The Fleece of Gold

Theophile Gautier

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CHAPTER I TIBURCE

TIBURCE was really a most extraordinary young man; his oddity had the peculiar merit of being unaffected; he did not lay it aside on returning home, as he did his hat and gloves; he was original between four walls, without spectators, for himself alone.

Do not conclude, I beg, that Tiburce was ridiculous, that he had one of those aggressive manias which are intolerable to all the world; he did .not eat spiders, he played on no instrument, nor did he read poetry to anybody. He was a staid, placid youth, talking little, listening less; and his half−opened eyes seemed to be turned inward.

He passed his life reclining in the corner of a divan, supported on either side by a pile of cushions, worrying as little about the affairs of the time as about what was taking place in the moon. There were very few substantives which had−any effect on him, and no one was ever less susceptible to long words. He cared absolutely nothing for his political rights, and thought that the people were still free at the wine−shop.

His ideas on all subjects were very simple; he preferred to do nothing rather than to work; he preferred good wine to cheap wine and a beautiful woman to an ugly one; in natural history he made a classification −than which nothing could be more succinct; things that eat, and things that do not eat. In brief, he was absolutely detached from all human affairs, and was as reasonable as he appeared mad.

He had not the slightest self−esteem; he did not deem himself the pivot of creation, and realized fully that the world could turn without his assistance; he thought little more of himself than of the rind of a cheese, or of the eels in vinegar. In face of eternity and the infinite, he had not the courage to be vain; having looked sometimes through the microscope and the telescope, he had not an exaggerated idea of the importance of the human race. His height was five feet, four inches; but he said to himself that the people in the sun might well be eight hundred leagues tall.

Such was our friend Tiburce.

It would be a mistake to think from all this that Tiburce was devoid of passions. Beneath the ashes of that placid exterior smouldered more than one burning brand. However, no one knew of any regular mistress of his, and he

displayed little gallantry toward women. Like almost all the young men of today, without being precisely a poet or a painter, he had read many novels and seen many pictures; lazy as he was, he preferred to live on the faith of other people; he loved with the poet's love, he looked with the eyes of the artist, and he was familiar with more poets than faces; reality was repugnant to him, and by dint of living in books and paintings, he had reached the point where nature no longer rang true.

The Madonnas of Raphael, the courtesans of Titian, caused the most celebrated beauties to seem ugly to him; Petrarch's Laura, Dante's Beatrice, Byron's Haides, Andre Chenier's Camille, threw completely into the shade the women in hats, gowns, andces; reality was repugnant to him, and by dint of living in books and paintings, he had reached the point where nature no longer rang true.

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His devotion to abstract beauty was manifested by the great number of statuettes, plaster casts, drawings and engravings with which his room and its walls were crowded, so that the ordinary *bourgeois* would have considered it rather an impossible abode; for he had no furniture save the divan mentioned above, and several cushions of different colors scattered over the carpet. Having no secrets, he could easily do without a secretary, and the incommodity of commodes was to him an established fact.

Tiburce rarely went into society, not from shyness, but from indifference; he welcomed his friends cordially, and never returned their visits. Was Tiburce happy? No; but he was not unhappy; he would have liked, however, to dress in red. Superficial persons accused him of insensibility, and kept women said that he had no heart; but in reality his was a heart of gold, and his search for physical beauty betrayed to observant eyes a painful disillusionment in the world of moral beauty. In default of sweetness of perfume, he sought grace in the vessel containing it; he did not complain, he indulged in no elegies, he did not wear ruffles *en pleureuse;* but one could see that he had suffered, that he had been deceived, and that he proposed not to love again except with his eyes open. As dissimulation of the body is much more difficult than dissimulation of the mind, he set much store by material perfection; but alas! a lovely body is as rare as a lovely soul. Moreover, Tiburce, depraved by the reflections of novel−writers, living in the charming, imaginary society created by poets, with his eyes full of the masterpieces of statuary and painting, had a lordly and scornful taste; and that which he took for love was simply the adoration of an artist. He found faults of drawing in his mistress; although he did not suspect it, woman was to him a model, nothing more.

One day, having smoked his hookah, having gazed at Correggio's threefold eda in its filleted frame, having turned Radine's latest statuette about in every direction, having taken his left foot in his right hand, and his right foot in his left hand, and having placed his sels on the edge of the mantel, Tiburce was forced to admit to himself that he had come to the end of his means of diversion, that he knew not which way to turn, and that the gray spiders of ennui were crawling down the walls of his room, all dusty with drowsiness.

He asked the time, and was told that it was a quarter to one, which seemed to him decisive and unanswerable. He bade his servant dress him and went out to walk the streets; as he walked he reflected that his heart was empty, and he felt the need of "making a passion," as they say in Parisian slang.

This laudable resolution formed, he propounded the following questions to himself: Shall I love a Spaniard with an amber complexion, frowning eyebrows, and jet−black hair? or an Italian with classic features, and orange−tinted eyelids encircling a glance of flame? or a slim−waisted Frenchwoman, with a nose *a la* Roxelane and a doll's foot? or a red Jewess with a sky−blue skin and green eyes? or a negress black as night, and gleaming like new bronze? Shall I have a fair or a dark passion? Terrible perplexity.

As he plodded along, head down, pondering this question, he ran against something hard, which caused him to

jump back with a blood−curdling oath. That something was a painter friend of his; together they entered the Museum. The painter, an enthusiastic admirer of Rubens, paused by preference before the canvasses of the Dutch Michelangelo, whom he extolled with a most contagious frenzy of admiration. Tiburce, surfeited with the Greek outline, the Roman contour, the tawny tones of the Italian masters, took delight in the plump forms, the satiny flesh, the ruddy faces, as blooming as bouquets of flowers, the luxuriant health that the Antwerpian artist sends bounding through the veins of those faces of his, with their net−work of blue and scarlet. His eye caressed with sensuous pleasure those lovely pearl−white shoulders and those siren−like hips drowned in waves of golden hair and marine pearls. Tiburce, who had an extraordinary faculty of assimilation, and who understood equally well the most contrasted types, was at that moment as Flemish as if he had been born in the *polders* and had never lost sight of Lillo fort and the steeples of Antwerp.

"It is decided," he said to himself as he left the gallery, "I will love a Fleming."

As Tiburce was the most logical person in the world, he placed before himself this irrefutable argument, namely, that Flemish women must be more numerous in Flanders than elsewhere, and that it was important for him to go to Belgium at once—*to hunt the blonde.* This Jason of a new type, in quest of another fleece of gold, took the Brussels diligence that same evening, with the mad haste of a bankrupt weary of intercourse with men and feeling a craving to leave France, that classic home of the fine arts, of lovely women, and of sheriffs' officers.

After a few hours, Tiburce, not without a thrill of joy, saw the Belgian lion appear on the signs of inns, beneath a poodle in nankeen breeches, accompanied by the inevitable *Verkoopt men dranken.* On the following evening he walked on Magdalena Strass in Brussels, climbed the mountain with its kitchen gardens, admired the stained−glass windows of St. Gudule's and the belfry of the Hotel de Ville, and scrutinized, not without alarm, all the women who passed.

He met an incalculable number of negresses, mulattresses, quadroons, half−breeds, griffs, yellow women, copper−colored women, green women, women of the color of a boot−flap, but not a single blonde; if it had been a little warmer he might have imagined himself at Seville; nothing was lacking, not even the black mantilla.

As he returned to his hotel on Rue d'Or, however, he saw a girl who was only a dark chestnut, but she was ugly. The next day, he saw near the *residenz* of Laeken, an Englishwoman with carroty−red hair and light−green shoes; but she was as thin, as a frog that has been shut up in a bottle for six months, to act as a barometer, which rendered her inapt to realize an ideal after the style of Rubens.

Finding that Brussels was peopled solely by Andalusians with *burnished breasts*—which fact is readily explained by the Spanish domination that held the Low Countries in subjection so long—Tiburce determined to go to Antwerp, thinking, with some appearance of reason, that the types familiar to Rubens and so constantly reproduced on his canvases were likely to be frequently met with in his beloved native city.

He betook himself, therefore, to the station of the railway that runs from Brussels to Antwerp. The steam horse had already eaten his ration of coal; he was snorting impatiently and blowing from his inflamed nostrils, with a strident noise, dense puffs of white smoke, mingled with showers of sparks. Tiburce seated himself in his compartment, in company with five Walloons, who sat as motionless in their places as canons in the chapter−house, and the train started. The pace was moderate at first; they moved little faster than one rides in a post chaise at ten francs the relay; but soon the beast became excited and was seized with a most extraordinary rage for rapidity. The poplars beside the track fled to right and left like a routed army; the landscape became blurred and was blotted out in a gray vapor; the colewort and the peony studded the black strips of ground with indistinct stars of gold and azure. Here and there a slender spire appeared amid the billowing clouds and disappeared instantly, like the mast of a ship on a stormy sea. Tiny light−pink or apple−green wine−shops made a fleeting impression on the eye at the rear of their gardens, beneath their garlands of vines or hops; here and there pools of water, encircled by dark mud, dazzled the eye like the mirror in a trap for larks. Meanwhile the iron monster belched forth with an ever−increasing roar its breath of boiling steam; it puffed like an asthmatic whale; a fiery sweat bathed its brazen sides. It seemed to complain of the insensate swiftness of its pace and to pray for mercy to its begrimed postillions, who spurred it on incessantly with shovelfuls of coal. There came a noise of bumping carriages and rattling chains: they had arrived.

Tiburce ran to right and left without fixed purpose, like a rabbit suddenly released from its cage. He took the first street that he saw, then a second, then a third, and plunged bravely into the heart of the ancient city, seeking the blonde with an ardor worthy of the knights−errant of old.

