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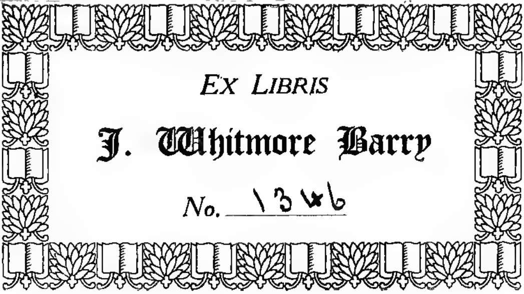

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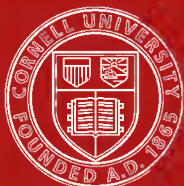

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THE RED LILY

BY

ANATOLE FRANCE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

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THE RED LILY

I

SHE gave a glance to the armchairs placed before the chimney, to the tea table which shone in the shade, and to the tall pale stems of flowers ascending above Chinese vases. She thrust her hand into the flowery branches of the guelder roses to make their silvery balls play. Then she looked at herself in a glass with serious attention. She held herself sidewise, her neck on her shoulder, to follow with her eyes the jet of her fine form in the black satin scabbard, around which floated a light tunic studded with pearls wherein sombre lights scintillated. She went nearer, curious to know her face of that day. The glass returned her look with tranquillity, as if this amiable woman whom she examined and who was not unpleasing to her lived without acute joy and without profound sadness.

On the walls of the large parlor, empty and dumb, the figures of the tapestries, vague as shadows, were pallid among their antique games, in their dying graces. Like them, the terra-cotta statu-

ettes on columnettes, the groups of old Saxony, and the paintings of Sèvres in the cases spoke of past things. On a pedestal ornamented with precious bronzes, the marble bust of some princess royal disguised as Diana seemed to fly out of her turbulent drapery, while on the ceiling a Night, powdered like a marquise and surrounded by cupids, sowed flowers. Everything was asleep, and one heard only the crackling of the logs and the light murmur of pearls in gauze.

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

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

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

"Love and gentle heart are one."

And she asked herself, with light and soft irony, if Miss Bell had ever been in love, and what could be the loves of Miss Bell. The poetess had at Fiesole an escort, Prince Albertinelli. Very handsome, he seemed coarse and vulgar; too much so to please an æsthete who placed in the desire for love the mysticism of an Annunciation.

"Good-night, Thérèse. I am worn out."

It was Princess Seniavine, supple in her furs, which seemed to form part of her dark and savage flesh. She sat brusquely, and in her voice, which was harsh and yet caressing, said:

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

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

"Because he had the gout in his toe."

Thérèse shrugged her shoulders, smiling:

"You squander your wickedness. You spoil things."

"And you want me, dear, to save my kindness and my wickedness for a serious investment?"

She drank Tokay wine.

Preceded by the powerful noise of his breathing, General Larivière approached with heavy state and sat between the two women, looking stubborn and satisfied, laughing in every wrinkle of his temples.

"How is M. Martin-Bellême? Always busy?"

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

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

"A Scandinavian play? Was it a success?

"Yes—I don't know. I was in the little green parlor, under the portrait of the Duc d'Orléans. M. Le Ménil came to me and did me one of those good turns that one never forgets. He saved me from M. Garain."

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

"Garain," he asked, "the Minister who was in the Cabinet when the princes were exiled?"

"Himself. I was excessively agreeable to him. He was talking to me of the needs of his heart and was looking at me with frightful tenderness. And from time to time he looked, with sighs, at the portrait of the Duc d'Orléans. I said to him: 'M. Garain, you are making a mistake. It is my sister-in-law who is an Orléanist. I am not.' At this moment M. Le Ménil came to escort me to the buffet. He paid great compliments—to my horses. He said, also, there was nothing so beautiful as the forest in winter. He talked about wolves. That refreshed me."

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

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

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

Princess Seniavine interrupted him:

"General, look and see how charming Madame Martin is. She is always charming, but at this moment she is prettier than ever. It is because she is bored. Nothing becomes her better than to be

bored. Since we have been here, we have bored her terribly. Look at her: her forehead clouded, her glance vague, her mouth dolorous. A victim."

She started, kissed Thérèse tumultuously, and fled, leaving the General astonished.

Madame Martin-Bellême prayed him not to listen to what the princess had said.

He collected himself and asked:

"How about your poets, Madame?"

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

"Yes, your poets. What has become of that M. Choulette, who calls on you with a red muffler?"

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

"Miss Bell? Isn't she that young person who looks, with her yellow crimped hair, like a little lapdog?"

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

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

They talked of the novel of the week. Madame

Marmet had dined often with the author, a young and very amiable man. Paul Vence thought the book annoying.

"Oh," sighed Madame Martin, "all books are annoying. But men are more annoying than books, and they are more exacting."

Madame Marmet said that her husband, who had much literary taste, had retained until the end of his days a horror for naturalism.

Widow of a member of the Académie des Inscriptions, she decked herself with her illustrious widowhood. She was sweet and modest in her black gown and under her beautiful white hair.

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

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

M. Daniel Salomon looked at Paul Vence through his square eye-glass with disdain.

Paul Vence surveyed the parlor with his eyes.

"You have beautiful things, Madame. That would be nothing. But you have only beautiful things, and things that become you."

She did not conceal her pleasure at hearing him talk in that way. She regarded Paul Vence as the only entirely intelligent man she knew. She had appreciated him before his books had made him celebrated. His ill health, his dark humor, his assiduous labor separated him from society. That little bilious man was not very pleasing; yet he

attracted her. She held in high esteem his profound irony, his wild pride, his talent ripened in solitude, and she admired him, with reason, as an excellent writer, the author of beautiful essays on art and on manners.

Little by little the parlor was filled by a brilliant crowd. In the large circle of the armchairs were Madame de Vresson, about whom people told frightful stories, and who kept, after twenty years of badly smothered scandal, eyes of a child on virginal cheeks; old Madame de Morlaine, who shouted in piercing cries her witty phrases; Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician; Madame Garain, the wife of the ex-Minister; three other ladies; and, standing against the mantelpiece, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles, editor of the *Journal des Débats*, a deputy who caressed his white whiskers while Madame de Morlaine shouted at him:

"Your article on bimetalism is a pearl, a jewel! Especially the end."

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

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

"He, nothing. His wife, everything."

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

"They are types that do not suit me. They wear their hearts on their hands and on their mouths. You present yourself at a club. They say, 'I promise to give you a white ball.' It will be an alabaster

ball—a snowball. They vote. It's a truffle. Life is a nasty thing when I think of it."

"Then don't think of it."

Daniel Salomon, who had joined them, whispered in their ears alcove secrets with a chaste voice. And at every strange revelation on Madame Raymond, on Madame Berthier, and on Princess Seniavine, he added negligently:

"Everybody knows it."

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

The latter went toward Madame Martin, and asked:

"When do you wish me to introduce Dechartre to you?"

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

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

"He is a delicate artist. He does not need to work in order to live. He caresses his figures with loving slowness. But do not be deceived about him, Madame. He knows and he feels. He would be a master if he did not live alone. I have known him since his childhood. People think that he is solitary and morose. He is passionate and timid. What he lacks, what he will lack always to reach the highest

point of his art, is simplicity of mind. He is disquiet, and he spoils his most beautiful impressions. In my opinion he was created less for sculpture than for poetry or philosophy. He knows a great deal, and you will be astonished by the wealth of his mind."

Madame Marmet approved.

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

"How is Toby?" asked Madame Martin. "M. Vence, do you know Toby? He has long silky hair and a lovely little black nose."

Madame Marmet was relishing praise of Toby, when an old man, pink and blonde, with curly hair, short-sighted, almost blind under his golden spectacles, low on his legs, striking against the furniture, bowing to empty armchairs, throwing himself into the looking-glasses, pushed his crooked nose before Madame Marmet, who looked at him indignantly.

It was M. Schmoll of the Académie des Inscriptions. He smiled, he turned a madrigal for Countess Martin with that hereditary harsh and fat voice with which the Jews, his fathers, pressed their creditors, the peasants of Alsace, of Poland, and of the

Crimea. He dragged his phrases heavily. This great philologist knew all the languages except French. And Madame Martin enjoyed his affable phrases, heavy and rusty like the iron-work of bric-à-brac shops, and among which fell dried leaves of the Anthology. M. Schmoll liked poets and women, and had wit.

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

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

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

"Oh, 'Yseult la Blonde,'" he exclaimed bitterly. "You are reading that book, Madame? Well, learn that Mlle. Vivian Bell has stolen an inscription from me, and that she has altered it, moreover, by putting it into verse. You will find it on page 109 of her book: 'A shade may weep over a shade.' You hear, Madame? 'A shade may weep over a shade.' Well, these words are translated textually from a funeral inscription which I was the first to publish and to illustrate. Last year, one day, when I was dining at your house, being placed by the side of Mlle. Bell, I quoted this phrase to her, and it pleased her a great deal. At her request, the next

day I translated into French the entire inscription and sent it to her. And now I find it changed in this volume of verses under this title: 'On the Sacred Way'—the sacred way, that's I."

And he repeated, in his bad humor:

"I, Madame, am the sacred way."

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

When he had gone, Countess Martin asked ingenuously of Paul Vence if he knew why good Madame Marmet had looked at M. Schmoll with so much anger and silence. He was surprised that she did not know.

"I never know anything."

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

"The day that poor Marmet was buried, melted snow was falling. We were wet and frozen to the bones. At the grave, in the wind, in the mud, Schmoll read under his umbrella a speech full of jovial cruelty and triumphant pity, which he brought afterward to the newspapers in a mourning carriage. An unskilful friend let Madame Marmet hear of it,

and she fainted. Is it possible, Madame, that you have not heard of this learned and ferocious quarrel?

"The Etruscan language was the cause of it. Marmet made it his unique study. He was surnamed Marmet the Etruscan. Neither he nor anyone else knew a word of that language, the last vestige of which is lost. Schmoll said incessantly to Marmet: 'You know that you do not know Etruscan, my dear colleague; that is why you are an honorable savant and a fair-minded man.' Piqued by his cruel praise, Marmet thought of learning Etruscan a little. He read to his colleague a memoir on the part played by flexions in the idiom of the ancient Tuscans."

Madame Martin asked what a flexion was.

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

"He reproached his young colleague—Marmet was not fifty years old—with reading Etruscan too well and Latin not well enough. From that time Marmet had no rest. At every meeting he was mocked with joyful ferocity; and, finally, in spite of his softness, he got angry. Schmoll is without rancor. It is a virtue of his race. He does not bear ill-will to those whom he persecutes. One day, as he went up the stairway of the Institute with Renan and Oppert, he met Marmet, and extended his hand to him. Marmet refused to take it, and said: 'I do

not know you.' 'Do you take me for a Latin inscription?' replied Schmoll. Marmet died and was buried because of that criticism. You know why his widow sees his enemy with horror."

"And I have made them dine together, side by side."

"Madame, it was not immoral, but it was cruel."

"My dear sir, I will shock you, perhaps; but if I had to choose, I would like better to do an immoral thing than to do a cruel thing."

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

"M. Vence, I think that you know M. Le Ménil."

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

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

"Yet Academicians go there," said M. Le Ménil. "I do not exaggerate their value, but they are an *élite.*"

Madame Martin smiled.

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

"What wolves?"

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

Paul Vence rose.

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

Madame Martin said:

"Oh, I do not ask for so much. People who are natural and show themselves as they are rarely annoy me, and sometimes they amuse me."

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

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

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

He entreated. Then she said:

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

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

"I do not want him to be introduced to me. He is to be introduced to me. He is a sculptor."

He deplored the fact that she needed to see new faces.

"A sculptor? They are generally brutal."

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

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

"My friend, you cannot complain of that. I did not even go to Madame Meillan's yesterday."

"You are right to show yourself there as little as possible. It isn't a house for you."

He explained. All the women who had gone there had had some adventure which people knew, which people related. Anyway, Madame Meillan favored intrigue. He gave examples. Madame Martin, however, her hands extended on the arms of the chair in charming restfulness, her head inclined, looked at the dying embers in the grate. Her thought had flown. Nothing of it remained on her face, a little saddened, nor on her languid body, more desirable than ever in that sleep of her mind. She kept for a while a profound immobility, which added to the attraction of her flesh the charm of things that art had created.

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

"We will go, to-morrow, if you wish, in far distant districts, in the odd districts where the poor people live. I like the old streets of misery."

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

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

She shook her head.

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

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

"I do not know if people talk about me. And what do I care? Nothing amounts to anything."

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

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

"I saw mamma; she was a good lady, very simple, and not very happy. I dreamed of a destiny different from hers. Why? I felt around me the

insipid taste of life, and breathed the future like an air full of salt and aroma. Why? What did I want, and what did I expect? Was I not warned enough of the sadness of everything?"

She was born wealthy, in the brilliancy of a fortune too new. Daughter of Montessuy, who, at first a clerk in a Parisian bank, founded and governed two great establishments, brought to sustain them the resources of a brilliant mind, invincible force of character, a rare alliance of ruse and honesty, and treated with the government as if he were a foreign power, she had grown in the historical castle of Joinville, bought, restored, and magnificently furnished by her father. Montessuy made life give all it could yield. An instinctive and powerful atheist, he wanted all the goods of the flesh and all the desirable things that this earth produces. He piled up pictures of masters, and precious sculptures. He enjoyed everything that is precious in society, with the brutality of his temperament.

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

She had never had any intimacy with her daughter, whom she felt instinctively too different from

herself, too free, too bold at heart; and divined in Thérèse, although she was sweet and good, the strong Montessuy blood, the ardor which had made her suffer so much, and which she forgave in her husband, but not in her daughter.

But Montessuy recognized his daughter and loved her. Like all great, carnivorous men, he had hours of charming gayety. Although he lived out of his house a great deal, he took breakfast with her almost every day, and sometimes took her out walking. He understood gowns and bibelots. He instructed and formed Thérèse. He amused her. Near her, his instinct for conquest inspired him still. He wanted to win always, and he won also his daughter. He separated her from her mother. Thérèse admired him, she adored him.

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

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

She had not really selected her husband. She did not know: she had permitted herself to be married by her father, who, then a widower, embarrassed by the delicate care of a girl, had wished to do things quickly and well. He considered the exterior advantages, estimated the eighty years of imperial nobility which Count Martin brought. The

idea never came to him that she might find love in marriage.

He flattered himself that she would find in it the satisfaction of the luxurious desires which he attributed to her, the joy of making a show, the common and strong grandeur, the vulgar pride, the material domination, which were for him all the value of life, having no ideas on the subject of the happiness of an honest woman in this world, but sure that his daughter would remain an honest woman.

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

After all, she was not so badly married. Her husband was as good as any other man. He had become quite bearable. Of all that she read in the ashes, in the veiled clearness of the lamps, of all her reminiscences, that of their married life was the most effaced. She found a few isolated traits of it, some absurd images, a vague and fastidious impression. The time had not seemed long and had left nothing behind. Six years had passed, and she did not even remember how she had regained her liberty, so prompt and easy had been her conquest of that husband, cold, sickly, selfish, and polite; of that man dried up and yellowed by business and politics, laborious, ambitious, and commonplace. He liked women only through vanity, and he had never loved his wife. The separation had been frank and complete. And since then, strangers to each other, they were

grateful to one another, tacitly, for their mutual freedom. She would have had some affection for him if she had not found him hypocritical and too subtle in the art of obtaining her signature when he needed money for enterprises wherein he placed more ostentation than avidity. That man with whom she dined and talked every day had no significance for her.

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

She yielded, two years later, to Robert Le Ménil, who had wanted her strongly, with all the warmth of his youth, with all the simplicity of his mind. She said to herself: "I gave myself to him because he loved me." It was the truth. The truth was, also, that a dumb and powerful instinct had impelled her, and that she had obeyed the obscure powers of her being. But these things were not she; what was she and her conscience was the fact that she had believed in the sincerity of his sentiment. She had yielded as soon as she had felt that she was loved. She had given herself quickly, simply. He thought that she had yielded easily. He was mistaken. She had felt the discouragement which the irreparable gives, and that sort of shame which comes of having suddenly something to conceal. Everything that had been whispered before her about other women resounded in her burning ears. But, proud and delicate, she took care to hide the value of the gift she was making. He never suspected her moral uneasiness, which lasted only a few days, and was replaced by perfect tranquillity. After three years she defended her conduct as innocent and natural. Having done harm to no one, she had no regrets. She was content. She was in love, she was loved. Doubtless she had not felt the intoxication she had expected, but does one ever feel it? She was the friend of the good and honest fellow, much liked by women who passed for disdainful and hard to please, and had a true affection for her. The pleasure which she gave him and the joy of being

beautiful for him attached her to this friend. He made life for her not constantly delightful, but easy to bear, and at times agreeable.

What she had not divined in her solitude, he had revealed to her. She knew herself when she knew him. It was a happy astonishment. Their sympathies were not in their minds. Her inclination toward him was simple and precise, and at this moment she found pleasure in the idea of meeting him the next day in the little apartment where they had met for three years. It was with a shake of the head and a shrug of her shoulders, more brutal than one would have expected from this exquisite woman, that she said to herself: "There! I need love."

II

It was no longer daylight when they came out of the little apartment in the Rue Spontini. Robert Le Ménil made a sign to a coachman, and went in the carriage with Thérèse. Close together, they rolled among the vague shadows, cut by sudden lights, through the ghostly city, having in their minds only impressions sweet and vanishing, like the clearness turning into dampness at the window panes. Everything around them seemed confused and fleeing, and they felt in their minds a sweet emptiness.

The carriage came near the Pont-Neuf. They stepped out. A dry cold made vivid the sombre January weather. Thérèse breathed joyfully under her veil the wind which swept on the hardened soil a dust white as salt. She was glad to go in freedom to unknown things. She liked to see the landscape of stones which the profound clearness of the air enveloped; to walk quickly and firmly on the quay where the trees displayed the black tulle of their branches on the horizon reddened by the smoke of the city; to look at the Seine. In the sky the first stars appeared.

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

He observed, too, that they scintillated a great

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

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

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

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

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

Among cups decorated with flowers she discovered a little knife, the ivory handle of which represented a tall and thin woman. She bought it for a few cents. It pleased her, because she already had the fork. Le Ménil confessed that he had no taste for such things, but his aunt knew a great deal about them. At Caen all the merchants knew her. She had restored and furnished her house in proper style. This house was noted in 1690. In a hall of

it were white cases full of books. His aunt had wished to put them in order. She had found frivolous books in them, ornamented with engravings so unconventional that she had burned them.

"Is she silly, your aunt?" asked Thérèse.

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

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

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

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

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

"I haven't a taste, I have tastes. You do not blame them all, I suppose."

He did not blame her. He was afraid only that

she might do herself harm by receiving a bohemian who had not a place in respectable houses.

She exclaimed:

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

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

that are easy to understand. He is afraid of altering her moral beauty by taking her out of the shame where she lives in perfect simplicity and admirable destitution."

Le Ménil shrugged his shoulders.

"But that Choulette is crazy, and Paul Vence has no right to tell you such stories. I am not austere, assuredly; but there are immoralities that disgust me."

They were walking at random. She fell into a dream.

"Yes, morality, I know—duty! But duty—it takes the devil to discover it. I can assure you that I do not know where duty is. It's like Miss's turtle. We spent all the evening looking for it under the furniture, and when we had found it, we went to bed."

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

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

She had ceased to listen. She was looking at a

woman selling fried potatoes. She realized that she was hungry and wanted to eat fried potatoes.

He remonstrated:

"Nobody knows of what they are made."

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

While she was eating them, he led her into deserted streets far from the gas lights. Thus they found themselves in front of the Cathedral. The moon silvered the roofs.

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

He smiled a tender smile.

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

It was at the Joinville castle that he had seen her for the first time, and had at once loved her. It was there, one night, that he had told her of his love, and that she had listened, dumb, with a pained ex-

pression on her mouth and a vague one in her eyes.

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

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

She was walking toward the Cathedral. She was thinking: "It is an enormous beast, a beast of the Apocalypse."

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

"Thank you, I have some."

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

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

"Let us go in," she said.

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

the last groans of organs that were hushed. She trembled in the silence, and said:

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

He replied:

"We have to believe in something. If there were no God, if our souls were not immortal, it would be too sad."

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

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

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

Under the trees he took her hand and kissed her.

"Is it not rare, Thérèse, to love as we love each other?"

"Rare? I don't know; but I think that you love me."

"And you?"

"I, too, love you."

"And you will love me always?"

"What does one ever know?"

And seeing the face of her friend darken:

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

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

"You know very well, my friend, that I am not frivolous."

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

Thérèse returned home on foot. Opposite the Trocadero she remembered what the old flower woman had said: "One can see that you are young." The words came back to her, not salacious, but sad. "One can see that you are young." Yes, she was young, she was loved, and she was bothered to death.

III

In the centre of the table, a basket contained flowers in its large circle of gilded bronze, where there were eagles among stars and bees, under handles formed like horns of plenty. On the sides winged Victories supported the branches of candelabra. This centrepiece of the Empire style had been given by Napoleon, in 1812, to Count Martin de l'Aisne, grandfather of the actual Count Martin-Bellême. Martin de l'Aisne, a deputy to the Legislative Corps in 1809, was appointed the following year member of the Committee on Finance, the assiduous and secret works of which suited his laborious temperament. Although a Liberal, he pleased the Emperor by his application and his exact honesty. For two years he was under a rain of favors. In 1813 he formed part of the moderate majority which approved the report in which Laine censured power and misfortune, by giving to the Empire tardy advice. January 1, 1814, he went with his colleagues to the Tuileries. The Emperor received them in a frightful manner. He charged on their ranks. Violent and sombre, in the horror of his present strength and of his coming fall, he stunned them with his anger and his contempt.

He came and went through their lines, and sud-

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

This son had married Mademoiselle Bellême, daughter of the first president of the court of Bourges, and with her the political glories of a family which gave three ministers to the moderate monarchy. The Bellêmes, advocates in the time of Louis XV, elevated the Jacobin origins of the Mar-

tins. The second Count Martin was a member of all the Assemblies until his death in 1881. His son took without trouble his seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Having married Mademoiselle Thérèse Montessuy, whose dowry supported his political fortune, he appeared discreetly among the four or five bourgeois, titled and wealthy, who rallied to democracy, and were received without much bad grace by the Republicans whom aristocracy flattered.

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

"Every false idea is dangerous. People think that dreamers do no harm. They are mistaken: dreamers do a great deal of harm. The most inoffensive Utopias really exercise a noxious influence. They tend to inspire disgust with reality."

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

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

Montessuy said:

"Well, M. Garain, be sincere. Confess that there are no reforms to be made, and that it is as much as one can do to change the color of postage stamps. Good or bad, things are as they should be. Yes, things are as they should be; but they change incessantly. Since 1870 the industrial and financial situation of the country has gone through four or five revolutions which political economists had not foreseen and which they do not yet understand. In society, as in nature, transformations are accomplished from within."

In matters of government he held to short and neat views. Strongly attached to the present, and heedless of the future, the Socialists troubled him little. Without caring whether the sun and capital should be extinguished some day, he enjoyed them.

According to him, one should let himself be carried. None but fools resisted the current, and none but fools tried to go in front of it.

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

"The Middle Ages," he said, "are closed only in the historical manuals which are given to pupils to spoil their minds. In reality, barbarians are always barbarians. Israel's mission is to instruct nations. It was Israel which, in the Middle Ages, brought to Europe the wisdom of ages. Socialism frightens you. It is a Christian evil, like priesthood. And anarchy? Do you not recognize in it the plague of the Albigeois and of the Vaudois? The Jews, who instructed and polished Europe, are the only ones who can save it to-day from the evangelical evil by which it is devoured. But they have not fulfilled their duty. They have made Christians of themselves among the Christians. And God punishes them. He permits them to be exiled and to be despoiled. Anti-Semitism is making fearful progress everywhere. From Russia my co-religionists are expelled like savage beasts. In France, civil

and military employments are closing against Jews. They have no longer access to aristocratic circles. My nephew, young Isaac Coblentz, has had to renounce a diplomatic career, after brilliantly passing his admission examination. The wives of several of my colleagues, when Madame Schmoll calls on them, display with affectation under her eyes anti-Semitic newspapers. And would you believe that the Minister of Public Instruction has refused to give me the cross of the Legion of Honor for which I have applied? There's ingratitude! Anti-Semitism is death—it is death, do you hear?—to European civilization."

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

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

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

This question was lost in the murmur of the dialogues wherein were mingled foreign politics, exhibitions of paintings, fashionable scandals, and Aca-

demic speeches. They talked of the new novel and of the coming play. This was a comedy. Napoleon was an incidental rôle in it.

The conversation fixed itself on Napoleon, often placed on the stage and newly studied in books read by many persons, an object of curiosity, a personage in the fashion, no longer a popular hero, a half god wearing boots for his country, as in the days when Norvins and Beranger, Charlet and Raffet were composing his legend; but a curious personage, an amusing type in his living infinity, a figure whose style is pleasant to artists, whose movements attract the gadabouters.

Garain, who had founded his political fortune on hatred of the Empire, judged sincerely that this return of national taste was only an absurd infatuation. He discovered no danger in it and felt no fear about it. In him fear was sudden and ferocious. For the moment he was very quiet: he talked neither of prohibiting performances nor of seizing books, nor of imprisoning authors, nor of suppressing anything. Calm and severe, he saw in Napoleon only Taine's *condottière* who kicked Volney in the stomach. Everybody wished to define the true Napoleon. Count Martin, in the face of the imperial centre-piece and of the winged Victories, talked suitably of Napoleon as an organizer and administrator, and placed him in a high position as president of the state council, where his words brought light into obscure questions. Garain affirmed that in his sessions, only too famous, Napoleon, under pretext of

taking snuff, asked the councillors to pass to him their gold boxes ornamented with miniatures and decked with diamonds, which they never saw again. The anecdote was told to him by the son of Mounier himself.

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

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

M. Daniel Salomon observed that the mask about which Duviquet talked, the plaster cast taken on the inanimate face of the emperor, and brought to Europe by Dr. Antommarchi, had been moulded in bronze and published by subscription for the first time in 1833, under Louis Philippe, and had then

inspired surprise and mistrust. People suspected that Italian, a comedy druggist, talkative and famished, of having tried to make fun of people. Disciples of Dr. Gall, whose system was then in favor, regarded the mask as suspicious. They did not find in it the bumps of genius; and the forehead, examined in accordance with the master's theories, presented nothing remarkable in its formation.

"Precisely," said Princess Seniavine. "Napoleon was remarkable only for having kicked Volney in the stomach and stolen a snuff-box ornamented with diamonds. M. Garain has just taught us."

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

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

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

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

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

"Napoleon committed faults; in his position he should not have committed any." And he hushed, very red.

Madame Martin asked:

"And you, M. Vence, what do you think of Napoleon?"

"Madame, I have not much love for sword bearers, and conquerors seem to me to be dangerous fools. In spite of everything, that figure of the Emperor interests me as it interests the public. I find character and life in it. There is no poem or novel which is worth the 'Memorial of Saint Helena,' although it is written in ridiculous fashion. What I think of Napoleon, if you wish to know, is that, made for glory, he had the brilliant simplicity of a hero of an epic poem. A hero must be human. Napoleon was human."

"Oh, oh!" people exclaimed.

But Paul Vence continued:

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

had, for a moment, the least care for what he could not reach."

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

"Surely," continued Paul Vence, "he had enough genius to be brilliant in the civil and military circus of the world. But he had not speculative genius. That genius is another pair of sleeves, as Buffon says. We have a collection of his writings and speeches. His style has movement and imagination. And in this mass of thoughts one cannot find a philosophic curiosity, not one expression of anxiety about the unknowable, not an expression of fear of the mystery which surrounds destiny. At Saint Helena, when he talks of God and of the soul, he seems to be a little fourteen-year-old scholar. Thrown into the world, his mind found itself fit for the world, and embraced it all. Nothing of that mind was lost in the infinite. A poet, he knew only the poetry of action. He limited to the earth his powerful dream of life. In his terrible and touching puerility he believed that a man could be great, and neither time nor misfortune made him lose that naïveté. His youth, or rather a sublime adolescence, lasted as long as he lived, because the days of his life did not add themselves to one another in order to form a conscious maturity. Such is the prodigious state of men of action. They are entirely in the moment when they are living, and their genius is concentrated on one point. The hours of their existence are not attached to one another by a chain

of grave and disinterested meditations. They succeed themselves in a series of acts. They lack interior life. This defect is particularly visible in Napoleon, who never lived within himself. From this is derived the frivolity of temperament which made him support easily the enormous load of his evils and of his faults. His mind, ever new, was born every day. He had more than any other person a capacity for diversion.. The first day that he saw the sun rise on his funeral rock at Saint Helena, he jumped from his bed, whistling the air of romance. It was the peace of a mind superior to fortune; it was the frivolity of a mind prompt in resurrection. He lived from the outside."

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

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

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

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

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

Garain, while complimenting Paul Vence on his

brilliant paradox, regretted that wit should be exercised at the expense of morality and justice.

"There is one principle," he said; "it is that men should be judged by their acts."

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

The sound of voices was mingled with the clear tintillation of the silverware. A warm air bathed the room. The roses shed their leaves on the cloth. Thoughts ascended more ardent into brains.

General Larivière fell into dreams.

"When they shall have split my ear," he said to his neighbor, "I will go to live at Tours. I will cultivate flowers."

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

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

The Princess teased the Deputy.

"Then you do not know, M. Garain, that one does the same things for very different reasons?"

Montessuy said she was right.

"It is very true, as you say, Madame, that actions prove nothing. This thought is striking in an episode of the life of Don Juan, which was known neither to Molière nor to Mozart, and which is revealed in an English legend, a knowledge of which I owe to my friend James Russell Lowell of London. One learns from it that the great seducer lost

his time with three women. One was a bourgeoise: she was in love with her husband; the other was a nun: she did not consent to violate her vows; the third, who had for a long time led a life of debauchery, had become ugly, and was a servant in a den. After what she had done, after what she had seen, love signified nothing to her. These three women had the same behavior for very different reasons. An action proves nothing. It is the mass of actions, their weight, their sum total, which makes the value of the human being."

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

She rose and took the General's arm.

In going to the parlor the Princess said:

"Thérèse is right. Other actions do not resemble us at all. They are little negresses which were brought to life when we were asleep."

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

Madame Martin served the coffee with her young cousin. She complimented Paul Vence on what he had said at table.

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

Then turning toward Dechartre:

"Do you like Napoleon?"

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

"M. Dechartre, why did you not say this at dinner? But, I see: you consent to have wit only in little corners."

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

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

She wanted to know if the book was written for women. He said no.

"You are wrong, M. Vence, not to write for women. A superior man can do nothing else for them."

And, as he wished to know what gave her that idea:

"It is," she said, "because I see all the intelligent women love fools."

"Who bore them."

"Certainly! But superior men would bother them more. They would have more resources to employ in annoying them. But tell me the subject of your novel."

"Do you care?"

"Oh, I care for nothing."

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

"Oh! One must be sensual to be human?"

"Certainly, Madame. Pity is in the physical frame as tenderness is, skin deep. He is not intelligent enough to doubt. He believes. He believes what he has read. And he has read that to establish universal happiness it is enough to destroy society. Thirst for martyrdom devours him. One morning, having kissed his mother, he goes out; he watches for the socialist deputy of his district, sees him, throws himself on him, and buries a poniard in his stomach. Long live anarchy! He is arrested, measured, photographed, questioned, judged, condemned to death, and guillotined. That is my novel."

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

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

"I had come to look at the cupola which Delacroix has painted in a wood of bluish myrtles with heroes and sages of antiquity. He had that wretched and pitiful air. He was warming himself. He smelled of wet cloth. He was talking with old colleagues and saying, while rubbing his hands: 'The proof that the Republic is the best of governments is that in 1871 it could kill in a week sixty thousand insurgents without becoming unpopular. After such a repression any other regime would have rendered itself impossible.'"

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

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

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

"I met this morning, in the park, Baronne Warburg, mounted on a magnificent horse. She said, 'General, how do you manage to have such fine

horses?' I replied: 'Madame, to have fine horses, you must be either very wealthy or very smart.'"

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

Paul Vence came near Countess Martin:

"I know the senator's name: it is Lyer. He is the vice-president of a political group, and author of a book entitled, 'The Crime of December 2d.'"

The General continued:

"The weather was horrible. I went into a hut. Le Mēnil was there. I was in bad humor. He was making fun of me, I saw. He imagines that because I am a general I must like the wind and melted snow. It's absurd. He said that he liked bad weather, and that he was to go fox-hunting with friends next week."

There was a pause; the General continued:

"I wish him much joy, but I don't envy him. Fox-hunting is not agreeable."

"But it's useful," said Montessuy.

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"Foxes are dangerous for chicken coops in the spring when they have to feed their families."

"Foxes are smart poachers, who do less harm to farmers than to hunters. I know something of this."

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

"He didn't tell me that he was going away!"

"Of what are you thinking, dear?"

"Of nothing interesting."

