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MADAME SAND
A BIOGRAPHICAL COMEDY

MADAME SAND

A BIOGRAPHICAL COMEDY

BY

PHILIP MOELLER

WITH A FOREWORD BY

MRS. FISKE

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY

ARTHUR HOPKINS

"As I have never loved before . . ."



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ALLEN & UNWIN

To

MRS. FISKE

FOR WHOM THE PLAY WAS WRITTEN

AND TO

ARTHUR HOPKINS

FOR WHOM I WROTE THE PLAY

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FOREWORD

ONLY one man has had the wit to paint Aurore Dudevant in a few swift words—Matthew Arnold.

“She was like one of the early gods,” he said—or something like it. Only her own hundred odd books can give even a faint understanding of this amazing woman. Among all women—this creature of a thousand colours—grande dame and Bohemian—gamine and daughter of kings, soubrette and philosopher, pagan and religieuse, housefrau and mad lover, everyday hard worker and impassioned dreamer, simpleton and sage, poseuse and farm woman, tragedy queen and imp of mischief, Sibyl and “big child,” everything that lives and burns and flames in man or woman, George Sand the generous, the kind, the simple. What she loved best in all the world was kindness.

Your incorrigibly brilliant and funny play, dear Mr. Moeller, reached me in the North Woods, and I laughed and laughed, and then, when I had quite finished laughing, I set out to learn something of George Sand—something that would give me better understanding than my superficial knowledge of the

FOREWORD

earlier flamboyant novels—or the beautiful peasant stories. But to study your astonishing heroine is like swimming in the ocean. Gather into yourself all your knowledge of all men, women, and children—unfold your entire “comédie humaine” and George will play every part for you.

Something of all mankind is hers and in splendour. George who could cut the hair from her head to offer it at the feet of her lover. George who could mend furniture at four in the morning. George who, cigar in hand, could “slip from the balcony window” and swagger along the darkened road for twenty odd miles in the summer storm. George who could harangue a nation as well as any man. George who could wait with her kind eyes watching for the “little cat that comes to us over the roofs”—wonderful, wonderful George with the friendly smile almost always playing around her lips. The friendly smile that Heine loved—ridiculous, priceless George.

And as I came to know her more and love her more and more as the most flagrantly human creature in history, I began to feel that we, you and I, were party to an act of unforgivable impertinence in our conspiracy to reveal your Aurora as we have revealed her. But this feeling passed—and passed because I continued to know her more and more and love her more and more, and in this ever-increasing love and knowledge I know that in no other way can she be revealed.

MINNIE MADDERN FISKE.

INTRODUCTION

IN "Madame Sand" the author has brought us past lives free from the odour of camphor and the rattle of moth balls. His resurrection of famous characters is worked with a touch that brings them really to life. It is not the efficacy of the embalming fluid, but the glow of life that he has breathed into them.

The biographical drama usually has the vigour of an obituary. Instead of "Here Is" it is invariably "Here Lies." But not so with George and Alfred and Pagello and Chopin and all the others. They live and breathe and seek. And in their seeking we find all that is at once human and tragic. Can one feel that George is seeking liberty or is it liberation? Is it not the hungry reaching-out for some new contact that will explain all the mysteries of life? Is it not the dissatisfied soul—not dissatisfied with what it has, but with what it feels? Is not the same quest for the unknown to be found in Alfred and Chopin, and to a less degree in Pagello?

Are these not souls between mediocrity and greatness who scoff at the conventions of one and are lost in the mazes of the other? Is it not a form of growth, of casting off, of revolution?

INTRODUCTION

In the sunset—by the sea—at the mountain peak—in a stranger's arms George is seeking—seeking what?

Perhaps Zoe Akins has found the answer. In her play "Baby Bunting" the deserted mother sings to her child, "Bye Bye, Baby Bunting, Daddy's gone a-hunting." The child asks "What for?" The mother answers "God knows."

God knows what tormented the restless George. Only a sensualist would think her scourge a physical one. Only an angel would think it a spiritual one. So perhaps she hung half-way between, a battle ground of conflicting desires, and in the conflict was born all the expression she left behind.

To the author rare credit must be accorded for bringing out so vividly the struggles—pathetic and comic—of George Sand, one of the great dissatisfied.

ARTHUR HOPKINS.

CHARACTERS

- ROSALIE, *Maid at Mme. Sand's.*
- PAUL DE MUSSET, *Alfred's brother.*
- MME. DE MUSSET, *Alfred's mother.*
- CASIMIR DUDEVANT, *Mme. Sand's husband.*
- BULOZ, *Editor of the "Revue des Deux Mondes."*
- HEINRICH HEINE.
- ALFRED DE MUSSET.
- MME. JULIE AURORE LUCILLE AMANDINE DUDEVANT—
GEORGE SAND.
- DR. GIUSEPPE PIETRO PAGELLO, *Mme.'s Italian Physician.*
- LUCREZIA VIOLENTE, *his Mistress.*
- Mlle. DE FLEURY.
- Mlle. ROLANDE.
- Mlle. DE LATOUR.
- FRANZ LISZT.
- FREDERICK CHOPIN, and
- GUESTS at the reception of Baron de Rothschild.

The Scenes are :

ACT I

The farewell supper at Mme. Sand's apartment in the Quartier, Paris, 1833.

ACT II

Mme. Sand's apartment in Venice, 1834.

ACT III

The reception for Chopin at Baron de Rothschild's, Paris.

ACT I

ROSALIE'S OMELET

The Scene

MME. SAND's apartment in the Quartier, Paris, 1833. It is a large studio-like room. Through a long window in the rear one sees the roofs of the city and the streets beyond with the first lamps lit. In the far distance are the twin towers of Notre Dame. The room is a shrine of literary Bohemia. The furnishings are of bizarre incongruity. An ornate Japanese screen barely hides an old-fashioned rubber bathtub, an Indian chest shows its design of arabesque in the shadow of a bed couch near a piano of the period. In the window are several cages in which canaries are asleep. On the balcony is a sort of little conservatory enclosed in glass. About the place are trunks, half finished in the packing, and clothes, hats, and shawls are scattered about. Books are everywhere. In the centre a table is set for supper. The place is dim with candle-light and shadows. The atmosphere is confused, that of an impromptu feast on the brink of a sudden farewell. ROSALIE, MME. SAND's servant, a pretty blunt country woman of about thirty, does not

know that the curtain has risen. She is seated at MADAME'S writing desk and at the moment is deeply puzzled, attempting to read the fifth chapter of MADAME'S new novel which is piled in manuscript before her. She turns the leaves, one by one, and is bored. The bell of the concierge jangles. She reads on. Again the jangling of the bell. The girl is oblivious. The canaries wake to a little shower of song, then silence, then footsteps below in the streets. ROSALIE mystified, turns another page. MADAME doesn't write for such as she. A knock at the door. She jumps up, pushes the manuscript into the rear of the desk and opens the door to PAUL and MME. DE MUSSET. MME. DE MUSSET is an aristocrat, a mother of the old régime who never loses the quiet dignity of her manner even under the stress of intense emotion. PAUL, the elder brother of a more famous brother, exists only in his own estimation. He hopes he is something of a gallant and doesn't for a moment doubt that he is a wit.

MME. DE MUSSET (*sinking into a chair*).

Those stairs! Ah, my poor heart!

PAUL.

You took the four flights without stopping.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Do you think a mother ever stops when her son is in peril?

ROSALIE (*to PAUL*).

Good-evening, monsieur.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I am Mme. de Musset. Is Mme. Sand in? (*She glances about the room.*)

ROSALIE.

No. Madame is not at home.

MME. DE MUSSET (*to PAUL*).

Home! Why, there is actually a bed in the dining-room!

PAUL.

These artists think it is a waste of time to live in more than one room.

MME. DE MUSSET.

You might spare me these disgusting details. (*Then to ROSALIE*) What time will Mme. Sand return?

ROSALIE.

I do not know, Madame.

MME. DE MUSSET.

But you must know. I am Alfred de Musset's mother.

ROSALIE.

He is kind to me. He gave me a hundred francs when my sister was careless—and—

MME. DE MUSSET.

Alfred!

PAUL.

Mother, Alfred is not the papa of every bambino in Paris. (*Then to ROSALIE*) You don't know when they are coming back?

ROSALIE.

These days I know nothing. Everything is upside down now that Madame is leaving.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Ah, my mother's instinct. I was right. So she is going when—when?

ROSALIE.

I do not know, because Madame does not know. On Monday I pack because Madame is leaving on Wednesday. On Wednesday I unpack because Madame is staying till Friday. On Friday I pack because Madame leaves on Saturday, and on Sunday I unpack because Madame isn't going at all.

PAUL.

You see, mother, there is no need to worry.

ROSALIE.

And while I pack and unpack Madame sits writing, writing all the time. She never stops. I go to bed. At four in the morning I hear a noise. Madame wishes me, I say to myself. I come in. Instead of writing she is mending furniture. And then she goes out. One night I followed her. She leans on the walls of the quays watching the river till the washer women come out and the sun's up. She's a queer one. All that scribbling has gone to her head.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Alone at five in the morning?

PAUL.

Well, anyway, she is alone.

ROSALIE.

Sometimes I try to read what she's written. I can't make it out. The words are too long. Sometimes she cries when she writes.

(MME. DE MUSSET *has been examining the room and at this moment she reaches the table.*)

MME. DE MUSSET.

The table is set. At what time do they dine?

PAUL.

They never dine at the Quartier. They only eat. (*He enjoys this immensely.*)

MME. DE MUSSET.

Paul, how can you waste your time trying to be witty when Alfred is in danger. (*Then to ROSALIE*) At what time is supper?

ROSALIE.

Whenever Madame gets back. She orders dinner at six and it turns into supper at eleven. It makes no difference, nothing matters. Madame is busy writing. All the time writing, except when the gentlemen come. Dinner for breakfast, breakfast for lunch. She'll let her omelet cool while she scrawls her ten pages. Nothing matters as long as there's ink for Madame and plenty of cigars. It wasn't like this in the country.

MME. DE MUSSET (*amazed*).

Cigars!

ROSALIE.

Black and long, twenty-five centimes. Now I must see to my tarts. Mons. Alfred likes them. Call if you want me. [*She goes out.*]

MME. DE MUSSET.

Except when the gentlemen come! Cigars! Five o'clock in the morning! God help my boy!

(*She is walking in agitation about the room.*

She stops in front of the screen.)

Heavens, isn't this a bathtub?

PAUL.

What could be more innocent than an empty bathtub? Ha! Ha!

MME. DE MUSSET.

So this is her lair.

(*She runs her fingers over the top of the desk and lifts them covered with dust.*)

She isn't very clean. So! In such a dusty place as this she snares men with her smiles. (*She has reached the window.*) And look! (*A tone of deep shame in her voice.*) In sight of Notre Dame. (*She grows more excited.*) God grant I'm in time.

PAUL.

You must keep calm, mother.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I am calm, Paul. I've been trained to control myself. Only peasants and literary people give way to their emotions.

PAUL.

You shouldn't have come.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I do not regret it, even after having seen the place. I'll do my duty. She shan't take him with her. God give me strength.

PAUL.

Hasn't he promised you he wouldn't go ?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Yes, but he will, unless I am by to save him. She is his mistress—and I—am only his mother.

PAUL.

If you had left it all to me.

MME. DE MUSSET.

As I did from the beginning, and what has happened? Were you blind? When I asked you what was going on, you told me Alfred was looking well—my poor Alfred—and that Madame was only more intelligent than charming.

PAUL.

You might think so yourself if you knew her.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Paul !

PAUL.

Sometimes I envy Alfred.

MME. DE MUSSET.

My son! Have you forgotten I'm your mother?

PAUL.

I don't think you'd better stay.

MME. DE MUSSET.

You were the elder. You should have known what would come of this. He was a most sensitive baby, a most fragile boy; and now at the beginning of his career, just when the great Hugo has praised his verses—she! she! My boy, my poor boy!

PAUL.

Why, you've never even seen the lady.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Yes, once in the Bois. She was driving with Alfred. I hid behind my sunshade. She's a dragon decked in ribbons. God help him!

PAUL.

Well—er—do you think she is the first woman that Alfred has—shall I say known?

MME. DE MUSSET (*defending her darling*).

No, Paul. How could one expect that from Alfred? I can understand my son's having a mistress but let my son's mistress belong to my son. When my son belongs to his mistress it is time for his mother to descend from modesty and reticence.

PAUL.

If you'd only given me a little longer.

MME. DE MUSSET.

They might have been on their way to Egypt and those dreadful crocodiles. My poor boy! (*She weeps.*)

PAUL.

What are you going to do?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Plead with her as a mother. She is a mother, isn't she?

PAUL.

Heine says she was born a mother and that her dolls were her lovers.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Don't you ever bring that man to my house. These artists have been the ruin of Alfred. Are you to be the next?

PAUL.

You can't understand their sort.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Thank God for that.

PAUL.

Mother, you're no match for her.

MME. DE MUSSET (*proudly*).

Why not, my son?

PAUL.

Because you're a lady and she's a woman.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I can descend. You think, don't you, that I know of nothing but my flowers and my old laces—but life has taught me many things.

PAUL.

A man must love, mother. Does it matter whom? Love is only an affair of good-evening, good-morning—and good-bye.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Then he must say good-bye. (*She sits down.*)

PAUL.

Do you find it so pleasant here?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Pleasant! Why the place reeks of Bohemia.

PAUL (*taking up his hat*).

Then let's drive in the Bois. It will calm you.

MME. DE MUSSET.

For a little while. Perhaps the air will do me good.

(PAUL gives her his arm. They turn towards the door. Suddenly she stops.)

But if they leave before we get back——

PAUL.

Don't you see the table is set for supper? They are spiritual but they still have stomachs.

(They have reached the door. Suddenly it flies open and CASIMIR DUDEVANT bursts in. He

is "fresh come" from Nohant and has been paying his respects to the Parisian cafés. He is rather handsome but not of an unusual sort, a mixture of the military and the country squire. At the moment he is a trifle unsteady.)

CASIMIR (*politely but swayingly to MME. DE MUSSET*).
Good-evening, Madame.

MME. DE MUSSET (*drawing back, half in dignity and half in fright*).

Another friend of Madame Sand ?

CASIMIR (*with a deep though tipping bow*).
No, Madame, not a friend. I am her husband.

(*And PAUL and MME. DE MUSSET are gone and CASIMIR from the top of the landing is waving them farewells. Then ROSALIE enters from the kitchen with her dish of tarts. She doesn't see DUDEVANT who is now leaning against the wall in a corner near the door. A minute later and the girl is again engrossed in the manuscript of MADAME'S new book, "Valentine."*)

CASIMIR (*as he recognizes ROSALIE*).
Good-evening, my girl.

ROSALIE.
How did you get in without ringing the bell ?

CASIMIR.
I slipped by, my dear ; because this morning when I asked for Madame, my wife, he said no one was at

home. And this afternoon again no one was at home, and when I said are you sure, he said he was sure, because Madame was never at home; and when I came again this evening (*he sways a little*) I couldn't bear to hear him repeat himself, so I came right up. The door was open and here I am.

ROSALIE.

Well, what do you want?

(*He has been eyeing her as he used to at Nohant.*)

CASIMIR.

First, I want to sit down. (*And he does so.*) And now, have you a nice glass of wine for my nice little stomach?

ROSALIE.

Another drop and you might spill over.

CASIMIR.

You haven't learned to talk like a Parisian. (*He leans against the table.*)

ROSALIE.

No, and I never wish to. Don't lean on that table cloth. It was clean three days ago.

CASIMIR.

So then I'm in time for dinner—Ah, my poor little stomach.

ROSALIE.

Get away from there.

CASIMIR.

If I weren't a gentleman, I mightn't like your tone. But I don't mind, I'm used to it. (ROSALIE turns away from him.) I always like the swing of your hips, so I came up from Berri to get you. You can tell a horse by its flanks and a woman by the swing of her hips. (*He comes nearer.*)

ROSALIE (*more hotly*).

Get away!

CASIMIR.

So, so, and your hot little temper, too. Come here, my dear, I think I'd like to burn myself. (*He steps nearer.*)

ROSALIE.

None of that, I wasn't born yesterday.

CASIMIR.

Then thank God for to-day. Don't you like me?

ROSALIE.

No, I don't, and I never did. I wouldn't come within ten feet of you by choice.

CASIMIR.

Then I must take the first step. (*But he finds this difficult to do.*) Why don't you have sawdust on the floor? I can move much better in a stable. The city always makes me thirsty. (*He begins singing.*) "How sweet are the fields, the fields of clover." Stop looking at me like that.

ROSALIE (*dodging him*).

What did you come here for?

CASIMIR.

To tell Madame I don't like the way she's carrying on. Ain't I her husband? I've come to take the census of her lovers.

ROSALIE (*resenting this*).

Get out of here or I'll call the concierge.

CASIMIR.

Is he one of them too? Ha! ha! Call until all the pretty angels listen, you can't budge me. (*He tries to take her in his arms. She runs from him.*)

CASIMIR (*reeling a little*).

Come over here and kiss me.

(*He tries to get her into a corner.*)

I've always wanted you.

(*He has crossed the room and is in front of*

GEORGE'S desk.)

So here's where she scribbles. Fine, very fine. But she never thinks of me. (*He takes up some sheets of the new manuscript.*)

ROSALIE.

[*Let that alone.*

(*She pushes him away from the desk and stands on guard.*)

That cost Madame five sleepless nights.

CASIMIR.

And how many sleepless nights do you think Madame has cost me? (*He sings "Your teeth are like dew in the roses."*) I haven't forgotten you, my pet.

(*He lurches towards her and slips his arm around her waist.*)

ROSALIE (*shoving him away*).

You'd better get out of here before the gentlemen come.

CASIMIR.

Maybe I will and maybe I won't. I'll stay to see my darling. (*And then very maudlin*) I'm the father of her children, she's the mother of mine. Nature, how wonderful is nature. She, me, then—they. One and one make—many. She is ill, she writes to her mother, and I come up to Paris to see her and you, my pet. If she's ill, she needs me. (*He weeps.*) Look at me, I'm a very worried husband. Kiss me, before my heart breaks.

ROSALIE.

Get away, I'm too old for that sort of nonsense. I told you that long ago.

CASIMIR.

How do you know, my darling, until you've tried? (*He hums "How innocent are the fields, the fields."*)

ROSALIE.

Sh— be quiet! (*His voice grows louder.*) Sh— some of the guests are coming.

CASIMIR.

Maybe they'll pity a poor wronged husband.

ROSALIE.

They mustn't see you like this ; get out.

CASIMIR.

You want me to leave without seeing her ? What gentleman would do that ? (*He again bursts into melody "How sweet are the fields."*)

ROSALIE (*pushing him toward the kitchen*).
Sleep it off in my room, behind there.

CASIMIR.

Sleep, gentle sleep, how sweet are the fields. (*He stops.*) But I must see Madame.

ROSALIE.

Yes, yes, I'll tell her. She'll come in to you. Get out ! Get out !

(*There is a sound of footsteps on the stairs and CASIMIR barely tumbles into the kitchen as ROSALIE opens the door for BULOZ and HEINE. BULOZ is a sort of sublimated journalist, terse, pat, with his eyes perpetually on the literary chance. He is editor of "The Revue des Deux Mondes" and finds MADAME'S "stuff" an attractive feature. HEINE is a tense, wandering soul who has drifted to the spiritual haven of Paris. Distinguished, keen—he is dynamic even in unessentials.*)

BULOZ.

I almost knocked you over, Heine.

HEINE.

I was finishing this on the last landing. I've been half an hour coming up. Each floor I read a few pages. (*He looks at an open book in his hand.*) She writes like water tumbling from a pump. Some day her words will flood the boulevards and Paris will be drowned.

ROSALIE.

Good-evening, gentlemen, Madame will be back soon.

BULOZ.

Good-evening, Rosalie. (*Then to HEINE*) Whenever George finishes a new book, I kiss Rosalie and sometimes she kisses me. It's a sensible arrangement. (*Then to ROSALIE*) When Madame leaves, would you like to come and cook for me?

ROSALIE.

No, sir ; I'm a respectable girl.

BULOZ (*anxiously*).

They're leaving to-night, aren't they?

ROSALIE.

I don't know. One day she's going, the next she ain't.

(CASIMIR'S voice is heard singing in the kitchen.)

ROSALIE.

Ah! I haven't washed the endive.

(*The voice becomes more distinct—"The field of cl—o—ver."*)

HEINE.

How sweetly the salad sings.

(*ROSALIE exits. HEINE has reached the table.*)

HEINE.

Seven candles. That's for luck, but I thought George was giving this farewell supper to commemorate her parting from Alfred.

BULOZ.

The bulletins differ. But we'll surely know before morning.

HEINE.

If his mother interferes it will be difficult for George. A woman can do what she wants with a man until another woman knocks at the door. Then the Gods bend down to listen, knowing the odds are even.

BULOZ.

There's the real danger. Though he doesn't know it, he still obeys his mother. She has written George threatening to prevent it.

HEINE.

And George?

BULOZ.

She's distracted with uncertainty. I've had five letters since noon. The first dark despair. Alfred

has again given his word to his mother. He won't go. (*He takes a packet of letters from his pocket.*) The third is cryptic. What do you make of this? (*He reads*) "*Night, Nubian night, but a skylark still soars in my heart.*"

HEINE.

Rather confining for the skylark.

