teeth. His eye-brows were very heavy; his face, rather melancholy when in repose, but firm when he looked at anyone, seemed to indicate a powerful will and great energy. He was still a young man, but from certain lines on his forehead, from his sad smile, you could see that life had not always been easy, and that he had tasted of its bitterness.

## CHAPTER V.

When Madame Vandelle had finished speaking, Olivier, who had listened in silence, said:

“I would like to ask you one thing, Henriette.”

“Ask it,” replied she, smiling.

“I fear,” continued he, “that you are not happy.”

“From whence does this fear arise, my friend?”

“Are you loved as you desire?”

“I do not know how I desire being loved; but I think that Monsieur Vandelle has a sincere and loyal affection for me.”

“And is that all?”

“I do not know life very well, my friend,” she answered, “but the little I have seen, makes me think that one must not expect perfect happiness.”

“And you love your husband?”

“Loyally, sincerely, as I desire, as I think he loves me. We did not make a love match. I knew Monsieur Vandelle very slightly, for he came here rarely. He did not displease me, that’s all. When this marriage was proposed to me as the only means of saving his fortune nearly lost, and my own in about the same condition, I consented without enthusiasm, but at the same time without repugnance. If he is kind, I told myself, I will love him, and I was confident that he would be.”

“Has this confidence been justified? What has come between you? What causes this coldness which he shows you,

which I have already noticed, and from which you suffer?"

"You are mistaken, I do not suffer, I only feel that I am somewhat isolated. My husband has need of violent exercise, of distractions in which I cannot share. It is necessary for his health and good temper and besides, my isolation is about to cease, as I will soon have a companion, and I hope a friend. I have had him write to Paris to find an honest, well bred young woman who would consent to come here as a reader and a *dame de compagnie*. If I find a person whose character pleases me, and whose tastes accord with mine, I will accommodate myself to the habits of Monsieur Vandelle."

He looked at her for an instant. Then, raising his voice, he cried:

"And is that all you ask in life, you who merit every attention, every joy?"



You are contented with the mere kindness of this man! Ah! this marriage! this marriage which threw me into despair! this marriage, which I hated, in breaking my heart, did not make you happy! I have not even the consolation of suffering alone!”

“What do you mean, Olivier?” demanded she, trying to speak severely.

“Pardon, pardon,” continued he, “the words escaped me in spite of myself. They came from my heart. I am too unhappy! I suffer too severely! Do you not know, Henriette, that I love you?”

“Stop! stop! Olivier; do you wish me to repent of the affectionate reception I gave you?”

“Henriette, my sister—”

“Your sister, yes, your sister. It is because of that name, and our memories of the past that I forgive you those

foolish and insulting words. I do not wish to remember them, and it shall be as if you had not spoken, and I had not heard. I will remember only our childhood's friendship. Keep that, as I do, a pure and happy memory of innocent joys we shared together. Henriette has become Madame Vandelle, do not forget that. Come, all is said, give me your arm, my brother; I must rejoin my guests, who, without reproaching you, I have too long neglected."

During their long conversation, the day had drawn to a close, and the first lights of the setting sun were lighting the tranquil waters of the Garonne, and the surging torrents of the Neste; all the mountains in the horizon were pictured against a clear sky, just commencing to redden and on their high summits, the snow and ice took a purple tinge from the heavens.

## CHAPTER VI.

When Henriette reappeared on the terrace of the chateau, the mayor was talking to Raynal and Vandelle.

“What happy mortals you are, gentlemen,” said he, “to have passed your youth at Paris! As for me, I have only dreamed of suppers, balls and that which is called, as I have been told, *la vie de polichinelle*.”

Madame Fourcanade had quietly drawn near, and, taking the arm of her husband, said to him:

“It seems to me, sir, that you have been *polichinelle* enough without leaving your province.”

“Great heavens, my dear friend,” re-

plied the mayor slightly troubled, "you cannot compare the two places. Sprees in Paris and those in the provinces are not at all alike. The women, above all, in the capital have a briskness which cannot be found in the provinces."

"Shame! sir, shame!" cried Madame Fourcanade, "near your daughter, a father of a family, a municipal magistrate, mayor of this place, to talk so!"

"I only talk so;" replied the mayor sighing; and fearing to again scandalize his wife, he turned towards Raynal and hastened to propose a game of billiards before dinner.

"I do not play billiards," answered the solicitor-general.

"What! really?" cried the mayor.

Madame Fourcanade took this opportunity of again interfering.

"Well, why are you astonished?" said she sharply to her husband. "Do you

think that the solicitor-general is a billiard-room loafer like yourself?"

The mayor drew himself up:

"I frequent cafes, madame," said he with dignity, "in the public interest. It is only in such places that I am called upon in my official capacity."

"Bah!" said Raynal.

"Without doubt. You cannot imagine, Solicitor-General, how much influence a bowl of punch, offered at the right time, can have on the deliberations of a municipal council. And the elections! I have been mayor here for twenty years. Well, sir, my commune has always voted, as one man, for the candidate of the government, no matter who he was. And it is in the cafes, that such results are accomplished."

"How is that?"

"It is very simple. For example: Take Crabioules who controls thirty

votes for the opposition. I play dominoes with him for his votes—and I win. In the following election the party of Crabioules is in power. It is now Brabazon whom I must win over. I play him a game of billiards—and I carry off his votes. That is how you govern a commune.”

All at once the mayor stopped to consult his watch.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I announce to you that the express from Paris to Toulouse is three minutes late.”

From the time when the station of Montrejeau had been established, Monsieur Fourcanade, whose little store of wooden objects and his municipal duties gave him plenty of leisure, had been given the position of manager at that point. You would have taken him for an employee, so well posted was he on the arrival and departure of

both freight and express trains. He had also become accustomed to extend his arm, like a signalman to show that the track was clear. At the hours when the express trains from Paris stopped at Montrejeau, you would see him run to the station. He would precipitate himself into the buffet, stare in the faces of the passengers, try to touch them and to converse with them. "They are to me" he would say, "like a Parisian perfume; I seem to have arrived from the capital myself and I forget the immense distance which separates me from it."

Whenever he met a pretty Parisian woman, he would take care of her like a father. "Madame can breakfast in peace" he would say to her, "she has more than twenty minutes; I will warn her when it is time to depart." He would go and come, would consult his

watch, regulate it by the railroad dial, would converse with the master of the buffet. The station-master, the assistant station-master and the baggage-master, had become his friends. Sometimes he would shout out: "Five minutes before the train leaves for Pierrefite and Tarbes; ten before it leaves for Luchon; fifteen before it leaves for Toulouse."

And, when the moment of departure arrived, he would run to his little Parisian woman, compel her to give him her satchel and assist her into a compartment.

"I have just had a walk on the boulevard des Italiens," he would say on returning home.

Alas! on the sixth of September, 1877, Monsieur Fourcanade dined with Vandelle, accompanied by his wife and daughter, and it was impossible for



him to be at the station to meet the express from Paris. It was unfortunate; he would have seen such a woman as he loved descend from the train; tall, distinguished, simply dressed, but in perfect taste. A light traveling wrap covered her shoulders, without entirely hiding her slender and supple waist; a dress of neutral tint and a simple hat completed her costume. Through a thin veil, which she wore, you could distinguish her charming features and a pair of bright eyes which took in everything at a glance.

She was alone. Fourcanade could have offered his services, and, what was most extraordinary, Montrejeau seemed to be the end her journey. She stop at Montrejeau! such an event did not happen once a year.

In place of walking about the station or entering a buffet, she turned towards

the entrance, gave up her ticket, learned that she could leave her baggage at the depot, and addressing a man standing near, asked:

“Will you kindly show me the road to Monsieur Vandelle’s house?”

When she discovered that she was only a kilometer from the chateau, she refused the carriage which was offered her and walked slowly along the road which had been pointed out.

A quarter of an hour later she entered the park, and, perceiving a gardener, she asked him to tell his master that a lady from Paris desired to speak with him.

The gardener, before starting, opened the *salon* of the Louis XIII pavilion for her.

Ten minutes passed, then Henri Vandelle appeared at the end of the path leading to the pavilion. He walked

rapidly, looking curiously in the direction pointed out by the gardener. What could anyone want of him? Who was this woman from Paris? He was looking for a companion for his wife, and he had written to several of his friends, but they had not yet answered. Besides, this person who desired to see him, if she was seeking the position of companion, would have presented herself directly to Madame Vandelle.

He stopped near the pavilion, the door of which was half-open, and looked in.

In the salon hung with the old tapestry, a woman was seated, but her back was turned towards the door and she did not seem to be aware of his approach.

He entered.

## CHAPTER VII.

The stranger rose leisurely, then turned quickly around.

“Esther!” cried he.

“Yes, it is I, Esther Sandraz.”

The surprise was too great, the emotion too strong; Vandelle felt faint and was obliged to lean against the wall for support. He looked at her for some moments without speaking. Then, feeling stronger, he stepped forward saying:

“You! you here?”

Esther did not answer; she stood before him, motionless, her eyes fixed on his.

Finally, carried away by an irresistible impulse, forgetting where he was,

his situation, and the danger that he ran of being overheard, he sprang towards her crying:

“My darling! is it possible that you have come back to me? You whom I despaired of seeing again! Is it not a dream? Is it you, really you? But how you look at me! I am changed, am I not? It is the life I lead here, your love which I miss. How right you were in saying that memory would torment me! Ah! I was ignorant of its mysterious power. How often have I cursed this marriage which parted us! Where have you come from? Where have you been? I have written you, I have searched for you—”

“I know it.”

“You knew it, and you remained hidden! You were avenging yourself?”

“Yes.”

“But at last, love has vanquished anger. Is it possible for us to live

apart? You have forgiven me and have understood that I could not have escaped this marriage? If I had not made it there would have been ruin for us both. What would have become of us in that Parisian whirlpool, with our expensive tastes, without a resource of any sort?"

He stopped to look at her. He was completely metamorphosised; his face had brightened, his glance was brilliant. He had grown young in an instant, after all the sad years that had passed. In his wild delight, his folly, he forgot his duty, his dignity.

"Ah! how beautiful you are, my Esther," said he, "more beautiful even than memory painted you. When I called you, when in the paroxysm of despair, in the fever of love, I evoked your image you did not appear to me like this! But why do you not speak to me? You came to find me, did you not?"

Let us leave here together. Where shall we go?"

"No where," replied she in a calm voice.

"You prefer to remain at Paris? So be it! I will meet you there, I can absent myself for months at a time. Or would you prefer to live in this neighborhood? At Luchon or Saint-Beat, wherever you wish. I will buy you a house, a chateau, carriages and horses; I will make your life luxurious and worthy of your *esprit* and your beauty."

She checked him with these words:

"Do you suppose that I have returned, after an absence of two years, to accept the propositions which I have already refused?"

This remark, and the cool way in which she said it, calmed Vandelle's excitement.

"What do you want then?" asked he,

in a dazed manner, like a person coming out of a dream. "Have you returned only to leave me again?"

"No, I shall remain here."

"How, here?—HERE!" repeated he astonished.

"Yes!" answered she, tranquilly. "I have come to live with you."

Stupified, he repeated twice:

"With me! with me!"

"Certainly," replied Esther. "Are you not looking for a companion for Madame Vandelle?"

"Well?"

"Well, I came to fill that position."

"YOU!"

"Yes, I."

"It is out of the question."

"Perhaps."

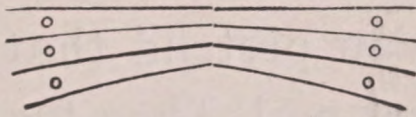
"It is quite impossible!"

"As you may remember, I have a fancy for accomplishing the impossible."



“But what is your object?”

“It is not necessary to tell you, you will soon see.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

As he was about to question her further, she took a chair, and her right shoulder resting against the back, her arms folded, she continued, in her slow sweet voice:

“What! you pretend that you have always loved me! That for two years you have thought and dreamed only of me; that you were in despair at having lost me and without me life was desolate! Yet, when I return offering to live always at your side, under your roof, and never to leave you, you repulse me, at the risk of losing me forever this time. You are very foolish, my dear.”

He started to reply, but she arose, walked towards him, laid a hand upon his shoulder and said quietly:

“You are to present me to your wife, I desire it.”

He trembled, but immediately recovering himself.

“My wife,” said he “would not commit the imprudence of admitting you into her household to share her life. You are too pretty, your beauty would frighten her.”

“My beauty,” replied she, “would not make the same impression on Madame Vandelle as it does on you. Women have not the same enthusiasm for each other that they are able to inspire in you men. Besides Madame Vandelle is also pretty, very pretty, I have been told, and she has too much self-respect to fear a rival. Moreover, I will manage, by the simplicity of my dress, by my be-

havoir, to avoid all danger. I will be so unobtrusive, I will take up so little room that nobody will think of looking at me."

"But," replied Vandelle, "my wife will not accept you without recommendations, without letters."

"Letters," said she tranquilly, "I have some."

She took from her pocket a little Russian leather case, from which she drew out two letters, and as the day was waning, went to the window and began to read them, throwing into her voice all the passion of which it was capable:

"Esther, I can no longer exist without you! I love you more than ever! I love you like a fool! Our past rises before me! I am all unstrung! My head is on fire—the memory of our love burns me, devours me! Say one

word and I will return to you, and be your slave for life.”

She ceased and turning towards Vandelle said:

“This letter you wrote me a month after your marriage. You addressed it to the rue de Seze, where a trustworthy person went to collect my letters and forwarded them to me at the retreat where you were unable to find me. But it is not all. Here is another one; dated like the former. Listen:

““I do not know if my letters have reached you. I do not know if this one will. Where have you hidden yourself? Where have you fled from me? I have used every possible means to find you. Are you not sufficiently avenged by the tortures I have endured? Ah! I swear to you, they are intolerable! Why do you avenge yourself since I do not love her, since I cannot love her. Your mem-

ory separates me from her, will always separate us! I shall never be able to find happiness with another woman. Write to me, come back, forgive me. Make your own conditions. I accept them in advance. Do with me as you will, I would do anything for you.'”

“Well!” he asked, when Esther had finished reading, “what use do you intend making of these letters?”

“None, if you present me to your wife, as the companion she expects. You can tell her whatever you choose; that don't interest me. You can say that I have been recommended to you by one of your friends in whom you have the utmost confidence, a relative, if necessary. Madame Vandelle does not read your letters, I presume. In spite of the distance that separated us, I did not lose sight of you, and, from the infor-

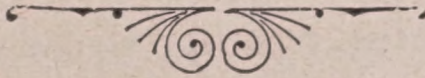
mation I received, know that you are master."

"It is true, but on condition that I do just and reasonable things."

"This time you will be unreasonable."

"And if I refuse?" asked he.

"It is useless to answer. You will do it—from weariness of the life that you lead, from your love for me, and," added she, holding up the letters, "from fear."