IV

In the little dark room, dumb with curtains, portières, cushions, bear skins, and carpets of the Orient, swords in the light of the fire shone on the walls among the faded favors of the cotillons of three winters. The rosewood chiffonier was surmounted by a silver cup, a premium from some sporting society. On the porcelain plaques of the table a crystal glass, on which ran flowers of gilded brass, held branches of white lilacs, and everywhere lights palpitated in the warm shadow. Thérèse and Robert, their eyes accustomed to obscurity, moved easily among these familiar objects. He lighted a cigarette while she arranged her hair, standing before the mirror, where she could hardly see herself. She took pins from the little Bohemian glass cup which was on the table as she had done for three years. He looked at her passing quickly through the gold ripples of her hair her fingers of light, while her face, hardened and bronzed by the shadow, acquired a mysterious expression. She did not talk.

He said to her:

"You are not cross now, my dear?"

And, as he insisted upon her replying:

"What do you wish me to say, my friend? I can

only repeat what I said at first. I think it strange that I have to learn of your projects from General Larivière."

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

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

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

"Then you are going?"

"Next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I shall be away for ten days at most."

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

"Is it something that you cannot postpone?"

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

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

"Is fox-hunting interesting?"

"Oh, yes, very. The fox has stratagems that you must unravel. The intelligence of these animals is

really admirable. I have observed at night a fox hunting a rabbit. He had organized a real hunt. I can assure you that it is not easy to dislodge a fox. Caumont has an excellent cellar. I do not care for it, but it is generally appreciated. I will bring you half a dozen skins."

"What do you want me to do with them?"

"Oh, you can make carpets of them."

"Oh, and you will be hunting for eight days?"

"Not entirely. I will go for two days to my aunt's. She is waiting for me. Last year at this time there was a beautiful reunion there. She had with her her two daughters and her three nieces with their husbands. All five are pretty, gay, charming, and irreproachable. I will probably find them at the commencement of next month, assembled for my aunt's birthday, and I shall stay for two days at her house."

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

"But you, Thérèse?"

"I, my friend? I can take care of myself."

The fire was going out. The shadow was growing thicker between them. She said in a dreamy tone:

"It is true that it is never prudent to leave a woman alone."

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

"You love me?"

"Oh, I can assure you that I do not love another—but——"

"What do you mean?"

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

He lighted the candelabra. His harsh and frank face was lighted up. He looked at her with a confidence that came less from his conceit than from the need of regular dignity which was in him. He believed in her through prejudice of education and simplicity of intelligence.

"Thérèse, I love you, and you love me, I know. Why do you torment me? Sometimes you are painfully harsh."

She shook her little head brusquely.

"What will you have? I am harsh and obstinate. It's in the blood. I take it from my father. You know Joinville; you have seen the castle, the ceilings, the tapestries, the gardens, the park, the hunting grounds; you said that there were none better in France; but you have not seen my father's workshop—a white wood table and a mahogany bureau. It's from there that everything comes, my friend. On that table my father made figures for forty years; at first in a little room, then in the apartment where I was born. We were not very wealthy then. I am a *parvenu's* daughter, or a con-

queror's daughter, it's all the same. We are interested people. My father wanted to earn money, to possess what he could buy, that is, everything. I want to earn and keep—what? I do not know—the happiness that I have—or that I have not. I have my way of being exacting. I want dreams and illusions. Oh, I know very well that all this is not worth the trouble of a woman giving herself to a man; but it is the trouble which is worth something, because my trouble is myself, my life. I like to enjoy what I like, or think what I like. I do not wish to lose. I am like papa: I want what is due to me. And then——"

She lowered her voice:

"And then, I have senses. There, my dear, I bother you. What will you have? You shouldn't have loved me."

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

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

"You know very well, Thérèse, that I wish to do nothing except to be agreeable to you. Don't be capricious with me."

"And why should not I be capricious? If I gave myself to you, it was not because I was reasonable, nor because I was beautiful. It was because I was —capricious."

He looked at her, astonished and saddened.

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

He replied, very sincerely:

"If I had not promised, I swear to you, Thérèse, that I would sacrifice that small pleasure with great joy."

She felt that he told the truth. He fulfilled his engagements in the smallest matters, incessantly bound by his word; he carried into society an exact conscience. She saw that if she insisted he would not go. But it was too late: she did not wish to win. She would seek hereafter only the violent pleasure of losing. She pretended to take his reason seriously, and said:

"Ah, you have promised!"

And she yielded with perfidy.

Surprised at first, he congratulated himself on having made her listen to reason. He was grateful to her for not having been stubborn. He put his

arm around her waist and kissed her on the neck and eyelids as a reward. He said:

"We may meet three or four times before I go, and more, if you wish. I will wait for you as often as you wish to come. Do you wish to come to-morrow?"

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

Softly she told the things that prevented her. The obstacles seemed light: calls, a gown to be tried on, a charity fair, exhibitions. When she examined them, the difficulties became thicker: the calls could not be postponed; there were three fairs; the exhibitions would soon close. In fine, it was impossible for her to see him again before his leaving.

As it was natural to his temperament to appreciate excuses of that sort, he failed to observe that it was not natural for Thérèse to offer them. Embarrassed by this tissue of mundane obligations, he did not persist; but he remained dumb and wretched.

With her left arm she raised the portière, placed her right hand on the key of the door; and there, in the panels of sapphire and ruby colors from the Oriental curtain, her head turned toward the friend whom she was leaving, she said a little mockingly, and almost tragically:

"Good-by, Robert. Enjoy yourself. My calls, my errands, your little travels are nothing. It is true that destiny is made of such things. Good-by."

She went out. He would have liked to accom-

pany her, but he made it a point not to show himself with her in the street, when she did not absolutely force him to do so.

In the street, Thérèse felt suddenly that she was alone, alone in the world, without joy and without pain. She returned to her house on foot, as was her habit. It was night; the air was frozen, clear, and tranquil. But the avenues through which she walked, in a shadow studded with lights, enveloped her with that lukewarmness of cities, so sweet to city folks, and which they feel even in the cold of winter. She walked between the lines of huts and little mansions, remains of the field days of Auteuil, which tall houses interrupted here and there. These shops of little merchants, these monotonous windows, were nothing to her. Yet she felt that she was under the mystery of the friendship of things, and it seemed to her that the stones, the doors of houses, the lights behind the window panes, were favorable to her. She was alone, and she wanted to be alone.

The steps which she was taking between the two houses wherein her habits were almost equal, the steps which she had taken so often, to-day seemed to her irrevocable. Why? What had that day brought? Hardly a quarrel. And yet that day had a feeble, strange, persistent taste, a taste which would never leave her. What had happened? Nothing. And that nothing effaced everything. She had a sort of obscure certainty that she would never return to that room which so recently enclosed

the most secret and dearest phases of her life. She had loved Robert with the gravity of a necessary joy. Made to be loved, and very reasonable, she had not lost in the abandonment of her person that instinct of reflection, that necessity for security, which was so strong in her. She had not chosen: one seldom chooses. She had not allowed herself to be taken at random and by surprise. She had done what she had wanted to do, as much as one does what one wants to do in such things. She had nothing to regret. He had been to her what it was his duty to be. She felt, in spite of everything, that all was at an end. She thought, with dry sadness, that three years of her life had been given to an honest man who loved her and whom she loved. "For I loved him. I had to love him in order to give myself to him." But she could not feel again the sentiments of other times, the movements of her mind when she had yielded. She recalled small and insignificant circumstances: the flowers on the wall paper and the pictures in the room. She recalled the words, a little ridiculous and almost touching, which he had said to her. But it seemed to her that the adventure had occurred to another woman, to a stranger whom she did not like and whom she hardly understood.

And what had happened a moment ago was far distant now. The bed, the lilacs in the crystal glass, the little saucer of Bohemian glass where she found her pins—she saw all these things as through a window by which one passes in the street. She was

without bitterness, and even without sadness. She had nothing to forgive, alas! This absence for a week was not a betrayal, it was not a fault against her; it was nothing, it was everything. It was the end. She knew it. She wanted to cease. She wanted to do this as the stone that falls wishes to fall. It was a consenting of all the forces of her being and of her nature. She said to herself: "I have no reason to love him less. Do I love him no more? Did I ever love him?" She did not know and she did not care to know.

Three years, during which there had been months when they had seen each other every day—was all this nothing? Life is not much. And what one puts in it, how little that is!

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

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

While she was thinking, passers-by, deceived by

the simplicity of her dress, followed her. One of them made propositions to her: a dinner and the theatre. It amused her. She was not at all disturbed; this was not a crisis. She thought: "How do other women manage such things? And I, who promised myself not to spoil my life. For what life is worth, there is no use in troubling."

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

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

"Beautiful movements," he added, "are music for the eyes."

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

He, too, liked to walk in populous towns and in beautiful fields. The mystery of highways tempted him. He liked to travel. Although voyages had become common and easy, they retained for him their

powerful charm. He had seen gilded days and transparent nights, Greece, Egypt, and the Bosphorus; but it was to Italy that he returned always, as to his mind's mother country.

"I am going next week," he said. "I want to see again Ravenna asleep in the black pines of its sterile shore. Have you seen Ravenna, Madame? It is an enchanted tomb where sparkling phantoms appear. The magic of death lies there. The mosaic work of Saint Vitale, with their barbarous angels and their aureolated empresses, make one feel the monstrous delights of the Orient. Despoiled to-day of its silver lamels, the grave of Galla Placidia is frightful under its crypt, luminous and dark. When one looks through an opening in the sarcophagus, it seems as if one saw the daughter of Theodosius, seated on her golden chair, stiff in her gown studded with stones and embroidered with scenes from the Old Testament; her beautiful, cruel face preserved hard and black with aromatic plants, and her ebony hands immovable on her knees. For thirteen centuries she retained this funereal majesty, until one day a child passed a candle through the opening of the grave and burned the body."

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

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

"She must have been pretty," said Madame Martin. "You have made me see her too vividly in her

tomb. She frightens me. Will you not go to Venice, M. Dechartre? Or are you tired of gondolas, of canals bordered by palaces, and of the pigeons in St. Marc's Square? I confess that I still like Venice, after having been there three times."

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

Whenever he went there, from a sculptor he became a painter, and made studies. It is the atmosphere of it that he would like to paint.

"Elsewhere," he said, "even in Florence, the sky is too high. At Venice it is everywhere; it caresses the earth and the water. It envelops lovingly the leaden domes and the marble façades, and throws into the iris-colored space its pearls and its crystals. The beauty of Venice is in its sky and its women. What pretty creatures the Venetian women are! Their flesh is so thin and subtle under their black shawls. If nothing remained of these women except a bone, one would find in that bone the charm of their exquisite structure. Sundays, at church, they form laughing groups, agitated, a mass of hips a little pointed, of elegant necks, of flowery smiles, of inflamed glances. And all that bends with a suppleness of young animals at the passage of a priest whose head resembles that of Vitellius, who carries the chalice, preceded by two choir boys."

He walked with unequal step, following the trend of his ideas, at times quick, at times slow. She walked more regularly, and tended to outstrip him. He looked at her sidewise, and liked the supple and firm manner of her walk. He observed the little

shake which at moments her obstinate head gave to the holly on her toque.

Without thinking of it, he was subject to the charm of that meeting, almost intimate, with a young woman almost unknown.

They had reached the place where the large avenue unfolds its four rows of trees. They were following the parapet of stone surmounted by a curtain of boxwood which utterly hides the ugliness of the buildings on the quay. Beyond one felt the presence of the river, by the milky atmosphere which in misty days rests on water. The sky was clear. The lights of the city were mingled with the stars. At the south shone the three gold nails of the Orion belt.

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

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

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

"They are almost all pretty, Madame. I speak

of the common girls—the cigar girls, the working girls in the glass shops. The others are commonplace enough."

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

"Society women? Oh, some of them are charming. As for loving them, that's a great affair."

"Do you think so?"

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

V

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

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

She could not refrain from smiling.

"But Gavaut, my friend, is a poor devil who never thought of anything except going out of the crowd of those who are dying of hunger. Gavaut never had any ideas except at his elbows. Does

anybody take him seriously in the political world? You may be sure that he never gave an illusion to any woman, not even his wife. And yet to give that sort of illusion, one doesn't need much, I can assure you." And brusquely she added:

"You know Miss Bell has invited me to spend a month with her at Fiesole. I have accepted; I am going."

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

At once she answered:

"With Madame Marmet."

There was no objection to make. Madame Marmet was a companion perfectly honorable, and specially designed for Italy, where her husband had made diggings in graveyards. He asked only:

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

"Next week."

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

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

He obstinately tried to flatter her vanity, unable

to realize that her mind was not mundane. She replied, negligently, that it might be a pretty voyage. Then he praised the mountains, the ancient cities, the bazaars, the costumes, the arms and armor.

He added:

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

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

He became attentive to her wants.

"You are not eating. You are ruining your stomach."

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

"Something might happen requiring the aid of all our friends. You have not followed the march of events, Thérèse?"

"No, my friend."

"I am sorry. You have judgment, liberality of mind. If you had followed the march of events you would have been struck by the current which is leading the country back to moderate opinions. The country is tired of exaggerations. It rejects the men compromised by radical politics and religious

persecution. Some day or other it will be necessary to make over a Casimir-Perier ministry with other men, and that day——"

He stopped: really she listened too little and too badly.

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

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

"But, my friend, since I am to go next week——"

This filled him with consternation.

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

She extended her hand to him.

"I am very glad to see you. I am going out of town. Paris is cold and black. This weather tires

and saddens me. I am going to Florence, for six weeks, to Miss Bell's."

M. Martin-Bellême lifted his eyes to heaven.

Vence asked if she had not been in Italy often.

"Three times; but I saw nothing. This time I want to see, to throw myself into things. From Florence I shall take walks into Tuscany, into Umbria. And, at the end, I will go to Venice."

"You will do well. Venice is the rest of Sunday in the grand week of creative and divine Italy."

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

"Yes, at Venice the sky is a colorist. At Florence it is witty. An old author has said: 'The sky of Florence is light and subtle, and feeds the beautiful ideas of men.' I have lived delicious days in Tuscany. I wish I could live them again."

"Come and see me there."

He sighed:

The newspaper, the books, the daily work prevented him.

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

"Oh, my books! One never says in a book what one wishes to say. It is impossible to express oneself. Oh, I know how to talk with my pen as well as any other person; but to talk or to write, what a

pity! How wretched are these little signs with which are formed syllables, words, and phrases. What becomes of the idea, the beautiful idea, which these wicked hieroglyphics hide? What does the reader make of my writing? A series of false sense, of counter sense, and of nonsense. To read, to hear, is to translate. There are beautiful translations, perhaps. There are no faithful translations. Why should I care for the admiration which they give to my books, since it is what they have put in them that they admire? Every reader substitutes his visions in the place of ours. We furnish him with the means to rub his imagination. It is a horrible thing to be a cause of such exercises. It is an infamous profession."

"You are jesting," said M. Martin.

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

"There are gestures," said Paul Vence.

"Don't you think, M. Vence, that gestures are a form of hieroglyphics? Give me news of M. Choulette. I do not see him any more."

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

"The idea, Madame, came to him in a marvellous fashion one day that he had gone to call on Maria

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

Madame Martin asked how much of this story

was really true. Vence replied that she must not try to learn.

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

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

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

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

Madame Martin said that nobody interested her as much as Choulette. Paul Vence said that he was a great human singularity.

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

She interrupted him:

"While I think of it, I want to congratulate you

on your friend Dechartre. He has a charming mind."

She added:

"Perhaps he is a little too timid."

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

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

"You have known his parents?"

"Yes. He is the only son of Philippe Dechartre."

"The architect?"

"The architect who, under Napoleon III, restored so many castles and churches in Touraine and the Orléanais. He had taste and knowledge. Solitary and very quiet, he had the imprudence to attack Viollet-le-Duc, then all-powerful. He reproached him with wanting to reëstablish buildings in their primitive plan, as they had been, or as they might have been, at the beginning. Philippe Dechartre, on the contrary, wished that everything which centuries had added little by little to a church, an abbey, or a castle should be respected. To make anachronisms disappear, and bring a building back to its primitive unity, seemed to him to be a scientific barbarity as dreadful as that of ignorance. He said, he repeated incessantly: 'It is a crime to efface the successive imprints made in stone by the hand and mind of our ancestors. New stones cut in old style are false witnesses.' He wished to limit the task of the archæologic architect to that of sup-

porting and consolidating walls. He was right. Everybody said that he was wrong. He achieved his ruin by dying young, while his rival triumphed. He bequeathed an honest fortune to his widow and his son. Jacques Dechartre was brought up by his mother, who adored him. I do not think that maternal tenderness was ever more impetuous. Jacques is a charming fellow; but he is a spoiled child."

"Yet he looks so indifferent, so easy to get along with, so distant from everything."

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

"Does he like women?"

"Why do you ask this?"

"Oh, it isn't for a marriage."

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

Madame Martin remembered Jeanne Tancrede; not very pretty, but well-shaped, with a grace a little slow in her rôles of love.

"Herself," replied Paul Vence. "They lived almost together in a little house at Auteuil. I often called on them. I found him lost in his dreams, forgetting to model a figure drying under its cloths, alone with himself, pursuing his idea, absolutely incapable of listening to anybody; she, studying her parts, her complexion burned by rouge, her eyes tender, pretty by her intelligence and her

activity. She complained to me that he was inattentive, cross, and ugly. She loved him and deceived him only to have rôles. And when she deceived him, it was done at once. Afterward she never thought of it. A serious woman. But she was imprudent; she went out with Joseph Springer in the hope that he would make her a member of the Comédie Française. Dechartre left her. Now she finds it more practical to live with her managers, and Jacques finds it more agreeable to travel."

"Does he regret her?"

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

Brusquely she changed the subject.

"And your novel, M. Vence?"

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

He rose and said good-night.

She called him back.

"M. Vence, you know that it is serious. Bring Choulette to me."

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

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

She replied that she would travel with Madame Marmet, and that there was nothing objectionable in that.

"But you announce your going to everybody, and do not even know if Madame Marmet can accompany you."

"Oh, Madame Marmet will soon pack her boxes. Nothing retains her in Paris except her dog. She will leave it to you; you'll take care of it."

"Does you father know of your project?"

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

"Your father is full of sense and of tact. I have been happy to find him agreeing with me several times in the advices which I have permitted myself to give you. He thinks, as I do, that Madame Meillan's

house is not a fit one for you to visit. The people who go there are mixed, and the mistress of the house favors intrigue. You are wrong, I must say, not to take account of what people think. I am mistaken if your father does not think it singular that you should go away with so much frivolity, and the absence will be the more remarked, my dear friend, since circumstances have made me eminent in the course of this legislature. My merit has nothing to do with the case, surely. But if you had consented to listen to me at dinner I would have demonstrated to you that the group of politicians to which I belong has almost reached power. It is not in such a moment that you should renounce your duties as mistress of the house. You understand this yourself."

She replied:

"You bother me."

And, turning her back to him, she closed herself in her room.

That night, in her bed, she opened a book, as she always did before going to sleep. It was a novel. She was turning the leaves with indifference, when her eyes fell on these lines:

"Love is like devotion: it comes late. A woman is hardly in love or devout at twenty, unless she has a special disposition to be either, a sort of native sanctity. Women who are predestined to love, themselves struggle for a long time against that grace of love which is more terrible than the thunderbolt which fell on the road to Damascus.

A woman most often yields to the passion of love only when age or solitude does not frighten her. Passion is an arid desert, a burning desert. Passion is profane asceticism, as harsh as religious asceticism. Great women lovers are as rare as great penitent women. Those who know life well, and society, know that women do not easily place on their delicate chests the cilicium of veritable love. They know that nothing is less common than sacrifice among them. And consider how much a mundane woman must sacrifice when she is in love—liberty, quietness, charming play of a free mind, coquetry, amusement, pleasure—she loses everything.

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

Thérèse closed the book and thought that these were dreams of novelists who did not know life. She knew very well that there was in reality neither

Carmel of passion nor cilicium of love, nor beautiful and terrible vocation against which the predestined one resisted in vain; she knew very well that love was only a short intoxication from which one recovered a little sadder. And yet, perhaps, she did not know everything ; perhaps there were loves in which one was deliciously lost. She put out her lamp. The dreams of her first youth came back to her.

VI

It was raining. Madame Martin-Bellême saw confusedly through the glass of her *coupé* the multitude of umbrellas passing like black turtles under the waters of the skies. She was thinking. Her thoughts were gray and indistinct, like the aspect of the streets and the squares that the rain effaced.

She no longer knew why the idea had come to her to spend a month at Miss Bell's. Truly she had never known. It was like a spring, at first hidden by leaves, and now forming the current of a profound and rapid brook. She remembered that Tuesday night at dinner she had said suddenly that she wanted to go, but she could not ascend to the first flush of that desire. It was not the wish to act toward Robert Le Ménil as he was acting toward her. Doubtless she thought it excellent to go promenading in Italy while he went fox-hunting. This seemed to her to be symmetrical. Robert, who was always pleased to see her when he came back, would not find her on his return. She thought this was right. But she had not thought of it at first. And since then she had thought little of it, and really she was not going for the pleasure of making him grieve. She had against him a thought less piquant, and more harsh. She did not wish to see him soon.

He had become to her a stranger. He seemed to her to be a man like the others—better than most others—good-looking, estimable, and who did not displease her; but he did not preoccupy her much. Suddenly he had gone out of her life. She did not remember how he had become mixed with it. The idea of belonging to him shocked her. The prevision that they might meet again in the small apartment of the Rue Spontini was so painful to her that she discarded it at once. She preferred to think that an unforeseen event would prevent their meeting again—the end of the world, for example. M. Lagrange, of the Académie des Sciences, had told her the day before of a comet which some day might meet the earth, envelop it with its flaming hair, give to animals and to plants unknown poisons, and make all men die in a frenzy of laughter. She expected that this, or something else, would happen next month. It was not inexplicable that she wished to go. But that her desire to go should contain a vague joy, that she should feel the charm of what she was to find, was inexplicable to her.

Her carriage left her at the corner of a street.

It was there, under the roof of a tall house, behind five windows heated by the sun, in a narrow and very clean apartment, Madame Marmet had lived since the death of her husband.

Countess Martin found her in her modest parlor, opposite M. Lagrange, half asleep in an armchair. This old mundane savant had remained faithful to her. He it was who, the day after the funeral of

Marmet, had conveyed to the unfortunate widow the poisoned speech delivered by Schmoll. She had fainted in his arms. Madame Marmet thought that he lacked judgment. He was her best friend. They dined together often with wealthy people.

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

cease to be the widow of Louis Marmet of the Acádemie des Inscriptions.

"Do not be afraid, Madame; a comet will not soon strike the earth. Such meetings are very improbable."

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

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

She looked at him. His arid cranium hardly fed a few hairs dyed black. His eyelids fell like rags on eyes yet smiling; long skins were hanging on his yellow face, and one divined that under his clothes his body was dried up. She thought, "He likes life."

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

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

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

She acknowledged that one was not at home anywhere, and that there were rats everywhere, either real or symbolical, legions of little beings that tor-

ment us. Yet she liked the Botanical Garden; she always wanted to go there, and never went. There was also the museum, which she was curious to visit.

Smiling, happy, he offered to escort her there. It was his house. He would show her the rare specimens. Some of them were superb.

She did not know at all what a bolide was. She recalled that someone had said to her that there were at the museum bones carved by primitive men, and plaques of ivory on which were engraved pictures of animals, the races of which were long ago lost. She asked if it was true. Lagrange ceased to smile. He replied indifferently that these objects concerned one of his colleagues.

"Ah!" said Madame Martin, "these things are not in your showcase."

She observed that learned men were not curious, and that it is indiscreet to question them on things that are not in their show-cases. It is true that Lagrange had made a scientific fortune with stones fallen from the skies. This led him to study comets. But he was a wise man. For twenty years he had been preoccupied by nothing except dining out.

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

"I am going next week to Fiesole, to Miss Bell's, and you are coming with me."

The good Madame Marmet, her forehead placid over searching eyes, kept silent for a moment, refused softly, and finally consented.

VII

The Marseilles express was ready on the quay, where ran the postmen and rolled the carriages in the smoke and the noise, under the livid clearness which fell from the windows. Before the open doors, travellers in long cloaks came and went. At the end of the gallery, blinded by soot and dust, appeared a small rainbow, not larger than one's hand. Countess Martin and the good Madame Marmet were already in their carriage, under the rack loaded with bags, among newspapers thrown on the cushions. Choulette had not appeared, and Madame Martin expected him no longer. Yet he had promised to be at the station. He had made his arrangements to go, and had received from his publisher the price of the "Blandices." Paul Vence had brought him, one evening, to Madame Martin's house. He had been sweet, polished, full of witty gayety and of naïve joy. She had promised herself much pleasure in travelling with a man of genius, original, picturesquely ugly, amusingly foolish; an old, abandoned child, full of sincere vices and of innocence. The doors closed. She expected him no longer. She should not have counted on his impulsive and vagabondish mind. At the moment when the engine began to breathe hoarsely, Madame

Marmet, who was looking out of the window said quietly:

"I think that here comes M. Choulette."

He was walking along the quay, limping on one leg, his hat on the back of his head, his beard unkempt, and dragging an old carpet-bag. He was almost terrible; and, in spite of his fifty years of age, looked young, so clear and lustrous were his eyes, so much ingenuous audacity had been retained in his yellowed and hollowed face, so vividly came out of this old man the expression of the eternal adolescence of the poet and artist. When she saw him, Thérèse regretted having taken so strange a companion. He walked, throwing a rough glance into every carriage—a glance which, little by little, became wicked and distrustful. But when he recognized Madame Martin, he smiled so prettily and said good morning to her in so caressing a voice that nothing was left in him of the old ferocious vagabond walking on the quay, nothing except the old carpet-bag, the handles of which were half broken.

He placed it in the rack with great care, among the elegant bags enveloped with gray cloth, beside which it made a dazzling and sordid spot. One could see then that it was studded with yellow flowers on a blood-colored background.

Well at ease, he complimented Madame Martin on her cape.

"Excuse me, ladies," he added, "I was afraid to be late. I went to six o'clock mass at St. Sévérin, my parish, in the Virgin Chapel, under those pretty,

absurd columns that go up to heaven like candy mottoes—like us, poor sinners that we are."

"Then," said Madam Martin, "you are pious to-day."

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

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

And, pointing to the horrible carpet-bag:

"I have also placed in it a host which a bad priest gave to me, the works of M. de Maistre, shirts, and several other things."

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

As the train rolled through the homely scenes of the outskirts, on that black fringe which borders the city so sadly, Choulette took from his pocket an old

book which he began to fumble. The scribe, hidden under the vagabond, revealed himself. Choulette, without wishing to appear to be careful of his papers, was very orderly about them. He assured himself that he had not lost the pieces of paper on which he noted at the coffee house his ideas for poems, nor the dozen of flattering letters which, soiled and spotted, he carried with him constantly, to read them to his newly-made companions at night under the gas-lamps. Verifying the fact that nothing was missing, he took from the book a letter folded in an open envelope. He waved it for a while, with an air of mysterious impudence, then handed it to Countess Martin. It was a letter of introduction from the Marquise de Rieu to a Princess of the house of France, a near relative of the Count de Chambord, who, old and a widow, lived in retirement at the doors of Florence. Having enjoyed the effect which he expected to produce, he said that he would perhaps see that Princess; that she was a good person, and pious.

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

He took the letter and put it back in his book. Then, arming himself with a horn-handled knife,

he began, with its point, to finish a figure sketched in the handle of his stick. He complimented himself on it:

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

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

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

"Their acts are a hideous invention of modern times. It dates from the seventeenth century. Before that time there were only guard houses where the soldiers played cards and told tales. Louis XIV was a precursor of Bonaparte. But the evil has attained its plenitude since the monstrous institution of the obligatory enlistment. The shame of emperors and of republics is to have made it an obligation for men to kill. In the ages called barbarous, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries, who fought prudently. In a great battle there were only five or six men killed. And when the knights went to the wars, at least they were not forced to do it; they died for their pleasure. They were good for nothing else. Nobody in the time of Saint Louis

would have thought of sending to battle a man of learning. And the laborer was not torn from the soil to be killed. Nowadays it is a duty for a poor peasant to be a soldier. He is exiled from the house, the roof of which smokes in the silence of night; from the fat prairies where the oxen graze; from the fields; from the paternal woods; he is taught regularly how to kill men; he is threatened, he is insulted, he is put in prison; he is told that it is an honor; and, if he does not care for that sort of honor, he is fusiladed. He obeys because he is subject to fright, and is of all domestic animals the gentlest and the most docile. We are warlike in France, and we are citizens. Another reason to be proud, this being a citizen! For the poor it consists in sustaining and preserving the wealthy in their power and their laziness. The poor must work for this, in presence of the majestic quality of the law which prohibits the wealthy as well as the poor from sleeping under the bridges, from begging in the streets, and from stealing bread. That is one of the good effects of the Revolution. As this Revolution was made by fools and idiots for the benefit of those who acquired national lands, and resulted in nothing but making the fortune of crafty peasants and financiering bourgeois, the Revolution elevated, under the name of equality, the empire of wealth. It has betrayed France into the hands of the men of wealth. They are masters and lords. The apparent government, composed of poor devils, piteous and calamitous, is in the pay of the financiers. For one

hundred years, in this poisoned country, whoever has loved the poor has been a traitor to society. One is a dangerous man when one says that there are wretched people. There are laws against indignation and pity, and what I say here could not go into print."

Choulette became excited and waved his knife, while under the cold sun passed fields of brown earth, violet bouquets of trees despoiled by winter, and curtains of poplars by the side of silvery rivers.

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

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

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

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

Between La Roche and Dijon they took breakfast in the restaurant car, and left Choulette in it, alone with his pipe, his glass of benedictine, and his irritated mind.

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

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

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

"Yes," she said, "Louis was the best of men and the best of husbands. Yet he made me very miserable. He had only one fault, but I suffered from it cruelly. He was jealous. Good, kind, tender, and generous as he was, this horrible passion made him unjust, ironical, and violent. I can assure you that my behavior gave not the least cause for suspicion. I was not a coquette. But I was young, fresh; I passed for beautiful. That was enough. He would not let me go out alone, and would not let me receive calls in his absence. Whenever we went to a reception, I trembled in advance with the fear of the scene which he would make in the carriage."

And the good Madame Marmet added, with a sigh:

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

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

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

She murmured carelessly:

"We want to be loved, and when we are loved we are tormented or bothered."

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

"It is true that she is happy, since she likes to remember."

The sadness of night penetrated her heart. And

when the moon rose on the fields of olive trees, seeing the soft lines of plains and of hills pass, Thérèse, in this landscape wherein everything spoke of peace and oblivion, and nothing spoke of her, regretted the Seine, the triumphal arch with its rays of avenues, and the alleys of the park where, at least, the trees and the stones knew her.

Suddenly Choulette threw himself into the carriage. Armed with his knotty stick, his face and head enveloped by red wool and ferocious skins, he almost frightened her. It was what he wished to do. His violent attitudes and his savage dress were studied. Incessantly preoccupied by puerile effects, it pleased him to seem frightful. He was glad to inspire the courage that he felt. A moment before, as he was smoking his pipe, he had felt, while seeing the moon run in the clouds, one of those childish frights that tormented his light mind. He had come near the countess to be reassured.

"Arles," he said. "Do you know Arles? It is pure beauty. I have seen, in the cloister, doves rest on the shoulders of statues, and I have seen the little gray lizards warm themselves in the sun on the tombs. The tombs are now in two rows on the road which leads to the church. They are formed like cisterns, and serve as beds for the wretched at night. One night, when I was walking among them, I met a good old woman who was placing dried herbs in the tomb of an antique virgin who had died on her wedding-day. We said good-night to her. She replied: 'May God hear you; but fate

wills that this cistern is open on the side of the mistral. If it were open on the other side, I would be lying like Queen Jeanne.' "

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

VIII

In her English cart, which she drove herself, Miss Bell had brought from the station of Florence, through the hills, Countess Martin-Bellême and Madame Marmet to her house at Fiesole, which, pink, and crowned with a band of balustrades, overlooked the incomparable city. The chambermaid followed with the luggage. Choulette, lodged, by Miss Bell's attention, in a sacristan widow's house, in the shadow of the cathedral of Fiesole, was not expected until dinner. Homely and gentle, with short hair, wearing a waistcoat, a man's shirt on a boy's chest, almost graceful, with small hips, the poetess was doing to her French friends the honors of the house, which reflected the ardent delicacy of her taste. On the walls of the parlor were Virgins pale, with long hands, reigning peacefully among angels, patriarchs, and saints in beautiful gilded architecture. On a pedestal was standing a Magdalena, clothed in her hair, frightful with thinness and old age, some beggar of the road to Pistoia, burned by the suns and the snows, whom some unknown precursor of Donatello had moulded. And everywhere the arms of Miss Bell—bells and cymbals. The biggest lifted their bronze clappers at the angles of the room; others formed a chain at the

foot of the walls. Smaller ones ran along the cornices. There were bells on the stove, on the safes, and on the chairs. The shelves were full of silver and golden bells. Big bronze bells marked with the Florentine lily; bells of the Renaissance, representing a lady wearing a white gown; bells of the deceased, decorated with tears and bones; bells covered with symbolical animals and leaves, which rang in the churches of the time of Saint Louis; table bells of the seventeenth century, having a statuette for a handle; flat and clear bells of the cows of the Rutli Valley; Hindu bells; Chinese bells formed like cylinders—they had come from all countries and all times, at the magic call of little Miss Bell.