BULOZ.

Then the fourth—again abject misery. Written on the back of a menu of the Café de Soleil. She contemplates suicide.

HEINE.

Everybody does since "Werther." She'll probably live till ninety.

BULOZ (*glancing at the paper*).

She regrets the river is frozen near the quays. Every week, every hour, they decide to part—but the fire of hope burns eternal.

HEINE (*an echo of bitterness in his voice*).

Till fate chokes the flame with the douche of disillusion.

BULOZ.

You're still young enough to be a pessimist?

HEINE.

Pessimism is my spiritual purge. How else can I keep my soul clean in this filthy world? My faith is the faith of to-morrow. I'm a Jew by birth, a Christian by necessity, and an atheist by conviction. (*He*

glances at the table.) Changeably religious—but always hungry. When will they be back?

BULOZ.

Here's her last note. They are going together to the top of Notre Dame to say farewell in the sunset.

HEINE.

Pinnacles are her obsessions. But she'll come down. Bed's the great leveller. Can't you see them, Buloz? Here's Madame preparing for the lover's leap. The last farewell has driven them to madness. There's de Musset peeping over the parapets—wondering just where they'll bump first. And the gargoyles with their granite hearts—hideous because they are doomed to grin for ever—leer in silence lest their laughter should shake the turrets when George again nobly renounces death. (*Then bitterly*) Ah, Buloz, beware of this love of ours. It is our enemy, most selfish, most subtle, and most sinister. What time does the coach start for Lyons?

BULOZ.

At nine from the Post Hotel.

HEINE (*looking at his watch*).

Nearly eight. They'll be here in ten minutes. Supper in fifteen. Haste may outwit his loving and too watchful mother. They've tasted love and drunken, they know not they are drunk. Then Italy—Italy, where golden youth lies sleeping in the

shadow of the centuries. Italy and dreams—and then some rainy morning—the awakening.

BULOZ.

They must go. Think what it means to me.

HEINE.

You?

BULOZ.

I've signed with her for five years. My subscriptions have been falling off. I needed just her sort of copy to boost them. Nothing sells like love.

HEINE.

Except a liaison.

BULOZ.

Exactly.

HEINE (*musingly*).

And if they should awake too soon and suffer——

BULOZ (*laconically*).

I count on that. Pathetic relief—the contrast of tears.

HEINE.

There's a thought to make an essay.

BULOZ.

Send it to me first. I'll print it in the *Revue*.

HEINE (*half to himself*).

Some must suffer that others may sup. Socially, spiritually, everywhere, always true—paying the toll to life, that others may sup.

BULOZ.

That ought to make, say, seven thousand words. Large type that means, shall we say—er—twenty pages?

HEINE (*tempering his scorn with a smile*).

You journalistic Judas. For thirty new subscriptions you would sell your soul.

BULOZ (*oblivious*).

Or perhaps twenty-two pages. We can expect something from de Musset, too.

HEINE.

Of course. He has a splendid past ahead of him, and besides he's a poet—a poet soaked in absinthe and dried in moonshine. But he needs more rust in his blood.

BULOZ (*dryly*).

And you?

HEINE.

I'm perfect where I am, Buloz, but not quite finished. Don't misjudge me. I'm not as modest as I sound—but hungrier.

ROSALIE (*rushes in from the kitchen*).

ROSALIE.

A cab has stopped in the courtyard. (*She begins lighting the candles. Then to BULOZ*) Don't let her start writing again till dinner's served.

BULOZ (*anxiously*).

Not if we can help it.

HEINE.

But if Calliope descends——

ROSALIE.

Another of those actor people? Put her out and remember the omelet. (*She leans out of the window.*) Yes, it's them, it's them. Madame is helping Monsieur out. Madame is paying the driver. Monsieur Alfred is coming up. He'll be so tired and so hungry. She's most likely been telling him novels all day. He's been so good to me. (*And she runs into the kitchen.*)

HEINE.

And how long do you think this affair will last, my friend?

BULOZ.

How long? Does that matter if the copy is good?

(*And ALFRED stands in the doorway, a poet, an aristocrat and something of a dandy. His glance is firm, his red lips half open. He is fragile and fine with that exquisite delicacy of virility, so irresistible to women.*)

ALFRED (*in the doorway*).

My friends! My friends! So you have come to say good-bye and I have come to say good-bye. I am giving up for ever (*BULOZ starts*) the most beautiful companion that man has ever known. (*ROSALIE enters.*) Rosalie, a glass of wine. (*He drinks it and sinks into a chair.*) See my people for me. I can't face them now. I might curse my mother whom I would die to save

from suffering. (*His head drops in his hands.*) Buloz, you see my brother and say good-bye for me, and you, Heine, because your style is rarer, you see my mother and tell her I bless her and will pray for her and will write her when my wound is healed.

BULOZ (*low to ROSALIE*).

Bring the soup.

ALFRED.

I'm so tired. George almost carried me up the last turn of the tower. Paris was like a fading print below us. Half-way up we saw two lovers embracing in a window.

HEINE.

Life is a see-saw and love swings the plank. Up and down, up and down.

ALFRED.

Till we slip, and the blind little worms are waiting. On the top of the tower verses came to me. I called them "The Blind." Where's the absinthe? Listen. (*He pulls out his cuff and begins reading the lines he has composed and which he has scrawled on his linen.*)

"The nightingale empassioned wounds his heart to sing,
 Whilst in the perfumed shade of roses mating.
 Love bursts to blossom each new bud of spring.
 But death, dim death, with scythe in hand stands waiting."

(*ROSALIE, enraptured in spite of herself, stands in the door to the kitchen. HEINE looks at BULOZ, who, on tiptoes, goes over to her.*)

BULOZ (*whispering aside to ROSALIE*).

I told you to bring the soup. (*And she goes out.*)

ALFRED.

That's death's victory and life's defeat. We are the blind.

HEINE.

We ostriches sticking our heads in the sands of hope.

(*And at this moment enters GEORGE—the brilliant, sumptuous, ridiculous but conquering GEORGE. She is never sentimental, never sententious, never conscious of her exuberance or her exaggerations; mistress of everything but her emotions which, though she thinks she masters, master her. The men listening to ALFRED do not see her.*)

ALFRED (*turning over his cuff, goes on with his reading*).

“Upon the moon-white waters glides the lonely swan,
The willows bend—— (*He stops, looks at the other side of his cuff, then back, then to the other cuff.*)

ALFRED (*slightly embarrassed repeats the last line*).

“The willows bend”—ahem—eh—(*there is a pause*)

I must have stopped writing.

(*And then GEORGE steps forward and speaks very simply in spite of her emotion.*)

GEORGE.

You did, Alfred, because at that very moment we said good-bye for ever. (*Again BULOZ starts.*) We were born but to say good-bye.

(There is a danger that the moment may become unbearably sublime, but ROSALIE opportunely arrives with the steaming tureen.)

ROSALIE.

Here's the cream of onions, Madame.

BULOZ (*sniffing*).

Supper at last.

GEORGE (*to BULOZ*).

Is your stomach more important than our souls?

HEINE.

No! But emptier.

(And the romantic spell is broken, and greetings are exchanged.)

GEORGE (*to BULOZ*).

Did you get all my letters? (*Then to HEINE*) Don't be too bitter to-night. I always mistrust you pessimists. Far down you're apt to be so sweet. Look deep enough in tears there's laughter, and deep enough in laughter, tears. Ah, well! Let's be gay. Though we feast on the brink of a precipice I shall smile. One must either smile—or die.

(During this speech they have taken their places at the table.)

ALFRED.

Where's the absinthe?

GEORGE.

Not too much, Freddo, you'll get drowsy and I can't let you sleep here to-night. I've got to unpack and finish five chapters.

BULOZ (*eagerly*).

Five chapters to-night?

GEORGE.

Perhaps six. I'm very tired. (*She looks lovingly at ALFRED.*) My soul has been sapped to-day but I must work. That's the one way of forgetting. Six chapters—and I haven't yet planned the fourth. (*She sits for a moment in deep thought eating radishes.*) I'll bring in this farewell supper. Why not, why not, I ask you? My stories are the mirror of my life. Though I write with my heart's blood, still I must write. This supper will make chapter five. (*She starts improvising.*) After the opera this little farewell feast. Bitter herbs and tears. (*She begins eating the onion soup as she talks.*) For weeks, Olivia has refused to see Raymond, but that night at the opera to the divine strains of Donizetti their eyes have met. (*She leans towards HEINE.*) Have you ever tasted such superb onion soup? Where was I? (*A moment and then she recaptures her theme.*) Ah! yes! Raymond has left his box and come over to Olivia's. Her hair is dark as night in the Apennines. (*Then very sadly*) We might have seen the Apennines, Freddo—if——

ALFRED.

“If” is the epitaph on the tomb of opportunity.

GEORGE (*patting his hand*).

Never mind, dear. We must be brave. (*Another loving glance and then she goes on with her story.*) There in the shadow of her box, whilst the melting music woos the stars. (*Suddenly she jumps up from the table and brings paper, ink and pen from her writing desk. Writing, she repeats*) Whilst the melting music woos the stars—charming phrase, isn't it?—There is a hurried conversation. Yes, she will go to his apartments that very night for their last supper together. Theirs and—ours, Freddo,—ours. (*She chokes back a sob.*)

HEINE (*the tension getting on his nerves*).

You might open the window, Rosalie.

GEORGE (*continuing*).

She has ordered her coachman to drive through the Bois. She must think, her brain pulses like Vesuvius. (*She gives a quick glance in ALFRED'S direction. He sits sadly examining the bottom of his empty glass. She goes on.*) Vesuvius. Passion masters her. Where are the olives, Rosalie? (*She continues.*) It has begun to rain. She leans from the window. The great drops wound her brow. (*She makes a note of this.*) Yes, she will go to Raymond, but—to say farewell. That ought to be a good ending for chapter four.

HEINE.

Yes, very. If it ends there.

GEORGE.

Chapter five. Her husband has been hunting tigers in the Pyrenees.

BULOZ.

But are there any tigers in the Pyrenees?

GEORGE.

What difference does that make? Aren't there giraffes in the zoo?

(BULOZ *consoles himself with his fish.*)

GEORGE (*unruffled*)

Her husband, whilst hunting tigers—— (*A glance at BULOZ.*) Is the salmon nice and fresh? (*Then she goes on*) Whilst hunting tigers has been wounded. Chapter five brings him back to Paris. At an inn on the way he has seduced Carmella, a peasant girl.

BULOZ (*methodically*).

Of course!

HEINE.

Is there a peasant girl in Europe that hasn't been seduced?

GEORGE (*undisturbed*).

He brings with him a Spanish dagger, bought at Burgos.

ALFRED (*catching her spirit*).

From a stall near the sunburnt cathedral.

GEORGE.

Sunburnt cathedral——that's a charming phrase, Freddo. (*She jots it down.*)

MADAME SAND

[ACT 1

ALFRED (*playfully*).

Plagiarist.

GEORGE (*patting his hand*).

Darling. He arrives at his home. It is past midnight. Madame is out. In her boudoir he finds Raymond's handkerchief. He recognizes the crest. Meanwhile, the lovers are at supper. How do you like it, Buloz?

BULOZ.

That's just the place to announce the next instalment.

ALFRED.

Why have we decided to part?

GEORGE.

We?

ALFRED.

I might have persuaded you to give up writing novels.

BULOZ.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Then think of the blissful life we might have led together philosophising under all the chestnut trees in Europe. (*He takes her hand.*)

GEORGE (*looking deep into his eyes*).

We must learn to live alone, Freddo—alone. (*She presses his hand to her lips.*)

(*Buloz sits watching them.*)

HEINE (*aside to BULOZ*).

Don't worry, she won't stop writing. Every novel to George is a new love affair. She always sees them through to the end.

GEORGE.

But you mustn't interrupt me, Freddo. (*Then choking back her sobs*) I call him Freddo because we were going to Italy together. Where was I? (*Recalling*) The rain has ceased.

(*There is a slight disturbance in the kitchen.*)

BULOZ (*at the door*).

Sh—, be quiet. Madame is composing.

ROSALIE (*sticking her head in, rather excited*).

I'm beating the eggs for the omelet. (*She closes the door.*)

GEORGE (*by mistake sprinkling her salmon with sugar*).

They are out on the veranda together in the moonlight.

ALFRED.

What would the romantic movement do, if it weren't for the moonlight.

BULOZ.

That's sugar, George, not salt.

GEORGE (*oblivious*).

She has come to say farewell, but poor, weak woman, she has forgotten the feud twixt flesh and spirit. We are but marionettes hung from the nimble fingers of the Gods.

HEINE (*looking up quickly as he breaks his bread*).

Yes, all of us! We jig at the end of the wires, poets and cooks, saints and grisettes—hung from the nimble fingers of the Gods. All, all of us—even you, George, even you!

GEORGE.

You mustn't break in with your Germanic philosophies. (*Then as she turns to ALFRED, slightly wetting her lips with her tongue*) There in the pungent odours of the night they melt into each other's arms. And Olivia turns only to see her husband standing in the room.

(*And this is only too true, for the noise outside has increased, and at the next moment, CASIMIR bursts in from the kitchen, bottle in hand. The men jump up.*)

GEORGE (*quite calmly*).

Oh, you! Wait a minute, please. (*Then unperturbed, she goes on with her story.*) Olivia, trembling like a lily in the wind (*she is writing this all down*) throws herself between the men as the Burgos blade (*a loving glance at ALFRED*)—bought from a stall near the sunburnt cathedral—flashes in the moonlight. (*She dots the sentence and turns to CASIMIR.*)

GEORGE.

And now, what do you want?

CASIMIR (*leering*).

You. I want you to come back to the country, my dear. I've no one to talk to, your mother's too old and the servants each has each.

(*He comes towards her. ALFRED intercepts him.*)

ALFRED.

Don't you dare come near this lady.

CASIMIR.

Eh?

(*HEINE goes over to the window and stands there calmly smoking. The others are all excited except GEORGE, who sits quietly finishing her salmon. ROSALIE peeps through the door.*)

ALFRED.

Get out of here, you're drunk.

CASIMIR (*lurching forward*).

Ain't I her broken-hearted husband? (*He begins to weep.*) She's mine by law.

GEORGE.

Have you come up from Nohant to teach me the law?

CASIMIR.

You still talk just like a man, Aurora. You haven't changed at all, but you're a wee bit fatter, my dear—a wee bit fatter.

GEORGE (*really resenting this*).

Nonsense, Casimir. (*And then very significantly, as she glances towards the door*) Good-evening, now. These three gentlemen are my friends.

CASIMIR.

Friends, Aurora? Isn't that a fancy way of putting it?

(*He pats ROSALIE on the cheek and begins singing "How sweet are the fields."*)

ROSALIE (*to GEORGE*).

He was after me at Nohant, too. That's why I came with you. He was awful bad, and though you're kind of queer, I knew it would be better with you, and anyhow I'd be safe in Paris.

CASIMIR (*lyrically*).

"The—fields—of—cl—oo—o—ver."

HEINE.

So he was the singing salad!

ROSALIE.

I tried to keep him in there till you'd gone, because you told me this morning you'd surely be leaving for Venice to-night.

(*There is a quick glance exchanged between HEINE and BULOZ. General consternation is imminent, but GEORGE is ready.*)

GEORGE (*sweetly and with a swooning look at ALFRED*).

But since then so much has happened.

(*Trustingly he takes her hand. HEINE comes down to BULOZ.*)

HEINE (*aside to BULOZ*).

I can't let these domestic scenes spoil my supper.

(*He sits down and begins to eat.*)

CASIMIR (*to ALFRED*).

Let go that lady's hand.

ALFRED.

Keep away, or I'll throw you out of the window.

CASIMIR.

You will? (*He roars with laughter.*) You will—you, with your pale face and your hair like a woman's? I'm a soldier, young man; do you know I'm a soldier?

(*ALFRED steps threateningly towards him.*)

GEORGE (*calmly*).

You'd better go now, Casimir (*and then pointing it with smiling delicacy*), before these gentlemen show you the way. The stairs are very steep, my friend. (*Then she turns to HEINE.*) Have some more salmon, do.

CASIMIR (*nastily*).

Look here, I've had enough of your cooing voice! Ain't you my wife?

GEORGE.

I have as much respect for our marriage contract as I have for you. The day you took the whip into your hands, I took the law into mine.

CASIMIR (*cowering*).

Wives don't talk that way.

GEORGE.

Then it's time they did. I don't want you, I don't need you. (*And then ever so sweetly*) Are you going now?

CASIMIR (*reaching the door and stopping*).

I can't leave, I can't.

(BULOZ and ALFRED step forward. GEORGE, with a gentle smile on her face, sits watching the scene.)

CASIMIR.

You see—well—er—I——

GEORGE.

Is it money, my dear?

CASIMIR (*brightening*).

Just like you, Lucy. Sooner or later you get to the point. The fact is—(*he reels*) I lost a few francs at my inn. He had cross-eyes, Lucy. Never gamble with a cross-eyed man; and now I've nothing to take me to Nohant.

GEORGE (*going to her desk*).

Here are twenty francs. (*And then to BULOZ.*) Advance me a hundred, Buloz. So—a hundred and twenty; and you—(*she turns to HEINE*) what do you add to get rid of this nuisance? That makes nearly two hundred. Rosalie, lend me ten francs. (*Which the girl takes from her stocking.*)

ALFRED.

And I?

GEORGE (*modestly*).

No, no; not that. Could I borrow from *you* to get rid of a husband?

ALFRED.

If it means your happiness.

GEORGE (*melting*).

Well, since you put it so beautifully.

(*And unwillingly she takes the money and gives it to CASIMIR.*)

GEORGE.

Good-bye! Don't stop to thank us.

(*CASIMIR takes the money, and stuffing it in his pocket, again reaches the door, and again stops.*)

CASIMIR.

I might have forgotten, Aurora, if my hand hadn't got to my pocket. (*He takes out a crumpled piece of paper.*) Maurice sent you this. (*He gives her a little water-colour drawing.*)

(*GEORGE's whole manner changes. All the mother in her welling up at the thought of MAURICE.*)

GEORGE.

My little darling! How is he, Casimir? Is he well? Does he blow his nose nicely? Is he kind to mother? Kiss him for me. (*CASIMIR steps towards her, ALFRED again threateningly intercepting him.*)

CASIMIR (*stumbling back*).

To think that I should live to see the day when my wife sits at table with murderers and long-haired swine. You've broken my heart, Aurora.

(*And singing "How fair are the fields," he reels down the stairs. There is an embarrassed silence.*)

GEORGE (*lifting the gloom*).

My friends, don't take this too seriously. What does a husband matter? He is an incident all married women should forget. (*Then reminiscently*) My marriage began what might have ended happily. (*She smiles wanly at ALFRED.*) What might have ended happily, Freddo, if fate had willed it.

ALFRED.

Fate is our enemy. We are born to defeat.

GEORGE (*fervidly*).

What have I now to live for but my children and my dreams? To-day I have lacerated my soul on the altars of renunciations. (*A poignant glance at ALFRED.*) Life called us and we turned away.

ALFRED.

How can I leave you to face the possibility of such another scene? You have suffered and you have borne in silence. There are tears in your eyes.

GEORGE (*resignedly*).

My friend, do not hope to dry them. I must weep lest my heart break.

(*She looks imploringly through the ceiling as though trying to see God, then she rushes over to the piano; she begins to play a sad lament in a desolate minor key. Then a few chords, arpeggios, and she begins chanting.*)

“The nightingale impassioned wounds his heart to sing,

Whilst in the perfumed shade of roses mating.”

BULOZ (*to ROSALIE, who stands listening*).

Go and get the omelet.

ROSALIE.

The eggs are beat.

HEINE (*with an apprehensive glance towards the piano as ROSALIE goes out*).

And put plenty of rum in it. (*And then to BULOZ*)
You shouldn't have brought me here. I can't stand music while I'm eating.

BULOZ.

Honestly, I didn't count on this sort of thing.

ALFRED (*tenderly to GEORGE*).

You have remembered my poor verses.

GEORGE.

Are they not seared in my soul?

(*More arpeggios. Then through her sobs she continues her chant.*)

“Love burst to blossom each new bud of spring,
But death—(*a chord, two chords, three chords*)—
Dim death with scythe in hand stands——”

(She can't finish the line. She throws herself into ALFRED's arms. A passionate embrace. Then she rushes from him over to the window. It is nicely timed; the moon is rising. Swiftly she opens one of the bird-cages and takes out one of the canaries.)

GEORGE *(in an ecstasy)*.

At least there shall be one free thing answering the winds of desire. *(She sets the bird free.)* Let him fly into the dawn.

BULOZ.

Him? How does she know it's a him?

HEINE.

In such matters she is infallible.

(There is a tableau at the window. The music, the moonlight, and the flight of the bird have been too much for ALFRED. He leans sobbing against the window frame. GEORGE is watching him. Then suddenly he reels about.)

ALFRED.

No, no! I shall not sacrifice two souls to duty.

HEINE *(dryly)*.

As I thought. He is beginning to realize that virtue is its own disappointment.

(GEORGE and ALFRED are in each other's arms. A passionate embrace through which HEINE and BULOZ speak.)

HEINE.

Don't you think we had better go into the kitchen?

BULOZ.

Why?

HEINE.

I am being pushed into the corner. Nothing fills a room like love. (*A sigh from the lovers.*) When do you think it will be finished?