## CHAPTER IX.

Henriette Vandelle and her companion are seated in a little summer drawing-room, which connects with the large Gothic *salon* of the chateau. Through the glass door opening on the terrace the magnificently sun-lit mountains can be seen. The sky is of a transparent blue, without a cloud, without a speck. On the horizon alone, light vapors, arising from the warm earth of some plateau, mount slowly towards the high summits, hiding for an instant some lofty peak, then mounting still higher finally disappear behind the most distant range.

From the terrace where the last



flowers of summer, mixed with the first of autumn, bloom from the neighboring hedge and from the lawns, where the grass is being cut, a thousand penetrating odors arise and, wafted by soft breezes, enter the *salon*.

Esther Sandraz, whom everybody, at Vandelle's, since her arrival, calls Claire Meunier, is reading aloud a new novel and Henriette has allowed her embroidery to fall in order that she might better listen to it. Suddenly she interrupted her by saying:

“How false such passions are! how exaggerated the sentiments!”

“Do you think so, Madame?” said Esther raising her head and pushing away the book.

“I understand why the authorities prohibit such kind of stories, for they are exciting and enervating and do no good to anyone.”

“That is strange. They don't trouble me a particle.”

“What! Mademoiselle, can you understand the criminal love of this woman, married to a man who loves her? her blind inordinate passion for a young man whom she scarcely knows, whom she has never seen?”

“I could understand it better,” replied Esther carelessly, “if she had known him for some time, or if her love dated from infancy.”

“Ah!” Henriette could not help saying.

“And if the husband,” continued Claire Meunier, “instead of loving his wife, showed only indifference and coldness towards her.”

“Is that a reason for unfaithfulness?” asked the astonished young wife.

“When you reason, no. But vexation,

sorrow and passion do not reason. And moreover there are some thoughts so sweet, so tender, and some comparisons so dangerous that desire is awakened and cannot be quieted."

She arose and, standing near the chimney, arranged some freshly cut flowers in a vase. Suddenly she turned towards Henriette and let fall these words:

"Monsieur Vandelle hunts a good deal lately."

"*Apropos* of what did you speak of Monsieur Vandelle?" asked the young wife raising her head.

"*Apropos* of a shot that was fired near the chateau," responded Èsther in a very natural tone. "Monsieur Vandelle is in a hurry to rejoin us."

Approaching the glass door and stepping out, she added:

"I was not wrong; some one is com-

ing through the park. Oh! but it is not he."

"A visitor already?" said Henriette without leaving her seat; "the Mayor perhaps, added she smiling."

"No," responded Esther, "it has just struck noon, and Monsieur Fourcanade must be at the depot. The train from Luchon is about due, and the Mayor told us he never missed a train now as he wanted to say *adieu* to the last Parisian detained in our mountains."

"Ah!" continued she, re-entering the *salon* and without loosing sight of Henriette, "I know who it is now. It is the young man who went away, three weeks ago, the day after my arrival here, and who seemed so sorry to leave this house. But what is the matter with you, Madame?"

"What is the matter with me?" asked

Henriette in a troubled manner. "Why this question?"

"I thought I saw you shiver," replied Esther. "The open door perhaps."

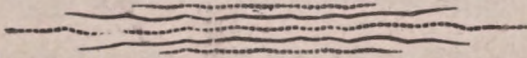
"Yes; will you please close it?"

As Esther was shutting the door, a servant entered and, addressing Henriette, said:

"Monsieur Olivier Deschamps asks if Madame will receive him."

"Certainly. Show him in," answered the young wife.

Esther took from the table the novel which she had been reading aloud, and seated herself at the far end of the salon.



## CHAPTER X.

Olivier had scarcely entered, when Madame Vandelle began to question him.

“Well, my friend,” asked she, “what news do you bring? Have you found the situation you desire?”

“I have found nothing,” replied he. “I have searched in vain through all the manufactories—everywhere the same answer: We have no need of any one. Vague promises of remembering me if in the future they needed anyone, which mean nothing and which have been forgotten before I have scarcely crossed the threshold. But I have not thought to enquire after your health. You look pale. Are you ill?”

“No, not at all, on the contrary, I am very well. Talk about yourself. What are you going to do?”

“Return to Paris.”

“Ah! you hope to find there—”

“I hope through my friends to obtain a situation abroad.”

“Abroad!”

“Yes. Our school furnishes many engineers for distant countries where manufacturing interests are in their infancy.”

“Leave France,” said she sadly, “and for so long?”

“For long, yes — forever perhaps. When one goes away can one tell if he will ever come back?”

“Alone, so far away, in an unknown country, amongst strangers.”

“Alone there or here! It is not solitude that frightens me. I would prefer to remain in this country near—near

the home of my infancy. Since that is impossible, it makes little difference where I live."

Claire Meunier, who had not said a word since the arrival of Olivier and who had contented herself with observing him from behind the book which she pretended to be reading, said:

"Pardon me, Madame, but I think I heard someone say that there was a vacancy in the factory of Monsieur Vandelle."

"I know it, Mademoiselle," answered Henriette dryly.

"Excuse me, I thought that perhaps you had forgotten it."

"Thanks."

Olivier turned towards Claire.

"A place here?" asked he, astonished.

"Yes," replied Mlle. Meunier, as she was addressed directly. "A position as engineer in the machine shop. I



heard Monsieur Vandelle speak of it only last evening." She arose, placed her book on the table, and addressing Henriette, said:

"Will you permit me to leave you for an instant, Madame? The mail leaves soon and I have a letter to write."

"Certainly, Mademoiselle."

When Madame Vandelle was alone with Olivier, she turned towards him saying:

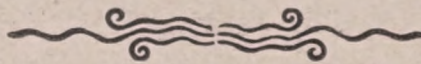
"I knew that there was a vacant place here. I hesitated, and I hesitate still to ask for it, because—but I am wrong, am I not? The past is really dead. We will both of us forget the words which escaped you a few days ago, and you will see in me only a sister, a friend. What do you think of it, Olivier? Can I ask for this place, would you be glad to obtain it?"

“Happy! living near you—can you doubt it?”

“No, if you talk so I will not ask for it. Say rather happy to have a position, to fulfill your duty.”

“I promise you that no words will come from my lips which can offend you. I answer for myself, I am strong. Your friendship is too precious to be lost. But allow me to say that it would be a happiness to live near you. Is not a brother happy to live near his sister?”

“If it is so, leave me, I hear my husband coming, and I desire to be alone with him when I talk about you.”



## CHAPTER XI.

A few minutes later Henri Vandelle, having taken off his hunting costume, entered the *salon*. He hoped to find Esther Sandraz, but when he saw she was not there, he started to withdraw, after exchanging a few insignificant words with his wife.

“I beg you to give me your attention for an instant, my friend,” said Henriette as he was going.

He stopped, and turning around, said in a cross manner:

“What do you want to say to me?”

“I want to beg you to give Monsieur Olivier Deschamps the vacant position of engineer in your factory.”

“Again!” said he.

“When I spoke to you about him, three weeks ago, you said there was no place for him. Today, a position is vacant, and I demand it for my protegee.”

“This is a business matter, my dear, and it is not in your domain.”

She arose, and, approaching him, replied:

“No, for me it is not a business matter. It is a question of friendship, of sympathy, and almost a duty. You are aware of the deep interest I take in this friend of my childhood. You know his merit, his worth—I will answer for his zeal, and I ask you from affection for me, as a personal favor, this place which is pledged to no one and which I desire for him.”

He appeared to reflect for an instant and then answered:

“I am sorry to refuse you, but for overlooking the machinery, a less expensive man will answer. I do not like the young college men, they are turned out overburdened with new theories and they upset the works in which they obtain positions.”

“We will say no more about it,” said she, moving towards the door.

“Believe me, I am sorry to refuse any request of yours.”

“It is I who regret having troubled you,” replied she without turning her head.

She went out through the door leading into the garden, leaving her husband alone in the *salon* with Esther who had just entered and who had overheard the last words of the conversation.

## CHAPTER XII.

Esther Sandraz followed Henriette with her eyes. When she had disappeared from sight in one of the paths of the park, she turned to Vandelle, and said:

“Why did you refuse this young man a position in your factory?”

“Have you not divined the reason?”

“No.”

“From two motives.”

“Which?”

“In the first place,” said he walking up and down the room in an agitated manner, “because I think it unwise to have a spy about.”

“Acknowledge,” said she smiling, “that the position of a spy would be a sinecure.”

“Well. But—”

“But what?”

“Nothing.”

“I understand, you count on the future,” said Esther.

“Oh!” cried he, “if I did not look to the future—”

“You are wrong; the future will be exactly like the present.”

“We will see!” said he meaningly.

“It is all seen. What is the second motive?”

“The second motive is that I am not disposed to be amiable.”

“That fact is visible. Have you not had good luck hunting today?”

“Hunting!”

“Certainly. Ah!” continued she, “after what have you been?”

“You ask me that?” said he stopping before her. “After you.”

“After me! What have you to reproach me with? Don’t I fulfill my duties as a companion well? Don’t I earn conscientiously my hundred and fifty francs, my board and lodging?”

“Enough joking. If I had known, three weeks ago, that you came here to torture me—”

“For what purpose did you think I came? What did you hope for? That I would dispute about you with your wife, share you with her, play the role of a servant-mistress beside of the legitimate wife? For me, Esther Sandraz, such a role! Second sultana in the harem of Pacha Vandelle, in the Haute-Garonne! It was really very stupid of you, my dear! How you have deteriorated since you left Paris!”



“I proposed to you, that we should go away.”

“To be deserted in six months or a year, when you had grown tired of this sentimental journey or when your business called you back. No, thanks! I am not disposed to pose for a deserted Ariadne.”

“Ah!” replied he drawing nearer her and trying to take her hand “I would never leave you.”

“It is possible,” replied she disengaging herself. “Those who are left behind are not those who suffer the most, experience has taught you that. You have discovered the force of certain attachments, the power of certain memories. But what would you? I am distrustful, and besides—and besides, you are married, my dear; I do not poach on other peoples preserves.”

“Then, what is it you want?” cried he.

She looked at him, straight in his eyes, and answered:

“You know well enough, you said it a few minutes ago: to make you suffer.”

He seized her fingers and grasped them nervously.

“How you hate me!” said he.

“Yes, indeed,” answered she laughing.

“Esther!” cried he furiously.

She laughed more gaily and more provokingly than before. Behind her red lips, shone a set of teeth, admirable in form and purity. Her head was thrown back, and her whole body bent backwards. She was only sustained by Vandelle who still held her fingers.

Suddenly she recovered herself, and leaning towards her former lover, said:

“There are some moments when you

could kill me with pleasure, are there not?"

"Oh yes!" cried he.

"You love me still, however?"

"Do I love you!"

"Well! you see—"

"What?"

"That in hate there is still—"

"Finish the sentence!"

"Ah! ah! ah! how nicely you were caught!"

"You devil!"

Discouraged, overcome by this struggle, he dropped her hands and fell into a chair.



## CHAPTER XIII.

She remained silent and motionless, awaiting until he recovered, that she might lead him on to a new struggle and inflict on him a new torture; then gliding behind him, she put her hand on his shoulder and bent so that her head just touched him.

“Do you remember, Henri,” she said in a low caressing voice, “the house on the rue de Seze, the room with drawn curtains, the window where I used to watch for you? Do you remember the arms which were held out to you, the eyes which searched for yours, the voice which said: Do not leave me yet?”

Infatuated again by the souvenirs

which she evoked, by her unexpected tenderness, he tried to draw her to him, to take her in his arms.

“Take care!” said she, with an air of modesty, “suppose your wife should come in! I do not want her to think that I have authorized you to pay me attention. Be careful, she would send me away. What would become of me then?”

She stopped and then continued:

“*Apropos* of Madame Vandelle, I always forget to say something; it is true that we are rarely alone. She is charming, your wife; I took a good look at her yesterday, and I recognized that fact. Why do you not love her? Look me in the face! Am I more beautiful than she?”

While so speaking, she drew herself up before him, her face animated, her eyes shining, a smile on her lips, sure o.

herself, and resplendent in her youth and beauty.

“Oh!” replied he putting his hands before his eyes to shut out the sight. “Don’t look at me so! don’t ask me to look at you! it makes me crazy!”

“I know it, and for that very reason—” replied she becoming again cold and mocking.

“Still” cried he, “this same cruel rail-lery!”

She sat down, turned around, and again becoming sentimental, said:

“I dreamt of you last night; I saw you as you were formerly, when you filled my heart, when the touch of your hand was enough to make me tremble. Oh! Henri, Henri, why did you allow me to go away? why did you leave me? why did you put this woman between us?”

“Forget that she exists.”

“She exists all the same. And moreover,” said she changing her tone, “how do you know, even if you were free, that I should care for you now?”

“You are a living and implacable torture,” cried he. “You play with me as a tiger does with his prey. With a word, with a glance, you set me on fire. I begin to hope; I see Love’s light burning in your eyes; I throw myself forward, and an icy remark, a sardonic smile plunges me again into the depths of despair!”

“That is just what I desire.”

“Will it always be so?”

“Always.”

“No! it shall not continue! This existence must finish. With me or without me, you leave here.”

“Bah!”

“Yes, for I will confess all.”

“To your wife? It’s a good idea! I

advise you to do so at once. It will be very amusing. I am curious to see the result."

As steps were heard in the next room, she opened the glass door leading on to the terrace and went out, tranquilly, calmly, a book in her hand, after throwing a final glance full of defiance, at Vandelle.





## CHAPTER XIV.

She knew well enough that he would not speak, for had he intended to, he would have done so at first, when he had scarcely seen her and before he had succumbed to the old infatuation. He would have done so when he could have said to his wife: "Yes, I loved, before knowing you, this woman who has the audacity to present herself here. I loved her still during the first months of our marriage, when I did not know you as I do today. Alas! is one responsible for what is past! In my weakness I wrote her some letters which today she threatens to show you unless I do as she wishes. But your grace, your beauty, your good-

ness have conquered me, and little by little I have forgotten the years which have passed and I live only in the present and for you. Forgive me, I beg, and no matter what this woman says or does, drive her from the house.”

It was too late for him to do this now: Esther had entered the house with his consent; he had even had the infamy to give his former mistress a place at the conjugal hearth.

And, while he thus became her accomplice, he became also her slave, her being, her thing. He belonged to her with all the violence of his souvenirs, of his desires, fought against, contended with, repelled for two years, and which the sight of Esther had revived, more ardent than before. At the moment when her image, becoming indistinct, was about to be effaced, as the last fires of a setting sun disappear from the horizon, she

reappeared suddenly, in all the splendor of her twenty-five years, in the perfection of her beauty. It was not sufficient for her to appear superb, radiant, and lovely enough to be adored at first sight, but she brought with her the past. He did not see her as she was now, with her air of reserve, her modest deportment, her toilet appropriate to her new position, her eyes cast down, with the humble mien of a dependant, but as memory painted her, with burning eye, mouth half-open, hair in disorder, bosom heaving; he heard her murmur tender words, he recalled her warm caresses.