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

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

"This one," she said, "is a holy village bell of the fifth century. She is a spiritual daughter of Saint Paulin de Nole, who was the first to make the sky sing over our heads. The metal is rare. Soon I will show to you a gentle Florentine, the queen of bells. She is coming. But I annoy you, Darling, with my babble. And I annoy, too, the good Madame Marmet. It is wrong."

She escorted them to their rooms.

An hour later, Madame Martin, rested, fresh, in a gown of foulard and laces, went on the terrace where Miss Bell was waiting for her. The humid air, made lukewarm by a sun still feeble and already generous, breathed the anxious sweetness of spring. Thérèse, resting on the balustrade, bathed her eyes in the light. At her feet, the cypress trees raised their black distaffs, and the olive trees were like sheep on the hills. In the valley, Florence extended its domes, its towers, and the multitudes of its red roofs, through which the Arno showed its undulating line. Beyond, the hills were blue.

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

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

"Darling, I cannot tell, I do not know how to tell. But look, Darling, look again. What you see there is unique in the world. Nature is nowhere else as subtle, elegant, and fine. The god who made the hills of Florence was an artist. Oh, he was a jeweller, an engraver, a sculptor, a bronze founder, and a painter; he was a Florentine. He did nothing else in the world, Darling. The rest was made by a hand less delicate, with work less perfect. How can you think that this violet hill of San Miniato, so firm and so pure in relief, was made

by the author of Mont Blanc? It is not possible. This landscape, Darling, has the beauty of an antique medal and of a precious painting. It is a perfect and measured work of art. And here is another thing that I do not know how to tell, that I do not know how to understand, and which is a real thing. In this country I feel—and you will feel as I do, Darling—half alive and half dead; in a condition which is very noble, very sad, and very sweet. Look, look again; you will realize the melancholy of those hills that surround Florence, and see a delicious sadness ascend from the land of the dead."

The sun was low over the horizon. The points of peaks went out one by one, while the clouds inflamed the sky. Madame Marmet sneezed.

Miss Bell sent for some shawls, and warned the French women that the evenings were fresh and malignant.

And suddenly:

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

IX

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

"I think that here is M. Choulette."

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

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

He arose and replied:

"Madame, you are preoccupied by vain images; but I reside in life and in truth."

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

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

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

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

Countess Martin smiled.

"M. Choulette, I desire nothing, and, nevertheless, I am not joyful. Must I make shoes, too?"

Choulette replied gravely:

"It is not yet time for that."

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

"Madame, could you tell me if it is true that the Pope's gowns are made by Worth?"

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

"The wisdom of princes is shortsighted," he said; "the salvation of the Church must come from the Italian republic, as Leo XIII believes and wishes; but the Church will not be saved in the manner which this pious Machiavel thinks. The revolution will make the Pope lose his last cent, with the rest of his patrimony. And it will be salvation. The Pope, destitute and poor, will become powerful. He will agitate the world. We shall see again Peter, Lin, Clet, Anaclet, and Clement; the humble, the ignorant; the saints of the first days will change the face of the earth. If to-morrow, in the chair of Peter, came to sit a real bishop, a real Christian, I would go to him, and I would say to him: 'Do not be an old man buried alive in a golden tomb; quit your noble guards and your cardinals; quit your court and its similacrums of power. Take my arm and come with me to beg for your bread among the nations. Covered with rags, poor, ill, dying, go on the highways, showing in yourself the image of Jesus. Say, "I am begging my bread for the condemnation of the wealthy." Go into the cities, and shout from door to door, with sublime stupidity, "Be humble, be gentle, be poor!" Announce to the black cities, to the dens, and to the barracks,

peace and charity. You will be disdained; the mob will throw stones at you. Policemen will drag you into prison. You shall be for the humble as for the powerful, for the poor as for the rich, a subject of laughter, an object of disgust and of pity. Your priests will dethrone you, and elevate against you an anti-pope, or will say that you are crazy. And it is necessary that they should tell the truth; it is necessary that you should be crazy; the crazy have saved the world. Men will give to you the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre, and they will spit in your face, and it is by that sign that you will appear as Christ and true king; and it is by such means that you will establish Christian socialism, which is the kingdom of God on earth.' "

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

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

"I do not know," replied Madame Martin; "but

reasonable people have always seemed to me to be bores. I can say this to you, M. Choulette."

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

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

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

The Prince was displaying his young, godlike beauty, that his beard, hard and black, intensified. He bowed.

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

The Countess and Choulette asked Miss Bell to

read to them the verses she was writing. She excused herself from reciting her uncertain cadence to the French poet, whom she liked best after François Villon. Then she recited in her pretty, hissing, birdlike voice.

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

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

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

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

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

X

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

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

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

Looking at Miss Bell with an evil eye:

"I compose verses while mending my clothes. I like to work with my hands. I sing songs to myself while sweeping my room; that is why my songs have gone to the hearts of men, like the old songs

of the farmers and artisans, which are even more beautiful than mine, but not more natural. I have pride enough not to want any other servant than myself. The sacristan's widow wanted to repair my clothes. I would not permit her to do it. It is wrong to make others do servilely for us works which we can do ourselves with noble pride."

The Prince was nonchalantly playing his nonchalant music. Thérèse, who for eight days had been running to churches and museums in the company of Madame Marmet, was thinking of the annoyance which her companion caused her by discovering incessantly in the faces of the old painters resemblances to persons she knew. In the morning, at the Ricardi Palace, on the frescoes of Gozzoli, she had recognized M. Garain, M. Lagrange, M. Schmoll, Princess Seniavine as a page, and M. Renan on horseback. She was terrified herself at finding M. Renan everywhere. She led all her ideas back to her little circle of Academicians and fashionable people, by an easy turn, which irritated her friend. She recalled in her soft voice the public meetings at the Institute, the lectures at the Sorbonne, the evening receptions where shone the mundane and spiritualist philosophers. As for the women, they were all charming and irreproachable. She dined with all of them. And Thérèse thought: "She is too prudent. She bothers me." And she thought of leaving her at Fiesole and visiting the churches alone. Employing a word that Le Ménil had taught her, she said to herself:

"I will plant Madame Marmet."

A lithe old man came into the parlor. His waxed mustache and his white goatee made him look like an old soldier; but his glance betrayed, under his glasses, the fine softness of eyes worn by science and voluptuousness. He was a Florentine, a friend of Miss Bell and of the Prince, Professor Arrighi, formerly adored by women, and now celebrated in Tuscany for his studies of agriculture.

He pleased Countess Martin at once. She questioned him on his methods, and on the results which he obtained from them.

He worked with prudent energy.

"The earth," he said, "is like women. The earth does not wish one to be either timid or brutal."

The Ave Maria rang in all the campaniles. It made of the sky an immense instrument of religious music.

"Darling," said Miss Bell, "do you observe that the air of Florence is made sonorous and silvery at night by the sound of the bells?"

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

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

Choulette went near Madame Marmet, and gravely:

"Madame Marmet, is it possible for you to look at a door—a simple, painted, wooden door like yours, I suppose, or like mine, or like this one, or like any

other—without being terror-stricken at the thought of the visitor who might, at any moment, come in? The door of one's room, Madame Marmet, opens on the infinite. Did you ever think of this? Does one ever know the true name of the man or woman, who, under a human guise, with a known face, in ordinary clothes, comes into one's house?"

When he was closeted in his room he could not look at the door without feeling his hair stand on end.

But Madame Marmet saw the doors of her parlor open without fear. She knew the name of everybody who came to see her—charming persons.

Choulette looked at her sadly, and, shaking his head:

"Madame Marmet, Madame Marmet, those whom you call by their terrestrial names have other names which you do not know, and which are their real names."

Madame Martin asked Choulette if he thought that misfortune needed to cross the threshold in order to enter people's houses.

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

Choulette warned Madame Martin severely that she should not call misfortune a bad visitor.

"Misfortune is our greatest master and our best friend. Misfortune teaches us the meaning of life.

Madame, when you shall suffer, you shall know what you must know; you shall believe what you must believe; you shall do what you must do; you shall be what you must be. And you shall have joy, which pleasure expels. Joy is timid, and does not find pleasure in festivals."

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

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

"At this moment," she said, "I would like to hear only figures of tapestries which should say pale things, ancient and precious as themselves."

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

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

"I think that here is M. Dechartre."

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

Miss Bell welcomed him with birdlike cries.

"M. Dechartre, we were impatient to see you.

M. Choulette was talking evil of doors—yes, of doors of houses; and he was saying, also, that misfortune is a very obliging old gentleman. You have lost all these beautiful things. You have made us wait very long, M. Dechartre. Why?"

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

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

She asked him if he had gone to Venice, and if he had seen again at Ravenna the empresses wearing aureolas, and the dazzling phantoms.

No, he had not stopped anywhere.

She said nothing. Her look remained fixed on the corner of the wall, on the Saint Paulin bell.

He said to her:

"You are looking at the Nolette."

Vivian Bell laid aside her papers and her pencils.

"You shall soon see a marvel, M. Dechartre. I have found the queen of small bells. I found it at Rimini, in an old building in ruins, which is used as a warehouse. I bought it and packed it myself. I am waiting for it. You shall see. It bears a Christ on a cross, between the Virgin and St. John, the

date of 1400, and the arms of Malatesta—M. Dechartre, you are not listening enough. Listen to me attentively. In 1400 Lorenzo Ghiberti, fleeing from war and the plague, took refuge at Rimini, at Paola Malatesta's house. It was he who modelled the figures of my bell. And you shall see here, next week, Ghiberti's work."

The servant announced that dinner was served.

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

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

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

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

"You are right," said Professor Arrighi. "They had no other anxiety than to use the best professors. The tension of their minds was on preparing the varnish and mixing the colors. The one who first thought of pasting a canvas on a panel, in order that the painting should not be broken when the wood was split, passed for a marvellous man. Every master had his secret formula."

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

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

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

Choulette began to relate to Madame Marmet the incidents of a call which he had made during the day on the Princess of the house of France to whom the Marquise de Rieu had given him a letter of introduction. He liked to impress upon people the fact that he, the bohemian and vagabond, had been received by that royal Princess, at whose house

neither Miss Bell nor Countess Martin would have been admitted, and whom Prince Albertinelli prided himself on having met one day at some ceremony.

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

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

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

"After a wait in consecutive parlors, I was permitted to kiss her hand."

And he stopped.

Madame Martin asked impatiently:

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

"She said to me: 'Have you visited Florence? I am told that recently new and handsome stores have been opened which are lighted at night.' She said also: 'We have a good druggist here. The Austrian druggists are not better. He placed on my leg, six months ago, a porous plaster which has not yet fallen." Such are the words that Marie Thérèse deigned to address to me. Oh, simple grandeur! oh, Christian virtue! oh, daughter of St. Louis! oh, mar-

vellous echo of your voice, holy Elizabeth of Hungary!"

Madame Martin smiled. She thought that Choulette was mocking. But he said no, indignantly, and Miss Bell said that Madame Martin was wrong. It was a fault of the French, she said, to think that people were always jesting.

Then they reverted to the ideas of art, which in that country are breathed with the air.

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

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

"There were at Florence, in the time of the superb Manfred, half a Mussulman, men who were said to be of the sect of Epicurus, and sought for arguments against the existence of God. Guido Cavalcanti disdained the ignorant folks who believed in the immortality of the soul. The following phrase by

him was quoted: 'The death of man is exactly similar to that of brutes.' Later, when antique beauty came out of graves, the Christian style seemed sad. The painters who worked in the churches and in the cloisters were neither devout nor chaste. Perugino was an atheist, and did not conceal it."

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

Professor Arrighi defended Pietro Vannucci of Perugia.

"He was," he said, "an honest man. And the Prior of the Gesuati of Florence was wrong to mistrust him. That monk practised the art of manufacturing ultramarine blue by crushing stones of burnt lapis-lazuli. Ultramarine was then worth its weight in gold; and the Prior, who doubtless had a secret, esteemed his own more precious than rubies or sapphires. He asked Pietro Vannucci to decorate the two cloisters of his convent, and he expected marvels, less from the skilfulness of the master than from the beauty of that ultramarine in the skies. During all the time the painter worked in the cloisters at the history of Jesus Christ, the Prior kept by his side and presented to him the precious powder in a bag which he never quitted. Pietro took from it, under the saintly man's look, the quantity he needed, and dipped his brush, loaded with color, in

a cup full of water, before rubbing the wall with it. He used in that manner a great quantity of the powder. And the good father, seeing his bag getting thinner, sighed: 'Jesus! How that lime devours the ultramarine!' When the frescoes were finished, when Perugino had received from the monk the agreed price, he placed in his hand a package of blue powder: 'This is for you, father. Your ultramarine which I took with my brush fell at the bottom of my cup, where I gathered it every day. I return it to you. Learn how to trust honest people.'"

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

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

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

At this moment, Choulette, to whom the waiter

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

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

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

In the parlor she said, while serving the coffee:

"M. Choulette, why do you condemn us to the savage sadness of equality? Why, Daphnis's flute would not sing well if it were made of seven equal reeds. You wish to destroy the beautiful harmonies of the masters and the servants, of the aristocrats and the artisans. Oh, you are a barbarian, M. Choulette. You are full of pity for those who are in need, and you have no pity for divine beauty which you exile from this world. You expel beauty, M. Choulette; you repudiate her, nude and in tears. Be certain of this: she will not remain on earth when the poor little men shall all be weak, delicate, and ignorant. Oh, to undo the ingenious groups which men of diverse conditions form in society, the humble with the magnificent, is to be the enemy of the poor and of the rich, is to be the enemy of the human race."

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

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

He did not desire less that she should go in the gardens at the first flush of spring. He contemplated her in advance on the noble terraces; he saw already the light playing on her neck and in her hair, the shadow of laurel trees falling on her eyes. For him the land and the sky of Florence had nothing more to do than to serve as an adornment to this young woman.

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

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

astonished and pleased her. She received agreeably the praise he gave her, without thinking that perhaps it was too intimate and almost indiscreet.

"So you look at gowns, M. Dechartre?"

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

He continued, in a tone a little more elevated:

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

"M. Dechartre," asked Prince Albertinelli, "how do you think a mauve waist studded with silver flowers would become Miss Bell?"

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

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

"M. Dechartre, that life may be great and complete, one must put in it the past and the future.

Our works of poetry and of art must be accomplished in honor of the dead and with the thought of those who are to come after us. Thus we shall participate in what has been, in what is, and in what shall be. You do not wish to be immortal, M. Dechartre. Beware, for God may hear you."

He replied:

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

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

An hour later, in the æsthetic room tapestried with stuffs whereon citron trees loaded with enormous golden fruits formed a fairy forest, Thérèse, her head on the pillow, and her handsome bare arms folded under her head, was thinking under the lamp and seeing float confusedly before her the images of her new life: Vivian Bell and her bells, her Preraphaelite figures, light as shadows, ladies, isolated knights, indifferent among pious scenes, a little sad, and looking to see who was coming; very pleasant thus, and friends in their soft lethargy; and in the evening, at the Fiesole villa, Prince Albertinelli, Professor Arrighi, Choulette, the odd play of ideas, and Dechartre, with youthful eyes in a careworn face.

She thought he had a charming imagination, a mind richer than all those which had been revealed to her, and an attraction which she no longer tried to resist. She had always recognized his gift to

please. She discovered now that he had the will to please. This idea was delightful to her; she closed her eyes to retain it. Then, suddenly, she shuddered. She had felt a dumb blow struck within her in the mystery of her being. She had the brusque vision of her friend, his gun under his arm, in the woods. He walked with firm and regular step in the profound alleys. She could not see his face, and that troubled her. She bore him no ill-will. She was not discontented with him. Now it was with herself that she was discontented. And Robert went straight before him, without turning his head, far, still farther, until he was only a black point in the desolate wood. She judged that she was capricious, and that she had been harsh in leaving him without a word of farewell, without even a letter. He was her friend, her only friend. She had never had another. She thought: "I would not wish him to be unfortunate because of me."

Little by little she was reassured. He loved her, doubtless; but he was not susceptible, not ingenious, happily, in tormenting himself. She said to herself: "He is hunting. He is glad. He sees his aunt, whom he admires." She calmed her fears and returned to the charming and profound gayety of Florence. She had seen badly, at the Offices, a picture that Dechartre liked. It was a decapitated head of the Medusa, a head work wherein Leonardo, the sculptor said, had expressed the minute profundity and the tragic refinement of his genius. She wanted to see it again, sorry that she had not seen

it better herself. She put out her lamp and went to sleep.

In the morning she dreamed that she met in a deserted church Robert Le Ménil enveloped in furs which she had never seen him wear. He was waiting for her, but a crowd of priests had separated them. She did not know what had become of him. She had not seen his face, and that frightened her. Having awakened, she heard at the window, which was open, a small, monotonous, and sad cry, and she saw in the milky dawn a humming-bird pass. Then, without cause, without reason, she fell into tears. She fell into tears about her fate, with the despair of a child.

XI

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

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

Near him, Choulette, seated on the balustrade of the terrace, his legs hanging, and his nose in his beard, was carving the figure of Misery on his vagabond's stick.

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

She was coming along the boxwood hedge, under

her umbrella, in her straw-colored gown. The fine sun of winter enveloped her in pale gold.

Dechartre put joy into his greeting.

She said:

"You are reciting verses which I do not know. I know only Metastasa. My teacher liked only Metastasa. What is the hour when the mind is divine in its visions?"

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

Choulette doubted that the poet meant dreams of the morning, which leave at awakening an impression so vivid, and often so painful, and which are not at all strangers to the flesh. But Dechartre had quoted these verses in the pleasure of the golden dawn which he had seen that morning on the blonde hills. He had been, for a long time, disquiet about the images which are formed in one's sleep, and he believed that these images were not related to the object which preoccupies one the most; but, on the contrary, to ideas abandoned during the day.

Then Thérèse recalled her morning dream, the hunter lost in the deep alley.

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

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

"It is perhaps true."

Then, quickly, she asked Choulette if he had finished the portrait of Misery on his stick. That Misery had become a Pieta, and Choulette recognized the Virgin in it. He had even composed a quatrain which he was to write on it in spiral form, a didactic and moral quatrain. He would cease to write, except in the style of the commandments of God rendered into French verses. The four lines were of that simple and good sort. He consented to recite them.

Thérèse rested on the balustrade of the terrace and sought in the distance, in the depth of the sea of light, the peaks of Vallambrosa, almost as fluid as the sky. Jacques Dechartre was looking at her. It seemed to him that he saw her then for the first time, such was the delicacy that he discovered in her face, where the work of light and of mind had placed profoundness without altering its young and fresh grace. Light, which she liked, was indulgent to her. And truly she was pretty, bathed in that light of Florence, which caresses beautiful forms and feeds noble thoughts. A fine, pink color rose to her well-rounded cheeks; her eyes, bluish gray, laughed; and when she talked, the brilliancy of her teeth had an ardent sweetness. His look embraced her supple bust, her full hips, and the bold attitude of her waist. She held her umbrella with her left hand, the other hand played with violets. Dechartre had a love, a mania for beautiful hands. Hands presented to his eyes a physiognomy as striking as the face—a character, a soul. These hands enchanted

him. They were witty. He adored their thin fingers, their pink nails, their palms soft and tender, traversed by lines as elegant as arabesques, and rising at the base of the fingers in little harmonious mounts. He examined them with charmed attention until she closed them on the handle of her umbrella. Then, standing behind her, he looked at her again. Her bust and her arms, graceful and pure in line, her beautiful form, which was that of a living amphora, pleased him.

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

It astonished him that she talked, that she thought. The clear sound of her voice amazed him, as if he had not yet heard it.

He replied at random. He was awkward. She feigned not to notice it. She seemed glad. His deep voice, which was veiled and weakened, caressed her. She said ordinary things:

"That view is beautiful. The weather is soft."

XII

In the morning, her head on the embroidered pillow, Thérèse was thinking of the walks of the day before; of the Virgins, so fine, in frames of angels; of the innumerable children, painted or carved, all beautiful, all happy, who sing ingenuously in the city the Alleluia of grace and of beauty. In the illustrious chapel of the Brancacci, before those frescoes, pale and resplendent as a divine dawn, he had talked to her of Masaccio, in a language so vivid and so colored that it had seemed to her as if she had seen him, the adolescent master of the masters, his mouth half open, his eyes dark and blue, dying, enchanted. And she had liked these marvels of a morning more charming than a day. Dechartre was for her the soul of those magnificent forms, the mind of those noble things. It was by him, it was through him, that she understood art and life. She took no interest in the spectacles of the world which did not interest him.

How had this affection come to her? She had no precise remembrance of it. In the first place, when Paul Vence wanted to introduce him to her, she had no desire to know him, no presentiment that he would please her. She recalled elegant bronze statuettes, fine wax-works signed with his name, that

she had remarked at the Champ de Mars salon or at Durand-Ruel's. But she did not imagine that he could be agreeable to her, nor more seductive than so many artists and lovers of art about whom she laughed at her intimate receptions. When she saw him, he pleased her; she had the peaceful idea of attracting him, of seeing him often. The night when he dined at her house, she observed that she had for him an affection which was noble and which flattered her. But soon after he irritated her a little; it made her impatient to see him closeted within himself and too little preoccupied by her. She would have liked to disturb him. She was in that state of impatience when she met him one evening, in front of the *grille* of the Religion Museum, and he talked to her of Ravenna and of the empress seated on a gold chair in a grave. She had found him serious and charming, his voice warm, his eyes soft in the shadow of the night, but too much a stranger, too far from her, too unknown. She had felt a sort of uneasiness, and she did not know, when she walked along the boxwood bordering the terrace, whether she desired to see him every day or never to see him again.

Since then, at Florence, her only pleasure was to feel that he was near her, to hear him. He made life for her amiable, diverse, and colored—new, all new. He revealed to her delicate joys and a delightful sadness; he awakened in her a voluptuousness which had been always dormant. Now she was determined never to give him up. But how? She

foresaw difficulties; her lucid mind and her temperament presented them all to her. For a moment she tried to deceive herself; she said to herself that perhaps, a dreamer, exalted, lost in his studies of art, he might remain assiduous without being exacting. But she did not wish to reassure herself with that idea. If Dechartre were not a lover, he lost all his charm. She did not dare to think of the future. She lived in the present hour, happy, anxious, and closing her eyes.

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

In his letter Robert made reasonable reproaches. Why did she go without saying anything, without leaving a word of farewell? Since his return to Paris he had expected every morning a letter which had not come. He was happier the year before, when he received in the morning, two or three times a week, letters so gentle and so well written that he regretted not being able to print them. Anxious, he had gone to her house.

"I was astounded to hear of your departure. Your husband received me. He said that, yielding to his advice, you had gone to finish the winter at

Florence with Miss Bell. He said that for some time you had looked pale and thin. He thought a change of air would do you good. You did not wish to go, but, as you suffered more and more, he succeeded in persuading you.

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

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

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

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

Having read this letter, she tore it up very softly, threw it in the fire, and sadly, in a graceless reverie, saw it burn.

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

Anxious, she thought: "He trusts me. He is quiet." This made her more impatient than anything. It irritated her to think that there were simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others.

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

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

Thérèse kissed Miss Bell, rested her head on her friend's shoulder, and said:

"May I look?"

"Oh, Darling, look if you wish. They are verses made on the model of the popular songs of your country."

"Is it a symbol, Vivian? Explain it to me."

"Oh, Darling, why explain, why? A poetic image must have several meanings. The one which you shall find shall be the real one. But there is a very clear meaning in them, my love; that is, that one should not lightly disengage oneself from what one has put in one's heart."

The horses were harnessed. They went, as it had been agreed, to visit the Albertinelli gallery. The Prince was waiting for them, and Dechartre was to meet them in the palace. On the way, while the carriage rolled on the wide pavement, Vivian Bell communicated in small, singing words her fine and precious gayety. As they were descending between houses pink and white, gardens in terraces ornamented with statues and fountains, she showed to her friend the villa, hidden under bluish pines, where the ladies and the cavaliers of the Decameron took refuge from the plague that ravaged Florence, and diverted one another with tales frivolous, facetious, or tragic. Then she confessed the thought which had come to her the day before.

"You had gone, Darling, to Carmine with M. Dechartre, and you had left at Fiesole Madame Marmet, who is an agreeable old lady, a moderate and polished old lady. She knows many anecdotes about persons of distinction who live in Paris. And when

she tells them, she does as my cook Pompaloni does when he serves eggs: he does not put salt in them, but he puts the salt cellar next to them. Madame Marmet's tongue is very sweet. The salt is near it, in her eyes. It is Pompaloni's dish, my love: each one seasons to his taste. Oh, I like Madame Marmet a great deal. Yesterday, after you had gone, I found her alone and sad in a corner of the parlor. She was thinking of her husband, and it was a mournful thought. I said to her: 'Do you wish me to think of your husband, too? I will think of him with you. I have been told that he was a learned man, a member of the Royal Society of Paris. Madame Marmet, talk to me of him.' She replied that he had devoted himself to the Etruscans, and that he had given to them his entire life. Oh, Darling, I cherished at once the memory of that M. Marmet, who lived for the Etruscans. And then a good idea came to me. I said to Madame Marmet, 'We have at Fiesole, in the Pretorio Palace, a modest little Etruscan museum. Come and visit it with me. Will you?' She replied it was what she desired to know in Italy. We went to the Pretorio Palace, we saw a lioness and a great many little bronze men, grotesque, very fat or very thin. The Etruscans were a seriously gay people. They made bronze caricatures. But these monkeys, some afflicted with big stomachs, others astonished to show their bones, Madame Marmet looked at with dolorous admiration. She contemplated them like—there is a beautiful French word that escapes

me—like the monuments and the trophies of M. Marmet."

Madame Martin smiled. But she was disquiet. She thought the sky dull, the streets ugly, the passersby common.

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

"I do not think so."

"Why, Darling, why?"

"Because I do not please him much."

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

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

Countess Martin recognized at once a banal and doubtful gallery; she felt bored among the multi-

tude of little Parrocels, showing in the darkness a bit of armor and a bit of white horse.

A valet presented a card.

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

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

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

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

Miss Bell babbled to the Prince pretty things about those old men and those Virgins whose blue mantles were agitated by an immovable tempest. Dechartre, pale, enervated, went near Thérèse, and said to her in a low tone:

"This gallery is a warehouse where picture dealers of the entire world hang the things they cannot sell. And the Prince sells here things which Jews could not sell."

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

"I have seen that Holy Family in the shops of picture dealers of London, of Basle, and of Paris.

As they could not get the twenty-five louis that it is worth, they have commissioned the last of the Albertinellis to sell it for fifty thousand francs."

The Prince, divining what they were saying, came near them gracefully.

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

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

Dechartre felt uneasy. Since the day before he had thought of Thérèse. He had all the night dreamed and labored over her image. He saw her again, delightful, but delightful in another manner, and even more desirable than he had imagined in his insomnia; less visionary, of a taste more vivid, stronger, harsher, and also of a mind more mysterious and more impenetrable. She was sad; she seemed to him to be cold and indifferent. He said to himself that he was nothing to her; that he was becoming importunate and ridiculous. This irritated him. He murmured bitterly in her ear:

"I have reflected. I did not wish to come. Why did I come?"

She understood at once what he meant, that he feared her now, and that he was impatient, timid, and awkward. It pleased her that he was thus, and she was grateful to him for the trouble and the desires which he inspired in her.

Her heart beat. But, affecting to understand that he regretted having disturbed himself for bad paintings, she replied that in truth this gallery was not interesting. Already, under the terror of displeasing her, he felt reassured, and believed that, really indifferent, she had not perceived the accent nor the significance of what he had said. He said:

"No, nothing interesting."

The Prince, who had invited the two visitors to breakfast, asked their friend to remain with them. Dechartre excused himself. He was going out, when, in the large, empty parlor, ornamented with confectioners' boxes, he found himself alone with Madame Martin. He had had the idea of running away from her. He had no other idea now than to see her again. He recalled to her that she was the next morning to visit the Bargello.

"You have permitted me to accompany you."

She asked him if he had not found her moody and bothersome. Oh, no; he had not thought her bothersome, but he thought she was sad.

"Alas," he added, "your sadness, your joys, I have not the right to know them."

She turned toward him a glance almost harsh.

"You cannot think I will take you for a confidante, can you?"

And she walked away brusquely.

XIII

After dinner, in the parlor full of bells, under the lamps from which the great shades permitted only an obscure light to rise, the good Madame Marmet was warming herself by the stove, with a white cat on her knees. The evening was cool. Madame Martin, her eyes full of light air, of violet peaks, and of antique trees twisting their monstrous arms on the road, smiled with happy fatigue. She had gone with Miss Bell, Dechartre, and Madame Marmet to the Chartrist convent of Ema. And now, in the fine intoxication of her visions, she forgot the care of the day before, the importunate letters, the distant reproaches, and did not think that there was anything else in the world than cloisters chiselled and painted, with a well in the grass of the yard, villages with red roofs, and roads where, rocked by flattering praises, she saw the first blush of spring. Dechartre had modelled for Miss Bell the wax figure of a Beatrice. Vivian was painting angels. Softly bent over her, Prince Albertinelli caressed his beard and threw around him courtesan-like glances.

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

"A woman must choose," he said. "With a

man whom women love she is not quiet. With a man whom the women do not love she is not happy."

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

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

"But, Darling, since the Prince has said that a woman cannot have at the same time happiness and security, tell me what your friend should choose; tell me, Darling."

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

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

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

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

"Are you speaking, Mademoiselle, of the solemn union between man and woman? In this sense, marriage is a sacrament. Hence it is always a sacrilege. As for civil marriage, it is a formality. The importance which is given to it in our society is an

idiotic thing which would have made the women of other times laugh. We owe this prejudice, like many others, to the bourgeois, to the coming forward of a lot of financiers which has been called the Revolution, and which seems admirable to the folks who profit by it. Civil marriage is, in reality, only an inscription like many others which the State exacts in order to be sure of the condition of persons: in every well organized state everybody must be indexed. Morally, this inscription in a big ledger has not even the virtue of inducing a wife to take a lover. Who ever thinks of betraying an oath taken before a mayor? In order to find joy in adultery, one must be pious."

"But, Monsieur," said Thérèse, "we were married at the church."

Then, with an accent of sincerity:

"I cannot understand how a man ever marries, nor how a woman at an age when she knows what she is doing can commit that folly."

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

"You display, Madame, the pride of the beautiful and intelligent French women whom subjection irritates. French women love liberty, and none of

them is as worthy of liberty as you are. I have lived in France a little. I have known and admired the elegant society of Paris, the salons, the festivals, the conversations, the plays. But in our mountains, under our olive trees, we become rustic again. We take again golden-age manners, and marriage is for us an idyll full of freshness."

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

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

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

Impatient at praise which was not destined for him, jealous of Dante as of the universe, a refined man of letters, he said:

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

And he lighted his pipe.

Vivian Bell exclaimed:

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

During the Prince's reading under the lamp, Dechartre, seated on the lounge near Countess Martin, talked of Dante with enthusiasm as the best sculptor among the poets. He recalled to Thérèse the painting which they had seen together two days before, on the door of the Servi, a fresco almost erased, where one hardly divined the presence of the poet wearing a laurel wreath, Florence, and the seven circles. This was enough to exalt the artist. But she had distinguished nothing, she had not been moved. And then she confessed that Dante did not attract her. Dechartre, accustomed to her sharing all his ideas of art and poetry, felt astonishment and some discontent. He said aloud:

"There are grand and strong things which you do not feel."

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

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

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

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

"Oh, how violent you are!"

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

"You must take me with my soul. I would have no joy in winning you if I won you with a stranger's soul."

This gave to Thérèse a shiver of fear and of joy.

XIV

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

looking-glass, under family portraits. All this, at a distance, seemed to her small, annoying, and sad. She finished her letter with words of friendship, the sweetness of which was not feigned. Truly, she had never felt more peaceful and clement toward her friend. In four pages she had said little and explained less. She announced only that she would stay a month in Florence, the air of which did her good. Then she wrote to her father, to her husband, and to Princess Seniavine. She went down the stairway with the letters in her hand. In the hall she threw three of them on the silver tray destined to receive papers for the post-office. Mistrusting Madame Marmet, she slipped into her pocket the letter to Le Ménil, counting on chance to throw it into a box.

Almost at the same time Dechartre came to accompany the three friends in a walk through the city. As he was waiting he saw the letters on the tray.

Without thinking that minds could be divined through penmanship, he was susceptible to the form of letters as to a sort of drawing which has its elegance. The writing of Thérèse charmed him as a fresh relic, and because he liked its biting frankness, the bold and simple turn of its lines. He looked at the addresses without reading them, with sensual admiration.