BULOZ (*with an apprehensive glance towards GEORGE and ALFRED.*)

What? The kiss?

HEINE (*with an eager look in the direction of the kitchen.*)

No. The omelet.

(*A moment later and ALFRED in a rapture swings GEORGE toward the open window.*)

ALFRED.

Listen, over the rumble of the city love is calling! Beyond the roofs of Paris lie the radiant valleys of the south!

HEINE.

Splendid eyesight, hasn't he? The heart sees all.

ALFRED.

You love me, George?

GEORGE (*mysteriously*).

As I have never loved before.

ALFRED (*lyrically*).

There is a higher right than duty, my adored one. Let us not hesitate. Love is calling. Italy and the

waiting years. Italy, where one drinks oblivion in a moment's ecstasy.

GEORGE (*in a sort of vision*).

Italy!—The moon is rising in my heart. (*A trill of song from the canaries.*) Listen! That is the music of the serenata. The night is waiting. We are at the gates of Eden.

ALFRED.

Then let us enter in.

HEINE.

At the very gates. What if they should slip?

(*A sound comes up from the street. Voices, laughter. It is Paris, not Italy. Suddenly GEORGE awakes.*)

GEORGE (*her voice gone gray*).

And your mother?

ALFRED.

She is dead to me. Let us escape from the shadow of her tomb.

GEORGE (*barely controlling her triumphant satisfaction*).

Alfred, my own, I have been waiting.

(*Again they are in each other's arms as ROSALIE arrives with the omelet.*)

GEORGE.

Quick! My bags, my trunks, my shawls, my manuscripts!

(*Then follows a scene of intense confusion, all of them running about to get the traps ready, while HEINE, undisturbed, sits eating.*)

GEORGE.

Hurry, Rosalie, my bonnet!

ROSALIE.

The new one with the broad brim which you bought for Italy?

GEORGE.

Yes; hurry, hurry!

(BULOZ is out of breath strapping the bags. Supper is forgotten. ALFRED is no help. He is in the way; every moment insisting on clasping GEORGE to his bosom. Soon, however, they are ready.)

BULOZ.

You go by way of Avignon?

GEORGE.

Yes—but first a stop at Lyons to see Stendahl.

ALFRED (remonstratingly).

But he will talk to us all night.

GEORGE.

No. He will dance for us in his Russian boots. And then the sea.

HEINE (as he takes the last olive).

Yes. We are all of us afloat.

GEORGE *(her voice aflame).*

Ah, my friends, life is meant to be squandered. Buloz, Heine, farewell, farewell. I'll write—I'll write.

(Then general embracing. For a moment the lovers stand bathed in the moonlight that floods the

room. *Confused voices: "Good-bye, farewell, Italy, life, love, etc., etc." They turn to leave. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. ROSALIE looks up. She hesitates. Then she goes to the door. In a moment she is back.)*

ROSALIE (*furtively*).

There is a lady to see you, madame.

GEORGE (*gaily*).

Tell her I am dying of love and can see no one.

ROSALIE.

She's been here before.

GEORGE.

I never turn a beggar from my doors. Buloz, give me twenty francs.

ROSALIE (*vainly trying to warn her*).

She came in a carriage.

GEORGE.

I've no objection. Let her drive back in it.

(The knock is repeated. Timidly ROSALIE opens the door and MME. DE MUSSET and PAUL enter.)

ALFRED.

Mother!

MME. DE MUSSET (*who with quiet dignity has arisen to the occasion*).

Alfred!

BULOZ (*under his breath*).

Mme. de Musset!

MME. DE MUSSET (*with gentle courtesy*).

Pardon this late intrusion, Madame. I see I disturb you at dinner. (*And then, pointing the facts with delicacy, but with a will behind it*) I thought my son might be leaving and would care to drive home with me.

(*A tense moment. The literary history of France hangs in the balance, and then MME. DE MUSSET brilliantly comes to the rescue.*)

MME. DE MUSSET (*with sudden inspiration*).
Delightful weather for December?

HEINE (*dryly*).

It always is.

BULOZ (*clearing his throat*).

Hem!

MME. DE MUSSET (*quietly but firmly*).
Well, Alfred?

ALFRED.

Please, mother, let's avoid a scene.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I've spent most of my life doing that, my son. (*She glances at GEORGE.*) Are you coming, Alfred?

ALFRED.

I—I must speak to you.

MME. DE MUSSET.

It will be very quiet in the carriage. Paul can take a cab. (*And then, with a note of graceful condescension, she turns to GEORGE*) Madame, I hope I find you well?

(And then equally sweetly, GEORGE, who mentally has been aiding destiny, answers her.)

GEORGE.

I'm well, Madame, I thank you, very; but won't you and your son finish supper with us? We've but just begun.

ROSALIE *(cheerily)*.

Yes, the omelet's just finished. Have some, Monsieur Paul. It's the kind you like.

(PAUL involuntarily steps towards the table.)

MME. DE MUSSET.

Paul! *(Then to GEORGE)* Thank you, Madame, but I've already supped. But we are keeping you so long from table. Come, Alfred, have you forgotten that you promised to read your new verses to your sister's friends, this evening? *(She steps towards the door.)* A thousand apologies for my intrusion. Good-evening, Madame, good-evening, gentlemen. Come, my sons.

(PAUL is at his mother's side. All eyes are on ALFRED. He steps towards the rack where he has hung his cape and hat. A pause. Then GEORGE takes the reins.)

GEORGE.

Madame, will you permit me to speak to you alone?

MME. DE MUSSET.

I doubt, Madame, if there is anything that we have to say to each other.

GEORGE (*significantly*).

Butterflies are fragile. Shall we bruise them on the anvils of our rashness?

MME. DE MUSSET (*slightly mystified*).

Pardon me, Madame, but——

GEORGE.

Gentlemen, you will excuse us. There are things that we women say to each other that you men can never know. Don't go into my bedroom, if you please. The bed is tossed.

(*And ROSALIE and the gentlemen go off leaving the candle-lit battle-field to GEORGE. Throughout the following scene her tone varies. One moment she is soft and feminine, the next masculine and dominant.*)

GEORGE.

And now we can have a nice cosy chat together. Do sit down.

MME. DE MUSSET (*stiffly*).

Thank you. (*But she remains standing.*)

GEORGE (*lightly*).

As you please.

(*And GEORGE, turning a chair about, seats herself at the table.*)

GEORGE (*offering MME. DE MUSSET a cigarette*).

Will you smoke?

MME. DE MUSSET.

That is one of the things, Madame, that I leave to men.

GEORGE (*pleasantly*).

That's the mistake we women make. We leave too much to the men. We bury our souls in satin, and they take advantage of our weakness. Perhaps you would prefer a cigar, Madame.

MME. DE MUSSET (*a gasp*).

No, Madame.

GEORGE.

After breakfast I cannot live without my cigar. The odour is so delicious mixed with my rose geraniums. (*She sniffs.*) Is there anything in the world so redolent as the odour of rose geraniums—or perhaps you prefer jasmine? But it's too late for jasmine.

MME. DE MUSSET (*involuntarily sitting down*).

Madame, do you think I came here to talk botany?

GEORGE (*tensely*).

No, Madame. You came to do what God alone can do, to command two people to cease loving each other. Do you think you can do that, Madame? Since the beginning of time all nature has been preparing for this love of ours—Alfred's and mine. The stars are in their allotted places so that we might love.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I know nothing about astronomy.

GEORGE (*oblivious*).

Eden first bloomed so that we might love. (*She has stretched across the table and has reached her ink and*

pen and paper, and in the shadow of the sugar bowl, is jotting down the phrases that particularly appeal to her.)

Abel slew Cain—er—er—so that we might love. Since the remotest hint of time, fate has willed it. Are you God, Madame? Can you toy with destiny?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Pardon me, but I cannot understand this literature you speak.

GEORGE.

You call my words literature? No, indeed, Madame, they are the burning truth—a truth you cannot understand. You have lived too long in your damask-dusty world where the blinds are always drawn whilst I,—I have cut my flesh on the thorns. Do you know what my life has been?

MME. DE MUSSET.

No, that I do not presume to know. I do not wish to know. It will not move me; my son shall not go with you. What would become of him?

GEORGE.

He would enter the glorious kingdom hand in hand with the woman he loves. Do you dare deny him that? Can God—God who is love be watching this?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Madame, spare me this melodrama. You are right. I have lived a guarded and what you would call a narrow life, but in that old-fashioned, ridiculous seclusion at which you scoff I have learned to respect tradition.

GEORGE (*tensely*).

Need is the only tradition I acknowledge.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Alfred will not go with you. He has given me his word. He is a gentleman.

GEORGE.

Ah, yes. It takes generations to make a gentleman, but it takes only one man to make a generation. I am helping to make mine because I am free. He, too, must be free. Do not fetter a falcon lest he break his chains.

MME. DE MUSSET (*not quite sure that she understands George's elaborate simile*).

If you mean that I restrain Alfred, you are wrong.

GEORGE.

Ah, that's what you would have him think. But you mothers have a way of holding on. I tell you he must be free to sing. I have bought my freedom with my heart's blood. I have suffered.

MME. DE MUSSET.

And we mothers, do you think we mothers do not suffer?

(*This is a superb moment for GEORGE. She snatches from her bosom the little water-colour drawing which CASIMIR has brought her.*)

GEORGE.

I, too, am a mother, Madame! Look what my darling son has sent me! This poor little painting of

roses. (*She is sobbing.*) Do you think I do not know a mother's heart?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Then give my son back to me.

GEORGE.

I have not taken him. God has sent him. Ah, my friend, he has made me so happy. Every day finds me more attached to him. Every day the beauty of life shines more brilliantly. Would you shatter this love of ours? He is my universe, my all.

MME. DE MUSSET (*slowly*).

Pardon me, Madame, but you force me to be cruel.

GEORGE.

Go on, go on, life has not spared me, why should you?

MME. DE MUSSET.

You say you are his universe, but, Madame, are you sure you are all of this to him?

GEORGE.

Ask him and his tears will answer you. (*She jots this down.*) After the desolation of my past he has come like a new dawn into my life. I was a mere girl when I married, young, furtive, reticent, romantic. I adored my husband. I gave him my faith, my life. And what did he make of them?

MME. DE MUSSET.

Spare me.

GEORGE (*leaning towards her*).

He tossed them to the first chambermaid that smiled on him. I suffered this because I still loved him. Men,—Madame, men never know what agony we women hush in our hearts.

MME. DE MUSSET (*in spite of herself*).

Yes—that is true.

GEORGE.

I bore this. My baby came. I still preserve his first wee darling shoes.

MME. DE MUSSET (*off her guard*).

And I've kept Alfred's curls. There's still a glint of gold in them. (*Her voice softens.*)

GEORGE (*making the most of the moment*).

I bore this till the day he struck me.

MME. DE MUSSET (*more gently*).

Struck you?

GEORGE.

Then I left him for ever to find refuge in Paris and consolation in my work. Ah, Madame, do you begin to understand?

(*Then MME. DE MUSSET speaks very quickly, attempting to cover a softening emotion which she can't suppress.*)

MME. DE MUSSET.

But why,—why have you chosen my boy from all the men you——

(*She stops short.*)

GEORGE.

Because he has come as my first love, when I thought that love was over for ever. You must not, you cannot take him from me.

(MME. DE MUSSET *is half-consciously beginning to pity her and she fights against it.*)

MME. DE MUSSET.

I am taking him away to save him.

GEORGE.

Save him? Is he not a man? Would you fling him to the grisettes of the boulevard as the Philistines flung Daniel to the lions? (*Again the Bible. The Scriptures were ever her "present help in trouble."*) No! no! I will be a mother to him. A mother and a mistress. That combination is unique, Madame, unique, but none the less sublime.

MME. DE MUSSET.

I—

GEORGE (*in a last beautiful effort*).

You are his mother. You gave him life. He drank in love at your breasts. You have reared and tendered him and in gratitude he would give back some of this love you have given him. He would pay heaven by loving in return. There are tears in your eyes. There are tears in the hearts of each of us. You have taught him love and now he would bring an offering of love to lay on the altar of my heart.

MME. DE MUSSET (*almost won*).

Your eloquence, Madame——

GEORGE.

No! No! It is not my eloquence, it is your mother's love, understanding the love of an unfortunate sister.

(*She throws herself on her knees before her, then with dulcet sweetness*)

May I call you mother?

MME. DE MUSSET.

I have misjudged you, Madame. I ask your pardon. There is much good in your heart.

GEORGE.

I have opened it to you. (*And then from a sublimated height of spirituality*) You will tell him to go with me.

MME. DE MUSSET (*on the verge of a collapse*).

I—I——

GEORGE (*very gently*).

You will, mother?

MME. DE MUSSET (*slowly*)

Yes, he shall go with you.

(*And GEORGE springs up and rushes triumphantly to the door of the kitchen.*)

GEORGE (*calling*).

Alfred, Alfred. Madame, you have chosen well.

(But the emotional strain has been too much for MME. DE MUSSET and she is weeping when ALFRED enters.)

ALFRED.

Mother, my mother, do not weep. If one of us must suffer, it shall not be you.

MME. DE MUSSET.

My son, my son.

ALFRED.

You have suffered agony to give me life, shall I not suffer agony to bring you peace? Come, mother, I renounce my love and will go with you.

(And MME. DE MUSSET is so swept away by her son's nobility that she forgets her words to GEORGE.)

MME. DE MUSSET *(throwing her arms about him)*.

Then come, my Alfred, and your mother will help you to forget.

(They move towards the door. A pause. GEORGE is almost swooning. But a moment later and she is ready even for this seeming defeat on the brink of victory. She bars their way.)

GEORGE *(darkly)*.

He loves me with his life. *(And then very tragically)* He will not hesitate if you come between us. He is a genius, and geniuses do not stop to think.

(In horror MME. DE MUSSET looks at ALFRED. Dejectedly he turns away, his head fallen.)

MME. DE MUSSET (*in terror*).

No! No! Not that! Not that!
(*The men crowd in at the doorway.*)

ALFRED.

I am but a poor reed, broken in the wind of destiny.

(*GEORGE watches MME. DE MUSSET. Her last thrust has gone home.*)

HEINE (*with a quick glance at GEORGE as she puts on the new bonnet bought for Italy*).

The wind has changed.

ALFRED.

I am ready, mother. I shall go with you though I leave my life behind me.

(*Candle-light and pathos crown the scene. Then MME. DE MUSSET speaks.*)

MME. DE MUSSET (*her voice trembling*).

No, Alfred, you shall go to Italy. I am your mother and I wish it. I have misjudged this lady. Her heart is noble. My blessings follow you.

(*She sinks into a chair at the table and ALFRED throws himself on his knees before her.*)

ALFRED.

My mother, my noble mother.

(*Pause. Tableau, then BULOZ bustles in.*)

BULOZ (*briskly*).

You haven't much time, if you're leaving to-night. The diligence starts from the Post in ten minutes.

GEORGE.

Quick, Rosalie, a cab, a cab. (ROSALIE *rushes out*.) Alfred, when Elysium beckons we'll not wait for baggage. Buloz, give Rosalie two hundred francs and send my trunks to Genoa and twenty reams of Weynan paper. My pen adores it. Alfred, Alfred, the world is kind.

(ALFRED *has got up and braced himself with half a bottle of claret.*)

ALFRED (*gaily*).

I'll write five comedies, a tragedy and three books of poems.

BULOZ.

Hurry! Hurry!

(*One or two wraps and a few small bags are hustled into the hall.*)

HEINE.

Good-bye, fond lovers, the gods have made you artists.

(ROSALIE *comes rushing in.*)

GEORGE (*rapturously*).

And love will make us gods.

ROSALIE.

There was a cab in the courtyard. (*Then to GEORGE*) He said you told him to wait all evening.

(*GEORGE from her pinnacle, disregarding this last blatant proof of her campaigning.*)

GEORGE.

Good-bye—farewell, my friends. (*And then beautifully to MME. DE MUSSET*) Madame, God looks down on us. Love is all.

MME. DE MUSSET (*suddenly succumbing to the practical*).

Be sure that Alfred wears his heaviest flannels in that draughty diligence.

GEORGE.

Trust me! Love is all!

(*And snatching her half-finished manuscript from the desk, she and ALFRED rush from the room, followed by BULOZ and HEINE. MME. DE MUSSET sits silently, quite overcome, as PAUL runs over to the window to watch the departure; and ROSALIE begins clearing the table. She sees the omelet.*)

ROSALIE (*laconically*).

And all those ten eggs wasted.

(*Voices sound up from the courtyard. The noise has again wakened the canaries. There is a shower of song and the curtain falls.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

NOTHING BUT TIME LASTS FOR EVER

The Scene

It is six months later. The scene is GEORGE'S apartment in the Hotel Danieli, Venice. It is evening. Through a great Venetian window, back centre, in the distance across the Grand Canal, can be seen the Island of San Giorgio with its Campanile silhouetted against the moon. The room is huge, tiled and gloomy. Deep shadows are everywhere. A few chairs are about. MADAME'S writing desk piled high with manuscripts is in a corner, and to the right a great four-poster bed with the curtains drawn. But the hand of the occupant hangs below them and is just visible in the dim light of a night-lamp which stands on a little bottle-covered table near the bed. There is a suggestion of the atmosphere of a sick-room, but somehow the idea of gloom is not too pervasive.

Outside on the Grand Canal a "serenata" is in full swing. One hears the call of the gondoliers, the bump of the boats, the chatter of voices, the beating of tambourines and the shrill laughter of women, like little rockets shooting up in the shifting hum of sound. A sudden stillness and then a man's voice sings, lusciously,

meltingly, a Venetian love song with an accompaniment like a barcarole of Mendelssohn.

Italy—night—and love—and this sick-room. But still the background is fitting, for in the deep, dark embrasure of the Venetian window in the rear which opens on a balcony over the canal, two figures are leaning, listening to their hearts and the music. They are GEORGE and her lover.

GEORGE.

No! No! Don't answer. The stillness is too eloquent. Listen! Listen!

(The voice of the singer at the serenata, lifts in poignant ecstasy.)

GEORGE.

Listen, his voice has reached the stars that bend down to hear. Ah, my beloved, love is the end and the beginning.

(They are smoking in the shadows of the deep window. The fumes float out.)

GEORGE.

Do you know what my life has been until you came bearing a light in the darkness? Nights of despair and dawns of disillusionment. Life was but a sorry riddle whose answer was death. *(She is almost sobbing.)* That thought came to me yesterday in the Hebrew cemetery. All was over, and now love again sings in my heart. Let silence be our prayer of thanksgiving.

(A moment's attempt at this "silence," but the crowd outside do not understand its beautiful necessity, and the next second the song is over and a tumultuous burst of applause lifts from the waters.)

GEORGE.

And now we'll have tea. How beautifully he sang. Music is perpetual passion yearning for ever. Sh! You mustn't speak so loudly or our patient may awake.

(She comes from the window. Her lover stops in the shadow watching her as she glides about. She dips a taper into the night-lamp and at the end of the room farthest from the bed lights a candle standing in a bracket hanging on the wall. The stage grows a little lighter. She is dressed in man's clothing and is smoking a huge cigar. She leans over a little brazier.)

GEORGE.

Yes—it's bubbling. I adore cooking. Even making tea fascinates me. That's why Dumas would never come to see me in Paris—ah, Paris—he was jealous of my sauces. *(She pours a little water into a teapot.)* Come, dear, it's ready.

(And DR. PAGELLO steps out of the shadow of the window. He is GEORGE's deep-eyed, hesitant, but none too brilliant Italian doctor. He has no mental distinction, no authority, no particular magnetism, but he is charmingly simple, and GEORGE has discovered in him a latent talent for

the tender one-syllabled sort of love which, at the moment of the threatening "debacle" of her affair with DE MUSSET, her soul needs; and withal, though he is not too masterful, he is extraordinarily handsome.)

GEORGE.

Sh! You mustn't speak too loudly. He may awake. *(She glances toward the bed.)* Though he has outraged our love, still I pity him.

PAGELLO.

He needs sleep badly.

GEORGE.

Ah, my friend, we must heal him. France needs him. He is weak, weak—his imagination has sapped his will. *(And then rather mysteriously)* But he must not pass beyond.

PAGELLO.

No. He will live, but I do not see why you say pass beyond. It is very difficult for a physician to understand how you other people feel about that sort of thing.

GEORGE *(half playfully)*.

You ponderous scientist. You wicked, wicked materialist, don't you believe the soul goes on for ever? *(Then beautifully)* Isn't love—our love—an earthly symbol of the soul's eternity. Don't you understand that, Pietro?

PAGELLO.

I—I used to understand only what I saw, but you somehow, you make me understand what I do not see. I cannot explain you to myself.

GEORGE.

I thought nothing was hidden from you doctors.

PAGELLO.

Most of the women I know are different from you. You are very unlike my mother.

GEORGE.

No, no, Pietro, perhaps you misjudge me. I, too, am only a woman.

PAGELLO.

I carry my mother's picture with me. See. (*He shows her a little locket, which hangs from a chain about his neck.*) She is very dear to me.

GEORGE (*looking at the miniature*).

Your eyes—your brow—and that look of trust. Some day you must tell me all about her. You will have a little rum? Yes—some day we'll go to her—you and I. (*PAGELLO starts slightly.*) I'll read her part of my latest novel. I wrote for six hours last night.

PAGELLO (*deeply concerned*).

That's too much.

