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A VIRGIN HEART

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A NOVEL

BY

REMY DE GOURMONT

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION

BY

ALDOUS HUXLEY

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PREFACE

The author had thought of qualifying this book: A Novel Without Hypocrisy; but he reflected that these words might appear unseemly, since hypocrisy is becoming more and more fashionable.

He next thought of: A Physiological Novel; but that was still worse in this age of great converts, when grace from on high so opportunely purifies the petty human passions.

These two sub-titles being barred, nothing was left; he has therefore put nothing.

A novel is a novel. And it would be no more than that if the author had not attempted, by an analysis that knows no scruples, to reveal in these pages what may be called the seamy side of a 'virgin heart,' to show that innocence has its instincts, its needs, its physiological dues.

A young girl is not merely a young heart, but a young human body, all complete.

Such is the subject of this novel, which must, in spite of everything, be called 'physiological.'

R. G.

A VIRGIN HEART

CHAPTER I

THE terrace was in a ruinous state, overgrown with grass and brambles and acacias. The girl was leaning on the parapet, eating mulberries. She displayed her purple-stained hands and laughed. M. Hervart looked up:

"You've got a moustache as well," he said. "It looks very funny."

"But I don't want to look funny."

She walked to the little stream flowing close at hand, wetted her handkerchief and began wiping her mouth.

M. Hervart's eyes returned to his magnifying glass; he went on examining the daisy on which he had found two scarlet bugs so closely joined together that they seemed a single insect. They had gone to sleep in the midst of their love-making, and but for the quivering of their long antennae, you would have thought they were dead. M. Hervart would have liked to watch the ending of this little scene of passion; but it might go on for hours. He lost heart.

"What's more," he reflected, "I know that the male does not die on the spot; he goes running about in search of food as soon as he's free. Still, I would have liked to see the mechanism of separation. That will come with luck. One must always count on luck, whether one is studying animals or men. To be sure, there is also patience, perseverance..."

He made a little movement with his head, signifying, no doubt, that patience and perseverance were not in his line. Then, very gently, he laid the flower with its sleeping burden on the parapet of the terrace. It was only then he noticed that Rose was no longer there.

"I must have annoyed her by what I said about the moustache. It wasn't true, either. But there are moments when that child gets on my nerves with that look of hers, as though she wanted to be kissed. And yet, if I did so much as to lay my hand on her shoulder, I should get my face smacked. A curious creature. But then all women are curious creatures, girls above all."

Carefully wiping his glass, M. Hervart stepped across the stream and entered the wood.

M. Hervart was about forty. He was tall and thin; sometimes, when his curiosity had kept him poring over something for too long at a stretch he stooped a little. His eyes were bright and penetrating, despite the fact that one of them had, it would seem, been narrowed and shrunk by the use of the microscope. His clear-complexioned face, with its light pointed beard, was pleasant, without being striking.

He was the keeper of the department of Greek sculpture at the Louvre, but the cold beauty of the marbles interested him little, and archaeology even less. He was a lover of life, who divided his days between women and animals. Studying the habits of insects was his favourite hobby. He was often to be seen at the Zoological gardens, or else, more often than at his office, in the animal-shop round the corner. His evenings he devoted to amusement, frequenting every kind of society. To sympathetic audiences he liked to give out that he was the descendant of the M. d'Hervart whose wife had La Fontaine for a lover. He used also to say that it was only his professional duties that had prevented his making himself a name as a naturalist. But the opin-

ion of most people was that M. Hervart was, in all he did, nothing more than a clever amateur, ruined by a great deal of indolence.

Every two or three years he used to go and stay with his friend M. Desbois at his manor of Robinvast, near Cherbourg. M. Desbois was a retired commercial sculptor, who had recently ennobled himself by means of a Y and one or two other little changes. When M. Des Boys burst upon the world, Hervart appeared not to notice the metamorphosis. That earned him an increase of affection, and whenever he came to visit, Mme Des Boys would take almost excessive pains about the cooking.

Mme Des Boys, who had been sentimental and romantic in her youth and had remained all her life rather a silly woman, had insisted on calling her daughter Rose. It would have been a ridiculous name—Rose Des Boys—if Rose had been the sort of girl to tolerate the repetition of a foolish compliment. Ordinarily she was a gay and gentle creature, but she could be chilling, could ignore and disregard you in the cruellest fashion. Her parents adored her and were afraid of her: so they

allowed her to do what she liked. She was twenty years old.

Meanwhile, M. Hervart was looking for Rose. He did not dare call her, because he did not know what name to use. In conversation he said: You; before strangers, Mademoiselle; in his own mind, Rose.

"She was much nicer two years ago. She listened to what I had to say. She obeyed me. She caught insects for me. This is the critical moment now. If we were bugs..."

He went on:

"Whether it's women or beetles, love is their whole life. Bugs die as soon as their work is done, and women begin dying from the moment of their first kiss.... They also begin living. It's pretty, the spectacle of these girls who want to live, want to fulfill their destiny, and don't know how, and go sobbing through the darkness, looking for their way. I expect I shall find her crying."

Rose, indeed, had just finished wiping her eyes. They were blue when she was sad and greenish when she laughed.

"You've been crying. Did you prick yourself coming through this holly? I did too."

"I shouldn't cry for a thing like that. But who told you I'd been crying? I got a fly in my eye. Look, only one of them's red."

But, instead of lifting her head, she bent down and began to pick the flowers at her feet.

"May I sit down beside you?"

"What a question!"

"You see, your skirt takes up all the room."

"Well then, push it away."

M. Hervart turned back the outspread skirt and sat down on the old bench—cautiously, for he knew that it was rather rickety. Now that he had money and an aristocratic name, M. Des Boys had become romantic. His whole domain, except for the kitchen garden and the rooms that were actually inhabited, was kept in a perennially wild, decrepit state. In the house and its surroundings you could see nothing but mouldering walls and rotten planks, moss-grown benches, impenetrable bramble bushes. Near the stream stood an old tower, from which the ivy fell in a cataract whose waves of greenery splashed up again to the summit of an old oak with dead forked branches—a pretty sight. The Des Boys never

went out except to show their virgin forest to a visitor. M. Des Boys dabbled in painting.

It was morning, and the wood was cool, still damp with dew. Through the thickly woven beech branches the sunlight fell on the stiff holly leaves and lit them up like flowers. A little chestnut tree, that had sprouted all awry, raised its twisted head towards the light. Near-by stood a wild cherry, into which the sparrows darted, twittering and alarmed. A jay passed like a flash of blue lightning. The wind crept in beneath the trees, stirring the bracken that darkened and lightened at its passage. A wounded bee fell on Rose's skirt.

"Poor bee! One of his wings is unhooked. I'll try and put it right."

"Take care," said M. Hervart. "It will sting. Animals never believe that you mean well by them. To them everyone's an enemy."

"True," said Rose, shaking off the bee. "Your bugs will eat him and that will be a happy ending. Everyone's an enemy."

Rose had spoken so bitterly that M. Hervart was quite distressed. He brought his face close to hers as her big straw hat would permit, and whispered:

"Are you unhappy?"

How beautifully women manage these things! In a flash the hat had disappeared, tossed almost angrily aside, and at the same moment an equisitely pale and fluffy head dropped on to M. Hervart's shoulder.

It was a touching moment. Much moved, the man put his arm round the girl's waist. His hand took possession of the little hand that she surrendered to him. He had only to turn and bend his head a little, and he was kissing, close below the hair, a white forehead, feverishly moist. He felt her abandonment to him becoming more deliberate; the hand he was holding squeezed his own

Rose made an abrupt movement which parted them, and looking full at M. Hervart, her face radiant with tenderness, she said:

"I'm not unhappy now."

She got up, and they moved away together through the wood, exchanging little insignificant phrases in voices full of tenderness. Each time their eyes met, they smiled. They kept on fingering leaves, flowers, mere pieces of wood, so as to have an excuse for touching each other's hand. Coming to a clearing where

they could walk abreast, they allowed their arms on the inner side to hang limply down, so that their hands touched and were soon joined.

There was a silence, prolonged and very delightful. Each, meanwhile, was absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Obviously," M. Hervart was saying to himself, "if I have any sense left, I shall take the train home. First of all, I must go to Cherbourg and send a telegram to someone who can send a wire to recall me. What a nuisance! I was enjoying myself so much here. To whom shall I appeal? To Gratienne? I shall have to write a letter in that case, to concoct some story. Three or four days longer won't make matters any worse;I know these young girls. Time doesn't exist for them; they live in the absolute. So long as there's no jealousy—and I don't see how there can be—I shall be all right. She is really charming—Rose. Lord! what a state of excitement I'm in! But I must be reasonable. I shall tell Gratienne to meet me at Grandcamp. She has been longing to go to Grandcamp ever since she read that novel about the place. Besides,

there are the rocks. I'm quite indifferent provided I get away from here. . . ."

"What are you thinking about?"

"Can you ask, my dear child?"