They visited, that morning, Santa Maria Novella, where Countess Martin had already gone with Madame Marmet. But Miss Bell had blamed them for

not seeing the beautiful Ginevra of Benci on a fresco of the choir. "You must visit that morning figure in a morning light," said Vivian. While the poetess and Thérèse were talking together, Dechartre listened patiently to Madame Marmet's conversation, filled with anecdotes, wherein Academicians dined with elegant women, and shared the anxiety of that lady, much preoccupied for several days by the necessity to buy a tulle veil. She could find none to her taste in the stores of Florence.

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

"I have made for my little companion a wooden leg out of a match, and he rests on my shoulder as formerly."

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

Thérèse asked the cobbler to tell his name and his history. His name was Serafino Stoppini, and he was a native of Stia. He was old. He had had much trouble in his life.

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

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

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

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

She said to him:

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

He replied:

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

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

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

"You knew . . . "

She looked at him and waited.

He finished his phrase:

" . . . that I love you?"

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

XV

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

As they came out of the palazzo, in order to avoid the wind which was blowing on the river, Miss Bell led her friends into the old streets with black stone houses which open abruptly on the horizon, where, in the purity of the air, laughs a hill with three frail trees. They walked, and Vivian showed to her friend, on façades where red rags were hanging, some marble jewel—a Virgin, a lily, a Saint Catherine. They walked through these alleys of the antique city to the church of Or San Michele, where it had been agreed that Dechartre would meet them.

Thérèse was thinking of him now with interested and minute attention. Madame Marmet was thinking of buying a veil; she had the hope of finding one on the Corso. This affair recalled to her M. Lagrange, who, at his lecture one day, took from his pocket a veil with gold dots and wiped his forehead with it, thinking it was his handkerchief. The audience was astonished, and whispered to one another. It was a veil which had been confided to him the day before by his niece, Mlle. Jeanne Michot, whom he had accompanied to the theatre, and Madame explained how, finding it in the pocket of his overcoat, he had taken it to return it to his niece.

At Lagrange's name, Thérèse recalled the flaming star announced by the savant, and said to herself, with mocking sadness, that it was time for that star to put an end to the world and take her out of her trouble. But above the precious walls of the old church she saw the sky, which, dried by the wind of the sea, shone pale blue and cruel. Miss Bell showed to her one of the bronze statues which, in their chiselled niches, ornament the façade of the church.

"See, Darling, how that Saint George is young and proud. Saint George was formerly the cavalier about whom young girls dreamed."

But Darling said that he looked precise, bothersome, and stubborn. At this moment she recalled suddenly the letter which had remained in her pocket.

"I think that here comes M. Dechartre," said the good Madame Marmet.

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

When she went near the statue which he was pointing out to her, Thérèse saw a letter box against the wall of the narrow street at which the saint looked. Dechartre, placed at the most convenient point of view, talked of his Saint Mark with abundant friendship.

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

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

Darling and Dechartre remained.

"I liked him," continued the sculptor; "I liked Saint Mark because I felt in him, much better than in the Saint George, the hand and mind of Donatello, who was a good workman. I like him even

more to-day, because he recalls to me, in his venerable and touching candor, the old cobbler to whom you were talking so gently this morning."

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

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

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

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

Perhaps it was a letter to Madame Schmoll, who was not a friend of Madame Marmet, and at once he realized that his suppositions were idiotic.

It was very clear. She had a lover. She was writing to him. Perhaps she was saying to him: "I saw Dechartre to-day; the poor fellow is badly

in love with me." But whether she wrote that or something else, she had a lover. He had not thought of that. To know that she belonged to another made him suffer profoundly. And that hand, that little hand dropping the letter, remained in his eyes and made them burn atrociously.

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

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

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

"I have to talk to you. I must see you alone to-morrow; meet me at six o'clock at the Lungarno Acciaoli."

She replied nothing.

XVI

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I was a coquette. Yet it was not my habit. But I was a coquette with you. I do not say that you have tried to take advantage of it, as

you had the right to do, nor that you are vain about it. I have not remarked vanity in you. It may be possible that you had not noticed. Superior men sometimes lack cleverness. But I know very well that I was not as I should have been, and I beg your pardon. That is why I came. Let us be good friends, since there is yet time."

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

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

"We could make of life a delightful garden."

She feigned to think that the dream was innocent.

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

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

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

"I found you in my path. I do not wish to lose you. I do not wish to lose you."

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

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

But, with the tranquil tone of her voice and with the regular movement of her skirts on the pavement, she irritated him. He told her how he suffered. He knew now the divine malady of love.

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

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

The black avalanche had passed. There were women weeping behind the coffin carried by phantoms wearing heavy shoes.

Thérèse sighed:

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

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

"Before I knew you I was not unhappy. I liked life. I was retained in it by dreams. I liked forms, and the mind in forms, the appearances that caress and flatter. I had the joy of seeing and of dreaming. I enjoyed everything and depended upon nothing. My desires, abundant and light, bore me without fatigue. I was interested in everything and wished for nothing. One suffers only through the will. I know this to-day. I had not a sombre will. Without knowing it, I was happy. Oh, it was not much, it was only enough to live. Now I haven't it. My pleasures, the interest which I took in the images of life and of art, the vivid amusement of creating with my hands a dreamed figure—you have made me lose everything and have even not left me regret. I would not want my liberty and tranquillity again. It seems to me that before I knew you I did not live; and now that I feel that I am living, I cannot live far from you nor near you. I am more wretched than the beggars whom we saw on the road to Ema. They had air to breathe, and I can breathe only you, whom I have not. Yet I am glad to have met you. This alone counts in my existence. A moment ago I thought I hated you. I was wrong; I adore you, and I bless you for the wrong you have done me. I love all that comes to me from you."

They were nearing the black trees at the entrance to San Niccola bridge. On the other side of the river the vague lots displayed their sadness, intensified by night. Seeing that he was calm and full of

a soft languor, she thought that his love, all in imagination, fled in words, and that his desires ran into reverie. She had not expected so prompt a resignation. It almost disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared.

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

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

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

"No, I will not let you go without having told you what I wish to say to you. But I know no longer how to talk; I cannot find the words. I love you. I want to know that you are mine. I swear to you that I will not stand another night in the horror of doubting it."

He pressed her in his arms; and watching for the light of her eyes through the obscurity of her veil, said:

"You must love me. I want you to love me, and it is your fault, for you have wanted it too. Say that you are mine. Say it."

Having gently disengaged herself, she replied with a voice weak and slow:

"I cannot. I cannot. You see I am acting frankly with you. I said to you a moment ago that you had not displeased me. But I cannot do as you wish."

And recalling to her thought the absent one who was waiting for her, she repeated:

"I cannot."

Bending over her, he anxiously questioned her look, the double star of which trembled and veiled itself.

"Why? You love me, I feel it, I see it. You love me. Why will you do me this wrong?"

He drew her to him, wishing to put his soul, with his mouth, on her veiled lips. She escaped him with agile will and said:

"I cannot. Do not ask more. I cannot be yours."

His lips trembled, his face was convulsed. He exclaimed:

"You have a lover, and you love him. Why do you mock me?"

"I swear to you I have no desire to mock you, and that if I loved anyone in the world it would be you."

But he was not listening to her.

"Leave me, leave me!"

And he ran toward the dark country. The Arno formed in the land lagoons, where the moon, half veiled, broke its uncertain clearness. He walked through the water and the mud, with a step rapid, blind, frightful.

She took fright and shouted. She called him. But he did not turn his head and made no answer. He fled with frightful tranquillity. She ran after him. Her feet hurt by the stones, her skirt made heavy with water, she rejoined him.

"What were you going to do?"

Then, looking at her, he saw in her eyes her fright, and said:

"Do not be afraid. I did not see where I was going. I assure you I was not trying to die. Oh, do not be afraid. I am desperate, but I am very calm. I was running away from you. I beg your pardon. But I could not see you any longer. Leave me, I pray you. Farewell!"

She replied, troubled and feeble:

"Come! We shall do what we can."

He remained sombre and spoke not.

She repeated:

"Well, come!"

She took his arm. The vivid softness of her hand animated him. He said:

"Do you wish?"

"I cannot leave you."

"You promise?"

"I must."

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

He said:

"To-morrow."

She, quickly, with a defensive instinct:

"Oh, no; not to-morrow!"

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

"No, I do not regret, but——"

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

"Saturday."

XVII

After dinner, Miss Bell was drawing in the parlor. She was tracing, on canvas, profiles of bearded Etruscans for a cushion which Madame Marmet was to embroider. Prince Albertinelli was selecting the wool with a feminine knowledge of shades. It was late when Choulette, having, as was his habit, played briscola with the cook at the caterer's, appeared, joyful, and as if having the mind of a god. He took a seat on a sofa, by the side of Madame Martin, and looked at her tenderly. Voluptuousness shone in his green eyes. He enveloped her, while talking to her, with poetic and picturesque phrases. It was like the sketch of a love song that he was improvising for her. In short, tormented and odd sentences, he was telling her the charm that she exhaled.

She thought:

"He, too!"

She amused herself by teasing him. She asked him if he had not found in Florence, in the low quarters, one of the women whom he addressed ordinarily. His preferences were known. He could deny it as much as he wished: none ignored the door where he had found the cordon of his Third Order. His friends had met him on the boulevard.

His taste for the most unfortunate women was evident in his most beautiful poems.

"Oh, M. Choulette, as far as I am able to judge, they are very bad women whom you prefer."

He replied with solemnity:

"Madame, you may collect the grain of calumnies sown by M. Paul Vence and throw handfuls of it at me. I will not try to avoid them. It is not necessary you should know that I am chaste and that my mind is pure. But do not judge lightly those whom you call unfortunate, and who should be sacred to you, since they are unfortunate. The disdained and lost girl is the docile clay under the finger of the Divine Potter: she is the victim and the altar of the holocaust. The unfortunates are nearer God than the honest women: they have lost conceit. They do not glorify themselves with the nothingness that honors the matron. They possess humility, which is the cornerstone of virtues agreeable to heaven. A short repentance will be sufficient for them to be the first in heaven; for their sins, without malice and without joy, contain their own forgiveness. Their faults, which are pains, participate in the merits attached to pain; slaves to brutal love, they are deprived of all voluptuousness, and in this they are like the men who practise continence for the Kingdom of God. They are like us, culprits; but shame falls on their crime like a balm, suffering purifies it like a coal. That is why God will listen to the first voice which they shall send to him. A throne is prepared for them at the right

hand of the Father. In the Kingdom of God, the queen and the empress will be happy to sit at the feet of the unfortunate; for you must not think that the celestial house is built on a human plan. It is far from it, Madame."

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

"The love of men is low," he said, "but it rises on painful, inclined planes, and leads to God."

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

"Saturday."

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

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

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

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

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

"Darling, I am sure you have a great deal of reason. Oh, I am sure of it. You are reasonable in the same way as M. Sadler is a violinist. He

plays a little out of tune when he wishes. And you, too, when you are not quite logical, it is for your pleasure. Oh, Darling, you have a great deal of reason and of judgment, and I come to ask your advice."

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

"I have read François Rabelais a great deal, my love. It is in Rabelais and in Villon that I studied French. They are good old masters of language. But, Darling, do you know the 'Pantagruel'? Oh! the 'Pantagruel' is a beautiful and noble city, full of palaces, in the resplendent dawn, before the street sweepers of Paris have come. Oh, no, Darling, the sweepers have not taken out the dirt, and the servant girls have not washed the marble slabs. And I have seen that French women do not read the 'Pantagruel.' You do not know it? No? Oh, it is not necessary. In the 'Pantagruel,' Panurge asks if he must marry, and he covers himself with ridicule, my love. Well, I am quite as laughable as he, since I am asking the same question of you."

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

"As for that, my dear, do not ask me. I have already told you my opinion."

"But, Darling, you have said only that men are wrong to marry. I cannot take that advice for myself."

Madame Martin looked at the little boyish head of Miss Bell, which oddly expressed loving modesty. She said, embracing her:

"Dear, there is not a man in the world exquisite and delicate enough for you."

Then, with an expression of affectionate gravity:

"You are not a child; if some one loves you, and you love him, do what you think you ought to do, without mingling with love interests and combinations that have nothing to do with sentiments. This is the advice of a friend."

Miss Bell hesitated a moment to understand. Then she blushed and rose. She had been shocked.

XVIII

Saturday, at four o'clock, Thérèse came, as she had promised, to the gate of the English cemetery. She found Dechartre at the *grille*. He was serious and troubled; he hardly talked. She was glad he did not display his joy. He led her by the deserted walls of the gardens to a narrow street which she did not know. She read on a signboard: "Via Alfieri." After they had taken fifty steps, he stopped before a sombre alley:

"It is there," he said.

She looked at him with infinite sadness.

"You wish me to go in?"

She saw he was resolute, and followed him without saying a word, in the humid shadow of the alley. He traversed a courtyard where the grass grew between the stones. In the back was a pavilion with three windows, with columns and a front ornamented with goats and nymphs. On the moss-covered stoop he turned in the lock a key that screeched and resisted. He murmured:

"It is rusty."

She replied, without thought:

"All the keys are rusty in this country."

They went up a stairway so silent under its Greek band that it seemed to have forgotten the

noise of footsteps. He pushed open a door and made Thérèse enter the room. She went straight to the window open on the graveyard. Above the wall rose summits of pines, which are not funereal on this earth where mourning is mingled with joy without troubling it, where the sweetness of living extends to the grass of the dead. He took her hand and led her to an arm-chair. He remained standing, and looked at the room which he had prepared so that she would not find herself lost in it. Panels of old print cloth, with figures of Comedy, placed on the walls the amiable sadness of past gayeties. He had placed in a corner an effaced pastel which they had seen together at an antiquary's, and which, for its vanished grace, she called the shade of Rosalba. A grandmother's arm-chair; white chairs; on the table painted cups and Venetian glasses. At all the corners, screens of colored paper, whereon were masks, grotesque figures, the light soul of Florence, of Bologna, and of Venice in the time of the Grand Dukes and of the last Doges. A looking-glass, a carpet, that was all.

He closed the window and lighted the fire. She sat in the arm-chair, and as she remained in it stiffly, he knelt before her, took her hands, kissed them, and looked at her for a while with a marvel of expression, timorous and proud. Then he pressed his lips on the end of her boot.

"What are you doing?"

"I kiss your feet because they have come."

He rose, drew her to him softly, and placed a long

kiss on her mouth. She remained inert, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. Her toque fell, her hair dropped on her shoulders.

Two hours later, when the setting sun made immeasurably longer the shadows on the stones, Thérèse, who had wished to walk alone in the city, found herself in front of the two obelisks of Santa Maria Novella without knowing how she had reached there. She saw at the corner of the square the old cobbler drawing his string with his eternal gesture. He smiled, bearing his sparrow on his shoulder.

She went into the shop, and sat on a chair. She said in French:

"Quentin Matsys, my friend, what have I done, and what will become of me?"

He looked at her quietly, with laughing kindness, not understanding nor caring. Nothing astonished him. She shook her head.

"What I did, my good Quentin, I did because he was suffering, and because I loved him. I regret nothing."

He replied, as was his habit, with the sonorous yes of Italy:

"Si! si!"

"Is it not so, Quentin? I have not done wrong? But what will happen now, my God?"

She prepared to go. He made her understand that he wished her to wait. He culled carefully a bit of basilick and offered it to her.

"For its fragrance, signora!"

XIX

It was the next day.

Having carefully placed on the table of the parlor his knotty stick, his pipe, and his antique carpet-bag, Choulette bowed to Madame Martin, who was reading at the window. He was going to Assisi. He was wearing a sheepskin coat, and resembled the old shepherds in pictures of the Nativity.

"Farewell, Madame. I am quitting Fiesole, you, Dechartre, the too handsome Prince Albertinelli, and that gentle ogress, Miss Bell. I am going to visit the Assisi mountain, which the poet says must be named no longer Assisi, but the Orient, because it is there that the sun of love rose. I am going to kneel before the happy crypt where Saint Francis is resting in a stone manger, with a stone for a pillow. For he would not even take out of this world a shroud—out of this world where he left the revelation of all joy and of all kindness."

"Farewell, M. Choulette. Bring to me a medal of Saint Clara. I like Saint Clara a great deal."

"You are right, Madame; she was a lady full of strength and of prudence. When Saint Francis, ill and almost blind, came to spend a few days at Saint Damien, near his friend, she built with her own hands a hut for him in the garden. He was glad.

A dolorous languor and the burning of his eyelids deprived him of sleep. Enormous rats came to attack him at night. Then he composed a canticle full of joy to bless the splendid brother the Sun, and our sister the Water, chaste, useful, and pure. My most beautiful verses have less inevitable charm and splendor. And it is just that it should be thus; for Saint Francis's soul was more beautiful than his mind. I am better than all those of my contemporaries whom I have known, still I am worth nothing. When Saint Francis had found his Song of the Sun he was very glad. He thought: 'We shall go, my brothers and I, into the cities, and stand in the public squares, with a lute, on the market day. Good people will come near us, and we shall say to them: "We are the jugglers of God, and we shall sing a lay to you. If you are pleased, you will reward us." They will promise, and when we shall have sung, we shall recall their promise to them. We shall say to them: "You owe a reward to us. And the one that we ask of you is that you love one another." Doubtless, to keep their word and not injure God's poor jugglers, they will avoid doing ill to others.' "

Madame Martin thought Saint Francis was the most amiable of the saints.

"His work," replied Choulette, "was destroyed while he lived. Yet he died happy, because in him was joy with humility. He was, in fact, God's sweet singer. And it is right that another poor poet should take his task and teach to the world true

religion and true joy. I shall be that poet, Madame, if I can despoil myself of reason and of conceit. For all moral beauty is achieved in this world through the inconceivable wisdom which comes from God and resembles folly."

"I shall not discourage you, M. Choulette. But I am anxious about the fate which you reserve for the poor women in your new society. You will imprison them all in convents."

"I confess," replied Choulette, "that they embarrass me a great deal in my project of reform. The violence with which one loves them is harsh and bad. The pleasure which they give is not peaceful, and does not lead to joy. I have committed for them, in my life, two or three abominable crimes which nobody knows. I doubt whether I shall ever invite you to supper, Madame, in the new Saint Mary of the Angels."

He took his pipe, his carpet-bag, and his stick:

"The crimes of love shall be forgiven. Or, rather, one cannot do evil when one loves. But sensual love is formed of hatred, selfishness, and anger as much as of love. Because I found you beautiful one night, on this sofa, I was assailed by a cloud of violent thoughts. I had come from the Albergo, where I had heard Miss Bell's cook improvise magnificently twelve hundred verses on Spring. I was inundated by a celestial joy which the sight of you made me lose. It must be that a profound truth is enclosed in Eve's malediction. For, near you, I became sad and wicked. I had soft words

on my lips. They were lies. I felt that I was your adversary and your enemy; I hated you. When I saw you smile, I felt a desire to kill you."

"Truly?"

"Oh, Madame, it is a very natural sentiment which you must have inspired more than once. But the common people feel it without being conscious of it, while my vivid imagination represents me to myself incessantly. I contemplate my mind, at times splendid, often hideous. If you had seen my mind that night you would have yelled with fright."

Thérèse smiled:

"Farewell, M. Choulette. Do not forget my medal of Saint Clara."

He placed his bag on the floor, raised his arm, and held his forefinger like one pointing:

"You have nothing to fear from me. But the one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you. Farewell, Madame."

He took his luggage and went out. She saw his long, rustic form disappear behind the bushes of the garden.

In the afternoon she went to San Marco, where Dechartre was waiting for her. She desired and she feared to see him so soon. She felt an anguish which an unknown sentiment, profoundly soft, appeased. She did not feel the stupor of the first time that she had yielded for love; she did not feel the brusque vision of the irreparable. She was under influences slower, more vague, and more powerful. This time a charming reverie bathed the

reminiscence of the caresses which she had received. She was full of trouble and of anxiety, but she felt no regret. She had acted less through her will than through a force which she divined to be better. She absorbed herself because of her disinterestedness. She counted on nothing, having calculated nothing. Doubtless, she had been wrong to yield, since she was not free; but she had exacted nothing. Perhaps she was for him only a sincere and violent caprice. She did not know him. She had not the experience of these beautiful, vivid imaginations that surpass immensely, in good as in evil, common mediocrity. If he went away from her and disappeared she would not reproach him for it; at least, she thought not. She would keep the reminiscence and the imprint of the rarest and most precious thing one may find in the world. Perhaps he was incapable of real attachment. He thought he loved her. He had loved her for an hour. She dared not wish for more, in the embarrassment of the false situation at which her frankness and her pride were irritated, and which troubled the lucidity of her intelligence. While the carriage was carrying her to San Marco, she persuaded herself that he would say nothing to her of the day before, and that the room from which one could see the pines rise to the sky would leave to them only the dream of a dream.

He extended his hand to her. Before he had spoken she saw in his look that he loved her and wanted her again, and she perceived at the same time that she wished him to be thus.

"You—" he said, "I have been here since noon. I was waiting, knowing that you would not come so soon, but able to live only at the place where I was to see you. It is you! Talk; let me see and hear you."

"Then you still love me?"

"It is now that I love you. I thought I loved you when you were only a phantom. Now, you are the being in whom I have put my soul. It is true you are mine. What have I done to obtain the greatest, the only, good of this world? And those men with whom the earth is covered think they are living! I alone live! Tell me, what have I done to obtain you?"

"Oh, what had to be done, I did. I say this to you frankly. If we have reached that point, the fault is mine. You see, they do not always confess it, but it is always the fault of women. So, whatever may happen, I will never reproach you for anything."

An agile troupe of yelling beggars, guides, and coachmen surrounded them with an importunity wherein was mingled the gracefulness which Italians never lose. Their subtlety made them divine that these were lovers, and they knew that lovers are prodigals. Dechartre threw coin to them, and they all returned to their happy laziness.

A municipal guard received the visitors. Madame Martin regretted that there was no monk. The white gown of the Dominicans was so beautiful under the arcades of the cloister!

They visited the cells where, on the bare plaster, Fra Angelico, aided by his brother Benedetto, painted for his companions innocent pictures.

"Do you recall the winter night when, meeting you before the Guimet Museum, I accompanied you to the narrow street bordered by small gardens which leads to the Billy quay? Before separating we stopped a moment on the parapet on which runs a thin boxwood curtain. You looked at that boxwood, dried by winter. And when you went away I looked at it for a long time."

They were in the cell wherein Savonarola lived. The guide showed to them the portrait and the relics of the martyr.

"What could there have been in me that you liked that day? It was dark."

"I saw you walk. It is in movements that forms speak. Each one of your steps told me the secrets of your precise and charming beauty. Oh! my imagination was never discreet for anything that concerned you. I did not dare to talk to you. When I saw you, it frightened me. It frightened me because you could do everything for me. When you were present, I adored you tremblingly. When you were far from me, I felt all the impieties of desire."

"I did not suspect this. But do you recall the first time we saw each other, when Paul Vence introduced you? You were seated near the screen. You were looking at the miniatures. You said to me: 'This lady, painted by Siccardi, resembles André

Chénier's mother.' I replied to you: 'She is my husband's great-grandmother. How looked André Chénier's mother?' And you said: 'There is a portrait of her: a faded Levantine.'"

He excused himself and thought that he had not spoken so impertinently.

"You did. My memory is better than yours."

They were walking in the white silence of the convent. They visited the cell which Angelico ornamented with the suavest painting. And there, before the Virgin which, in the pale sky, receives from God the Father the immortal crown, he took Thérèse in his arms and placed a kiss on her mouth, almost in view of two Englishwomen who were walking through the corridors, consulting their Baedeker. She said to him:

"We must not forget Saint Anthony's cell."

"Thérèse, I am suffering in my happiness from everything that is yours and that escapes me. I am suffering because you do not live for me alone. I wish to have you entire, and to have had you in the past."

She shrugged her shoulders a little.

"Oh, the past!"

"The past is the only human reality. Everything that is, is past."

She raised toward him her eyes, which resembled charming skies full of mingled sun and rain.

"Well, I may say this to you: I have never felt that I lived except with you."

When she returned to Fiesole, she found a brief

and threatening letter from Le Ménil. He could not understand her prolonged absence, her silence. If she did not announce at once her return, he would go to Florence for her.

She read without astonishment, but annoyed to see that everything which could happen was happening, and that nothing would be spared to her of what she had feared. She could still calm him and reassure him: she had only to say to him that she loved him; that she would soon return to Paris; that he should renounce the foolish idea of rejoining her here; that Florence was a village where they would be seen at once. But she would have to write: "I love you." She would have to quiet him with caressing phrases. She had not the courage to do it. She would let him guess the truth. She accused herself in veiled terms. She wrote obscurely of souls carried by the flood of life, and of the little that one is on the moving ocean of things. She asked him, with affectionate sadness, to keep of her a good reminiscence in a little corner of his soul.

She took the letter to the post-office box on the Fiesole square. Children were playing in the twilight. She looked from the top of the hill to the elegant cup which carried like a jewel beautiful Florence. And the peace of night made her shiver. She threw the letter in the box. Then only she had the clear vision of what she had done and of what the result would be.

XX

On the square, where the sun of spring threw its yellow roses, the ringing bells at noon dispersed the rustic crowd of grain merchants assembled to sell their wares. At the foot of the Lanzi, before the assembly of statues, the venders of ices had placed on tables covered with red cottonade small castles bearing the inscription: "Bibite cliacciate." And easy joy descended from heaven on earth. Thérèse and Jacques, returning from an early promenade to the Boboli Gardens, were passing before the illustrious loggia. Thérèse looked at the Sabine by John of Bologna with that interested curiosity of a woman examining another woman. But Dechartre looked at Thérèse only. He said to her:

"It is marvellous how the vivid light of day flatters your beauty, loves you, and caresses the mother-of-pearl on your cheeks."

"Yes," she said. "Candle light hardens my features. I had observed this. I am not an evening woman, unfortunately. It is at night that women have a chance to show themselves and to please. At night, Princess Seniavine has a fine gilt complexion; in the sun she is as yellow as a lemon. It must be owned that she does not care. She is not a coquette."

"And you are?"

"Oh, yes. Formerly I was a coquette for myself, now I am a coquette for you."

She looked at the Sabine woman, who with her arms, long and robust, tried to avoid the Roman's embraces.

"To be beautiful, must a woman have that dryness of form and that length of limb? I am not shaped in that way."

He took pains to reassure her. But she was not anxious. She was looking now at the little castle of the ice-vender. A sudden desire had come to her to eat an ice there, standing as the working-girls of the city did. He said:

"Wait a moment."

He ran toward the street which follows the left side of the Lanzi, and disappeared.

After a moment he came back, and gave to her a little gold spoon, the handle of which was finished in a lily of Florence, the chalice of which was enamelled with red.

"It is to eat your ice. The man does not give a spoon. You would have had to put out your tongue. It would have been pretty, but you haven't the habit of it."

She recognized the spoon, a jewel which she had remarked the day before in the showcase of an antiquarian.

They were happy; they disseminated their joy, which was full and simple, in light words which had no sense. And they laughed when the Florentine

repeated to them with sober and powerful mimicry passages of the old Italian writers. She enjoyed the play of his face, which was antique and jovial. But she did not always understand what he said. She asked Jacques:

"What did he say?"

"Do you wish to know?"

She wished to know.

"Well, he said he would be happy if the fleas in his bed were shaped like you."

When she had eaten the ice, he asked her to return to San Michele. It was so near! They would traverse the square and at once discover the old stone jewel. They went. They looked at the Saint George and at the bronze Saint Mark. Dechartre saw again on the wall the post-office box, and he recalled with painful exactitude the little gloved hand which had thrown the letter. He thought it hideous, that copper mouth which had swallowed Thérèse's secret. He could not turn his eyes away from it. All his gayety had fled. She applied herself to admiring the rude statue of the Evangelist.

"It is true that he looks honest and frank, and that, if he talked, nothing would come out of his mouth except words of truth."

He replied bitterly:

"It is not a woman's mouth."

She understood his thought, and said in her soft tone:

"My friend, why do you say this to me? I am frank."

"What do you call frank? You know that a woman is obliged to lie."

She hesitated. Then:

"A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly."

XXI

Thérèse was dressed in sombre gray. The bushes were covered with silver stars on the border of the terrace, and on the side of the hills the laurel trees threw their odoriferous flame. The cup of Florence was in bloom.

Vivian Bell walked, white, in the fragrant garden.

"You see, Darling, Florence is truly the City of Flowers, and it is not wrong that she should have a red lily for emblem. It is a festival to-day, Darling."

"A festival, to-day?"

"Darling, you do not know this is the first of May? You did not wake this morning in a charming fairy spectacle? Oh, Darling, you do not celebrate the Festival of the Flowers? You do not feel joyful, you who love flowers? For you love them, my love, I know it; you are very good to them. You said to me that they felt joy and pain; that they suffered as we do."

"Ah! I said that they suffered as we do?"

"Yes, you said it. It is their festival to-day. We must celebrate it with the rites consecrated by old painters."

Thérèse heard without understanding. She was crumpling under her glove a letter which she had

just received, a letter bearing the Italian postage stamp, and containing only these two lines:

"I am staying at the Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli. I shall expect you to-morrow morning. No. 18."

"Oh, Darling, you do not know it is the custom of Florence to celebrate spring the first of May every year? Then you did not understand the meaning of Botticelli's picture consecrated to the Festival of Flowers. Formerly, Darling, the first of May the entire city was in joy. Young girls, crowned with sweetbriar and other flowers, made a long cortège through the Corso, under arches, and formed choruses on the new grass. We shall do as they did. We shall dance in the garden."

"Ah, we shall dance in the garden?"

"Yes, Darling; and I will teach you Tuscan steps of the fifteenth century which have been found in a manuscript by Mr. Morrison, the oldest librarian in London. Come back soon, my love; we shall put on flower hats and dance."

"Yes, dear, we shall dance."

And pushing the gate, she ran through the little pathway that hid its stones under rose bushes. She threw herself into the first carriage she found. The coachman wore forget-me-nots on his hat and on the handle of his whip.

"Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli."

She knew where that was, Lungarno Acciaoli. She had gone there at sunset, and she had seen the gold of the sun on the agitated surface of the river.

Then night had come, the murmur of the waters in the silence, the words and the looks that had troubled her, the first kiss of the friend, the beginning of irreparable love. Oh, yes, she recalled Lungarno Acciaoli and the river side beyond the old bridge—Great Britain Hotel—she knew: a big stone façade on the quay. It was fortunate, since he had to come, that he had gone there. He might as easily have gone to the City Hotel, where Dechartre was. It was fortunate they were not side by side in the same corridor. Lungarno Acciaoli! The dead body which they had seen pass was at peace somewhere in the little graveyard in bloom.

"Number 18."

It was a bare hotel room, with a stove in the Italian fashion, a set of brushes minutely displayed on the table, and a time-table. Not a book, not a journal. He was there; she saw suffering on his bony face, an air of fever. This produced on her a grave impression. He waited a moment for a word, a gesture; but she dared do nothing. He offered a chair to her. She refused it and remained standing.

"Thérèse, there is something which I do not know. Speak."

After a moment of silence, she replied, with painful slowness:

"My friend, when I was in Paris, why did you go?"

By the sadness of her accent he believed, he wished to believe, in the expression of an affectionate reproach. His face colored. He replied ardently:

"Ah, if I could have foreseen! That hunting party—I cared little for it, as you may think! But you—your letter, that of the 27th" (he had a gift for dates) "has thrown me into a horrible anxiety. Something has happened. Tell me everything."

"My friend, I believed you had ceased to love me."

"But now that you know the contrary?"

"Now——"

She paused, her arms falling and her hands joined.

Then, with affected tranquillity:

"Well, my friend, we took each other without knowing. One never knows. You are young; younger than I, since we are of the same age. You have, doubtless, projects for the future."

He looked at her proudly. She continued:

"Your parents, your mother, your aunts, your uncle the General, have projects for you. It's natural. I might have become an obstacle. It is better that I should disappear from your life. We shall keep a good reminiscence of each other."

She extended to him her gloved hand. He folded his arms:

"Then, you do not want me? You have made me happy, as no other man ever was, and you think now to brush me aside? Truly, you think you have finished with me? What have you come to say to me? A *liaison?* that is easily undone. People take each other, quit each other—well, no! You are not a person whom one may quit."

"Yes, you had perhaps placed in me more than one does ordinarily in such cases. I was more than an amusement for you. But, if I am not the woman you thought I was, if I have deceived you, if I am frivolous—you know people have said so—well, if I have not been to you what I should have been——"

She hesitated, and continued in a brave tone, contrasting with what she said:

"If, while I was yours, I have been led astray; if I have been curious; if I say to you that I was not made for serious sentiment——"

He interrupted her:

"You are not telling the truth."

"No, I am not telling the truth. And I do not know how to lie. I wanted to spoil our past. I was wrong. It was, as you know it was. But——"

"But?"

"I have always told you I am not sure. There are women, it is said, who are sure of themselves. I warned you that I am not like them."

