

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

Anatole France

Table of Contents

<u>Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2</u>	1
<u>Anatole France</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER X. DECHARTRE ARRIVES IN FLORENCE</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER XI. "THE DAWN OF FAITH AND LOVE"</u>	8
<u>CHAPTER XII. HEARTS AWAKENED</u>	10
<u>CHAPTER XIII. "YOU MUST TAKE ME WITH MY OWN SOUL!"</u>	13
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE AVOWAL</u>	16
<u>CHAPTER XV. THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER</u>	18
<u>CHAPTER XVI. "TO-MORROW?"</u>	19
<u>CHAPTER XVII. MISS BELL ASKS A QUESTION</u>	23
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. "I KISS YOUR FEET BECAUSE THEY HAVE COME!"</u>	25
<u>CHAPTER XIX. CHOULETTE TAKES A JOURNEY</u>	26
<u>CHAPTER XX. WHAT IS FRANKNESS?</u>	30
<u>CHAPTER XXI. "I NEVER HAVE LOVED ANY ONE BUT YOU!"</u>	31
<u>CHAPTER XXII. A MEETING AT THE STATION</u>	38

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

Anatole France

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- CHAPTER X. DECHARTRE ARRIVES IN FLORENCE
 - CHAPTER XI. "THE DAWN OF FAITH AND LOVE"
 - CHAPTER XII. HEARTS AWAKENED
 - CHAPTER XIII. "YOU MUST TAKE ME WITH MY OWN SOUL!"
 - CHAPTER XIV. THE AVOWAL
 - CHAPTER XV. THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER
 - CHAPTER XVI. "TO-MORROW?"
 - CHAPTER XVII. MISS BELL ASKS A QUESTION
 - CHAPTER XVIII. "I KISS YOUR FEET BECAUSE THEY HAVE COME!"
 - CHAPTER XIX. CHOULETTE TAKES A JOURNEY
 - CHAPTER XX. WHAT IS FRANKNESS?
 - CHAPTER XXI. "I NEVER HAVE LOVED ANY ONE BUT YOU!"
 - CHAPTER XXII. A MEETING AT THE STATION
-

This etext was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

CHAPTER X. DECHARTRE ARRIVES IN FLORENCE

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

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

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

Looking at Miss Bell with an evil eye, he said:

"I compose verses while mending my clothes. I like to work with my hands. I sing songs to myself while sweeping my room; that is the reason why my songs have gone to the hearts of men, like the old songs of the farmers and artisans, which are even more beautiful than mine, but not more natural. I have pride enough not to want any other servant than myself. The sacristan's widow offered to repair my clothes. I would not permit her to do it. It is wrong to make others do servilely for us work which we can do ourselves with noble pride."

The Prince was nonchalantly playing his nonchalant music. Therese, who for eight days had been running to churches and museums in the company of Madame Marmet, was thinking of the annoyance which her companion

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

caused her by discovering in the faces of the old painters resemblances to persons she knew. In the morning, at the Ricardi Palace, on the frescoes of Gozzoli, she had recognized M. Gamin, M. Lagrange, M. Schmoll, the Princess Seniavine as a page, and M. Renan on horseback. She was terrified at finding M. Renan everywhere. She led all her ideas back to her little circle of academicians and fashionable people, by an easy turn, which irritated her friend. She recalled in her soft voice the public meetings at the Institute, the lectures at the Sorbonne, the evening receptions where shone the worldly and the spiritualist philosophers. As for the women, they were all charming and irreproachable. She dined with all of them. And Therese thought: "She is too prudent. She bores me." And she thought of leaving her at Fiesole and visiting the churches alone. Employing a word that Le Menil had taught her, she said to herself:

"I will 'plant' Madame Marmet."

A lithe old man came into the parlor. His waxed moustache and his white imperial made him look like an old soldier; but his glance betrayed, under his glasses, the fine softness of eyes worn by science and voluptuousness. He was a Florentine, a friend of Miss Bell and of the Prince, Professor Arrighi, formerly adored by women, and now celebrated in Tuscany for his studies of agriculture. He pleased the Countess Martin at once. She questioned him on his methods, and on the results he obtained from them. He said that he worked with prudent energy. "The earth," he said, "is like women. The earth does not wish one to treat it with either timidity or brutality." The Ave Maria rang in all the campaniles, seeming to make of the sky an immense instrument of religious music. "Darling," said Miss Bell, "do you observe that the air of Florence is made sonorous and silvery at night by the sound of the bells?"

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

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

Choulette approached Madame Marmet, and said, gravely "Madame Marmet, is it possible for you to look at a door a simple, painted, wooden door like yours, I suppose, or like mine, or like this one, or like any other without being terror-stricken at the thought of the visitor who might, at any moment, come in? The door of one's room, Madame Marmet, opens on the infinite. Have you ever thought of that? Does one ever know the true name of the man or woman, who, under a human guise, with a known face, in ordinary clothes, comes into one's house?"

He added that when he was closeted in his room he could not look at the door without feeling his hair stand on end. But Madame Marmet saw the doors of her rooms open without fear. She knew the name of every one who came to see her charming persons.

Choulette looked at her sadly, and said, shaking his head: "Madame Marmet, those whom you call by their terrestrial names have other names which you do not know, and which are their real names."

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

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

Choulette warned Madame Martin severely that she should not call misfortune an unwelcome visitor.

"Misfortune is our greatest master and our best friend. Misfortune teaches us the meaning of life. Madame, when you suffer, you know what you must know; you believe what you must believe; you do what you must do; you are

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

what you must be. And you shall have joy, which pleasure expels. True joy is timid, and does not find pleasure among a multitude.

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

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

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

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

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

"I think that Monsieur Dechartre is coming."

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

Miss Bell welcomed him with birdlike cries.

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

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

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

She asked him whether he had gone to Venice, and whether he had seen again at Ravenna the empresses wearing aureolas, and the phantoms that had formerly dazzled him.

No, he had not stopped anywhere.

She said nothing. Her eyes remained fixed on the corner of the wall, on the St. Paulin bell.

He said to her:

"You are looking at the Nolette."

Vivian Bell laid aside her papers and her pencils.

"You shall soon see a marvel, Monsieur Dechartre. I have found the queen of small bells. I found it at Rimini, in an old building in ruins, which is used as a warehouse. I bought it and packed it myself. I am waiting for it. You shall see. It bears a Christ on a cross, between the Virgin and Saint John, the date of 1400, and the arms of

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

The servant announced that dinner was served.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Choulette began to relate to Madame Marmet the incidents of a call he had made during the day on the Princess of the House of France to whom the Marquise de Rieu had given him a letter of introduction. He liked to impress upon people the fact that he, the Bohemian and vagabond, had been received by that royal Princess, at whose house neither Miss Bell nor the Countess Martin would have been admitted, and whom Prince Albertinelli prided himself on having met one day at some ceremony.

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

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

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

"After waiting in consecutive anterooms, I was at last permitted to kiss her hand."