GEORGE.

And for seven again this morning before breakfast. I've gotten used to it. (*She glances toward the bed,*

and then with a note of genuine sadness in her voice)
It helps me to forget.

PAGELLO (*professionally*).

Work like that is bad for you, you cannot keep it up—or——

GEORGE.

Is it can or cannot? I must live, and to live I must write.

PAGELLO.

Why, even we physicians——

GEORGE.

Yes, yes, I know. (*She is smiling gently at him.*)
Your mother will like my book, and you, too, Pietro.
It is written out of my heart.

PAGELLO.

I think my father would care more to hear it. He is a scholar, you know. He has come up from Castelfranco to read some books in the library here. He is waiting for me in the Piazzetta; we are to have ices together. All day he is busy with his books, and in the evening I meet him.

GEORGE.

You are a dutiful son. Do not believe the cynics, Pietro. The world is full of dutiful sons. (*A half glance towards the bed.*)

PAGELLO.

He is writing a history of Castelfranco. He loves our home.

GEORGE.

Yes, yes; I, too, love the scenes of my childhood. Dear, secluded Nohant—but lately I have been dreaming (*she leans a little toward him*) of the Alpine hills. Why, even here in Venice I smell the scent of the almond flowers. (*Then very tenderly*) You know the Alpine valleys, Pietro—it is spring (*and into the last word she crowds all the essence of the sweet beginning of things*)—spring.

PAGELLO.

I have seen very little. Venice and the country about my home.

GEORGE.

Yes, we will go there some day.

PAGELLO.

George! (*He leans towards her, then stops.*)
George——

GEORGE.

You have an adorable way of hesitating and then a lovely worried smile comes into your eyes. You must ever stay what I know you are, rather than what you may be.

PAGELLO.

What I am, what I have done, does that matter now?

GEORGE.

You must tell me nothing. (*She glances towards the bed.*) Once before I thought I knew the heart of a man. Ah, well! (*She sadly shakes her head.*) But

now—now—— (*She leans towards him.*) You must remain a mystery.

PAGELLO.

Why? Why?

GEORGE.

Because my love for you is beyond understanding. It is part of myself. You have come to me (*again a pathetic glance at the patient*) when my heart was broken.

PAGELLO.

Before I knew you nothing used to interest me so much as gall-stones. But now——

GEORGE.

You droll darling. Sh—sh! We mustn't talk so loud. (*There is a movement and a sigh from the sleeper behind the curtains.*) God grant he is quiet to-night. I cannot stand this terrible life much longer.

PAGELLO.

I pity you; you have nursed him like a mother.

GEORGE.

What has he not done to break my heart?

(*She steps towards the bed and mournfully looks in at the sleeper. Then she is back at the table.*)

GEORGE.

May God—who is love—some day give me the strength to forgive him.

PAGELLO.

He is better, almost well again—if he can give up this drinking——

GEORGE.

If? Think of it, Pietro. The other night I had to call up two of the stoutest porters to hold him down. He wept and sang and without a stitch of clothing danced about the room shrieking that the place was full of demons with vipers in their hair. It was terrible.

PAGELLO (*attempting to quiet her*).

Don't speak of these things, George.

(The memory of it is too much for her, but the old instinct conquers.)

GEORGE.

Some day I shall put that scene into a novel. Why not?—life is my theme. He has come reeling home. He has squandered his money and mine, Pietro. He has lost thousands of francs at the tables. I sent to Paris; Buloz advanced me more.

PAGELLO.

What? This money that you earn, writing day and night——

GEORGE.

Yes! Yes! By the sweat of my soul—I should say brow. It is true, my friend. The French Consul has taken him to these gambling houses and other places—other places, Pietro.

PAGELLO.

And all the while you sat there. (*He points to the desk.*)

GEORGE.

Do you think he minded that? One night in the pocket of his coat I found a slipper—a slipper of a ballerina. It was soaked with champagne.

PAGELLO (*the extravagance rather than the impropriety getting the better of him*).

No! Champagne! That cost two lires a bottle!

GEORGE.

The toe was stuffed. That's how these people seem to dance on nothing. Ah! I have borne much.

PAGELLO.

Yes, yes.

GEORGE.

Sh! He is awake.

(*A moment's pause, then again quiet. The hand below the curtain falls a little lower in exhausted relaxation.*)

PAGELLO.

George, George, my noble friend, how you have suffered.

GEORGE.

I have borne all. The gold he flung about him, that mattered little. I could write, write. The incessant drink—I forgave him that.

PAGELLO.

And the ballet dancer?

GEORGE (*bitterly*).

That, too, my friend. Do you think that mattered? No. All that is nothing—nothing; but he has committed the one sin a woman cannot forgive. (*And then with a sincerity that sounds through the romance of it all*) He has ceased to love me. (*She is weeping.*)

PAGELLO.

And you, George, you no longer love him?

GEORGE.

Pietro, how can you ask me that? No, that is over.

PAGELLO.

No mother could have nursed him more tenderly than you.

GEORGE.

No, no.

PAGELLO.

I loved you for your care of him.

GEORGE (*getting up*).

Perhaps his pillow needs turning.

PAGELLO.

No, do not disturb him.

GEORGE.

I would give my life rather than see him suffer.

PAGELLO.

The world will never know what you have done for him.

GEORGE (*for the moment forgetting her itching pen*).

Never, never, Pietro; but does that matter? (*She is over at the bedside, a symbol of sacrificial duty*.)
I at least have kept my faith. (*Then reminiscently*) How he urged me to go with him to Italy when I hesitated.
(*Then she is back at the table, weeping and slicing a lemon as she speaks.*)

GEORGE (*with deep meaning*).

You came just in time, Pietro.

PAGELLO (*again with a tinge of professional pride*).
I hope I have helped him; the case wasn't easy.

GEORGE (*dramatically*).

It is me whom you have lifted from the grave.

PAGELLO.

You?

GEORGE (*darkly*).

I had decided to die.

PAGELLO.

You?

GEORGE.

The day before you came into my life I had planned to leap from the Campanile in the afternoon just when the band was playing so that all the world might know what he had done to me.

PAGELLO (*stirred*).

You must stop writing—you're tired, overstrained.

GEORGE (*tenderly*).

Ah! Pietro. Now I am better. God has sent you. Can you know what you mean to me? Help me to be strong.

PAGELLO.

I, too, thank God for the day I chanced to pass your window.

GEORGE (*suddenly, her hand on his*).

Chance! Chance! And in that little word lies all the joy and sorrow of the world.

(*Pause. Farther in the distance can be heard the sound of the serenata. PAGELLO goes to the window.*)

PAGELLO (*pointing to the balcony*).

It was here you stood. De Musset was next you. There was something strange about you as you flecked the ashes from your cigar. I looked up. (*He is back from the window.*)

GEORGE.

I remember, Pietro. (*She gleams up at him.*)

PAGELLO.

Was it a sort of mesmerism?

GEORGE.

Older than Mesmer, Pietro, man calling unto woman. It began in Eden.

PAGELLO.

It was as if we spoke.

GEORGE (*lyrically*).

Our hearts were answering one another.

(*The tenor's song lifts in the distance.*)

PAGELLO.

All day I thought of the beauty of your sad eyes.

GEORGE (*gently*).

Beauty—no, my friend. They were dim with weeping.

PAGELLO.

All my visits seemed dull to me. Even my most serious case—a fat Turk dying of typhus—didn't interest me. Whilst I bled him I thought of you.

GEORGE (*sweetly, accepting the compliment*).

Yes, Pietro?

PAGELLO.

Back in my office, I could think of nothing but you.

(*There is a restless move from the sleeper behind the curtains, but GEORGE—who for a long while has heard no such tenderness as this—doesn't notice it.*)

PAGELLO.

You—you.

GEORGE.

And I, Pietro, I of you. As I leaned over my writing, I saw you. Do you remember Dante?—your Dante—Paola, Francesca—only I must change the words a little. (*She smiles faintly.*) I must say: that day I wrote no more. (*She drifts over to the*

window. She leans out.) Ah! Pietro, the night is like a drawn sword. Listen, the very stars are singing.

PAGELLO (*a little confused*).

No, that's the tenor at the serenata. Ah, how I love you! That day even Dr. Ganetti's book on gall-stones couldn't interest me.

GEORGE.

No, Pietro? (*She is back at the table; he follows her.*)

PAGELLO.

Always across the page I saw the scarlet of the scarf that you wore about your head.

(*They are leaning across the table, their hands clasped together.*)

PAGELLO (*passionately*).

You love me, George?

GEORGE (*sweetly, simply, all that is deepest in her welling up*).

I love you, Pietro. Why I do not know. I love you as I have never loved before. All my other love has been but as a preparation for this love of ours, which shall last for ever. (*Another sigh from the bed.*) Sh! He is awake.

PAGELLO.

No, if he has taken the powder he will sleep till morning. (*He is around the table next to her.*) George, George, how grateful I am to God that so beautiful a soul as yours has bent down to me.

GEORGE.

Bent, my darling? No! It is you who have lifted me from despair. (*They are about to embrace. The sleeper is again restless. She whispers.*) Sh! We are much too loud.

(*Love in the shadow of the patient's bed is too incongruous even for her artist's nature.*)

GEORGE (*with an attempt at readjustment*).

Let's finish our tea. It's from India. Alfred bought it in the Rialto. It cost four lire.

PAGELLO.

What! That's a lot of money.

GEORGE.

Nothing is too fine for Alfred. (*Then with a sad little laugh in her voice*) It was my money.

(*She pours out the tea. There is only one cup.*)

PAGELLO *not noticing this, takes it up.*)

PAGELLO (*sipping his tea*).

It tastes strange.

GEORGE (*fantastically*).

Nude girls gathered it.

PAGELLO.

It certainly does taste different.

GEORGE (*continuing*).

It's what the jewelled and drowsy nabobs sip whilst they loll in their hammocks of spun silk.

(She goes over to her desk and makes a note on the back of one of the sheets of her manuscript paper.)

GEORGE *(writing)*.

That's a beautiful sentence. It has the odour of twilights in the East.

PAGELLO.

The tea ?

GEORGE.

No, darling, my words. You mustn't be too literal. That's what too much science does.

(As she passes him on her way back to the table, she lovingly taps his head.)

GEORGE *(smiling)*.

All the night is in your eyes.

PAGELLO *(slipping his arm about her)*.

Let's go out on the balcony. By now the crowds are far beyond the Piazzetta. *(He takes a step towards her.)*

GEORGE *(admonishing him, as she glances toward the bed)*.

No, no, Pietro, you are too impetuous. Our poor Alfred might need something.

PAGELLO.

He is almost well, to-morrow he can get up. *(He takes up his tea-cup.)*

GEORGE.

I am waiting until he is strong again. *(She glances at the doctor.)* Then he must be told.

PAGELLO.

He has my pity. Sooner or later he would find out.

GEORGE.

Yes—we are above subterfuge.

PAGELLO (*sipping his tea*).

But you aren't drinking. (*He looks down at the table to hand her the other cup.*) Why look—there is only one.

GEORGE.

Isn't one enough, Pietro? (*She is over next to him.*) I shall sup from yours.

PAGELLO (*tenderly*).

Then you must bend down.

(And she does so, and his arm goes about her waist. And the next moment she is in his lap. And their mouths are almost touching as they press the cup to their lips. And at this moment ALFRED'S night-capped head pops out through the curtains of the bed behind them. Tableau. He chokes back an exclamation of amazement and the curtains hanging about him tremble.)

GEORGE (*wistfully*).

There now—I have had my tea.

PAGELLO (*ardently*).

And I shall have my kiss.

GEORGE (*faintly*).

Pietro! Pietro!

(And ALFRED, pale as the curtains about him, leans forward, watching them. And passionately they embrace, and then suddenly she jumps up and as suddenly ALFRED drops back behind the curtains.)

GEORGE (*the "eclaircissement" has come*).
Now I understand everything. I see it all clearly.

PAGELLO (*quite taken by surprise*).
What's the matter?

GEORGE.
We must go away, and at once.

PAGELLO.
What——

GEORGE.
We cannot stay. It is a desecration, no, not here, not here. It is an insult to this love of ours. We dare not hesitate.

PAGELLO.
I—George——

GEORGE.
Life is calling us. This room stifles me.

PAGELLO (*practical as ever*).
Then let's go out on the balcony.

GEORGE.
No, no, come, come away, away.

PAGELLO (*quite misunderstanding her dynamic impetuosity*).
Shall we go to the Lido? Shall I call a gondola?

GEORGE.

No, no, to the Alpine valleys. I am dressed for climbing.

PAGELLO (*completely stupefied*).

What! George!

GEORGE.

It is spring—spring. (*The thought gives a buoyant ring to her voice.*) We will wander hand in hand like innocent, laughing children, and we will love to the sound of the tumbling cascades.

(PAGELLO *stands looking at her in wonder.*)

GEORGE.

And then—Paris. We've got to be in time, Pietro, to see my little darlings, Solange, Maurice, take their prizes at school.

PAGELLO (*who can scarcely gasp*).

To Paris——

GEORGE.

And to freedom! Come!

(*She glances toward the bed. ALFRED, his head poked out on the other side, is listening.*)

Let us not hesitate. A moment may shatter—all.

PAGELLO (*completely at a loss*).

But——

GEORGE.

For weeks, weeks I have known this would come. I have prophetic visions. To-morrow, the day after, it will be the same. I cannot live in the shadow of these memories.

PAGELLO (*not quite keyed to such speed*).
And—de Musset——?

GEORGE.

He shall be told. But now, now we cannot wait.
We must leave together. Destiny has spoken.

(*She is in his arms, and ALFRED is leaning half out of bed. His intentions are patently to have something to do with this destiny, but as GEORGE sweeps forward, he involuntarily slips back.*)

GEORGE.

Come, Pietro.

PAGELLO (*not knowing what to say*).
And leave Venice?—George——

GEORGE.

I have been sent to save you, you must go lest your future sink in the mud of these languorous lagoons. The world is waiting to receive you.

PAGELLO.

And my patients?

GEORGE (*inspirationally*).

Your patients—why emperors shall call you in for gall-stones.

PAGELLO (*still unpersuaded*).

And my mother?

GEORGE (*involuntarily*).

Mother, mother. No, no. That mustn't happen again. (*But in a moment she has recovered.*) You

must be free to realize yourself. I have done that. I am free.

PAGELLO (*still doubtful*).

And my father?

GEORGE.

Have you any aunts or uncles? Your father, what of him?

PAGELLO.

He will never consent to this.

GEORGE.

I shall persuade him.

PAGELLO (*in amazement*).

You?

GEORGE.

He is eating ices in the Piazzetta. He is a scholar. You told me this. A scholar who is eating ices—the combination proves him gentle. He will understand. He will bless you and send you with me.

PAGELLO.

But——

GEORGE.

Again but—nothing but buts. Come, Pietro. Come.
(*They are at the door.*)

PAGELLO (*pointing to her trousers*).

Can you go like that?

GEORGE.

Yes. Venice has got used to me.

PAGELLO.

This is madness.

GEORGE.

Love has spoken.

PAGELLO.

But my father will never consent to this.

GEORGE (*undaunted*).

I know a parent's heart. (*ALFRED is about to call out.*) I have not lived my life for nothing. Come! The scent of the almond bloom is calling.

(And half dragging him after her they are gone.

ALFRED gazes after them in speechless astonishment.

Then he tries to get up to follow. He is too weak.

He falls back on the bed. Very far in the distance

the noise of the serenata can be heard. Slowly he

rouses himself. He pours out some brandy which

stands on the little table near the bed. Half-swoon-

ing he reaches the window. He tries to call out.

His strength fails him. He leans against the window

frame. Suddenly there is a knock at the door and

he turns to see PAUL at the threshold.)

ALFRED.

Paul!

PAUL.

Good God, Alfred, what's the matter? You look half dead.

ALFRED (*faintly*).

Help me back to bed.

PAUL.

Where's George?

(ALFRED leaning on him reaches the bed.)

ALFRED.

Eating ices on the Piazzetta.

PAUL.

She leaves you alone like this?

ALFRED.

She must have her ices. *(He pours out another glass of brandy.)* You didn't write you were coming. What brings you to Venice?

PAUL.

Mother sent me. She was uneasy.

ALFRED.

Uneasy?

PAUL.

Yes. You and George. Your letters came less frequently.

ALFRED.

I've been busy. I've started three tragedies, four comedies and a book of poems. How's mother?

PAUL.

She sends her kindest greetings to George.

ALFRED *(smiling faintly)*.

Yes——

PAUL.

When will George be back?

ALFRED.

When?

PAUL.

Mother is so grateful to her. Buloz says she's taken such good care of you.

ALFRED.

And——

PAUL.

But lately he's been silent. Mother drove to his office every day.

ALFRED.

Poor Buloz——

PAUL.

And all he would do was to sit there looking at her strangely through his monocle.

ALFRED.

And mother, I suppose, would stare back through her lorgnon. Curious, isn't it, Paul? Sometimes the harder people look the less they see.

PAUL.

Of course I told her everything was all right.

ALFRED (*on the verge of laughter*).

Of course.

PAUL.

I saw Heine.

ALFRED.

Yes?

PAUL.

Said he knew nothing but he advised me to leave it all to George. Said that she would manage somehow.

ALFRED.

She has managed—somehow. (*He is laughing to himself.*)

PAUL.

I told Heine I was going to Venice

ALFRED.

Yes.

PAUL.

He sent you a message.

ALFRED.

A blessing that sneers ?

PAUL.

No, he told me to tell you that hell is the place where the satisfied compare disappointments.

ALFRED.

He knows.

PAUL.

You're so white, Alfred, what's the matter ?

ALFRED.

I've been ill. Sunstroke, lying on the beach at the Lido.

PAUL.

You should have known better.

ALFRED.

I couldn't get away. George insisted on reading me her last six chapters. Such rubbish! Perhaps it was the book and not the sun.

PAUL.

You're better now?

ALFRED.

To-morrow I'll be about again.

PAUL.

Mother sent you this. (*He hands him a letter.*)

ALFRED (*slipping it under his pillow*).

How much?

PAUL.

A thousand francs.

ALFRED (*petulantly flinging himself back on the pillow*).

But I needed fifteen hundred. Has she forgiven my going?

PAUL.

A week after and she was glad you'd gone.

ALFRED.

Glad?

PAUL.

Said it would do you good to see life.

ALFRED.

Yes—Yes—It's done me good. Have a bit of brandy, Paul. (*He sits up and pours out a little in a glass.*)

PAUL.

As I came by two men raced past me. They almost knocked me over.

ALFRED (*sipping his brandy*).

You're not easily bowled over, are you, Paul?

PAUL.

These Italians have such brutal manners. But just the same I was amused.

ALFRED.

Yes.

PAUL.

One of them bore the strangest resemblance to George.

ALFRED.

Naturally.

PAUL.

What?

ALFRED.

Have a bit of brandy.

PAUL.

Why did you say naturally?

ALFRED (*speaking slowly and rather amused watching the effect on PAUL*).

It was George.

PAUL.

What? George? Running through the streets with another man dressed like that.

ALFRED (*a twinkle in his voice*).

To hesitate is to hinder history.

PAUL.

Can't you be serious? Where were they running to?

ALFRED.

As far as their trousered legs can carry them.

PAUL.

What?

ALFRED.

If something doesn't stop them they'll reach the end of the earth and then drop off.

PAUL.

You mean the Grand Canal?

ALFRED.

Not exactly. But something will stop them.

PAUL.

I hope so. Can she swim?

ALFRED.

In any waters. But she'll be stopped unless I am mistaken and by something she doesn't quite expect. The old man's a scholar.

PAUL (*in the dark*).

What?

ALFRED.

She'll bump into his papa.

PAUL (*mystified*).

Papa?

ALFRED.

Yes. The papa of the other man who nearly knocked you over.

PAUL.

I—

ALFRED (*shedding the light*).

She is planning to elope with him.

PAUL (*springing up*).

Then it's ended?

ALFRED.

How swiftly you deduce. A great philosopher lies buried deep—very deep, in you.

PAUL.

If ever again I believe in a woman I'll cease to believe in God. I've come just in time. Mother was right to send me. Perhaps I can patch it up.

ALFRED.

No, leave it torn. That's how the light soaks through.

PAUL (*sympathetically coming towards him*).

My poor, poor Alfred. Don't let it hurt too much. Paris is crowded with women. They mayn't all know literature, but nearly all know love.

ALFRED.

Yes, Paul.

PAUL.

My poor, poor brother.

ALFRED.

My poor, poor imbecile. Thank God it's over! I wish she were in hell!

(*And PAUL flops back into his chair, and then ALFRED lets loose what has been storing up in him for months.*)

ALFRED.

I can't bear her about me. She's like a noisy old clock that can't stop ticking. Why, she actually had the indelicacy when I lay here recovering from my sunstroke (*he takes a gulp of brandy*) to sit next to my bed scratching away all night at her endless novels. She writes as a cow gives milk. All she has to do is to jerk at her mind. Sometimes I drank a little to forget. (*PAUL in silent astonishment sits listening.*) There are two ways to get to know a person, Paul. Gambling with them or travelling with them. The first is better, it's over sooner. (*His pent-up vehemence comes pouring out.*) She has the soul of a bourgeoisie. One day I sat there trying to write, and what do you think I heard in the next room? She was telling the chambermaid—the chambermaid, Paul—how her mother was dancing at a ball a month before her marriage, and how she stopped in the middle of the quadrille, and five minutes afterwards gave birth to George.