A squeeze from the little hand showed that his answer had been understood. Silence settled down once more.

"Gratienne? At this very moment she's probably with another lover. But then, think of leaving a woman alone in Paris, in July? 'I am never bored. I dine at Mme Fleury's every day; she loves having me. We start for Honfleur on the 25th. You must come and see us.' She imagines that Honfleur is close to Cherbourg. 'I am never bored.' Come, come; when women speak so clearly, it means they have nothing to hide. . . . On the contrary it's one of their tricks. . . ."

"Well, my child, how's your wretchedness? Is it all over?"

"I am very happy," Rose answered.

A look from her big limpid eyes confirmed these solemn words and M. Hervart was more moved than at the moment of her surrender. The idea that he was the cause of this child's happiness filled him with pride.

"Better not disturb Gratienne. She's so suspicious. Whom shall I write to, then? My colleagues? No, I'm not on intimate enough terms. Gauvain, the animal-shop man? That would be humiliating. What a bore it all is! Leave it; we'll see later on. And after all, what's the matter? A little sentimental friendship. Rose lives such a lonely life. Why should I rob her of the innocent pleasure of playing at sentiment with me? Summer-holiday amusements..."

"Oh," said Rose, "look at that beetle. Isn't he handsome?"

But the animal, superb in its gold and sapphire armour, had disappeared under the dead leaves. They thought no more about it. Rose was occupied by very different thoughts. She felt herself filled with an exultant tenderness.

"I don't belong to myself any more. It's very thrilling. What is going to happen? He'll kiss me on the eyes. There'll be no resisting, because I belong to him."

She lifted her head and looked at M. Hervart. She seemed to be offering her eyes. Without changing her position she closed

them. A kiss settled lightly on her soft eyelids.

"He does everything I expect him to do. Does he read my thoughts or do I read his?"

Meanwhile M. Hervart was trying to find something gallant or sentimental to say, and could think of nothing.

"I might praise her chestnut hair, with its golden lights, tell her how fine and silky it is. But is it? And besides, it might be a little premature. What shall I praise? Her mouth? It's rather large. Her nose? It's a little too hooked. Her complexion? Is it a compliment to say it's pale and opaque? Her eyes? That would look like an allusion. They're pretty, though—her eyes, the way they change colour."

He had picked a blade of grass as he walked. It was covered with little black moving specks.

"What a bore," said M. Hervart, "I've forgotten to bring my microscope."

"I've got one, only the reflector's broken. It will have to be sent to Cherbourg.

"Couldn't you take it yourself?"

"If you like."

"But wouldn't you enjoy it, Rose?"

She was so pleased at being called Rose, that for a moment she did not answer. Then she said, blushing:

"You see, I scarcely ever go out of this place; the idea hardly occurs to me. But I should love to go with you."

She added with a spoilt child's tone of authority: "I'll go and tell father. We'll start after luncheon."

M. Hervart looked once more at his indecipherable grass blade.

"I know a good shop," he said. "Lepoultel, the marine optician. Do you know him? He's a friend of Gauvain's...."

"The animal man?"

"What, do you mean to say you remember that?"

"I remember everything you tell me," answered Rose, very seriously.

M. Hervart was flattered. It occurred to him also that this sentimental child might make a very good practical little wife. His rather curious life passed rapidly before him and he called to mind some of the mistresses of his fugitive amours. He saw Gratienne; it was six months since they had met; she would

have left him, very likely, by the time he returned. At this thought M. Hervart frowned. At the same time the pressure of his fingers relaxed.

Rose looked at him:

"What are you thinking about?"

"Again!" said M. Hervart to himself. "Oh, that eternal feminine question! As if anyone ever answered it! Here's my answer...."

Looking at the clouds, he pronounced:

"I think it's going to rain."

"Oh, no!" said Rose, "I don't think so. The wind is 'suet'...."

Conscious of having uttered a provincialism, she made haste to add:

"As the country people say."

"What does it mean?"

"South-east."

M. Hervart was little interested in dialectal forms; rather spitefully and with the true Parisian's fatuous vanity, he replied:

"What an ugly word! You ought to say South-east. You're a regular peasant woman."

"Laugh away," said Rose. "I don't mind, now. We're all country-people; my father comes from these parts, so does my mother. I

wasn't born here, but I belong to the place. I belong to it as the trees do, as the grass and all the animals. Yes, I *am* a peasant woman.

She raised her head proudly.

"I come from here too," said M. Hervart.

"Yes, and you don't care for it any longer."

"I do, because it produced you and because you love it."

Delighted at the discovery of this insipidity, M. Hervart darted, hat in hand, in pursuit of a butterfly; he missed it.

"They're not so easy to catch as kisses," said Rose with a touch of irony.

M. Hervart was startled:

"Is she merely sensual?" he wondered.

But Rose was incapable of dividing her nature into categories. She felt her character as a perfect unity. Her remark had been just a conversational remark, for she was not lacking in wit.

Meanwhile, this mystery plunged M. Hervart into a prolonged meditation. He constructed the most perverse theories about the precocity of girls.

But he was soon ashamed of these mental wanderings.

"Women are complex; not more so, of course, than men, but in a different way which men can't understand. They don't understand themselves, and what's more, they don't care about understanding. They feel, and that suffices to steer them very satisfactorily through life, as well as to solve problems which leave men utterly helpless. One must act towards them as they do themselves. It's only through the feelings that one can get into contact with them. There is but one way of understanding women, and that is to love them.... Why shouldn't I say that aloud? It would amuse her, and perhaps she might find something pretty to say in reply."

But, without being exactly shy, M. Hervart was nervous about hearing the sound of his own voice. That was why he generally gave vent only to the curtest phrases. Rose had taken his hand once more. This mute language seemed to appeal to her, and M. Hervart was content to put up with it, though he found this exchange of manual confidences a little childish.

"But nothing," he went on to himself, "nothing is childish in love...."

This word, which he did not pronounce, even to himself, but which he seemed to see, as though his own hand had written it on a sheet of paper—this word filled him with terror. He burst out into secret protestations:

"But there's no question of love. She doesn't love me. I don't love her. It's a mere game. This child has made me a child like herself ...."

He wanted to stop thinking, but the process went on of its own accord.

"A dangerous game.... I oughtn't to have kissed her eyes. Her forehead, that's a different matter; it's fatherly... And then letting her lean on my shoulder, like that! What's to be done?"

He had to admit that he had been the guilty party. Almost unconsciously, prompted by his mere male instinct, he had, since his arrival a fortnight before, and while still to all appearance, he continued to treat her as a child, been silently courting her. He was always looking at her, smiling to her, even though his words might be serious. Feeling herself the object of an unceasing attention, Rose had concluded that he wanted to capture her, and she had al-

lowed herself to be caught. M. Hervart considered himself too expert in feminine psychology to admit the possibility of a young girl's having deliberately taken the first step. He felt like an absent-minded sportsman who, forgetting that he has fired, wakes up to find a partridge in his game-bag.

"An agreeable surprise," he reflected. "Almost too agreeable."

CHAPTER II

IT had already grown hot. They sat down in the shade, on a tree trunk. Large harmless ants crawled hither and thither on the bark, but M. Hervart seemed to have lost his interest in entomology. Idly, they looked at the busy little creatures, crossing and re-crossing one another's path.

"Do they know what they're doing? And do I know what I'm doing? Some sensation guides them. What about me? They run here and there, because they think they've seen or smelt some prey. And I? Oh, I should like to run away from my prey. I reason, I deliberate.... Yes, I deliberate, or at least I try."

He looked up at the girl.

Rose was engaged in pulling fox-glove buds off their stems and making them pop in the palm of her hand. Her face was serious. M. Hervart could look at her without distracting her from her dreams.

She made a pretty picture, as she sat there, gentle and, at the same time, wild. Her features, while they still preserved a trace of childishness, were growing marked and definite. She was a woman. How red her mouth was, how voluptuous! M. Hervart caught himself reflecting that that mouth would give most excellent kisses. What a fruit to bite, firm-fleshed and succulent! Rose heaved a sigh, and it was as though a wave had lifted her white dress; all her young bosom had seemed to expand. M. Hervart had a vision of roseate whiteness, soft and living; he desired it as a child desires the peach he sees on the wall hidden under its long leaves. He took the pleasure in this desire that he had sometimes taken in standing before Titian's Portrait of a Young Lady. The obstacle was as insurmountable: Rose, so far as he was concerned, was an illusion.

"But that makes no difference," he said to himself, "I have desired her, which isn't chaste of me. If I had been in love with her, I should not have had that kind of vision. Therefore I am not in love with her. Fortunately!"

Rose was thinking of nothing. She was just

letting herself be looked at. Having been examined, she smiled gently, a smile that was faintly tinged with shyness. Flying suddenly to the opposite extreme, she burst out laughing and, holding on with both hands to the knotted trunk, leaned backwards. Her hat fell off, her hair came undone. She sat up again, looking wilder than ever. M. Hervart thought that she was going to run away, like Galatea; but there was no willow tree.