And he stopped.

Madame Martin asked, impatiently:

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

"She said to me: 'Have you visited Florence? I am told that recently new and handsome shops have been opened which are lighted at night.' She said also 'We have a good chemist here. The Austrian chemists are not better. He placed on my leg, six months ago, a porous plaster which has not yet come off.' Such are the words that Maria Therese deigned to address to me. O simple grandeur! O Christian virtue! O daughter of Saint Louis! O marvellous echo of your voice, holy Elizabeth of Hungary!"

Madame Martin smiled. She thought that Choulette was mocking. But he denied the charge, indignantly, and Miss Bell said that Madame Martin was wrong. It was a fault of the French, she said, to think that people were always jesting.

Then they reverted to the subject of art, which in that country is inhaled with the air.

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

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

"There were at Florence, in the time of the superb Manfred, who was half a Mussulman, men who were said to be of the sect of Epicurus, and who sought for arguments against the existence of God. Guido Cavalcanti disdained the ignorant folk who believed in the immortality of the soul. The following phrase by him was quoted: 'The death of man is exactly similar to that of brutes.' Later, when antique beauty was excavated from ruins, the Christian style of art seemed sad. The painters that worked in the churches and cloisters were neither devout nor chaste. Perugino was an atheist, and did not conceal it."

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

Professor Arrighi defended Pietro Vanucci of Perugia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the drawing-room she said, while serving the coffee:

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

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

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

He wished that she should go in the gardens at the first flush of spring. He contemplated her in advance on the noble terraces; he saw already the light playing on her neck and in her hair; the shadow of laurel-trees falling on her eyes. For him the land and the sky of Florence had nothing more to do than to serve as an adornment to this young woman.

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

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

"So you look at gowns, Monsieur Dechartre?"

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

He continued, in a tone a little more elevated:

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

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

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

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

"Monsieur Dechartre, that life may be great and complete, one must put into it the past and the future. Our works of poetry and of art must be accomplished in honor of the dead and with the thought of those who are to come after us. Thus we shall participate in what has been, in what is, and in what shall be. You do not wish to be immortal, Monsieur Dechartre? Beware, for God may hear you."

Dechartre replied:

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

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

An hour later, in the aesthetic room hung with tapestry, whereon citron-trees loaded with golden fruit formed a fairy forest, Therese, her head on the pillow, and her handsome bare arms folded under her head, was thinking, seeing float confusedly before her the images of her new life: Vivian Bell and her bells, her pre-Raphaelite figures, light as shadows, ladies, isolated knights, indifferent among pious scenes, a little sad, and looking to see who was coming; she thought also of the Prince Albertinelli, Professor Arrighi, Choulette, with his odd play of ideas, and Dechartre, with youthful eyes in a careworn face.

She thought he had a charming imagination, a mind richer than all those that had been revealed to her, and an attraction which she no longer tried to resist. She had always recognized his gift to please. She discovered now that he had the will to please. This idea was delightful to her; she closed her eyes to retain it. Then, suddenly, she shuddered. She had felt a deep blow struck within her in the depth of her being. She had a sudden vision of

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

Robert, his gun under his arm, in the woods. He walked with firm and regular step in the shadowy thicket. She could not see his face, and that troubled her. She bore him no ill-will. She was not discontented with him, but with herself. Robert went straight on, without turning his head, far, and still farther, until he was only a black point in the desolate wood. She thought that perhaps she had been capricious and harsh in leaving him without a word of farewell, without even a letter. He was her lover and her only friend. She never had had another. "I do not wish him to be unfortunate because of me," she thought.

Little by little she was reassured. He loved her, doubtless; but he was not susceptible, not ingenious, happily, in tormenting himself. She said to herself:

"He is hunting and enjoying the sport. He is with his aunt, whom he admires." She calmed her fears and returned to the charming gayety of Florence. She had seen casually, at the Offices, a picture that Dechartre liked. It was a decapitated head of the Medusa, a work wherein Leonardo, the sculptor said, had expressed the minute profundity and tragic refinement of his genius. She wished to see it again, regretting that she had not seen it better at first. She extinguished her lamp and went to sleep.

She dreamed that she met in a deserted church Robert Le Menil enveloped in furs which she had never seen him wear. He was waiting for her, but a crowd of priests had separated them. She did not know what had become of him. She had not seen his face, and that frightened her. She awoke and heard at the open window a sad, monotonous cry, and saw a humming-bird darting about in the light of early dawn. Then, without cause, she began to weep in a passion of self-pity, and with the abandon of a child.

CHAPTER XI. "THE DAWN OF FAITH AND LOVE"

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

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

Near him, Choulette, seated on the balustrade of the terrace, his legs hanging, and his nose in his beard, was still at work on the figure of Misery on his stick.

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

She approached beside the boxwood hedge, holding a parasol and dressed in a straw-colored gown. The faint sunlight of winter enveloped her in pale gold.

Dechartre greeted her joyfully.

She said:

"You are reciting verses that I do not know. I know only Metastasio. My teacher liked only Metastasio. What is the hour when the mind has divine visions?"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

Choulette doubted that the poet meant dreams of the morning, which leave at awakening vivid and painful impressions, and which are not altogether strangers to the flesh. But Dechartre had quoted these verses in the pleasure of the glorious dawn which he had seen that morning on the golden hills. He had been, for a long time, troubled about the images that one sees in sleep, and he believed that these images were not related to the object that preoccupies one the most, but, on the contrary, to ideas abandoned during the day.

Therese recalled her morning dream, the hunter lost in the thicket.

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

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

"That is perhaps true."

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

Therese rested on the balustrade of the terrace and sought in the distance, in the depth of the sea of light, the peaks of Vallambrosa, almost as blue as the sky. Jacques Dechartre looked at her. It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time, such was the delicacy that he discovered in her face, which tenderness and intelligence had invested with thoughtfulness without altering its young, fresh grace. The daylight which she liked, was indulgent to her. And truly she was pretty, bathed in that light of Florence, which caresses beautiful forms and feeds noble thoughts. A fine, pink color rose to her well-rounded cheeks; her eyes, bluish-gray, laughed; and when she talked, the brilliancy of her teeth set off her lips of ardent sweetness. His look embraced her supple bust, her full hips, and the bold attitude of her waist. She held her parasol with her left hand, the other hand played with violets. Dechartre had a mania for beautiful hands. Hands presented to his eyes a physiognomy as striking as the face a character, a soul. These hands enchanted him. They were exquisite. He adored their slender fingers, their pink nails, their palms soft and tender, traversed by lines as elegant as arabesques, and rising at the base of the fingers in harmonious mounts. He examined them with charmed attention until she closed them on the handle of her umbrella. Then, standing behind her, he looked at her again. Her bust and arms, graceful and pure in line, her beautiful form, which was like that of a living amphora, pleased him.

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

It astonished him that she talked, that she thought. The clear sound of her voice amazed him, as if he never had heard it.