He saw a vast number of houses painted mouse−gray, canary−yellow, sea−green, pale lilac; with roofs like stairways, moulded gables, doors with vermiculated bosses, with short stout pillars, decorated with quadrangular bracelets like those at the Luxembourg, leaded Renaissance windows, gargoyles, carved beams, and a thousand curious architectural details, which would have enchanted him on any other occasion; he barely glanced at the illuminated Madonnas, at the Christs bearing lanterns at the street corners, at the saints of wax or wood with their gewgaws and tinsel—all those Catholic emblems that have so strange a look to an inhabitant of one of our Voltairean cities. Another thought absorbed him: his eyes sought, through the dark, smoke−begrimed windows, some fair−haired feminine apparition, a tranquil and kindly Brabantine face, with the ruddy freshness of the peach, and smiling within its halo of golden hair.

He saw only old women making lace, reading prayer−books, or squatting in corners and watching for the passing of an infrequent pedestrian, reflected by the glass of their *espions,* or by the ball of polished steel hanging in the doorway.

The streets were deserted, and more silent than those of Venice; no sound was to be heard save that of the chimes of various churches striking the hours in every possible key, for at least twenty minutes. The pavements, surrounded by a fringe of weeds, like those in the courtyards of unoccupied houses, told of the infrequency and small number of the passersby. Skimming the ground like stealthy swallows, a few women, wrapped discreetly in the folds of their dark hoods, glided noiselessly along the houses, sometimes followed by a small boy carrying their dog. Tiburce quickened his pace, in order to catch a glimpse of the features buried beneath the shadow of the hood, and saw there pale faces, with compressed lips, eyes surrounded by dark circles, prudent chins, delicate and circumspect noses—the genuine type of the pious Roman or the Spanish duenna; his burning glance was shattered against dead glances, the glassy stare of a dead fish.

From square to square, from street to street, Tiburce arrived at last at the Quay of the Scheldt by the Harbor Gate. The magnificent spectacle extorted a cry of surprise from him; an endless number of masts, yards, and cordage resembled a forest on the river, stripped of leaves and reduced to the state of a mere skeleton. The bowsprits and lateen yards rested familiarly on the parapet of the wharf, as a horse rests his head on the neck of his carriage−mate. There were Dutch *orques,* round−sterned, with their red sails; sharp, black American brigs, with cordage as fine as silk thread; salmon−colored Norwegian koffs, emitting a penetrating odor of planed fir; barges, fishermen, Breton salt−vessels, English coalers, ships from all parts of the world. An indescribable odor of sour herring, tobacco, rancid suet, melted tar, heightened by the acrid smells of the ships from Batavia, loaded with pepper, cinnamon, ginger and cochineal, floated about in the air in dense puffs, like the smoke from an enormous perfume−pan lighted in honor of commerce.

Tiburce, hoping to find the true Flemish type among the lower classes entered the taverns and gin−shops. He drank lambick, white beer of Louvain, ale, porter, and whisky, desiring to improve the opportunity to make the acquaintance of the northern Bacchus. He also smoked cigars of several brands, ate salmon, sauerkraut, yellow potatoes, rare roast−beef, and partook of all the delights of the country.

While he was dining, German women, chubby−faced, swarthy as gypsies, with short skirts and Alsatian caps, came to his table and squalled unmelodiously some dismal ballad, accompanying themselves on the violin and other un−pleasant instruments. Blonde Germany, as if to mock at Tiburce, had besmeared itself with the deepest shade of sunburn; he tossed them angrily a handful of small coins, which procured him the favor of another ballad of gratitude, shriller and more uncivilized than the first.

In the evening he went to the music−halls to see the sailors dance with their mistresses; all of the latter had beautiful glossy black hair that shone like a crow's wing. A very pretty Creole seated herself beside him and familiarly touched her lips to his glass, according to the custom of the country, and tried to enter into conversation with him in excellent Spanish, for she was from Havana; she had such velvety−black eyes, a pale complexion, so warm and golden, such a small foot, and such a slender figure, that Tiburce, exasperated, sent her to all the devils, to the great surprise of the poor creature, who was little accustomed to such a greeting.

Utterly insensible to the dark perfections of the dancers, Tiburce with−drew to the Arms of Brabant Hotel. He undressed in a dissatisfied frame of mind, and wrapping himself as well as he could in the openwork napkins which take the place of sheets in Flanders, he soon slept the sleep of the just.

He had the loveliest dreams imaginable.

The nymphs and allegorical figures of the Medici Galley, in the most enticing *deshabille,* paid him a nocturnal

visit; they gazed fondly at him with their great blue eyes, and smiled at him in the most friendly way, with their lips blooming like red flowers amid the milky whiteness of their round, plump faces. One of them, the Nereid in the picture called *The Queen's Voyage*, carried familiarity so far as to pass her pretty taper fingers, tinged with carmine, through the hair of the love−lorn sleeper. Drapery of flowered brocade cleverly concealed the deformity of her scaly legs, ending in a forked tail; her fair hair was adorned with seaweed and coral, as befits a daughter of the sea; she was adorable in that guise. Groups of chubby children, as red as roses, swam about in a luminous atmosphere, holding aloft wreaths of flowers of insupportable brilliancy, and drew down from heaven a perfumed rain. At a sign from the Nereid, the nymphs stood in two rows and tied together the ends of their long auburn hair, in such wise as to form a sort of hammock of gold filigree for the fortunate Tiburce and his finny mistress; they took their places therein, and the nymphs swung them to and fro, moving their heads slightly with a rhythm of infinite sweetness.

Suddenly there was a sharp noise, the golden threads broke, and Tiburce fell to the ground. He opened his eyes and saw naught save a horrible bronze−colored face, which fastened upon him two great enamel eyes, only the whites of which could be seen.

"Your breakfast, *mein Herr,"* said an old Hottentot negress, a servant of the hotel, placing on a small table a salver laden with dishes and silverware.

"Damnation! I ought to have gone to Africa to look for blondes!" grumbled Tiburce, as he attacked his beefsteak in desperation.

CHAPTER II CHESTNUT HAIR

TTBURCE, having duly satisfied his appetite, left the Arms of Brabant with the laudable and conscientious purpose of continuing the search for his ideal. He was no more fortunate than on the previous day; dark−skinned ironies, emerging from every street, cast sly and mocking glances at him; India, Africa, America, passed before him in specimens more or less copper−colored; one would have said that the venerable city, advised of his purpose, concealed in a spirit of mockery, in the depths of its most impenetrable back yards and behind its dingiest windows, all those of its daughters who might have recalled, vividly or remotely, the paintings of Jordaems or Rubens; stingy with its gold it was lavish with its ebony.

Enraged by this sort of mute ridicule, Tiburce visited the museums and galleries, to escape it. The Flemish Olympus shone once more before his eyes. Once more cascades of hair glistened in tiny reddish waves, with aquiver of gold and radiance; the shoulders of the allegories, refurbishing their silvery whiteness, glowed more vividly than ever; the blue of the eyes became lighter, the ruddy cheeks bloomed like bunches of carnations; a pink vapor infused warmth into the bluish pallor of the knees, elbows, and fingers of all those fair−haired goddesses; soft gleams of changing light, ruddy reflections, played over the plump, rounded flesh; the pigeon−breast draperies swelled before the breath of an invisible wind, and began to flutter about in the azure vapor; the fresh, plump Netherlandish poesy was revealed in all its entirety to our enthusiastic traveler.

But these beauties on canvas were not enough for him. He had come thither in search of real, living types. He had fed long enough on written and painted poetry, and he had discovered that intercourse with abstractions was somewhat unsubstantial. Doubtless it would have been much simpler to stay in Paris and fall in love with a pretty woman, or even with an ugly one, like everybody else; but Tiburce did not understand nature and was able to read it only in translations. He grasped admirably all the types realized in the works of the masters, but he would not have noticed them of his own motion if he had met them on the street or in society; in a word, if he had been a painter, he would have made vignettes based on the verses of poets; if he had been a poet, he would have written verses based on the pictures of painters. Art had taken possession of him when he was too young and had corrupted him and prejudiced him. Such instances are more common than is supposed in our over−refined civilization, where we come in contact with the works of man more often than with those of nature.

For a moment Tiburce had an idea of compromising with himself, and made this cowardly and ill−sounding remark: "Chestnut−hair is a very pretty color." He even went so far, the sycophant, the villain, the man of little faith, as to admit to himself that black eyes were very bright and very attractive. It may be said, to excuse him, that he had scoured in every direction, and without the slightest result, a city which everything justified him in believing to be radically blonde. A little discouragement was quite pardonable.

At the moment that he uttered this blasphemy under his breath, a lovely blue glance, wrapped in a mantilla, flashed before him and disappeared like a will−o'−the−wisp around the corner of Mei'r Square.

Tiburce quickened his pace, but he saw nothing more; the street was deserted from end to end. Evidently the flying vision had entered one of the neighboring houses, or had vanished in some unknown alley. Tiburce, bitterly disappointed, after glancing at the well, • with the iron scrollwork forged by Quintin Metzys, the painter−locksmith, took it into his head to visit the cathedral, which he found daubed from top to bottom with a horrible canary−yellow. Luckily the wooden pulpit, carved by Verbruggen, with its decorations of foliage alive with birds, squirrels, and turkeys displaying their plumage, and all the zoological equipage which surrounded Adam and Eve in the terrestrial paradise, redeemed that general insipidity by the delicacy of its angles and its nicety of detail. Luckily, the blazonry of the noble families, and the pictures of Otto Venius, of Rubens, and of Van Dyck, partly concealed that hateful color, so dear to the middle classes and to the clergy.