"I don't care," she said as M. Hervart handed her the hat; "my hair will have to stay down. It's all right like that. Pins don't hold on my head."

"Pins," said M. Hervart, "pins rarely do hold on women's heads."

She smiled without answering and certainly without understanding. She was smiling a great deal this morning, M. Hervart thought.

"But her smile is so sweet that I should never get tired of it. Come now, I'll tell her that...."

"I love your smile. It's so sweet that I should never get tired of it."

"As sweet as that? That's because it's so new. I don't smile much generally."

It was enough to move any man to the depths of his being, M. Hervart murmured spontaneously:

"I love you, Rose."

Frankly, and without showing any surprise, she answered:

"So do I, my dear."

At the same time she shook her skirt on which a number of ants were crawling.

"This sort doesn't bite," she said. They're nice...."

"Like you. (What a compliment! How insipid! What a fool I'm making of myself!)"

"There's one on your sleeve," said Rose. She brushed it off.

"Now say thank you," and she presented her cheek, on which M. Hervart printed the most fraternal of kisses.

"It's incomprehensible," he thought. "However, I don't think she's in love. If she were, she would run away. It is only after the decisive act that love becomes familiar...."

"If we want to go to Cherbourg," said Rose, "we must have lunch early."

They moved away; soon they were out of the wood and had entered the hardly less un-

kempt garden. It was sunny there, and they crossed it quickly. She walked ahead. M. Hervart picked a rose as he went along and presented it to her. Rose took it and picked another, which she gave to M. Hervart, saying:

"This one's me."

M. Hervart had to begin pondering again. He was feeling happy, but understood less and less.

"She behaves as though she were in love with me.... She also behaves as though she weren't. At one moment one would think that I was everything to her. A little later she treats me like a mere friend of the family .... And it's she who leads me on.... I have never seen that with flirts.... Where can she have learnt it? Women are like the noblemen in Moliere's time: they know everything without having been taught anything at all."

M. Hervart, weighed down in mind, but light of heart, went up to his room, so as to be able to meditate more at ease. First of all he smartened himself up with some care. He plucked from his beard a hair, which, if not

quite silver, was certainly very pale gold. He scented his waistcoat and slipped on his finger an elaborately chased ring.

"It may come in useful when conversation begins to flag."

He was about to begin his meditations, when somebody knocked at the door. Luncheon was ready.

M. Des Boys, despite the disturbance of his plans, seemed pleased. A drive, he declared, would do him good. He needed an outing; besides he had a right to one.

"I have just finished the ninth panel of my life of Saint Clotilde. It is her entry into the monastery of Saint Martin at Tours."

M. Hervart manifested an interest in this composition, which he had admired the previous evening before it had been given the final touches. He hoped to see it soon in its proper frame, with the other panels in Robinvast church.

"There are going to be twelve in all," said M. Des Boys.

"People will come and see them as they do the Life of St. Bruno that used to be at the Chartreux and is now in the Louvre."

"So I hope."

"But they won't come quite so much."

"Yes, Robinvast is rather far. But then who goes to the Louvre? A few artists, a few aimless foreign sightseers. Nobody in France takes an interest in art."

"Nobody in the world does," said M. Hervart, "except those who live by it."

"What about those who die of it?" asked Rose.

Mme Des Boys looked at her daughter with some surprise:

"I have never heard that painting was a dangerous industry."

"When one believes in it, it is," said M. Hervart.

"What, not dangerous?" said M. Des Boys. "What about white lead?"

"One must believe," said Rose, looking at M. Hervart.

"This just shows," M. Des Boys went on, "what the public's point of view in this matter is. My wife's marvellously absurd remark exactly represents their feelings."

There followed a series of pointless anecdotes on Mme Des Boys' habitual absence of

mind. M. Hervart very nearly forgot to laugh: he was thinking of what Rose had just said.

"Rose," said M. Des Boys, "ask Hervart if we weren't believers when we went around the Louvre. We were in a fever of enthusiasm. Hervart is my pupil; I formed his taste for beauty. Unluckily I left Paris and he has turned out badly. I remain faithful, in spite of everything."

"But," said M. Hervart, "faithfulness only begins at the moment of discovering one's real vocation."

Rose seemed to have given these words a meaning which M. Hervart had not consciously intended they should have. Two eyes, full of an infinite tenderness, rested on his like a caress.

"It's as though I had made a declaration," he thought. "I must be mad. But how can one avoid phrases which people go and take as premeditated allusions?"

However, he found the game amusing. It was possible in this way to speak in public and to give utterance to one's real feelings under cover of the commonplaces of conversation.

Rose had given him the example; he had followed her without thinking, but this docility was a serious symptom.

"I am lost. Here I am in process of falling in love."

But like those drunkards who, feeling the moment of intoxication at hand, desire to control themselves, but must still obey their cravings because they have been so far weakened by the very sensation that now awakens them to a consciousness of their state, M. Hervart, while deciding that he ought to struggle, yielded.

He drank off a whole glass of wine and said:

"It is easy to make a mistake at one's first entry into life, and to go on making it long after. I am still very fond of art, but I was never meant to do more than pay her visits. We are friends, not a married couple. I have built my house on other foundations; it may be worth much or little, but I live in it faithfully. One can only stick to what one loves. To keep a treasure, you must have found it first."

He had spoken with passion.

"What eloquence!" said M. Des Boys.

All of a sudden, Rose began to laugh, a laugh so happy, so full of gratitude, that M. Hervart could make no mistake about its meaning.

"You're being laughed at, my poor friend," M. Des Boys went on.

At this mistake, Rose's laughter redoubled. It became gay, childish, uncontrollable.

"This is something," said Mme Des Boys, "which will console you, I hope. But what a little demon my daughter is!"

Out of pity for her mother, Rose made an effort to restrain herself. She succeeded after two or three renewed spasms and said, addressing herself to M. Hervart:

"What do you think of the little demon? Are you afraid?"

"More than you think."

"So am I; I'm afraid of myself."

"That's a sensible remark," said Mme Des Boys. "Come now, behave."

The home-made cake being approved of, she began giving the recipe. A meal rarely passed without Mme Des Boys' revealing some culinary mystery.

The carriage drove past the windows, and

lunch ended almost without further conversation. Rose had become dreamy. M. Hervart's conclusion was:

"Our affair has made the most terrifying progress in these few seconds."

CHAPTER III

HE went on with his meditations in the little wagonette which carried them to Couville station. Rose was sitting opposite; their feet, naturally, came into contact.

M. Des Boys, who owned several farms, stopped to examine the state of the crops. In some of the fields the corn had been beaten down. He got up on the box beside the driver to ask him whether it was the same throughout the whole district. He was very disquieted.

M. Hervart stretched out his legs, so that he held the girl's knees between his own. She smiled. M. Hervart, a little oppressed by his emotions, dared not speak. He took her hand and kissed it.

All of a sudden, Rose exclaimed: "We have forgotten the microscope!"

"So we have! our pretext. What will become of us?"

"But do we need a pretext, now?"

M. Hervart renewed the pressure of his prisoning knees. That was his first answer.

"We're conspirators, Rose," he then said. "It's serious."

"I hope so."

"We have been conspirators for a long time."

"Since this morning, yes."

She blushed a little.

"From that moment," M. Hervart went on, "when you said, 'One must believe'."

"I said what I thought."

"It's what I think too."

"In this way," he said to himself, "I say what I ought to say without going too far. Oh, if only I dared!"

Meanwhile, he was disturbed by the thought of the microscope.

"I shall buy one," he said, "and leave it with you. It will be of use to me when I come again."

"Stop," said Rose; her voice was low, but its tone was violent. "When you talk of coming again, you're talking of going away."

M. Hervart had nothing to answer. He got

out of the difficulty by renewing the pressure of his legs.

They reached the little lonely station. The train came in, and a quarter of an hour later they were in Cherbourg.

M. Des Boys at once announced his intention of going to see the museum. He wanted to look at a few masterpieces, he said, so that he might once more compare his own art with that of the great men. M. Hervart protested. For him, a holiday consisted in getting away from museums. Furthermore, he regarded this particular collection, with its list of great names, as being in large part apocryphal.

"If the catalogue of the Louvre is false, as it is, what must the catalogue of the Cherbourg museum be like?" he asked.

M. Des Boys shrugged his shoulders:

"You have lost my esteem."

And he affirmed the perfect authenticity of the Van Dycks, Van Eycks, Chardins, Poussins, Murillos, Jordaenses, Ribeiras, Fra Angelicos, Cranachs, Pourbuses and Leonardos which adorned the town hall.

"There's no Raphael," said M. Hervart,

"and there ought to be a Velasquez and a Titian and a Correggio."

M. Des Boys replied sarcastically:

"There's a Natural History museum."

And with a wave of the hand, he disappeared round the corner of a street.