He replied at random. He was awkward. She feigned not to notice it, but felt a deep inward joy. His low voice, which was veiled and softened, seemed to caress her. She said ordinary things:

"That view is beautiful, The weather is fine."

CHAPTER XII. HEARTS AWAKENED

In the morning, her head on the embroidered pillow, Therese was thinking of the walks of the day before; of the Virgins, framed with angels; of the innumerable children, painted or carved, all beautiful, all happy, who sing ingenuously the Alleluia of grace and of beauty. In the illustrious chapel of the Brancacci, before those frescoes, pale and resplendent as a divine dawn, he had talked to her of Masaccio, in language so vivid that it had seemed to her as if she had seen him, the adolescent master of the masters, his mouth half open, his eyes dark and blue, dying, enchanted. And she had liked these marvels of a morning more charming than a day. Dechartre was for her the soul of those magnificent forms, the mind of those noble things. It was by him, it was through him, that she understood art and life. She took no interest in things that did not interest him. How had this affection come to her? She had no precise remembrance of it. In the first place, when Paul Vence wished to introduce him to her, she had no desire to know him, no presentiment that he would please her. She recalled elegant bronze statuettes, fine waxworks signed with his name, that she had remarked at the Champ de Mars salon or at Durand-Ruel's. But she did not imagine that he could be agreeable to her, or more seductive than many artists and lovers of art at whom she laughed with her friends. When she saw him, he pleased her; she had a desire to attract him, to see him often. The night he dined at her house she realized that she had for him a noble and elevating affection. But soon after he irritated her a little; it made her impatient to see him closeted within himself and too little preoccupied by her. She would have liked to disturb him. She was in that state of impatience when she met him one evening, in front of the grille of the Musee des Religions, and he talked to her of Ravenna and of the Empress seated on a gold chair in her tomb. She had found him serious and charming, his voice warm, his eyes soft in the shadow of the night, but too much a stranger, too far from her, too unknown. She had felt a sort of uneasiness, and she did not know, when she walked along the boxwood bordering the terrace, whether she desired to see him every day or never to see him again.

Since then, at Florence, her only pleasure was to feel that he was near her, to hear him. He made life for her charming, diverse, animated, new. He revealed to her delicate joys and a delightful sadness; he awakened in her a voluptuousness which had been always dormant. Now she was determined never to give him up. But how? She foresaw difficulties; her lucid mind and her temperament presented them all to her. For a moment she tried to deceive herself; she reflected that perhaps he, a dreamer, exalted, lost in his studies of art, might remain assiduous without being exacting. But she did not wish to reassure herself with that idea. If Dechartre were not a lover, he lost all his charm. She did not dare to think of the future. She lived in the present, happy, anxious, and closing her eyes.

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

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

"I was astounded to hear of your departure. Your husband received me. He said that, yielding to his advice, you had gone to finish the winter at Florence with Miss Bell. He said that for some time you had looked pale and thin. He thought a change of air would do you good. You had not wished to go, but, as you suffered more and more, he succeeded in persuading you.

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

at once, I pray you.

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

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

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

Having read this letter, she tore it up gently, threw it in the fire, and calmly watched it burn.

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

Anxious, she thought: "He trusts me. He suspects nothing." This made her more impatient than anything. It irritated her to think that there were simple people who doubt neither themselves nor others.

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

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

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

"May I look?"

"Look if you wish, dear. They are verses made on the model of the popular songs of your country."

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

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

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

had come to her the day before.

"You had gone, darling, to Carmine with Monsieur Dechartre, and you had left at Fiesole Madame Marmet, who is an agreeable person, a moderate and polished woman. She knows many anecdotes about persons of distinction who live in Paris. And when she tells them, she does as my cook Pompaloni does when he serves eggs: he does not put salt in them, but he puts the salt-cellar next to them. Madame Marmet's tongue is very sweet, but the salt is near it, in her eyes. Her conversation is like Pompaloni's dish, my love each one seasons to his taste. Oh, I like Madame Marmet a great deal. Yesterday, after you had gone, I found her alone and sad in a corner of the drawing-room. She was thinking mournfully of her husband. I said to her: 'Do you wish me to think of your husband, too? I will think of him with you. I have been told that he was a learned man, a member of the Royal Society of Paris. Madame Marmet, talk to me of him.' She replied that he had devoted himself to the Etruscans, and that he had given to them his entire life. Oh, darling, I cherished at once the memory of that Monsieur Marmet, who lived for the Etruscans. And then a good idea came to me. I said to Madame Marmet, 'We have at Fiesole, in the Pretorio Palace, a modest little Etruscan museum. Come and visit it with me. Will you?' She replied it was what she most desired to see in Italy. We went to the Pretorio Palace; we saw a lioness and a great many little bronze figures, grotesque, very fat or very thin. The Etruscans were a seriously gay people. They made bronze caricatures. But the monkeys some afflicted with big stomachs, others astonished to show their bones Madame Marmet looked at them with reluctant admiration. She contemplated them like there is a beautiful French word that escapes me like the monuments and the trophies of Monsieur Marmet."

Madame Martin smiled. But she was restless. She thought the sky dull, the streets ugly, the passers-by common.

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

"I do not think so."

"Why, darling, why?"

"Because I do not please him much."

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

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

The Countess Martin recognized at once a banal and doubtful collection; she felt bored among the multitude of little Parrocels, showing in the darkness a bit of armor and a white horse.

A valet presented a card.

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

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

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

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

Miss Bell babbled to the Prince her usual prattle about those old men and those Virgins whose blue mantles were agitated by an immovable tempest. Dechartre, pale, enervated, approached Therese, and said to her, in a low tone:

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

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

"I have seen that Holy Family in the shops of picture–dealers of London, of Basle, and of Paris. As they could not get the twenty–five louis that it is worth, they have commissioned the last of the Albertinellis to sell it for fifty thousand francs."

The Prince, divining what they were saying, approached them gracefully.

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

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

Dechartre felt uneasy. Since the day before he had thought of Therese. He had all night dreamed and yearned over her image. He saw her again, delightful, but in another manner, and even more desirable than he had imagined in his insomnia; less visionary, of a more vivid piquancy, and also of a mind more mysteriously impenetrable. She was sad; she seemed cold and indifferent. He said to himself that he was nothing to her; that he was becoming importunate and ridiculous. This irritated him. He murmured bitterly in her ear: "I have reflected. I did not wish to come. Why did I come?" She understood at once what he meant, that he feared her now, and that he was impatient, timid, and awkward. It pleased her that he was thus, and she was grateful to him for the trouble and the desires he inspired in her. Her heart throbbed faster. But, affecting to understand that he regretted having disturbed himself to come and look at bad paintings, she replied that in truth this gallery was not interesting. Already, under the terror of displeasing her, he felt reassured, and believed that, really indifferent, she had not perceived the accent nor the significance of what he had said. He said "No, nothing interesting." The Prince, who had invited the two visitors to breakfast, asked their friend to remain with them. Dechartre excused himself. He was about to depart when, in the large empty salon, he found himself alone with Madame Martin. He had had the idea of running away from her. He had no other wish now than to see her again. He recalled to her that she was the next morning to visit the Bargello. "You have permitted me to accompany you." She asked him if he had not found her moody and tiresome. Oh, no; he had not thought her tiresome, but he feared she was sad.