A number of Beguins at prayer were scattered about on the pavement of the church; but the fervor of their piety caused them to bend their faces so low over their red−edged prayer−books, that it was difficult to distinguish their features. Moreover, the sanctity of the spot and the venerable aspect of their costumes prevented Tiburce from feeling inclined to carry his investigation farther.

Five or six Englishmen, breathless after ascending and descending the four hundred and seventy stairs of the steeple to which the dove's−nests with which it is always capped give the aspect of an Alpine peak, were examining the pictures and, trusting only in part to their guide's loquacious learning, were hunting up in their guidebooks the names of the masters, for fear of admiring one thing for another; and they repeated in front of every canvas, with imperturbable stolidity: "It • is a very fine exhibition." These Englishmen had squarely−cut faces, and the enormous distance between their noses and their chins demonstrated the purity of the breed. As for the English lady who was with them, she was the same one whom Tiburce had previously seen at the *residenz* of Laeken; she wore the same green boots and the same red hair. Tiburce, despairing of finding Flemish blondes, was almost on the point of darting a killing glance at her; but the vaudeville couplets aimed at perfidious Albion came to his mind most opportunely.

In honor of these visitors, so manifestly Britannic, who could not move without a jingling of guineas, the beadle opened the shutters which, during three−fourths of the year, concealed the two wonderful paintings of the *Crucifixion* and the *Descent from the Cross.*

The *Crucifixion* is a work that stands by itself, and Rubens, when he painted it, was thinking of Michelangelo. The drawing is rough, savage, impetuous, like those of the Roman school; all the muscles stand out at once, all the bones and sinews are visible, nerves of steel are surrounded by flesh like granite. Here is no trace of the joyous, ruddy tones with which the Antwerpian artist nonchalantly sprinkles his innumerable productions; it is the Italian bistre in its tawniest intensity; executioners, colossi shaped like elephants, have tigers' muzzles and attitudes of bestial ferocity; even the Christ Himself, included in this exaggeration, wears rather the aspect of a Milo of Crotona, nailed to a wooden horse by rival athletes, than of a God voluntarily sacrificing Himself for the redemption of humanity. There is nothing Flemish in the picture save the great Snyders dog barking in a corner.

When the shutters of the *Descent from the Cross* were thrown open, Tiburce was dazzled and seized with vertigo as if he had looked into an abyss of blinding light; the sublime head of the Magdalen blazed triumphantly in an ocean of gold, and seemed to illuminate with the beams from its eyes the pale, gray atmosphere that filtered through the narrow Gothic windows. Everything about him faded away; there was an absolute void; the square−jawed Englishman, the red−haired Eng−lish woman, the violet−robed beadle— he saw them no more.

The sight of that face was to Ti−burce a revelation from on high; scales fell from his eyes, he found himself face to face with his secret dream, with his unavowed hope; the intangible image which he had pursued with all the ardor of an amorous imagination, and of which he had been able to espy only the profile or the ravishing fold of a dress; the capricious and untamed chimera, always ready to unfold its restless wings, was there before him, fleeing no more, motionless in the splendor of its beauty. The great master had copied in his own heart the anticipated and longed−for mistress; it seemed to him that he himself had painted the picture; the hand of genius had drawn unerringly and with broad strokes of the brush, what was only confusedly sketched in his mind, and had garbed in gorgeous colors his undefined fancy for the unknown. He recognized that race, and yet he had never seen it.

He stood there, mute, absorbed, as insensible as a man in a cataleptic fit, not moving an eyelid and plunging his eyes into the boundless glance of the great penitent.

A foot of the Christ, white with a bloodless whiteness, as pure and lifeless as a consecrated wafer, hovered with all the inert listlessness of death over the saint's white shoulder, an ivory footstool placed there by the sublime artist to enable the divine corpse to descend from the tree of redemption. Tiburce felt jealous of the Christ. For such a blessed privilege he would gladly have endured the Passion. The bluish pallor of the flesh hardly reassured him. He was deeply wounded,

too, because the Magdalen did not turn towards him her melting, glistening eye, wherein the light bestowed its diamonds and grief its pearls. The dolorous and impassioned persistence of that glance, which wrapped the beloved body in a winding−sheet of love, seemed to him humiliating, and eminently unjust to him, Tiburce. He would have rejoiced if the most imperceptible gesture had given him to understand that she was touched by his love; he had already forgotten that he was standing before a painting, so quick is passion to attribute its own ardor even to objects incapable of feeling it. Pygmalion must have been astonished, as if it were a most extraordinary thing, that his statue did not return caress for caress; Tiburce was no less shocked by the coldness of his painted sweetheart.

Kneeling in her robe of green satin, with its ample and swelling folds, she continued to gaze upon the Christ

with an expression of grief−stricken concupiscence, like a mistress who seeks to surfeit herself with the features of an adored face which she is never to see again; her hair fell over her shoulders, a luminous fringe; a sunbeam, straying in by chance, heightened the warm whiteness of her linen and of her arms of gilded marble; in the wavering light her breast seemed to swell and throb with an appearance of life; the tears in her eyes melted, and flowed like human tears.

Tiburce thought that she was about to rise and step down from the picture.

Suddenly there was darkness: the vision vanished.

The English visitors had withdrawn, after observing: "Very well; a pretty picture"; and the beadle, annoyed byTiburce's prolonged contemplation, had closed the shutters, and was demanding the usual fee. Tiburce gave him all that he had in his pocket; lovers are generous to duennas; the Antwerpian beadle was the Magdalen's duenna, and Tiburce, already looking forward to another interview, was interested in obtaining his favorable consideration.

The colossal St. Christopher, and the hermit carrying a lantern, painted on the exterior of the shutters, albeit very remarkable works, were far from consoling Tiburce for the closing of that dazzling tabernacle, whence the genius of Rubens sparkles like a monstrance laden with precious stones.

He left the church, carrying in his heart the barbed arrow of an impossible love; he had at last fallen in with the passion that he sought, but he was punished where he had sinned: he had become too fond of painting, he was doomed to love a picture. Nature, neglected for art, revenged herself in barbarous fashion; the most timid lover in the presence of the most virtuous of women, always retains a secret hope in a corner of his heart; as for Tiburce, he was sure of his mistress's resistance and he was perfectly well aware that he would never be happy; so that his passion was a genuine passion, a wild, insensate passion, capable of anything; it was especially remarkable for its disinterestedness.

Do not make too merry over Tiburce's love; how many men do we see deeply enamored of women whom they have never seen except in a box at the theater, to whom −they have never spoken, and even the sound of whose voice they do not know! Are such men much more reasonable than our hero, and are their impalpable idols to be compared with the Magdalen at Antwerp?

Tiburce walked the streets with a proud and mysterious air, like a gallant returning from a first assignation. The intensity of his sensations surprised him agreeably—he who had never lived except in the brain felt the beating of his heart. It was a novel sensation; and so he abandoned himself without reserve to the charms of that unfamiliar impression; a real woman would not have touched him so deeply. An artificial man can be moved only by an artificial thing; there is a harmony between them; the true would create a discord. As we have said, Tiburce had read much, seen much, thought much, and felt very little; his fancies were simply brain fancies; in him passion rarely went below the cravat. But this time he was really in love, just like a student of rhetoric; the dazzling image of the Magdalen floated before his eyes in luminous spots, as if he had been looking at the sun; the slightest fold, the most imperceptible detail stood out clearly in his memory; the picture was always present before him. He tried in all seriousness to devise some means to impart life to that insensible beauty and to induce her to come forth from her frame; he thought of Prometheus, who kindled the fire of heaven in order to give a soul to his lifeless work; of Pygmalion, who succeeded in finding a way to move and warm a block of marble; he had an idea of plunging into the bottomless ocean of the occult sciences, in order to discover a charm sufficiently powerful to give life and substance to that vain appearance. He raved, he was mad: he was in love, you see.

Have you not yourself, without reaching that pitch of excitement, been invaded by a feeling of indescribable melancholy in a gallery of old masters, while thinking of the vanished beauties represented by their pictures? Would not one be glad to infuse life into all those pale and silent faces which seem to muse sadly against the greenish ultra−marine or the coal−black which forms the background? Those eyes, whose vital spark gleams more brightly beneath the veil of age, were copied from those of a young princess or a lovely courtesan, of whom naught remains, not even a single grain of dust; those lips, half parted in a painted smile, recall real smiles forever fled. What a pity, in truth, that the women of Raphael, of Correggio, and of Titian are but impalpable shades! And why have not the models, like their portraits, received the privilege of immortality? The harem of the most voluptuous sultan would be a small matter compared with that which one might form with the odalisques of painting, and it is really to be regretted that so much beauty is lost.

Tiburce went every day to the cathedral, and lost himself in contemplation of his beloved Magdalen; and he

returned to the hotel each evening, more in love, more depressed, and more insane than ever. More than one noble heart, even without caring for pictures, has known the sufferings of our friend, when trying to breathe his soul into some lifeless idol, who had only the outward phantom of life, and realized the passion she inspired no more than a colored figure.

With the aid of powerful glasses our lover scrutinized his inamorata even in the most imperceptible details. He admired the fineness of the flesh, the solidity and suppleness of the coloring, the energy of tne brush, the vigor of the drawings, as another would admire the velvety softness of the skin, the whiteness and the beautiful coloring of a living mistress. On the pretext of examining the work at closer range, he obtained a ladder from his friend, the beadle, and, all aquiver with love, he dared to rest a presumptuous hand on the Magdalen's shoulder. He was greatly surprised to feel, instead of the satin−like softness of a woman's flesh, a hard, rough surface like a file, with hollows and ridges everywhere, due to the impetuosity of the impulsive painter's brush. This discovery greatly depressed Tiburce, but, as soon as he had descended to the floor again, his illusion returned.