One would thing everything in this dreary maritime city had been arranged to disguise the fact that the sea is there. The houses turn their backs on it, and a desert of stones and dust and wind lies between the shores and the town. To discover that Cherbourg is really a sea port, one must climb to the top of the Roule rock. M. Hervart had a desire to scale this pinnacle.

"It's a waste of time," said Rose, "let's go up the tower in the Liais gardens."

Side by side, they walked through the dismal streets. Rose kept on looking at M. Hervart; she was disquieted by his silence. She took his arm.

"I didn't dare offer it to you," he said.

"That's why I took it myself."

"I do enjoy walking with you like this, Rose."

But as a matter of fact he was most em-

barrassed. This privilege was at once too innocent and too free. He wondered what he should do to keep it within its present bounds.

"If this is going on... And to think it only started this morning...."

He reassured himself by this most logical piece of reasoning:

"Either I do or I don't want to marry her; in either case I shall have to respect her.... That's evident. Being neither a fool nor a blackguard, I have nothing to fear from myself. The civilized instinct will certainly be stronger than the natural instinct; I'm very civilized...."

They were lightly clad. As he held her arm, he could feel its warmth burning into his flesh.

"Distressing fact! in love you can never be sure of anything or anybody, least of all of yourself. I'm helpless in the hands of desire. And then, at the same time as my own, I must calm down this child's overexcited nerves. Nerves? No, feelings. Feelings lead anywhere.... What a fool I am, making mental sermons like this! I am spoiling delicious moments."

A house like all the others, a carriage door,

a vaulted passage—and behold, you were in a great garden, where the brilliance and scent of exotic flowers burst from among the palm-trees, more intoxicating to their senses than the familiar scents and colours of the copse at Robinvast. Within the high walls of this strange oasis, the air hung motionless, heavy and feverish. The flowers breathed forth an almost carnal odour.

"What a place to make love in," thought M. Hervart.

He forgot all about Rose; his imagination called up the thought of Gratienne and her voluptuousness. He shut out the sun, lit up the place with dim far away lamps, spread scarlet cushions on the grass where a magnolia had let fall one of its fabulous flowers, and on them fancied his mistress.... He knelt beside her, bent over her beauty, covering it with kisses and adoration.

"This garden's making me mad," said M. Hervart aloud. The dream was scattered.

"Here's the tower," said Rose. "Let's go up. It will be cool on top."

She too was breathing heavily, but from uneasiness, not from passion. It was cool within

the tower. In a few moments Rose, now freed from her sense of oppression, was at the top. She had quite well realized that M. Hervart, absorbed in some dream of his own, had been far away from her all the last part of their walk. Rose was annoyed, and the appearance of M. Hervart, rather red in the face and with eyes that were still wild, was not calculated to calm her. She felt jealous and would have liked to destroy the object of his thought.

M. Hervart noticed the little movement of irritation, which Rose had been unable to repress, and he was pleased. He would have liked to be alone.

He went and leaned on the balustrade and, without speaking, looked far out over the blue sea. Seeing him once more absorbed by something which was not herself, Rose was torn by another pang of jealousy; but this time she knew her rival. Women have no doubts about one another, which is what always ensures them the victory, but Rose now pitted herself against the charm of the infinite sea. She took up her position very close to M. Hervart, shoulder to shoulder with him.

M. Hervart looked at Rose and stopped looking at the sea.

His eyes were melancholy at having seen the ironic flight of desire. Rose's were full of smiles.

"They are the colour of the infinite sea, Rose."

"It's quite pleasant," thought M. Hervart, "to be the first man to say that to a young girl.... In the ordinary way, women with blue eyes hear that compliment for the hundredth time, and it makes them think that all men are alike and all stupid.... It's men who have made love so insipid.... Rose's eyes are pretty, but I ought not to have said so.... Am I the first?..."

M. Hervart felt the prick, ill defined as yet, of jealousy.

"Who can have taught her these little physical complaisances? She has no girl friends; it must have been some enterprising young cousin.... What a fool I am, torturing myself! Rose has had girl friends, at Valognes at the convent. She has them still, she writes to them.... And besides, what do I care? I'm not in love; it's all nothing

more than a series of light sensations, a pretext for amusing observations. . . ."

The afternoon was drawing on. They had to think of the commissions which Mme Des Boys had given them. . . . It was time to go down.

"How dark the staircase is," said Rose. "Give me your hand."

At the bottom, as though to thank him for his help, she offered her cheek. His kiss settled on the corner of her mouth. Rose recoiled, warned of danger by this new sensation that was too intimate, too intense. But in the process of moving away, she came near to falling. Her hands clutched at his, and she found herself once more leaning towards M. Hervart. They looked at one another for a moment. Rose shut her eyes and waited for a renewal of the burning touch.

"I hope you haven't hurt yourself."

She burst out laughing.

"That," said M. Hervart to himself, "is what is called being self controlled. And then she laughs at me for it. Such are the fruits of virtue."

They went into almost all the shops in the

Rue Fontaine, which is the centre of this big outlandish village. M. Hervart bought some picture postcards. The castles in the Hague district are almost as fine and as picturesque as those on the banks of the Loire. He would have liked to send the picture of them to Gratienne, but he felt himself to be Rose's prisoner. For a moment, that put him in a bad temper. Then, as Rose was entering a draper's shop, he made up his mind; the post office was next door.

"I should like your advice," said Rose. "I have got to match some wools."

But he had gone. She waited patiently.

The castles were at last dropped into the box and they continued their course. The walk finished up at the confectioner's.

One of M. Hervart's pleasures was eating cakes at a pastry cook's, and the pleasure was complete when a woman was with him. He was a regular customer at the shop in the Rue du Louvre, at the corner of the square; he went there every day and not always alone.

Entering the shop with Rose, he imagined himself in Paris, enjoying a little flirtation, and the thought amused him. Rose was as happy

as he. Smiling and serious, she looked as though she were accomplishing some familiar rite.

"She would soon make a Parisian," M. Hervart thought, as he looked at her.

And in an instant of time, he saw a whole future unfolding before him. They would live in the Quai Voltaire; she would often start out with him in the mornings on her way to the Louvre stores. He would take her as far as the arcades. She would come and pick him up for luncheon. On other days, she would come into his office at four o'clock and they would go and eat cakes and drink a glass of iced water; and then they would walk slowly back by the Pont Neuf and the Quays; on the way they would buy some queer old book and look at the play of the sunlight on the water and in the trees. Sometimes they would take the steamer or the train and go to some wood, not so wild as the Robinvast wood, but pleasant enough, where Rose could breathe an air almost as pure as the air of her native place ....

There was not much imagination in this dream of M. Hervart's, for he had often real-

ized it in the past. But the introduction of Rose made of it something quite new, a pleasure hitherto unfelt.

"By the end of my stay I shall be madly in love with her and very unhappy," he said to himself at last.

A little while later they met M. Des Boys, who was looking for them. While they were waiting at the station for the train, M. Hervart examined his duplicate postcards of the castles.

"Why shouldn't we go and look at them?" said Rose, glancing at her father.

He acquiesced:

"It will give me some ideas for the restoration of Robinvast, which I think of carrying out."

All that he meant to do was simply to set the place in order. He would have the mortar re-pointed without touching the ivy, and while preserving the wildness of the park and wood, he would have paths and alleys made.

"Art," he said sententiously, "admits only of a certain kind of disorder. Besides, I have to think of public opinion; the disorder of my garden will make people think what I am let-

ting my daughter grow up in the same way . . . ."

There was, in these words, a hint of marriage plans. Rose perceived it at once.

"I'm quite all right as I am," she said, "and so is Robinvast."

"Vain little creature!"

"Don't you agree with me?" said Rose, turning to M. Hervart with a laugh that palliated the boldness of her question.

"About yourself, most certainly."

"Oh, there's nothing more to be done with me. The harm's done already; I'm a savage. I'm thinking of the wildness of Robinvast; I like it and it suits my wildness."

"All the same," said M. Hervart, whose hands were covered with scratches, "there are a lot of brambles in the wood. I've never seen such fine ones, shoots like tropical creepers, like huge snakes. . . ."

"I never scratch myself," said Rose.

But it was not without a feeling of satisfaction that she looked at M. Hervart's hands, which were scarred with picking blackberries for her. She whispered to him:

"I'm as cruel as the brambles."

"Defend yourself as well as they do," M. Hervart replied.

It had been only a chance word. No doubt, M. Des Boys thought of marrying his daughter, but the project was still distant. No suitor threatened. M. Hervart was pleased with this state of affairs; for, having fallen in love at ten in the morning, he was thinking now, at seven, of marrying this nervous and sentimental child who had offered the corner of her mouth to his clumsy kiss.

The evenings at Robinvast were regularly spent in playing cards. Trained from her earliest youth to participate in this occupation, Rose played whist with conviction. She managed the whole game, scolded her mother, argued about points with her father and kept M. Hervart fascinated under the gaze of her gentle eyes.