He shook his head from right to left, like an irritated beast.

"What do you mean? I do not understand. I understand nothing. Speak clearly. There is something between us. I do not know what. I want to know what it is. What is it?"

"There is the fact that I am not a woman sure of herself, and that you should not rely on me. No, you should not rely on me. I had promised nothing—and then, if I had promised, what are words?"

"You do not love me. Oh, you love me no more. I can see it. But it is so much the worse for you! I love you. You should not have given yourself to me. Do not think that you can take yourself back. I love you and I'll keep you. So you thought you could get out of trouble very quietly? Listen a moment. You have done everything to make me love you, to attach me to you, to make it impossible for me to live without you.

"Six weeks ago you asked for nothing better. You were everything for me, I was everything for you. And now you want suddenly that I should know you no longer; that you should be to me a stranger, a lady whom one meets in society. Ah, you have a fine audacity! Have I dreamed? All the past is not true? I invented it all? Oh, there can be no doubt of it. You loved me. I feel it still. Well, I have not changed. I am what I was; you have nothing to complain of. I have not betrayed you for other women. It isn't credit that I claim. I could not have done it. When one has known you, one finds the prettiest women insipid. I have never had the idea of deceiving you. I have always acted well toward you. Why should you not love me? Answer. Speak. Say you love me still. Say it, since it is true. Come, Thérèse, you will feel at once that you love as you loved me formerly in the little nest where we were so happy. Come!"

He went near her ardently. She, her eyes full of fright, pushed him away with glacial horror.

He understood, stopped, and said:

"You have a lover."

She lowered her head, then lifted it, grave and dumb.

Then he made a gesture as if to strike her, and at once recoiled in shame. He lowered his eyes and was silent. His fingers to his lips, and biting his nails, he saw that his hand had been pricked by a pin on her waist, and bled. He threw himself in an armchair, drew his handkerchief to wipe off the blood, and remained indifferent and without thought.

She, with her back to the door, her head straight and pale, her look vague, arranged her hat with instinctive care. At the noise, formerly delicious, that the rustle of her skirts made, he started, looked at her, and asked furiously:

"Who is he? I want to know."

She did not move. She replied with soft firmness:

"I have told you all I can. Do not ask more; it would be useless."

He looked at her with a cruel look which she had never seen before.

"Oh, do not tell me his name. It will not be difficult for me to find it."

She said not a word, saddened for him, anxious for another, full of anguish and of fear, and yet without regret, without bitterness, having her soul elsewhere.

He had a vague sensation of what was happening in her. In his anger to see her so sweet and so serene, to find her beautiful, and beautiful for an-

other, he felt a desire to kill her, and he shouted at her:

"Go!"

Then, weakened by this effort of hatred which was not natural to him, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

His pain touched her, gave her the hope of quieting him. She thought she might perhaps console him for her loss. Amicably and comfortably she sat by him.

"My friend, blame me. I am to blame, and more to be pitied. Disdain me, if you wish, if one can disdain an unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life. In fine, judge me as you wish. But keep for me a little friendship in your anger, a little bitter and sweet reminiscence, something like those days of autumn where there is sunlight and strong wind. That is what I deserve. Do not be harsh to the agreeable and frivolous visitor who passed through your life. Bid good-by to me as to a traveller who goes one knows not where, and who is sad. There is so much sadness in separation! You were irritated against me a moment ago. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I only suffer for it. Reserve a little sympathy for me. Who knows? The future is always unknown. It is very gray and very obscure before me. Let me say to myself that I have been kind, simple, frank with you, and that you have not forgotten it. In time you will understand, you will forgive; to-day have a little pity."

He was not listening. He was only appeased by the caress of her voice, wherein the sounds were limpid and clear. He exclaimed:

"You do not love him. I am the one whom you love. Then——"

She hesitated:

"Ah, to say whom one loves or loves not is not an easy thing for a woman, or at least for me. I do not know how other women do. But life is not good to me. I am thrown, pushed, rocked."

He looked at her calmly. An idea came to him. He had taken a resolution; he forgave, he forgot, provided she returned to him at once.

"Thérèse, you do not love him. It was an error, a moment of forgetfulness, a horrible and stupid thing that you did through weakness, through surprise, perhaps in spite. Swear to me that you will never see him again."

He took her arm:

"Swear to me."

She said not a word, her teeth set, her face sombre. He wrenched her wrist. She exclaimed:

"You hurt me."

However, he followed his idea; he led her to the table, on which, near the brushes, were an ink bottle, and several leaves of letter paper ornamented with a large blue vignette, representing the façade of the hotel, with innumerable windows.

"Write what I am going to dictate to you. I will have somebody to take the letter."

And as she resisted, he made her fall on her knees. Proud and tranquil, she said:

"I cannot, I will not."

"Why?"

"Because—do you wish to know?—because I love him."

Brusquely he released her. If he had had his revolver at hand, perhaps he would have killed her. But almost at once his anger was dampened by sadness; and now, desperate, he was the one who would have wished to die.

"Is what you say true? Is it possible?"

"How do I know? Can I say? Do I understand? Have I an idea, a sentiment, on anything?"

With an effort she added:

"Am I at this moment aware of anything except my sadness and your despair?"

"You love him, you love him! What has he, how is he, that you should love him?"

His surprise made him stupid; he was in an abyss of astonishment. But what she had said separated them. He did not dare to complain. He only repeated:

"You love him, you love him; but what has he done to you, what has he said, for you to love him? I know you. I have not told you every time your ideas shocked me. I would wager he is not even a man in society. And you believe he loves you? You believe it? Well, you are deceiving yourself. He does not love you. You flatter him, simply. He will quit you at the first opportunity. When he

shall have compromised you, he will abandon you. Next year people will say of you: 'She goes with everybody.' I am sorry for your father; he is one of my friends, and will know your behavior. You cannot expect to deceive him."

She listened, humiliated but consoled, thinking how she would have suffered had she found him generous.

In his simplicity he sincerely disdained her. This disdain relieved him.

"How did the thing happen? You can tell me."

She shrugged her shoulders with so much pity that he dared not continue. He became hateful again.

"Do you imagine that I will aid you in saving appearances, that I will return to your house, that I will continue to call on your husband?"

"I think you will continue to do what a gentleman should. I ask nothing of you. I should have liked to preserve of you the reminiscence of an excellent friend. I thought you might be indulgent and kind to me, but it's not possible. I see that people never quit each other kindly. Later, later, you will judge me better. Farewell!"

He looked at her. Now his face expressed more pain than anger. She had never seen his eyes so dry and so black, his temples so arid. It seemed as if he had grown old in an hour.

"I prefer to tell you in advance. It will be impossible for me to see you again. You are not a woman whom one may meet after one has been

loved by her. You are not like others. You have a poison of your own, which you have given to me, and which I feel in me, in my veins. Why have I known you?"

She looked at him kindly.

"Farewell! Say to yourself that I am not worthy of being regretted so much."

Then, when he saw that she placed her hand on the key of the door, when he felt at that gesture that he was to lose her, that he would never have her again, he shouted. He forgot everything. There remained in him only the dazed feeling of a great misfortune accomplished, of an irreparable calamity. And from the depth of his stupor a desire ascended. He wanted to captivate again the one who was going and would never return. He drew her to him. She resisted with all the force of her will, which was free and on the alert. She disengaged herself, crumpled, torn, without even having been afraid.

He understood that everything was useless; he realized she was no longer for him, because she belonged to another. As his suffering returned, he pushed her out of the door.

She remained a moment in the corridor, proudly waiting for a word.

But he shouted again, "Go!" and shut the door violently.

On the Via Alfieri, she saw again the pavilion in the rear of the courtyard where pale grass grew. She found it tranquil and dumb, faithful, with its

goats and its nymphs, to the lovers of the time of Grand Duchess Eliza. She felt at once freed from the painful and brutal world, and transported to ages wherein she had not known the sadness of life. At the foot of the stairs, the steps of which were covered with roses, Dechartre was waiting. She threw herself in his arms. He carried her inert, as the precious trophy before which he had become pallid and trembling. She enjoyed, her eyelids half closed, the superb humiliation of being a beautiful prey. Her fatigue, her sadness, her disgust with the day, the reminiscence of violence, her regained liberty, the need of forgetting, remains of fright, everything vivified, irritated her tenderness. She linked her arms around the neck of her friend.

They had the gayety of children. They laughed, said nothings, played, ate lemons, oranges, and other fruits piled up near them on painted plates. Her lips were half open on the brilliancy of her humid teeth. She asked, with coquettish anxiety, if he were not disillusioned after the beautiful dream he had made of her.

In the caressing lights of the day which he had arranged, he contemplated her with youthful joy. He gave praise and kisses to her. They forgot themselves in caresses, in friendly quarrels, in happy glances.

He asked her how a little red mark on her temple had come there. She replied that she had forgotten; that it was nothing. She hardly lied; truly she had forgotten.

They recalled to each other their beautiful and short history, all their life, which dated from the day when they had met.

"You know, on the terrace, the day after your arrival, you said vague words to me. I guessed that you loved me."

"I was afraid to seem stupid to you."

"You were, a little. It was my triumph. It made me impatient to see you so little troubled near me. I loved you before you loved me. Oh, I do not blush for it."

He gave her a glass of Asti. But there was on the table a bottle of Trasimène. She wished to taste it, in memory of the lake which she had seen desolate and beautiful at night in its opal cup. It was at her first stay in Italy. It had happened six years before.

He chided her for having discovered the beauty of things without his aid.

She said:

"Without you, I did not know how to see anything. Why did you not come before?"

He closed her mouth with a kiss. Then she said:

"Yes, I love you! Yes, I have never loved any one but you!"

XXII

Le Ménil had written: "I leave to-morrow at seven p.m. Meet me at the station."

She had come. She saw him in long coat and cape, precise and calm, in front of the hotel stages. He said only:

"Ah, you have come."

"But, my friend, you have called me."

He did not confess that he had written in the absurd hope that she would love him again and that the rest would be forgotten, or that she would say to him: "It was a trial."

If she had said so he would have believed her.

Astonished because she did not speak, he said dryly:

"What have you to say to me? It is not for me, it is for you to talk. I have no explanations to give you. I haven't to justify a betrayal."

"My friend, do not be cruel, do not be ungrateful. This is what I had to say to you. And I have still to say to you that I quit you with the sadness of a real friend."

"Is that all? Go and say this to the other. It will interest him more than it does me."

"You have called me, I have come; do not make me regret it."

"I am sorry to have disturbed you. You could doubtless find a better employment for your time. I will not detain you. Rejoin him, since you are dying to do so."

At the thought that the poor and wretched words which she heard expressed a moment of the eternal human pain, and that tragedy had illustrated similar ones, she had an impression of sadness mingled with irony which a curl of her lips betrayed. He thought she was laughing.

"Do not laugh; listen to me. The other day, in the hotel room, I wanted to kill you. I came so near doing it that now I know what it is. I will not do it. You can rest secure. What would be the use? As I wish to keep up appearances, I will call on you in Paris. It will grieve me to learn that you cannot receive me. I will see your husband, I will see your father also. It will be to say good-by to them, as I intend to go on a long voyage. Farewell, Madame!"

At the moment when he turned his back to her, Thérèse saw Miss Bell and Prince Albertinelli coming out of the freight station toward her. The Prince was very handsome. Vivian was walking by his side with the lightness of chaste joys.

"Oh, Darling, what a pleasant surprise to find you here. The Prince and I have just seen, at the custom house, the bell, which has come."

"Ah, the bell has come?"

"It is here, Darling, the Ghiberti bell. I saw it in its wooden cage. It did not ring, because it was

a prisoner. But it will have a campanile in my Fiesole house. When it feels the air of Florence, it will be happy to let its silvery voice be heard. Visited by the doves, it will ring for all our joys and for all our sufferings. It will ring for you, for me, for the Prince, for good Madame Marmet, for M. Choulette, for all our friends."

"Dear, bells never ring for real joys and for real sufferings. Bells are honest functionaries who know only official sentiments."

"Oh, Darling, you are much mistaken. Bells know the secrets of souls; they know everything. But I am very glad to find you here. Oh, I know, my love, why you came to the station. Your maid betrayed you. She told me you were waiting for a pink gown which delayed coming and that you were very impatient. But do not let that trouble you. You are always beautiful, my love."

She made Madame Martin enter her wagon.

"Come, quick, Darling; M. Jacques Dechartre dines at the house to-night, and I would not like to make him wait."

And while they were going through the silence of the night, through the pathways full of savage perfumes:

"Do you see over there, Darling, the black distaffs of the Fates, the cypresses of the cemetery? It is there I wish to sleep."

But Thérèse thought anxiously: "They saw him. Did they recognize him? I think not. The place was dark, and studded with little blinding lights.

Did she know him? I do not recall whether she saw him at my house last year."

What made her anxious was the half-concealed joy of the Prince.

"Darling, do you wish a place near me in that rustic graveyard? Shall we rest side by side under a little earth and a great deal of sky? But I do wrong to extend to you an invitation which you cannot accept. It will not be permitted to you to sleep your eternal sleep at the foot of the hill of Fiesole, my love. You will have to rest in Paris, in a handsome monument, by the side of Count Martin-Belléme."

"Why? Do you think, dear, that the wife must be united to her husband even after death?"

"Certainly she must, Darling. Marriage is for time and for eternity. Do you not know the history of a young couple who loved each other in the province of Auvergne? They died almost at the same time, and were placed in two tombs separated by a road. But every night a sweetbriar bush threw from one tomb to the other its flowery branches. The two coffins had to be reunited."

When they had passed the Badia, they saw a procession coming up the side of the hill. The wind of night blew on the last flames of the candles borne in gilt wood candlesticks. The girls, white and blue, of the societies, accompanied the painted banners. Then came a little Saint John, blonde, curly-headed, nude under the lamb's fleece which showed his arms and his shoulders; and a Saint Mary Mag-

dalene, seven years old, in the gilt crown of her crimped hair. The people of Fiesole followed. Countess Martin recognized Choulette among them. A candle in one hand, his book in the other, blue spectacles on the end of his nose, he was singing; there were savage lights in the corners of his face and on the bumps of his head. His wild beard went up and down with the rhythm of the song. Under the harshness of the shades and lights which worked on his face, he had an old and robust air similar to that of a solitary monk capable of accomplishing a century of penance.

"How handsome he is," said Thérèse. "He is making a spectacle of himself to himself. He is a great artist."

"Oh, Darling, why will you insist that M. Choulette is not a pious man? Why? There is much joy and much beauty in faith. Poets know this. If M. Choulette had not faith, he could not write the admirable verses that he does."

"And you, dear, have you faith?"

"Oh, yes; I believe in God and in the word of Christ."

Now the banners and the white veils had disappeared in the road. But one could see on the bald cranium of Choulette the flame of the candle reflected in rays of gold.

Dechartre, however, was waiting alone in the garden. Thérèse found him resting on the balcony of the terrace where he had felt the first sufferings of love. While Miss Bell was trying to find with

the Prince a place for the campanile, he led his friend under the trees.

"You promised me that you would be in the garden when I came. I have been waiting for you an hour which seemed mortal. You were not to go out. Your absence has surprised and grieved me."

She replied vaguely that she had been compelled to go to the station, and that Miss Bell had brought her back in the wagon.

He begged her pardon for the anxious expression of his face, but everything frightened him. His happiness made him afraid.

They were already at table when Choulette appeared, with the face of an antique satyr. A terrible joy shone in his phosphorous eyes. Since his return from Assisi, he lived only among paupers, drank Chianti wine all day with girls and artisans to whom he taught joy and innocence, the advent of Jesus Christ, and the imminent abolition of taxes and military service. At the beginning of the procession he had gathered vagabonds in the ruins of the Roman theatre, and had delivered to them in a macaronic language, half French and half Tuscan, a sermon, which he took pleasure in repeating:

"Kings, senators and judges have said: 'The life of nations is in us.' Well, they lie; and they are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle.'

"The life of nations is in the crops of the fields yellowing under the eye of the Lord. It is in the

vines, and in the smiles and in the tears with which the sky bathes the fruits on the trees.

"It is not in the laws which were made by the rich and the powerful for the preservation of power and riches.

"The chiefs of kingdoms and of republics have said in their books that the right of peoples is the right of war, and they have glorified violence. And they render honors unto conquerors, and they raise on the public squares statues to the victorious man and horse. But one has not the right to kill; that is why the just man will not draw from the urn a number which will send him to the war. The right is not to feed folly and crimes of a prince raised over a kingdom or over a republic; and that is why the just will not pay taxes and will not give money to the publicans. He will enjoy in peace the fruit of his work, and he will make bread with the wheat that he has sown, and he will eat the fruits of the trees which he has cut."

"Ah, M. Choulette," said Prince Albertinelli, gravely, "you are right to take interest in the state of our unfortunate fields, which taxes exhaust. What fruit can be drawn from a soil taxed to thirty-three per cent. of its net income? The master and the servants are the prey of the publicans."

Dechartre and Madame Martin were struck by the unexpected sincerity of his accent.

He added:

"I like the King. I am sure of my loyalty, but the ills of the peasants move me."

The truth is that he pursued with obstinacy a single aim: to reëstablish the domain of Casentino that his father, Prince Carlo, an officer of Victor Emmanuel, had left devoured by usurers. His affected gentleness concealed his stubbornness. He had only useful vices. It was to become a great Tuscan landowner that he had dealt in pictures, sold the famous ceilings of his palace, made love to old women, and, finally, sought the hand of Miss Bell, whom he knew to be skilful at earning money and practised in the art of housekeeping. He liked peasants really. The ardent praises of Choulette, which he understood vaguely, awakened this affection in him. He forgot himself enough to express his mind:

"In a country where master and servants form one family, the fate of the one depends on that of the others. Taxes despoil us. How good are our fathers. They are the best men in the world to till the soil."

Madame Martin confessed that she would not have believed it. The country of Lombardy alone seemed to her to be well cultivated. Tuscany seemed to be a beautiful, savage orchard.

The Prince replied, smilingly, that perhaps she would not have talked in that way if she had done him the honor of visiting his farms of Casentino, although these had suffered from long and ruinous suits. She would have seen there what an Italian landscape really is.

"I take a great deal of care of my domain. I was coming from it to-night when I had the double

pleasure of finding at the station Miss Bell, who had come for her Ghiberti bell, and you, Madame, who were talking with a friend from Paris."

He had the idea that it would be disagreeable to her to hear him speak of that meeting. He looked around the table, and saw the motion of anxious surprise which Dechartre could not restrain. He insisted:

"Forgive, Madame, in a rustic, a certain pretension to knowing something about the world. In the man who was talking to you I recognized a Parisian, because he had an English air; and while he affected stiffness, he showed perfect ease and particular vivacity."

"Oh," said Thérèse negligently, "I have not seen him for a long time. I was much surprised to meet him at Florence at the moment of his departure."

She looked at Dechartre, who affected not to listen.

"I know that gentleman," said Miss Bell. "It is M. Le Ménil. I dined with him twice at Madame Martin's, and he talked to me very well. He said he liked football; that he introduced the game in France, and that now football is quite in the fashion. He also related to me his hunting adventures. He likes animals. I have observed that hunters like animals. I assure you, Darling, that M. Le Ménil talks admirably about hares. He knows their habits. He said to me it was a pleasure to look at them dancing in the moonlight in the plains. He has assured me that they were very intelligent, and that he had seen an old hare, pursued by dogs, force another

hare to get out of the trail so as to deceive the hunters. Darling, did M. Le Ménil ever talk to you about hares?"

Thérèse replied she did not know, she thought hunters were bothersome.

Miss Bell exclaimed. She did not think M. Le Ménil was ever bothersome when talking of the hares that danced in the moonlight in the plains and in the vines. She would have liked to raise a hare, like Phanion.

"Darling, you do not know Phanion. Oh, I am sure that M. Dechartre knows her. She was beautiful, and dear to poets. She lived in the Island of Cos, in a house on the side of a dell which, covered with lemon trees, descended to the blue sea. And they say that she looked at the blue glances of the waves. I related Phanion's history to M. Le Ménil, and he was very glad to hear it. She had received from some hunter a little hare with long ears. She raised it on her knees and fed it on the flowers of spring. It loved Phanion and forgot its mother. It died before having eaten too many flowers. Phanion lamented over its loss. She buried it in the lemon garden, in a grave which she could see from her bed. And the shade of the little hare was consoled by the songs of the poets."

The good Madame Marmet said that M. Le Ménil pleased by his elegant and discreet manners, which young men no longer know. She would have liked to have seen him. She wanted him to do something for her.

"For my nephew," she said. "He is a captain in the artillery, and his chiefs like him. His colonel was for a long time under orders of M. Le Ménil's uncle, General La Briche. If M. Le Ménil would ask his uncle to write to Colonel Faure in favor of my nephew I would be grateful to him. My nephew is not a stranger to M. Le Ménil. They met last year at the masked ball which Captain de Lessay gave at the Hotel at Caen."

Madame Marmet lowered her eyes and added:

"The invited guests, naturally, were not society women. But it is said some of them were very pretty. They came from Paris. My nephew, who gave these details to me, was dressed as a coachman. M. Le Ménil was dressed as a Hussar of Death, and he had much success."

Miss Bell said she was sorry not to have known that M. Le Ménil was in Florence. Certainly, she would have invited him to come to Fiesole.

Dechartre remained sombre and distant during the rest of the dinner; and when, at the moment of leaving, Thérèse extended her hand to him, she felt that he avoided pressing it in his.

XXIII

The next day, in the hidden pavilion of the Via Alfieri, she found him preoccupied. She tried to distract him with ardent gayety, with the sweetness of pressing intimacy, with superb humility. But he remained sombre. He had all night meditated, labored over, and formed his sadness. He had found reasons for suffering. His thought had brought together the hand which threw a letter in the box before the bronze San Marco and the banal and dreadful unknown who had been seen at the station. Now Jacques Dechartre gave a face and a name to his suffering. In the grandmother's armchair where Thérèse had been seated on the day of her welcome, and which she had this time offered to him, he was assailed by painful images; while she, bent over one of his arms, enveloped him with her warm form and her loving mind. She divined too well what he was suffering to ask it of him simply.

In order to bring him back to gentle ideas, she recalled the secrets of the room where they were and reminiscences of their walks through the city. She was gracefully familiar.

"The little spoon you gave me, the little red lily

spoon, I use for my tea in the morning. And I know by the pleasure which I feel at seeing it when I wake how much I love you."

Then, as he replied only in sentences sad and veiled, she said:

"I am here near you, and you do not care for me. You are preoccupied by some idea that I do not know. Yet I am alive, and an idea is nothing."

"An idea is nothing? Do you think so? One may be wretched or happy for an idea; one may live and one may die for an idea. Well, I am thinking——"

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask? You know very well I am thinking of what I heard last night, which you had concealed from me. I am thinking of your meeting at the station, which was not due to chance, but which a letter had caused, a letter thrown—remember—in the box of San Michele. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I have not the right. But why did you give yourself to me if you were not free?"

She thought she must tell an untruth.

"You mean someone whom I met at the station yesterday? I assure you it was the most ordinary meeting in the world."

He was painfully impressed with the fact that she did not dare to name the one she spoke of. He avoided, too, to pronounce that name.

"Thérèse, he had not come for you? You did not know he was in Florence? He is nothing more

to you than a man whom you meet socially? He is not the one who, when absent, made you say to me, 'I cannot'? He is nothing to you?"

She replied resolutely:

"He comes to the house at times. He was introduced to me by General Larivière. I have nothing more to say to you about him. I assure you he is of no interest to me, and I cannot conceive what may be in your mind about him."

She felt a sort of contentment at repudiating the man who had sustained against her with so much harshness and violence his rights of ownership. But she was in a hurry to get out of her tortuous path. She rose and looked at her friend, with beautiful, tender, and grave eyes.

"Listen to me: the day when I gave myself to you, my life was yours entire. If a doubt or a suspicion comes to you, question me. The present is yours, and you know well there is only you, you alone, in it. As for my past, if you knew what nothingness it was you would be glad. I do not think another woman made as I was, to love, would have brought to you a mind newer to love than is mine. That I swear to you. The years which were spent without you, I have not lived them. Let us not talk of them. There is nothing in them of which I may be ashamed. To have regret for them is another thing. I regret to have known you so late. Why did you not come sooner? You could have had me five years ago as easily as to-day. But, believe me, let us not tire ourselves with digging

time that has gone. Remember Lohengrin. If you love me, I am for you the swan's knight. I have asked nothing of you. I have wanted to know nothing. I have not chided you about Mlle. Jeanne Tancrede. I saw you loved me, that you were suffering, and it was enough—because I loved you."

"A woman cannot be jealous in the same manner as a man, nor feel what makes us suffer."

"I do not know. Why?"

"Why? Because there is not in the blood, in the flesh of a woman that absurd and generous fury for ownership, that antique instinct of which man has made a right. Man is the god who wants his creature entire. Since time immemorial woman is accustomed to sharing men's love. It is the past, the obscure past, which determines our passions. We were already so old when we were born! Jealousy for a woman is only a wound to her own self-love. For a man it is a torture as profound as moral suffering, as continuous as physical suffering. You ask why? Because, in spite of my submission and of my respect, in spite of the fright you cause me, you are matter and I am the idea; you are the thing and I am the mind; you are the clay and I am the artisan. Oh, do not complain of this! Near the amphora round and surrounded with garlands, what is the humble and rude potter? The amphora is tranquil and beautiful: he is wretched; he is tormented; he wills; he suffers; for to will is to suffer. Yes, I am jealous. I know what there is in my jealousy. When I examine it, I find in it

hereditary prejudices, savage conceit, sickly susceptibility, a mingling of bestial violence and cruel feebleness, imbecile and wicked revolt against the laws of life and society. But it does not matter that I know it for what it is: it exists and torments me. I am the chemist who, studying the properties of acid which he has drunk, knows how it was combined and what salts form it. Nevertheless the acid burns him, and will burn him to the bone."

"My friend, you are absurd."

"Yes, I am absurd. I feel it better than you feel it yourself. To want a woman in all the brilliancy of her beauty and her wit, mistress of herself, and who knows and who dares; more beautiful in that and more desirable, and whose choice is free, voluntary, learned; to desire her, to love her for what she is, and to suffer because she is not puerile candor nor pale innocence, which would be shocking in her if it were possible to find them there; to ask her at the same time that she be herself and not be herself; to adore her as life has made her, and regret bitterly that life, which has made her so beautiful, has touched her— Oh, this is absurd! I love you. I love you with all that you bring to me of sensations, of habits, with all that comes of your experiences, with all that comes from him perhaps, from them, how do I know? These things are my delights and they are my tortures. There must be a profound sense in the public idiocy which says that our love is guilty. Joy is guilty when it is immense. That is why I suffer, my beloved."

She knelt before him, took his hands, and drew him to her:

"I do not wish you to suffer; I will not have it. It would be folly. I love you, and have never loved any one but you. You may believe me; I do not lie."

He kissed her forehead.

"If you deceived me, my dear, I would not reproach you for that; on the contrary, I should be grateful to you. Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain. What would become of us if women had not for us the pity of untruth? Lie, my beloved, lie for the sake of charity. Give me the dream that colors black sorrow. Lie; have no scruples. You will add only an illusion to the illusion of love and beauty."

He sighed:

"Oh, common sense, common wisdom."

She asked him what he meant, and what common wisdom was. He said it was a sensible proverb, but brutal, and which it was better not to tell.

"Tell it all the same."

"You wish me to tell it to you: 'A kissed mouth does not lose its freshness.'"

And he added:

"It is true that love preserves beauty, and that the flesh of women is fed on caresses as bees are fed on flowers."

She placed on his mouth a pledge in a kiss.

"I swear to you I never loved any one but you. Oh, no, it is not caresses that have preserved the few

charms which I am happy to have in order to offer them to you. I love you. I love you."

But he remembered the letter thrown in the box, and the unknown individual met at the station.

"If you loved me truly, you would love only me."

She rose, indignant:

"Then, you believe I love another? What you are saying is monstrous. Is that what you think of me? And you say you loved me. I pity you because you are crazy."

"Truly, I am crazy."

She, kneeling, with the supple palms of her hands enveloped his temples and his cheeks. He said again that he was crazy to be anxious about a vulgar and banal meeting. She forced him to believe her, or, rather, to forget. He saw, knew, no longer anything. His bitterness and his anger vanishing left to him nothing but the harsh desire to forget everything, to make her forget everything.

. . . .

She asked him why he was sad.

"You were glad a moment ago. Why are you not glad now?"

And as he shook his head and said nothing:

"Speak. I like your complaints better than your silence."

Then he said:

"You wish to know? Do not be angry. I suffer now more than ever, because I know now what you are capable of giving."

She withdrew brusquely, and with eyes full of pain and reproach:

"You can believe that I was to another what I am to you! You wound me in my most susceptible sentiment, in my love for you. I do not forgive you for this. I love you. I have never loved any one except you. I have never suffered except through you. Be content. You do me a great deal of harm. Are you wicked?"

"Thérèse, one is never kind when one is in love."

She remained for a long time immovable and dreamy. Her face colored, and a tear dampened her eyelids.

"Thérèse, you are weeping!"

"Forgive me, my friend, it is the first time that I am in love and that I am really loved. I am afraid."

XXIV

As the roll of boxes on the stairways filled the Bell villa; as Pauline, loaded with packages, lightly came down the steps; as good Madame Marmet, with tranquil vigilance, supervised everything; and as Miss Bell finished dressing in her room; Thérèse, dressed in gray, resting on the terrace, looked once again at the Flower City.

She had decided to start. Her husband recalled her in every one of his letters. If, as he asked her to do, she returned to Paris in the first days of May, they might give two or three dinners, followed by receptions. His political group was supported by public opinion. The tide was pushing him along, and Garain thought Countess Martin's drawing-room could exercise an excellent influence on the future of the country. These reasons moved her not; but she felt a desire to be agreeable to her husband. She had received the day before a letter from her father. M. Montessuy, without sharing the political views of his son-in-law, and without giving any advice to his daughter, insinuated that they were beginning to talk in society of Countess Martin's mysterious sojourn at Florence among poets and artists. The Bell villa took, from a distance, an air of sentimental fantasy. She felt herself that she was too

closely observed at Fiesole. Madame Marmet annoyed her. Prince Albertinelli disquieted her. The meetings in the pavilion of the Via Alfieri had become difficult and dangerous. Professor Arrighi, whom the Prince often met, had seen her one night as she was walking through the deserted streets leaning on Dechartre. Professor Arrighi, author of a treatise on agriculture, was the most amiable of wise men. He had turned his beautiful, heroic face, and said, only the next day, to the young woman: "Formerly, I could guess from a distance the coming of a beautiful woman. Now that I have gone beyond the age to be viewed favorably by women, heaven has pity on me. Heaven prevents my seeing them. My eyes are very bad. The most amiable visage I can no longer recognize." She had understood, and heeded the warning. She wished now to conceal her joy in the immensity of Paris.

Vivian, to whom she had announced her departure, had asked her to remain a few days longer. But Thérèse suspected that her friend remained shocked by the advice which she had received one night in the lemon-decorated room; that, at least, she did not enjoy herself entirely in the familiarity of a confidante who disapproved of her choice, and whom the Prince had represented to her as a coquette, and perhaps worse. The date of the departure had been fixed for May 5th.

The day shone brilliant, pure and charming on the Arno valley. Thérèse, dreamy, saw from the terrace the immense morning rose placed in the blue

cup of Florence. She leaned forward to discover, at the foot of the flowery hills, the imperceptible point where she had known infinite joys. There the graveyard garden made a small, sombre spot near which she divined the Via Alfieri. She saw herself again in the room wherein, doubtless, she would never enter again. The hours that had passed had for her the sadness of a dream. She felt her eyes becoming veiled, her knees weaken, and her soul shudder. It seemed to her that her life was no longer in her, and that she had left it in that corner where she saw the black pines raise their immovable summits. She reproached herself for troubling without reason when, on the contrary, she should be reassured and joyful. She knew she would meet Jacques Dechartre in Paris. They would have liked to arrive there at the same time, or, rather, to go there together. They had thought it indispensable that he should remain three or four days longer in Florence, but their meeting would not be retarded beyond that. They had appointed a place of meeting, and she lived in the thought of it. She wore her love mingled with her flesh and running in her blood. Still, a part of herself remained in the pavilion decorated with goats and with nymphs, a part of herself which would be never returned to her. In full ardor of life, she was dying for things infinitely delicate and precious. She recalled that Dechartre had said to her: "Love likes charms. I gathered from the terrace the leaves of a tree which you had admired." Why had she not thought of taking a

stone of the pavilion wherein she had forgotten the world?

A shout from Pauline drew her from her thoughts. Choulette, jumping from a bush, had suddenly kissed the maid, who was carrying overcoats and bags into the carriage. Now he was running through the alleys, joyful, his ears standing like horns. He bowed to Countess Martin.

"I have, then, to say farewell to you, Madame."