He passed more than a fortnight thus, in a state of transcendental enthusiasm, wildly stretching out his arms to his chimera, imploring Heaven to perform a miracle. In his lucid moments he resigned himself to the alternative of seeking throughout the city some type approaching his ideal; but his search resulted in nothing, for one does not find readily on streets and public promenades such a diamond of beauty.

One evening, however, he met again, at the corner of Mei'r Square, the charming blue glance we have previously mentioned; this time the vision disappeared less quickly, and Tiburce had time to see a lovely face framed by rich clusters of fair hair, and an artless smile playing about the freshest lips in the world. She quickened her pacewhen She realized that she was followed, but Tiburce, keeping at a distance, saw her stop in front of a respectable old Flemish house, of poor but decent aspect. As there was some delay in admitting her, she turned for an instant, doubtless in obedience to a vague instinct of feminine coquetry, to see if the stranger had been discouraged by the long walk she had compelled him to take. Tiburce as if enlightened by a sudden gleam of light, saw that she bore a striking resemblance to—the Magdalen.

CHAPTER III RESEMBLANCE

THE house which the slender figure had entered had an air of Flemish simplicity altogether patriarchal. It was painted a faded rose−color, with narrow white lines to represent the joints of the stones. The gable, denticulated like the steps of a staircase; the roof with its round windows surrounded by scrollwork; the impost, representing, with Gothic artlessness, the story of Noah derided by his sons; the stork's nest, and the pigeons making their toilet in the sun, made it a perfect example of its type; you would have said that it was one of those factories so common in the pictures of Van der Heyden and of Teniers.

A few stalks of hops softened with their playful greenery the too severe and too methodical aspect of the house as a whole. The lower windows were provided with round bars, and over the two lower panes were squares of muslin embroidered with great bunches of flowers after the Brussels fashion; in the

space left empty by the swelling of the iron bars were china pots containing a few pale carnations of sickly aspect, despite the evident care the owner took of them, for their drooping heads were supported by playing−cards and a complicated system of tiny scaffolding of twigs of osier. Tiburce observed this detail, which indicated a chaste and restrained life, a whole poem of youth and beauty.

As, after two hours of waiting, he had not seen the fair Magdalen with the blue eyes come forth, he sagely concluded that she must live there; which was true. All that he had left to do was to learn her name, her position in society, to become acquainted with her, and to win her love; mere trifles, in very truth. A professional Lovelace would not have been delayed five minutes; but honest Tiburce was not a Lovelace; on the contrary, he was bold in thought, but timid in action; no one was less clever than he at passing from the general to the particular, and in love affairs he had a most pressing need of a truthworthy Pandarus to extol his perfections and to arrange his rendezvous. Once under way, he did not lack eloquence; he declaimed the languorous harangue with due self−possession, and played the lover at least as well as a provincial *jeune premier;* but, unlike Petit−Jean, the clog's lawyer, the part that he was least expert at was the beginning.

We are bound to admit, therefore, that worthy Tiburce swam in a sea of uncertainty, devising a thousand stratagems more ingenious than those of Poly−bius, to gain access to his divinity. As he found nothing suitable, he conceived the idea, like Don Cleofas in the *Diable Boiteux,* of setting fire to the house, in order to have an opportunity to rescue his darling from the flames and thus to prove to her his courage and his devotion; but he reflected that a fireman, more accustomed than he to roam about on burning rafters, might supplant him; and, moreover, that the method of making a pretty girl's acquaintance was forbidden by the Code.

Awaiting a better inspiration, he engraved very clearly on his brain the location of the house, noted the name of the street, and returned to his hotel, reasonably content, for he had imagined that he saw vaguely outlined behind the embroidered muslin at the window the graceful silhouette of the unknown, and a tiny hand put aside a corner of the transparent fabric, doubtless to make sure of his virtuous persistence in standing sentry, without hope of being relieved, at the corner of a lonely street in Antwerp. Was this mere conceit on the part of Tiburce, and was his *bonne fortune* one of those common to nearsighted men, who mistake linen hanging in the window for the scarf of Juliet leaning over toward Romeo, and pots of flowers for princesses in gowns of gold brocade? However that may have been, he went away in high spirits, looking upon himself as one of the most triumphant of gallants. The hostess of the Arms of Brabant and her black maidservant were surprised at the airs of Hamilcar and of a drum−major which he assumed. He lighted his cigar in the most determined fashion, crossed his legs, and began to dandle his slipper on his toes with the superb nonchalance of a mortal who utterly despises all creation, and who is blessed with joys unknown to the ordinary run of mankind; he had at last found the blonde. Jason was no happier when he took the marvelous fleece from the enchanted tree.

Our hero was in the best of all possible situations: a genuine Havana cigar in his mouth, slippers on his feet, a bottle of Rhine wine on his table, with the newspapers of the past week and a pretty little pirated edition of the poems of Alfred de Musset.

He could drink a glass, or even two, of Tokay, read *Namouna,* or an account of the latest ballet; there is no

reason, therefore, why we should not leave him alone for a few moments; we have given him enough to dispel his ennui, assuming that a lover can ever suffer from ennui. We will return without him— for he is not the sort of a man to open the doors for us—to the little house on Rue Kipdorp, and we will act as introducers, we will show you what there is behind the embroidered muslin of the lower windows; for, as our first piece of information, we will tell you that the heroine of this tale lived on the ground floor and her name was Gretchen; a name which, albeit not so euphonious as Ethelwina, or Azalia, seemed sufficiently sweet to German or Dutch ears.

Enter, after carefully wiping your feet, for Flemish cleanliness reigns despotically here. In Flanders, people wash their faces only once a week, but by way of compensation the floors are scalded and'scraped to the quick twice a day. The floor in the hall, like those in the rest of the house, is made of pine boards, whose natural color is retained, the long, pale veins and the star−like knots being hidden by no varnish; it is sprinkled with a light coating ofsea−sand, carefully sifted, the grains of which hold the feet and prevent the slipping so frequent in our salons, where one skates rather than walks. Gretchen's bedroom is at the right, behind that door painted a modest gray, whose copper knob, scoured with pumice, shines as if it were of gold; rub your feet once more upon this mat of rushes; the emperor himself might not enter with muddy feet.

Observe an instant this placid and peaceful interior; there is nothing to attract the eye; everything is calm, sober, restrained; the chamber of Marguerite herself produces no more virginal impression; it is the serenity of innocence which presides over all these petty details so fascinatingly neat.

The brown walls, with an oaken wainscoting waist−high, have no other ornament than a Madonna in colored plaster, dressed in real fabrics like a doll, with satin shoes, a wreath of rushes, a necklace of colored glass, and two small vases of artificial flowers in front of her. At the rear of the room, in the corner most in the shadow, stands a four−posted bed of antique shape, with curtains of green serge and valances with pinked edges and a hem of yellow lace. By the pillow, a figure of the Christ, the lower part of the cross forming a holy−water vessel, stretches His ivory arms above the chaste maiden's slumbers.

A chest which glistens like a mirror, so diligently is it rubbed; a table with twisted legs standing near the window, and covered with spools, skeins of silk, and all the paraphernalia of lacework; a huge, upholstered easy−chair, three or four high−backed, chairs of the style of Louis XIII, such as we see in the engravings of Abraham Bosse, composed the furnishing, almost puritanical in its simplicity.

We must add, however, that Gretchen, innocent as she was, had indulged in the luxury of a Venetian mirror, with beveled edges, surrounded by a frame of ebony encrusted with copper. To be sure, to sanctify that profane object, a twig of blessed boxwood was stuck in the frame.

Imagine Gretchen sitting in the great upholstered easy−chair, with her feet upon a stool embroidered by herself, entangling and disentangling with her fairy fingers the almost imperceptible network of a piece of lace just begun; her pretty head leaning over her work is lighted from below by a thousand frolicsome reflections which brighten with fresh and vapory tints the transparent shadow in which she is bathed; a delicate bloom of youth softens the somewhat too Dutch ruddiness of her cheeks, whose freshness the half−light cannot impair; the daylight, admitted sparingly through the upper panes, touches only the top of her brow, and makes the little wisps of hair that rebel against the restraint of the comb gleam like golden tendrils. Cause a sudden ray of sunlight to play upon the cornice and upon the chest, sprinkle dots of gold over the rounded sides of the pewter pots, make the Christ a little yellower; retouch with a deeper shadow the stiff, straight folds of the serge curtains; darken the modernized pallor of the window−glass; stand old Barbara, armed with her broom, at the end of the room, concentrate all the light upon the maiden's head and hands, and you will have a Flemish painting of the best period, which Terburg or Gaspard Netscher would not refuse to sign.

What a contrast between that interior, so clean and neat and so easily understood, and the bedroom of a young Frenchwoman, always filled with clothes, with music−paper, with unfinished water−colors; where every article is out of its place; where tumbled dresses hang on the backs of chairs; and where the household cat tears with her claws the novel carelessly left on the floor! How clear and crystalline is the water in which that half−withered rose stands! How white that linen, how clear and transparent that glassware! Not a particle of dust in th£ air, not a. rug out of place.

Metzu, who painted in a summer−house situated in the%enter of a lake, in order to preserve %he integrity of his colors, might have' worked without annoyance in Gretchen's bedroom. The iron back of the fireplace shines like a silver bas−relief.

At this point a sudden apprehension seizes us; is she really the heroine suited to our hero? Is Gretchen really Tiburce's ideal? Is not all this very minute, very commonplace, very practical? is it not rather the Dutch than the Flemish type, and do you really be−'lieve that Ruben's models were built like her? Was it not rather merry gossips, highly−colored, abounding in flesh, of robust health, and careless and vulgar manners, whose commonplace reality the painter's genius has idealized? The great masters often play us such tricks. Of an indifferent site they make a lovely landscape; of an ugly maidservant, a Venus; they do not copy what they see, but what they desire.