As soon as he sat down at the card table, he was conscious of this fascination, which, up till then, had worked on him without his knowledge. He remembered now that each time a chance had brought him face to face with Rose, he had felt himself intoxicated by a great pleasure. It was a kind of possession;

spectators feel the same at the theatre, when they see the actress of their dreams. He reflected too that his own pleasure, almost unconscious though it had been, must have expressed itself by fervent looks....

"Her heart responded little by little to the mysterious passion of my eyes.... I have nice eyes too, I know; they are my best feature.... My pleasure is easily explained; full face, Rose is quite divine, though her profile is rather hard. Her nose, which is a little long, looks all right from the front; her face is a perfect oval; her smile seems to be the natural movement of her rather wide mouth, and her eyes come out in the lamp light from their deep setting, like flowers.... I have often stood in the same ecstasy before my lovely Titian Venus; it's true that she displays other beauties as well, but her face and her eyes are above all exquisite...."

"Don't make signs at one another!"

This observation, which had followed a too obvious exchange of smiles, amused Rose enormously; for she had been thinking very little of the game at the moment. She bowed

her head innocently under the paternal rebuke.

They played extremely badly and lost a great number of points.

At the change of partners they were separated; but separation united them the better, for their knees soon came together under the table. The game, under these conditions, became delicious. Rose did her best to beat her lover and at the same time, delighting in the sense of contrast, caressed him under the table. Life seemed to her very delightful.

She was a little feverish and it was late before she went to sleep, to dream of this wonderful day when she had so joyously reached the summit of her desires. She was loved; that was happiness. She did not for a moment think of wondering whether she were herself in love. She had no doubts on the state of her heart.

M. Hervart's reflections were somewhat different. They also were extremely confused. Women live entirely in the present; men much more in the future—a sign, it may be, that their nature is not so well or organized. M.

Hervart was making plans. He went to sleep. in the midst of his scheming, exhausted by his inability to make so much as one plan that should be tenable.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN he came down fairly early next morning, he found M. Des Boys, who was usually invisible till lunch time, walking in the garden with his daughter. He was gesticulating, largely. M. Hervart was alarmed.

But they were not talking of him. M. Des Boys was planning a long winding alley and was showing Rose how it would run. After consulting M. Hervart, who was all eagerness in agreeing, he decided that they should start their tour of the castles that very day.

At the same time he sent for workmen to come the next day and wrote to Lanfranc, the architect of Martinvast, a friend of whom he had lost sight for a good many years. Lanfranc lived at St. Lo, where he acted as clerk of the works to the local authorities. M. Hervart was also acquainted with him.

Meanwhile, M. Des Boys forgot his painting and stayed in the garden nearly the whole

morning. Rose was annoyed. She had counted on repeating their yesterday's walk among the hollies and brambles, among the fox-gloves and through the bracken. She dreamed of how she would take this walk every day of her life, believing that she would find it eternally the same, as moving and as novel.

M. Hervart, though he was grateful for this diversion, could not help feeling certain regrets. He missed Rose's hand within his own.

For a moment, as they were walking along the terrace, they found themselves alone, at the very spot where the crisis had begun.

Quickly, they took one another's hands and Rose offered her cheek. M. Hervart made no attempt, on this occasion, to obtain a better kiss. It was not the occasion. Perhaps he did not even think of it. Rose was disappointed. M. Hervart noticed it and lifted the girl's hands to his lips. He loved this caress, having a special cult for hands. He gave utterance to his secret thought, saying:

"How is it that I have never yet kissed your hands?"

Pleased, without being moved, Rose confined herself to smiling. Then, suddenly, as

an idea flashed through her mind, the smile broke into a laugh, which, for all its violence, seemed somehow tinged with shyness. Grown calmer, she asked.

"I'd like to know...to know...I'd like to know your name."

M. Hervart was nonplussed.

"My name? But... Ah, I see...the other one."

He hesitated. This name, the sound of which he had hardly heard since his mother's death, was so unfamiliar to him that he felt a certain embarrassment at uttering it. He signed himself simply "Hervart." All his friends called him by this name, for none had known him in the intimacy of the family; even his mistresses had never murmured any other. Besides, women prefer to make use of appellations suitable to everyone in general, such as "wolf," or "pussy-cat," or "white rabbit."—M. Hervart, who was thin, had been generally called "wolf."

"Xavier," he said at last. Rose seemed satisfied.

She began eating blackberries as she had done the day before. And M. Hervart, just as

he had done yesterday, opened his magnifying glass; he counted the black spots on the back of a lady-bird, *coccinella septempunctata;* there were only six.

In the palm of her little hand, well smeared already with purple, Rose placed a fine blackberry and held it out to M. Hervart. As he did not lift his head, but still sat there, one eye shut, the other absorbed in what he was looking at, she said gently, in a voice without affection, a voice that was deliciously natural:

"Xavier!"

M. Hervart felt an intense emotion. He looked at Rose with surprised and troubled eyes. She was still holding out her hand. He ate the blackberry in a kiss and then repeated several times in succession,

"Rose, Rose..."

"How pale you are!" she said, equally moved.

She stepped back, leant against the wall. M. Hervart took a step forward. They were standing now, looking into one another's eyes. Very serious, Rose waited. M. Hervart said:

"Rose, I love you."

She hid her face in her hands. M. Hervart

dared not speak or move. He looked at the hands that hid Rose's face.

When she uncovered her face, it was grave and her eyes were wet. She said nothing, but went off and picked a blackberry as though nothing had happened. But instead of eating it, she threw it aside and, instead of coming back to M. Hervart, she walked away.

M. Hervart felt chilled. He stood looking at her sadly, as she smoothed the folds of her dress and set her hat straight.

When she reached the corner by the lilac bushes, Rose stopped, turned round and blew a kiss then, then, taking flight, she disappeared in the direction of the house.

The scene had lasted two or three minutes; but in that little space, M. Hervart had lived a great deal. It had been the most moving instant of his life; at least he could not remember having known one like it. At the sound of that name, Xavier, almost blotted from his memory, a host of charming moments from the past had entered his heart; he thought of his mother's love, of his first declaration, his first caresses. He found himself once more at the

outset of life and as incapable of mournful thoughts as at twenty.

His whole manner suddenly changed. He hoisted himself on to the terrace and, sitting on the edge in the dry grass, lit a cigarette and looked at the world without thinking of anything at all.

CHAPTER V

THEIR rapid intimacy did not leave off growing during the following days. M. Des Boys never left the workmen who were making the new paths and from moment to moment he would call his daughter or M. Hervart soliciting their approval.

In the afternoons they would go and look at one of the castles in the neighborhood.

They saw Martinvast, towers, chapel, Gothic arches, ingeniously adapted so as to cover, without spoiling their lines, the flimsy luxury of modern times. Tourlaville, though less old, looked more decayed under its cloak of ivy. M. Hervart admired the great octagonal tower, the bold lines of the inward-curving roofs. They saw Pepinvast, a thing of lace-work and turrets, florid with trefoils and pinnacles. They saw Chiflevast, a Janus, Gothic on one side and Louis XIV on the other.

Nacqueville is old in parts; the main block seems to be contemporary with Richelieu; as

a whole, it is imposing, a building to which each generation has added its own life without hiding the distant origins.

Vast, which looks quite modern, occupies a pleasing site by the falls of the Saire. It seemed more human than the others, whose hugeness and splendour they had admired without a wish to possess. Here one could give play to one's desire.

"All the same," said M. Hervart, "it looks too much like a big cottage."

M. Des Boys resolved to have a cascade at Robinvast. It was a pity that he had nothing better than a stream at his disposal.

They returned by La Pernelle, from which one can see all the eastern part of the Hague, from Gatteville to St Marcouf, a great sheet of emerald green, bordered, far away, by a ribbon of blue sea.

They made a halt. Rose picked some heather, with which she filled M. Hervart's arms. The eagerness of the air lit up her eyes, fired her cheeks.

"Isn't it lovely, my country?"

A cloud hid the sun. Colour paled away from the scene; a shadow walked across the

sea, quenching its brilliance; but southward, towards the isles of St Marcouf, it was still bright.

"A sad thought crossing the brow of the sea," said M. Hervart. "But look..."

Everything had suddenly lit up once again.

Rose blew kisses into space.

They had to go back towards St. Vast, where they had hired the carriage. Thence, travelling by the little railway which follows the sea for a space before it turns inland under the apple trees, they arrived at Valognes.

They dined at the St. Michel hotel. M. Des Boys was bored; he had begun to find the excursion rather too long. But there were still a lot of fine buildings to be looked at, Fontenay, Flamanville... However, those didn't mean such long journeys.

"We have still got to go," said he, "to Barnavast, Richemont, the Hermitage and Pannelier. That can be done in one afternoon."

They did not get back to Robinvast till very late. The darkness in the carriage gave M. Hervart his opportunity; his leg came into contact with Rose's; under pretext of steadying

the bundle of heather which Rose was balancing on her knee, their hands met for an instant.