"Alas," he added, "your sadness, your joys, I have not the right to know them." She turned toward him a glance almost harsh. "You do not think that I shall take you for a confidante, do you?" And she walked away brusquely.

CHAPTER XIII. "YOU MUST TAKE ME WITH MY OWN SOUL!"

After dinner, in the salon of the bells, under the lamps from which the great shades permitted only an obscure light to filter, good Madame Marmet was warming herself by the hearth, with a white cat on her knees. The

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

evening was cool. Madame Martin, her eyes reminiscent of the golden light, the violet peaks, and the ancient trees of Florence, smiled with happy fatigue. She had gone with Miss Bell, Dechartre, and Madame Marmet to the Chartrist convent of Ema. And now, in the intoxication of her visions, she forgot the care of the day before, the importunate letters, the distant reproaches, and thought of nothing in the world but cloisters chiselled and painted, villages with red roofs, and roads where she saw the first blush of spring. Dechartre had modelled for Miss Bell a waxen figure of Beatrice. Vivian was painting angels. Softly bent over her, Prince Albertinelli caressed his beard and threw around him glances that appeared to seek admiration.

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

"A woman must choose," he said. "With a man whom women love her heart is not quiet. With a man whom the women do not love she is not happy."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you speaking, Mademoiselle, of the solemn union between man and woman? In this sense, marriage is a sacrament. But sometimes, alas! it is almost a sacrilege. As for civil marriage, it is a formality. The importance given to it in our society is an idiotic thing which would have made the women of other times laugh. We owe this prejudice, like many others, to the bourgeois, to the mad performances of a lot of financiers which have been called the Revolution, and which seem admirable to those that have profited by it. Civil marriage is, in reality, only registry, like many others which the State exacts in order to be sure of the condition of persons: in every well organized state everybody must be indexed. Morally, this registry in a big ledger has not even the virtue of inducing a wife to take a lover. Who ever thinks of betraying an oath taken before a mayor? In order to find joy in adultery, one must be pious."

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

Then, with an accent of sincerity:

"I can not understand how a man ever makes up his mind to marry; nor how a woman, after she has reached an age when she knows what she is doing, can commit that folly."

The Prince looked at her with distrust. He was clever, but he was incapable of conceiving that one might talk without an object, disinterestedly, and to express general ideas. He imagined that Countess Martin-Belleme was

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

suggesting to him projects that she wished him to consider. And as he was thinking of defending himself and also avenging himself, he made velvet eyes at her and talked with tender gallantry:

"You display, Madame, the pride of the beautiful and intelligent French women whom subjection irritates. French women love liberty, and none of them is as worthy of liberty as you. I have lived in France a little. I have known and admired the elegant society of Paris, the salons, the festivals, the conversations, the plays. But in our mountains, under our olive-trees, we become rustic again. We assume golden-age manners, and marriage is for us an idyl full of freshness."

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

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

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

Impatient at praise which was not destined for himself, jealous of Dante as of the universe, a refined man of letters, Choulette continued:

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

And he lighted his pipe.

Vivian Bell exclaimed:

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

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

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

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

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

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

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

"Oh, how violent you are!"

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

"You must take me with my own soul!"

Therese felt a shiver of fear mingled with joy.

CHAPTER XIV. THE AVOWAL

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

She saw again in her mind this cuirassier, which he had shown to her one day, with pride, in his bedroom, near the mirror, under family portraits. All this, at a distance, seemed to her petty and tiresome. She finished her letter with words of friendship, the sweetness of which was not feigned. Truly, she had never felt more peaceful and gentle toward her lover. In four pages she had said little and explained less. She announced only that she should stay a month in Florence, the air of which did her good. Then she wrote to her father, to her husband, and to Princess Seniavine. She went down the stairway with the letters in her hand. In the hall she threw three of them on the silver tray destined to receive papers for the post-office. Mistrusting Madame Marmet, she slipped into her pocket the letter to Le Menil, counting on chance to throw it into a post-box.

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

Without believing that characters could be divined through penmanship, he was susceptible to the form of letters as to elegance of drawing. The writing of Therese charmed him, and he liked its openness, the bold and simple turn of its lines. He looked at the addresses without reading them, with an artist's admiration.

They visited, that morning, Santa Maria Novella, where the Countess Martin had already gone with Madame Marmet. But Miss Bell had reproached them for not observing the beautiful Ginevra of Benci on a fresco of the choir. "You must visit that figure of the morning in a morning light," said Vivian. While the poetess and Therese

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

were talking together, Dechartre listened patiently to Madame Marmet's conversation, filled with anecdotes, wherein academicians dined with elegant women, and shared the anxiety of that lady, much preoccupied for several days by the necessity to buy a tulle veil. She could find none to her taste in the shops of Florence.

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

"I have made for my little companion a wooden leg out of a match, and he hops upon my shoulder as formerly," said the cobbler.

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

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

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

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

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

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

She said to him:

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

He replied:

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

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

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

"You know . . . "

She looked at him and waited.

He finished his phrase:

". . . that I love you?"

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

CHAPTER XV. THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER

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

As they came out of the palazzo, in order to avoid the wind which was blowing on the river, Miss Bell led her friends into the old streets with black stone houses and a view of the distant horizon, where, in the pure air, stands a hill with three slender trees. They walked; and Vivian showed to her friend, on facades where red rags were hanging, some marble masterpiece a Virgin, a lily, a St. Catherine. They walked through these alleys of the antique city to the church of Or San Michele, where it had been agreed that Dechartre should meet them. Therese was thinking of him now with deepest interest. Madame Marmet was thinking of buying a veil; she hoped to find one on the Corso. This affair recalled to her M. Lagrange, who, at his regular lecture one day, took from his pocket a veil with gold dots and wiped his forehead with it, thinking it was his handkerchief. The audience was astonished, and whispered to one another. It was a veil that had been confided to him the day before by his niece, Mademoiselle Jeanne Michot, whom he had accompanied to the theatre, and Madame Marmet explained how, finding it in the pocket of his overcoat, he had taken it to return it to his niece.

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

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

But "darling" said that he looked precise, tiresome, and stubborn. At this moment she recalled suddenly the letter that was still in her pocket.

"Ah! here comes Monsieur Dechartre," said the good Madame Marmet.

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

When Therese approached the statue which he was pointing out to her, she saw a post-box against the wall of the narrow street opposite the saint. Dechartre, placed at the most convenient point of view, talked of his St. Mark with abundant friendship.

"It is to him I make my first visit when I come to Florence. I failed to do this only once. He will forgive me; he is an excellent man. He is not appreciated by the crowd, and does not attract attention. I take pleasure in his society,

however. He is vivid. I understand that Donatello, after giving a soul to him, exclaimed: 'Mark, why do you not speak?'"