PAUL.

My God—no——

ALFRED.

I called her in. I remonstrated with her, and she sneered at my hypocritical breeding.

PAUL.

And could you expect her to understand that?

ALFRED.

She laughed at me and said that many of the best family trees bore the worst fruit. I rushed away and drank, drank, drank (*and he does so*), to forget the vulgarity of it all.

PAUL (*commiseratingly*).

My poor Alfred!

ALFRED.

And when I got back, there she sat scribbling. All my beautiful, glorious ideas deserted me. There she sat—scribbling, scribbling all the night long, scratching away like a rusty old file.

(*He is exhausted, and falls weakly back on the bed.*)

PAUL (*leaning over him*).

My poor brother, what you have lived through.

ALFRED.

Think of it, Paul. Only a few minutes ago I caught them kissing, actually kissing, in the shadow of my bed—my bed of torture.

PAUL (*slowly*).

What will mother say?

ALFRED.

She must never know.

PAUL.

Two weeks and the boulevards will be gabbing. George tells everything to Buloz.

ALFRED.

She tells everything to everybody. (*Then half bitterly, half humorously*) Copy—copy.

PAUL.

But I'll defend you now that I know the truth.

ALFRED (*suddenly sitting up*).

What?

PAUL.

I'll answer her. Leave it to me; wait and see.

ALFRED (*making the most of the moment by adding to the data*).

There she lay in his arms, Paul, drinking my tea from the one cup, both of them, whilst she mumbled something about haste and almond blossoms.

PAUL.

And so George the untiring, weary of the de Musset doll, tosses the broken puppet into a corner.

ALFRED.

God knows how kind, how gentle, I have been with her. (*And then he too begins thinking of the beginning of their love in Paris.*) How she urged me to go to Italy when I hesitated. I at least have been faithful.

PAUL.

And now she's leaving you?

ALFRED.

If fate is kind and the old father is a fool. If he can't stop her nothing will. Listen, they are coming back. (*He points to a door behind the bed.*) Quick, wait in there.

(*And he is about to crawl back into bed, but the next instant the door flies open and LUCREZIA VIOLENTE, PAGELLO'S mistress, rushes into the room. She is tense, dark, scented, a colourful combination of a languorous poppy when happy, and an angry fire-cracker when stirred. She slams the door behind her and leans against it.*)

LUCREZIA (*panting*).

I must speak with you, you. (*She glares at ALFRED.*)
You!

(*And PAUL with a sly, knowing glance at his brother, begins to whistle a sprightly snatch of a love song, and then trips over to examine more closely the beautiful, though tempestuous LUCREZIA.*)

ALFRED (*to PAUL*).

What are you doing? What's the matter with you?

PAUL (*smiling significantly*).

So! So! My naughty, naughty brother. And this is why the George gets on your poor nerves. But I don't blame you, Alfred, really I don't.

(Very intimately he begins ogling LUCREZIA and whistling even louder. He steps with a swaggering familiarity closer to her.)

ALFRED *(coming between them)*.

I tell you to wait in the next room.

PAUL *(laughing)*.

All right. Two's company, three's a chaperon.

(And he enjoys his wit immensely, to the intense discomfort of ALFRED and the astonishment of LUCREZIA.)

ALFRED.

Get out. I tell you I've never seen the girl before.

PAUL.

Then thank the dear gods who sent her.

(And PAUL backs out of the room, still whistling, with an intimate wave of his hand to LUCREZIA.)

ALFRED.

Who are you?

LUCREZIA *(with terrific speed as she speaks throughout)*.

Lucrezia Maria Camilla Elvira Violente.

ALFRED *(rather gallantly but a bit uncertain)*.

And what do you wish with me, my dear?

LUCREZIA *(resenting his tone)*.

What do you think?

ALFRED *(taking her in)*.

Well—er—er—

(LUCREZIA with a slight swagger steps towards him.)

LUCREZIA.

Well!

ALFRED (*smiling at her*).

Did the French Consul send you to me?

LUCREZIA.

No one has sent me.

ALFRED.

I haven't seen you at the serenatas.

LUCREZIA.

No.

ALFRED.

Nor at the opera.

LUCREZIA.

No.

ALFRED.

Nor in the Piazzetta, watching the fireworks.

LUCREZIA (*as he steps a little nearer*).

No. No.

ALFRED (*not quite sure of his ground, but he is ALFRED and she is beautiful*).Well, you see (*and then very sweetly*), my dear——
(*He is closer to her.*)LUCREZIA (*starting back*).

My dear! How dare you! How dare you! Dio Mio, Dio Mio, how dare you?

ALFRED.

Forgive me, my dear, but you see I am a man—it is night—you come to my room——

LUCREZIA.

Yes, yes, I come to your room. (*She looks about her.*)

ALFRED.

Well, then, who are you?

LUCREZIA.

Lucrezia Maria——

ALFRED (*stemming the tide*).

Yes, yes—but where do you come from?

LUCREZIA.

From Castelfranco.

ALFRED.

And what do you want with me?

LUCREZIA (*not tempering her disdain*).

You—I want nothing with you.

ALFRED (*resenting this, his tone a mixture of surprise and disappointment*).

'Then why do you come here?

LUCREZIA (*almost spitting the words in his face*).

It is your woman, your woman that I want.

ALFRED (*in the dark*).

What—why, I've never even seen you before.

LUCREZIA.

You! Bah! (*With a gesture as though wiping him off her hands.*) I am an Italian. I want to see this George Sand. (*She has a curious way of sounding the "e" in George.*)

ALFRED (*backing into a chair at the table*).

Yes. I see that you're an Italian. And what do you want with Mme. Sand?

LUCREZIA (*mysteriously handling something which is in her belt under her shawl, and speaking very simply like a wide-eyed child.*)

I wish to kill her.

ALFRED (*darting back*).

Good God! Who are you? What are you?

LUCREZIA (*coming close to him and leaning in his face as she speaks the words slowly and with intense significance.*)

I am a friend—a good friend—of Dr. Pietro Pagello. Do you understand me, you Frenchman?

ALFRED (*the light breaking*).

How did you get in here?

LUCREZIA.

I said I had come to nurse the invalid. Bah! (*She glares at him in abject disgust.*) And now where is this Signora George Sand?

ALFRED.

She has gone out with——(*He stops short, LUCREZIA watching him.*) With a friend—a friend. They have gone to—to (*and then with inspiration*)—to see the Punch and Judy show. Madame adores to watch the puppets dance.

LUCREZIA.

So. Then they will soon be back. (*She steps towards a chair.*)

ALFRED (*fencing*).

No. No. That was last night. To-night—to-night they—she——

LUCREZIA (*pointing it*).

They—— Yes——

ALFRED (*a bit at a loss*).

She—they—yes, they—have gone by moonlight to the open sea beyond Murano. Yes—yes—— (*His imagination begins to work*) Madame couldn't stand the noise of the serenata. Listen, it's coming back. (*The boats on the Canal have shifted and are coming nearer.*) Listen!

LUCREZIA.

So! So! (*She draws a chair away from the table and sits watching ALFRED.*) Then I will wait till she comes back from this open sea beyond Murano with this friend. (*Her breath comes in little panting gasps*) Madonna mia, this friend—this friend.

ALFRED (*at his wits' end*).

They may stay away all night.

LUCREZIA (*her eyes aflame*).

Madonna mia. So it has come to that—all night.

ALFRED.

That is—Madame sometimes waits to see the dawn rise over the sea—the Adriatic, you know.

LUCREZIA (*less imaginative perhaps, but quite his match.*)

Then I will stay till morning till Madame has seen this dawn rise over this Adriatic.

ALFRED.

You can't do that, Madame. Can't you see I'm in my dressing-gown?

LUCREZIA.

If you are so modest, my little Frenchman, then go back to bed. I didn't come to talk with you.

ALFRED.

But see here—people don't do that sort of thing. Stop and think.

LUCREZIA.

My heart speaks. I do not stop to think.

ALFRED.

No. I can see that.

LUCREZIA.

What do I care what you see? I have come to save my Pietro. I shall take him from this George Sand.

(*This is too much for ALFRED. Suddenly he realizes how she may entangle the chances of his own happy and imminent release.*)

ALFRED (*with intense conviction*).

No, you mustn't, you mustn't do that.

LUCREZIA (*jumping up*).

What—you say that?

ALFRED (*rushing along*).

It will do him good. Let him see life. Madame will teach him much.

LUCREZIA.

Madonna, Madonna. You tell me that. You dead little dove of a man! Are you not her lover?

ALFRED (*at a loss*).

Yes—was—that is—yes—yes, of course I am. (*His emotions are mixed.*) Now you just go away and I'll have a nice little talk with George and she'll send him back to you.

LUCREZIA (*the hand under her shawl nervously twitching*).

If—I—no, no—there is nothing but milk in your veins.

ALFRED (*vainly groping for a way out*).

Yes, yes, lots of milk. Goat's milk. I've been sick, sunstroke. He makes me take milk, gallons of milk. He's a wonderful doctor, this Dr. Pagello.

LUCREZIA (*her hand at her heart*).

My Pietro—my Pietro. He gives you milk?

ALFRED (*grasping the straw*).

It's time for it now. You'll excuse me, good-evening. I've got to go out for my milk.

(*He hopefully glances towards the door, but LUCREZIA is unbudgeable. He tries to take a step, but he is too weak and slips back into his chair.*)

LUCREZIA.

Go back to your bed lest you faint like a woman.

ALFRED (*weakly*).

But you can't sit there all night long.

LUCREZIA (*firmly*).

No?

ALFRED.

Look here. I'll—— (*He turns to move towards her. He is exhausted.*)

LUCREZIA (*the hand under her shawl twitching*).

Yes——

(*The sound of the serenata comes up from the waters—tambourines, the laughter of women, the song of the tenor.*)

ALFRED.

Listen! That's a song of love. (*He falters towards the bed.*)

LUCREZIA (*with a sneer*).

Love! What do you know of love, you little Frenchman?

ALFRED (*throwing himself down*).

This—only this. Life lays the trap of love and we poor human fools, are crowding, crowding and waiting to be caught. (*He lies back a moment in thought. Then suddenly*) Ah! No sooner is she out of the way than it comes back to me. (*Then to LUCREZIA*) Bring me some paper, quick.

LUCREZIA (*marvelling*).

What?

ALFRED.

From that desk. There in the corner.

(LUCREZIA *resents his sudden, shifting impetuosity. Her experience with poets has been limited.*)

LUCREZIA.

What! You dare to order me——

ALFRED.

Oh, don't mind that. Women always do what I ask them. My mother began it. (*He tries to get up, but sinks back on the pillow.*) Quick! Some verses have come to me, beautiful verses. The first in months.

(*There is something pathetic in his voice.*)

LUCREZIA *goes toward s the desk.*)

ALFRED.

Yes. That's it. Several sheets.

LUCREZIA (*lifting up some of the pages of GEORGE'S latest romance*).

This?

ALFRED.

Yes, yes. It's her new novel. But she'll never miss it. Never. (*Angrily LUCREZIA is about to crush the papers in her hand.*) And dip a pen for me. As soon as she's out. Of course, of course, I might have known. One room isn't big enough for two muses.

LUCREZIA (*bringing the paper and pen to his bedside*).
Here.

ALFRED (*propping himself up*).

Won't you go now?

LUCREZIA.

What?

ALFRED.

You mustn't stand there watching me when I write. It makes me nervous. (LUCREZIA glares at him in astonishment.) Go, please, please.

(*For a moment he forgets her. He begins writing, whilst she backs to the table and sits watching him.*)

LUCREZIA (*under her breath*).

I cannot understand these Frenchmen. They are mad.

(*And in her deep disgust she goes to the window and stands looking out.*)

ALFRED (*fanning his inspiration*).

Yes—yes—yes——

(*His pen glides over the paper. Silence for a moment, only the scratching of the quill is heard. Then suddenly voices sound just outside the door. LUCREZIA leaps up like a smouldering flame that is hit by the wind, and instinctively glides into the deep embrasure of the window. The papers fall from ALFRED'S hand to the floor as swiftly he draws the curtains together and slips back into the*

bed. A moment, and GEORGE triumphantly enters smoking a huge cigar, and at her heels is PAGELLO, his big eyes filled with love.)

PAGELLO.

Ah, my beloved, how you spoke to him. There were tears in his eyes. Such eloquence.

(LUCREZIA is watching them. She is mystified.

PAGELLO is PAGELLO, but who is GEORGE? The man's costume baffles her, the room is but dimly lit. But then GEORGE speaks.)

GEORGE.

No, Pietro, it was not my eloquence.

(Then the girl recognizes her. She is about to spring forward, but GEORGE goes on.)

GEORGE *(lyrically)*.

He understood my sorrow. I will bless and remember him for ever. His heart is gentle. There is only one wound that hurts my happiness.

PAGELLO.

There is much perhaps that I should tell you.

GEORGE.

No, no, not you. *(Then sadly she glances towards the bed.)* He must be told.

PAGELLO.

Wait until to-morrow.

GEORGE.

To-morrow we may die. Life has spoken. What must be, must be.

(She goes towards the bed. She draws back the curtains. Tenderly she leans over the patient.)

GEORGE.

Alfred! Alfred!

(A moment's quiet. Then ALFRED stirs in his slumber. Then he awakes.)

ALFRED *(with a far-away voice)*.

Ah! You, George. What time is it? You've been gone so long. *(He leans out of bed and looks about him.)* Ah! She is gone.

(LUCREZIA is too deep in the window for him to see her, but she too is leaning forward listening.)

GEORGE *(at a loss)*.

Who? Who?

ALFRED.

That's well. That is well. She is gone.

GEORGE *(mystified)*.

Who? Who?

ALFRED.

Perhaps I've been dreaming. I'm so tired.

PAGELLO.

Yes. Lie down. *(Then softly to GEORGE)* He still is weak and imagines that he sees things. *(He draws her away from the bed.)* Wait until to-morrow.

GEORGE.

Sooner or later we must tell him.

ALFRED (*trying to overhear them*).

What are you two whispering about? Don't tell me that I've got to take one of those nasty powders and more milk. I'll fling it out of the window.

GEORGE.

Yes. He's better. Much better. It is time.

(*She goes towards the bed and stands for a moment looking at him. Her hesitancy worries him.*)

ALFRED (*encouragingly*).

I'm well again. Strong as a porter. (*He glances at GEORGE*) Look. (*And expectantly he sits bolt upright in the bed.*) My sunstroke's over.

GEORGE.

Ah, my friend, you must beware of this sun that comes in bottles.

ALFRED.

Strong as two porters that I've seen somewhere.

GEORGE (*putting her hand on his shoulder. Her tone is simple but deeply fraught*).

Alfred, I have something to say to you.

ALFRED (*eagerly*).

Yes—yes——

GEORGE (*almost philosophically*).

Life is so different from literature.

ALFRED (*not expecting the digression*).

What?

GEORGE.

Some day I must use this scene, and I must be careful to keep it unelaborate.

ALFRED (*lest her commentary go on too long*).

Doctor, do you think I'm strong enough to talk literature?

GEORGE.

No, my friend, I haven't come to speak of literature—but life. But I was thinking after all, how very simple reality really is. Be brave, Alfred, I have something to say to you.

ALFRED.

Yes?

GEORGE.

We are at the cross-roads. Even as Ruth (*a puff at her cigar*) and Naomi. (*As always, God and the Bible are her refuge.*)

ALFRED (*impatiently*).

Yes—yes.

GEORGE (*very simply*).

I can no longer be your mistress, Alfred. I can only be your friend. I love Dr. Pagello.

(*A pause. Four hearts are for a moment still. From the water lifts the sound of the serenata. The girl in the window starts forward, but the next instant out of the bed comes what is meant to be a heart-broken wail of despair.*)

ALFRED (*from among the pillows*).

George, George, why do you tell me this, George?

GEORGE (*beautifully*).

Be brave, be brave, my friend. (PAGELLO *stands looking at her in rapture*.) I tell you this because I cannot let the shadow of a lie dim the fading memory of what once we were to one another. (*And she takes a long, deep pull at her cigar*.)

ALFRED.

George, George, how can I bear this?

GEORGE.

We are but born to bear. We poor pilgrims. (*And she smiles tenderly at the doctor*.) Life is our cross. (*Then she turns to ALFRED*) I shall remember that once I loved you.

ALFRED (*taking her hand and pressing it to his lips*).

Though I weep, I shall remember (*he is perhaps sobbing a little*) what you have done for me.

(LUCREZIA *in blank-eyed amazement leans forward, listening to their beautiful pathos*.)

GEORGE.

It is over, over. Our poor romance is ended. Time has written (*then she turns graciously to PAGELLO*) finito. Come, Pietro, this place is no longer holy. This shrine of love has been defiled. (*And then in mysterious metaphor*) Something has entered in.

(*And the something in the window is almost convulsed with passionate hate*.)

GEORGE.

Come, my beloved. (*And then she turns to ALFRED, speaking with childlike frankness*) We must go from here. Out into the light. We are going high into the mountains, where the air shall purify. There, there perhaps I shall be able to forget. (*She turns to the doctor*) Come, my beloved.

(*She is almost in his arms, but suddenly from the window there is a mad little yelp of rage, and the next instant LUCREZIA springs forward confronting her, burning indomitable.*)

ALFRED (*as the beautiful structure of similes tumbles*).
She! She! I thought she'd gone.

PAGELLO (*as though shot*).

Lucrezia, you! You!

GEORGE (*quite calmly*).

Good evening, madame. Did you climb up the columns to the balcony?

LUCREZIA.

You shall not take him. You shall not.

GEORGE.

What, madame?

LUCREZIA.

I shall kill you.

GEORGE (*oblivious*).

I can't see how you ever did it in those skirts.

LUCREZIA (*a mixture of temper and tears*).

Pietro, Pietronini, caro mio, caro mio—you no longer love me—me. (*She is shrieking.*) Dio—Madonna—you no longer love me.

GEORGE.

I beg you, madame, not to shout. My friend Monsieur de Musset is none too strong. Won't you be seated?

(*And GEORGE sits down at the table unbuttoning the lowest button of her vest.*)

LUCREZIA.

Who are you? What are you? You crazy woman! (*Her fingers are twitching.*) You woman in breeches dressed like that.

PAGELLO.

Lucrezia, be still, be still.

LUCREZIA (*poco fortissimo*).

No! No! She must listen. No! No!

GEORGE.

I am trying to, madame, but you make so much noise. I cannot hear you.

LUCREZIA (*piu forte*).

I make noise! No! No! I make no noise!

(*She is almost dancing in her rage.*)

GEORGE.

What a fascinating personality!

(*And she goes over to her desk and brings over some manuscript paper and a pen.*)

LUCREZIA.

I spit at you.

GEORGE.

No, I wouldn't do that. It isn't nice.

LUCREZIA.

Nice! Nice! I dig my nails in your heart.

GEORGE (*sweetly*).

My dear girl, save up all that energy, and one of these days you'll bring beautiful children into this ugly world. I am a mother, and I know.

(LUCREZIA suddenly whips the stiletto from under her shawl and springs towards GEORGE.)

LUCREZIA.

You sneer, you short-haired French one.

(*And she makes a dash towards her. PAGELLO catches her by the wrist and the knife falls to the floor.*)

PAGELLO.

For God's sake, what are you doing?

GEORGE (*calmly taking notes*).

Ah! What a place to end a chapter.

PAGELLO (*struggling with the girl*).

Do you know who she is?

LUCREZIA (*trying to get away*).

What do I care who, what she is.

PAGELLO (*with a sort of awe*).

She is the great George Sand.

(*And GEORGE glances up from her writing smilingly to accept the compliment.*)

PAGELLO.

She is a famous woman. A great writer.

(*ALFRED is leaning far out of bed clutching one of the posts.*)

ALFRED.

Have you no respect for literature?

LUCREZIA (*in blinding scorn, sizzling over like a miniature Vesuvius.*)

Literature! What do I care—literature, lies, lies. I, too, know literature. (*And then in her rage she flings out all the names she can remember, mixing geography with letters to justify her claim*) Dante, Dante, Alighieri, Tasso, Campanile, San Marco, Venezia, Ariosto, Petrarca, Laura. Literature, bah! bah!—lies, lies! I spit at them. I spit at you.

(*She is again going for GEORGE, wildly gesticulating, and PAGELLO again intercepts her. Suddenly in a wild paroxysm of passion she clutches him to her breast. By this time ALFRED is almost tumbling out of bed, and GEORGE sits quietly writing.*)

LUCREZIA (*clinging to him, her voice hot with passion and rage.*)

I love you. I hate you. I love you. I speak your name when I sleep; when I go to the well the water says Pietro, and I drink, and drink, and drink.

GEORGE (*writing as quickly as she can*).

Charming, charming. Do you mind repeating that? How many times did you say drink? Alfred, what does fiction know of life?

(LUCREZIA *clings to PAGELLO as to a spar in this tossing sea of passion.*)

LUCREZIA.

Pietro! Pietronini!

ALFRED (*looking at GEORGE and speaking into the curtain of his bed*).

God! That woman, even now she can write.

GEORGE.

Ah! What a scene this will make when I'm through with it. Such fervour, such reality. Buloz will be delighted.

(PAGELLO *has forced LUCREZIA into a chair. In a frenzy her fists beat the table.*)

GEORGE.