And, to calm the acuteness of these memories, to appease his heated blood, she promised nothing for the future; she said nothing which could make him forget the present and take refuge in hope. She seemed to say, on the con-

trary: "See what I am; but remember what I was; think what I could be, if I would join the present with the past, if I wished—but I do not wish—I will never wish."

These last words he absolutely refused to hear. His self-love, his pride would not permit it! Never! How never? Would he admit that, after having loved him so much, she no longer loved him, that she was not tortured by the same thoughts as himself? Yes. In punishing his treason, she suffered as well as he. But the punishment was only for a time; the pain soon passed. She wished to test him; to enslave him entirely this time; to make revolt for the future impossible. She loved him still. He desired to believe so, and the wish was father to the thought.

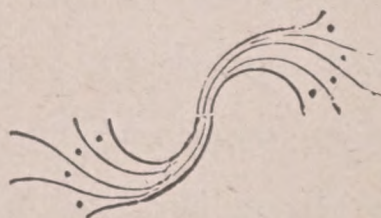
Was he mistaken? Did she really love him? After two years of struggle, two

years of efforts to forget him, had she at last been carried away by a wild desire to see him again? Did the past rise up before the mistress, as it rose before the lover? Or, as she declared, victorious over her memories, sure of herself, prepared for a new struggle, did she think only of revenge?

If expiation was all she desired, she could boast of having imagined a very terrible torture for this man, whose body was the soul, and whom she cruelly struck in the flesh.

However, she was less severe on her former lover, than he was on himself; she was content with living under his roof, a continual living reproach. If he had not known Esther Sandraz, he could not have addressed any reproach to Claire Meunier. She submitted to, rather than provoked, any conversation with him. It was Vandelle who sought

her without cease, who tried his best to meet her, to surprise her; always on the alert, always awaiting the hour when the long resistance would end in an embrace.



## CHAPTER XV.

One afternoon, as Vandelle was crossing the park, he perceived Esther Sandraz leaving the chateau, and bending her steps towards a widespreading elm tree under which Henriette and herself liked to sit during the warm part of the day. Esther was alone, Madame Vandelle having declared, at breakfast, that she had a headache and would pass the day in her room.

It occurred to him at once that this was a good opportunity to have a long *tete-a-tete* with her who always shunned him. However, he did not join her immediately but, like a prudent man, decided to give her time to install herself com-

fortably, so that she would be less likely to fly at his approach. He allowed a quarter of an hour to pass, then following the same path that Esther had taken, but shielding himself behind the trees, he reached her retreat, and hiding behind a clump of bushes, watched her.

Lucky it was that he had decided on this course for Esther, profiting from the liberty that Henriette had given her, persuaded that no one would trouble her in this quiet nook, and having no reason for not making herself comfortable, instead of seating herself as usual on a rustic bench, installed herself in a hammock which was suspended between two trees. Then, overcome by the heat, she grew drowsy.

Vandelle, holding his breath, regarded her ardently. From his hiding place he could see her clearly, and admire every line of her gracious figure.



Thanks to the hammock, Esther was visible at a glance from head to foot. She was splendid so; a ray of the sun, after having made a long white path through the foliage, played about her face, in her hair and on her half naked arms which were thrown behind her head for a pillow. The long lashes of her half-closed eyes cast a light shadow on her cheeks. Her half-opened mouth smiled voluptuously; perhaps she was dreaming of far-off loves. Lying on her back, her full bosom appeared to have the firmness of marble, and the edge of her dress slightly raised permitted him to see a beautifully formed plump leg.

After admiring her face, Vandelle was able, thanks to the hammock suspended between heaven and earth, to follow all the contours of her body, notice all the lines clearly defined by the tightly stretched canvass, which seemed to

mould her as clay moulds some wonder whose imprint the sculptor wishes to preserve.

The white cloth of the hammock supporting this beautiful body, in dissimulating its drapery, gave to it the whiteness of marble, the nudity of a statue.

He did not tire of watching her but his head troubled him. Everything in nature seemed combined to intoxicate him: the waves of warm light, the exhalations of the sun-bathed earth, the low murmuring of insect life midst the waving branches of the elm tree.

He awaited, however, until Esther's eyes should be entirely closed, until the nervous rise and fall of her bosom had given place to the calm and regular motion of sleep; then, leaving his place of concealment, he glided softly towards the hammock.

## CHAPTER XVI.

He was able to approach without waking her, to stand over her and to feast his eyes on the beauty of the woman he loved and desired.

Suddenly, carried away by an overwhelming rush of affection, he bent and kissed her.

Esther awoke with a start. Her eyes expressed fear; and, as she could utter no sound, being, so to speak, gagged, she placed her hand against Vandelle's breast and essayed to push him away. She succeeded in freeing herself to a certain extent and cried: "Leave me, coward, or I will cry for help!"

She could not continue, as he seized her hands and silenced her with kisses.

She made desperate efforts to escape him, or at least to turn her head to one side, but whoever has reposed in a hammock which is hung rather high, is aware of the fact that it is difficult to turn or descend to the ground even when no one holds you, and Esther found herself a captive in this canvass net which encircled her on all sides and in which she was detained by a strong and determined man.

The struggle was unequal and she gave it up. Finding herself obliged to submit to Vandelle's kisses, she decided to make the best of it. Then took place that strange phenomenon, often noticed among women—even the most affectionate; whether surprise, anger or indignation suddenly paralyze them or whether they have in themselves a

strength of will capable of dominating the violence of their temperament, they become sometimes, either involuntarily or of their own will, as cold and icy, as at another time they are loving and demonstrative. Woman, doubtless because she is feeble, has an instinctive horror of violence. She will willingly give her love but will not permit it to be stolen. More than one man has seen a victory he thought assured, escape him because he has tried to force his end.

To the repugnance and anger of Esther at seeing herself so brusquely attacked, to the disgust which Vandelle at that moment inspired in her, was added another motive for passive resistance or cold resignation. If she responded to the caresses of her former lover, she would soon succumb entirely, and her vengeance would escape. The days and nights of struggle and immo-

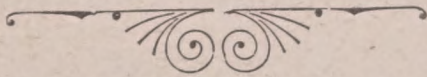
lation, two years passed in the endeavor to dull memory, to kill love, a thousand efforts, a thousand sufferings, would become effaced and useless in an instant. A moment of folly would be sufficient to unite the present with the past. She would recompense Vandelle whom she had come hither to punish; he would rejoice instead of suffer.

So renouncing a dangerous struggle, she submitted to the kisses forced upon her, but did not return them. Her teeth were tightly shut, her lips remained obstinately closed, cold, dry, inert, and Vandelle felt as if he had pressed his mouth to that of a corpse.

Astonished, startled, he drew back his head to look at her; Esther's cheeks were colorless, her eyes dull and expressionless, in them he could read neither defiance, desire, or the joy of triumph.

Chilled by her manner and not daring

to touch her again, he stepped aside and Esther immediately profited by the movement to spring from the hammock ; then free, she walked away without once condescending even to glance at him.



## CHAPTER XVII.

The vengeance of Esther had taken a new and unexpected form. It had never occurred to Mlle. Sandraz that she would be called upon to play the role of a statue, indeed she would have thought herself utterly incapable of playing such a part; and, when she had asked herself with a certain inquietude what would become of her if Vandelle, strong in the strength of his past success, was to show himself too audacious, she now suddenly found in herself the strength to resist all attacks, provided with such weapons of defense as rendered herself all powerful.

Her assurance grew with her victory;



since she had been able to resist the first assault, she hoped to be the victor in all others. She was no longer forced to be prudently reserved, to forego all coquetting, she could permit herself to be admired without danger since she remained insensible to that admiration and could prevent it's passing the limits she had assigned.

She thus added the refinement of cruelty to her vengeance; inactive before, it now became militant. She engaged her adversary and measured her strength with his, exciting herself with the combat, she would fight with cold-blooded impassibility against his audacity and ardor. Struggles had always had an attraction for this strange girl, who, as we have seen, tamed vicious horses, climbed mountains and braved the sea when she was only twenty.

Of a vivid imagination, the activity

of which had been augmented by the abstinence she had practiced, she found a certain pleasure in wearing hair-cloth, in lacerating her flesh and in conquering her senses. Sometimes sensuality hides under asceticism.

Vandelle ought soon to give her another occasion of triumphing over herself. His first defeat had not discouraged him; he considered it a slight skirmish in which he had been taken by surprise. He would soon engage in a great battle, confident of the victory.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

A great general could not have better arranged his plan of action. He selected with care the ground, the day and the hour. He even went so far as to consult the barometer, because he desired, for fighting advantageously, to have the best atmospheric conditions as his past feminine experiences had taught him that the condition of the sky and the direction of the wind played a great part in the history of woman. Wet and rainy weather make them lazy, indolent and apathetic; fatigued without exercise, sad without reason, and melancholy without cause, they desire solitude and sleep. Dry weather,

on the contrary, and a strong north-east wind warm the blood, quicken the circulation, excite the nervous system and urges one to look for one's Alter Ego to counteract this effect; to scratch or to love if one is of a lovable disposition. When there is electricity in the air, it is different: one is no longer contented with scratching; one wishes to bite, to fight or to be fought; to seek a quarrel with the most inoffensive people; to embrace an adored friend, to cry out, laugh, or weep. Ordinarily women commit their first indiscretion during stormy weather. This fact they remember, and they think the sky was their accomplice; this consoles them, but the sky must have a heavily laden conscience.

Therefore, Vandelle, like a man who has tried everything, like a player who holds all the trumps, chose a stormy day to continue the struggle.

He thought that he ought to take advantage of a journey that Henriette made to Luchon, where some of her relatives lived. During the first two days of her absence, Vandelle lamented the serenity of the sky, the placidity of the atmosphere, which did not assist him, and perhaps might hinder him from profiting from so good an opportunity. But, on the afternoon of the third day, light clouds gathering from Spain quickly veiled the mountains, the air became heavy and suffocating, and everything announced the approach of one of those tempests so frequent among the Pyrenees.

Soon thunder was heard in the distance, the mountain echoes prolonging for some time the noise, and sharp frequent flashes of lightning made furrows in the clouds.

Towards evening the storm was at

its height. Esther Sandraz did not come down to dinner; she excused herself with the pretext that the weather had given her a headache; but Vandelle knew that she was awake, for from the park he could see lights in her room.

He awaited until the servants had retired, and then, walking on tip-toe, he carefully ascended the stairs.

Reaching the second floor, he went out on the balcony, which ran around the building, and so was able to reach the windows of Esther's room. He found them closed; but the dormer-window, which was beyond and which opened into a dressing-room, was half-open. Suffocated by the heat of this stormy evening, but not daring to open the balcony window, Mlle. Sandraz had opened the door leading into her boudoir and thus received indirectly the air.

Vandelle, without hesitating (he had

decided on everything, perhaps even a scandal), entered the boudoir, and, holding his breath, approached the door of communication and looked into the adjoining room,

Èsther had her back turned, but he could see her reflected in the glass over the chimney. Standing, wrapped in a muslin *peignoir*, she was arranging her hair for the night; her arms, naked to the shoulder, were raised behind her head, while her agile fingers arranged her hair. Her glance had a vague, languishing aspect, and her half-open lips seemed agitated with a voluptuous shiver.

To better combat the heat, she had taken off her corsets and her starched petticoats, but the floating material which enveloped her did not expose her figure, and Vandelle could not have pictured it in his imagination, if the past,

rising suddenly before him, had not revealed to him all the splendors formerly contemplated.

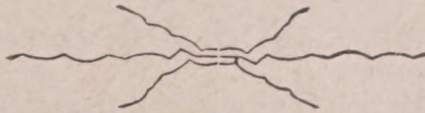
The storm had left the mountains to descend into the valley, the flashes of lightning becoming more vivid and the room being at times illuminated, the muslin *peignoir* became more transparent, and at intervals, like a sudden vision, Esther appeared in all her nudity.

The supple and powerful lines of her body were clearly designed, bending in at the waist, but swelling out at the bosom and thighs. Her skin glittered in the blue glare of the lightning, and, under the influence of electric currents, seemed traversed by rapid quivers. She was at once both goddess and woman; goddess from the grandeur of the scene which surrounded her, from her sculptural figure, the harmony of her lines, and her regal grace; woman, when her body



trembled, quivered, and displayed itself in its soft voluptuousness.

Suddenly the lightning struck near the chateau, and Esther, overcome by fear, turned towards the door to close it. Vandelle, finding himself discovered, sprang forward and clasped her in his arms.



## CHAPTER XIX.

She appeared neither frightened or surprised. Perhaps she had expected this sudden interruption, this brusque attack; perhaps, she had divined Vandelle's project, and, sure of herself, certain of not succumbing in the struggle, had bravely awaited it.

She neither cried out or made any effort to escape from the brutal embrace of her former lover. She lay motionless in his arms, and contented herself with braving his glance and smiling ironically. She seemed to say; "Well, you have your wish. I am in your power, disarmed, and without the strength to resist you. I am yours, do

with me whatever you desire; do not forget, however, that I am an inanimate being, a body without a soul. I am the matter; to animate me, the power of the materialist or the divine inspiration of the spiritualist is necessary. Love me, I defy you."

He had not yet understood, had not divined what had passed within her, and he had never measured the strength of resistance which is in a woman determined in her obstinacy, sure of herself because she had already triumphed, and eager for revenge. Recalling the past, he always thought that she would become again what she had been; he judged her by himself: he had loved her only with his senses, and his senses still ruled him. He forgot that Esther had loved him formerly with all her heart, and that the heart was now lacerated, and her senses slept.

He, however, still held her in his arms and tried to revive her, but he did not succeed. The day, when having surprised her in the hammock, he had tried to make her eyes ardent and her lips amorous, his efforts had been in vain. This time it was not her mouth, her glance or her face which were impassible, but her body, her entire body. Her bosom preserved its marble-like impassibility, her waist its stiffness, and her arms hung listlessly down; no quiver of desire ran over her skin, and when he lifted his eyes to hers, he always met her ironical smile, her steady gaze.

He hoped, at least, to move her by his words. He depicted his sufferings, his tortures; he said that he would die; that he would kill himself, if she no longer loved him. His words were really eloquent, passionate and burning. She listened to him without interruption,

still silent, still impassible, still smiling. He cried like a child; she watched him cry. Furious, he raised her from the floor and threw her on a sofa; she fell in a heap, or rather tumbled, as a statue of Venus, overturned from its pedestal, falls.

Then he became afraid of this inertia, of this steady glance, of this mouth half-open from which no breath seemed to come out, of this silence which surrounded him, of this corpse-like rigidity. He perceived himself a second time defeated, incapable of struggling longer, or of triumphing over the calculated and instinctive resistance of this woman of fire metamorphosized into a woman of ice.