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

Therese and Dechartre remained.

"I like him," continued the sculptor; "I like Saint Mark because I feel in him, much more than in the Saint George, the hand and mind of Donatello, who was a good workman. I like him even more to-day, because he recalls to me, in his venerable and touching candor, the old cobbler to whom you were speaking so kindly this morning."

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

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

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

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

Perhaps it was a letter to Madame Schmoll, who was not a friend of Madame Marmet, but immediately he realized that this idea was foolish.

All was clear. She had a lover. She was writing to him. Perhaps she was saying to him: "I saw Dechartre to-day; the poor fellow is deeply in love with me." But whether she wrote that or something else, she had a lover. He had not thought of that. To know that she belonged to another made him suffer profoundly. And that hand, that little hand dropping the letter, remained in his eyes and made them burn.

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

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

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

"I must speak to you. I must see you alone tomorrow; meet me at six o'clock at the Lungarno Acciaoli."

She made no reply.

CHAPTER XVI. "TO-MORROW?"

When, in her Carmelite mantle, she came to the Lungarno Acciaoli, at about half-past six, Dechartre greeted her

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

with a humble look that moved her. The setting sun made the Arno purple. They remained silent for a moment. While they were walking past the monotonous line of palaces to the old bridge, she was the first to speak.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We could make of life a delightful garden."

She feigned to think that the dream was innocent.

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

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

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

"I found you in my path. I do not wish to lose you. No, I do not wish to lose you."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

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

But, with the tranquil tone of her voice and with the rustle of her skirts on the pavement, she irritated him.

He told her how he suffered. He knew now the divine malady of love.

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

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

The black avalanche had disappeared. There were women weeping behind the coffin carried by the black phantoms, who wore heavy shoes.

Therese sighed:

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

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

"Before I knew you I was not unhappy. I liked life. I was retained in it by dreams. I liked forms, and the mind in forms, the appearances that caress and flatter. I had the joy of seeing and of dreaming. I enjoyed everything and depended upon nothing. My desires, abundant and light, I gratified without fatigue. I was interested in everything and wished for nothing. One suffers only through the will. Without knowing it, I was happy. Oh, it was not much, it was only enough to live. Now I have no joy in life. My pleasures, the interest that I took in the images of life and of art, the vivid amusement of creating with my hands the figures of my dreams you have made me lose everything and have not left me even regret. I do not want my liberty and tranquillity again. It seems to me that before I knew you I did not live; and now that I feel that I am living, I can not live either far from you or near you. I am more wretched than the beggars we saw on the road to Ema. They had air to breathe, and I can breathe only you, whom I have not. Yet I am glad to have known you. That alone counts in my existence. A moment ago I thought I hated you. I was wrong; I adore you, and I bless you for the harm you have done me. I love all that comes to me from you."

They were nearing the black trees at the entrance to San Niccola bridge. On the other side of the river the vague fields displayed their sadness, intensified by night. Seeing that he was calm and full of a soft languor, she thought that his love, all imagination, had fled in words, and that his desires had become only a reverie. She had not expected so prompt a resignation. It almost disappointed her to escape the danger she had feared.

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

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

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

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

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

He pressed her in his arms; and seeking the light of her eyes through the obscurity of her veil, said "You must love me. I desire you to love me, and it is your fault, for you have desired it too. Say that you are mine. Say it."

Having gently disengaged herself, she replied, faintly and slowly "I can not! I can not! You see I am acting frankly with you. I said to you a moment ago that you had not displeased me. But I can not do as you wish."

And recalling to her thought the absent one who was waiting for her, she repeated: "I can not!" Bending over her he anxiously questioned her eyes, the double stars that trembled and veiled themselves. "Why? You love me, I feel it, I see it. You love me. Why will you do me this wrong?"

He drew her to him, wishing to lay his soul, with his lips, on her veiled lips. She escaped him swiftly, saying: "I can not. Do not ask more. I can not be yours."

His lips trembled, his face was convulsed. He exclaimed "You have a lover, and you love him. Why do you mock me?"

"I swear to you I have no desire to mock you, and that if I loved any one in the world it would be you." But he was not listening to her.

"Leave me, leave me!" And he ran toward the dark fields. The Arno formed lagoons, upon which the moon, half veiled, shone fitfully. He walked through the water and the mud, with a step rapid, blind, like that of one intoxicated. She took fright and shouted. She called him. But he did not turn his head and made no answer. He fled with alarming recklessness. She ran after him. Her feet were hurt by the stones, and her skirt was heavy with water, but soon she overtook him.

"What were you about to do?"

He looked at her, and saw her fright in her eyes. "Do not be afraid," he said. "I did not see where I was going. I assure you I did not intend to kill myself. I am desperate, but I am calm. I was only trying to escape from you. I beg your pardon. But I could not see you any longer. Leave me, I pray you. Farewell!"

She replied, agitated and trembling: "Come! We shall do what we can."

He remained sombre and made no reply. She repeated "Come!"

She took his arm. The living warmth of her hand animated him. He said:

"Do you wish it?"

"I can not leave you."

"You promise?"

"I must."

And, in her anxiety and anguish, she almost smiled, in thinking that he had succeeded so quickly by his folly.

"To-morrow?" said he, inquiringly.

She replied quickly, with a defensive instinct:

"Oh, no; not to-morrow!"

"You do not love me; you regret that you have promised."

"No, I do not regret, but

He implored, he supplicated her. She looked at him for a moment, turned her head, hesitated, and said, in a low tone:

"Saturday."

CHAPTER XVII. MISS BELL ASKS A QUESTION

After dinner, Miss Bell was sketching in the drawing-room. She was tracing, on canvas, profiles of bearded Etruscans for a cushion which Madame Marmet was to embroider. Prince Albertinelli was selecting the wool with an almost feminine knowledge of shades. It was late when Choulette, having, as was his habit, played briscola with the cook at the caterer's, appeared, as joyful as if he possessed the mind of a god. He took a seat on a sofa, beside Madame Martin, and looked at her tenderly. Voluptuousness shone in his green eyes. He enveloped her, while talking to her, with poetic and picturesque phrases. It was like the sketch of a lovesong that he was improvising for her. In oddly involved sentences, he told her of the charm that she exhaled.

"He, too!" said she to herself.

She amused herself by teasing him. She asked whether he had not found in Florence, in the low quarters, one of the kind of women whom he liked to visit. His preferences were known. He could deny it as much as he wished: no one was ignorant of the door where he had found the cordon of his Third Order. His friends had met him on the boulevard. His taste for unfortunate women was evident in his most beautiful poems.

"Oh, Monsieur Choulette, so far as I am able to judge, you like very bad women."