Don't do that, my dear, or I can't write.

(*And then LUCREZIA, her passion for the moment spent, goes forward, her head in her arms, shaken with convulsive weeping. And then GEORGE springs up and goes over to her. Her whole manner changes. She speaks to her as she would to an angry child.*)

GEORGE.

You have my pity, madame. I speak to you out of my soul. I, too, have loved and lost. (*Sorrowfully*

she glances at ALFRED.) That is the lot of us poor women. We give our love only to be forsaken.

PAGELLO (*half in a whisper, half stupidly*).

I wanted to tell you, tell you all.

GEORGE.

No, no, don't speak. I understand. (*And then with a tone of universal pity*) We are but human. (*By a glance she even includes ALFRED in her deep love for humanity. Then sympathetically to LUCREZIA*) Life has spoken, and life must be answered. He has come to save me when my nature faltered, and he shall go with me—eventually—to Paris.

(*And at this LUCREZIA springs up. This is the last straw. Again her rage begins to bubble.*)

LUCREZIA.

No. No.

GEORGE.

Not right away. After we have found love in the Alpine valleys. Ah, the scent of the almond blossoms.

LUCREZIA (*turning on PAGELLO*).

You have deceived me. Dio! Dio! You have lied to me. You have deserted me.

GEORGE (*gliding between them*).

Madame, you are wrong. He has not deserted you. God has sent him.

LUCREZIA.

No! No!

GEORGE.

Who can change the choice of love? It is as blind as we.

LUCREZIA (*by this time strident*).

No! No! You shall not take him. You shall not take him.

GEORGE.

Love is our master. (*This is almost to herself. A sad little smile plays about her lips.*)

LUCREZIA (*glaring at her*).

You! You oil your words with lies.

(*GEORGE is standing in a sort of sublimated ecstasy lit by the light from the night lamp. The music sounds from the serenata. ALFRED, on the bed's edge, sits watching her in wonder.*)

GEORGE (*her head shaking slowly*).

Love gives us power—power but to obey.

LUCREZIA (*almost frightened*).

Pietro! Look! The devil's speaking to her. Come away. Her heart is black.

(*A moment's pause. They all look at her. Then she takes a deep pull at her cigar and goes over to her desk to make a note of this power of love.*)

GEORGE (*to LUCREZIA. From the farthest heights of sisterly sympathy*).

Madame, you have my love.

(LUCREZIA makes another dash for the knife.
PAGELLO stops her.)

GEORGE.

Take her to her gondola, Pietro. (ALFRED starts.)
I shall watch from the window.

(And PAGELLO attempts to lead the struggling
LUCREZIA from the room.)

LUCREZIA (in a last wild frenzy).

You shall not take him. No! No!

GEORGE (quietly).

Love has spoken.

(PAGELLO and the girl have almost reached the
door.)

LUCREZIA.

I'll follow him. I'll save him. He will come back
to me.

ALFRED (involuntarily).

I wonder.

LUCREZIA.

I will follow you to Paris or—to Hell.

(She is half kissing, half beating the doctor as he
leads her from the room.)

GEORGE (at her desk making a last note or so).

What a wonderful girl. The most splendid type I
have seen in Italy. Ah, I shall be sad to go.

(And then she glides over to the window and
leans out to see that no harm comes to PIETRO.)

ALFRED (*lifting up the sheets of manuscript near the bed*).

Look, George, I have been reading your last few pages. They are wonderful. How you have moved me. If I could write as you——

GEORGE.

I'll do even better after to-night. Ah! There they are! She is weeping. How gently he helps her into her gondola.

(ALFRED *braces himself with another swallow of brandy, and steps towards her*.)

ALFRED.

There is something besides farewell that I must say to you.

GEORGE (*oblivious*).

He shall be the hero of my next romance.

ALFRED (*with a strange note of seriousness in his voice*).

Some day, George, this love of yours will break your heart.

GEORGE (*almost tragically*).

You say that after what you have done to me! (*Then again at the window, her voice low and tender*)
Look, Freddo, they are weeping.

ALFRED (*for a moment succumbing to her mood*).

You will never know what you have meant to me.

GEORGE (*almost sobbing*).

Ah, my friend, do not let the sorrow of our parting break your heart. Some day you will forget me.

ALFRED (*sadly*).

If such is fate.

GEORGE (*almost sternly*).

Our fate is what we make it.

ALFRED (*with a note of bitterness*).

Do you remember that night in Paris? "We are but marionettes," you said.

GEORGE (*her voice soft again*).

Pietro—my Pietro——

ALFRED.

"Hung from the fingers of the gods." Heine stopped you as he broke his bread.

GEORGE.

He eats too much. Besides, Heine is a German, and I mistrust him.

ALFRED.

That is true of all of us, he echoed.

GEORGE (*again leaning out*).

Look at his profile in the moonlight. Worthy of Giorgione. I shall love him for ever.

ALFRED.

You, too, George—even you—must jig to this music of fate.

GEORGE (*lyric, dominant, speaking as a priestess with a prophecy*).

There is no such thing as fate. That is what life has still to teach you. Fate is the death-cry of the coward. I at least am mistress of my destiny.

ALFRED (*with a touch of cynicism, perhaps of anger, in his voice*).

We shall see.

GEORGE (*in glory*).

Look! He is coming back. Yes, we shall see.

(*And she rushes over to the door and stands anxiously waiting, and in a moment she is in PIETRO'S arms.*)

GEORGE.

Ah! How noble you were, my Pietro, and she—she will forget.

ALFRED (*sotto voce*).

Perhaps.

GEORGE (*sadly to ALFRED*).

It is time to say farewell. Once our love was noble. May our friendship still be beautiful.

(*And she gives him her hand. ALFRED bends over it.*)

PAGELLO (*catching the mood*).

Alfred, will we—we still be friends?

ALFRED (*magnificently rising to the beauty of the moment*).

George—Pagello—my companions, my saviours, and my friends! (*Then to PAGELLO*) You have given life

back to me. (*And then to GEORGE*) You have taught me the nobility of love. In my silence read my gratitude. How shall we seal our trinity of trust?

(*Their three hands are almost touching. Suddenly he sees LUCREZIA'S stiletto at their feet. He cannot resist the romantic effect. He takes it up.*)

ALFRED.

On this let us pledge our faith!

GEORGE.

Yes! on this symbol of death we shall pledge our love that shall survive the tomb.

PAGELLO (*not quite liking the sight of LUCREZIA'S stiletto*).

No! No! Not on that! On this. It has never known hate!

(*And he tears out from under his shirt his mother's picture. Their hands close about it. The light in the night lamp flickers.*)

GEORGE (*solemnly—lyrically*).

For ever friends.

ALFRED (*echoing*).

Friends.

PAGELLO (*on the verge of tears*).

Friends.

GEORGE.

And now farewell. Come, we shall see the sun rise, Pietro, and then to Padua.

(They are about to move. Then PAGELLO stops, embarrassed.)

PAGELLO.

But—I——

GEORGE.

What? What?

PAGELLO.

I have but—— *(His hand comes out of his pocket.)*
I'm but a poor practitioner—look, seven lires. *(And he holds them out.)* I have a little money in my office, but most of what I make goes to my mother.

(GEORGE rushes over to her desk and flings the drawer open.)

GEORGE *(on the brink of disaster)*.

Only yesterday the bill was paid. There is no money.

(A pause. Imminent tragedy. PAGELLO is in despair. GEORGE for the second time in six months is on the verge of swooning. ALFRED sees his freedom tumbling; but suddenly he jumps into the breach and to the rescue. He rushes over and snatches from under his pillow the money that his mother has sent him.)

ALFRED.

Here, my friends, go, go. Love must be obeyed.
Here are a thousand francs.

(He forces the money into PAGELLO's hand.)

GEORGE (*gazing at him in admiring wonder*).

Alfred! Alfred! You have redeemed our love.

(*And again their three hands are clasped, this time over the money.*)

GEORGE.

Come, love has saved us. We will see the sun rise after all. And then to Padua. Alfred, see Pietro's papa and have his things and my other trousers sent there, *poste restante*.

(*And she snatches her new manuscript from her writing desk and they are gone, and the door slams behind them, and in the reverberating echoes ALFRED is heard laughing softly. Then he calls.*)

ALFRED.

Paul. Paul.

PAUL (*rushing in*).

You've kept me waiting.

ALFRED (*significantly*).

History was in the making.

PAUL.

And?

ALFRED (*leaning against the bedpost*).

They're gone.

PAUL.

If you had only left it to me. (ALFRED *laughs*.)
Aren't you laughing to hide something that hurts?

ALFRED.

Hurts! I am healed. (*Gaily*) I haven't felt better since Paris.

PAUL.

And what will mother say to this?

ALFRED.

God bless her. She has saved me.

PAUL.

Mother?

ALFRED.

Yes. The thousand francs she sent me. Her money pays their way. She's bought me back. (*But the emotional strain has been too much for him. Then weakly*) God help Pagello. Who's next? History will complete the catalogue. Sandeau—Mérimée—De Musset—Pa——

(The curtain is descending as he speaks. The list is incompleting, whilst from the Canal, the tenor's voice again singing of love, for a little moment lifts in poignant ecstasy and then dies away in the starlit stillness of the night.)

ACT III

. . . AND LISZT PLAYS ON

The Scene

The scene is a reception at Baron de Rothschild's. The room is a typical drawing-room of the period, panelled, severe, dignified, with a sense of quiet spaciousness. The furniture does not clutter the stage. What there is should be exquisite in design, and lend to the general air of distinction. Down left is a fire-place, and below this is a door with a smaller drawing-room beyond. Down right is the entrance to the conservatory. Towards the rear is the entrance from the hall of the house, and to the right of this a great door, beyond which is the music-room. If practicable throughout the act the guests should be seen coming and going, because, while not absolutely necessary, this will add to the refinedly expectant atmosphere of this soirée of tuft-hunters and celebrities. Later on a charming effect could be realized if the people in the picturesque costumes of the period could be seen, rapt and ecstatic, listening to the playing of the virtuosi. I leave the possible arrangement of the room beyond to the genius of the scene designer. It is not inevitably essential to the action of the play. The lighting is candle light, low,

soft, rather too little than too glaringly distinct. Throughout the act a sound of admiring murmurs and subdued applause should be heard from the music-room.

The curtain lifts on three pretty, chattering girls, quaint, beruffled, beribboned. Two are on a long sofa, and one is opposite, or vice versa, rearranged as best accords with the charm of the decoration. It is the first great reception for these three demoiselles, and their hearts and tongues are aflutter; but now the curtain is lifted, and you can see and hear for yourself. They are Mlle. de Latour, Mlle. Rolande, and Mlle. de Fleury.

Mlle. de Fleury.

I think we are too early.

Mlle. Rolande.

I am afraid I exasperated mamma. She's in the little drawing-room. I couldn't wait until we'd started.

Mlle. de Fleury.

How adorable of the Baron to ask us.

Mlle. Rolande.

It was surely the idea of the Baroness.

Mlle. de Fleury.

What matter! We're here. And as everyone is going to be so important, there may as well be a few who are pretty. (*And they laugh like children.*) Do you like my new gown?

Mlle. Rolande.

Quite adorable, but I think I like you in grey better.

Mlle. de Fleury.

Nonsense! (*And she turns to Mlle. de Latour to ask her opinion, but Mlle. de Latour sits deep in thought.*) Elise, don't try to hide your excitement by attempting to look bored.

Mlle. de Latour.

I was just wondering how many pages of my diary I would need to write about everything to-night.

(*She looks at a huge book she holds in her lap.*)

Mlle. de Fleury.

A hundred at least. (*Then with ill-concealed excitement*) Do you know who is coming?

Mlle. Rolande.

De Musset and Heine.

THE OTHER GIRLS.

Yes! Yes!

Mlle. Rolande.

And the great Franz Liszt.

Mlle. de Fleury.

And his rival Thalberg?

Mlle. Rolande.

I do not think so. They are seldom seen together.

Mlle. de Fleury.

Who else? Who else?

MILLE. ROLANDE.

Surely the Italian, Pagello. I saw him in the Palais Royal, leaning on her arm. (*She gives a quivering stress to the "her."*)

MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Is he a blond? I think blonds are so wonderful.

MILLE. ROLANDE.

No, he is more wonderful than any blond. He looks like Paris of Troy.

MILLE. DE LATOUR.

How do you know that?

MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Elise, you have the silliest way of asking things.

(*And again they laugh merrily.*)

MILLE. ROLANDE.

And Chopin, imagine, Chopin!

MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Will he play?

MILLE. ROLANDE.

If the whim moves him. Of course, the Baroness would never ask him.

MILLE. DE LATOUR.

I don't see why not.

MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Elise, you are too absurd. How could one have the atrocious taste to *ask* a guest to perform? These

artists are not trained monkeys, who will run up a stick when you want them to.

Mlle. Rolande.

I do not suppose we can ever understand them. Ah! these artists—they are so different from us ordinary mortals.

Mlle. de Latour.

Yes?

Mlle. Rolande.

They are not moved by human passions as you and I.

Mlle. de Fleury.

No, no.

Mlle. Rolande.

Their life is aloof—removed—they do not suffer as we suffer.

Mlle. de Fleury.

No, no.

Mlle. de Latour (*quite un sentimentally*).

I do not suffer.

Mlle. Rolande.

Wait till you are a little older; Elise. Ah! have you seen this Pagello? I have been dreaming of him every night.

Mlle. de Fleury.

I would give all the world if I could be a great artist—a writer. There are only four things I love: literature, art, music, and Nature. Ah! imagine what it would mean to see one's name in the *Revue* of the great Buloz.

Mlle. ROLANDE.

He's coming, too.

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

I am more anxious to see *her* than any of the others.

Mlle. ROLANDE (*with awed voice*).

Her!

Mlle. DE FLEURY (*as though addressing God*).

Her!

Mlle. ROLANDE.

She is removed from earthly passions. She lives in a sphere apart.

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

What do you mean by that?

Mlle. DE FLEURY.

Elise, you ask as many questions as a hungry parrot.

*(And they all burst into ripples of laughter.
Some guests pass through the room beyond.)*

Mlle. ROLANDE.

She is the greatest woman in France.

Mlle. DE FLEURY (*in astonished contradiction*).

In France, Mathilde? Why, in the whole, whole world!

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

I do not see how you can decide that.

Mlle. DE FLEURY (*to silence her for ever*).

No? Have you ever read (*she lowers her voice*)
“Lelia”?

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

No.

Mlle. ROLANDE.

Mamma forbids me to read any book of *hers*.
(*Again the religious intonation.*)

Mlle. DE FLEURY.

So does mine, but my maid bought “Lelia” for me. I sat up all night reading it, and I wept and wept and wept. I never enjoyed myself so much.

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

Because you wept?

Mlle. ROLANDE.

Of course. Elise, you are too funny.

(*And the two girls laugh together.*)

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

I shall ask her to write in my album. I brought it with me.

Mlle. DE FLEURY (*springing to her feet as though shot*).

Elise, my dear, you wouldn't do that! One can see that you went to school in the country. Why, I'd rather cut off my little finger than even dare speak to her.

Mlle. DE LATOUR.

I can't see why not.

(Some guests, preceded by a lackey, pass through the room.)

Mlle. ROLANDE *(over at the door)*.
Quick, my dears, quick, someone has arrived.

Mlle. DE FLEURY.
We mustn't miss anything. Who? Who?

Mlle. DE LATOUR *(laconically)*.
It oughtn't take more than three pages of my diary.
(Some people pass into the conservatory, and the three girls flutter after them. And then the door is opened by a lackey and BULOZ enters. He is somewhat nervous. With him is PAGELLO and at their heels is HEINE.)

BULOZ *(to PAGELLO, pointing to the little room on the left)*.

You can wait in there, doctor, if you wish to.

PAGELLO.
But I do not understand. What has happened? I was to meet Mme. Sand and she was to present me to the Baron.

BULOZ.
I don't think she has arrived yet. The moment she comes I will send for you. You will excuse me—I should say us. I have something important to say to Heine.

PAGELLO.
Of course. *(He steps towards the door.)*

BULOZ.

Business, you know, literary business. It's terrible being the editor of a magazine. You will find some charming books on the table in there.

HEINE.

Nothing medical, Doctor, I'm afraid, but perhaps something of Mme. Sand's.

(And BULOZ almost pushes PAGELLO out of the room, and quickly closes the door behind him. Then he turns very excitedly to HEINE.)

BULOZ.

But, good God! what are we to do?

HEINE.

Don't talk so quickly. Give me a moment to think.

BULOZ.

In a moment that girl will be up. Nothing will stop her. I asked her to wait. I told her I'd bring Pagello down. George will be here any second. She's dining with Liszt. He's bringing her here.

HEINE.

We've a moment, then. That means they'll talk late.

BULOZ.

Yes——

HEINE.

How did you prevent Pagello seeing this Italian?

BULOZ.

Whilst he was leaving his cloak I managed to get her into the picture gallery. It was by the merest chance I was at the door. As soon as she asked for him I knew something was wrong.

HEINE.

Who is she?

BULOZ.

His mistress. She had a letter with her. Some enemy of George has sent the girl money to come from Venice.

HEINE.

Our enemies are the price we pay for fame.

BULOZ.

What shall we do?

HEINE (*is silent for a moment in thought and then*).
It would be best to wait until to-morrow.

BULOZ.

By to-morrow they may be gone.

HEINE.

She will be able to bear it better when he is no longer in Paris.

BULOZ.

It will break her heart if she is separated from him.

HEINE.

I wonder——

BULOZ.

She has never loved like this before. There is something mysterious, something hidden about it.

HEINE.

The hidden is not always the mysterious. But when you say hidden perhaps you are right.

BULOZ.

It's not as it was with de Musset. It's deeper—more profound.

HEINE.

How do you know that?

BULOZ.

Because she doesn't find time to write me letters telling me about her heart.

HEINE (*slowly*).

Perhaps she's reading it and hasn't time to write.

BULOZ (*thinking it out*).

If we don't tell her the girl has come she'll never forgive us for not warning her, and if we do it may kill her.

HEINE.

Think of the *Revue*. Don't tell her.

BULOZ.

I must.

HEINE.

Why?

BULOZ.

Because she's the one woman in Paris who would know how to find a way to prevent it. What shall we do?

HEINE.

First find our chessman, if we're to play the game. I'll see if George is in the music-room. Keep Pagello in there until I warn you. Then we must get him home.

(And as he goes into the music-room, and BULOZ in to guard PAGELLO, some guests cross the stage on their way to the conservatory. As they enter the chatter of voices is heard, and a moment later a lackey opens the door and FRANZ LISZT comes in, and with him is GEORGE. She is in an elaborate evening gown. Perhaps it is a little unusual—the conventional might even say a bit bizarre—but nevertheless, she looks extraordinarily handsome, and though her soul is sad, she has made the most of the beautiful shoulders which HEINE so much admired. LISZT is thin, pale, distinguished, æsthetic, but not of the exquisite fragility of CHOPIN, who is also on his way to the reception. He is a queer mixture of impetuosity and method. A surprising streak of practicality governs his pyrotechnic nature. GEORGE's manner is fraught with melancholy and deep intentions.)

LISZT.

These Parisian dinners, George—

GEORGE.

I'm telling you this, Franz, because you know the human heart.

LISZT.

If I do it is because I do not try to. But why haven't you told Buloz?

GEORGE.

Because he wouldn't understand.

LISZT.

And Heine?

GEORGE.

Because he would understand too well. It's you I may need as I did this morning. He has come. He wouldn't stay at home.

LISZT.

Your Pagello is a fool.

GEORGE.

Poor boy, he never wants to leave me. He's afraid of being alone. He's insensible.

LISZT.

Quite! Quite!

GEORGE.

Weeks ago it was over, and he still stays on.

LISZT.

Seeking the oasis in the desert of your heart.

GEORGE.

I can still respect his simplicity, but I can no longer love his naïveté.

LISZT.

He needed his background of lagoons.

GEORGE (*sadly, reminiscently*).

Perhaps, perhaps.

LISZT.

Alas! "Lelia"—how circumstances alter love.

GEORGE.

Can you expect me to be untrue to my soul?

LISZT (*subtly*).

If you mean by that your instincts—no, never!

GEORGE.

I was blind. What I thought was his purity I have found to be his emptiness.

LISZT.

Lelia, I too have learned from life that nothing is so unlovely as the thing one used to love. Some day I shall write, shall I call it a symphonic poem? with that idea for theme. Three movements, hope—love—disillusion. Disillusion in the violins struggling against love in the wood-winds. Write the programme for me, Lelia.

GEORGE (*disregarding the digression*).

He has cost me dearly.

LISZT.

Yes, spending emotion leaves one poor.

GEORGE.

I have ceased to love him and (*with a tone like a funeral knell*) ceasing to love him I have ceased to love for ever.

LISZT.

When one says for ever one is apt to forget tomorrow. Something must be done. He can't spend the rest of his life going from hospital to hospital studying these diseases. It isn't healthy.

GEORGE.

No, you are right.

LISZT.

Heine hasn't decided which is dearer to Pagello, you or these gall-stones.

GEORGE.

Do not speak unkindly of him, Franz.

LISZT.

Why, all you had to do was to look at his perfect profile to realize his limitations.

GEORGE.

That is the way a man reasons. A woman only feels and knows she is right.

LISZT.

And when the feelings change?

GEORGE (*sadly*).

Life is calling us to school.