## CHAPTER XX.

The storm had ceased; in the mountains only could be heard heavy rumbles, like far off and faint echoes which still are heard when silence has reigned for some time. All the clouds had fled, leaving a deep blue sky, studded with bright stars, which seemed to increase in number and brightness. A full moon, surrounded by a large luminous circle, gilded some light vapors which the storm had forgotten to carry off in its flight. The mountains appeared, as clearly designed as in daylight, with their salient angles and their snowy summits tinted like gold by the lights from the sky. From the moist earth, from the

grass in the valley, and from the leafy thickets, arose a thousand perfumes. In the large trees in the park the birds, whom the storm had kept awake, and whom the clearness of the night now hindered from sleeping, sang, relating their fears during the tempest, and giving a nocturnal concert. Nature was appeased; noise, disorder and horror had been succeeded by repose, harmony and serene beauty.

Esther, alone now, opened her window and, leaning on the sill, could enjoy the splendor of this beautiful night, while relishing her new triumph. It was complete: she had vanquished her memories and her past; her senses attempted perhaps to revolt against the constraint which she had imposed on them. Ah! she was well revenged, so well revenged indeed that she no longer even thought of taking vengeance, as she had at first.

planned, on this Henriette de Loustal who had stolen her lover, her future husband.

And yet, Henriette had done nothing to soften her, to inspire in her some pity or some sympathy. From instinct, and from intuition, she had treated Esther, if not harshly, at least without affability. She had not tried to make of her either a friend or a confident; she had considered her only in the light of a companion, nearly a servant. Esther had been submissive from force of circumstances.

However, Henriette would have need of an ally: forsaken by her husband, bruised, disdained and nearly hated, her glances had turned towards Olivier, the companion of her childhood, the friend of her youth. According to Esther, who had succumbed without long resistance, on the day when she per-



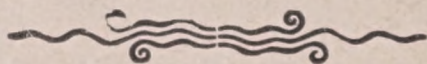
ceived herself in love with Vandelle; according to Esther, brought up by a too feeble mother and thrown at an early age on her own resources, daring from her birth and, on account of her education, having only an imperfect idea of duty, rebellious at understanding certain sacrifices and self-denials, Henriette must have fallen or be on the point of falling.

But of what importance was this struggle now to her? Could she open the eyes of Vandelle? Why should she separate them forever? Did not Vandelle belong to her for life, and had she not, in reviving the past, in giving him her body, raised an insuperable barrier between them?

And this young wife, of what crime was she guilty? In marrying Vandelle, had she been conscious of the wrong she was doing Esther, or of the despair

into which she plunged her? She had, it is true, acted coldly towards her companion. Claire Meunier might have been wounded; Esther Sandraz had not been touched. Does an actress, when off the stage, bear any resentment against an actor, who the night before, in playing his part, had mortally injured her; Esther wore a mask which could be cuffed with impunity, without touching the cheek.

Unhappily for Henriette, she was about to cruelly wound Esther Sandraz.



## CHAPTER XXI.

One evening in September, Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle Fourcanade were visiting at the chateau.

The evenings, in this mountainous country, were commencing to become cool, and so large fagots were burning brightly in the fire-place in the grand *salon* where the Vandelles received their guests.

Madame Fourcanade, her daughter Angelique, Henriette and Claire Meunier, seated near a large table, were talking and working. Vandelle, seated in an easy chair at the other end of the *salon*, appeared to be listening to Monsieur Fourcanade who was

taking him into his confidence, while really watching Esther, whose features, lighted by the flames, stood out boldly in the semi-obscurity.

“Angelique, my child,” said her mother, “why don’t you amuse yourself looking at some pictures? It is well for a young girl to be occupied.”

“With pleasure, mamma,” replied Angelique, “but I have no pictures to look at.”

Madame Fourcanade, turning to Mlle. Meunier begged her to give an album to her daughter.

Esther took a large book from a neighboring table and, handing it to Angelique, said:

“Here is *Le Tour du Monde*, Mademoiselle, in which you will find some instructive engravings.”

“No savages, are there?” asked the mayoress in terror.

“No, Madame, no savages,” replied Esther smiling.

“Good. Savages are not always proper for young ladies to look at.”

As Angelique turned over the leaves of the book near the window that she might have the benefit of the last rays of the setting sun, her mother who thought that she ought not to allow the conversation to drop, and who had a talent for transitions, said to Henriette:

“Monsieur Vandelle does not travel much now.”

“Very rarely,” answered Henriette.

“You have made a good conversion. You should be proud of it.”

Then, after being sure that neither her daughter or the master of the house could overhear her, she leaned towards the young wife and, lowering her voice, said:

“If I speak of conversion it is because Monsieur Vandelle, before his marriage, passed for a *mauvais sujet* far worse than my husband. They say that he led in Paris a life—I know that your tutor has well instructed you, dear Madame, otherwise believe me, I would not speak of such little things.”

Leaning forward still more, so that she could only be heard by Henriette and Esther, she added confidentially: “It seems that he had a nearly serious passion, a very intimate *liaison* with a foreigner, a Portuguese, I believe. She came to France, with her mother, looking for a fortune, and had, so they say, an idea of marrying him.”

“I know it,” responded Henriette continuing her work, while Esther Sandraz, pale and moved, stopped hers, and listened attentively to the conversation.

“My tutor spoke about this person to

Monsieur Vandelle who acknowledged frankly his past folly. But I do not think that he ever had any idea of marrying her. Can one marry such women?"

Esther appeared to suppress an angry movement.

"And were you not jealous of this past love?" asked Madame Fourcanade.

"Jealous! What was there in common between us? I pity with all my heart the unfortunate ones about whom we are talking, and I feel still more sympathy for them than disgust. But if he, to whom I have given my hand and my faith, should so far forget his dignity and honor, or should fall so low as to give to me for a rival, to me his wife, a creature of this kind, my contempt for him would be greater than for her, and I would not even do him the honor of suffering."

“Really!” murmured Esther, upright and trembling.

“What did you say, Mademoiselle?” asked Madame Vandelle raising her head.

“Nothing, Madame,” answered Claire Meunier, reseating herself. “I did not speak.”

“I am not like you,” said the mayor-ess. “I have been jealous of all women, even the servants, and, if Monsieur Fourcanade had taken for a mistress the worst of these, even a Portuguese, no consideration of dignity could have prevented me from tearing out the eyes of the guilty ones.”

“You can be jealous of a servant,” observed Henriette, “if she is honorable. The maid, whom poverty has forced to serve us, is above those intriguing women who have but one end: to



marry and to occupy the position of honest women."

Madame Fourcanade raising her voice cried:

"Angelique, look at the pictures."

"Yes, mamma," replied the obedient Angelique, who was all the while listening attentively to the conversation.

The mayoress turned again to Madame Vandelle.

"Perhaps you are a little severe on this—young lady—as they called her in the capital," added she, trying to smile ingeniously. "I have heard it affirmed that she was formerly received in Parisian society, and that she had good manners and a fine education—"

Henriette stopped her and answered, with the severity of a young girl, brought up in the country, and the brutality of a chaste woman:

"She is none the less guilty! Her

past, her education should have preserved her from a shameful fall. But I know her of whom we are speaking better than you do; you are not the first one who has talked to me about her. Recently, at Luchon, one of my friends spoke of her. She called herself Esther Sandraz, I believe, and made a scandal in Paris by her eccentricities, her extravagance, and her loud toilets. She was not highly esteemed even before her disgrace. As to her downfall it must have been premeditated—Monsieur Vandelle was rich at that time—it was a villainous calculation, an odious bargain.”

Esther arose, menacing and terrible; but the obscurity had increased around her by degrees, the flames in the fireplace no longer threw out any light, and so neither the change in her expression and deportment, or the strangeness of her manner could be marked,

and when an instant later, a servant brought in a lamp, she had recovered her composure.

Soon Monsieur Fourcanade, who had heard the whistle of the train and at the same time looking at his watch to see if it was on time, joined his wife and respectfully observed to her that it was time to leave.

Angelique had just become interested in the pictures; she was looking at a scantily clothed African colony; so she said:

“But, papa, it is only nine o’clock.”

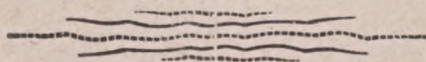
“My child,” replied Monsieur Fourcanade in a positive manner, “it is a quarter past nine, for the train is just leaving.”

“Let us imitate the train,” added the mayoress, who thought she was saying something witty.

She took leave of Henriette and

marched majestically towards the door followed by her daughter and husband who carried a cane, an umbrella, a lantern, the needlework of the ladies, and some shawls.

Vandelle, with the pretext of accompanying the Fourcanade tribe, went out with them, while Henriette went to her room.



## CHAPTER XXII.

A quarter of an hour later, Henri Vandelle returned to the *salon* and found Esther there, nervous and agitated.

She seemed to have made up her mind as soon as she saw him, and going straight to him said:

“Have you not a position of engineer still vacant in your factory?”

“Yes,” answered he astonished.

“Does Madame Vandelle continue to ask it for Monsieur Olivier Deschamps?”

“Yes, she insisted on obtaining it for him even today.

“You refused her request?”

“Yes.”

“On the contrary, you must grant what she desires,” said she briefly, trembling all over.

“Why? I do not understand,” replied he more and more astonished.

“You don’t need to understand,” replied she. “Give this place in question to the young man, I wish it.”

“But—” stammered he.

“Ah! you must have explanations,” cried she suddenly. “Is it absolutely necessary that you understand? Well, so be it! Winter is approaching, and it will be tiresome among your mountains, in your chateau; this young man is charming, and will help us pass the time.”

He became as pale as she.

“Ah! that is the reason,” replied he, “why you ask for this place. You have not then made me suffer enough? You

desire now to add the torture of jealousy!"

She laughed nervously and replied:

"Ah! Ah! he thinks I am in love with this gentlemen! as if I could love now! I made a calculation when I submitted myself to you—I concluded a bargain—I sold myself."

"Who said that?"

"Your wife! She said it here a few minutes ago, in this very room, before me. And I listened, in silence, without replying. What could I have answered? She was perhaps right, and I bear her no ill feeling, since I plead her cause with you, since I wish for her happiness."

"Her happiness?"

"Without doubt. Ah! he sees nothing; they are all alike."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean," replied she no longer able to

keep from laughing, "that your Henriette, so severe, so hard, so cruel towards me, loves Monsieur Olivier Deschamps."

"She!"

"Yes, she. Will you maintain that she is too honest, too virtuous for that; that she cannot commit a fault, that I am the only one that can? Let us see if she has a monopoly of virtue! Ah! she insulted me, she spoke of Esther Sandraz as a *filie perdue*, as a courtesan, as a woman of the town. I hope to see her love in her turn, and to succumb; I hope that she will have less disgust for me; I hope in fact, that Olivier Deschamps will come to live here, breathe the same air as she, and seduce her as I have been seduced."

"And I?" asked Vandelle.

"Ah! yes, it is true—I did not think of you. Well, my dear, that will be a



new form of vengeance on you, I had not thought of that. I disdained your wife, but she attacked me, she outraged me and in taking revenge on her, I will also revenge myself on her husband. You have deserted, betrayed and ruined me, trampled me under foot, and crushed me to make a good marriage, to wed fortune and virtue. Your fortune, keep it, you offered it to me before but I don't wish it. As to the virtue of your wife, don't count too much on that—she will escape you; I hope she will escape you. So it is settled—tomorrow the old friend of Madame Vandelle will be your guest, or I will depart and you will never see me again. You will not even have the consolation of thinking that some day perhaps the past will reappear.”

She accompanied these words with a

long steady glance and went out, leaving him to his reflections, without wishing to hear him.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

He was stunned by this torrent of words, astounded by this unexpected scene, and terrified by these new pretensions of Esther.

It was folly, pure folly! The relative isolation to which Mlle. Sandraz had condemned herself and her sudden transplantation to a half-savage country, the constraint which she imposed on herself and the abstinence to which, from a spirit of revenge, she had sentenced herself, all her suppressed aspirations and her unsatiated desires, had at last produced in her a profound perturbation. Her brain was diseased and it would be dangerous for Vandelle to obey her

lucubrations, or to follow her to the point where she wished to drag him.

He walked up and down the *salon* while thinking of these things, talking aloud and gesturing wildly, as if he was himself becoming crazy.

Suddenly he stopped in the midst of his tempestuous course, remained an instant on the same spot, and then, moving slowly towards an easy-chair near the fire-place, sat down and broached new ideas, which if not wiser ones, were at least more calm.

After all, what was it that Mlle. Sandraz demanded? She wished Olivier Deschamps to have the position of engineer in the factory; but this was precisely what Madame Vandelle had been asking for so long, and what he had refused to grant from pure caprice and from a spirit of contrariness, for he really needed an engineer and this young man

had the best of recommendations. He was therefore going to willingly grant to his former mistress the place solicited by his wife, if Esther was interested in Olivier Deschamps only because he was a graduate of the Central school. But she was giving him a part to play, not only in the factory but in the chateau, not only among the workmen but near Madame Vandelle. Henriette was not favoring an employee without a place, she was interesting herself in a young amiable man who pleased her, and Esther pretended to befriend their *amours*. Should he not therefore refuse with indignation the requests made of him, and close his door on this disguised engineer?

After deep reflection, after turning over and over in his mind the question, he reached the conclusion that he had exaggerated the matter, and that he had

not reasoned with sufficient calmness. Mlle. Sandraz was not competent to understand Madame Vandelle; she credited her with intentions, and with aspirations absolutely unworthy of her. Henriette, deserted as she was, abused as she perceived herself to be, was not a woman to fail in her duty. He no longer loved her, perhaps he had never loved her, but he would do her that justice. He could without danger introduce Olivier Deschamps into his house; Henriette would not fail him, he could answer for her.

If, however he was mistaken? Supposing Henriette should be drawn more strongly towards her old companion than he supposed, than she herself thought; supposing she hoped to find in him a refuge, to console herself near him for her mistaken love, her deceiving dreams, and for his de-

sersion. Should he not then protect her against herself, and remove her from all danger of doing wrong? Surely, it was his duty! It must be that Esther had lost her reason and thought him somewhat unbalanced himself, to have spoken as she did, and order him to commit a dishonorable action.

He had left his seat near the fire-place and had recommenced his promenade, more agitated and more excited than ever. This had resulted from his being forced to acknowledge that Esther had judged him well. Yes, he was out of his head, above all since his last defeat; his vanity, his wounded pride, and his mortified senses irritated him, agitated him beyond measure, and drove him mad. He had only one idea: to triumph over the resistance of Esther, to overcome her coldness, and animate this marble statue.

He did not know how to accomplish it; he now doubted his own ability and was afraid of being vanquished again, He thought of her without cease, he saw her in her room just as he had contemplated her, just as he had pressed her in his arms, and far from perceiving himself calmed by her indifference, from being cooled by her coldness, he felt himself more excited than before, and more beset by ardent covetousness.