He replied with solemnity:

"Madame, you may collect the grain of calumny sown by Monsieur Paul Vence and throw handfuls of it at me. I will not try to avoid it. It is not necessary you should know that I am chaste and that my mind is pure. But do not judge lightly those whom you call unfortunate, and who should be sacred to you, since they are unfortunate. The disdained and lost girl is the docile clay under the finger of the Divine Potter: she is the victim and the altar of the holocaust. The unfortunates are nearer God than the honest women: they have lost conceit. They do not glorify themselves with the untried virtue the matron prides herself on. They possess humility, which is the cornerstone of virtues agreeable to heaven. A short repentance will be sufficient for them to be the first in heaven; for their sins, without malice and without joy, contain their own forgiveness. Their faults, which are pains, participate in the merits attached to pain; slaves to brutal passion, they are deprived of all voluptuousness, and in this they are like the men who practise continence for the kingdom of God. They are like us, culprits; but shame falls on their

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

crime like a balm, suffering purifies it like fire. That is the reason why God will listen to the first voice which they shall send to him. A throne is prepared for them at the right hand of the Father. In the kingdom of God, the queen and the empress will be happy to sit at the feet of the unfortunate; for you must not think that the celestial house is built on a human plan. Far from it, Madame."

Nevertheless, he conceded that more than one road led to salvation. One could follow the road of love.

"Man's love is earthly," he said, "but it rises by painful degrees, and finally leads to God."

The Prince had risen. Kissing Miss Bell's hand, he said:

"Saturday."

"Yes, the day after to-morrow, Saturday," replied Vivian.

Therese started. Saturday! They were talking of Saturday quietly, as of an ordinary day. Until then she had not wished to think that Saturday would come so soon or so naturally.

The guests had been gone for half an hour. Therese, tired, was thinking in her bed, when she heard a knock at the door of her room. The panel opened, and Vivian's little head appeared.

"I am not intruding, darling? You are not sleepy?"

No, Therese had no desire to sleep. She rose on her elbow. Vivian sat on the bed, so light that she made no impression on it.

"Darling, I am sure you have a great deal of reason. Oh, I am sure of it. You are reasonable in the same way that Monsieur Sadler is a violinist. He plays a little out of tune when he wishes. And you, too, when you are not quite logical, it is for your own pleasure. Oh, darling, you have a great deal of reason and of judgment, and I come to ask your advice."

Astonished, and a little anxious, Therese denied that she was logical. She denied this very sincerely. But Vivian would not listen to her.

"I have read Francois Rabelais a great deal, my love. It is in Rabelais and in Villon that I studied French. They are good old masters of language. But, darling, do you know the 'Pantagruel?' 'Pantagruel' is like a beautiful and noble city, full of palaces, in the resplendent dawn, before the street-sweepers of Paris have come. The sweepers have not taken out the dirt, and the maids have not washed the marble steps. And I have seen that French women do not read the 'Pantagruel.' You do not know it? Well, it is not necessary. In the 'Pantagruel,' Panurge asks whether he must marry, and he covers himself with ridicule, my love. Well, I am quite as laughable as he, since I am asking the same question of you."

Therese replied with an uneasiness she did not try to conceal:

"As for that, my dear, do not ask me. I have already told you my opinion."

"But, darling, you have said that only men are wrong to marry. I can not take that advice for myself."

Madame Martin looked at the little boyish face and head of Miss Bell, which oddly expressed tenderness and modesty.

Then she embraced her, saying:

"Dear, there is not a man in the world exquisite and delicate enough for you."

She added, with an expression of affectionate gravity:

"You are not a child. If some one loves you, and you love him, do what you think you ought to do, without mingling interests and combinations that have nothing to do with sentiment. This is the advice of a friend."

Miss Bell hesitated a moment. Then she blushed and arose. She had been a little shocked.

CHAPTER XVIII. "I KISS YOUR FEET BECAUSE THEY HAVE COME!"

Saturday, at four o'clock, Therese went, as she had promised, to the gate of the English cemetery. There she found Dechartre. He was serious and agitated; he spoke little. She was glad he did not display his joy. He led her by the deserted walls of the gardens to a narrow street which she did not know. She read on a signboard: Via Alfieri. After they had taken fifty steps, he stopped before a sombre alley:

"It is in there," he said.

She looked at him with infinite sadness.

"You wish me to go in?"

She saw he was resolute, and followed him without saying a word, into the humid shadow of the alley. He traversed a courtyard where the grass grew among the stones. In the back was a pavilion with three windows, with columns and a front ornamented with goats and nymphs. On the moss-covered steps he turned in the lock a key that creaked and resisted. He murmured

"It is rusty."

She replied, without thought "All the keys are rusty in this country."

They went up a stairway so silent that it seemed to have forgotten the sound of footsteps. He pushed open a door and made Therese enter the room. She went straight to a window opening on the cemetery. Above the wall rose the tops of pine-trees, which are not funereal in this land where mourning is mingled with joy without troubling it, where the sweetness of living extends to the city of the dead. He took her hand and led her to an armchair. He remained standing, and looked at the room which he had prepared so that she would not find herself lost in it. Panels of old print cloth, with figures of Comedy, gave to the walls the sadness of past gayeties. He had placed in a corner a dim pastel which they had seen together at an antiquary's, and which, for its shadowy grace, she called the shade of Rosalba. There was a grandmother's armchair; white chairs; and on the table painted cups and Venetian glasses. In all the corners were screens of colored paper, whereon were masks, grotesque figures, the light soul of Florence, of Bologna, and of Venice in the time of the Grand Dukes and of the last Doges. A mirror and a carpet completed the furnishings.

He closed the window and lighted the fire. She sat in the armchair, and as she remained in it erect, he knelt before her, took her hands, kissed them, and looked at her with a wondering expression, timorous and proud. Then he pressed his lips to the tip of her boot.

"What are you doing?"

"I kiss your feet because they have come."

He rose, drew her to him softly, and placed a long kiss on her lips. She remained inert, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. Her toque fell, her hair dropped on her shoulders.

Two hours later, when the setting sun made immeasurably longer the shadows on the stones, Therese, who had wished to walk alone in the city, found herself in front of the two obelisks of Santa Maria Novella without knowing how she had reached there. She saw at the corner of the square the old cobbler drawing his string with his eternal gesture. He smiled, bearing his sparrow on his shoulder.

She went into the shop, and sat on a chair. She said in French:

"Quentin Matsys, my friend, what have I done, and what will become of me?"

He looked at her quietly, with laughing kindness, not understanding nor caring. Nothing astonished him. She shook her head.

"What I did, my good Quentin, I did because he was suffering, and because I loved him. I regret nothing."

He replied, as was his habit, with the sonorous syllable of Italy:

"Si! si!"

"Is it not so, Quentin? I have not done wrong? But, my God! what will happen now?"

She prepared to go. He made her understand that he wished her to wait. He culled carefully a bit of basilick and offered it to her.

"For its fragrance, signora!"

CHAPTER XIX. CHOULETTE TAKES A JOURNEY

It was the next day.

Having carefully placed on the drawing-room table his knotty stick, his pipe, and his antique carpet-bag, Choulette bowed to Madame Martin, who was reading at the window. He was going to Assisi. He wore a sheepskin coat, and resembled the old shepherds in pictures of the Nativity.