He was remaining in Italy. A lady was calling him, he said: it was Rome. He wanted to see the cardinals. One of them, whom people praised as an old man full of sense, would perhaps share the ideas of the socialist and revolutionary church. Choulette had his aim: to plant on the ruins of unjust and cruel civilization the cross of Calvary, not dead and bare, but vivid, and with its flowery arms chaining the world. He was founding with that design an Order and a newspaper. Madame Martin knew the Order. The newspaper was to be sold for one cent, and to be written in rhythmic phrases. It was a newspaper to be sung. Verse, simple, violent, or joyful, was the only language which suited the people. Prose pleased only people whose intelligence was very subtle. He had seen anarchists in the taverns of the Rue Saint Jacques. They spent their evenings reciting and listening to romances.

And he added:

"A newspaper which shall be at the same time a song-book will touch the soul of the people. People say I have genius. I do not know if people are

right. But it must be admitted that I have a practical mind."

Miss Bell came down the stoop, putting on her gloves.

"Oh, Darling, the city and the mountains and the sky want you to lament your departure. They make themselves beautiful to-day in order to make you regret quitting them and desire to see them again."

But Choulette, whom the elegant dryness of the Tuscan nature tired, regretted green Umbria and its humid sky. He recalled Assisi. He said:

"There are woods and rocks, a small sky and white clouds. I have walked there in the footsteps of good Saint Francis, and I transcribed his canticle to the sun in old French rhymes, simple and poor."

Madame Martin said she would like to hear it. Miss Bell was already listening, and her face took the fervent expression of an angel sculptured by Mino.

Choulette told them it was a rustic and artless work. The verses were not trying to be beautiful. They were simple, although uneven, for the sake of lightness. Then in a slow and monotonous voice he recited the canticle.

"Oh, M. Choulette," said Miss Bell, "this canticle goes up to heaven like the hermit in the Campo Santo of Pisa, whom one saw going up the mountain that the goats liked. I will tell you. The old hermit goes up, leaning on the staff of faith, and his step is unequal because the crutch, being on one

side, places one of the feet at an advantage over the other. That is why your verses are unequal. Oh, I have understood it."

The poet accepted this praise, persuaded that he had unwittingly deserved it.

"You have faith, M. Choulette," said Thérèse. "Of what use is it to you if not to write beautiful verses?"

"Faith serves me to commit sin, Madame."

"Oh, we commit sins without that."

Madame Marmet appeared, equipped for the journey, in the tranquil joy of returning to her little apartment, her little dog Toby, her old friend Lagrange, and to see again, after the Etruscans of Fiesole, the domestic warrior who, among the bonbon boxes, looked out of the window.

Miss Bell in her carriage escorted her friends to the station.

XXV

DECHARTRE came to the carriage to salute the two travellers. Separated from him, Thérèse felt what he was to her: he had given to her a new taste of life, delicious and so vivid, so real, that she felt it on her lips. She lived under a charm in the dream of seeing him again, surprised when Madame Marmet, along the journey, said: "I think we are passing the frontier," or "Rose-bushes are in bloom by the seaside." She retained her interior joy when, after a night at the hotel in Marseilles, she saw the gray olive trees in the stony fields, then the mulberry trees and the distant profile of Mount Pilate, and the Rhone, and Lyons, and then the familiar landscapes, the trees raising their summits into bouquets clothed in tender green, and the lines of poplars on the side of rivers. She enjoyed the plenitude of the hours she lived and the astonishment of profound joys. And it was with the smile of a sleeper suddenly awakened that, at the station in Paris, under the livid light of the station, she greeted her husband, who was glad to see her. When she kissed Madame Marmet, she told her that she thanked her with all her heart. And truly she was grateful to all things, like M. Choulette's Saint Francis.

In the coupé, which followed the quays in the luminous dust of the setting sun, she listened without impatience to her husband confiding to her his successes as an orator, the intentions of his parliamentary groups, his projects, his hopes, and the necessity to give two or three big political dinners. She closed her eyes in order to think better. She said to herself: "I shall have a letter to-morrow, and will see him again within eight days." When the coupé passed on the bridge, she looked at the water, which seemed to roll flames; at the smoky arches; at the rows of trees; at the heads of the chestnut trees in bloom on the Cours-la-Reine; all these familiar aspects seemed to be clothed for her in novel magnificence. It seemed to her that her love had given a new color to the universe. And she asked herself if the trees and the stones recognized her. She was thinking: "How is it that my silence, my eyes, and heaven and earth do not yell my secret?" M. Martin-Bellême, thinking she was a little tired, advised her to rest. And at night, closeted in her room, in the midst of the grand silence wherein she heard the palpitations of her mind, she wrote to the absent one a letter full of these words, which are similar to flowers in their perpetual novelty: "I love you. I am waiting for you. I am happy. I feel you are near me. There is nobody except you and me in the world. I see from my window a blue star which trembles, and I look at it, thinking that you see it in Florence. I have put on my table the little red lily spoon. Come!

Come!" And she found thus, all fresh in her mind, the eternal sensations and images.

For a week she lived an inward life, feeling within her the soft warmth which remained of the days passed in the Via Alfieri, breathing the kisses which she had received, and loving herself for being loved. She took delicate care and displayed attentive taste in new gowns. It was to herself, too, that she was pleasing. Madly anxious when there was nothing for her at the post-office, trembling and joyful when she received through the small window a letter wherein she recognized the large handwriting of her friend, she devoured her reminiscences, her desires, and her hopes. Thus the hours quickly annihilated themselves.

Only the morning of the day when he was to arrive seemed to her to be odiously long. She was at the station before the train arrived. A delay had been signalled. It weighed heavily upon her. Optimist in her projects, and placing by force, like her father, faith on the side of her will, that delay which she had not foreseen seemed to her to be treason. The gray light, which for three-quarters of an hour filtered through the window panes of the hall, fell on her like the rays of an immense hourglass which measured for her the minutes of happiness lost. She was lamenting her fate, when, in the red light of the sun, she saw the locomotive of the express stop, monstrous and docile, on the quay, and, in the crowd of travellers coming out of the carriages, Jacques coming toward her. He was

looking at her with that sort of sombre and violent joy which she had observed in him. He said:

"At last here you are. I feared to die before seeing you again. You do not know, I did not know myself, what torture it is to live a week away from you. I have returned to the little pavilion of the Via Alfieri. In the room you know, in front of the old pastel, I have cried for love and rage."

She looked at him contentedly.

"And I, do you not think that I called you, that I wanted you, that when alone I extended my arms toward you? I had hidden your letters in the chiffonier where my jewels are. I read them at night: it was delicious, but it was imprudent. Your letters were yourself—too much and not enough."

They traversed the court where rolled cabs loaded with boxes. She asked if they were to take a carriage.

He made no answer. He seemed not to hear. She said:

"I went to see your house; I did not dare go in. I looked through the *grille* and saw windows hidden in rose bushes in the rear of a yard, behind a tree, and I said: 'It is there!' I have never been so moved."

He was not listening to her nor looking at her. He traversed quickly with her the paved street, and through a narrow stairway reached a deserted street running by the station. There, between wood and coal yards, was a hotel with a restaurant on the first floor and tables on the sidewalk. There were, under

the painted sign board, white curtains at the windows. Dechartre stopped before the small door and pushed Thérèse into the obscure alley. She asked:

"Where are you leading me? What is the time? I must be home at half-past seven. We are mad."

. . . .

She said, while they were coming down the stairs:

"Jacques, my friend, we are too happy; we are robbing life."

XXVI

A CAB brought her, the next day, to a populous street, half sad, half gay, with walls of gardens in the intervals of new houses, and stopped at the point where the sidewalk passes under the arcade of a mansion of the Regency, covered now with dust and oblivion, and fantastically placed across the street. Here and there green branches give gayety to that city corner. Thérèse, while ringing at the door, saw in the limited perspective of the houses a pulley at a window and a big gilt key, the sign of a locksmith. Her eyes were full of this picture, which was new to her. Pigeons flew above her head; she heard chickens cackle. A servant with a military look opened the door. She found herself in a yard covered with sand, shaded by a tree, and where, at the left, was the janitor's box with bird cages at the windows. On that side rose, under a green trellis, the mansard of the neighboring house. A sculptor's studio backed on it its glass-covered roof, which showed plaster figures asleep in the dust. At the right, the wall which closed the yard bore débris of monuments, broken bases of columnettes. In the rear, the house, not very large, opened the six windows of its façade, half hidden by vines and rose bushes.

Philippe Dechartre, infatuated with the architecture of the fifteenth century in France, had reproduced there very learnedly the characteristics of a private house of the time of Louis XII. That house, begun in the middle of the Second Empire, had not been finished. The builder of so many castles died without being able to finish his own house. It was better thus. Conceived in a manner which had then its distinction and its value, but which seems to-day banal and outlandish, having lost little by little its large frame of gardens, tightened now between the walls of the tall buildings, Philippe Dechartre's little house, by the roughness of its stones, by the naïve heaviness of its windows, by the simplicity of the roof, which the architect's widow had caused to be covered with little expense, by all the lucky accidents of the unfinished and unpremeditated, corrected the lack of grace of its antiquity too new, of its archæologic romanticism, and harmonized with the humility of a district made ugly by progress of population.

In fine, under its appearance of ruin and in its green drapery, that little house had its charm. Suddenly and instinctively, Thérèse discovered in it other harmonies. In the elegant negligence which extended from the walls covered with vines to the darkened panes of the studio, and even in the bent tree, the bark of which studded with its shells the wild grass of the courtyard, she divined the mind of the master, nonchalant, not skilful in preserving, dragging the long solitude of passionate men. She

had in her joy a sort of grief at observing this indifference wherein her friend left things around him. She found in it a sort of grace and nobility, but also a spirit of indifference contrary to her own nature, opposite to the interested and careful mind of the Montessuys. At once she thought that, without spoiling the pensive softness of that savage corner, she would bring to it her well-ordered activity; she would have sand thrown in the alley, and in the angle wherein a little sunlight came she would put the gayety of flowers. She looked sympathetically at a statue which had come there from some park, a Flora, lying on the earth, eaten by black moss, and her two arms lying by her side. She thought of raising her soon, of making of her a centrepiece for a fountain.

Dechartre, who for an hour had been watching for her coming, joyful, anxious, trembling in his agitated happiness, descended the stairs of the stoop. In the fresh shade of the vestibule, wherein she divined confusedly the severe splendor of bronze and marble statues, she stopped, troubled by the beatings of her heart, which rang with all its might in her chest.

He pressed her in his arms and kissed her. She heard him, through the tumult of her temples, recalling to her the short delights of the day before. She saw again the lion of the Atlas on the carpet, and returned to Jacques his kisses with delicious slowness.

He led her by a wooden stairway, into the

vast hall which served formerly as a workshop, and where he designed and modelled his figures, and, above all, read; liking reading as if it were opium.

Gothic tapestries, very pale, which let one divine in a marvellous forest a lady at the feet of whom a unicorn lay on grass in bloom, ascended above cabinets to the painted beams of the ceiling.

He led her to a large and low divan, loaded with cushions which sumptuous fragments of Spanish and Byzantine cloaks covered; but she sat in an arm-chair.

"You are here. You are here. The world may come to an end."

She replied:

"Formerly I thought of the end of the world, but I was not afraid of it. M. Lagrange had promised it to me, and I was waiting for it. When I did not know you, I felt so lonely."

She looked at the tables loaded with vases and statuettes, the tapestries, the confused and splendid mass of weapons, the animals, the marbles, the paintings, the ancient books.

"You have beautiful things."

"Most of them come from my father, who lived in the golden age of collectors. These histories of the unicorn, the complete series of which is at Cluny, were found by my father in 1851 in an inn."

But she, curious and disappointed:

"I see nothing that you have done; not a statue, not one of those wax figures which are prized so

highly in England, not a figurine nor a plaque nor a medal."

"If you think I could find any pleasure in living among my works! I know my figures too well—they annoy me. Whatever is without secret is without charm."

She looked at him with affected spite.

"You had not told me that one had lost all charm when one had no more secrets."

He put his arm around her waist.

"Ah! The things that live are only too mysterious; and you remain for me, my beloved, an enigma, the unknown sense of which contains the lights of life. Do not fear to give yourself to me. I will desire you always, and I will never know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses, caresses, anything else than the effort of a delightful despair? When I embrace you, I am still searching for you, and I never have you; since I want you always, since in you I expect the impossible and the infinite. What you are, the devil knows if I will ever know! Because I have modelled a few bad figures I am not a sculptor; I am rather a sort of poet and philosopher who seeks for subjects of anxiety and torment in nature. The sentiment of form is not sufficient for me. My colleagues laugh at me because I have not their simplicity. They are right. And that brute Choulette is right, too, when he says we ought to live without thinking and without desiring. Our friend the cobbler of Santa Maria Novella, who knows nothing of what might

make him unjust and unfortunate, is a master of the art of living. I ought to love you naïvely, without that sort of metaphysics which is passional and makes me absurd and wicked. There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget. Come, come, I have thought of you too cruelly in the tortures of your absence; come, my beloved. I must forget you with you. It is with you only that I can forget you and lose myself."

He took her in his arms and, lifting her veil, kissed her on the mouth.

A little frightened in that vast, unknown hall, embarrassed by the look of strange things, she drew the black tulle to her chin.

"Here! You cannot think of it."

He said they were alone.

"Alone? And the man with terrible mustaches who opened the door?"

He smiled:

"That is Fusellier, father's former servant. He and his wife take charge of the house. Do not be afraid. They remain in their box. You shall see Madame Fusellier; she is inclined to familiarity, I warn you."

"My friend, why has M. Fusellier, a janitor, mustaches like a Tartar?"

"My dear, nature gave them to him. I am not sorry that he has the air of a sergeant-major and gives me the illusion of being a country neighbor."

Seated on a corner of the divan, he drew her to his knees and gave to her kisses which she returned.

She rose quickly.

"Show me the other rooms. I am curious. I want to see everything."

He escorted her to the second story. Aquarelles by Philippe Dechartre covered the walls of the corridor. He opened the door and made her enter a room furnished with white mahogany.

It was his mother's room. He kept it intact in its past. Uninhabited for nine years, the room had not the air of being resigned to its solitude. The looking-glass waited for the old lady's look, and on the onyx clock a pensive Sappho was lonely because she did not hear the noise of the pendulum.

There were two portraits on the walls. One by Ricard represented Philippe Dechartre, very pale, with rumpled hair, and eyes lost in a romantic dream. The other showed a middle-aged lady, almost beautiful in her ardent thinness. It was Madame Philippe Dechartre.

"My poor mother's room is like me," said Jacques; "it remembers."

"You resemble your mother," said Thérèse; "you have her eyes. Paul Vence told me she adored you."

"Yes," he replied, smilingly. "Mother was excellent, intelligent, exquisite, marvellously absurd. Her madness was maternal love. She did not give me a moment of rest. She tormented herself and tormented me."

Thérèse looked at a bronze figure by Carpeaux, placed on the chiffonier.

"You recognize," said Dechartre, "the Prince Imperial by his ears, which are like the wings of a zephyr, and which make gay his cold visage. This bronze is a gift of Napoleon III. My parents went to Compiègne. My father, while the court was at Fontainebleau, made the plan of the castle, and designed the gallery. In the morning the Emperor would come in his frock coat, and smoking his meerschaum pipe, to sit near him like a penguin on a rock. At that epoch I went to day school. I listened to his stories at table, and I have not forgotten them. The Emperor stayed there, peaceful and quiet, interrupting his long silence with few words smothered under his big mustache; then he excited himself a little and explained his ideas of machinery. He was an inventor. He would draw a pencil from his pocket and make drawings on the designs of my father. He spoiled in that way two or three studies a week. He liked my father a great deal, and promised works and honors to him which never came. The Emperor was kind, but he had no influence, as mamma said. At that time I was a little boy. Since then a vague sympathy has remained in me for that man, who was lacking in genius, but whose mind was affectionate and beautiful, and who carried through great adventures a simple courage and a soft fatalism. Then, he is sympathetic to me because he has been combated and insulted by people who wanted to take his place, and who had not, as he had, in the depths of their souls, a love for the people. We have seen them in power since

then. Heavens, how ugly they are! Senator Loyer, for instance, who at your house, in the smoking-room, filled his pockets with cigars, and invited me to do likewise. That Loyer is a bad man, harsh to the unfortunate, to the weak, and to the humble. And Garain, don't you think his mind is disgusting? Do you remember the first time I dined at your house and we talked of Napoleon? Your hair, twisted above your neck, and traversed by a diamond arrow, was adorable. Paul Vence said subtle things. Garain did not understand. You asked for my opinion."

"It was to make you shine. I was already conceited for you."

"Oh, I never could say a single phrase before people who are so serious. Yet I had a great desire to say that Napoleon III. pleased me more than Napoleon I.; that I thought him more touching; but perhaps that idea would have produced a bad effect. Anyway, I am not so destitute of talent as to care about politics."

He turned around the room, looking at the furniture with familiar tenderness. He opened a drawer:

"Here are mamma's eye-glasses. How she looked for these eye-glasses! Now I will show you my room. If it is not in order you must excuse Madame Fusellier, who is trained to respect my disorder."

The curtains of the windows were down. He did not lift them. After an hour she drew back the red satin draperies; rays of light dazzled her eyes and

fell on her undone hair. She looked for a mirror and found only a looking-glass of Venice, dull in its wide ebony border. Rising on the tips of her toes to see herself in it:

"Is that sombre and far-away spectre I? The women who have looked at themselves in this glass cannot have complimented you on it."

As she was taking pins from the table she noticed a little bronze figure which she had not yet seen. It was an old Italian work of Flemish taste: a nude woman, with short legs and heavy stomach, who apparently ran with an arm extended. She thought the figure had a droll air. She asked what she was doing.

"She is doing what Madame Mundanity does on the portal of the cathedral at Basle."

But Thérèse, who had been at Basle, did not know Madame Mundanity. She looked at the figure again, did not understand, and asked:

"Is it something very bad? How can a thing done on the portal of a church be so difficult to tell here?"

Suddenly an anxiety came to her:

"What will M. and Madame Fusellier think of me?"

Then, discovering on the wall a medallion wherein Dechartre had modelled the profile of a girl, amusing and vicious:

"What is that?"

"That is Clara, a newspaper girl. She brought the 'Figaro' to me every morning. She had dim-

ples in her cheeks, nests of kisses. One day I said to her: 'I will make your portrait.' She came, one summer morning, with earrings and rings which she had bought at the Neuilly fair. I never saw her again. I do not know what has become of her. She was too instinctive to become a fashionable demi-mondaine. Shall I take it out?"

"No; it looks very well in that corner. I am not jealous of Clara."

It was time to return home, and she could not decide to go. She put her arms around her friend's neck.

"Oh, I love you! And then, you have been today good-natured and gay. Gayety becomes you so well. I would like to make you gay always. I need joy almost as much as love; and who will give me joy if you do not?"

XXVII

After her return to Paris, for six weeks Thérèse lived in the ardent half sleep of happiness, and prolonged delightfully her thoughtless dream. She went to see Jacques every day in the little house that a tree shaded; and when they had at last parted at night, she brought with her adored reminiscences. They had the same tastes; they yielded to the same fantasies. The same capricious thoughts carried them away. They found pleasure in running to the country that borders the city, the streets where the wine-shops are shaded by acacia, the stony roads where the grass grows at the foot of walls, the little woods and the fields on which is extended a fine sky that the smoke of manufactories stripes. She was happy to feel him near her in these lands where she did not know herself, and where she gave to herself the illusion of being lost with him.

That day they had taken the boat which she had seen pass so often under her windows. She was not afraid to be recognized. Her danger was not great, and, since she was in love, she had lost prudence. They saw shores which little by little grew gay, escaping the dusty aridity of the suburbs; they went by islands with bouquets of trees shading taverns, and innumerable boats tied under willows.

They disembarked at Bas-Meudon. As she said she was too warm, and that she was thirsty, he made her enter a wine-shop. It was a building surcharged with wooden galleries, which solitude made to appear larger, and which slept in rustic peace, waiting for Sunday to fill it with the laughter of girls, the cries of boatmen, the odor of fried fish, and the smoke of stews.

They went up the stairway, shaped like a ladder, which groaned, and in a first-story room a servant brought wine and biscuits to them. On the mantelpiece, at one of the corners of the room, was an oval mirror in a flower-covered frame. Through the open window one saw the Seine, its green shores, and the hills in the distance bathed with warm air. The trembling peace of a summer night filled the sky, the earth, and the water.

Thérèse looked at the running river. The boat passed on the water, and when the wake which it left reached the shore it seemed as if the house rocked like a vessel.

"I like the water," said Thérèse. "How happy I am!"

Their lips met.

Lost in the enchanted despair of love, time was not marked for them except by the cool plash of the water, which at intervals broke under the half-open window. To the caressing praise of her friend she replied:

"It is true I was made for love. I love myself because you love me."

Certainly, he loved her; and it was not possible for him to explain to himself why he loved her with ardent piety, with a sort of sacred fury. It was not because of her beauty, although it was rare and infinitely precious. She had line, but line follows movement, and flies incessantly; it is lost and found again; causes æsthetic joys and despair. A beautiful line is the lightning which deliciously wounds the eyes. One admires and one is surprised. What makes one love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty. One finds one woman among a thousand whom one wants always. Thérèse was that woman whom one cannot quit nor betray.

She exclaimed joyfully:

"I cannot be quitted?"

She asked why he did not make her bust, since he thought her beautiful.

"Why? Because I am an ordinary sculptor, and I know it; which is not the faculty of an ordinary mind. But if you wish to think that I am a great artist, I will give you other reasons. To create a figure that will live, one must take the model like a vile material from which one will extract the beauty, press it, crush it, and obtain its essence. There is nothing in you which is not precious to me. If I made your bust I would be servilely attached to these things which are everything to me because they are something of you. I would stubbornly attach myself to the details, and would not succeed in composing a finished figure."

She looked at him, astonished.

He said:

"From memory I might. I tried a pencil sketch."

As she wanted to see it, he showed it to her. It was on an album leaf, a very simple sketch. She did not recognize herself in it, and thought he had represented her with a soul that she did not have.

"Ah, is that the way in which you see me? Is that the way in which you love me?"

He closed the album.

"No; this is only a note. But I think the note is just. It is probable you do not see yourself exactly as I see you. Every human creature is a different being for everyone of those who look at it."

He added, with a sort of gayety:

"In that sense one may say one woman never belonged to two men. That is one of Paul Vence's ideas."

"I think it is a true idea," said Thérèse.

She asked:

"What is the time?"

It was seven o'clock. She said she had to go. Every day she returned home later. Her husband had noticed it. He had said: "We are the last to arrive at all the dinners; there is a fatality about it!" But, detained every day in the Chamber of Deputies, where the budget was being discussed, and absorbed by the work of a sub-committee of which he was the chairman, state reasons excused Thérèse's lack of punctuality. She recalled smilingly a night when she had arrived at Madame Garain's at half-

past eight. She had feared to cause a scandal. But it was a day of great interpellations. Her husband came from the Chamber at nine o'clock only, with Garain. They dined in morning dress. They had saved the Ministry.

Then she fell into a dream.

"When the Chamber shall be adjourned, my friend, I shall not have a pretext to remain in Paris. Father does not understand my devotion to my husband which makes me stay in Paris. In a week I shall have to go to Dinard. What will become of me without you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a sadness infinitely tender. But he, more sombre:

"It is I, Thérèse, it is I who must ask anxiously, What will become of me without you? When you leave me alone I am assailed by painful thoughts; black ideas come and sit in a circle around me."

She asked him what those ideas were.

He replied:

"My beloved, I have already told you: I have to forget you with you. When you are gone, your memory will torment me. I have to pay for the happiness you give me."

XXVIII

The blue sea, studded with pink shoals, threw its silvery fringe softly to the fine sand of the beach, along the amphitheatre which two golden horns terminate. The beauty of the day threw a ray of Greece's sunlight on the tomb of Châteaubriand. In the room the balcony of which dominated the beach, the ocean, the islands, and the promontories, Thérèse was reading the letters which she had found in the morning at the Saint Milo post-office, and which she had not opened in the boat, loaded with passengers. At once, after breakfast, she had closeted herself in her room, and there, her letters unfolded on her knees, she relished hastily her furtive joy. She was to drive at two o'clock on the mall with her father; her husband; Princess Seniavine; Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, the wife of the Deputy; and Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician. She had two letters that day. The first one she read exhaled a fine and gay odor of love. Jacques had never displayed more simplicity, more happiness, and more charm.

Since he had been in love with her, he said, he walked so lightly and was supported by such a joy that his feet did not touch the earth. He had only one fear, which was that he might be dreaming, and

awake unknown to her. Doubtless he was only dreaming. And what a dream! He was like one intoxicated and singing. He had not his reason, happily. Absent, he saw her incessantly. "Yes, I see you near me; I see your lashes on eyes the gray of which is more delicious than all the blue of the sky and the flowers; your lips, which have the taste of a marvellous fruit; your cheeks, where laughter puts two adorable dimples; I see you beautiful and desired, but fleeing and gliding away; and when I open my arms, you have gone; and I see you afar on the long, long beach, not taller in your pink gown and under your umbrella than a twig. Oh, so small—small as you were one day when I saw you from the height of the Campanile on the square at Florence. And I say to myself, as I said that day: 'A bit of grass would suffice to hide her from me, and she is for me the infinite of joy and of pain.'"

He complained of the torments of absence. And he mingled with his complaints the smiles of fortunate love. He threatened jokingly to surprise her at Dinard. "Do not be afraid. They will not recognize me. I shall be disguised as a vendor of plaster images. It will not be a lie. Dressed in gray tunic and trousers, my beard and face covered with white dust, I will ring the bell of the Montessuy villa. You may recognize me, Thérèse, by the statuettes on the plank placed on my head. They will all be Cupids. There will be faithful Love, jealous Love, tender Love, vivid Love; there will be many vivid Loves. And I will shout in the rude and

sonorous language of the artisans of Pisa or of Florence: 'Tutti gli Amori per la Signora Teresina!'"

The last page of this letter was tender and grave. There were pious effusions in it which reminded Thérèse of the prayer books which she read when a child. "I love you, and I love everything in you: the earth which carries you, on which you weigh so little, and which you embellish; the light which makes me see you; the air you breathe. I like the bent tree of my yard because you have seen it. I have walked to-night on the avenue where I met you one winter night. I have culled a branch of the boxwood at which you looked. In this city, where you are not, I see only you."

He said at the end of his letter that he was to dine out. In the absence of Madame Fusellier, who had gone to the country, he would go to a wine shop of the Rue Royale where he was known. And there, in the indistinct crowd, he would be alone with her.

Thérèse, made languid by the softness of invisible caresses, closed her eyes and threw back her head on the armchair. When she heard the noise of the carriage coming near the stoop, she opened the second letter. As soon as she saw the altered handwriting of it, the lines precipitated and falling, the sad, violent aspect of the address, she was troubled.

Its obscure commencement indicated sudden anguish and black suspicion: "Thérèse, Thérèse, why did you give yourself to me if you were not giving

yourself to me entire? How does it serve me that you have deceived me, now that I know what I did not wish to know?"

She stopped; a veil came over her eyes. She thought: "We were so happy a moment ago. What has happened? And I was so pleased at his joy, when it had already gone; it would be better not to write, since letters show only vanished sentiments and effaced ideas."

She read further. And seeing that he was full of jealousy, she felt discouraged:

"If I have not proved to him that I love him with all my strength, that I love him with all there is in me, how am I ever to persuade him of it?"

And she was in a hurry to discover the cause of his brusque folly. Jacques told it. While taking breakfast in the Rue Royale he had met there a former companion who had just returned from tho seaside. They had talked together; chance made that man talk of Countess Martin, whom he knew. And at once, interrupting the narration, Jacques exclaimed: "Thérèse, Thérèse, why did you lie to me, since I was bound to learn some day what I alone ignored? But the error is mine more than yours. The letter which you threw in the San Michele box, your meeting at the Florence station, would have instructed me if I had not obstinately retained my illusions and disdained evidence.

"I did not know; I wanted to remain ignorant. I did not ask you anything, from fear that you might

not be able to continue to lie; I was prudent; and it has happened that an idiot, suddenly, brutally, before a restaurant table, has opened my eyes and forced me to know. Oh, now that I know, now that I cannot doubt, it seems to me that to doubt is delicious! He gave the name, the name which I heard at Fiesole from Miss Bell, and he added: 'Everybody knows about that.'

"So you loved him. You love him still! He is near you, doubtless. He goes every year to the Dinard races. I have been told so. I see him. I see everything. If you knew the images that worry me, you would say, 'He is crazy,' and you would take pity on me. Oh, how I would like to forget you. and everything! But I cannot. You know very well I cannot forget you except with you. I see you incessantly with him. It is torture. I thought I was unfortunate that night on the Arno shore. But I did not even know then what it is to suffer. To-day I know."

As she finished reading that letter, Thérèse thought: "A word thrown haphazard has placed him in that condition, a word has made him despairing and mad." She tried to think who might be the wretched fellow who could have talked in that way. She suspected two or three young men whom Le Ménil had introduced to her once, warning her not to trust them. And with one of the white and cold fits of anger she had inherited from her father she said to herself: "I must know who he is." In the meanwhile what was she to do? Her friend in

despair, mad, ill, she could not run to him, embrace him, and throw herself on him with such an abandonment that he would feel how entirely she was his, and be forced to believe in her. To write? How much better it would be to go near him, to fall down on his heart and to say to him: "Dare to believe I am not yours only!" But she could only write. She had hardly begun her letter when she heard voices and laughter in the garden. Thérèse went down tranquil and smiling; her large straw hat threw on her face a transparent shadow wherein her gray eyes shone.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Princess Seniavine. "What a pity it is we never see her! In the morning she is promenading in the alleys of Saint Milo, in the afternoon she is closeted in her room. She is running away from us."

The coach turned around the large circle of the beach at the foot of the villas and gardens on the hillside. And one saw at the left the ramparts and the steeple of Saint Milo come out of the blue sea. Then the coach went into a road bordered by hedges, along which walked Dinard women, straight under their wide headdress.

"Unfortunately," said Madame Raymond, seated on the box by Montessuy's side, "old costumes are dying out. The fault is with the railways."

"It is true," said Montessuy, "that if it were not for the railways the peasants would still wear their picturesque costumes of other times. But we would not see them."

"What does it matter?" replied Madame Raymond. "We could imagine them."

"But," asked Princess Seniavine, "do you ever see interesting things? I never do."

Madame Raymond, who had taken from her husband's books a vague tint of philosophy, declared that things were nothing, and that the idea was everything.

Without looking at Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, seated at her right, Countess Martin murmured:

"Oh, yes, people see only their ideas; they follow only their ideas. They go along, blind and deaf. One cannot stop them."

"But, my dear," said Count Martin, placed in front of her, by the Princess's side, "without leading ideas one would go haphazard. Have you read, Montessuy, the speech delivered by Loyer at the unveiling of the Cadet-Gassicourt statue? The beginning is remarkable. Loyer is not lacking in political sense."

The carriage, having traversed the fields bordered with willows, went up a hill and advanced on a vast, wooded plateau. For a long time it skirted the walls of the park.

"Is it the Guerric?" asked Princess Seniavine.

Suddenly, between two stone pillars surmounted by lions, appeared the closed gate. At the end of a long alley stood the gray stones of a castle.

"Yes," said Montessuy, "it is the Guerric."

And, addressing Thérèse:

"You knew the Marquis de Ré? At sixty-five he

had retained his strength and his youth. He set the fashion and was loved. Young men copied his frock coat, his monocle, his gestures, his exquisite insolence, his amusing mania. Suddenly he abandoned society, closed his house, sold his stable, ceased to show himself. Do you remember, Thérèse, his sudden disappearance? You had been married a short time. He called on you often. One fine day people learned that he had quitted Paris. It is here that he had come in winter. People tried to find a reason for the sudden retreat; people thought he had run away under the influence of some sorrow, of some humiliation, or from fear that people might see him grow old. He was afraid of old age more than anything. For seven years he has retired from society, he has not gone out of the castle once. He receives at the Guerric two or three old men who were his companions in youth. This gate is opened for them only. Since his retirement no one has seen him; no one will ever see him. He has the same energy to conceal himself that he had to show himself. He has not suffered from his decline. He has died alive. That is not contemptible."

And Thérèse, recalling the amiable old man who had wished to finish gloriously with her his life of gallantry, turned her head and looked at the Guerric lifting its four towers above the gray summits of oaks.

On their return she said she had a headache and that she would not take dinner. She closed herself in her room and drew from her jewel casket

the lamentable letter. She read over the last page.

"The thought that you belong to another burns me. And then, I did not wish that one to be the one."

It was a fixed idea. He had written three times on the same leaf these words: "I did not wish that one to be the one."

She, too, had only one idea: not to lose him. Not to lose him, she would have said anything, she would have done anything. She went to her table and wrote, under the spur of a tender and plaintive violence, a letter wherein she repeated like a groan: "I love you, I love you. I never loved any one but you. You are alone, alone—do you hear?—in my mind, in me. Do not listen to what this wretched man says. Listen to me. I never loved any one, I swear, any one, before you."