And yet Gretchen, although daintier and more refined, really bore a striking resemblance to the Magdalen of Antwerp Cathedral, and Tiburce's imagination might well rest upon her without going astray. It would have been hard for him to find a more magnificent body for the phantom of his painted mistress. You desire, doubtless, now that you know Gretchen and her bedroom, the bird and its nest, as well as we ourselves do, to have some details concerning her life and her social position. Her history was as simple as possible: Gretchen was the daughter of small trades−people who had been unfortunate, and she had been an orphan for several years; she lived with Barbara, a devoted old servant, upon a small income, the remains of her father's property, and upon the proceeds of her work; as Gretchen made her own dresses and her laces, as she was looked upon by the Flemings as a prodigy of prudence and neatness, she was able, although a simple working−girl, to dress with a certain elegance, and to differ little from the daughters of citizens of the middle class; her linen was fine, her caps were always notable for their whiteness; her boots were the best made in the city; for—we trust that this detail will not displease Tiburce—we must admit that Gretchen had the foot of a Spanish countess, and shod herself to correspond. She was a well−educated girl; she knew how to read, could write well, knew all possible stitches in embroidery, had no rival on earth in needlework, and did not play the piano. Let us add that she had by way of compensation an admirable talent for cooking pear−tarts, carp *au bleu,* and cake; for she prided herself on her culinary skill, like all good housekeepers, and knew how toprepare a thousand little delicacies after her own recipes.

These details will seem without doubt far from aristocratic, but our heroine is neither a princess of diplomacy nor a charming woman of thirty, nor a fashionable singer; she is a simple working−girl of Rue Kipdorp, near the ramparts, Antwerp; but as, in our eyes, women have no real distinction save their beauty, Gretchen is the equal of a duchess who is entitled to sit in the king's presence, and we look upon her sixteen years as sixteen quarterings of nobility.

What was the state of Gretchen's heart? The state of her heart was most satisfactory; she had never loved anything but coffee−colored turtle−doves, gold−fish, and other absolutely innocent small creatures, which could not cause the most savagely jealous lover a moment's anxiety. Every Sunday she went to hear high mass at the Jesuits' church, modestly wrapped in her hood and attended by Barbara carrying her book; then she went home and turned over the leaves of a Bible, "in which God the Father was represented in the costume of an emperor," and of which the wood−engravings aroused her admiration for the thousandth time. If the weather was fine, she went out to Lillo fort, or to the Head of Flanders, with a girl of her own age, also a lace−worker. During 'the week she seldom went out, except to deliver her work; and Barbara undertook that duty most of the time. A girl of sixteen years who has never thought of love would be an improbable character in a warmer climate; but the atmosphere of Flanders, made heavy by the sickly exhalations from the canals, contains very few aphrodisiac molecules; the flowers are backward there, and when they come are thick and pulpy; their odors, laden with moisture, resemble the odors of decoctions of aromatic herbs; the fruits are watery; the earth and the sky, saturated with moisture, send back and forth the vapors which they cannot absorb, and which the sun tries in vain to drink with its pale lips; the women who live in this bath of mist have no difficulty in being virtuous, for, according to Byron, that rascal of a sun is a great seducer and has made more conquests than Don Juan.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Gretchen, in such a moral atmosphere, was a perfect stranger to all ideas of love, even under the form of marriage, a legal and permissible form if such there be. She has read no bad novels, nor even any good ones; she had not any male relatives, cousins or second cousins. Lucky Tiburce! Moreover, the sailors with their short, colored pipes, the captains of the East−Indiamen who strolled about the city during their brief time on shore, and the dignified merchants who went to the Bourse, revolving figures in the wrinkles of their foreheads, and who cast their fleeting shadows into Gretchen's sanctum as they walked by the house, were not at all calculated to inflame the imagination.

Let us admit, however, that, despite her.maidenly ignorance, the laceworker had remarked Tiburce as a well−turned cavalier with regular features; she had seen him several times at the cathedral, in rapt contemplation before the *Descent from the Cross,* and attributed his ecstatic attitude to an excessive piety most edifying in so young a man. As she whirled her bobbins about, she thought of the stranger of Me'i'r Square, and abandoned herself to innocent reverie. One day even, under the influence of that thought, she rose, and unconscious of her own act, went to her mirror, which she consulted for a long while; she looked at herself full−faced, in profile, in all possible lights, and discovered—what was quite true—that her complexion was more silky than a sheet of rice or camellia paper; that she had blue eyes of a marvelous limpidity, charming teeth in a mouth as red as a peach, and fail hair of the loveliest shade. She noticed for the first time her youthful charm and her beauty; she took the white rose which stood in the pretty glass, placed it in her hair, and smiled to see how that simple flower embellished her; coquetry was born and love would soon follow it.

But it is a long time since we left Tiburce; what had he been doing at the Arms of Brabant, while we furnished this information concerning the lace−worker? He had written upon a very fine sheet of paper what was probably a declaration of love, unless it was a challenge; for several other sheets, besmeared and marred by erasures, which lay on the floor, proved that it was a document very difficult to draw up, and of great importance. After finishing it, he took his cloak and bent his steps once more toward Rue Kipdorp.

Gretchen's lamp, a star of peace and toil, shone softly behind the glass, and the shadow of the girl as she leaned over her work was cast upon the transparent muslin. Tiburce, more excited than a robber about to turn the key of a treasure−chest, drew near the window with the step of a wolf, passed his hand through the bars, and buried in the soft earth of the vase of carnations the corner of his letter thrice folded, hoping that Gretchen could not fail to see it when she opened her window in the morning to water her flowers. That done, he withdrew with a step as light as if the soles of his boots were covered with felt.

CHAPTER IV A CERTIFICATE OF BEAUTY

THE fresh blue light of the morning paled the sickly yellow of the lanterns, which were almost burned out; the Scheldt streamed like a sweating horse, and the daylight was beginning to filter through the rents in the mist, when Gretchen's window opened. Gretchen's eyes were still swimming in languor, and the mark left on her delicate cheek by a fold of the pillow showed that she had slept without moving in her little virginal bed, that profound sleep of which youth alone has the secret. She was anxious to see how her dear carnations had passed the night, and had hastily wrapped herself in the first garment that came to hand; that graceful and modest *deshabille* became her wondrously; and if the idea of a goddess can be reconciled with a little cap of Flanders, linen embellished with lace, and a dressing−sack of white dimity, we will venture to say that she had the aspect of Aurora opening the gates of the East; this comparison is perhaps a little too majestic for a laceworker who is about to water a garden contained in two porcelain pots; but surely Aurora was less fresh and rosy, especially the Aurora of Flanders, whose eyes are always a little dull.

Gretchen, armed with a large pitcher, prepared to water her carnations, and Tiburce's ardent declaration came very near being drowned beneath a moral deluge of cold water; luckily the white paper caught Gretchen's eye; she disinterred the letter and was greatly surprised when she saw the contents. There were only two sentences, one in French, the other in German; the French sentence was composed of two words, "je t'aime;" the German of three, "ich liebe dich;" which means exactly the same thing—"I love you." Tiburce had provided for the possibility that Gretchen would understand only her mother tongue; he was, as you see, a consummately prudent person.

Really, it was well worth while to besmear more paper than Malherbe ever used to compose a stanza, and to drink, on the pretext of exciting the imagination, a bottle of excellent Tokay, in order to arrive at that ingenious and novel thought. But, despite its apparent simplicity, Tiburce's letter was perhaps a masterpiece of libertinism, unless it was mere folly, which is possible. However, was it not a master−stroke to let fall thus, like a drop of melted lead, into the midst of that tranquillity of mind that single phrase, "I love you?" And was not its fall certain to produce, as on the surface of a lake, an infinite number of radiations and concentric circles?

In truth, what do all the most ardent love−letters contain? What remains of all the bombast of passion when one pricks it with the pin of reason? All the eloquence of Saint−Preux reduces itself to a phrase; and Tiburce had really attained great profundity by concentrating in that brief sentence the flowery rhetoric of his first drafts.

He did not sign it; indeed, what information would his name have given? He was a stranger in the city, he did not know Gretchen's name, and, to tell the truth, cared very little about it. The affair was more romantic, more mysterious thus; the least fertile imagination might build thereupon twenty octavo volumes more or less probable. Was he a sylph, a pure spirit, a lovelorn angel, a handsome officer, a banker's son, a young nobleman, a peer of England with an income of a million, a Russian feudal lord, with a name ending in *off*, many roubles, and a multitude of fur collars? Such were the serious questions which that laconically eloquent letter must inevitably raise. The familiar form of address, which is used only to Divinity, betrayed a violence of passion which Tiburce was very far from feeling, but which might produce the best effect upon the girl's mind, as exaggeration always seems more natural to a woman than the truth.

Gretchen did not hesitate an instant to believe the young man of Mei'r Square to be the author of the note; women never err in such matters; they have a wonderful instinct, a scent, which takes the place of familiarity with the world and knowledge of the passions. The most virtuous of them knows more than Don Juan with his list.

We have described our heroine as a very artless, very ignorant, and very respectable young woman; we must confess, however, that she did not feel the virtuous indignation which a woman ought to feel who receives a note written in two languages and containing such a decided incongruity. She felt rather a thrill of pleasure, and a faint pink flush passed over her face. Thatletter was to her like a certificate of beauty; it reassured her concerning herself, and gave her a definite rank; it was the first glance that had ever penetrated her modest obscurity; the small proportions of her fortune prevented her being sought in marriage. Thus far she had been considered simply as a child, Tiburce consecrated her a young woman; she felt for him such gratitude as the pearl must feel for the

diver who discovers it in its coarse shell beneath the dark cloak of the ocean.