LISZT.

Paris has soon wearied of this moony medico.

GEORGE.

He was once dear to me. (*And then almost tenderly*) He still imagines that he loves me.

LISZT.

Poor Pagello ! Why, any man knows that love is over the day the woman begins telling herself that it will last for ever.

GEORGE (*very melancholy, thinking perhaps more of herself than PAGELLO*).

Yes, yes.

LISZT.

And when will this be over ?

GEORGE (*quite simply*).

If things happen as I plan, to-night.

LISZT.

And how ?

GEORGE (*as though she might be saying "good morning"*).

I am sending him back to Venice.

(*And LISZT looks up barely concealing his astonishment.*)

LISZT.

What ?

GEORGE (*in explanation*).

It breaks my heart to see the poor boy suffer.

LISZT (*with a smile*).

So, so—and that is why you're out of mourning.

GEORGE (*in the dark*).

Mourning ?

LISZT.

Yes, this is the first time since Italy that Paris has seen your shoulders. And how does Lelia manage this with Pietro?

GEORGE.

He will leave to-night for Lyons.

LISZT (*smiling ever so little*).

Poor Pagello! Poor poodle! He entered Paris a triumphant captive of love, and now he goes back alone.

GEORGE.

No, not alone. A month ago a letter arrived from Castelfranco and with that letter my salvation.

LISZT.

Salvation by post?

GEORGE (*oblivious*).

Yes, yes.

LISZT.

Why not, salvation is such a little thing. Just what one wants at the moment.

GEORGE (*continuing*).

Suddenly everything was clear to me. I got money from Buloz on my new book. Pagello is the hero. (*And then quite unconscious of the subtle truth she is speaking*) The book is almost finished.

LISZT.

So is Pagello.

GEORGE.

Of this money I sent her enough to come to Paris.

LISZT.

Ah! His mother?

GEORGE.

No! No! I am done with fathers and with mothers.

LISZT.

If not his mother, then—— (*He looks at her questioningly.*)

GEORGE.

Yes, you are right. His mistress. The letter came as from any anonymous sympathetic friend of Pietro's here in Paris.

LISZT (*in admiration*).

So?

GEORGE.

Ah, I can tell you, Franz, that friend did not spare George Sand.

LISZT.

Then his mistress is the woman I met at the coach this morning?

GEORGE.

Yes, she will follow him here.

LISZT.

Here?

GEORGE.

I came to-night because my soul needed the consolation of the music. As I tell you, he would not stay at home; but I left word where he was going.

LISZT.

Swift as my technic, Lelia. You act as quickly as I play my scales. (*And he runs his fingers through the air.*)

GEORGE.

If I know her, and I think I do, she will come to-night and fetch him. I cannot stand the strain a moment longer. It must end at once. I am saving him, Franz. His sadness breaks my heart.

LISZT.

Alas, we poor men are but threads between the shears. (*And he makes a snapping little movement as though cutting the thread in two. Then suddenly*) Ah! That would make a splendid finger exercise. (*And he begins trying it over and over.*) Do you know that Chopin is going to play to-night?

GEORGE (*looking up*).

Why has he refused to meet me?

LISZT.

Because being an artist he has little time for art. Besides, I don't think he likes you. He's very shy.

GEORGE (*as though trying to explain it to herself*).

There is something in his music as of desire, chained.

LISZT.

He is the greatest artist in the world, save one.

GEORGE.

Thalberg?

LISZT (*angrily*).

No, no; one Liszt—Franz Liszt. If the women keep away long enough to allow him to practice the world will hear of him.

GEORGE.

And what of Chopin? Do the women bother him? These Poles are so romantic.

LISZT.

Poor Frederick, he has just recovered—he and the Wodzinska. They loved as children, and because she was a woman she has married someone else. It nearly broke his heart.

GEORGE (*deeply*).

Life is cruel, and the most sensitive to beauty are those who suffer most. The other night at de Custines when he was playing it was as though a soul were singing—seeking.

(And at this moment the three girls appear in the doorway whispering together and trying not to seem too rudely interested in the celebrities.)

GEORGE.

Ah, we are early, Franz; but it is just as well. I shall come back here and sit alone to listen to the music. Sorrow is but unwelcome company. *(And she sighs deeply as she glances at the three girls.)* Come, Franz, where is the Baron? I must say good evening.

LISZT.

They are receiving in the conservatory.

GEORGE.

Come!

(*And she goes into the conservatory, followed by LISZT.*)

MLLE. ROLANDE.

That was *she*.MLLE. DE FLEURY (*breathless*).

Yes, yes!

MLLE. DE LATOUR.

Was that Pagello?

MLLE. ROLANDE.

Nonsense; that was Chopin.

MLLE. DE FLEURY.

No, my dear, I'm sure it was De Musset. Chopin is taller.

MLLE. ROLANDE.

Did you notice how she glanced at us? Let us follow them.

MLLE. DE FLEURY.

Do you think we ought?

MLLE. DE LATOUR.

Why not?

MLLE. ROLANDE.

We can stay at the other side of the room and seem not to be watching them.

MLLE. DE FLEURY.

Isn't it all just wonderful? Did you like her dress?

M^{LLE}. ROLANDE.

That certainly was last year's bodice.

M^{LLE}. DE LATOUR.

Let's go after them.

THE OTHER GIRLS.

Yes! Yes!

(And they follow GEORGE and LISZT into the conservatory as HEINE comes in from the music-room. He goes over to the door of the little drawing-room and calls BULOZ.)

BULOZ (*entering*).

Well?

HEINE.

She's come. They are in the conservatory. Only a few are ahead of them. They'll be back in a second.

BULOZ.

They mustn't see each other. God knows what'll happen to George if that woman takes Pagello away from her. She mustn't break down, for my sake.

HEINE.

Your sake?

BULOZ.

She's promised me three chapters before morning. We go to press at ten. Did you see how that Italian woman looked?

HEINE.

Silent as a pool before the storm.

BULOZ.

If it were the old George she'd meet her match.

HEINE.

George is unmatchable.

BULOZ (*at his wits' end*).

Well, what will come of it?

HEINE.

I can hear Olympus rumbling with almighty laughter.

(And indeed at this moment there is a sound of voices from the hall.)

BULOZ.

Chopin has arrived. Hear them buzz.

HEINE (*mischievously, with a sort of impish prophecy*).

The toy box is too crowded. Some of the dolls will be broken. Pagello, George, this girl—and Chopin come in the nick of time, perhaps, to play an obligato to their parting. *(He begins laughing quietly to himself.)* The gods are busy at the strings. Come, Buloz, let us dance, dance!

(And at this moment from one side of the stage enters CHOPIN escorted by a lackey, and from the conservatory opposite comes GEORGE followed by LISZT. And as they come forward GEORGE and FREDERICK stop and look at each other even as Tristan and Isolde, and as all other mortals who are doomed to love have looked since the beginning of time when Adam—or was it Eve—looked and thus began the trouble.)

LISZT (*rushing forward to CHOPIN*).
Frederick!

(*And CHOPIN speaks. He is fragile, exquisite, spiritual. There is something about him as of flame and sleep. He is simple and profound, childlike and dominant; his whims are emotional necessities. He is part reticent reserve and part sudden irritability. Withal he is a genius, who in the words of Balzac, was less a musician than a soul which makes itself audible.*)

CHOPIN.

Good evening, Franz. Ah, Heine—Buloz——

HEINE (*with elaborate and fantastic ceremony*).

May it be my privilege to present the matchless composer of the B Minor Scherzo to the peerless creator of the immortal Lelia.

(*And GEORGE gives CHOPIN her hand, and he bends over to press it to his lips.*)

CHOPIN (*kissing her fingers*).

Madame.

GEORGE (*as their eyes meet as he straightens up*).

You have suffered—that is why you can sing. You must come some time with Franz to see me.

CHOPIN.

Madame.

(*He again bows, and she turns to HEINE.*)

LISZT (*to CHOPIN*).

Shall I present you to the Baron?

(*And as LISZT and CHOPIN cross to the right of the stage HEINE and GEORGE cross to the left.*)

LISZT (*low to CHOPIN*).

What do you think of her?

CHOPIN (*low to LISZT*).

Her eyes are too large, but she is less impossible than I thought.

HEINE (*low to GEORGE*).

What do you think of him?

GEORGE (*low to HEINE*).

His chin is weak, but he is more of a man than I had imagined.

(*And at this moment the three girls appear, still hunting the celebrities, and as CHOPIN and LISZT go into the conservatory LISZT stops to chat with them, and then he and the adoring girls exit to follow CHOPIN.*)

GEORGE (*sitting down*).

Chopin alone can make this party bearable. The Baron is a charming gentleman, but his guests are too wealthy to be anything but stupid.

BULOZ (*aside to HEINE*)

What shall I do?

HEINE.

Tell her now.

BULOZ (*coming forward, nervously*).

Good evening, George.

GEORGE.

Ah! Buloz. Now I know what you're going to say.

(BULOZ *starts*.)

HEINE.

Not this time, George.

GEORGE.

Heine, please don't begin quoting Faust in that horrid guttural German; and you, Buloz, don't jump at my throat and shriek for those last two chapters. You shall have them by to-morrow.

HEINE (*trying to lead up*).

Perhaps you mayn't write to-night, George.

GEORGE.

Nothing but death can stop me.

BULOZ (*desperately*).

Why should we beat about the bush?

GEORGE (*lightly*).

Why not? That's one way of stirring the birds to sing.

HEINE.

To sing? First they may fly away.

GEORGE.

Questing the eternal fires of the dawn. Ah! that's a fine phrase.

(And she takes a tiny pencil from a little bag hanging at her waist and jots down the words on one of the panels of her fan.)

BULOZ *(guardedly, darkly, attempting to begin)*.
George, I believe in you.

GEORGE *(lightly)*.

Of course you do. Don't you print me?

BULOZ *(lugubriously)*.

George——

GEORGE.

You sound as if you were reciting Corneille.

(He hesitates, and looks across the room for help from HEINE, but HEINE is deep in a book he has lifted from the table.)

BULOZ *(clearing his throat and attempting to go on)*.

You are strong, you can control——

(Embarrassed he stops short.)

GEORGE.

Are you writing my obituary?

BULOZ.

Be brave. Remember you have children.

(And GEORGE springs up and for a second goes white and leans half fainting against her chair.)

GEORGE.

My God! My children! Maurice, Solange. Have they fever? Are they dead?

BULOZ.

No, George, it is not your children, but——

(And the next second the light breaks in GEORGE'S face, and she can hardly suppress an exclamation of long hoped for relief. And all the while HEINE stands scrutinizing her.)

GEORGE.

What is it? Tell me. Tell me.

BULOZ *(speaking very slowly. He is doing his stumbling best to keep from hurting her too suddenly).*

Remember, France, the world, has need of you.

GEORGE.

Is it all preface? Begin—begin.

BULOZ *(he stops and wipes his monocle).*

Well——

GEORGE.

Yes.

BULOZ *(carefully, with deep pity for her, watching the effect).*

Pagello's mistress has come from Italy.

(And to his amazement she takes the news quite calmly—indeed, in a way that puzzles him. But HEINE'S eyes never leave her face.)

GEORGE.

Lucrezia ?

BULOZ.

She is waiting in the hall for him.

GEORGE (*solemnly, as though she felt HEINE's eyes*).

It is the hand of heaven. Fate doesn't mean that I should keep him from her any longer.

(*And a sound of voices is heard beyond in the hall—a lackey's and a woman's voice in remonstrance, and the door is thrown open and LUCREZIA rushes in.*)

LUCREZIA.

He is here, I tell you. I will wait no longer. (*Then she sees GEORGE.*) You! You! Where are your breeches ?

BULOZ.

Not so loud, madame. The greatest pianist in the world is about to improvise in the music room.

HEINE.

Whilst fate is improvising here. (*And then almost inaudibly*) Fate—or George.

LUCREZIA (*threateningly to GEORGE*).

Once before you drove him dumb with your words. This time I shall speak.

GEORGE (*quite unflustered*).

Yes, apparently, apparently. And how is Venice ? Do tame nightingales sing on every balcony and are there still fresh oysters on every doorstep ?

LUCREZIA (*pointing to the letter in her hand*).
I know all, all.

HEINE.

Rivalling the Omnipotent. Does she mean George or God?

LUCREZIA.

Madonna, what have you done to him?

GEORGE.

What have I done to him? Perhaps the greatest thing any woman can do for any man. I have given him his soul.

LUCREZIA.

It is all written here (*and she waves her letter in GEORGE'S face*). This friend of Pietro's knows the lies your heart hides, and has told me all. Caro mio Pietro. (*And to stifle back her tears her voice goes louder*) Pietro!

(*And the door of the little drawing-room opens and PAGELLO enters, an open book in his hand.*)

PAGELLO (*on the threshold, not seeing LUCREZIA*).
Did some one call me?

HEINE.

Yes, Doctor, a voice from beyond the Alps.

PAGELLO.

I do not understand this poetical way you have of saying things. Ah, George, good evening.

GEORGE (*a bit mournfully but nevertheless leading in the right direction*).

“Good evening?” No, my friend, not good evening, but alas, good-bye.

PAGELLO (*as usual a bit mystified*).

What?

GEORGE (*unable to resist the cadence*).

Good-bye—for ever.

(*And in a second all is clear because as he looks up for an explanation he sees LUCREZIA and he stumbles back against the sofa and the book falls from his hand.*)

PAGELLO.

San Giovanni — San Pietro — San Paolo — San Luichele——

HEINE (*low to BULOZ*).

This is a splendid chance to learn the Italian calendar.

BULOZ (*his eyes on GEORGE*).

Will she be strong enough to bear it?

PAGELLO.

Santa Maria, you—you—— Where have you come from?

GEORGE.

From Italy, Pietro, moonlit Italy.

(*And in the next room CHOPIN can be heard improvising.*)

GEORGE.

Ah, Madame, life has taught me much. I have wronged you, wronged you deeply.

LUCREZIA (*to PAGELLO*).

Come away, she is beginning to talk.

PAGELLO (*hardly recovered from the shock*).

How did you get here, Lucrezia?

LUCREZIA.

You have a friend in Paris, Pietroninni. One who hates this George Sand. (*And she again points to the letter.*)

GEORGE.

Madame, alas, there are many such. The rich because I would enrich the poor, the wise because I pity fools.

BULOZ (*aside to HEINE*).

She is magnificent.

HEINE.

Yes, perhaps more so than you think.

GEORGE.

In Venice, Madame, I wronged you. In Paris I ask your pardon. (*She steps toward LUCREZIA but the girl, protecting PAGELLO, backs into a corner.*) Ah, Madame, do not shrink from me. Love has taught me humility. Though it breaks my heart I give him back to you.

LUCREZIA (*shrieking*).

You do not give him. He comes. He comes.

(*And at this moment LISZT's head pops in at the door.*)

LISZT.

Shhh! my dears! If you are playing charades be a little quieter. You're disturbing the music Chopin is improvising. (*And then he lowers his voice to a whisper and hushes them with his lifted finger*) Piano! Piano! (*Then he sees LUCREZIA and begins thoughtlessly to bubble over*) Ah—so, George—she—you—

(*But GEORGE is ready and suddenly she turns to him and speaks as though nothing but the answer to her question mattered.*)

GEORGE.

Isn't that Thalberg playing? It's like his touch.

LISZT (*swiftly, almost angrily*).

No, no. Chopin. Only Chopin can play like that. Listen, ah, that phrasing—such delicacy, such nuance. Listen, that modulation.

GEORGE.

And can you modulate so beautifully, my friend?

(*And the message has registered not unseen by HEINE.*)

LISZT (*his whole manner changing looking at*

LUCREZIA).

What a beautiful girl! Is she an artist come to dance the Tarantula?

HEINE.

No, she is an avenging fury whose wings are clipped.

GEORGE (*peering through him*).

That is very cryptic, Heine.

HEINE (*smiling back*).

Perhaps, George, but not too deep for you to read.

(*There is a pause. CHOPIN has reached a brilliant passage and instinctively they all stop to listen.*)

LISZT.

Ah! Beauty made audible. Singing starlight.

LUCREZIA (*in utter disgust*).

Monkey!

LISZT.

Ah! (*His hand lifted in ecstatic admiration.*) The moment's inspiration——

GEORGE (*as the music swells and dies*).

The heritage of all the years.

(*And LISZT, softly closing the door behind him, goes back into the music room.*)

LUCREZIA (*to PAGELLO*).

Come away, Pietro, these people are all crazy. They rattle in their heads.

PAGELLO (*at a loss. It is all too much for him*).

George——

GEORGE.

Go, Pietro, I shall be brave. My blessings follow you, my friend. Life must be answered—youth be heard. She is Sarah come from the South to call you. I am as Hagar cast without. But in the wilderness I shall find my peace. My little Ishmaels are calling me.

HEINE.

She's a little mixed, but what difference does it make—they're Italians.

GEORGE.

Under the trees at Nohant I shall find forgetfulness and rest. Do not forget me, Pietro.

(And she bends over to kiss him a last farewell.)

LUCREZIA *(in a corner, her hands twitching)*.

Madonna mia. She's a witch.

GEORGE.

No, no, Pietro. *(Through habit and not knowing what to do he is about to kiss her on the lips.)* No, no, not on the lips—the brow, my friend, the brow, as you would kiss a sister. *(And thus nobly and sadly they embrace.)* Good-bye, my brother.

(And then LUCREZIA is over next to him, her arms through his and they are moving towards the door.)

PAGELLO *(suddenly stopping)*.

But—— *(And instinctively his hand goes to his pocket)* I—I—— *(And at a loss just how to put it)* I am but a poor practitioner.

GEORGE (*thoughtfully*).

Pietro, it seems to me I've heard you say that same thing once before.

(There is an embarrassed pause, but in an instant she is ready.)

GEORGE.

Of course, of course. Buloz, advance me a thousand francs. They may need it. You shall have two books for it instead of one. The writing will help me to forget. Go with them, remember they are strangers in this whirling world of Paris.

HEINE (*with significance*).

Strange as two babies at a ball.

(And as PAGELLO comes over tenderly to shake her hand in gratitude, LUCREZIA keeps hold of his other hand with a sort of instinctive feeling that he won't be safe until out of sight of GEORGE.)

HEINE (*aside to BULOZ*).

Michael Angelo alone could do justice to that group.

GEORGE.

Come, Buloz, see these two children on their way. You remember the coach for Lyons leaves the Post Hotel at nine.

(And she is over at the door with PAGELLO and LUCREZIA.)

HEINE (*sotto voce to BULOZ as he moves towards them*).

It was on this very coach that she started with De Musset.

BULOZ.

Well, what of it?

HEINE.

If this sort of thing goes on the people of the diligence should make her an allowance.

GEORGE.

Good-bye, my brother. (*And then even more beautifully*) Good-bye, my new-found sister.

(*And at this moment the CHOPIN improvisation is over and a burst of applause sounds from the next room.*)

GEORGE (*unperturbed*).

Love will protect you.

(*And she stretches out her hand to PIETRO and he bends over and kisses it. And she offers her hand to LUCREZIA, but the girl refuses it and suddenly turns and faces her.*)

LUCREZIA (*all the passion in her spilling over*).

Corpo di Cristo, I will not take your hand. I am an Italian and I do not forget. Dio! And I do not forgive. What you have stolen I have taken back. Maladetta! What you have taught him I shall profit by.

(*And half dragging, half embracing her recaptured Doctor, they are gone and BULOZ with them. GEORGE for a moment stands looking after them, a sad little smile in her eyes. Then she turns to HEINE.*)

GEORGE.

Ah, Heine, youth is the one thing worth having longest. She is glorious. Mark my words, my friend, the world shall yet be saved by women.

HEINE.

Then as their first priestess let me tender you my homage. (*And he gallantly kisses her hand*) If you ever cease writing, George, go on the stage. Melpomene herself could not have played it better.

GEORGE.

Yes—I wrote that letter, Heine.

HEINE.

Ah, my prophetic soul.

GEORGE.

Poor Pietro could never have managed it alone.

HEINE (*seriously*).

George, I have ever loved you.

GEORGE (*lightly*).

Too late, too late, my German. My soul is turning grey.

HEINE.

That is why my admiration for you means the more. Tell them to carve upon your tombstone: "Here lies George the indefatigable."

GEORGE.

That doesn't interest me. I won't be there to read it.

HEINE.

You'll probably outlive us all.

GEORGE.

No, Heine, you are wrong. (*And then as irrefutable proof*) I've just had my old mattresses re-covered and I regret it. It wasn't worth while for the little time I still contemplate living. I am going to an island in the Mediterranean to die. Wait and see, time will tell.

HEINE.

Time tells nothing. Leave it to your biographers.

GEORGE (*though a minute ago life was over*).

What! Never! I'll forestall their lies and some day, like Rousseau, I'll confess in twenty volumes. (*Then sadly*) My heart is a graveyard.

HEINE.

Don't you mean a cemetery, George?

(*And at this moment a lackey opens the door from the hall and ALFRED DE MUSSET enters, his mother leaning on his arm. It is their first meeting since Italy.*)

MME. DE MUSSET (*stepping forward and cordially taking GEORGE'S hand*).

Alfred has told me all. (*And GEORGE is as near hysterical surprise as she has ever come in her life.*)

MME. DE MUSSET.

A mother's thanks for all that you have done for him. Yes, I know how patiently you nursed him

through his sunstroke and sat at his bedside bathing his brow and giving him his milk.