Mme Des Boys was waiting for them, rather anxiously. She kissed her daughter almost frenziedly. Enervated, Rose burst out laughing, said she wanted something to drink and, having drunk, expressed a wish for food.

"That's it," said M. Hervart. "Let's have supper."

He checked himself:

"I was only joking; I'm not in the least hungry."

But Rose found the idea amusing; she went in search of food, bringing into the drawing-room every kind of object, down to a bottle of sparkling cider she had discovered in a cupboard.

"Hervart's a boy of twenty-five," said M. Des Boys, as he watched his friend helping Rose in her preparations. "I shall go to bed."

"At twenty-five," said Hervart, "one doesn't know what to do with one's life. One has all the trumps in one's hand, but one plays one's cards at haphazard, and one loses."

"Does he talk of playing, now?" said M. Des

Boys, who was half asleep. Rose burst out laughing.

"Are you really going to bed?" asked Mme Des Boys; she looked tired. "I suppose I must stay here."

But she was soon bored. It was half past twelve. She tried to get her daughter to come.

"Ten minutes more, mother."

"All right, I'll leave you. I shall expect you in ten minutes."

M. Hervart got up.

"I give you ten minutes. Be indulgent with the child. All this fresh air has gone to her head."

M. Hervart felt embarrassed. A week ago such a tete-a-tete would have seemed the most innocent and perhaps, too, the most tedious of things.

"I really don't know what may happen. I must be serious, cold; I must try and look tired and antique. . . ."

As soon as she heard her mother's footsteps in the room above the drawing-room, Rose came and sat down close to M. Hervart, put her hands on the arm of his chair. He looked at her, and there was something of madness in

his eyes. He turned completely and laid his hands upon the girl's hands. They moved, took his and pressed them, gently. Then, without having had the time to think of what they were doing, they woke up a second later mouth against mouth. This kiss exhausted their emotion. With the same instinctive movement both drew back, but they went on looking at one another.

Decidedly, she was very pretty. She, for her part, found him admirable, thinking:

"I belong to him. I have given him my lips. I am his. What will he do? What shall I do? . . . ."

That was just what M. Hervart was wondering—what ought he to do?

"What caresses are possible, what won't she object to? I should like to kiss her lips again . . . . Her eyes? Her neck? Which of the Italian poets was it who said: 'Kiss the arms, the neck, the breasts of your beloved, they will not give you back your kisses. The lips alone.' But I shall have to say something. Of course, I ought to say: 'Je vous aime.' But I don't love her. If I did, I should have said: 'Je

t'aime!' and I should have said it without thinking, without knowing.

"Rose, I love you."

She shut her eyes, laid her head on the arm of the chair; for she was sitting on a low stool.

It was the ear that presented itself. M. Hervart kissed her ear slowly, savouring it, kiss by kiss, like an epicure over some choice shell-fish.

"She lets me do what I like. It's amusing ...."

He kissed his way round her ear and halted next to the eye, which was shut.

"How soft her eyelid is!"

His lips travelled down her nose and settled at the corner of her mouth. Tickled by their touch, she smiled.

When he had thoroughly kissed the right side, she offered him the left; then, giving her lips to him frankly, she received his passionate kiss, returned it with all her heart, and got up.

She smiled without any embarrassment. She was happy and very little disturbed.

"There," she said to herself. "Now I'm married."

CHAPTER VI

THE paths were now visible. One of them, in front of the house, made an oval round a lawn, which looked, at the moment, like a patch of weeds, with all sorts of flowers in the uneven grass—buttercups, moon-daisies, cranes-bill and centaury; there were rushes, too, and nettles, hemlock and plants of lingwort that looked like long thin girls in white hats.

Encoignard, the gardener from Valognes, was contemplating this wildness with a melancholy eye:

"It will have to be ploughed, M. Des Boys, or at least well hoed. Then we'll sift the earth we've broken up, level it down and sow ray-grass. In two years it will be like a carpet of green velvet."

Eyeing the landscape, he went on:

"Lime trees! You ought to have a segoya here and over there an araucaria. And what's that? An apple-tree. That's quite wrong.

We'll have that up and put a magnolia grandiflora there. You want an English garden, don't you? An English garden oughtn't to contain anything but exotic plants. Lilacs and roses... Why not snow-ball trees? Ah, there's a nice spotted holly. We might use that perhaps."

"I don't want anyone to touch my trees," said Rose, who had drawn near.

"She's right," said M. Des Boys.

"Think of pulling up lilacs," Rose went on, "pulling up rose-trees."

"But I mean to put prettier flowers in their place, Mademoiselle."

"The prettiest flowers are the ones I like best."

She picked a red rose and put it to her lips, kissing it as though it were something sacred and adored.

M. Des Boys looked at his daughter with astonishment.

"Well, M. Encoignard, we must do what she wants. Hervart, what do you think about it?"

"I think that one ought to leave nature as unkempt as possible. I also think that one ought to love the plants of the country where

one lives. They are the only ones that harmonize with the sky and the crops, with the colour of the rivers and roads and roofs."

"Quite right," said M. Des Boys.

"Xavier, I love you," Rose whispered, taking M. Hervart's arm.

The inspection of the garden was continued, and it was decided that M. Encoignard's collaboration should be reduced to the ordinary functions of a plain docile gardener. One or two new plants were admitted on condition that the old should be respected.

M. Hervart had got up early and had been strolling about the garden for some time past. He had spent half the night in thought. All the women he had loved or known had visited his memory with their customary gestures and the attitudes they affected. There was that other one who seemed always to have come merely to pay a friendly call; it needed real diplomacy to obtain from her what, at the bottom of her heart, she really desired. Between these two extremes there were many gradations. Most of them liked to give themselves little by little, playing their desire against their sense of shame. M. Hervart flattered himself

that he knew all about women; he knew that the woman who lets herself be touched will let herself be wholly possessed.

"A woman," he said to himself, "who has been as familiar as Rose has been, or even much less familiar, ought to be one who has surrendered herself. Perhaps she might make me wait a few days more, but she would belong to me, she would let her eyes confess it and her lips would speak it out. Such a woman would even be disposed to hasten the coming of the delightful moment, if I had not the wit to prepare it myself. Rose, being a young girl and having only the dimmest presentiments of the truth, does not know how to hasten our happiness; otherwise she most certainly would hasten it. She belongs, then, to me. The question to be answered is this: shall I go on smelling the rose on the tree, or shall I pluck it?"

The poetical quality of this metaphor seemed to him perhaps a little flabby. He began to speak to himself, without actually articulating the words, even in a whisper, in more precise terms.

"Well, then, if I take her, I shall keep her. I have never thought of marrying, but it's no

good going against the current of one's life. It may be happiness. Shall I lay up this regret for my old age: happiness passed close to me, smiling to my desire, and my eyes remained dull and my mouth dumb? Happiness? Is it certain? Happiness is always uncertain. Unhappiness too. And the fusing of these two elements makes a dull insipid mixture."

This commonplace idea occupied him for a while. Every joy is transient, and when it has passed one finds oneself numb and neutral once again.

"Neutral, or below neutral? A woman of this temperament? I can still tame her? Yes, but what will happen ten years hence, when she is thirty? Ah, well, till then. . . !"

M. Des Boys carried off Encoignard into his study. Left alone, Rose and M. Hervart had soon vanished behind the trees shrubberies, had soon crossed the stream. They almost ran.

"Here we are at home," said Rose and, very calmly, she offered her lips to M. Hervart.

"She's positively conjugal already," thought M. Hervart.

Nevertheless, this kiss disturbed his equa-

nimity, the more so since Rose, in gratitude no doubt to M. Hervart for his defence of her old garden, kept her mouth a long time pressed to his. She was growing breathless and her breasts rose under her thin white blouse. M. Hervart was tempted to touch them. He made bold, and his gesture was received without indignation. They looked at one another, anxious to speak, but finding no words. Their mouths came together once more. M. Hervart gently pressed Rose's breast, and a small hand squeeed his other hand. It was a perilous moment. Realising this, M. Hervart tried to put an end to the contact. But the little hand squeeezd his own more tightly and in a convulsive movement her knee came into contact with his leg. The tension was broken. Their hands were loosened, they drew away from one another, and for the first time after a kiss, Rose shut her eyes.

M. Hervart felt a pain in the back of his neck.

He began thinking of that season of Platonic love he had once passed at Versailles with a virtuous woman, and he was frightened; for that passion of light kisses and hand-pressures

had undermined him as more violent excesses had never done.

"What will become of me?" he thought. "This is a case of acute Platonism, marked by the most decisive symptoms. All or nothing! Otherwise I am a dead man."

He looked at Rose, meaning to put on a chilly expression; but those eyes of hers looked back at him so sweetly!

His thoughts became confused. He felt a desire to lie down in the grass and sleep, and he said so.

"All right, lie down and sleep. I'll watch over you and keep the flies away from your eyes and mouth. I'll fan you with this fern."