And she had just showed him the means of ending his long martyrdom, of obtaining the victory after so many defeats, and of receiving the ardently desired recompense, the appeasement succeeding a mortal enervation. Yes; if he should give her the chance of revenging herself on her who had outraged her, she would consent to become softened, to revive the past, and to resuscitate her dead voluptuousness.



But it was exactly this hope, this promise which frightened and disgusted the remnants of his conscience. Henriette would run no risk, her virtue was beyond danger. He could safely give Olivier Deschamps the position demanded for him; but he must not submit to the solicitations of Esther, or accept the bargain which she had proposed to him.

Resolved this time, and decided not to succumb to a wrong and criminal temptation, he left the *salon* and went to his apartments.

A letter had been left on the table in his sleeping room during the evening. He opened it and read:

“SIR: In the conversation which we had during the day, I did not dare to say certain things, which, after reflection, I thought best to write you: According to my marriage contract, half

of the mill which you direct belongs to me. Such being the case, don't you think that you are really a little too disobliging in persisting to refuse me the favor which I have asked of you: namely, to give a position in the factory to a man who can be of great service to us, my old friend, Olivier Deschamps?"

"Ah!" cried he, interrupting the reading, "she wishes it, it is she who desires it! It is she who declares war!"

END OF PART TWO.

PART · THREE.



## CHAPTER I.

Winter has arrived. The plains which surround Montrejeau, and the neighboring hills are covered with deep snow, soon hardened by the stubborn northwest wind. The distant mountains, formerly green and whose summits alone, with their eternal snow, recalled winter, have become white in a night; the trunks of several gigantic pines and some boulders too perpendicular for the snow to cling to, cast the only shadows on this uniform scene. The glaciers, recognizable in summer by the reflection and by their slightly grayish color, are now confounded with the meadows,

the bushes, the snowy clumps, and have a whitish tint from the mountains.

Silence reigns around the chateau. The only sound heard is the monotonous noise of the Neste rolling impetuously down the rocks before emptying into the Garonne which, swelled by these waters, loses its tranquility and changes from a quiet stream into a vast torrent.

Sometimes also, at certain hours, the roaring noise of the factory makes itself heard, announces its vitality and throws suddenly a clamorous note into the deep silence of nature, and this noise, transmitted by the snow, is prolonged into infinity.

The railroad, deprived of part of its traffic, seems to sleep. It reposes after its summer activity and after the lively motion which, during the season of summer resorts, has reigned on its

rails. At long intervals, the whistle of an engine is heard and a train stops at Montrejeau; very few passengers, however, descend to warm themselves in the buffet, and never now is a Parisian seen; therefore Monsieur Fourcanade, deprived of his habitual pleasure, no longer runs to the station, but taking refuge in the cafe at Montrejeau and faithful to his political customs, plays billiards and gains some votes for his favorite candidate in the coming election.

The chateau has a most somber aspect, the paths in the park have disappeared beneath the snow, and the great *salon* is silent and deserted.

Henri Vandelle, melancholy and taciturn as the weather, remains shut up in his room when he is not hunting. Esther Sandraz also stays in her room, sitting with Henriette only when she is summoned by her.

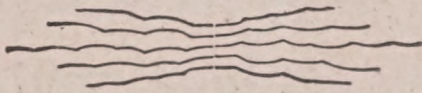
Such appeals are more and more rare, as Madame Vandelle passes entire days without seeking the society of her companion, or asking Esther to read to her. She does not retire to her room after breakfast, like Mlle. Meunier, but remains in the little *salon* and passes hours at a time lying on a lounge buried in thought.

Her health appears to resent this bodily prostration and this activity of mind; her complexion has lost its former brilliancy, for her blood courses less freely beneath the skin and a blue circle surrounds her eyes, her lips are discolored and dry, and remain firmly closed instead of smiling.

The body itself has grown thin, and the exquisite roundness of her bosom has diminished and tends to disappear. She is still adorable, more adorable in her semi-languor than when she was in the



full enjoyment of health and strength ;  
but it was easy to foresee that if this  
life was prolonged, her beauty would  
suffer.



## CHAPTER II.

About four o'clock one afternoon towards the last of November, Henriette, buried in thought, did not hear the step in the hall of the chateau or notice the entrance of Olivier Deschamps.

"I beg your pardon," said he on perceiving her, "I did not know you were here."

"What do you want?" asked she quickly.

"To speak with Monsieur Vandelle." replied Olivier.

"He is not here."

"Will he return soon?"

"I don't know. He does not inform

me of his movements. You know that very well."

Astonished at her tone and the dryness of her answers, he approached her timidly and in a sad, sweet voice said:

"What is the matter with you? Do you suffer?"

"No," answered she with impatience.

"Then you are angry with me?"

"With you? no."

"There is something the matter. You do not speak to me as you usually do. It looks to me as if my presence annoyed you. Since the day that Monsieur Vandelle, finally overcome by your persistancy, detained me at the very moment that I was going away, have I forfeited the good opinion of either him or yourself? Is he not contented with my work?"

"Monsieur Vandelle," replied Henriette more sweetly, "never speaks to me of

you, and I have nothing to reproach you for. This somber and cold weather has made me slightly ill, but don't disquiet yourself about me. Think of your work, of your future. Are you contented with your position in the factory? Are you obeyed, considered and loved? Are you very busy at present?"

"Yes, but one thing is lacking."

"What is that."

"The eye of a master: Monsieur Vandelle is not often among us."

"Well, replace him."

"I have not the requisite authority; I am too recent a comer in the factory."

"I can do nothing about it."

"I know it, and I would not have said anything about this matter if you had not asked me."

They regarded each other for some time in silence. He, with his eyes fixed on her, happy to contemplate her, but

ranked among those who never succumb, and the number is large, no matter what one says to the contrary. But for an hour, she no longer felt that superb confidence in herself which, up to that time, had sustained her; her first step on a dangerous path had frightened her beyond measure and had caused her to fear making a second; she was about to acquire suddenly, in her hour of need, the experience which she lacked. Smiling and without fear, although a little anxious, she had climbed a high mountain without falling or looking behind her. Then, having made a false step, a very slight one, the abyss appeared before her and she now feared the vertigo.

But how to escape the danger? What to do? To go away, but could she? The women, who have the greatest need of motion and of activity, of dis-

traction and of traveling, to escape from certain influences, are the ones most frequently condemned to inaction and seclusion. It is necessary for them to fight the danger on the spot without a change of atmosphere, with nothing new to divert their thoughts. If the danger comes—and it is often the husband who involuntarily brings it in the form of an attractive friend—they must submit to it; they cannot turn him out. A man, on the contrary, can take his hat and say: “Decidedly this woman is too interesting. I had better not come again.” If, supposing an impossible case, he should be turned out of the house; he can grab his traveling bag and fly with all haste and—he is saved. A married woman cannot do this; in her case such a precipitate flight would be regarded as an acknowledgement of her guilt and nobody would believe that,

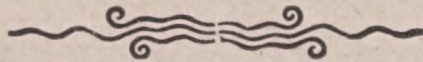
on reaching the railroad station, she entered a compartment reserved for ladies.

But, if Madame Vandelle could not run away from Olivier Deschamps, she had sufficient command over herself to compel him to leave the chateau, and to make him promise never to see her again. It was terrible, and nothing but this thought made her cry. She cried about herself, whose isolation would be so complete; she cried about him, who would be desolate and despairing.

She did not hesitate; she was resolved to make no compromise with her conscience, for she knew her peril, the deep chasm appeared before her and seeing herself standing on the edge, she dared neither to mount higher or to remain in the same place but desired to

descend as quickly as possible to the plain below.

The horizon would be limited: the cloud which had been below her, now surrounded her and the bright, blue sky, beheld for an instant from the high summits, had disappeared and she remained, amidst the fog, mournful and discouraged. But what mattered her feelings? She had done her duty, had expiated her fault, and would be exposed to no new temptations.





## CHAPTER V.

How was she going to let Olivier know that he must go? How was she going to speak to him, or to convince him? And if, in place of sharing her fears, obeying her, and leaving the country, he should try to persuade her that he could safely remain; if she should allow herself to be touched by his reasoning and his eloquence; if conquered by his despair, discouraged and weakened herself by the struggle, she should again commit some imprudence? Ah! she could fear anything now; had they not allowed themselves to be carried away in an unguarded moment when she neither doubted his strength or her own?

Should she write to him? He would respond, discuss her reasons and perhaps advance strong ones for not leaving, which she would have to combat. And besides, if she wrote, would that not be another mistake?

She must have a confidant, somebody whom she could depend upon, a friend who could speak to Olivier in her name, convince him and make him agree to go away. Then, she need not see him again or risk being touched by his prayers, and so would not be tempted to say: "Remain," or forget herself while saying good bye.

But she had neither a confidant nor a friend; she was alone, entirely alone in the nearly deserted and dreary country; she felt utterly desolate and the dark night outside seemed a fitting accompaniment to her despair.

While she was thus thinking, Claire entered the room.

She looked at her. The young woman appeared as sad, as depressed and dejected as she did herself. She was no longer, as on the day of her arrival at the chateau, smiling and glowing with health, but had paled greatly, and the brightness of her eyes seemed to have decreased.

Henriette reproached herself for not having noticed this transformation before, for living absorbed in her own sorrow without seeing that of others, for having considered only her own troubles without thinking that this young woman might have her's. Without family, without friends and without fortune, Claire Meunier had agreed to shut herself up in the heart of France, far from all distractions, and in a country wild in summer, desolate in winter. Should

she not have expected to receive from her, with whom she shared her exile, a little kindness and amiability, if not affection? But no, Henriette had detached herself little by little from her, and, that she might entirely devote herself to her reveries, had, so to speak, quarantined her.

And Claire had said nothing, had suffered in silence; she no doubt needed her pay and so did not dare complain.

Truly, Henriette had been too egotistical, too cruel! She reproached herself and was ashamed of her past conduct.

Then, as Claire, taking a book, seated herself in a corner so as not to disturb her meditations, Henriette arrived at the conclusion that this young woman perhaps merited her confidence. Besides, had she not appeared at the very moment when she had

wished for a confident, a friend? Was not one led to believe that Heaven, to whom Madame Vandelle had complained of her isolation, had opened to give passage to her who would console and perhaps save her?

However, she did not think at this time of disclosing her secret, or of charging her with the mission to Olivier. If, later, she should decide to do so, it would be because an irresistible desire for sympathy drew her out farther than she wished. She intended at first to show a great amount of affection for her whom she had up to this time kept at a distance. She wished to attach her to herself, to make her for the future a beloved friend and to confide in her to some extent so that Claire, in her turn, might open up her heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

When one has lived for a long time absorbed in one's self, in one's reflections, in one's thoughts, without confiding them to a soul, and when tired of silence, of isolation, and nervous beyond measure, if by hazzard, one becomes confidential, there is no stopping; one excites one's self by one's own words, becomes still more nervous and says a great deal more than one intends. This is what was about to happen to Henriette. After the dinner, which was short, and at which the master of the house did not appear, Madame Vandelle, finding herself alone with Esther, went and sat beside her, saying kindly:

“I do not mean to reproach you, my dear Mlle. Meunier, but for some time past you have left me much alone. You only come to me when I ask for you. I have need of some one to speak to me, some one to love me. Have I offended you? Have you any grievance or grudge against me?”

“Any grievance or grudge? What an idea!” replied Esther in rather a hard voice.

“Ah! You are vexed at me; I can see it,” continued the young wife. “I have seemed cold towards you perhaps, but it is not pride; I do not easily become intimate. I am neither imperious nor haughty, and if my words are not always the same, or if I am some times a little impatient and brusque, it is because I suffer, and grief renders one irritable and unjust.”

“But, Madame,” observed Esther,

“why do you say this to me? I have made no complaints.”

“No; you do not complain but you are sad, you are melancholy, and you shun me. And I repeat to you that never, never have I had such need of affection, counsel and support as at this minute. I have neither mother, sister or friend. I am alone, alone to fight against sorrow, my thoughts, and the folly and anger of despair.”

Little by little, as we have predicted, Henriette went beyond the limits she had traced for her confidence, exciting herself as she spoke. Her aching heart, so long closed to all the world, was now opened and poured forth its troubles freely.

“I do not understand you, Madame,” responded Esther.

“Oh, yes! you comprehend,” replied she feverishly. “You have certainly



guessed; you must have seen that he who should cherish and protect me, abandons me; that he who should love me, shows me only indifference and disdain. But you can sustain, comfort and counsel me. You are strong and I am weak. I fully appreciate your strong, proud character. Will you be my friend? there is nothing to prevent our becoming warm ones. Are you not my equal in education and intelligence? You are a woman, and therefore should sustain me, if not from affection and sympathy, at least from pity."

"I pity you?"

"Why not? asked Henriette. Because chance has deprived you of that fortune which has made me so miserable. Oh! I envy you. You are free, depend only on yourself, and can follow the dictates of your own heart. I silenced mine to save this miserable property. Ah! but I did

not know. Weak, always weak, I allowed myself to be led, and now, in my bruised and wounded heart, the past awakens. I am obliged to suppress, to stifle my feelings, and to bring despair to another heart, which has never beaten but for me.”

“Another heart!” exclaimed Esther.

“Yes, yes,” continued Henriette, more excited than ever, and comprehending that she had said too much to stop now, “yes, you know very well. Did you not guess it a long time ago? Must I put my secret into words for you to understand it? That young man, the friend of my childhood, he who lives with us, must go away to-morrow, to-night if possible. I must not see him again. Say this to him for me, beseech him, order him to go.”

“I!” cried Esther, astonished.

“Yes. I should not have the courage.

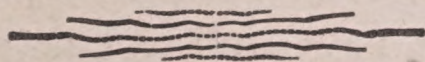
Do this, I beg of you, my companion, my friend.”

She continued to talk for some time longer, insisting, almost supplicating. Then, without giving Esther time to answer, in the fear of receiving a refusal and perhaps also, because she feared she might revoke her decision, she left the room precipitately.

When she had gone, Esther Sandraz slowly let fall these words:

“How strangely such people comprehend love!”

Then gloomy and down-hearted, she remained plunged in her reflections.



## CHAPTER VII.

Soon, Olivier Deschamps, whom a servant had gone to find at the factory where he worked every evening before going home, joined Esther.

She lifted her head when she heard him enter but instead of speaking to him at once, regarded him fixedly for several minutes.

His strong features, his deep eyes, certain lines in his forehead, something sad in his smile, revealed the hard student; deep reflection and perhaps the events of his life had ripened him early, and given him experience. But that which

was above all pleasing in him was the charm of his face, his clear gaze, which was, so to speak, full of sunshine and frankness.

Astonished that Mlle. Claire Meunier should ask for him, he waited at first for her to open the interview. Finally seeing that she continued to keep silent he decided to speak.

“I have come, Mademoiselle, at your command. What do you wish of me? Why do you look at me so?”

“Because, Monsieur, I do not know how to acquit myself of the mission with which I have been charged.”

“A mission?”

“A very strange and painful one.”

“From whom?”

“Madame Vandelle.”