This first impression passed, Gretchen experienced a sensation well known to all those who have been brought up strictly, and who never have had a secret; the letter embarrassed her like a block of marble; she did not know what to do with it. Her room seemed to her not to have enough dark corners, enough impenetrable hiding places, in which to conceal it from all eyes. She put it in the chest behind a pile of linen; but after a few moments she took it out again; the letter blazed through the boards of the wardrobe like Doctor Faust's microcosm in Rembrandt's etching. Gretchen looked for another, safer place; Barbara might need napkins or sheets and might find it. She took a chair, stood upon it, and placed the letter on the canopy of her bed; the paper burned her hands like a piece of red−hot iron.

Barbara entered to arrange the room. Gretchen, affecting the most indifferent air imaginable, took her usual seat and resumed her work of the day before; but at every step that Barbara took toward the bed, she fell into a horrible fright; the arteries in her temples throbbed, the sweat of anguish stood upon her forehead, her fingers became entangled in the threads, and it seemed to her that an invisible hand was grasping her heart. Barbara seemed to her to have an uneasy, suspicious expression which was not customary with her. At last the old woman went out, with a basket on her arm, to do her marketing. Poor Gretchen breathed freely again, and took down her letter, which she put in her pocket; but soon it made her itch; the creaking of the paper terrified her, and she put it in her breast; for that is where a woman puts everything that embarrasses her. The waist of a dress is a cupboard without a key, an arsenal filled with flowers, locks of hair, lockets, and sentimental epistles; a sort of letter box, in which one mails all the correspondence of the heart.

But why did Gretchen not burn that insignificant scrap of paper which caused her such keen terror? In the first place, Gretchen had never in her life experienced such poignant emotion; she was terrified and enchanted at once. And then, pray tell us why lovers persist in not destroying letters which may lead later to their detection and perdition? It is because a letter is a visible soul; because passion has passed through that paltry sheet with its electric fluid, and has imparted life to it. To burn a letter is to commit a moral murder; in the ashes of a destroyed correspondence there are always some particles of two hearts.

So Gretchen kept her letter in the folds of her dress, beside a little gold crucifix, which was greatly surprised to find itself in close proximity to a love−letter.

Like a shrewd young man, Tiburce left his declaration time to work. He played the dead man and did not againappear in Rue Kipdorp. Gretchen was beginning to be alarmed, when one fine morning she perceived in the bars of her window a superb bouquet of exotic flowers. Tiburce had passed that way; that was his visiting−card.

The bouquet afforded much pleasure to the young working−girl, who had become accustomed to the thought of Tiburce, and whose stelf−esteemi was secretly hurt by the small amount of zeal which he had shown after such an ardent beginning; she took the bunch of flowers, filled with water one of her pretty Saxon vases with a raised blue design, untied the stalks and put them in water, in order to keep them longer. On this occasion she told the first lie of her life, informing Barbara that the bouquet was a present from a lady to whom she had carried some lace, and who knew her liking for flowers.

During the day Tiburce came to cool his heels in front of the house, on the pretext of making a drawing of some odd bit of architecture; he remained for a long while, working with a blunt pencil on a piece of wretched vellum. Gretchen played the dead in her turn; not a fold stirred, not a window opened; the house seemed asleep. Entrenched in a corner, she was able by means of the mirror in her work−box to watch Tiburce at her ease. She saw that he was tall, well−built, with an air of distinction in his whole person, regular features, a soft and melting eye, and a melancholy expression, which touched her deeply, accustomed as she was to the rubicund health of Brabantine faces. Moreover, Tiburce, although he was neither a lion nor a dandy, did not lack natural refinement, and must have appeared an ultra−fashionable to a young girl so innocent as Gretchen; on Boulevard de Gand he would have seemed hardly up−to−date, on Rue Kipdorp he was magnificent.

In the middle of the night, Gretchen, obeying an adorable childish impulse, rose and went barefooted to look at her bouquet; she buried her face in the flowers, and kissed Tiburce on the red lips of a magnificent dahlia; she 'thrust her head passionately into the multicolored waves of that bath of flowers, inhaling with long breaths intoxicating perfume, breathing with full nostrils, until she felt her heart melt and her eyes grow moist. When she stood erect, her cheeks glistened with pearly drops, and her fascinating little nose, smeared as prettily as possible with the golden dust from the stamens, was a lovely shade of yellow. She wiped it laughingly, returned to bed and

to sleep; as you may imagine, she saw Tiburce in all her dreams.

In all this what had become of the Magdalen of the *Descent from the Cross?* She still reigned without a rival in our young enthusiast's heart; she had the advantage over the loveliest living woman of being impossible; with her there was no disillusionment, no satiety; she did not break the spell by commonplace or absurd phrases; she was always there, motionless, adhering religiously to the sovereign lines within which the great master had confined her; sure of being beautiful to all eternity; and relating to the world in her silent language the dream of a sublime genius.

The little laceworker of Rue Kipdorp was truly a charming creature; but how far were her arms from having that undulating and supple contour, that potent energy, all enveloped with grace! how juvenile was the slender curve of her shoulders! and how pale the shade of her hair beside those strange, rich tones with which Rubens had warmed the rippling locks of the placid sinner! Such was the language which Tiburce used to himself as he walked upon the Quay of the Scheldt.

However, seeing that he made little progress in his love affair with the painting, he reasoned with himself most sensibly concerning his monumental folly. He returned to Gretchen, not without a long−drawn sigh of regret; he did not love her, but at all events she reminded him of his dream, as a daughter reminds one of an adored mother who is dead. We will not dwell on the details of this little intrigue, for everyone can easily imagine them. Chance, that great procurer, afforded our two lovers a very natural opportunity to speak.

Gretchen had gone as usual to the Head of Flanders on the other side of the Scheldt with her young friend. They had run after butterflies, made wreaths of blue−bottles, and rolled about on the straw in the mills, so long that night had come and the ferryman had made his last trip, unperceived by them. They were standing there, both decidedly perturbed, with one foot in the water, shouting with all the strength of their little silvery voices for him to come back and get them; but the playful breeze carried their shouts away, and there was no reply save the soft splashing of the waves on the sand. Luckily, Tiburce was drifting about in a small sailboat; he heard them and offered to take them across; an offer which the friend eagerly accepted, despite Gret−chen's embarrassed air and her flushed cheeks. Tiburce escorted her home and took care to organize a boating party for the following Sunday, with the assent of Barbara, whom his assiduous attendance at the churches and his devotion to the picture of the *Descent from the Cross* had very favorably disposed.

Tiburce met with no great resistance on Gretchen's part. She was so pure that she did not defend herself, because she did not know that she was attacked; and besides, she loved Tiburce; for although he talked very jocosely and expressed himself upon all subjects with ironical heedlessness, she divined that he was unhappy, and a woman's instinct is to console: grief attracts them as a mirror attracts the lark.

Although the young Frenchman was most attentive to her and treated her with extreme courtesy, she felt that she did not possess his heart entirely, and that there were corners in his mind to which she never penetrated. Some hidden thought of superior moment seemed to engross him and it was evident that he made frequent journeys into an unknown world; his fancy, borne away by the involuntary flappings of its wings, lost its footing constantly and beat against the ceiling, seeking, like a captive bird, some issue through which to dart forth into the blue sky. Often, he scrutinized her with extraordinary earnestness for hours at a time, sometimes with a satisfied expression, and again with an air of dissatisfaction. That look was not the look of a lover. Gretchen could not understand such behavior, but as she was sure of Tiburce's loyalty, she was not alarmed.

Tiburce, on the pretext that Gretchen's name was hard to pronounce, had christened her Magdalen, a substitu−tion which she had gladly accepted, feeling a secret pleasure in having her lover call her by a different and mysterious name, as if she were to him another woman. He still made frequent visits to the cathedral, teasing his mania by impotent contemplations; and on 'those days Gretchen paid the penalty for the harsh treatment of the Magdalen; the real had to pay for the ideal. He was cross, bored, tiresome, which the honest creature ascribed to irritated nerves or too persistent reading.

Nevertheless, Gretchen was a charming girl, who deserved to be loved on her own account. Not in all the di visions of Flanders, in Brabant or Hainault, could you find a whiter and fresher skin and hair of a lovelier shade; her hand was at once plump and slender, with nails like agate,—a genuine princess's hand; and—a rare perfection in the country of Rubens—a small foot.

Ah! Tiburce, Tiburce, who longed to hold in your arms a real ideal, and to kiss your chimera on the mouth, beware! Chimeras, despite their rounded throats, their swan's wings, and then sparkling smiles, have sharp teeth

and tearing claws. The evil creatures will pump the pure blood from your heart, and leave you dryer and more hollow than a sponge; avoid that unbridled ambition, do not try to make marble statues descend from their pedestals, and do not address your supplications to dumb canvases; all your painters and your poets were afflicted with the same disease that you have; they tried to make creations of their own in the midst of God's creation. With marble, with colors, with the rhythm of verses, they translated and defined their dream of beauty; their works are not the portraits of their mistresses, but of the mistresses they longed for and you would seek in vain their models on earth. Go and buy another bouquet for Gretchen, who is a sweet and lovely maiden; drop your dead women and your phantoms, and try to live with the people of this world.

CHAPTER V TO PARIS!

YES, Tiburce, though it will surprise you greatly to learn it, Gretchen is vastly superior to you. She has never read the poets, and does not even know the names of Homer and Virgil; the lamentations of the Wandering Jew, of Henriette and Damon, printed on wood and roughly−colored, compose all of her literature, except the Latin in her mass−book, which she spells out conscientiously every Sunday; Virginie knew little more in the solitude of her paradise of magnolias and roses.