She spoke in a voice that was caressingly passionate. It was like music. M. Hervart woke up and uttered words of love.

"I love you, Rose. The touch of your lips has refreshed my blood and brought joy to my heart. When I first touched you, it was as though I were clasping a treasure without price. But tell me, my darling, you won't take back this treasure now you have given it?"

M. Hervart was breathing heavily. Rose shook her head and said, "No, I won't take it

back;" and to prove that she meant it, she leaned towards him, as though offering her bosom; M. Hervart lightly touched the stuff of her blouse with his lips.

Seeing her lover's lack of alacrity, Rose, without suspecting the mystery, at least guessed that there was a mystery.

"No doubt," she thought, "love needs a rest every now and then. We will go for a little walk and I'll talk to him of flowers and insects. We should do well, perhaps, to go back to the garden, for it would be very annoying if they took it into their heads to come and look for us." They got up and walked round the wood, meaning to go straight back to the house.

M. Hervart seemed to be in an absent-minded mood. He was holding Rose's hand in his, but he forgot to squeeze it. His thoughts were, none the less, thoughts of love. He looked about him as though he were searching for something.

"What are you looking for? Tell me; I'll look too."

M. Hervart was looking for a nook. He inspected the dry leaves, peeped into every nook

and bower of the wood. But he felt ashamed of his quest.

"Yet," he thought, "I must. I love her and these innocent amusements are really too pernicious. Shall I go away? That would be to condemn myself to a melancholy solitude, with, perhaps, bitter consolations. Marry her, then? Certainly, but it can't come off to-morrow, and we are too much aquiver with desire to wait patiently. And suppose, when we are engaged, we have to submit ourselves to the law of the traditional sentimentality.... No, let us be peasants, children of this kindly earth. Let us, like them, make love first, at haphazard, where the paths of the wood lead us; then, when we are certain of the consent of our flesh, we will call our fellow men to witness."

He went on looking and found what he wanted, but when he had found, he started searching again, for he was ashamed of himself.

"Perhaps," he thought, answering his own objections, "one may have to behave like a cad in order to be happy. What, shall I submit myself to the prejudices of the world at the moment when life offers to my kisses a virgin

who is unaware of them? I will have the courage of my caddishness."

Time passed and his eyes examined the heaps of leaves with decreasing interest. His imagination returned pleasantly to the joys of a little before, and he longed to be able to lay his trembling hand once more on Rose's breast and to drink her breath in a kiss.

M. Hervart was recovering all his self-possession. He concluded:

"Well, it's a very curious adventure and one that will increase the sum of my knowledge and of my pleasures."

Rose, feeling the pressure of his fingers, had the courage, at last, to look at him. He smiled and she was reassured.

"You won't leave me, will you?" she said. "Promise. When we are married we'll live wherever you like, but till then, I want you near me, in my house, in my garden, my woods, my fields. Do you understand?"

"Child, I love you and I understand that you love me too."

"Why 'too'? I loved you first; I don't like that word; it expresses a kind of imitation."

"It's true," said M. Hervart. "We fell in

love simultaneously. But the convention is that the man falls in love first and the woman does no more than consent to his desires."

"What can you want that I don't want myself?"

"Delicious innocence!" thought M. Hervart.

He went on:

"But perhaps I want still more intimacy, complete surrender, Rose."

"But am I not entirely yours? I want you in exchange, though, Xavier, I want you, all of you."

M. Hervart did not know what to say. He became quite shy. This charming ingenuousness troubled his imagination more than the images of pleasure itself.

"She doesn't know," he thought. "She hasn't even dreamed of it. What chastity and grace!"

He answered:

"I belong to you, Rose, with all my heart . . . ."

"What were you thinking of a moment ago? You seemed far away."

"I was just feeling happy."

"You must have had such a lot of happinesses since you began life, Xavier. You have given happiness, received it..."

"I have just lived," said M. Hervart.

"Yes, and I'm only a girl of twenty."

"Think of being twenty!"

"If you were twenty, I shouldn't love you."

M. Hervart answered only by a smile which he tried to make as young, as delicate as possible. He knew what he would have liked to say, but he felt that he could not say it. Besides, he wondered whether Rose and he were really speaking the same language.

"This conversation is really absurd. I tell her that I want her to surrender herself to me, and she answers—at least I suppose that's what she means—that she has given me her heart. Obviously, she has no idea of what might happen between us.... What do these little caresses mean to her? They're just marks of affection.... All the same there was surely desire in her movements, her kisses, her eyes. And her body trembled at the urgent touch of my lips. Yes, she knows what

love is. How ridiculous! All the same, if we go to work cleverly. . . ."

"You mustn't believe, Rose," he said out loud, "that I have ever yet had occasion to give my heart. That doesn't always happen in the course of a life; and when it does happen, it happens only once. . . . A man has plenty of adventures in which his will is not concerned . . . . Man is an animal as well as a man. . . ." because of their innocence. . . .

"And what about women?"

"The best people agree," said M. Hervart, "that woman is an angel."

Rose burst out laughing at this remark, apparently very innocently, and said:

"I can't claim to be an angel. It wouldn't amuse me to be one, either. Angels—why, father puts them in his pictures. No, I prefer being a woman. Would you love an angel?"

M. Hervart laughed too. He explained that young girls had a right to being called angels, because of their innocence. . . .

"When one is in love, is one still innocent?"

"If one still is, one doesn't remain so long."

They could say no more. They had come back to the stream and here they caught sight

of M. Des Boys showing his domains to two unknown gentlemen, one of whom seemed to be of his own age, while the other looked about thirty.

CHAPTER VII

MHERVART soon recognized in one of the visitors a friend of old days, Lanfranc, the architect. The young man, as he found out, was Lanfranc's nephew, pupil and probable successor. He was further informed that the two architects were installed in the old manor house of Barnavast, the restoration of which they had undertaken on behalf of Mme Suif, widow of that famous Suif who gave such a fine impulse to the art of mortuary and religious sculpture. Lanfranc, who had patched and painted every church in Normandy, had for twenty years bought his materials at Suif's and the widow had always appreciated him. Hence this job at Barnavast which would round off his fortune, make it possible for him to return to Paris and achieve a place in the Institute.

As soon as they had settled down in the shade of the chestnut trees on the rustic seat,

Lanfranc began telling the story of Mme Suif, a story that was well known to everyone. Rose listened attentively. The moment Lanfranc could collect a friendly audience he always told the story of Mme Suif. It was, in some degree, his own story too. Mme Suif had been his mistress, then he had married, then he had resumed relations with her and had, with the cooling of their passion, remained her friend.

"Ah! If I hadn't been so childish as to marry for love, I would marry Mme Suif's millions to-day, for Mme Suif would be grateful to any man who would relieve her of her name. Being an architect of churches and ancient monuments, I could hardly get divorced, could I? But of course she may be willing to call herself Mme Leonor Varin. For she looks at my nephew with no unfavorable eye."

"Thanks, I don't want her," said Leonor, blushing.

Rose had looked at him and he had suddenly felt quite ashamed of his secret cupidity.

Leonor, who was nearly thirty, looked older from a distance and younger from close at hand. He was large, rather massive and slow

in his movements. But when one came near him one was surprised at the sentimental expression of his eyes, surprised at the youthful appearance of a beard that still seemed to be newly sprouting, at the awkwardness of his gestures and, when he spoke, the abrupt shyness of his speech; for he could hardly open his mouth without blushing. It is true that the moment after he would frown and contract his whole face into an expression of harshness. But the eyes remained blue and gentle in this frowning mask. Leonor was a riddle for everybody, including himself. He liked pondering, and when he thought of love it was to come to the conclusion that his ideal hovered between the day dream and the debauch, between the happiness of kissing, on bended knees, a gloved hand and the pleasure of lying languidly in the midst of a troop of odalisques of easy virtue. He had no suspicion that he was like almost all other men. He was afraid of himself and contemptuous too, when he caught himself thinking too complacently of Mme Suif's millions, those millions that would give immediate satisfaction to his vices and, later on, to his sentimental aspirations.

He looked at Rose in his turn, but Rose did not drop her eyes. Meanwhile, M. Hervart was growing bored.

"Mme Suif," said Lanfranc, "is still quite well preserved. For instance. . . ."

"Rose dear," interrupted M. Des Boys, "doesn't your mother want you?"

"Oh, no, I'm sure she doesn't. Mother would only find me in the way."

"Your father is right, Rose," said M. Hervart, glad to make trial of his authority.

She did not dare oppose her lover's wish, but she felt angry as she rose to go.

"Acting like my master already!" she thought. "I should so like to listen to M. Lanfranc. . ."

She dared not add: ". . . and to look at this M. Leonor and be looked at by him and, still more, to hear them talk of Mme Suif. What was he going to say? Oh, I do want to know!"

She entered the house, came out again by another door and hid herself in a shrubbery from which she could hear their voices quite clearly.