“Ah!” said he paling, and he added after an instant in a voice which he

tried to render calm; "what is this mission?"

"Madame Vandelle," slowly answered Esther, "begs you, orders you if necessary, to leave here."

He cast a suspicious glance at her. He was astonished, not by the order which Henriette sent him, for he knew her and had dreaded to receive it, but, not having assisted at the interview which had just taken place between the two women and not taking into account all that had influenced Madame Vandelle, he could not understand why she had chosen Claire Meunier for a confidant. His astonishment betrayed itself in these words:

"And it is you whom she has charged?—"

"Yes, I, interrupted Esther, "and my surprise equals your own. However, have the kindness to reflect that I was

the only person who could speak to you in her name." Then as he did not respond, she added: "Well, sir, what is your decision? what answer am I to give to Madame Vandelle?"

"Say to her," answered he resolutely, "that I will obey, without discussing her commands."

She arose and advanced towards him.

"Your answer is not serious, you still doubt me, do you not? You do not believe that I am really charged with this message to you."

"I did indeed doubt, Mademoiselle, but I have reflected and I doubt no longer."

"Then," replied Esther, "you will really go tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

"Without bidding her good bye?"

"Yes, if she exacts it."

“You do not love her then!” cried Esther.

Her accent, her gesture, confirmed Olivier in the belief that she was sincere, and proved, at the same time, the truth of certain ideas which he soon expressed.

“You see to what an extent I love her since I agree to go away.”

“I don’t understand.”

He made a step towards her and, looking her straight in the eyes, said:

“You have never loved then?”

“I don’t know,” replied she quickly. “But it seems to me that no obstacle could separate me from the one I loved; and that if by chance there were any, before I would renounce my happiness and my life, I would surmount them all.”

“Even at the risk of fatally compromising an existence more precious than your own?”



“At any risk, at any price. Is not my life as good as another’s?”

“It is easy to see,” answered he, “that you have never loved.”

She kept silent and seemed to reflect. Perhaps she was asking herself if he was not right, if she had ever really loved. At last lifting her head she said:

“So you are really going?”

“I am going. Have the kindness to say to Madame Vandelle that tomorrow, at the earliest hour, I shall leave this house. Tell her that in spite of the pain in my heart, her memory shall be my guiding star. Say to her that I go because I wish her to be pure, honored and holy in all eyes, that I go blessing her, without a murmur. I shall die of it perhaps, but I shall expire without regretting my sacrifice, and my last thought shall be a tender one for her.”

He spoke no more and yet she lis-

tened, astonished and stupified at the words which he had uttered, by the sentiments so new, so strange to her.



## CHAPTER VIII.

Olivier, after a few moments, broke the silence, and, approaching Esther, said:

“Now that we have adjusted Madame Vandelle’s and my situation, we will, if you please, speak about you.”

“About me?”

“Yes, about you, who, intrusted with the mission of sending me away, tried to detain me.”

“I, I tried ——?”

“Without doubt. Did you not say that no obstacle could separate you from the man you loved; that you would break through everything, at any risk, at any price? That was as much as telling me to remain.”

“Really! And why should I try to detain you?” asked she. “What difference does your presence or your absence make to me?”

“Much,” replied he in a firm voice, transfixing Esther with a steady gaze. “If I depart, Madame Vandelle would escape from all danger, and you are waiting for her fall.”

“I! I!” cried she astonished and pale. “What does this mean, sir? By what right do you thus accuse me? Why do you insult me? With what end should I await for the fall of Madame Vandelle?”

“With the idea,” replied he, “of separating Monsieur Vandelle forever from his wife and of living with him.”

“Sir!”

He added without departing from his calm:

“You thought I was too much in love

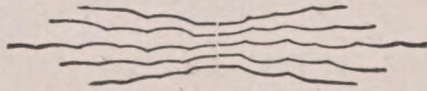
to see things clearly here. You were mistaken. Who are you? I don't know. From where you come? of little importance. Had you some secret design in introducing yourself into this house? I am not posted to that extent; but it is certain that you have made a great impression on Monsieur Vandelle since your arrival here. It is also certain that he is not indifferent to you. Don't lie; I know what I am talking about. I quickly understood that Madame Vandelle ran a great danger from you two, and that is why I wanted a position in the factory; why I am here. I leave tomorrow because she has ordered me to do so, but you leave with me."

"In truth," cried she, "you so dispose of my person?"

"No, it is you who are going to dispose of it, of your own free will. You do

not know yourself and so I am about to give you a lesson."

"Well!" said she, regarding more curiously the man who was about to metamorphose her to some extent, to reveal her to herself.



## CHAPTER IX.

He continued in an assured, but sweet and penetrating voice:

“You have been, Mademoiselle, spoiled and petted during your infancy and youth. You were so pretty, so beautiful, that you were loved and admired, without anyone thinking of preparing you to lead an honorable and honored life. Later, you have loved in your turn, but one of those men for whom a woman’s heart does not exist, who materialize and debase her. You have suffered much from this man, and you no longer have but one thought—revenge.”

She trembled, but she made neither a gesture nor spoke.

He continued:

“What vengeance you have dreamed of in this moment of perturbation, of anger, I do not exactly know. But for two months, from the day that I obtained a place here, I have observed you, watched your gestures, your glances, and I am sure that without having had the courage to abandon your designs, you are ashamed of them; you blush at yourself, you suffer.”

She remained motionless, her head lowered and her glance fixed.

“To-day,” went on Olivier more sweetly, as if speaking to an invalid, “to-day, you suffer more than you have ever suffered; she whom you formerly hated, whom you wished to sacrifice to your resentments, has shown herself towards you, affectionate and kind, and has treated you as a friend. These marks of sympathy have touched



you, and your heart, already less hard, grows still more softened. But I have understood from certain words that you said a short time ago, that something had made a still more lively impression on your heart: Madame Vandelle suffers on account of her husband; she has been humiliated, ill-treated and abused by him, and yet far from thinking of taking revenge on him, she has sacrificed herself so that the honor of him, whose name she bears, might run no danger, so that he might not suffer on her account. She loves me, you cannot doubt it; you have known it for some time, and yet she sends me away. As for me, instead of resisting her orders, in spite of my pain, I submit. Her conduct and mine have profoundly astonished you. Our way of understanding love, duty and devotion have succeeded in moving your heart, wavering and

tormented. You have experienced a change of sentiment, and I am very much mistaken if you are not on the road to salvation. That is what I desired to tell you in my turn, Mademoiselle."

He saluted her and went out, without her having pronounced a word.



## CHAPTER X.

A quarter of an hour later, while Esther was still seated in the same place, steps sounded in the dining-room, adjoining the little *salon*. It was Vandelle who entered; his hunting expedition had no doubt been in vain as no detonation had been heard. He had not yet dined and so he ordered his dinner at once without going upstairs, contenting himself with placing his gun, still loaded, in a corner.

His repast lasted about an hour. For some time, Vandelle had lingered longer over his meals than before; perhaps he tried in this way to forget his misfortunes, and, with the assistance of good

wine, to replace the dismal present by a bright colored dream, to live in the past and above all in the future, since the present was so sad.

When his abundant repast was finished and when he had consumed a demi-caraffe of kirsch that he might better enjoy dreaming, he lighted a cigar and turned towards the little *salon*, where he hoped to comfortably enjoy his siesta. Vandelle appreciated all the refinements of good living and comfort.

He was greatly astonished to find Esther seated before the fire, thoughtful and plunged in meditation. He thought that she had long ago retired to her room and had not hoped for a *tete-a-tete* with her. If he had known that she was there, so near him, perhaps he would not have remained so long at table, would have been more moderate in his drinking; he had indulged so

freely that he saw it was out of the question for him to attempt to sustain a conversation, or to profit from his good fortune. He had so little confidence in his intellectual faculties, in his aptitude for making gallant speeches, that he decided to keep silent and imitate the mutism of Esther. He took his habitual place on the lounge, installed himself at his ease, put a cushion under his head, stretched out his legs, and lighted a fresh cigar.

This evening did not lack its charm: it reminded him of those he had passed in the apartments of Esther on the rue de Seze. He was then, as today, alone with her in a small room, stretched out on a lounge from which he contemplated and admired her, without saying a word.

But then such eloquent silence was succeeded by conversation still more

eloquent. He did not always remain alone on the lounge; sometimes she joined him there and thanked him for his mute admiration. Today, she paid no attention to the direction of his glances, their ardor did not touch her, she showed herself indifferent to their steadiness.

A moment however arrived, when, in consequence of a magnetic phenomenon, which one cannot gainsay, the obstinacy of his steady gaze forced Esther to raise her eyes.

She saw the purple face of Vandelle, his unnaturally brilliant eye, full of lust; his large open nostrils, his red lips. With his large shoulders, his short, thick, powerfully veined neck, burned by the wind and sun; his thick, black, bushy hair; his abundant beard, now uncared for, Vandelle recalled the faun of antique statuary, which Greek art

is known to leave, under robust appearances, under a certain elegance of form. It was the perfect type of sensuality, but of an Athenian sensuality, Parisian and *mondaine*.

She was now able to regard him at her ease. Strong, because of the reserved attitude he had assumed and the sort of lethargy into which his half-drunken condition had plunged him, she did not have to be on her guard against him. Also he appeared to her in all his materiality, just as he was.

And this was all she had succeeded in inspiring in him. The love that he felt, the great love that he showed for her, could be summed up in one word: possession.

He saw only that, he aspired only for that, he coveted nothing else. Her body, and that was all.

Ah! what a distance separated this

physical love from that real love which Henriette Vandelle inspired in Olivier Deschamps! Although they were both young, both ardent, healthy and vigorous, yet they did not allow themselves to be governed by their passions or carried away by sensuality. The heart ruled them, they listened to it, and the noise of its beating deadened all the murmurs which sounded within them, ennobled them, and preserved them from all pollution. He loved her, he knew himself beloved by her and yet he was ready to make any sacrifice. She loved him and in the fear of allowing him to see her love, of becoming tender in his presence, she sent him away and condemned herself to self-denial.

What a difference between Olivier Deschamps and Vandelle, and what a barrier separated her from Henriette!



For she interrogated her conscience; she asked herself if she was any better than her lover. Had she not developed her desires, irritated her senses, placed carnal pleasures above all intellectual enjoyments? Has not a woman a mission to fulfill near the man she loves: to speak to his reason, to his soul; not to permit him to devote so much time to sensations, but to consider his feelings, to enhance them, uplift them, and act so that her love, however ardent it may be, will ennoble and purify him? But at the time of their *liaison*, she forgot herself so completely in his arms, that she neither thought to interrogate his heart nor allow her own to speak.

And this is what he had become: awaiting the return of past pleasures, watching for the hour when she would become more human, would change

from a statue to a living being, whose ice would melt. He had no other objective: the world might fall to pieces, and he would not perceive it while his eyes were fixed on her, awaiting the propitious hour.

And this is what she had become: to avenge herself, she had found only one way: to crucify him in the flesh.

Ah! they were noble! She told herself that she was worse than he. Had she not conceived the odious project of revenging herself on poor Henriette? If the unhappy one suffered, at this time, from her love for Olivier, if she was discouraged and broken-hearted, was it not Esther who had inflicted this new suffering on her? Had not Mlle. Sandraz exacted that Olivier should enter the house, be constantly with her? Had she not fanned the fire of their love? Vandelle had not doubted

his wife; he believed in her virtue, and, without being criminal, had exposed her to danger, persuaded that Henriette would not succumb to it. But she, Esther Sandraz, had believed, on the contrary, in the certain downfall of Madame Vandelle; she had desired it, had prepared it.

And what a great lesson these honest people had taught her! Olivier, whom she had mixed in her vengeance without any reason, whom she condemned to the same martyrdom; Olivier, who seemed to have discovered her secret designs, instead of threatening, of crushing her, had appealed to her good sentiments, had pitied her, had found excuses for her faults, nearly for her criminal projects, and went away confiding to her the woman she wished to ruin. As to Henriette, she had taken her for a confident, for a friend, had come to her

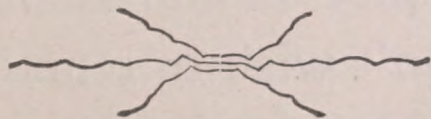
in her hour of need, and believing in her virtue, had charged Esther with protecting her.

All this world of thoughts whirled around in her brain; she went over her past life: the unpleasantness and caprices of her infancy, the eccentricities of her youth, her thoughtlessness, her frivolity, her idleness, her love of noise and a crowd, her mother for whom she had not long mourned, Vandelle whom she had loved too quickly, without giving herself the trouble of studying him, her too brusque struggle, her enervating *amours*, her undignified vengeance, brutal towards Vandelle, unjust and criminal towards Henriette, and now her defeat, her confusion, her shame. Those that she had wished to strike had escaped her; they overwhelmed her with their kindness, their goodness. They raised themselves so

high, so high above her, that she could not reach them, and they surrounded themselves in regions which were interdicted to her.

Vandelle alone remained to her. He had not raised himself off the earth; he crept there, on the ground. She could still make him suffer, throw a provoking glance at him, call him by a sign, and to exasperate him, become again a woman of ice. What infamy!

She could also resuscitate the past, here, in this *salon*, under his roof, in the house of Henriette. How shameful!



## CHAPTER XI.

While Esther Sandraz was thinking of these things, Vandelle, still stretched on the lounge, his cigar between his teeth, did not cease to watch her. He said to himself that if Esther, who usually fled from him, who avoided every *tete-a-tete*, remained there near him at this hour, it was because she was commencing to become more human, and soon, perhaps this very evening, she would take pity on him and on herself.

“Ah! I don't wish to remain here any longer,” suddenly cried Esther leaving her seat. “I will leave tomorrow!”

He had so little expected this phrase, that he made a brusque movement and

fell back all in a heap, as if he had received a sudden shock.

“Leave!” exclaimed he. “What do you mean?”

She had drawn near him, and in a firm voice said:

“Forget me; there is still time.”

“Forget you!” replied he without understanding, while trying to regain his scattered senses.

“Yes, forget me. I came to avenge myself on you, but I loved you all the time. I am sure that I loved you, for, if I had not, would not I have long ago renounced my vengeance and driven your memory from my heart? All that I have said, all that I have done, my irony, my resistance, my coldness, was only an illusion. I wished you ill, much ill, I could have killed you with delight, but I suffered, I also, in making you suffer; when I became marble and statue-

like in your arms, I suffered as much as you, perhaps more. But I am ashamed of myself. I do not wish to see you any more! I desire to leave, to depart—good bye.”

She had already turned towards the door when he sprang up and, seizing her in his arms, rivited her to the spot where she stood.

“Depart!” cried he, “leave here! when you have just told me that you still love me, you are a fool!”

“I don’t know,” replied she, “it is possible.”