You are, it is true, thoroughly posted in literary affairs. You are profoundly versed in esthetics, esoterics, plastics, architectonics, and poetics; Marphurius and Pancratius had not a finer list of acquirements in *ics*. From Orpheus and Lycophron down to M. de Lamar−tine's last volume, you have devoured everything that is composed of meters,, of rimed lines, and of strophes cast in every possible mold; no romance has escaped you. You have traversed from end to end the vast world of the imagination; you know all the painters from Andrea Rico of Crete, and Bizzamano, down to Messieurs Ingres and Delacroix; you have studied beauty at its purest sources; the bas−reliefs ofthe friezes of the Parthenon, the Etruscan vases, the hieratic sculptures of Egypt, Greek art and Roman art, the Gothic and the Renaissance; you have searched and analyzed everything; you have become a sort of jockey of Beauty, whose advice painters take when they desire to select a model, as one consults a groom concerning the purchase of a horse. Certainly no one is more familiar than you with the physical side of woman; you are as expert as an Athenian sculptor on that point; but poetry has engrossed you so much that you have suppressed nature, the world, and life. Your mistresses have been to you simply pictures more or less satisfying; your love for the beauty and attractive ones was in the proportion of a Titian to a Coucher or a Vanloo; but you have never wondered whether anything real throbbed and vibrated beneath that exterior. Although you have a kind heart, grief and joy seem to you like two grimaces which disturb the tranquillity of the outlines; woman is in your eyes a warm statue.

Ah! unhappy child, throw your books into the fire, tear your engraving, shatter your plaster casts, forget Raphael, forget Homer, forget Phidias, since you have not the courage to take a pencil, a pen, or a modeling−tool; of what use is this sterile admiration to you? what will be the end of these insane impulses? Do you demand more of life than it can give you? Great geniuses alone are entitled not to be content with creation. They can go and look the Sphinx squarely in the face, for they solve its riddles. But you are not a great genius; be simple of heart, love those who love you, and, as Jean Paul says, do not ask for moonlight, or for a gondola on Lake Mag'giore, or for a rendezvous at Isola Bella.

Become a philanthropic advocate or a concierge; limit your ambition to becoming a voter and a corporal in your company; have what in the world is called a trade; become an honest citizen. At these words no doubt your long hair will stand erect in horror, for you have the same scorn for the simple *bourgeois* that the German student professes for the Philistine, the soldier for the civilian, and the Brahma for the Pariah. You crush with ineffable disdain every worthy tradesman who prefers a vaudeville song to a tercet of Dante, and the muslin of fashionable portrait−painters to a sketch by Michelangelo. Such a man is in your eyes below the brute, and yet there are plain citizens whose minds—and they have minds—are rich with poetic feeling, who are capable of love and devotion, and who experience emotions of which you are incapable, yet whose brain has annihilated the heart.

Look at Gretchen, who has done nothing but water carnations and make lace all her life; she is a thousand times more poetic than you, *monsieur I'artiste,* as they say nowadays; she believes, she hopes, she smiles, and weeps; a word from you brings sunshine or rain to her lovely face; she sits there in her great upholstered arm−chair, beside her window, in a melancholy light, at work upon her usual task; but how her young brain labors! how fast her imagination travels! how many castles in Spain she builds and throws down! See her blush and turn pale, turn hot and cold, like the amorous maiden of the ancient ode; her lace drops from her hands, she has heard on the brick sidewalk a step whichshe distinguishes among a thousand, with all the acuteness which passion gives to the senses; although you arrive at the appointed time, she has been waiting for you a long while. All day you have been her sole preoccupation; she has asked herself: "Where is he now?—What is he doing?—Is

he thinking of me as I am thinking of him?— Perhaps he is ill; yesterday he seemed to me paler than usual, and he had a distressed and preoccupied expression when he left me; can anything have happened to him? Has he received unpleasant news from Paris?"—and all those questions which love propounds to itself in its sublime disquietude.

That poor child, with her great loving heart, has displaced the center of her existence, she no longer lives except in you and through you. By virtue of the wonderful mystery of the incarnation of love, her soul inhabits your body, her spirit descends upon you and visits you; she would throw herself in front of the sword which should threaten your breast; the blow that should reach you would cause her death; and yet you have taken her up simply as a plaything, to use her as a manikin for your ideal. To merit such a wealth of love, you have darted a few glances at her, given her a few bouquets, and declaimed in a passionate tone the commonplaces of romance. A more earnest lover would have failed perhaps; for, alas! to inspire love, it is not necessary to feel it oneself. You have deliberately disturbed for all time the limpidity of that modest existence. Upon my word, Master Tiburce, adorer of the blonde type and contemner of the *bourgeois,* you have done a cruel thing; we regret to be obliged to tell you so.

Gretchen was not happy; she divined an invisible rival between herself and her lover and jealousy seized her; she watched Tiburce's movements, and saw. that he went only to his hotel, the Arms of Brabant, and to the cathedral on Mei'r Square. She was reassured.

"What is the matter with you," she asked him once, "that you are always looking at the figure of the Magdalen supporting the Saviour's body in the picture of the *Descent from the Cross?"*

"Because she looks like you," Tiburce replied.

Gretchen blushed with pleasure and ran to the mirror to verify the accuracy of the comparison; she saw that she had the unctuous and glowing eyes, the fair hair, the arched forehead, the general shape of the saint's face.

"So that is the reason that you call me Magdalen and not Gretchen, or Marguerite, which is my real name?"

"Precisely so," replied Tiburce, with an embarrassed air.

"I would never have believed that I was so lovely," said Gretchen; "and it makes me very happy, for you will love me better for it."

Serenity returned for some time to the maiden's heart, and we must confess that Tiburce made virtuous efforts to combat his insane passion. The fear of becoming a monomaniac came to his mind; and to cut short that obsession he determined to return to Paris.

Before starting, he went to pay one last visit to the cathedral, and his friend the beadle opened the shutters of the *Descent from the Cross* for him.

The Magdalen seemed to him more sad and disconsolate than usual; great tears rolled down her pallid cheeks, her mouth was contracted by a spasm ofgrief, a bluish circle surrounded her melting eyes, the sunbeam had left her hair, and there was, in her whole attitude, an expression of despair and prostration; one would have said that she no longer believed in the resurrection of her beloved Lord. In truth, the Christ was that day of such a sallow, greenish hue that it was difficult to imagine that life could ever return to His decomposing flesh. All the other people in the picture seemed to share that feeling; their eyes were dull, their expressions mournful, and their halos gave forth only a leaden gleam; the livid hue of death had invaded that canvas formerly so warm and full of life.

Tiburce was deeply touched by the expression of supreme melancholy upon the Magdalen's face, and his resolution to depart was shaken. He preferred to attribute it to a secret sympathy rather than to a caprice of the light. The weather was dull, the rain cut the sky with slender threads, and a ray of daylight, drenched with water and mist, forced its way with difficulty through the glass, streaming and beaten by the wing of the squall; that reason was much too plausible to be admitted by Tiburce.

"Ah!" he said to himself in an undertone, quoting a verse of one of our young poets, " 'How I would love thee tomorrow if thou wert living!'—Why art thou only an impalpable ghost attached for ever to the meshes of this canvas and held captive by this thin layer of varnish? Why art thou the phantom of life, without the power to live? What does it profit thee to be lovely, noble, and great, to have in thine eyes the flame of earthly love and of divine love, and about thy head the resplendent halo of repentance, being simply a little oil and paint spread on canvas in a certain way? Oh! lovely adored one, turn toward me for an instant that glance, at once so soft and so dazzling; sinner, take pity upon an insane passion, thou, to whom love opened the gates of Heaven; descend from that frame, stand erect in thy long, green satin skirt; for it is a long while that thou hast knelt before the sublime

scaffold; these holy women will guard the body without thee and will suffice for the death vigil. Come, Magdalen, come! thou hast not emptied all thy jars of perfume at the feet of the Divine Master! there must remain enough of nard and cinnamon in the bottom of thy onyx jar to renew the luster of thy hair, dimmed by the ashes of repentance. Thou shalt have, as of yore, strings of pearls, negro pages, and coverlets of the purple of Sidon. Come, Magdalen, although thou hast been two thousand years dead, I have enough of youth and ardor to reanimate thy dust. Ah! specter of beauty, let me but hold thee in my arms one instant, then let me die!"

A stifled sigh, as faint and soft as the wail of a dove mortally wounded, echoed sadly in the air. Tiburce thought that the Magdalen had answered him.

It was Gretchen, who, hidden behind a pillar, had seen all, heard all, understood all. Something had broken in her heart; she was not loved.

That evening Tiburce came to see her; he was pale and depressed. Gretchen was as white as wax. The excitement of the morning had driven the color from her cheeks, like the powder from the wings of a butterfly.

"I start for Paris tomorrow; will you come with me?"

"To Paris or elsewhere; wherever you please," replied Gretchen, in whom every shred of will−power seemed extinct; "shall I not be unhappy everywhere?"

Tiburce flashed a keen and searching glance at her.

"Come tomorrow morning; I will be ready; I have given you my heart and my life. Dispose of your servant."

She went with Tiburce to the Arms of Brabant, to assist him to make his preparations for departure; she packed his books, his linen, and his pictures, then she returned to her little room on Rue Kipdorp; she did not undress, but threw herself fully dressed upon her bed.

An unconquerable depression had seized upon her soul; everything about her seemed sad: the bouquets were withered in their blue glass vases; the lamps flickered and cast a dim and intermittent light; the ivory Christ bent His head in despair upon His breast; and the blessed boxwood assumed the aspect of a cypress dipped in lustral water.

The little Virgin from her little recess watched her in surprise with her enamel eyes; and the storm, pressing his knee against the window−pane, made the lead partitions groan and creak.