"It's not only her shoulders," M. Lanfranc

was saying, "they're not the only things about her that tempt one. She's forty-five, but her figure is still good and not too excessively run to flesh. As a whole she is certainly a bit ample, but at the Art School one could still make a very respectable Juno of her. I've seen worse on the model's throne..."

"Time," said M. Hervart, "often shows angelical clemency. He pardons women who have been good lovers."

"And still are," said Lanfranc.

"There's no better recreation than love," said Leonor. "No sport more suited to keep one fit and supple."

M. Hervart looked in surprise at this dim young man who had so unexpectedly made a joke. Anxious to shine in his turn, he replied.

"No one has ever dared to put that in a manual of hygiene. What a charming chapter one could make of it, in the style of the First Empire: 'Love, the preserver of Beauty.'"

"A pretty subject too for the Prix de Rome," said Lanfranc.

"Seriously," broke in M. Des Boys, "I believe that the thing that so quickly shrivels up virtuous women is chastity."

"Virtuous women!" said Lanfranc, "they're meant to reproduce the species. When they have had their children, and that must take place between twenty and thirty, their rôle is finished."

"The only thing left for them to do," said M. Des Boys, "is to concoct philters to keep us young."

The others looked at him interrogatively; he laughed.

"You will see, or rather you'll taste, and you will understand. I wish you all as good a magician as Mme Des Boys."

"True," said M. Hervart, understanding him at last," she has a real genius for cookery. Dinners of her planning are regular love-potions."

"You'll realise that when you get back to Paris."

"Yes, when I get back to Paris. I am taking a holiday here," said M. Hervart, pleased at this mark of confidence. He even added, so as to guard against possible suspicions:

"A holiday from love is not without a certain melancholy."

Rose had found it all very amusing, but

when her father began speaking she stopped listening. Leonor, pleased at having made a witty remark and afraid of not being able to think of another, had got up and was walking about the garden. Rose looked at him. The sight of this young animal interested her. And what curious words about love had issued from that mouth! So love was an exercise like tennis, or bicycling, or riding! What a revelation! And the most singular fancies took shape in her mind as she followed with her eyes the now distant figure of this ingenious and decisive young man.

"How do people play the game of love," she wondered, "real love? Xavier teaches me nothing. He knows all about it though, more probably than this young Leonor, but he takes care not to tell me. He treats me like a little girl, while he makes fun of my innocence. Oh! it's gentle fun, because he loves me; but all the same he rather abuses his superior position. A sport, a sport..."

Quitting the shrubbery, she went and sat down on an old stone bench in a lonely corner, from which she could keep a watch between the trees on all that was happening in the

neighborhood. She was fond of this nook and in it, before M. Hervart's arrival, she had spent whole mornings dreaming alone. She laughed at the childishness of those dreams now.

"It always seemed to me," she thought, "that the branches were just about to open, making way for some beautiful young cavalier .... Without saying a word, he would bring his horse to a stop at my side, would lean down, pick me up, lay me across the saddle and off we should go. Then there was to be a mad furious, endless gallop and in the end I should go to sleep. And in reality I used to wake up as though from a sleep, even though I hadn't dropped off. Nothing happened but this dumb ride in the blue air, and yet, when I came to myself, I felt tired..... How often I have dreamed this dream! How often have I seen the lilac plumes bending to make way for my lovely young knight and his black horse! The horse was always black. I remember very little of the face of the Perseus who delivered me, for a few hours at least, from the bondage of my boring existence .... A sport? That was indeed a sport!

What did he do with his Andromeda, this Perseus of mine? I've never been able to find out. What do Perseuses do with their Andromedas?"

To this question Rose's tireless imagination provided, for the hundredth time, a new series of answers. The imagination of a young girl who knows and yet is ignorant of what she desires has an Aretine-like fecundity.

Into all these imaginations of hers Rose now introduced the complicity of M. Hervart. Even at the moment when she was on the look-out for Leonor's return, it was really of M. Hervart that she was thinking. Leonor was to be nothing more than a stimulant for her heart and her nerves, a musical accompaniment to something else. The stimulation which the young man's arrival had brought to her went to the profit of M. Hervart.

"Xavier," she murmured, "Xavier. . . ."

Xavier, meanwhile, was congratulating himself that this paternal intervention had spared Rose's ears the hearing of those over-frank remarks of M. Lanfranc. The architect would of course have toned down his language; but

is it good that a young girl should learn the use that wives make of marriage? He said:

"M. Lanfranc, keep an eye on your language at table. Don't forget that we have a young girl with us."

"Yes," said M. Des Boys, "I sent her away from here, but that would hardly be possible during luncheon."

"Girls," said Lanfranc, "understand nothing."

"They guess," said M. Hervart.

M. Des Boys had no opinions on maiden perspicacity, but he desired to conform to custom and allow his daughter to listen only to the choicest conversation.

"Well, then," said Lanfranc, "let us profitably employ these moments while we are alone." His lively blue eyes lit up his tanned face.

The conversation had deviated once more in the direction of Mme Des Boys' administrative merits.

"One meets so many different kinds of women," said M. Hervart. "The best of them is never equal to the dream one makes up about them."

"Silly commonplace," he thought. "What answer will he make to that?"

"I don't dream," said Lanfranc, "I search. But I scarcely ever find. Adventures have always disappointed me. That's why Paris is the only place for love affairs. One can find plenty of pleasant romances there with only one chapter—the last."

"Your opinion of women ceases to astonish me then!"

"His opinion is very reasonable," said M. Des Boys. "You talk as though you were still twenty-five, Hervart."

He reddened a little.

"Me! Oh no, thank God! I'm forty."

And seeing the appropriateness of the occasion, he added:

"You're jealous of my liberty, but I am becoming afraid that I may lose it."

"Are you thinking of marriage?" asked Lanfranc.

"Perhaps."

"Mme Suif would suit you very well. Leonor is being coy about her. . . ."

Irritated by so much vulgarity, M. Hervart got up and walked into the garden. Rose and Leonor were strolling there together.

CHAPTER VIII

ROSE had laid her plans in such a fashion that the young man had found her in his path. Not to see her was too deliberately to avoid her. If he saw her, he had to take off his hat. And this was what had happened. Rose had answered his salutation by a word of welcome; conversation had then passed to the old house at Barnavast, finally to Mme Suif. But Leonor was discreet and vague, so much so that at one of Rose's questions the conversation had switched off on to sentimental commonplaces. But, for Rose, nothing in the world was commonplace yet.

"Isn't she rather old to marry again?" she asked.

"Ah, but Mme Suif is one of those whose hearts are always young."

"Then there are some hearts that grow old more slowly than others?"

"Some never grow old at all, just as some have never been young."

"All the same, I see a great difference, when I look around me, between the feelings of young and old people."

"Do you know many people?"

"No, very few; but I have always seen a certain correspondence between people's hearts and faces."

"Certainly; but a general truth, although it may represent the average of particular truths, is hardly ever the same as a single particular case selected by chance...."

Rose looked at Leonor with a mixture of admiration and shame: she did not understand. Leonor perceived the fact and went on:

"I mean that there are, in all things, exceptions. I also mean that there are rules which admit of a great number of exceptions. It even happens in life, just as in grammar, that the exceptional are more numerous than the regular cases. Do you follow?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"But that," he concluded, emphasizing his words, "does not prevent the rule's being the

rule, even though there were only two normal cases as against ten exceptions."

Rose liked this magisterial tone. M. Hervart had, for some time, done nothing but agree with her opinions.

"But how does one recognize the rule?" she went on.

"Rules," said Leonor, "always satisfy the reason."

Rose looked at him in alarm; then, pretending she had understood made a sign of affirmation.

"Women never understand that very well," Leonor continued. "It doesn't satisfy them. They yield only to their feelings. So do men, for that matter, but they don't admit it. So that women accused of hypocrisy and vanity have less of these vices, it may be, than men .... At any rate the rule is the rule. The rule demands that Marguerite should give up..."

"Who's Marguerite?"

"Mme Suif."

"Do you know her well?"

Leonor smiled. "Am I not the nephew and lieutenant of her architect? The rule, then,

would demand that Marguerite should give up love; and the rule further demands, Mademoiselle, that you should begin to think of it."

"The rule is the rule," said Rose sententiously, suppressing the shouts of laughter that exploded silently in her heart.

"The rule's not so stupid after all," she thought. "I don't ask anything better than to obey it...."

At this moment M. Hervart came face to face with them at the turn of a path. Rose welcomed him with a happy smile, a smile of delicious frankness.

"Good," thought M. Hervart, "he isn't my rival yet. My rôle for the moment is to act the part of the man who is sure of himself, the man who possesses, dominates, the lord who is above all changes and chances...."

And he began to talk of his stay at Robinvast and of the pleasure he found in the midst of this rich disorderly scene of nature.

"But you," he said, "have come to put it in order. You have come to whiten these walls, scrape off this moss and ivy, cut clearings through these dark masses, and you will make M. Des Boys a present of a brand-new castle