“Depart!” continued he, beside himself. “I will not permit you. I am determined now. I thought for a time, when I saw you so cold, so cruel, that the only feeling you had for me was hatred. Now I know that you love me, that you struggle against me and would like—”



She interrupted him. While he was speaking she had reflected on the mistake that she had made: the acknowledgement which escaped her in a moment of frankness, because she was fatigued and worn out by the comedy that she had been playing so long, had fortified Vandelle and turned him against herself. So, excited as she had been a few minutes before, she became again calm and cold.

“I have told you that I wish to go away,” said she in a positive voice.

“And I have told you that I will not allow you to do so,” cried he.

“What will you dare to do?”

“Everything.”

And he encircled her with his arms and held her against his breast.

“Let me go,” said she trying to defend herself.

“Let you go? when I have waited

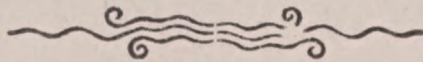
and hoped, for so long. Let you depart? to remain here more miserable, more wretched than ever.”

“Ah! you make me afraid.”

“No, because you love me.”

“No, no! I thought that I loved you when I returned here, but I no longer care for you—I do not love you. Was it ever real love?”

A noise was heard in the next room: the servants, before retiring, were coming to close the windows in the *salon*. Vandelle was obliged to let Esther go. She immediately profited by her liberty to run to the door, open it and disappear.



## CHAPTER XII.

Mlle. Sandraz, on leaving Vandelle, quickly crossed the vestibule and ascended the stairs to her room; but as she reached the landing on the second floor, a door, half-open for some time, swung back and Henriette appeared.

Esther, understanding that Madame Vandelle desired to speak with her, joined her after being assured that nobody was looking.

“Well!” said Henriette in a low voice, “Did he come, have you spoken with him?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“What did he say?”

“That he was broken-hearted, but that he would obey you.”

“Ah!—and when does he go?”

“Tomorrow, as early as possible.”

“Without seeing me again?” asked she sadly.

“You desired that he should not see you again and I demanded of him, in your name, this last sacrifice.”

“And he does it!” exclaimed Henriette. “Ah! to recompense him, I should go say good bye to him.”

These last words made Esther tremble: to go to Olivier, at this hour of the evening, at the end of the park, in the pavilion which he occupied alone, and while Vandelle was down stairs and could see her pass. What imprudence!

But her fears were soon quieted: Henriette was incapable of such folly. She had wished to say no doubt that she should, that she ought to meet Olivier the next morning on the road, at the

moment of his departure. However, Madame Vandelle, after having thanked Esther effusively, and, in a burst of feeling which she could not control, having pressed her to her heart, had re-entered her room.

Esther, reassured and entirely overcome by this new mark of affection, left the landing and retired to her room.



## CHAPTER XIII.

During this time, Vandelle, alone in the little *salon*, gave himself up to reflection. He had opened the door which communicated with the dining-room, and walked up and down, interrupting his promenade from time to time by stopping before a table on which stood a decanter of liqueur.

Esther had announced to him her near departure! Why should she go, since she had betrayed herself, since she had acknowledged at last that it was her love, her passion for him that had brought her there? She said, it is true, that she no longer loved him; but, thanks to his conceitedness, Vandelle

believed he knew what to think on that subject: it was, according to his reasoning, the desperate attempt of a woman to regain the secret which she had disclosed.

She loved him! she had always loved him! He could not disbelieve it, and yet she was going away. Why?

Because she had had an insane dream: Henriette, in constant relations with Olivier Deschamps, would inevitably become enamored with the companion of her childhood and, without delay, would fail in her duty and become criminal. Then, Vandelle, whom nothing escaped, who was not one of those blind husbands whom you can deceive with impunity, would soon become aware of her deeds and would separate himself forever from his wife.

It was necessarily, still following his line of reasoning, the end looked for

by Esther; not, as she would have him believe, from a desire of vengeance, but from love, from jealousy, with the hope of regaining the place which had been taken from her, of no longer having a rival.

Indeed, Esther Sandraz, thought her former lover, must suffer cruelly at seeing near him a young and pretty woman. It was useless for him to say that he did not love her, that he had never loved her, that their relations were of the most frigid character, Esther could doubt this, and the doubt tormented her. She had a certain knowledge of life, she was not ignorant that men, no matter how much in love they may be with a mistress, do not consider themselves obliged to condemn their wives to a life of celibacy. Often indeed, the more culpable they are, the more amiable they think they should be; they thus draw off suspicion from



themselves and persuade the wife that she is the only woman they love.

But, if the legitimate wife, disdainful of the deference shown her by her husband, suspecting his treason in spite of all his precautions, finds a diversion for her chagrins in an illicit *liaison* and commits a fault, the husband regains his liberty at once and drives from his house the unfaithful one, or at least breaks off every relation with her.

It was exactly on a rupture of this kind, Vandelle said to himself, that Esther had counted. She had shown herself very modest in this for she might have hoped for better. Vandelle was not a man, when he knew his wife to be guilty, to content himself with a rupture, with an amiable or legal separation. At this thought, that Henriette might deceive him, he forgot that he himself had but one desire, one aspira-

tion, one end in view at this moment: to deceive her himself. He became furious, and, armed with the code, so severe on the wives, so indulgent for the husbands, he thought of dealing out justice promptly and well.

But happily he had no cause. Henriette, in spite of the foresight of Esther, had for Olivier Deschamps only a sincere friendship. Henriette, in spite of the wrong done her by Vandelle, loved only her husband, could only love him. It was with impunity that she had given Olivier Deschamps a position in the factory and quarters in the little Louis XIII pavilion at the end of the park.

And, having considered all these things, having made all these evolutions, he returned to the starting point: Esther, obliged to acknowledge that she was mistaken in her judgment of Henriette, obliged to bow down before the

unassailable virtue of Madame Vandelle, Esther vanquished, more in love than ever, but determined not to admit it, retired in favor of her rival and wished to fly the country.

But he would retain her by force; or, if she did indeed desire to depart, he would follow her.



## CHAPTER XIV.

While he was thus thinking he heard foot-steps on the stairs; it sounded as if some one was coming down quietly on tip-toe.

A servant would not have taken so much precaution, and besides, they had all gone to bed an hour previous, in a wing of the chateau entirely separated from the family.

If it should be Esther Sandraz coming back.

He listened.

The vestibule was crossed and then the steps grew fainter, for now they were turned towards the door opening into the park.

Who could be going out at such an hour, in such cold weather, in the dark?

He ran to the lamp standing on the table and extinguished it; then, turning to the window, he looked out.

Soon a human form appeared in the alley. No stars glittered in the sky, but the snow and the leaves on the shrubs made a white background against which the shadow of the person walking in the alley stood out plainly.

It was a woman covered by a large cloak with a black hood. He trembled, for he had recognized the costume that Henriette had been wearing every since the cold weather had begun.

Where was she going?

At a distance, about a hundred meters from the chateau, lights could be seen. The pavilion occupied by Olivier Deschamps was still lighted, and Henriette was taking the path leading to it.

What! At the moment when he was priding himself on her virtue, when he was praising her to the skies, he suddenly discovered—Oh! it was impossible! Esther could not be right! It was not Henriette who went out so secretly to visit her lover, when she thought everybody asleep.

He looked again; it was she indeed!

Then, angry and excited, again under the influence of the wine he had drunk at dinner, he seized his gun, which he had placed two hours before in a corner of the dining-room, and opening the door dashed out into the park.



## CHAPTER XV.

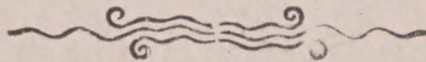
However Vandelle, in spite of his excitement, showed some intelligence and *sang-froid* in his pursuit. Instead of taking the path which Henriette had followed, and of being seen in case she should turn around, he took a path, lost among the dense foliage, which led directly to the pavilion inhabited by Olivier.

A few steps from the pavilion he stopped. Henriette had not yet arrived. But she was approaching, for in the deep silence of the night, he could hear the crisp snow crack under her feet.

Vandelle, hidden behind a clump of bushes like a hunter watching for his prey, waited.

At last, she arrived, still enveloped in her hooded cloak. She walked quickly towards the door and tried to open it, but the door was locked. Then, without hesitation, like an expected and desired person, she knocked.

A noise could be heard on the inside and the light was seen to move about, then the shutters were opened and Olivier appeared behind the glass, a lamp in his hand. Quickly the door opened and Henriette disappeared.





## CHAPTER XVI.

What was taking place in the heart of Vandelle? Did jealousy alone hold him? Did he think only of his outraged honor? Or indeed, at this moment, did Esther appear before him, provoking and superb, and cry to him: "She has taken my place, I wish to take her's; I will be your wife. You have surprised her in the very act, in the abode of her lover, and the law will absolve you if you kill her. Kill her!" We will not settle this question; we will only follow Vandelle.

He, leaving his hiding place, crossed the path which separated him from the pavilion and approached the door. But

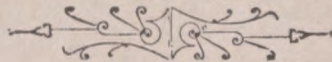
the shutters had been drawn and so he could not look in.

Then, holding his gun in his right hand, resting the barrel on his left arm, with a finger on the trigger, he slowly walked around the pavilion looking for an open window.

Everything was closed. What should he do? No. An outside shutter was only half-closed. He approached it slowly, and without noise swung it wide open.

He could see clearly now: her back was turned to him but she was there, standing near Olivier.

Then, kneeling in the snow, he rested the barrel of his gun on the window-sill, took aim and fired.



## CHAPTER XVII.

Raynal, after having questioned several of the workmen at the factory and having received some information from Vandelle, returned, as you will remember, to the village.

He had to attend a dinner at Monsieur Fourcanade's, but precisely at eight o'clock he was at the mayorality and continued the inquest over the body of the man which had been found suspended in the Commune.

Unhappily, the majority of the inhabitants of G——, summoned by him, did not appear disposed to facilitate his nocturnal labors; he was unable, when

once seated at his desk, to restrain himself from making the following remark:

“It must be acknowledged, Mayor, that those under your jurisdiction do not seem in a hurry to assist me.”

“Good heavens!” replied Fourcanade without appearing in the least annoyed, “the greater part of those under my jurisdiction are at the fair at Saint-Beat, and you know—”

“Yes,” continued Raynal, “I know that this inquest does not progress very rapidly. I have however allowed sufficient time for those, whom I wish to question, to unite here.”

“I will at once send out the entire *gendarmerie*,” replied the mayor.

“You call that a *gendarmerie*! There are two men here. Have you only two *gendarmes* in the Commune!”

“Oh! they are enough,” murmured

Fourcanade, "for people as easily governed as sheep."

"Sheep which commit crimes," replied Raynal.

"Crimes, they! But, my dear sir, this man is a suicide. You are making a good deal out of nothing."

"Mayor," replied Raynal with severity, "I alone am the judge of my conduct, and I can dispense with any comments from you. As to the cause of this man's death, I will await the report of the surgeon before pronouncing my decision. Besides, should it only be a suicide, is that not a crime?"

Suddenly he stopped.

"What is that noise?" he demanded.

"What noise?"

"There, on this side."

"Ah! in the closet," replied the mayor tranquilly. "It is nothing. They are fighting."

“Who is fighting in the closet?”

“The attributes of the mayoralty. Flags of all colors and of all epochs. Phrygian caps, *fleurs de lys* on board and on zinc, some old weather-cocks, some eagles, and above all a magnificent collection of busts on plaques: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Robespierre, Marat, the complete Directoire, then Bonaparte, Napoleon I, Louis XVIII, Charles X, Louis-Phillipe, General Cavaignac, Prince Napoleon, Napoleon III, Trochu, Jules Favre, Thierry—”

“Stop! stop!” cried Raynal, “I know my history. Why do you keep all that trash?”

“To instruct the young men morally and politically. Twice a month the school-teacher brings his class here; he opens the closet and says: “Dear pupils, this is the pantheon of our Com-

mune. Here are the glories of France. For these people here have been more or less decorated by the name of savior, or well loved and—now they are obliged to hide in a closet. *Sic transit gloira mundi*. Their history teaches you to beware of the popularity and honors which certainly await you in the world. But, at the same time respect all these placques, dust them with care for we will need them some day. This old bust covered with cobwebs is perhaps destined to leave the closet and retake its place in the large room of the mayoralty. The Commune is not rich; it cannot afford to buy new placques every two or three years; therefore it must content itself with the old ones. Happily, we possess a complete assortment. This little speech originated in my brain; I taught it to the different

school-teachers and they repeat it to their pupils."

"Accept my compliments, Mayor, you are a philosopher."

"In politics, I acknowledge, I have no passion, but in private life, in domestic life, I catch up. Ah! the women!"

"Take care, Mayor, your secretary hears you."

"That don't make any difference; he knows me! Ah! I hear the *gendarmerie*."

"That is lucky!" replied Raynal, regaining his solemn air. "I am now to gain the information I have been waiting for."

Then, addressing the *gendarme* who remained standing respectfully on the threshold, he said:

"Come closer."

The *gendarme* placed on the desk a package of letters which Raynal hastened to open.



“No trace of blows or wounds,” murmured he, his eyes fixed on the report of the surgeon, “no violence. This death can only be attributed to a suicide.”

“What did I tell you!” cried Fourcanade triumphantly.

Raynal arose, dignified and cold, and approaching his clerk said:

“Add this, I beg of you, to your case, and let us go. It was not worth the trouble it caused me,” he could not help adding.

“But it was not me who called you, Solicitor-General,” replied the Mayor; “it was you who wished to come. There is nothing for you to do in my Commune. I repeat: all are honest people, really sheep.”

Just as he was saying this, a detonation was heard in the distance.

“What was that?” demanded Ray-

nal lifting his head quickly. "A gunshot!"

"In the direction of the chateau," added the mayor astonished. "Nobody hunts at such an hour!"

"It is a murder then!" cried Raynal. And, addressing the *gendarmes*, he added:

"Run, run quickly!" Then, turning towards Fourcanade, he said ironically:

"Eh! eh! Mayor, this model Commune, these sheep!"

"Good Heavens!" replied the unhappy Fourcanade, this time worried, "it is perhaps an accident, a simple accident. Some hunter who discharged his gun on entering his home."

"At ten o'clock in the evening, in winter? Enough to frighten the entire community," replied Raynal. "If it was, you should have already drawn up a

report against this hunter. But something tells me this is a more serious affair. What is that murmur?"



## CHAPTER XVIII.

The village of G—— seemed indeed to have awakened in an instant from its torpor. This detonation bursting suddenly on the still air of the winter's night, when all sounds become more distinct, had caused much excitement among the inhabitants. All those who were not already in bed, had at once left their homes and run to the village square.

They were questioning, talking, discussing, when a man, walking rapidly, crossed the square, passed near the different groups and entered the mayoralty.

All had recognized him: it was the master of the chateau, the proprietor of the factory. It was Vandelle.

Evidently he brought news. They followed him. But the curiosity of the inhabitants of G—— was disappointed. As soon as he had penetrated into the room where the Solicitor-General, his clerk, and the Mayor were assembled, he advanced toward Raynal and expressed the wish to be alone with him.