"Farewell, Madame. I am quitting Fiesole, you, Dechartre, the too handsome Prince Albertinelli, and that gentle ogress, Miss Bell. I am going to visit the Assisi mountain, which the poet says must be named no longer Assisi, but the Orient, because it is there that the sun of love rose. I am going to kneel before the happy crypt where Saint Francis is resting in a stone manger, with a stone for a pillow. For he would not even take out of this world a shroud out of this world where he left the revelation of all joy and of all kindness."

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Bring me a medal of Saint Clara. I like Saint Clara a great deal."

"You are right, Madame; she was a woman of strength and prudence. When Saint Francis, ill and almost blind, came to spend a few days at Saint Damien, near his friend, she built with her own hands a hut for him in the garden. Pain, languor, and burning eyelids deprived him of sleep. Enormous rats came to attack him at night. Then he composed a joyous canticle in praise of our splendid brother the Sun, and our sister the Water, chaste,

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

useful, and pure. My most beautiful verses have less charm and splendor. And it is just that it should be thus, for Saint Francis's soul was more beautiful than his mind. I am better than all my contemporaries whom I have known, yet I am worth nothing. When Saint Francis had composed his Song of the Sun he rejoiced. He thought: "We shall go, my brothers and I, into the cities, and stand in the public squares, with a lute, on the market-day. Good people will come near us, and we shall say to them: "We are the jugglers of God, and we shall sing a lay to you. If you are pleased, you will reward us." They will promise, and when we shall have sung, we shall recall their promise to them. We shall say to them: "You owe a reward to us. And the one that we ask of you is that you love one another." Doubtless, to keep their word and not injure God's poor jugglers, they will avoid doing ill to others."

Madame Martin thought St. Francis was the most amiable of the saints.

"His work," replied Choulette, "was destroyed while he lived. Yet he died happy, because in him was joy with humility. He was, in fact, God's sweet singer. And it is right that another poor poet should take his task and teach the world true religion and true joy. I shall be that poet, Madame, if I can despoil myself of reason and of conceit. For all moral beauty is achieved in this world through the inconceivable wisdom that comes from God and resembles folly."

"I shall not discourage you, Monsieur Choulette. But I am anxious about the fate which you reserve for the poor women in your new society. You will imprison them all in convents."

"I confess," replied Choulette, "that they embarrass me a great deal in my project of reform. The violence with which one loves them is harsh and injurious. The pleasure they give is not peaceful, and does not lead to joy. I have committed for them, in my life, two or three abominable crimes of which no one knows. I doubt whether I shall ever invite you to supper, Madame, in the new Saint Mary of the Angels." He took his pipe, his carpet-bag, and his stick:

"The crimes of love shall be forgiven. Or, rather, one can not do evil when one loves purely. But sensual love is formed of hatred, selfishness, and anger as much as of passion. Because I found you beautiful one night, on this sofa, I was assailed by a cloud of violent thoughts. I had come from the Albergo, where I had heard Miss Bell's cook improvise magnificently twelve hundred verses on Spring. I was inundated by a celestial joy which the sight of you made me lose. It must be that a profound truth is enclosed in the curse of Eve. For, near you, I felt reckless and wicked. I had soft words on my lips. They were lies. I felt that I was your adversary and your enemy; I hated you. When I saw you smile, I felt a desire to kill you."

"Truly?"

"Oh, Madame, it is a very natural sentiment, which you must have inspired more than once. But common people feel it without being conscious of it, while my vivid imagination represents me to myself incessantly. I contemplate my mind, at times splendid, often hideous. If you had been able to read my mind that night you would have screamed with fright."

Therese smiled:

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette. Do not forget my medal of Saint Clara."

He placed his bag on the floor, raised his arm, and pointed his finger:

"You have nothing to fear from me. But the one whom you will love and who will love you will harm you. Farewell, Madame."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

He took his luggage and went out. She saw his long, rustic form disappear behind the bushes of the garden.

In the afternoon she went to San Marco, where Dechartre was waiting for her. She desired yet she feared to see him again so soon. She felt an anguish which an unknown sentiment, profoundly soft, appeased. She did not feel the stupor of the first time that she had yielded for love; she did not feel the brusque vision of the irreparable. She was under influences slower, more vague, and more powerful. This time a charming reverie bathed the reminiscence of the caresses which she had received. She was full of trouble and anxiety, but she felt no regret. She had acted less through her will than through a force which she divined to be higher. She absolved herself because of her disinterestedness. She counted on nothing, having calculated nothing.

Doubtless, she had been wrong to yield, since she was not free; but she had exacted nothing. Perhaps she was for him only a violent caprice. She did not know him. She had not one of those vivid imaginations that surpass immensely, in good as in evil, common mediocrity. If he went away from her and disappeared she would not reproach him for it; at least, she thought not. She would keep the reminiscence and the imprint of the rarest and most precious thing one may find in the world. Perhaps he was incapable of real attachment. He thought he loved her. He had loved her for an hour. She dared not wish for more, in the embarrassment of the false situation which irritated her frankness and her pride, and which troubled the lucidity of her intelligence. While the carriage was carrying her to San Marco, she persuaded herself that he would say nothing to her of the day before, and that the room from which one could see the pines rise to the sky would leave to them only the dream of a dream.

He extended his hand to her. Before he had spoken she saw in his look that he loved her as much now as before, and she perceived at the same time that she wished him to be thus.

"You " he said, "I have been here since noon. I was waiting, knowing that you would not come so soon, but able to live only at the place where I was to see you. It is you! Talk; let me see and hear you."

"Then you still love me?"

"It is now that I love you. I thought I loved you when you were only a phantom. Now, you are the being in whose hands I have put my soul. It is true that you are mine! What have I done to obtain the greatest, the only, good of this world? And those men with whom the earth is covered think they are living! I alone live! Tell me, what have I done to obtain you?"

"Oh, what had to be done, I did. I say this to you frankly. If we have reached that point, the fault is mine. You see, women do not always confess it, but it is always their fault. So, whatever may happen, I never will reproach you for anything."

An agile troupe of yelling beggars, guides, and coachmen surrounded them with an importunity wherein was mingled the gracefulness which Italians never lose. Their subtlety made them divine that these were lovers, and they knew that lovers are prodigal. Dechartre threw coin to them, and they all returned to their happy laziness.

A municipal guard received the visitors. Madame Martin regretted that there was no monk. The white gown of the Dominicans was so beautiful under the arcades of the cloister!

They visited the cells where, on the bare plaster, Fra Angelico, aided by his brother Benedetto, painted innocent pictures for his companions.

"Do you recall the winter night when, meeting you before the Guimet Museum, I accompanied you to the narrow street bordered by small gardens which leads to the Billy Quay? Before separating we stopped a moment on the parapet along which runs a thin boxwood hedge. You looked at that boxwood, dried by winter. And when you went away I looked at it for a long time."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

They were in the cell wherein Savonarola lived. The guide showed to them the portrait and the relics of the martyr.