As she was writing, the great and light sigh of the sea accompanied her sigh. She wanted to say, she believed she was saying, real things; and all that she was saying was true of the truth of her love. She heard the heavy step of her father on the stairway. She hid her letter and opened the door. Montessuy asked her if she did not feel better.

"I came," he said, "to say good evening to you, and to ask you something. It is probable that I will meet Le Ménil at the races. He goes there every year. If I meet him, darling, would you have any objection to my inviting him to come here for a few

days? Your husband thinks he would be agreeable company for you. We might give him the blue room."

"As you wish. But I should prefer that you keep the blue room for Paul Vence, who wishes to come. It is possible, too, that Choulette comes without warning. It's his habit. We shall see him some morning ringing like a beggar at the gate. You know my husband is mistaken when he thinks Le Ménil pleases me. And then I have to go to Paris next week for two or three days."

XXIX

Twenty-four hours after her letter, Thérèse came from Dinard to the little house in the Ternes. It had not been difficult for her to find a pretext to go to Paris. She had made the trip with her husband, who wanted to see his electors, whom the Socialists were working over. She surprised Jacques in the morning, at the studio, while he was sketching a tall figure of Florence weeping on the shore of the Arno.

The model, seated on a very high stool, kept her pose. She was a long, dark girl. The harsh light which fell from the skylight gave precision to the pure lines of her hip and thighs, accentuated her harsh visage, her dark neck, her marble chest, her grimacing knees, and her feet, the toes of which were set one over the other. Thérèse looked at her curiously, divining her exquisite form under the miseries of her flesh, poorly fed and badly cared for.

Dechartre came toward Thérèse with an air of painful tenderness which moved her. Then, placing his clay and the instrument near the easel, and covering the figure with a wet cloth, he said to the model:

"It is enough for to-day."

Then she rose, picked up awkwardly her clothing, a handful of sombre wool and dirty linen, and went to dress behind the screen.

Meanwhile the sculptor, having dipped in the water of a green bowl his hands, where the tenacious clay was whitening, went out of the studio with Thérèse.

They passed under the tree which studded the sand of the courtyard with the shells of its flayed bark. She said:

"You have no more faith, have you?"

He led her to the room.

The letter written from Dinard had already softened his painful impressions. She had come at the moment when, tired of suffering, he felt the need of calm and of tenderness. A few lines of handwriting had appeased his mind, fed on images, less susceptible to things than to the signs of things; but he felt a pain in his heart.

In the room where everything talked for her, where the furniture, the curtains, and the carpets told of their love, she murmured soft words:

"You could believe—do you not know what you are?—it was folly! How can a woman who has known you care for another after you?"

"But before?"

"Before, I was waiting for you."

"And he did not attend the races at Dinard?"

She did not think he had, and it was very certain she did not attend them herself. Horses and horsey men bored her.

"Jacques, fear no one, since you are not comparable to any one."

He knew, on the contrary, how insignificant he was and how insignificant every one is in this world where beings, agitated like grains in a van, are mixed and separated by a shake of the rustic or of the god. This idea of the agricultural or mystical van represented too well measure and order to be exactly applied to life. It seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill. He had a vivid sensation of this the day before, when he saw Madame Fusellier grinding coffee in her mill.

Thérèse said to him:

"Why are you not conceited?"

She added few words, but she talked with her eyes, her arms, the breath that made her bosom rise.

In the happy surprise of seeing and hearing her, he permitted himself to be convinced.

She asked who had said so odious a thing.

He had no reason to conceal his name from her. It was Daniel Salomon.

She was not surprised. Daniel Salomon, who passed for not having been the lover of any woman, wished at least to be in the confidence of all and know their secrets. She guessed why he had talked.

"Jacques, do not be cross at what I say to you. You are not skilful in concealing your sentiments. He suspected you were in love with me, and he wanted to be sure of it. I am persuaded that now he has no doubt of our relations. But that is in-

different to me. On the contrary, if you knew better how to dissimulate, I would be less quiet. I would think you did not love me enough."

For fear of disquieting him, she turned to other thoughts:

"I have not told you how much I like your sketch. It is Florence on the Arno. Then it is we?"

"Yes, I have placed in that figure the emotion of my love. It is sad, and I wish it were beautiful. You see, Thérèse, beauty is painful. That is why, since life is beautiful, I suffer."

He took out of his flannel coat his cigarette holder, but she told him to dress. She would bring him to breakfast with her. They would not quit each other that day. It would be delightful.

She looked at him with childish joy. Then she became sad, thinking she would have to return to Dinard at the end of the week, later go to Joinville, and that during that time they would be separated.

At Joinville, at her father's, she would cause him to be invited for a few days. But they would not be free and alone there, as they were in Paris.

"It is true," he said, "that Paris is good to us in its confused immensity."

And he added:

"Even in your absence I cannot quit Paris. It would be terrible for me to live in countries that do not know you. A sky, mountains, trees, fountains, statues which do not know how to talk of you would have nothing to say to me."

While he was dressing she was turning the leaves of a book which she had found on the table. It was "The Arabian Nights." Romantic engravings displayed here and there in the text grand viziers, sultanas, black tunics, bazaars, and caravans.

She asked:

"'The Arabian Nights'—does that amuse you?"

"A great deal," he replied, tying his cravat. "I believe as much as I wish in these Arabian princes whose legs become black marble, and in these women of the harem who wander at night in graveyards. These tales give me easy dreams which make me forget life. Last night I went to bed in sadness and read the history of the Three Calendars."

She said with a little bitterness:

"You are trying to forget. I would not consent for anything in the world to lose the memory of a pain which came to me from you."

They went down together in the street. She was to take a carriage a little further on and precede him at her house by a few minutes.

"My husband expects you to breakfast."

They talked, on the way, of insignificant things, which their love made great and charming. They arranged their afternoon in advance in order to put into it the infinity of profound joy and of ingenious pleasure. She consulted him about her gowns. She could not decide to leave him, happy to walk with him in the streets, which the sun and the gayety of noon filled. When they reached the Avenue des

Ternes they saw before them, on the avenue, shops displaying side by side a magnificent abundance of victuals. There were rosaries of chickens at the caterer's, and at the fruiterer's boxes of apricots and of peaches, baskets of grapes, piles of pears. Wagons filled with fruits and flowers bordered the sidewalk. Under the awning of a restaurant men and women were taking breakfast. Thérèse recognized among them, alone, at a small table against a laurel tree in a box, Choulette lighting his pipe.

Having seen her, he threw superbly a five-franc piece on the table, rose, and bowed. He was grave; his long frock coat gave him an air of decency and of austerity.

He said he would have liked to call on Madame Martin at Dinard, but he had been detained in the Vendée by the Marquise de Rieu. However, he had issued a new edition of the "Jardin Clos," augmented by the "Verger de Sainte-Claire." He had moved souls which were thought to be insensible and made springs come out of rocks.

"So," he said, "I was, in a fashion, a Moses."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew from a book a letter which was worn and spotted.

"This is what Madame Raymond, the Academician's wife, writes me. I publish what she says, because it is creditable to her."

And, unfolding the thin leaves, he read:

"I have made your book known to my husband, who exclaimed: 'It is pure spiritualism. Here is a closed garden, which on the side of the lilies and

white roses has, I imagine, a small gate opening on the road to the Académie.' "

Choulette relished these phrases mingled in his mouth with the perfume of whiskey, and replaced carefully the letter in its book.

Madame Martin congratulated the poet on being Madame Raymond's candidate.

"You should be mine, M. Choulette, if I were interested in Academic elections. But does the Institute excite your envy?"

He kept for a few moments a solemn silence, then:

"I am going now, Madame, to confer with divers notable persons of the political and religious worlds who reside at Neuilly. The Marquise de Rieu wishes me to be a candidate, in her country, to a senatorial seat which has become vacant by the death of an old man who was, they say, a general during his illusory life. I will consult in this regard with priests, women, and children—oh, eternal wisdom!—of the Bineau Boulevard. The constituency whose suffrages I shall attempt to obtain is an undulated and wooded land wherein willows frame the fields. And it is not a rare thing to find in the hollow of one of these old willows the skeleton of a Chouan pressing his gun against his breast and holding his beads in his fleshless fingers. I shall have my programme posted on the bark of oaks. I will say: 'Peace to presbyteries! Let the day come when bishops, holding in their hands the wooden crook, shall make themselves similar to the poorest servant

of the poorest parish! It is the bishops who crucified Jesus Christ. Their names were Anne and Caiph. And they still retain these names before the Son of God. While they were nailing Him to the cross, I was the good thief hanged by His side.' "

He lifted his stick and pointed toward Neuilly:

"Dechartre, my friend, do you not think the Bineau Boulevard is the dusty one over there, at the right?"

"Farewell, M. Choulette," said Thérèse. "Remember me when you are a senator."

"Madame, I do not forget you in any of my prayers, morning and evening. And I say to God: 'Since, in your anger, you gave to her riches and beauty, regard her, Lord, with kindness, and treat her in accordance with your sovereign mercy."

And he went, stiff, and dragging his leg, through the populous avenue.

XXX

Enveloped in a mantle of pink cloth, Thérèse went down the steps of the stoop with Dechartre. He had come in the morning to Joinville. She had made him come to the circle of her intimate friends, before the hunting party to which she feared Le Ménil had been invited as was the custom. The light air of September agitated the curls of her hair, and the sun made golden darts shine in the profound gray of her eyes. Behind them, the façade of the palace displayed above the three arcades of the first story, in the intervals of the windows, on long tables, busts of Roman emperors. The house was placed between two tall pavilions which their great slate roofs made higher, over pillars of the Ionic order. This style betrayed the art of the architect Leveáu, who had constructed, in 1650, the castle of Joinville-sur-Oise for that rich Mareuilles, creature of Mazarin, and fortunate accomplice of Fouquet.

Thérèse and Jacques saw before them the flower beds designed by Le Nôtre, the green carpet, the fountain; then the grotto with its five rustic arcades crowned by the tall trees on which autumn had already begun to spread its golden mantle.

"This green geometry is beautiful," said Dechartre.

"Yes," said Thérèse. "But I think of the tree bent in the small courtyard where grass grows between the stones. We shall build a beautiful fountain in it, shall we not, and put flowers in it?"

Leaning against one of the stone lions, with almost human face, that watched over the steps, she turned her head toward the castle, and, looking at one of the windows, said:

"There is your room; I went into it last night. On the same floor, on the other side, at the other end, is father's office. A white wood table, a mahogany portfolio, a decanter on the mantelpiece: his office when he was a young man. Our entire fortune came out of that."

Through the sand-covered paths between the flower beds they walked to the boxwood wall which bordered the park on the southern side. They passed before the orange grove, the monumental door of which was surmounted by the Lorraine cross of Mareuilles, and then passed under the linden trees which formed an alley on the lawn. Statues of nymphs shivered in the damp shade studded with pale lights. A pigeon, posed on the shoulder of one of the white women, fled. From time to time a breath of wind detached a dried leaf which fell, a shell of red gold, where remained a drop of rain. Thérèse pointed to the nymph and said:

"She saw me when a child and wishing to die. I suffered of desire and of fright. I was waiting for you. But you were so far away!"

The linden alley stopped near the large basin, in

the centre of which was a group of tritons blowing in their shells to form, when the waters played, a liquid diadem with flowers of foam.

"It is the Joinville crown," she said.

She pointed to a pathway which, starting from the basin, went to lose itself in the fields, in the direction of the rising sun.

"This is my pathway. How often I walked in it sadly! I was sad when I did not know you."

They found the alley which, with other lindens and other nymphs, went beyond. And they followed it to the grottoes. There was, in the rear of the park, a semicircle of five large niches of rocks surmounted by balustrades and separated by gigantic Terminus gods. One of these gods, at a corner of the monument, dominated all the others by his monstrous nudity, and lowered on them his stony look, ferocious and soft.

"When my father bought Joinville," she said, "the grottoes were only ruins, full of grass and of vipers. A thousand rabbits had made holes in them. He restored the Terminus gods and the arcades in accordance with prints by Perrelle, which are preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale. He was his own architect."

A desire for shade and mystery led them toward the arbor near the grottoes. But the noise of footsteps which they heard, coming from the covered alley, made them stop for a moment, and they saw, through the leaves, Montessuy, with his arm around Princess Seniavine's waist. Quietly they were

walking toward the palace. Jacques and Thérèse, hiding behind the enormous Terminus god, waited until they had passed. Then she said to Dechartre, who was looking at her silently:

"That is great! I understand now why Princess Seniavine, this winter, wanted father to advise her about buying horses."

Yet Thérèse admired her father for having conquered that beautiful woman, who passed for being hard to please, and who was known to be wealthy, in spite of the embarrassments which her mad disorder caused her. She asked Jacques if he did not think the Princess was beautiful. He said she was stylish. She was beautiful, doubtless.

Thérèse led Jacques to the moss-covered steps which, ascending behind the grottoes, led to the Gerbe-de-l'Oise, formed of leaden reeds in the midst of a grand pink marble vase. There were tall trees which closed the park's perspective and stood at the beginning of the forest. They walked under them. They were silent under the faint moan of the leaves.

He pressed her in his arms and placed kisses on her eyelids. Night was descending from the sky, the first stars were trembling among the branches. In the damp grass sighed the frogs' flutes. They went no farther.

When she took with him, in the night, the road to the palace, the taste of kisses and of mint remained on her lips, and in her eyes was the image of her friend. She smiled under the lindens at the nymphs

who had seen the tears of her childhood. The Swan lifted in the sky its cross made of stars, and the moon mirrored its fine horn in the basin of the crown. Insects in the grass uttered appeals to love. At the last turn of the boxwood hedge, Thérèse and Jacques saw the triple, frightful and black mass of the castle, and through the wide bay windows of the first story distinguished, in the red light, moving forms. The bell rang.

Thérèse exclaimed:

"I have hardly time to dress for dinner."

And she ran before the stone lions, leaving her friend under the impression of a fairy-tale vision.

In the parlor, after dinner, M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles was reading the newspaper, and Princess Seniavine playing solitaire. Thérèse sat, her eyes half closed on a book.

The Princess asked if she found what she was reading amusing.

"I do not know. I was reading and thinking. Paul Vence is right: 'We find only ourselves in books.'"

Through the hangings came from the billiard-room the voices of the players and the shock of the balls.

"I have it!" exclaimed the Princess, throwing down the cards.

She had wagered a big sum on a horse which was running that day at the Chantilly races.

Thérèse said she had received a letter from Fiesole. Miss Bell announced her forthcoming marriage with Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina.

The Princess laughed:

"There's a man who will render a service to her."

"What service?" asked Thérèse.

"He will disgust her with men, of course."

Montessuy came into the parlor joyfully. He had won the game.

He sat beside Berthier-d'Eyzelles, and, taking a newspaper from the sofa, said:

"The Minister of Finance announces that he will propose, when the Chamber reassembles, his savings-bank bill."

This bill was to give to savings banks the authority to lend money to communes, a proceeding which would take from Montessuy's business houses their best customers.

"Berthier," asked the financier, "are you resolutely hostile to that bill?"

Berthier nodded.

Montessuy rose, placed his hand on the Deputy's shoulder, and said:

"My dear Berthier, I have an idea that the Cabinet will fall at the beginning of the session."

He went near his daughter.

"I have received an odd letter from Le Ménil."

Thérèse rose and closed the door which separated the parlor from the billiard-room.

She was afraid of draughts, she said.

"A singular letter," continued Montessuy. "Le Ménil will not come to Joinville. He has bought the yacht *Rosebud*. He is on the Mediterranean, and

cannot live except on the water. It is a pity. He is the only one who knows how to manage a hunt."

At this instant Dechartre came into the parlor with Count Martin, who, after beating him at billiards, had acquired a great affection for him and was explaining to him the dangers of a personal tax based on the number of servants.

XXXI

A PALE winter sun, piercing the mists of the Seine, illuminated on the doors of the dining-room the dogs painted by Oudry.

Madame Martin had at her right Garain the Deputy, former Chancellor, former President of the Council, and at her left Senator Loyer. At Count Martin-Bellême's right was M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles. It was an intimate and sober business breakfast. In conformity with Montessuy's prediction, the Cabinet had fallen four days before. Called to the Elysée the same morning, Garain had accepted the task of forming a Cabinet. He was preparing, while taking breakfast, the combination which was to be submitted in the evening to the President. And, while they were discussing names, Thérèse was reviewing in herself the images of her intimate life.

She had returned to Paris with Count Martin at the opening of the parliamentary session, and since that moment was leading an enchanted life.

Jacques loved her; he loved her with a delicious mingling of passion and of tenderness, of learned experience and of curious ingenuity. He was nervous, irritable, anxious. But the inequality of his humor gave more value to his gayety. That artistic

gayety, bursting out suddenly like a flame, caressed love without offending it. And the witty laughter of her friend made Thérèse marvel. She could never have imagined the infallible taste which he exercised naturally in joyful caprice and in familiar fantasy. At first he had displayed only monotonous and sombre ardor. That alone had captured her. But since then she had discovered in him a gay mind, abundant and diverse, the gift of flattery.

"A homogeneous ministry," exclaimed Garain, "is easily said. Yet one must be inspired by the tendencies of the various factions of the Chamber."

He was disquiet. He saw himself surrounded by as many snares as those which he had laid. His collaborators even became hostile to him.

Count Martin wanted the new ministry to satisfy the aspirations of the new men.

"Your list is formed of personalities essentially different in origin and in tendency," he said. "Yet the most important fact in the political history of recent years is the possibility, I should say the necessity, to introduce unity of views in the government of the republic. These are ideas which you, my dear Garain, have expressed with rare eloquence."

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles kept silence.

Senator Loyer rolled crumbs with his fingers. A former frequenter of beer halls, it was while moulding crumbs or cutting corks that he found ideas. He raised his red face. And looking at Garain with wrinkled eyes wherein red fire sparkled:

"I said it, and nobody would believe it. The annihilation of the monarchical Right was for the chiefs of the republican party an irreparable misfortune. We governed formerly against it. The real support of a government is the Opposition. The Empire governed against the Orléanists and against us; MacMahon governed against the Republicans. More fortunate, we governed against the Right. The Right—what a magnificent Opposition it was! It threatened, was candid, powerless, vast, honest, unpopular! We should have nursed it. We did not know how to do that. And then it must be said that everything wears out. Yet it is always necessary to govern against something. There are to-day only Socialists to give us the support which the Right lent to us fifteen years ago with so constant a generosity. But they are too weak. We should reinforce them, make of them a political party. To do this at the present hour is the first duty of a state minister."

Garain, who was not cynical, made no answer.

"Garain, you do not yet know," asked Count Martin, "if with the Premiership you are to take the Seals or the Interior?"

Garain replied that his decision would depend on the choice which some one else would make. The presence of that personage in the Cabinet was necessary, and he hesitated between two portfolios. Garain sacrificed his personal convenience to superior interests.

Senator Loyer made a face in his beard. He

wanted the Seals. It was an ancient desire. A teacher of law under the Empire, he gave in *cafés* lessons which were appreciated. He had the sense of chicanery. Having begun his political fortune with articles skilfully written in order to attract to him prosecution, suits, and several weeks of imprisonment, he had considered the press as a weapon of opposition which every good government should break. Since September 4, 1870, he had had the ambition to become Keeper of the Seals, so that everybody might see how the old Bohemian who formerly explained the code while dining on sauerkraut, would appear as supreme chief of the magistracy.

Idiots by the dozen had climbed over his back. Become aged in the ordinary honors of the Senate, badly polished, married to a brewery girl, poor, lazy, disillusionized, his old Jacobin spirit and his sincere contempt for the people surviving his ambition, made of him a good governmental man. This time a part of the Garain combination, he imagined he held the Department of Justice. And his protector, who would not give it to him, was an unfortunate rival. He laughed, while shaping with bread a lapdog.

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, calm and grave, caressed his handsome white whiskers.

"Do you not think, M. Garain, that it would be well to give a place in the Cabinet to the men who have followed from the beginning the political principles towards which we are directing ourselves to-day?"

"They lost themselves in doing it," replied Garain impatiently. "The politician should never be in advance of circumstances. It is wrong to be in the right too soon. Thinkers are not men of business. And then—let us talk frankly—if you want a Ministry of the Left Centre variety, say so: I will retire. But I warn you that neither the Chamber nor the country will sustain you."

"It is evident," said Count Martin, "that we have to be sure of a majority."

"With my list, we have a majority," said Garain. "It is the minority which sustained the Ministry against us. Gentlemen, I appeal to your devotion."

And the laborious distribution of the portfolios began again. Count Martin received in the first place the Public Works, which he refused, for lack of competency, and afterward the Foreign Affairs, which he accepted without objection.

But M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles, to whom Garain offered Commerce and Agriculture, reserved his decision.

Loyer got the Colonies. He seemed very busy trying to make his bread dog stand on the cloth. Yet he was looking with a corner of his little wrinkled eye at Countess Martin and thinking that she was desirable. He vaguely thought of the pleasure of meeting her again.

Leaving Garain to his combination, he was preoccupied by that pretty woman, trying to divine her tastes and her habits, asking her if she went to the theatre, and if she ever went at night to the coffee-

house with her husband. And Thérèse was beginning to think he was more interesting than the others, with his ignorance of the world and his superb cynicism.

Garain rose. He had to see several persons before submitting his list to the President of the Republic. Count Martin offered his carriage, but Garain had one.

"Do you not think," asked Count Martin, "that the President might object to some names?"

"The President," replied Garain, "will be inspired by the necessities of the situation."

He had already gone out of the door when he struck his forehead with his hand.

"We have forgotten the Ministry of War."

"We shall easily find somebody for it among the generals," said Count Martin.

"Ah," exclaimed Garain, "you believe the choice of a Minister of War is easy. It is clear you have not, like me, been a member of three Cabinets and President of the Council. In my Cabinets, and during my Presidency, the greatest difficulties came from the Ministry of War. Generals are all alike. You know the one whom I chose for the Cabinet which I formed. When we took him, he knew nothing of affairs. He hardly knew there were two Chambers. We had to explain to him all the wheels of parliamentary machinery; we had to teach him that there were an army committee, finance committee, sub-committees, presidents of committees, a budget. He asked that all this information be writ-

ten for him on a piece of paper. His ignorance of men and of things frightened us. In a fortnight he knew the most subtle tricks of the trade; he knew personally all the Senators and all the Deputies, and was intriguing with them against us. If it had not been for President Grévy's help, he would have overthrown us. And he was a very ordinary general, a general like any other. Oh, no; do not think that the Portfolio of War may be given hastily, without reflection."

And Garain still shivered at the thought of his former colleague.

Thérèse rose. Senator Loyer offered his arm to her, with the beautiful attitude that he had learned forty years before at Bullier's dancing hall. She left the politicians in the parlor. She hastened to meet Dechartre.

Reddish mists covered the Seine, the stone quays, and the gilded trees. The red sun threw into the cloudy sky the last glories of the year. Thérèse, as she went out, relished delightfully the harshness of the air and the dying splendor of the day. Since her return to Paris, happy, she found pleasure every morning in the novelty of the weather. It seemed to her, in her generous selfishness, that it was for her the wind blew in the trees, or the fine, gray rain wet the horizon of the avenues, or the sun dragged in the chilled sky its frozen block; for her, so that she might say, as she entered the little house of the Ternes, "It is windy; it is raining; the weather is pleasant;" mingling thus the ocean of things in the

intimacy of her love. And every day was beautiful for her, since each one brought her into the arms of her friend.

While she was going that day to the little house of the Ternes, she was thinking of her unexpected happiness, so full and so secure. She was walking in the last glory of the sun already touched by winter, and she was saying to herself:

"He loves me; I believe he loves me entirely. To love is easier and more natural for him than for other men. They have in life ideas superior to them, a faith, habits, interests. They believe in God, or in duties, or in themselves. He believes in me only. I am his God, his duty, and his life."

Then she thought:

"It is true, too, that he needs nobody, not even me. His thoughts are a magnificent world in which he could easily live. But I cannot live without him. What would become of me if I did not have him?"

She was not alarmed by the violent taste, the charmed habit, which he had for her. She recalled that she had said to him one day: "Your love for me is only sensual. I do not complain of it; it is perhaps the only true love." And he had replied: "It is also the only grand and strong love. It has its measure and its weapons. It is full of meaning and of images. It is violent and mysterious. It attaches itself to the flesh and to the soul of the flesh. The rest is only illusion and untruth." She was almost tranquil in her joy. Suspicions and

anxieties had fled like the mists of a summer storm. The worst weather of their love had come when they had been separated from each other. One should never leave the one whom one loves.

At the corner of Avenue Marceau and of the Rue Galilée, she divined rather than recognized a shadow that had passed by her, a forgotten form. She thought, she wished to think, she was mistaken. The one whom she thought she had seen existed no longer, had never existed. It was a spectre seen in the limbo of another world, in the darkness of a half light. And she walked, retaining of this ill-defined meeting an impression of coldness, of vague embarrassment, and of pain in the heart.

As she ascended the avenue she saw coming toward her newspaper carriers holding the evening sheets announcing the new Cabinet. She traversed the square; her steps followed the happy impatience of her desire. She had visions of Jacques waiting for her at the foot of the stairway, among the marble figures; taking her in his arms and carrying her, trembling from kisses, to that room full of shadows and of delights, where the sweetness of life made her forget life.

But in the solitude of the Avenue MacMahon, the shadow which she had seen at the corner of the Rue Galilée came near her with a precision which was banal and painful.

She recognized Robert Le Ménil, who, having followed her from the quay, was stopping her at the most quiet and secure place.

His air, his attitude, expressed the limpidity of mind which had formerly pleased Thérèse. His face, naturally harsh, darkened by sunburn, somewhat hollowed, very calm, concealed and expressed profound suffering.

"I have to talk to you."

She slackened her pace. He walked by her side.

"I have tried to forget you. After what had happened it was natural, was it not? I have done all I could. It was better to forget you, surely; but I could not. So I bought a boat. And I have been travelling for six months. You know, perhaps?"

She made a sign that she knew.

He continued:

"The *Rosebud*, a beautiful yacht. There were six men in the crew. I manœuvred with them. It was a pastime."

He paused. She was walking slowly, saddened, and, above all, bothered. It seemed to her an absurd and painful thing, beyond all expression, to have to listen to such words from a stranger.

He continued:

"What I suffered on that boat I would be ashamed to tell you."

She felt he told the truth.

"Oh, I forgive you. I have reflected alone a great deal. I passed many nights and days on the divan of the deck house, turning always the same ideas in my mind. For six months I have thought more than I ever did in my life. Do not laugh.

There is nothing like suffering to enlarge the mind. I have understood that if I have lost you the fault is mine. I should have known how to keep you. And I said to myself: 'I did not know. Oh, if I could only begin again!' By dint of thinking and of suffering, I have understood. I have understood that I had not sufficiently shared your tastes and your ideas. You are a superior woman. I had not noticed that, because it was not for that I loved you. Without suspecting it, I irritated you."

She shook her head. He insisted.

"Yes, yes, I often wounded your feelings. I did not take care of your delicacy. There were misunderstandings between us. The reason is we have not the same temperament. And then, I did not know how to amuse you. I did not know how to give you the amusement you need. I did not procure for you the pleasure which becomes a woman intelligent as you are."

So simple and so true in his regrets and in his pain, she found him worthy of sympathy. She said to him softly:

"My friend, I never had to complain of you."

He continued:

"All I have said to you is true. I understood this when I was alone in my boat. I have spent hours on it to which I would not condemn my worst enemy. Often I felt like throwing myself into the water. I have not done it. Is it because I have religious principles or family sentiments, or because I have no courage? I do not know. The reason

is, perhaps, that from a distance you retained me in life. I was attracted by you, since I am here. For two days I have been watching you. I did not wish to reappear at your house. I would not have found you alone; I would not have been able to talk to you. And then you would have been forced to receive me. I thought it better to talk to you in the street. The idea came to me on the boat. I said to myself: 'In the street she will listen to me only if she wishes, as she wished four years ago in the park of Joinville, you know, under the statues, near the crown.'"

He continued, with a sigh:

"Yes, as at Joinville, since all is to be begun again. For two days I have been watching you. Yesterday it was raining; you went out in a carriage. I might have followed you, learned where you were going. I wished to do it. I did not do it. I do not wish to do what would displease you."

She extended her hand to him.

"I thank you. I knew I would not have to regret the trust which I have placed in you."

Alarmed, impatient, enervated, fearing what he might say, she tried to escape him.

"Farewell! You have all life before you. You are happy. Appreciate it, and do not torment yourself about things that are not worth the trouble."

He stopped her with a look. His face had taken the violent and resolute expression which she knew.

"I have told you I had to talk to you. Listen to me for a minute."

She was thinking of Jacques, who was waiting for her. Rare passersby looked at her and went on their way. She stopped under the black branches of a tree, and waited with pity and fright in her soul.

He said:

"I forgive you and forget everything. Take me back. I will promise never to say a word of the past."

She shuddered, and made a movement of surprise and desolation so natural that he stopped. Then, after a moment of reflection:

"My proposition to you is not an ordinary one, I know it well. But I have reflected. I have thought of everything. It is the only possible thing. Think of it, Thérèse, and do not reply at once."

"It would be wrong to deceive you. I cannot, I will not do what you say; and you know why."

A cab was passing slowly near them. She made a sign to the coachman to stop. Le Ménil kept her a moment longer.

"I knew you would say this to me, and that is why I say to you, do not reply at once."

Her hand on the handle of the door, she turned on him the glance of her gray eyes.

It was a painful moment for him. He recalled the time when he saw those charming gray eyes slide under half-closed lids. He smothered a sob, and murmured:

"Listen; I cannot live without you. I love you. It is now that I love you. Before I did not know."

And while she gave haphazard the address of a dressmaker, he went away.

She kept of that meeting an uneasiness and an anxiety. Since she had to see him again, she would have preferred to see him violent and brutal, as he had been at Florence. At the corner of the avenue she said to the coachman:

"To the Ternes."

XXXII

It was Friday, at the Opera. The curtain had fallen on Faust's laboratory. From the orchestra, opera-glasses were raised, and looks, under the lights, lost in the immense emptiness, analyzed the purple and gold hall. The sombre drapery of the boxes framed the dazzling heads and bare shoulders of women. The amphitheatre bent slowly above the parquette its garland of diamonds, of flowers, of hair, of flesh, of gauze, and of satin. In the proscenium boxes were the wife of the Austrian Ambassador and Duchess Gladwin; in the amphitheatre Berthe d'Osigny and Jane Tulle, the latter made famous the day before by the suicide of one of her lovers; in the boxes, Madame Berard de La Malle, her eyes lowered, her long eyelashes shading her pure cheeks; Princess Seniavine, who, superb, concealed under her fan panther-like yawnings; Madame de Morlaine, between two young women whom she was training in the elegances of the mind; Madame Meillan, resting assured on thirty years of sovereign beauty; Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, stiff under iron-gray hair loaded with diamonds. The red of her face heightened the austere dignity of her attitude. She was attracting much notice. It had been learned in the morning that, after the failure

of Garain's combination, M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles had undertaken the task of forming a Ministry. The papers published lists with the name of Martin-Bellême for the Treasury, and the opera-glasses were turned uselessly toward the box, still empty, of Countess Martin.

A murmur of voices filled the hall. In the third rank of the orchestra, General Larivière, standing at his place, was talking with General de La Briche.

"I will do like you, my old comrade, I will go and plant cabbage in Touraine."

He was in one of his moments of melancholy, when nothingness appeared to him to be at the end of life. He had flattered Garain, and Garain, thinking him too smart, had preferred for Minister of War a short-sighted and chimerical artillery general. At least, the General relished the pleasure of seeing Garain abandoned, betrayed by his friends Berthier-d'Eyzelles and Martin-Bellême. It made him laugh with the wrinkles of his small eyes. He laughed in profile. Weary of a long life of dissimulation, he gave to himself suddenly the joy and the beauty of expressing his thoughts.

"You see, my good La Briche, they bother us with their civil army, which costs a great deal, and is worth nothing. Small armies are the only good ones. This was the opinion of Napoleon I., who knew."

"It is true, it is very true," sighed General de La Briche, with tears in his eyes.

Montessuy passed before them; Larivière extended his hand to him.

"They say, Montessuy, that you are the one who checked Garain. Accept my compliments."

Montessuy denied that he exercised any political influence. He was not a senator nor a deputy, nor councillor-general. And, looking through his glasses at the hall:

"See, Larivière, in that box at the right, a very beautiful woman, a brunette."

And he took his seat quietly, relishing the realities of power.

However, in the hall, in the corridors, the names of the new Ministers went from mouth to mouth in the midst of profound indifference: President of the Council and Minister of the Interior, Berthier-d'Eyzelles; Justice and Religions, Loyer; Treasury, Martin-Bellême. All the Ministers were known except those of Commerce, War, and the Navy, who were not yet designated.

The curtain was raised on the wine-shop of Bacchus. The students were singing their second chorus when Madame Martin appeared in her box. Her white gown had sleeves like wings, and on the drapery of her corsage, at the left breast, shone a large ruby lily.