“It is but just,” said Raynal, “that all these people should go. You also, Mayor;” and, added he, ironically: “I beg of you to watch your model Commune, while I occupy myself with the crimes they commit.”

Fourcanade, who was dreadfully curious, nevertheless felt that he must obey, and went out, closing the door behind him.

Vandelle remained alone with Raynal

and his clerk, who was arranging some papers on the desk.

“You look quite undone, Monsieur Vandelle,” remarked Raynal as soon as the door was closed. “You are pale, you appear greatly agitated. Is it something very serious? Come, what have you to tell me?”

“I have a confession to make.”

“To the magistrate?”

“Yes, to the magistrate.”

“Ah! that is different.”

Raynal made a sign to his clerk, who was about to follow the others, to remain, then seating himself at his desk and crossing his arms, he said:

“Speak, sir.”

“A murder has just been committed at my place,” began Vandelle.

“A murder! a murder!” interrupted Raynal. “Who has been murdered?”

“My wife.”

“What! Madame Vandelle! Explain quickly, sir. The magistrate should proceed with order and calmness, but the friend has a right to be moved. How! Madame Vandelle! Who do you suspect of having committed this crime?”

“Myself,” murmured Vandelle in a low voice.

“WHAT!” cried Raynal springing to his feet.

“I say that it is I who have killed my wife,” muttered Vandelle.

“You! it is impossible! Why? How?”

He answered in a trembling voice, casting troubled glances about the room:

“I was in love! I was crazy! Ah! how she made me suffer!”

“Madame Vandelle?”

“Eh? What? Madame Vandelle—” said he astonished, as if it was not of

her that he had been speaking. He collected himself a little and continued:

“It is right, you wish to know all. Well, a few months ago, I admitted into my house a young man, Olivier Deschamps, the friend and youthful comrade of my wife, they were brought up together. It was she—she who urged me to take him in, she made me believe—oh! I don’t know what! I have already told you that I was crazy.”

“Go on,” said Raynal, “and get to the end. We will take up the details later. What happened this evening?”

“This evening? This evening—I had a scene with her. She told me she was going away. I felt that I should lose her forever and as I have already told you, I love her, I worship her.”

“Try to regain your usual calmness, sir. This evening you say, Madame Vandelle—”

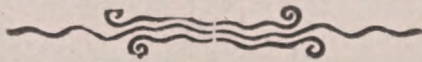


“Ah! yes. Madame Vandelle crossed the *salon* where I was—she seemed to wish to pass unnoticed—she went into the park—I followed her—she went towards the pavilion occupied by Olivier Deschamps. I slipped behind a clump of shrubbery—she knocked at the door—Olivier opened it and she entered—They were side by side—they spoke low—then I remembered what she had said, what she had promised me—I cocked the gun which I carried in my hand—I fired—I heard a horrible cry—then I fled and came here to give myself up.”

Raynal looked at the clerk who understood the thought of his chief, and with his eyes designated a code which lay open on the desk. For these two men of law, the affair, as it presented itself, lost a great part of its gravity: Vandelle was protected by the penal

code under the article relating to justifiable acts.

But his declaration was not sufficient. Raynal must make a thorough investigation and so he decided to go at once to the scene of the crime.



## CHAPTER XIX.

They set out on the road to the chateau with Raynal and his clerk leading; the mayor came next accompanied by his deputy, and Vandelle followed them, sad, downcast and unsteady.

The *gendarmes* had been ordered to allow him his liberty, but to keep him in sight; they conscientiously fulfilled this duty, at the same time keeping the inhabitants of G——, who were trying to mix in the procession, at a distance.

There was something sinister in this long file of men, marching silently along the snow covered road this dark night.

Several attempts of Fourcanade to

talk with Raynal had been useless; the young magistrate, plunged in thought, was insensible to all advances made by the mayor. Two currents of thought, directly opposed to each other, were at this time running through his brain: the one—the magistrate, yet at the beginning of his career, delighted at being summoned to investigate an affair which would make him conspicuous, could not help regretting that Vandelle, in the present case, was legally excusable; the other—the honest, kind-hearted man, which is always to be found behind the French magistrate, was tempted to declare innocent one of his fellow beings, and to rejoice at meeting only an unfortunate man where he had expected to find a criminal.

When the party reached the park gate, they turned directly towards the pavilion inhabited by Olivier Deschamps.

Some servants and workmen from the factory wandered about the grounds or formed groups near the house. Great excitement reigned on all sides.

While Vandelle remained near the half-open door, with the *gendarmes* and the people of G——, Raynal, followed by his clerk and the mayor, entered the room.

A lamp and several logs, which had been thrown into the fire-place, scarcely sufficed to light the large room and to render visible the different persons who were present.

At the end of the room, opposite the door, a group composed of Olivier Deschamps, some servants and a doctor, who had been hastily summoned from Montrejeau, stood around a lounge on which lay the victim of Vandelle.

Raynal, after throwing a sharp glance on all sides, started towards the group, but Olivier met him half way.

“You come no doubt,” said he in an animated tone, “to bring the assassin into the presence of his victim?”

“Sir,” responded the magistrate in a stern voice, “I warn you not to use epithets which I myself dare not use. The word assassin is entirely out of place in your mouth as you were the accomplice of this unfortunate woman, and as it was you who were the real cause of this terrible crime.”

Olivier, becoming more master of himself, and raising his voice so all could hear, replied:

“You make a great mistake, sir, but a very natural one. Up to now you have only listened to Monsieur Vandelle—He thought he saw his wife leave the chateau and turn her steps towards this pavilion which I inhabit; he immediately said to himself, without inquiring if she was not simply going to say

good bye to her childhood's companion, who was leaving the next day: She is guilty; I will kill her. Kill her to regain my liberty and to live with the woman I love. He remembered neither the honesty or the purity of his wife, which should have preserved her from all suspicion, nor her personal wrongs which should have sufficed to prove her innocent, but having made up his mind, without anger perhaps, certainly without jealousy, he became an assassin!"

Raynal, in his turn, raised his voice and said:

"I repeat to you, sir, that you have not the right to be so severe on him whom you have wronged. The role of accuser does not belong to you."

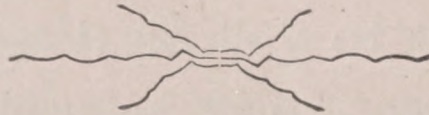
"So be it," replied Olivier. "I will accuse no longer; it is she who will accuse."

He turned, and going to the group in

the corner of the room, seized by the arm a person kneeling before the lounge, dragged her to Vandelle's side, and placing her in front of him, cried:

“Look, murderer!”

Vandelle gave a cry of terror. Henriette, whom he thought he had killed, stood like a specter before him.





## CHAPTER XX.

The young magistrate, in spite of his efforts not to appear surprised at anything, could not in this case, dissimulate his astonishment.

“But then,” said he, pointing to Henriette Vandelle, “Madame was not here, when—”

“Madame,” replied Olivier interrupting him, “was in her room when the shot was fired. Her servants found her there and told her of the crime; she followed them here that she might lend her assistance.”

“Who, then, is the victim,” asked Raynal.

“It is Claire Meunier,” responded

Olivier, "or rather Esther Sandraz, the former mistress of Vandelle! Yes, she whom he had abandoned and betrayed, had introduced herself into his house in the quality of a companion and under a false name. She wished to revenge herself on Vandelle, to make him suffer, for he loved her, he always loved her. Perhaps she also still loved him and dreamt of driving away the legitimate wife and taking her place; but, vanquished by Madame Vandelle's straightforwardness, frankness and kindness, she renounced her purpose and appreciated the enormity of the crime she had contemplated committing. This evening, knowing that I was going away and fearing that Henriette, my friend from infancy, my sister, would wish to say good bye to me, also fearing lest Vandelle should surprise her, she decided to warn me. Misled by a cloak, which she

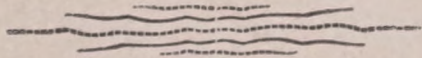
had found in the vestibule and had hastily thrown about her, Vandelle took her for his wife, followed her to this pavilion, and while she was speaking with me, confessing her faults, while she asked pardon from God, he cowardly shot her."

"Is she dead?" asked Raynal.

"No, but the doctor despairs of saving her, and she has not been conscious for an hour."

"Then it is a crime. At last I have a crime!" the young magistrate could not help muttering.

At the same time he approached the *gendarmes* and ordered them in a low tone to arrest the murderer.



## CHAPTER XXI.

Vandelle without doubt understood this order of Raynal's, for when the *gendarmes* started to seize him, he made a bound backwards, leaped over the threshold of the door, pushed aside the crowd standing in front of the pavilion, darted into the park and, protected by the night, disappeared.

Then, with a unanimous and spontaneous movement, the villagers and the servants started in pursuit of the fugitive. Man has naturally the instincts of a hunter, he shows it from the time of birth; he runs after all that tries to escape. He remembers the time when, naked, without arms, deprived of every-

thing, he struggled with agility against the animals necessary for his support. Today he no longer hunts game, but, carried away by an irresistible impulse, he joins in the pursuit of his fellow beings whenever an occasion presents itself. If, in our streets, a man starts to run, immediately ten, twenty or thirty persons whose number continually increases, run after him, without knowing why, from need of the exercise, from the instinct of the hunter.

But, in following their natural inclination, the inhabitants of Montrejeau submitted likewise to other influences: Vandelle was not popular. They had found him indifferent to the interests of the Commune, never willing to assist them, but, on the contrary always harsh and violent; they were angry with him because he had always disdained his birth-place and when he did return, had

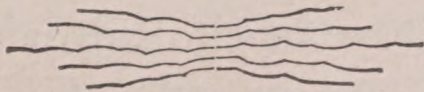
cast off all the old familiar deeds of his father. Henriette, on the contrary, was adored by all; they had seen her grow up and had always found her kind and charitable.

And it was the child of the country, she whom the old guides had often carried over the mountains, she whom the peasants were accustomed to see at church, that her husband had tried to kill and who had escaped by a miracle. They cried for vengeance, they desired to punish Vandelle for his misdeeds, for his cruelty, and they chased him furiously and untiringly.

But the night was dark; he had disappeared. Then they resorted to lanterns, lit the pine torches used by mountaineers, and dispersing on all sides endeavored to form a circle around the fugitive; a regular battle was organized. The village drummer joined the party

and added to the din with long rolls on his drum; the church sexton, awakened suddenly by the cries and thinking that it was a fire, rang the bell furiously. This man-hunt in the snow of this dark night, lit up only by the flickering light cast by the lanterns and torches, was dismally picturesque.

In the large room of the Louis XIII pavilion, Henriette on her knees, prayed by the side of Esther Sandraz.



## CHAPTER XXII.

Vandelle could no longer be seen. Had he taken refuge in a path known only to himself? Was he trying to reach the first chain of mountains? Was he going to escape his pursuers?

They were becoming discouraged when loud cries were heard from near the railroad station at Montrejeau. It was the employees of the railroad signalling to those in the suburbs.

They ran from all sides; the circle grew narrow; Vandelle was being hemmed in. He could no longer turn in any direction without encountering an enemy, and the light of the torches,



uniting at one point, made him plainly visible.

He appeared in hunting costume; his massive shoulders, thrown back, pushing his way powerfully through the snow, running always straight ahead.

He seemed exhausted, and, at times, they could see his knees shake. Those near whom he passed and who dared not stop him in his flight, said the next day that they had heard him pant, that his breath was short, that while running, he gesticulated, talked aloud and cried like a madman.

Perhaps he had gone mad, after all the emotion of this night, tracked and pursued like a wild beast, and with this fixed idea that he was the murderer of Esther: Esther whom he adored.

Suddenly, just as a fool stops his walk and retraces his steps, he stopped

brusquely and cast anxious glances about him.

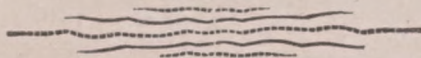
He could have been captured then, but nobody was courageous enough, as he still appeared full of strength and energy. On the contrary the circle grew wider. All the men united, armed with guns, clubs or long iron-pointed staves, were afraid of this unarmed man.

He looked towards the chateau; he tried no doubt to distinguish in the dark night the pavilion where Esther was dying. Perhaps he thought of bursting through the crowd which surrounded him, of returning home, of going back to the room where Esther was and seeing her again for the last time, of dying near her.

But the crowd became more compact; all those at a distance had drawn near. The timid grew brave near the more courageous; the mountain guides, those

men insensible of all danger, advanced in little groups, step by step, one behind another, without haste but fearlessly, just as they make perilous ascensions.

He had a moment of reason: he understood that they were trying to capture him, to deliver him up to justice as an assassin, that he would not be permitted to approach Esther, and that he would make a useless struggle. So he turned and continued his flight, this time towards the river.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

Vandelle now followed the road leading from the railway station to the bridge of Montrejeau. Whether he was resolved to flee and to brave all dangers to succeed, or whether, suicide appearing the only refuge, he wished to die at once, he ran more swiftly and more vigorously than ever, without looking behind him or paying any attention to the shouts of his pursuers. Soon he reached the bridge, but he did not run across its entire length.

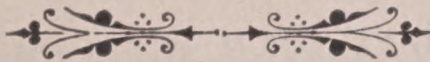
A large part of the population of Montrejeau, awakened by the noise, had left the village and turned towards the bridge and they formed at one end

of it a compact mass through which the fugitive could not break.

On looking back, he also saw that he could not retrace his steps: all those who had pursued him, up to that point, were united in one large group at the western extremity of the bridge.

He discovered that he was indeed hemmed in; beneath him flowed the Garonne; behind and before him was a hostile, threatening crowd.

Then, tracked on all sides, discouraged, crazy perhaps, he turned towards the parapet of the bridge, climbed on to it, and after casting one lingering glance toward the horizon, jumped into the water below.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

The next day, at dawn, his body was found two kilometers below Montrejeau: all night the current had rolled him over the stones, hurled him against the rocks and crushed him in its course.

Raynal, accompanied by the mayor and his two *gendarmes*, came to identify the body. This task accomplished, the young magistrate was heard to mutter these words: "I have finally discovered a crime, but I no longer have a criminal."

During the day, a surgeon from Toulouse, summoned by telegraph, after having carefully examined the wounds

of Esther Sandraz, declared it possible to save her.

This hope was not unfounded. Surgical science gained a new victory: today Esther is well.

It was Henriette who nursed her with the greatest devotion, like a true sister of charity. But she was not satisfied with curing the body, she wished also to purify the soul, and it is safe to say that she succeeded.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the elections on May 16th following, Fourcanade, thanks to his able campaign, was able to elect the official candidate. But, his deputy having become an invalid, all his sympathies were instantly turned to the republican recommended by the new *prefect*, and after a game of dominoes, he gained a new political victory.

It is probable he, always firm in his

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ability, catering to all governments, eternally decorated in his old sash, will, in a few months, marry Olivier Deschamps to Henriette Vandelle, *nee* de Loustaï.

THE END.









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