GEORGE (*equal even to this*).

I promised you that I would care for him.

MME. DE MUSSET.

And you have, you have. A mother's gratitude goes out to you.

(*And in her enthusiasm she bends over and kisses GEORGE, and HEINE, who has been watching ALFRED—who stands like a monument trying to solve a riddle—comes to the rescue.*)

HEINE (*bowing to MME. DE MUSSET*).

May I have the honour of escorting you to the Baron?

MME. DE MUSSET (*taking his arm*).

We are very late.

(*Again the piano sounds from the music room.*)

GEORGE (*a little more enthusiastically than she realizes*).

Ah, that is Chopin. Liszt is to play later in the evening.

MME. DE MUSSET.

Are you coming in, Madame?

GEORGE.

No, I shall sit here alone to listen. I am not well, Madame. I do not like the crowd.

MME. DE MUSSET (*as she reaches the door*).

I shall see you later then, at supper?

HEINE.

At supper—of course.

GEORGE.

If I stay, but alas, Madame, I am so spent. (*And she heaves a deep sigh.*) I do not know what will happen to me.

(*As indeed she doesn't. And GEORGE and ALFRED are left alone.*)

GEORGE (*sadly*).

That was kind of Heine. I wanted to see you, Alfred, once before I left Paris. I'm very tired.

ALFRED.

You're overworking. You should break with Buloz. He expects too much of you.

GEORGE.

No, it isn't that. (*And then slowly*) I have just sent Pietro back to Venice.

ALFRED (*as the memories stir*).

Ah——

GEORGE.

All is over. It is the end—the end.

ALFRED.

Go down to the country, you will rest there out in the open. It is quiet under the trees.

GEORGE (*wearily*).

It is a quiet deeper than the silence of Nohant that I seek.

ALFRED.

You mean——

GEORGE.

Yes, my friend. I welcome it as a long rest after a too long journey. I can no longer live with dignity.

ALFRED.

You've been like this before. Why, by to-morrow——

GEORGE.

No. No. That was long ago. (*A nocturne of exquisite melancholy sounds from the music room.*) To-morrow bears but the same sad burden as to-day. I shall miss only the sound of my children's voices. Solange is so sweet—you should see her, Alfred. I can hardly keep from weeping when I kiss her. I shall miss my children and the feel of the wind in my face. I adore the wind. It is the symbol of perpetual energy.

ALFRED.

Blowing nowhere and for ever—but such is life.

GEORGE (*sadly. It is her tragic moment.*)

And such is love. We are like leaves tossed in the wind of desire. Do you remember that night in Venice in the window? I laughed at you and your fear of fate. But you were right, Alfred. Destiny has piped and I have danced—and now I'm tired.

ALFRED.

And love?

GEORGE (*and from her heart comes the cry of bitterness*).

Love, alas, I have called to love and it has answered me with lies. I am done with that delusion. It is Nature's trick to make us fools. It is empty, empty. You remember you gave me a message at parting in Venice. Now I shall give you one. (*And she holds out her hand to him.*) Store up the gold of life in youth, my friend, whilst you can still believe this lie that men call love.

ALFRED (*bending over her hand and kissing it*).

Good-bye.

(*And he goes into the conservatory, and as GEORGE is about to sit down on the long sofa near the fireplace she sees the book that PIETRO has dropped and she picks it up.*)

GEORGE (*perhaps she is weeping a little. She reads the title*).

"Lelia." Faithful to the last. Finis. Finis. (*And she glances toward the little room through which PAGELLO and LUCREZIA have gone*) Adieu, Pagello! (*And she lets the little book fall to the table and then she looks toward the conservatory through which DE MUSSET has gone*) Adieu, Freddo. (*And then she looks into the fire as though bidding a last farewell*) Adieu, love!

(*And she sits gazing for a moment into the flame. A pause. And a little later a tremendous burst of applause sounds from the music room. The*

nocturne is finished. Another sound of voices, then more applause, and then CHOPIN bursts in from the music room followed by LISZT; and the three young girls all a-flutter are crowded in the doorway. From her deep seat next the fireplace GEORGE is almost invisible.)

CHOPIN (*irritable, excited*).

No, no. No more. I'm tired.

LISZT.

The humming fools. Give them the B Minor Scherzo, Frederick.

CHOPIN.

No, no. No more. No more.

MILLE. ROLANDE AND MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Ah! Ah!

MILLE. DE LATOUR.

He's probably tired. Look how white he is.

MILLE. DE FLEURY.

Have you ever heard anything so divine?

MILLE. ROLANDE.

Positively beguiling, my dear. I——

CHOPIN (*low to LISZT*).

Get them away. Get them away.

LISZT (*with exaggerated politeness*).

Ladies, your pardon.

(And he slowly closes the door. And the three demoiselles sink back into the music room.)

CHOPIN.

It distresses me to play before a crowd like that.

LISZT.

Do you know that in the middle of your most beautiful pianissimi one of those fat hyenas sneezed?

CHOPIN.

I didn't notice it.

LISZT (*amazed*).

What, why I hear everything when I perform.

CHOPIN.

I like best playing for my beloved Poles. They are breathless when an artist plays.

(*More applause from the next room. Then Mlle. de Fleury and Mlle. Rolande are back.*)

Mlle. de Fleury (*to Chopin*).

Monsieur, the people are clamouring for you.

CHOPIN.

Ladies, you must excuse me.

Mlle. Rolande.

But we beseech you.

CHOPIN.

You must pardon me. I am sorry to refuse. (*And as he turns away he unknowingly drops his handkerchief. The applause sounds again.*) Franz, for God's sake go in and appease them. I want to be alone. Alone.

(And the two girls flutter up to LISZT with exclamations of admiration. And as CHOPIN turns from them barely concealing his irritation, Mlle. DE FLEURY swiftly lifts his handkerchief from the floor and with a look as though she were robbing a shrine of the sacred "bambino," she stuffs the precious relic into her bodice and GEORGE who is watching smiles. This is unseen by all the others. Mlle. ROLANDE and LISZT are at the door. Then Mlle. DE FLEURY joins them, and as they enter the music room LISZT is greeted with a salvo of approval. The door is closed and then CHOPIN begins walking up and down. He is warm. He wants to mop his brow. He is nervous. He looks at a picture. Then again for his handkerchief. It is gone. This increases his irritation. He sits down, still feeling in his pockets; and then—and it sounds as if it came from nowhere—GEORGE speaks. And as she does so CHOPIN jumps up not knowing from whence it came.)

GEORGE.

Here, take mine. *(And she hands him her handkerchief.)*

CHOPIN *(taking it)*.

Ah, you. Thank you, Madame.

GEORGE.

Sit down, you must be very tired. Sit down and rest.

CHOPIN.

Yes. Yes.

GEORGE.

I can't imagine anything more frightful than having to face a room of people like that. It must be so much more wonderful to play for two or three.

CHOPIN.

I like best to play for only one. That is when I can "speak."

GEORGE.

Yes——

CHOPIN.

I always choose some one to whom I play. To-night there was no one in there who interested me.

GEORGE.

Your art is the most fragile of all the arts. It is born of the moment and as it lives it dies.

CHOPIN.

Yes. Yes. (*He begins walking about again.*)

GEORGE.

Oh, don't be alarmed, I'm not going to talk music. Would you like some champagne? Shall I call a lackey?

CHOPIN.

No. Let us sit quietly for awhile.

(*And they do so, listening to the music.*)

CHOPIN (*after a moment*).

That is a beautiful melody but in a second he will spoil it with his fireworks.

(GEORGE *doesn't answer*. Then *after a little while he goes on*.)

CHOPIN.

I have never read any of your books.

GEORGE (*unconcerned*).

No?

CHOPIN.

No. Listen! Music should have more soul and less speed. (*A pause*.) You do not answer me. (*Another pause*.) You are so different from other women. You seem to know how to be still.

GEORGE (*smiling*).

I am listening to you.

CHOPIN.

Some day I will come and play for you.

GEORGE (*unmoved*).

Yes?

CHOPIN (*a bit piqued at her lack of enthusiasm*).
I do not do that often.

GEORGE.

No, I am sure of that.

(*There is another pause*. Then GEORGE *speaks*.
Something stirs in the ashes of her heart.)

GEORGE.

Why have you avoided me since you've been in Paris?

CHOPIN.

I was afraid of you.

GEORGE.

Afraid? If that is a compliment it is too roundabout.

CHOPIN.

From a distance you seemed, shall I say——(*He hesitates for a word.*)

GEORGE (*lightly*).

Formidable.

CHOPIN.

No—er—(*then he gets it*) complicated.

GEORGE.

You have chosen badly. I am really very simple. (*Then with a shake of her head because she really means it*) Too simple for my good.

(*And he looks at her and she turns away and gazes into the fire. Another pause.*)

CHOPIN.

Weren't you at the Marquis de Custine's last Saturday?

GEORGE (*almost carelessly*).

Yes.

CHOPIN.

I didn't meet you.

GEORGE.

No, I left early.

CHOPIN.

But women always want to meet me.

GEORGE.

You're very shy.

CHOPIN.

I thought I saw you looking at me when I was playing.

GEORGE.

And so beautifully——

CHOPIN.

I was dreaming of some one long ago.

GEORGE.

Yes.

CHOPIN.

Why did you leave so early ?

GEORGE.

I went home to work.

CHOPIN.

At night.

GEORGE.

Yes. Till four in the morning.

CHOPIN.

My art too is exacting. Sometimes I practise ten hours a day.

GEORGE (*as she glances at him, she is thinking of her writing but, alas, how often people mean one thing and say another*).

I have been practising all my life.

CHOPIN.

One of these days I must read something you've written.

GEORGE.

Why?

CHOPIN.

I do not read much.

GEORGE.

There are too many books. It is life that really matters. (*A note of sadness comes into her voice*)
Life!

CHOPIN.

You are sad, Madame?

GEORGE.

Alas, my friend, I have suffered.

(*She looks at him tenderly, then back into the flames.*)

CHOPIN (*slowly. It is to very few he would say this, but she is different*).

I understand, Madame. I too have lived.

GEORGE (*expectantly*).

Yes?

(*A pause. She waits for him to go on but he is silent.*)

GEORGE.

Some day, perhaps, you will care to tell me?

CHOPIN (*perhaps he is a little embarrassed*).

Listen! Liszt is playing the "Libestraum." Less than Beethoven—but 'twill serve. Listen!

GEORGE.

Yes. You are right. I too cannot abide these people who are an Æolian harp through which their grief is for ever moaning. (*She is in danger. She is beginning to forget herself. She glances at him. He is listening to the music.*) It is a love that has lasted long, my friend? (*Her hand is on his.*)

CHOPIN.

Since my boyhood. I do not know why I tell you this.

GEORGE (*very tenderly*).

That is the only love that matters. So you too have been lonely.

CHOPIN.

I've been alone for all my life.

GEORGE.

That is the sad melody that runs through life. We are for ever seeking companionship whilst in reality we are for ever alone, alone.

(*And her voice drifts away on the sweet sadness of the word.*)

CHOPIN.

Yes. I must come and play for you.

GEORGE.

I shall listen with my soul.

(A little flame stirs in the ashes. Is it the spell of the music that moves her?)

CHOPIN.

You are not like what I thought.

GEORGE.

No?

CHOPIN.

I imagined you were always talking philosophy.

GEORGE.

That's what the world thinks of literary people. The truth is I seldom mention books.

CHOPIN.

Franz told me that you were the cleverest woman in Paris.

GEORGE.

I thought he was my friend.

CHOPIN.

There are days when I cannot abide Paris and these crowds of brilliant people. *(He looks towards the music room.)*

GEORGE.

Yes, I know what you mean. I too have felt that. Why don't you go away?

CHOPIN.

I would, but though I dislike people, I don't like being all alone. It gives me a feeling of peace to know there is some one to whom I can go—some one who will understand.

GEORGE (*for the first time looking him straight in the eyes*).

Yes. That is the perfect companion. Some one you know is there and still never feel about you. I have tried many but all have failed, even Alfred.

CHOPIN.

Does such a one exist?

GEORGE.

In dreams perhaps.

(*And she is languorously fanning herself whilst in the music room LISZT plays "The Lorelei."*)

CHOPIN.

What a delicious odour.

GEORGE.

"Lily of Japan." Pagello bought it for me in the Palais Royal with his last two francs. But the odour was too strong for him. That's why he's run away to Venice.

CHOPIN (*looking at her*).

With such a person far away——

GEORGE (*lightly but still with a faint sense of suggestion*).

In a blue isle in the Mediterranean shall we say? I too have been dreaming of the South.

CHOPIN (*smiling back at her fantasy*).

Yes. Why not? The Mediterranean——

GEORGE (*leaning back a little, her tongue wetting her lips goes on with the delicious nonsense*).

Where the tropic palms droop in the odorous shadows and the scarlet flamingoes sleep in the sun.

(*She likes this and begins jotting it down on her fan.*)

CHOPIN.

What are you doing?

GEORGE (*almost sprightly*).

I just thought of what I must order for luncheon to-morrow. (*And she repeats as she writes*)—Scarlet flamingoes.

CHOPIN.

Flamingoes for lunch?

GEORGE.

Why not? Perhaps you will come and dine with me.

CHOPIN.

Perhaps. You are the one woman in Paris who doesn't bore me.

GEORGE (*laughing*).

What! Go back to your island, my friend.

CHOPIN.

No. Do not think I am jesting. If for awhile I could break away from all this cleverness! (*And again he waves his hand with a gesture of disgust towards the music room.*) There in this mythical island I could realize my dreams and give to the world all the music that struggles and mounts in my heart.

GEORGE (*whimsically*).

And if you go I shall follow you and lie quietly listening among the ferns. (*He looks at her. She looks back. There is a pause. Then jestingly, laughingly*) Or perhaps we might go together.

CHOPIN (*slowly*).

Why not? Why not?

GEORGE (*her hand again touching his. Her voice low*).

Why not? (*The light of the fire shines about them.*) Some day, perhaps. (*Half prophetically, half in subconscious hope*) Some day.

(*And CHOPIN sits looking at her and she leans back, her eyes slightly closed.*)

CHOPIN.

I am so tired.

GEORGE (*leaning towards him*).

Shall I drive you home?

CHOPIN.

Would you? (*And he smiles at her wanly, sweetly.*)

GEORGE.

Poor boy, you are very tired, aren't you? (*A pause, she is closer to him.*) There is something about you so like my little son.

CHOPIN.

Yes?

GEORGE.

And do you know what I should do if you were he?

CHOPIN.

No.

GEORGE.

This, my poor tired child—this.

(And like a mother—indeed love and the mother in her are mixed beyond comprehension—she takes him in her arms and kisses him and the next instant she awakes to the calamitous rashness of her deed.)

GEORGE.

What have I done? What have I done? Can you ever forgive me?

CHOPIN (*bending towards her*).

Why not?

GEORGE (*springing up as once before she has done in Venice*).

Now I realize it all. For weeks the ecstasy of your music has sustained my fainting spirit. All the while I have loved you, loved you as I have never loved before, loved when I thought that love was over for ever—and

I haven't known. And now that I have told you, good-bye. (*She rushes from him.*)

CHOPIN (*his voice low*).

Wait! Wait! You mustn't leave me now, now at the beginning.

GEORGE (*struggling with her heart*).

No, no. I am done with love. I have prayed to love and it has come to hurt me. No, no. Not again. Not again. I am through with love for ever.

CHOPIN (*his arm is about her*).

This is the beginning. We have found each other in our loneliness. You have brought peace to my heart. (*His lips are close to hers.*) George! George, nothing else matters. This is the beginning.

(*And he kisses her. A pause. And then she breaks from him. There are tears in her eyes. For a moment she stands watching him, the old wonder ever new breaks in her heart. He comes over to her. His voice is very gentle.*)

CHOPIN.

You know you said that you would drive me home.

GEORGE (*and all that she has forgotten and all that she hopes are in the words*).

You mean?

CHOPIN.

If you are willing—yes.

(And again they are in each other's arms. Tableau! From beyond sounds the music. She has lost her head. This is rash. Some one may come in. She breaks away from him. He follows her.)

GEORGE *(she looks about her)*.

No, no. This is not the Mediterranean. There are too many lackeys. *(She steps towards the door.)*

CHOPIN.

But aren't you going to drive me home?

GEORGE.

And if I should tell the coachman to drive to this island in the sea?

CHOPIN.

I should follow you. There is too much art in Paris. Come.

GEORGE *(swiftly)*.

A moment. A word to Buloz lest he wait for me.

(And impetuously she tears out the fly leaf from the copy of "Lelia" lying on the table and scrawls some words and then)

GEORGE.

Chopin, we may be driving to the world's end.

CHOPIN.

To the sound of music. Come.

(And they rush out as very cautiously from the music room enters Mlle. de Latour with her autograph album in her hand followed by Mlle. Rolande.)

Mlle. de Latour *(looking about)*.

Why, I thought she was in here.

Mlle. Rolande.

Probably they're in the supper room.

Mlle. de Latour.

I'm going to ask her. I may never see her again. I don't care what Agnès says.

(And they run out through the little drawing-room to the applause which sounds from the music-room as Heine opens the door and comes in.)

Heine *(calling)*.

Frederick! Where is he?

(And Buloz bustles in from the hall.)

Heine.

Where's Chopin?

Buloz.

Gone!

Heine.

Gone! The Baroness was hoping he would play again. Liszt seems tied to the piano. Nothing can budge him.

BULOZ.

No.

HEINE.

I'll ask George to read a chapter of "Lelia". (*He takes the book from the table.*) That will quiet him.

BULOZ.

She's gone.

HEINE.

What? She too.

BULOZ.

I saw them leave together.

HEINE.

Together? (*He looks surprised.*)

BULOZ.

Yes. Why not? Can't a man and a woman drive from a party without the world coming to an end? She left me this. (*He points to the note in his hand.*) It's written on the half title of "Lelia."

HEINE.

Perhaps you can print it in the *Revue*.BULOZ (*with a quick look*).

Not yet. Read it, Heine.

(*And HEINE does so and in his amazement he lets the note flutter to the floor.*)

BULOZ.

And how long this time, Heine?

HEINE.

How long? How long? Does it matter? Think of the copy it will make and how the world will revel in it. And now—let's go in to supper.

(And as they exit Mlle. de Fleury comes in from the music room on her way to join Mlle. de Latour and Mlle. Rolande. Suddenly she sees the note which Heine has let fall. She picks it up.)

Mlle. de Fleury *(with swimming eyes as she reads it)*.

“Good-night, Buloz, don't wait for me. Life is love. That's all that matters. I've taken Chopin home to put the poor, tired boy to bed.”

(And she clutches the note to her trembling heart.)

Mlle. de Fleury *(tenderly, lit with the thrilling romance of it all)*.

How beautiful! How beautiful!

(And the curtain falls as Liszt, the untiring, thunders from the music room the beginning of a brilliant Polonaise.)

A NOTE ON THE MUSIC FOR "MADAME SAND."

All the entr'acte music should be of the period of the play but the overture must be Mozart's "Cosi Fan Tutte." The Italian title of this sparkling music when rendered into the balder English and reading, "Thus Do All Women," delicately suggests that George is not the only member of her gentler sex who might have acted as she did. In fact, given her "talent" perhaps any woman would, that is, if she could.

Chopin, by his music, is to be subtly anticipated throughout the comedy. After each entr'acte group, in that wonderful moment, when the lights are dim, echoes of his music should be heard; for the beginning of Act I the gay little Posthumous Mazurka in F Major, for the beginning of Act II the languorous Prelude in B Flat, Opus 28, No. 21; and for Act III the curtain lifts on the three prattling demoiselles to the charming strains of the little A Major Prelude.

One number of the entr'acte music for Act II

MADAME SAND

should be an arrangement of a group of the tinkling tunes heard throughout the Venice episode at the "serenata" which is supposed to be in full swing under the lovers' window on the Grand Canal. For Mrs. Fiske's production authentic melodies, such as one hears at these floating concerts in Italy, were used.

Throughout Act III Liszt and Chopin are heard in the music room improvising on themes which later in their careers they are to use for some of their most famous compositions. During George's first meeting with Alfred, after the ending of their love affair in Venice, we hear Chopin playing the second theme of the Posthumous Valse in G Flat, Opus 70, No. 1. During her farewell scene with De Musset, in which, out of her broken heart she speaks of the disillusionment of love, Chopin is heard playing the G Major Nocturne, Opus 37, No. 2. The sudden break, as it actually occurs in the music, is used to denote Chopin's distress and comes just at the moment before he rushes from the piano quite unknowingly into George's arms. For the opening of George's love scene with Chopin, Liszt, unconscious of what is taking place in the little drawing-room, is accompanying the dawning love of Chopin and George to the romantic strains of the third "Liebestraum" in A Flat. Chopin's words: "but in a moment he will spoil it with his fireworks," are spoken just before the famous pyrotechnic figuration

MADAME SAND

which is the despair of all amateurs who lovingly flay the "Liebestraum." When Chopin and George, in this crowded world of Paris, find each other in their loneliness, Liszt is playing the theme which later in life he is to use for his song arrangement of Heine's "Lorelei"; and as the comedy ends and Mlle. de Fleury presses George's tell-tale note to her trembling heart, Liszt, "because no one has been able to drag him from the piano," is still heard playing, at this moment, the dazzling opening phrases of his second Polonaise in E Major.

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