The heaviest furniture, the most unimportant utensils, wore an expression of intelligence and compassion; they cracked dolorously and gave forth mournful sounds. The easy−chair held out its long, unoccupied arms; the hop−vine on the trellis passed its little green hand familiarly through a broken pane; the kettle complained and wept among the ashes; the curtains of the bed fell in more lifeless and more distressed folds; the whole room seemed to understand that it was about to lose its young mistress. Gretchen called her old servant, who wept bitterly; she handed her her keys and the certificates of her little income, then opened the cage of her two−coffee−colored turtle−doves and set them free.

The next morning she was on her way to Paris with Tiburce.

CHAPTER VI FROM THE CANVAS

TIBURCE'S apartment greatly surprised the young Antwerp maiden, accustomed to Flemish strictness and method. That mixture of luxury and heedlessness upset all her ideas. For instance, a crimson velvet cover was thrown upon a wretched broken table; magnificent candelabra of the most ornate style, which would not have been out of place in the boudoir of a king's mistress, were supplied with paltry *bobdches* of common glass, which the candles, burning down to the very bottom, had burst; a china vase of beautiful material and workmanship and of great value had received a kick in the side, and its splintered fragments were held together by iron wire; exceedingly rare engravings were fastened to the wall by pins; a Greek cap was on the head of an antique Venus, and a multitude of incongruous objects, such as Turkish pipes, narghiles, daggers, yataghans, Chinese shoes, and Indian slippers, encumbered the chairs and what−nots.

The painstaking Gretchen had no rest until all this was cleaned, neatly hung, and labeled; like God who made the world from chaos, she made of thatmedley a delightful apartment. Tiburce, who was accustomed to its confusion and who knew perfectly where things ought not to be, had difficulty at first in recognizing his surroundings; but he ended by becoming used to it. The objects which he disarranged returned to their places as if by magic. He realized for the first time what comfort meant. Like all imaginative people, he neglected details. The door of his bedroom was gilded and covered with arabesques, but it had no weather−strips; like the genuine savage that he was, he loved splendor and not well−being; he would have worn, like the Orientals, waistcoats of gold brocade lined with toweling.

And yet, although he seemed to enjoy this more human and more reasonable mode of life, he was often sad and distraught; he would remain whole days upon his divan, flanked by two piles of cushions, with eyes closed and hands hanging, and not utter a word; Gretchen dared not question him, she was so afraid of his reply. The scene in the cathedral had remained engraved upon her memory, in painful and ineffaceable strokes.

He continued to think of the Magdalen at Antwerp; absence made her more beautiful in his sight; he saw her before him like a luminous apparition. An imaginary sunlight riddled her hair with rays of gold, her dress had the transparency of an emerald, her shoulders gleamed like Parian marble. Her tears had dried, and youth shone in all its bloom upon, the down of her rosy cheeks; she seemed entirely consoled for the death of the Christ; whose bluish white foot she supported heedlessly, while she turned her face towards her earthly lover. The rigid outlines of sanctity were softened and had become undulating and supple; the sinner reappeared in the person of the penitent; her neckerchief floated more freely, her skirt swelled out in alluring and worldly folds, her arms were amorously outstretched,.as if ready to seize a victim of love. The great saint had become a courtesan, and had transformed herself into a temptress. In a more credulous age Tiburce would have seen therein some underhand machination of him who goes prowling about, "seeking whom he may devour"; he would have believed that the devil's claw was upon his shoulder and that he was bewitched in due form.

How did it happen that Tiburce, beloved by a charming young girl, simple of heart, and endowed with intelligence, possessed of beauty, youth, innocence, all the real gifts which come from God, and which no one can acquire, persisted in pursuing a mad chimera, an impossible dream; and how could that mind, so keen and powerful, have arrived at such a degree of aberration? Such things are seen every day; have we not, each one of us in our respective spheres, been loved obscurely by some humble heart, while we sought more exalted loves? Have not we trodden under foot a pale violet with its timid perfume, while striding along with lowered eyes toward a cold and gleaming star which cast its ironic glance upon us from the depths of infinity? Has not the abyss its magnetism and the impossible its fascination?

One day Tiburce entered Gretchen's chamber carrying a bundle; he took from it a skirt and waist of green satin, made after the antique style, a chemi−sette of a shape long out of fashion, and a string of huge pearls. He requested Gretchen to put on those garments, which could not fail to be most becoming to her, and to keep them in the house; he told her by way of explanation that he was very fond of. sixteenth−century costumes, and that by falling in with that fancy of his she would confer very great pleasure upon him. You will readily believe that a

young girl did not need to be asked twice to try on a new gown; she was soon dressed, and when she entered the salon, Tiburce could not withhold a cry of surprise and admiration. He found something to criticize, however, in the head−dress, and, releasing the hair from the teeth of the comb, he spread it out in great curls over Gretchen's shoulders, like the Magdalen's hair in the *Descent from the Cross.* That done, he gave a different twist to some folds of the skirt, loosened the laces of the waist, rumpled the neckerchief, which was too stiff and starchy, and, stepping back a few feet, contemplated his work.

Doubtless you have seen what are called living pictures, at some special performance. The most beautiful actresses are selected, and dressed and posed in such wise as to reproduce some familiar painting. Tiburce had achieved a masterpiece of that sort; you would have said that it was a bit cut from Ruben's canvas.

Gretchen made a movement.

"Don't stir, you will spoil the pose; you are so lovely thus!" cried Tiburce in a tone of entreaty.

The poor girl obeyed and remained motionless for several minutes. When she turned, Tiburce saw that her face was bathed in tears.

He realized that she knew all.

Gretchen's tears flowed silently down her cheeks, without contraction of the features, without effort, like pearls overflowing from the too full cup of her eyes, lovely azure flowers of divine limpidity; grief could not mar the harmony of her face, and her tears were lovelier than another woman's smile.

Gretchen wiped them away with the back of her hand, and leaning upon the arm of a chair, she said in a voice tremulous and melting with emotion:

"Oh, how you have made me suffer, Tiburce! Jealousy of a new sort wrung my heart; although I had no rival, I was betrayed none the less; you loved a painted woman; she possessed your thoughts, your dreams; she alone seemed fair to you, who saw only her in all the world; plunged in that mad contemplation, you did not even see that I had wept. And I believed for an instant that you loved me, whereas I was simply a duplicate, a counterfeit of your passion! I know well that in your eyes I am only an ignorant little girl who speaks French with a German accent that makes you laugh; my face pleases you as a reminder of your imaginary mistress; you see in me a pretty manikin which you drape according to your fancy; but I tell you the manikin suffers and loves you."

Tiburce tried to draw her to his heart, but she released herself and continued:

"You talked to me enchantingly of love, you taught me that I was lovely and charming to look upon, you pressed my hands and declared that no fairy had smaller ones; you said of my hair that it was more precious than a prince's golden cloak, and of my eyes that the angels came down from Heaven to lookat themselves in them, and that they stayed so long that they were late in returning and were scolded by the good Lord; and all this in a sweet and penetrating voice, with an accent of truth that would have deceived those more experienced than I. Alas! my resemblance to the Magdalen in the picture kindled your imagination and gave you that artificial eloquence; she answered you through my mouth; I gave her the life that she lacks, and I served to complete your illusion. If I have given you a few moments of happiness, I forgive you for making me play this part. After all, it is not your fault if you do not know how to love, if the impossible alone attracts you, if you long only for that which you cannot attain. You are ambitious to love, you are deceived concerning yourself, you will never love. You must have perfection, the ideal and poesy—all those things which do not exist.' Instead of loving in a woman the love that she has for you, of being grateful to her for her devotion and for the gift of her heart, you look to see if she resembles that plaster Venus in your study. Woe to her if the outline of her brow has not the desired curve! You are concerned about the grain of her skin, the shade of her hair, the fineness of her wrists and her ankles, but never about her heart. You are not a lover, poor Tiburce, you are simply a painter. What you have taken for passion is simply admiration for shape and beauty; you were in love with the talent of Rubens, not with the Magdalen; your vocation of painter stirred vaguely within you and produced those frantic outbursts which you could not control. Thence came all the degradation of your fantasy. I have discovered this, because I love you. Love is a woman's genius, her mind is not engrossed in selfish contemplation! Since I have been here I have turned over your books, I have read your poets, I have become almost a scholar. The veil has fallen from my " eyes. I have discovered many things that I should never have suspected. Thus I have been able to read clearly in your heart. You used to draw—take up your pencils again. You must place your dreams upon canvas, and all this great agitation will calm down of itself. If I cannot be your mistress, I will at all events be your model."

She rang and told the servant to bring an easel, canvas, colors, and brushes.

When the servant had prepared everything, the chaste girl suddenly let her garments fall to the floor with sublime immodesty, and raising her hair, like Aphrodite come forth from the sea, stood in the bright light.

"Am I not as lovely as your *Venus of Milo?"* she asked with a sweet little pout.

After two hours, the face was already alive and half protruding from the canvas; in a week it was finished. It was not a perfect picture, however; but an exquisite touch of refinement and of purity, a wonderful softness of tone, and the noble simplicity of the arrangement made it noteworthy, especially to connoisseurs. That slender white and fair−haired figure, standing forth in an unconstrained attitude against the twofold azure of the sky and the sea, and presenting herself to the world nude and smiling, had' a reflection of antique poesy and recalled the best periods of Greek sculpture.

Tiburce had already forgotten the Magdalen of Antwerp.

"Well!" said Gretchen, "are you satisfied with your model?"

"When would you like to publish our banns?" was Tiburce's reply.

"I shall be the wife of a great painter," she said, throwing her arms about her lover's neck; "but do not forget, monsieur, that it was I who discovered your genius, that priceless jewel —I, little Gretchen of Rue Kipdorp!"