Miss Bell sat near her, in a green velvet Queen Anne gown. Engaged to be married to Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina, she had come to Paris to order her trousseau.

In the movement and the noise of the kirmess:

"Darling," said Miss Bell, "you have left at Florence a friend who retains preciously the charm of your memory. It is Professor Arrighi. He reserves for you the praise which he says is the most beautiful. He says you are a musical creature. But how could Professor Arrighi not remember you, Darling, since the trees in the garden have not forgotten you? Their unleaved branches lament your absence. Oh, they regret you, Darling."

"Tell them," said Thérèse, "that I have of Fiesole a delightful reminiscence, of which I want to live."

In the rear of the box M. Martin-Bellême was explaining in a low voice his ideas to Joseph Springer and to Duviquet. He was saying: "France's signature is the best in the world." He was inclined to prudence in financial matters.

And Miss Bell said:

"Oh, Darling, I will tell the trees of Fiesole that you regret them and that you will soon come to visit them on their hills. But I ask you, do you see M. Dechartre in Paris? I would like to see him very much. I like him because his mind is graceful. Oh, Darling, the mind of M. Dechartre is full of grace and elegance."

Thérèse replied M. Dechartre was doubtless in the hall, and that he would not fail to come and salute Miss Bell.

The curtain fell on the colored turbulence of the waltz. Visitors crowded the hall. Financiers, artists, deputies in a moment met in the parlor

adjoining the box. They surrounded M. Martin-Bellême, murmured congratulations, made graceful gestures to him, and smothered one another in order to shake his hand. Joseph Schmoll, coughing, complaining, blind and deaf, made his way through their disdained mass and reached Madame Martin. He took her hand, and said:

"They say your husband was appointed Minister. Is it true?"

She knew they were talking of it, but she did not think he had been appointed yet. Her husband was there, why not ask him?

Sensitive to literal truths only, Schmoll said:

"Your husband is not yet a Minister? When he is appointed, I will ask you for an interview. It is an affair of the highest importance."

He paused, turning under his golden spectacles his glances of a blind man and of a visionary, which kept him, despite the brutal exactitude of his temperament, in a sort of mysticism. He asked brusquely:

"You were in Italy this year, Madame?"

And, without giving her time to answer:

"I know, I know. You went to Rome. You have looked at the arch of the infamous Titus, that execrable monument, where one may see the seven-branched candle-stick among the spoils of the Jews. Well, Madame, it is a shame for the universe that this monument remains standing in the city of Rome, where the Popes have subsisted only through the art of the Jews, financiers and money-changers.

The Jews brought to Italy the science of Greece and of the Orient. The Renaissance, Madame, is the work of Israel. That is the truth, certain and misunderstood."

And he went through the crowd of the visitors, in the faint noise of hats which he crushed.

Princess Seniavine looked at her friend from her box with the curiosity that the beauty of women at times excited in her. She made a sign to Paul Vence, who was near her:

"Do you not think Madame Martin is extraordinarily beautiful this year?"

In the lobby, full of light and of gold, General de La Briche asked Larivière:

"Did you see my nephew?"

"Your nephew, Le Ménil?"

"Yes—Robert. He was in the hall a moment ago."

La Briche remained pensive for a moment. Then:

"He came this summer to Sémanville. I thought him odd. A charming fellow, as frank as gold, and intelligent. But he ought to have some occupation, some aim in life."

The bell which announced the end of an intermission between the acts had hushed. In the lobby the two old men were walking.

"An aim in life," repeated La Briche, tall, thin and bent, while his companion, lightened and rejuvenated, was hurrying not to miss a scene.

Marguerite, in the garden, was spinning and

singing. When she had finished, Miss Bell said to Madame Martin:

"Oh, Darling, M. Choulette has written me a perfectly beautiful letter. He has told me that he is very celebrated. And I am very glad to know it. And he has said also: 'The glory of other poets reposes in myrrh and aromatic plants. Mine bleeds and moans under a rain of stones and of oyster shells.' Do the French, my love, really throw stones at M. Choulette?"

While Thérèse reassured Miss Bell, Loyer, imperious and somewhat noisy, caused the door of the box to be opened. He appeared wet, covered with mud.

"I come from the Elysée," he said.

He had the gallantry to announce to Madame Martin, first, the good news he was bringing:

"The decrees are signed. Your husband has the Finances. It is a good portfolio."

"The President of the Republic," asked M. Martin-Bellême, "made no objection when my name was pronounced?"

"No; Berthier praised the hereditary property of the Martins, your caution, and the links with which you are attached to certain personalities in the financial world whose concurrence may be useful to the government. And the President, in accordance with Garain's happy expression, was inspired by the necessities of the situation. He has signed."

On Count Martin's yellowed face two or three wrinkles appeared. He was smiling.

"The decree," continued Loyer, "will be published to-morrow. I accompanied myself the clerk who took it to the printer. It was surer. In Grévy's time, and Grévy was not an idiot, decrees were intercepted in the journey from the Elysée to the Quay Voltaire."

And Loyer threw himself on a chair. There, relishing the view of Madame Martin:

"People will not say, as they did in the time of my poor friend Gambetta, that the republic is lacking in women. You will give fine festivals to us, Madame, in the parlors of the Ministry."

Marguerite, looking at herself in the glass, with her necklace and her ear-rings, was singing the jewel air.

"We shall have to compose the declaration," said Count Martin. "I have thought of it. For my department I have found, I think, a fine formula."

Loyer shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Martin, we have nothing essential to change in the declaration of the preceding Cabinet; the situation is unchanged."

He struck his forehead with his hand.

"Oh, I had forgotten. We have made Minister of War, your friend, old Larivière, without consulting him. I have to warn him."

He thought he could find him in the Boulevard *café*, where military men go. But Count Martin knew the General was in the hall.

"I must find him," said Loyer.

Bowing:

"You permit me, Countess, to take your husband?"

They had just gone out when Jacques Dechartre and Paul Vence came into the box.

"I congratulate you, Madame," said Paul Vence.

But she turned toward Dechartre:

"I hope you have not come to congratulate me too."

Paul Vence asked her if she would move into the apartments of the Ministry. She said:

"Oh, no."

"At least, Madame," said Paul Vence, "you will go to the balls at the Elysées, and we shall admire the art with which you retain your mysterious charm."

"Changes in cabinets," said Madame Martin, "inspire you, M. Vence, with very frivolous reflections."

"Madame," continued Paul Vence, "I shall not say like Renan, my beloved master: 'What does Sirius care?' because somebody would reply with reason: 'What does little Earth care for big Sirius?' But I am always surprised when people who are adult and even old let themselves be abused by the illusion of power, as if hunger, love, and death, all the ignoble or sublime necessities of life, did not exercise on the crowd of men an empire too sovereign to leave to masters any other thing than power written on paper and an empire of words. And, what is still more marvellous, people imagine they have other chiefs of state and other ministers than their miseries, their

desire, and their imbecility. He was a wise man who said: 'Let us give to men as witnesses and judges irony and pity.'"

"But, M. Vence," said Madame Martin laughingly, "you are the man who wrote that. I read it."

The two Ministers looked vainly in the hall and in the corridors for the General. On the advice of the ushers, they went behind the scenes, and, through the decorations which went up and down, in the crowd of young German women in red skirts, of witches, of demons, of antique courtesans, they found the lobby of the dance; the vast hall, ornamented with allegoric paintings, almost deserted, had the air of gravity which the state and wealth give to their institutions.

Two ballet dancers were standing sadly, with a foot on the bar placed against the wall. Here and there men in evening dress and women in gauze formed groups almost silent.

Loyer and Martin-Bellême, when they entered, took off their hats. They saw, in the rear of the hall, Larivière with a pretty girl whose pink tunic, held by a gold belt, was split at the hips.

She held in her hand a gilt pasteboard cup. When they were near her, they heard her say to the General:

"You are old, you, but I am sure you do as much as he does."

And she was pointing disdainfully to a young man who, near them, with a gardenia in his button-hole, grinned.

Loyer motioned to the General that he wished to speak to him, and, pushing him against the bar:

"I have the pleasure to announce to you that you have been appointed Minister of War."

Larivière, distrustful, said nothing. That badly dressed man with long hair, who, under his dusty coat, resembled a clown, inspired so little confidence in him that he suspected a snare, perhaps a bad joke.

"Monsieur Loyer, Keeper of the Seals," said Count Martin.

Loyer said:

"General, you cannot refuse. I have said you will accept. If you hesitate, it will be favoring the offensive return of Garain. He is a traitor."

"My dear colleague, you exaggerate," said Count Martin; "but Garain, perhaps, is lacking a little in frankness. And the General's adhesion is urgent."

"The Fatherland before everything," replied Larivière with emotion.

"You know, General," continued Loyer, "the existing laws are to be applied with inflexible moderation."

He looked at the two dancers who were extending on the bar their short and muscular legs.

Larivière murmured:

"The army's patriotism is excellent; the good will of the chiefs is at the height of the most critical circumstances."

Loyer tapped his shoulder.

"My dear colleague, there is some good in big armies."

"I believe as you do," replied Larivière; "the present army fills the superior necessities of national defence."

"The good of big armies," continued Loyer, "is to make war impossible. One would be crazy to engage in a war these immeasurable forces, the management of which surpasses all human faculty. Is not this your opinion, General?"

General Larivière winked.

"The situation," he said, "exacts circumspection. We are in the face of a perilous unknown."

Then Loyer, looking at his war colleague with cynical and soft contempt, said:

"In the very improbable case of a war, don't you think, my dear colleague, that the real generals would be the station masters?"

The three Ministers went out by the private stairway. The President of the Council was waiting for them.

The last act had begun; Madame Martin had in her box only Dechartre and Miss Bell. Miss Bell was saying:

"I rejoice, Darling, I am exalted, at the thought that you wear on your heart the red lily of Florence. M. Dechartre, whose soul is artistic, must be very glad, too, to see at your corsage that gentle jewel. Oh, I would like to know the jeweller who made it, Darling. This lily is lithe and supple like an iris flower. Oh, it is elegant, magnificent, and cruel. Have you noticed, my love, that beautiful jewels have an air of magnificent cruelty?"

"My jeweller," said Thérèse, "is here, and you have named him ; it is M. Dechartre who designed this jewel."

The door of the box was opened. Thérèse half turned her head and saw in the shadow Le Ménil, who was bowing to her with his brusque suppleness.

"Transmit, I pray you, Madame, my congratulations to your husband."

He complimented her dryly on her fine appearance. He spoke to Miss Bell a few obliging and precise words.

Thérèse listened anxiously, her mouth half open in the painful effort to reply insignificant things. He asked her if she had had a good season at Joinville. He would have liked to go in the hunting time, but he could not. He had gone on the Mediterranean ; then he had hunted at Sémanville.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Ménil," said Miss Bell, "you have wandered on the blue sea. Have you seen sirens?"

No, he had not seen sirens, but for three days a dolphin had swum in the yacht's wake.

Miss Bell asked him if that dolphin liked music.

He thought not.

"Dolphins," he said, "are very ordinary fish that sailors call sea geese because they have a goose-shaped head."

But Miss Bell would not believe that the monster which carried the poet Arion had a goose head.

"Monsieur Le Ménil, if next year a dolphin comes to swim near your boat, I pray you play to him on

the flute the Delphic Hymn to Apollo. Do you like the sea, Monsieur Le Ménil?"

"I prefer the woods."

Self-contained, simple, he talked quietly.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Ménil, I know you like woods where the hares dance in moonlight."

Dechartre, pale, rose and went out.

It was the church scene. Marguerite, kneeling, was wringing her hands, and her head fell by the weight of her long tresses; and the voices of the organ and the chorus sang the death song.

"Oh, Darling, do you know that that death song, which is sung only in the Catholic churches, comes from a Franciscan hermitage? It retains the noise of the wind which blows in winter in the trees on the summit of the Alverno."

Thérèse did not hear. Her soul had run out of the door of her box.

There was in the parlor a noise of overthrown arm-chairs. It was Schmoll coming back. He had learned that M. Martin-Bellême had been appointed Minister. At once he claimed the cross of Commander of the Legion of Honor and a larger apartment at the Institute. His apartment was small, narrow, insufficient for his wife and his five daughters. He had been forced to put his workshop under the roof. He made long complaints, and consented to go only after Madame Martin had promised that she would speak to her husband.

"M. Le Ménil," asked Miss Bell, "shall you go yachting next year?"

Le Ménil thought not. He did not intend to keep the *Rosebud.* The water was sad.

And calm, energetic, stubborn, he looked at Thérèse.

On the stage, in Marguerite's prison, Mephistopheles sang, and the orchestra imitated the gallop of horses. Thérèse murmured:

"I have a headache. It is too warm here."

Le Ménil opened the door.

The clear phrase of Marguerite calling the angels ascended in white sparks in the air.

"Darling, I will tell you that poor Marguerite does not wish to be saved according to the flesh, and for that reason she is saved in spirit and in truth. I believe one thing, Darling, I believe firmly we shall all be saved. Oh, yes, I believe in the final purification of sinners."

Thérèse rose, tall and white, with the red flower at her breast. Miss Bell, immovable, listened to the music. Le Ménil, in the parlor, took Madame Martin's cloak, and, while he held it unfolded, she traversed the box, the parlor, and stopped before the mirror of the half-open door. He placed on her bare shoulders the cape of red velvet embroidered with gold and lined with ermine, and said in a low tone, with a voice brief and clear:

"Thérèse, I love you. Remember what I asked you day before yesterday. I shall be every day, every day at three o'clock, at our home, Rue Spontini."

At this moment, as she made a motion with her

head to receive the cloak, she saw Dechartre with his hand on the knob of the door. He had heard. He looked at her with all the reproaches and the suffering that human eyes can contain. Then he went into the vague corridor. She felt hammers of fire beating in her chest and remained immovable on the threshold.

"You were waiting for me?" said Montessuy. "How you are left alone to-day. I will escort you and Miss Bell."

XXXIII

In the carriage, in her room, she saw again the look of her friend, that cruel and dolorous look. She knew with what facility he fell into despair, the promptness of his will not to will. She had seen him run away thus on the shore of the Arno. Happy then in her sadness and in her anguish, she could run after him and say, "Come." Now again, surrounded, watched, she should have found, she should have said something, and not let him go dumb and desolate. She had remained surprised, stunned. The accident had been so absurd and so rapid! She had against Le Ménil the sentiment of simple anger which malicious things cause. She reproached herself bitterly for having permitted her friend to go without a word, without a glance, wherein she could have placed her soul.

While Pauline was waiting to undress her, she was walking to and fro impatiently. Then she would stop suddenly. In the obscure mirrors, wherein the reflections of the candles were drowned, she saw the corridor of the playhouse, and her friend flying from her through it.

Where was he now? What was he saying to himself alone? It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him and see him again at once.

She pressed her heart with her hands; she was smothering.

Pauline uttered a cry. She saw on the white corsage of her mistress drops of blood.

Thérèse, without knowing it, had pricked her hand with the red lily.

She detached the emblematic jewel which she had worn before all as the dazzling secret of her heart, and, holding it in her fingers, contemplated it for a long time. Then she saw again the days of Florence—the cell of San Marco, where her friend's kiss weighed delicately on her mouth, while, through her lowered lashes, she vaguely perceived again the angels and the sky painted on the wall, and the dazzling fountain of the ice vender on the cottonade cloth; the pavilion of the Via Alfieri, its nymphs, its goats, and the room where the shepherds and the masks on the screens listened to her cries and to her long silences.

No, all these things were not shadows of the past, spectres of ancient hours. They were the present reality of her love. And a word stupidly cast by a stranger would destroy these beautiful things! Happily, it was not possible. Her love, her lover, did not depend on such insignificant matters. If only she could run to his house! She would find him before the fire, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, sad. Then she would put her fingers through his hair, force him to lift his head, to see that she loved him, that she was his treasure, living with joy and love.

She had dismissed her maid. In her bed she was thinking on only one idea.

It was an accident, an absurd accident. He would understand it; he would know that their love had nothing to do with anything so stupid. What folly for him to care about another! As if there were other men in the world!

M. Martin-Bellême half opened the door. Seeing a light, he went in.

"You are not asleep, Thérèse?"

He had been at a conference with his colleagues. He wanted advice from his wife on certain points. He needed to hear sincere words.

"It is done," he said. "You will help me, I am sure, in my situation, which is much envied, but very difficult and even perilous. I owe it to you somewhat, since it came to me through the powerful influence of your father."

He consulted her on the choice of a Chief of Cabinet.

She advised him as best she could. She thought he was sensible, calm, and not sillier than the others.

He lost himself in reflections.

"I have to defend before the Senate the budget voted by the Chamber of Deputies. The budget contains innovations which I did not approve. When I was a Deputy I fought against them. Now that I am a Minister I must support them. I saw things from the outside formerly. I see them from the inside now, and their aspect is changed. And, then, I am free no longer."

He sighed:

"Ah, if the people only knew the little that we can do when we are powerful!"

He told her his impressions. Berthier was reserved. The others were impenetrable. Loyer alone was excessively authoritative.

She listened to him without attention and without impatience. His pale face and voice marked for her like a clock the minutes which were passing one by one, slowly.

"Loyer had odd sallies of wit. At the moment when he was declaring his strict adhesion to the Concordat, he said: 'Bishops are spiritual prefects. I will protect them since they belong to me. And through them I will hold the guardians of souls, curates.'"

He recalled to her that she would have to meet people who were not of her class and who would shock her by their vulgarity. But his situation demanded that he should not disdain anybody. At all events, he counted on her tact and on her devotion.

She looked at him, a little astonished.

"There is no hurry, my friend. We shall see later."

He was tired. He said good-night and advised her to sleep. She was ruining her health by reading all night. He left her.

She heard the noise of his footsteps, heavier than usual, while he traversed the workshop, encumbered with blue books and journals, to reach his room,

where he would perhaps sleep. Then she felt the weight on her of the night's silence. She looked at her watch. It was half-past one.

She said to herself: "He too is suffering. He looked at me with so much despair and anger."

She was courageous and ardent. She was impatient at being a prisoner. When daylight came, she would go, she would see him, she would explain everything to him. It was so clear! In the painful monotony of her thought, she listened to the rolling of wagons which at long intervals passed on the quay. That noise preoccupied, almost interested her. She listened to the rumble, at first weak and distant, then thicker, in which she could distinguish the rubbing of the wheels, the creaking of the axles, the shock of the horses' shoes, which, weakening little by little, ended in an imperceptible murmur.

And when silence returned, she fell again into her idea.

He would understand that she loved him, that she had never loved any one except him. It was unfortunate that the night was so long. She did not dare to look at her watch for fear of seeing in it the immobility of time.

She rose, went to the window, and drew the curtains. There was a pale light in the clouded sky. She thought it might be the beginning of dawn. She looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

She returned to the window. The sombre infinity outdoors attracted her. She looked. The side-

walks shone under the gas-jets. An invisible and dumb rain fell from the sky. Suddenly a voice ascended in the silence; acute, and then grave, it seemed to be made of several voices replying to one another. It was a drunkard disputing with the beings of his dream, to whom he generously gave utterance, and whom he confounded afterward with great gestures and in furious sentences. Thérèse could see the poor man walk along the parapet in his white blouse, and she could hear words recurring incessantly: "That is what I say to the government."

Chilled, she returned to her bed. She thought, "He is jealous, he is madly jealous. It is a question of nerves and of blood. But his love, too, is an affair of blood and of nerves. His love and his jealousy are one and the same thing. Another would understand. It would be sufficient to please his self-love." But he was jealous from the depth of his flesh. She knew this; she knew that in him jealousy was a physical torture, a wound enlarged by imagination. She knew how profound the evil was. She had seen him grow pale before the bronze Saint Mark when she had thrown the letter in the box on the wall of the old Florentine house at a time when she was his only in dreams.

She recalled his smothered complaints, his sudden fits of sadness, and the painful mystery of the words which he repeated incessantly: "I have to forget you with you." She saw again the Dinard letter and his furious despair for a word overheard at a wine-shop table. She felt that the blow had been

struck accidentally at the most sensitive point, at the bleeding wound. But she did not lose courage. She would tell everything, she would confess everything, and all her avowals would say to him: "I love you. I have never loved any one except you!" She had not betrayed him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed. She had lied so little, as little as possible, and then only not to give him pain. How should he not understand? It was better he should know everything, since everything was nothing. She represented to herself incessantly the same ideas, repeated to herself the same words.

Her lamp gave only a smoky light. She lighted candles. It was six o'clock. She realized that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and mingled with the earth in a chaos of thick darkness. Then she was curious to know exactly at what hour the sun would rise. She had no idea of this. She thought only that nights were long in December. She did not think of looking at the calendar. The heavy step of workmen walking in squads, the noise of wagons of milkmen and marketmen, came to her ear like sounds of good augury. She shuddered at this first awakening of the city.

XXXIV

At nine o'clock, in the yard of the little house, she saw M. Fusellier sweeping in the rain while smoking his pipe. Madame Fusellier came out of her box. Both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"M. Jacques is not at home."

And, as Thérèse remained silent, immovable, Fusellier came near her with his broom, hiding with his left hand his pipe behind his back:

"M. Jacques has not yet come home."

"I will wait for him," said Thérèse.

Madame Fusellier led her to the parlor, where she lit the fire. And as the wood smoked and would not flame, she remained bent, with her hands on her knees.

"It is the rain," she said, "which causes the smoke."

Madame Martin said it was not worth while to make a fire, that she did not feel cold.

She saw herself in the glass.

She was livid, with ardent spots on her cheeks. Then only she felt that her feet were frozen. She went near the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing her anxious, spoke softly to her:

"M. Jacques will come soon. Let Madame warm herself while waiting for him."

A sad light fell with the rain on the glass ceiling. Along the walls, the lady with the unicorn was not beautiful among the cavaliers in a forest full of flowers and birds. Thérèse was repeating to herself the words: "He has not yet come home." And by dint of saying them she lost the meaning of them. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without a movement, without a thought, for a time the duration of which she did not know; perhaps half an hour. The noise of a footstep came to her, the door was opened. He came in. She saw that he was wet with rain and mud, and burned by fever.

She fixed on him a look so sincere and so frank that it struck him. But almost at once he recalled within himself all his sufferings.

He said to her:

"What do you want of me? You have done me all the harm you could do me."

Fatigue gave him an air of kindness. It frightened her.

"Jacques, listen to me!"

He motioned to her that he wished to hear nothing from her.

"Jacques, listen to me. I have not deceived you. Oh, no, I have not deceived you. Was it possible? Was it——"

He interrupted her:

"Have some pity for me. Do not make me suffer

again. Leave me, I pray you. If you knew the night I have passed, you would not have the courage to torment me again."

He let himself fall on the divan.

He had walked all night. Not to suffer too much, he tried to find diversions. On the Bercy Quay he had looked at the moon running in the clouds. For an hour he had seen it veil itself and reappear. Then he had counted the windows of houses with minute care. The rain had begun to fall. He had gone to the market and had drunk whiskey in a wine-room. A big girl who squinted had said to him, "You don't look happy." He had fallen half asleep on the leather bench. It had been a good moment.

The images of that painful night passed before his eyes. He said:

"I recalled the night of the Arno. You have spoiled for me all the joy and all the beauty in the world."

He asked her to leave him alone. In his lassitude he had a great pity for himself. He would have liked to sleep—not to die; he held death in horror—but to sleep and never to wake again. Yet, before him, as desirable as formerly, despite the painful fixity of her dry eyes, and more mysterious than ever, he saw her. His hatred was vivified by suffering.

She extended her arms to him.

"Listen to me, Jacques."

He motioned to her that it was useless for her to speak. Yet he wished to listen to her, and already

he was listening with avidity. He detested and rejected in advance what she would say, but nothing else in the world interested him. She said:

"You may have believed I was betraying you, that I was not living for you alone. But can you not understand anything? You do not see that if that man were my lover it would not have been necessary for him to talk to me at the play-house in that box; he would have a thousand other ways of meeting me. Oh, no, my friend, I assure you that since the day when I had the happiness to meet you, I have been yours entirely. Could I have been another's? What you imagine is monstrous. But I love you, I love you! I love only you. I have never loved any one except you."

He replied slowly, with cruel heaviness:

"I shall be every day, at three o'clock, in our home, Rue Spontini. It was not a lover, your lover, who said these things? No! it was a stranger, an unknown person."

She straightened herself, and with painful gravity said:

"Yes, I was his. You knew it. I have denied it, I have told an untruth, not to irritate or grieve you. I saw you so anxious. But I lied so little and so badly. You knew. Do not reproach me for it. You knew; you often spoke to me of the past, and then one day somebody told you at the restaurant —and you imagined much more than ever happened. While telling an untruth, I was not deceiving you. If you knew the little that he was in my life!

There! I did not know you. I did not know you were to come. I was lonely."

She fell on her knees.

"I was wrong. I should have waited for you. But if you knew to what degree that thing never existed."

And her voice, modulating a soft and singing complaint, said:

"Why did you not come sooner, why?"

She dragged herself to him, tried to take his hands. He repulsed her.

"I was stupid. I did not think. I did not know. I did not want to know."

He rose, and exclaimed in an explosion of hatred:

"I did not want, I did not want him to be that man."

She sat in the place which he had left, and there, plaintive, in a low voice, she explained the past. In that epoch she was in a world horribly commonplace. She had yielded, but she had regretted at once. Oh, if he knew the sadness of her life he would not be jealous. He would pity her. She shook her head and said, looking at him through the undone locks of her hair:

"I am talking to you of another woman. There is nothing in common between that woman and me. I exist only since I have known you, since I have belonged to you."

He walked in the room madly. He laughed painfully.

"Yes; but while you loved me, the other woman—the one who was not you?"

She looked at him indignantly:

"Can you believe——"

"Did you not see him again at Florence? Did you not escort him to the station?"

She told him that he had come to Italy to find her; that she had seen him; that she had broken with him: that he had gone, irritated, and that since then he was trying to take her back; but that she had not even paid attention to him.

"My friend, I see, I know, only you in the world."

He shook his head.

"I do not believe you."

She revolted.

"I have told you everything. Accuse me, condemn me, but do not offend me in my love for you."

He shook his head.

"Leave me. You have harmed me too much. I have loved you so much that all the pain which you could have given me I would have taken, kept, loved; but this is too hideous. I hate it. Leave me. I am suffering too much. Farewell!"

Straight, her small feet fixed on the carpet:

"I have come. It is my happiness, it is my life, I am fighting for. I will not go."

And she said again all that she had said. Violent and sincere, sure of herself, she explained how she had broken the tie which was already loose and irritated her: how since the day when she had loved him she had been his only, without regret, without

a wandering look or thought. But in speaking to him of another she irritated him. And he shouted at her:

"I do not believe you."

Then she began to say again what she had said before.

And suddenly, instinctively, she looked at her watch:

"Oh, it is noon."

She had often given that cry of alarm when the farewell hour surprised them. And Jacques shuddered at this word which was so familiar, so painful, and was this time so desperate. For a few minutes she said ardent words wet with tears. Then she had to go; she had gained nothing.

At her house she found in the waiting-room the market woman who had come to present a bouquet to her. She remembered that her husband was a state Minister. There were telegrams, visiting-cards and letters, congratulations and solicitations. Madame Marmet wrote to recommend her nephew to General Larivière.

She went into the dining-room and fell in a chair. M. Martin-Bellême was finishing his breakfast. He was expected at the Cabinet Council and at the former Finance Minister's, to whom he owed a call.

"Do not forget, my dear friend, to call on Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles. You know how susceptible she is."

She made no answer. While he was dipping his fingers in the glass bowl, he saw her so tired that

he dared not say anything. He found himself in the presence of a secret which he did not wish to know; in presence of an intimate suffering which one word would make explode. He felt anxious, frightened, and respectful.

He threw down his napkin.

"Excuse me, dear."

He went out.

She tried to eat. She could swallow nothing.

At two o'clock she returned to the little house of the Ternes. She found Jacques in his room. He was smoking a wooden pipe. A cup of coffee almost empty was on the table. He looked at her with a harshness that chilled her. She dared not talk, feeling that everything that she could say would offend and irritate him, and that, discreet and dumb, she vivified his anger. He knew that she would return; he had waited for her with impatience. A sudden light came to her, and she saw that she had been wrong to come; that if she had been absent he would have desired, wanted, called for her, perhaps. But it was too late; and, at all events, she was not trying to be crafty.

She said to him:

"You see I have returned. I could not do otherwise. And then it was natural, since I love you. And you know it."

She knew very well that all she could say would only irritate him. He asked her if that was the way she spoke in the Rue Spontini.

She looked at him with sadness.

"Jacques, you have often told me that there were hatred and anger in your heart against me. You like to make me suffer. I can see it."

With ardent patience, at length, she told him her entire life; the little that she had put into it; the sadness of the past; and how, since he had known her, she had lived only through him and in him.

The words fell as limpid as her look. She sat near him. He listened to her with wicked avidity. Cruel with himself, he wished to know everything; her last meetings with the other. She reported faithfully the events of the Great Britain Hotel; but she changed the scene to the outside, in an alley of the Casino, from fear that the image of their sad interview in a closed room should irritate her friend. Then she explained the meeting at the station. She had not wished to cause despair to a man who was so violent and suffering. Since then she had had no news from him until the day when he spoke to her on the street. She repeated what she had replied to him. Two days later she had seen him at the opera, in her box. Certainly, she had not encouraged him to come. It was the truth.

It was the truth. But the ancient poison slowly piled up in him burned him. She made the past, the irreparable past, present to him by her avowals. He saw images of it which tortured him. He said:

"I do not believe you."

And he added:

"And if I believed you, I could not see you again, because of the idea that you have loved that

man. I have told you, I have written to you, you remember, that I did not wish him to be that man. And since——"

He stopped.

She said:

"You know very well that since then nothing has happened."

He replied, with dumb violence:

"Since then I have seen him."

They remained silent for a long time. Then she said, surprised and plaintive:

"But, my friend, you should have thought that a woman such as I am, married as I was—every day one sees women bring to their lovers a past heavier than mine and yet inspire love. Ah, my past—if you knew how insignificant it was!"

"I know what you can give. One cannot forgive to you what one may forgive to another."

"But, my friend, I am like the others."

"No, you are not like the others. To you one cannot forgive anything."

He talked with set teeth. His eyes—his eyes which she had seen so large, loaded with tenderness, now dry, harsh, narrowed between wrinkled lids—cast a new glance at her. He frightened her. She went to the rear of the room, sat on a chair, and there she remained, trembling, for a long time, smothered by her sobs. Then she fell into tears.

He sighed:

"Why did I ever know you?"

She replied, in her tears:

"I do not regret having known you. I am dying of it, and I do not regret it. I have loved."

He stubbornly continued to make her suffer. He felt that he was playing an odious part, but he could not stop.

"It is possible, after all, that you have loved me too."

She, with soft bitterness:

"But I have loved only you. I have loved you too much. And it is for that you are punishing me. Oh, you can think that I was to another what I have been to you?"

"Why not?"

She looked at him without force and without courage.

"It is true that you do not believe me."

She added softly:

"If I killed myself would you believe me?"

"No, I would not believe you."

She wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief; then, lifting her eyes, shining through her tears:

"Then, all is at an end!"

She rose, saw again in the room the thousand things with which she had lived in laughing intimacy, which she was making hers, and which suddenly were nothing to her, and looked at her as a stranger and an enemy; she saw again the nude woman who was making, while running, the gesture which had not been explained to her; the Florentine models which recalled to her Fiesole and the enchanted hours of Italy; the profile sketch by De-

chartre of the girl who laughed in her pretty suffering thinness. She stopped a moment sympathetically in front of that little newspaper girl who had come there too, and had disappeared, carried away in the frightful immensity of life and of things.

She repeated:

"Then all is at an end?"

He remained silent.

The twilight was rubbing out forms.

She said:

"What will become of me?"

He replied:

"And what will become of me?"

They looked at each other with pity, because each one pitied his own fate.

Thérèse said again:

"And I, who feared to grow old for you—for me, who feared this so that our beautiful love should not end? It would have been better if it had never come. Yes, it would be better if I had not been born. What a presentiment was the one that came to me, when a child, under the lindens of Joinville, before the marble nymphs! I wished to die then."

Her arms fell, and clasping her hands she lifted her eyes; her wet glance threw a light in the shade.

"Is there not a way of my making you feel that what I am saying to you is true? That never since I have been yours, never— But how could I? The very idea of it seems horrible, absurd. Do you know me so little?"

He shook his head sadly.

"I do not know you."

She questioned once more with her eyes all the objects in the room.

"But then, what we have been for each other was vain, useless. People break themselves against each other; they do not mingle."

She revolted. It was not possible that he should not feel what he was to her. And, in the ardor of her love, she threw herself on him and enveloped him with kisses and tears.

He forgot everything. Already, with her head thrown back, she smiled in her tears. Brusquely he disengaged himself.

"I do not see you alone. I see the other one with you always."

She looked at him, dumb, indignant, desperate. Then, feeling that all was at an end, she cast around her a surprised glance of her eyes, which did not see, and went out slowly.

THE END.

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