"What could there have been in me that you liked that day? It was dark."

"I saw you walk. It is in movements that forms speak. Each one of your steps told me the secrets of your charming beauty. Oh! my imagination was never discreet in anything that concerned you. I did not dare to speak to you. When I saw you, it frightened me. It frightened me because you could do everything for me. When you were present, I adored you tremblingly. When you were far from me, I felt all the impieties of desire."

"I did not suspect this. But do you recall the first time we saw each other, when Paul Vence introduced you? You were seated near a screen. You were looking at the miniatures. You said to me: 'This lady, painted by Siccardi, resembles Andre Chenier's mother.' I replied to you: 'She is my husband's great-grandmother. How did Andre Chenier's mother look?' And you said: 'There is a portrait of her: a faded Levantine.'"

He excused himself and thought that he had not spoken so impertinently.

"You did. My memory is better than yours."

They were walking in the white silence of the convent. They saw the cell which Angelico had ornamented with the loveliest painting. And there, before the Virgin who, in the pale sky, receives from God the Father the immortal crown, he took Therese in his arms and placed a kiss on her lips, almost in view of two Englishwomen who were walking through the corridors, consulting their Baedeker. She said to him:

"We must not forget Saint Anthony's cell."

"Therese, I am suffering in my happiness from everything that is yours and that escapes me. I am suffering because you do not live for me alone. I wish to have you wholly, and to have had you in the past."

She shrugged her shoulders a little.

"Oh, the past!"

"The past is the only human reality. Everything that is, is past."

She raised toward him her eyes, which resembled bits of blue sky full of mingled sun and rain.

"Well, I may say this to you: I never have felt that I lived except with you."

When she returned to Fiesole, she found a brief and threatening letter from Le Menil. He could not understand, her prolonged absence, her silence. If she did not announce at once her return, he would go to Florence for her.

She read without astonishment, but was annoyed to see that everything disagreeable that could happen was happening, and that nothing would be spared to her of what she had feared. She could still calm him and reassure him: she had only to say to him that she loved him; that she would soon return to Paris; that he should renounce the foolish idea of rejoining her here; that Florence was a village where they would be watched at once. But she would have to write: "I love you." She must quiet him with caressing phrases.

She had not the courage to do it. She would let him guess the truth. She accused herself in veiled terms. She wrote obscurely of souls carried away by the flood of life, and of the atom one is on the moving ocean of events. She asked him, with affectionate sadness, to keep of her a fond reminiscence in a corner of his soul.

She took the letter to the post-office box on the Fiesole square. Children were playing in the twilight. She looked from the top of the hill to the beautiful cup which carried beautiful Florence like a jewel. And the peace of night made her shiver. She dropped the letter into the box. Then only she had the clear vision of what she had done and of what the result would be.

CHAPTER XX. WHAT IS FRANKNESS?

In the square, where the spring sun scattered its yellow roses, the bells at noon dispersed the rustic crowd of grain-merchants assembled to sell their wares. At the foot of the Lanzi, before the statues, the venders of ices had placed, on tables covered with red cotton, small castles bearing the inscription: 'Bibite ghiacciate'. And joy descended from heaven to earth. Therese and Jacques, returning from an early promenade in the Boboli Gardens, were passing before the illustrious loggia. Therese looked at the Sabine by John of Bologna with that interested curiosity of a woman examining another woman. But Dechartre looked at Therese only. He said to her:

"It is marvellous how the vivid light of day flatters your beauty, loves you, and caresses the mother-of-pearl on your cheeks."

"Yes," she said. "Candle-light hardens my features. I have observed this. I am not an evening woman, unfortunately. It is at night that women have a chance to show themselves and to please. At night, Princess Seniavine has a fine blond complexion; in the sun she is as yellow as a lemon. It must be owned that she does not care. She is not a coquette."

"And you are?"

"Oh, yes. Formerly I was a coquette for myself, now I am a coquette for you."

She looked at the Sabine woman, who with her waving arms, long and robust, tried to avoid the Roman's embraces.

"To be beautiful, must a woman have that thin form and that length of limb? I am not shaped in that way."

He took pains to reassure her. But she was not disturbed about it. She was looking now at the little castle of the ice-vender. A sudden desire had come to her to eat an ice standing there, as the working-girls of the city stood.

"Wait a moment," said Dechartre.

He ran toward the street that follows the left side of the Lanzi, and disappeared.

After a moment he came back, and gave her a little gold spoon, the handle of which was finished in a lily of Florence, with its chalice enamelled in red.

"You must eat your ice with this. The man does not give a spoon with his ices. You would have had to put out your tongue. It would have been pretty, but you are not accustomed to it."

She recognized the spoon, a jewel which she had remarked the day before in the showcase of an antiquarian.

They were happy; they disseminated their joy, which was full and simple, in light words which had no sense. And they laughed when the Florentine repeated to them passages of the old Italian writers. She enjoyed the play of his face, which was antique in style and jovial in expression. But she did not always understand what he said. She asked Jacques:

"What did he say?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

Yes, she wished to know.

"Well, he said he should be happy if the fleas in his bed were shaped like you!"

When she had eaten the ice, he asked her to return to San Michele. It was so near! They would cross the square and at once discover the masterpiece in stone. They went. They looked at the St. George and at the bronze St. Mark. Dechartre saw again on the wall the post-box, and he recalled with painful exactitude the little gloved hand that had dropped the letter. He thought it hideous, that copper mouth which had swallowed Therese's secret. He could not turn his eyes away from it. All his gayety had fled. She admired the rude statue of the Evangelist.

"It is true that he looks honest and frank, and it seems that, if he spoke, nothing but words of truth would come out of his mouth."

He replied bitterly:

"It is not a woman's mouth."

She understood his thought, and said, in her soft tone:

"My friend, why do you say this to me? I am frank."

"What do you call frank? You know that a woman is obliged to lie."

She hesitated. Then she said:

"A woman is frank when she does not lie uselessly."

CHAPTER XXI. "I NEVER HAVE LOVED ANY ONE BUT YOU!"

Therese was dressed in sombre gray. The bushes on the border of the terrace were covered with silver stars and on the hillsides the laurel-trees threw their odoriferous flame. The cup of Florence was in bloom.

Vivian Bell walked, arrayed in white, in the fragrant garden.

"You see, darling, Florence is truly the city of flowers, and it is not inappropriate that she should have a red lily for her emblem. It is a festival to-day, darling."

"A festival, to-day?"

"Darling, do you not know this is the first day of May? You did not wake this morning in a charming fairy spectacle? Do you not celebrate the Festival of Flowers? Do you not feel joyful, you who love flowers? For you love them, my love, I know it: you are very good to them. You said to me that they feel joy and pain; that they suffer as we do."

"Ah! I said that they suffer as we do?"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

"Yes, you said it. It is their festival to-day. We must celebrate it with the rites consecrated by old painters."

Therese heard without understanding. She was crumpling under her glove a letter which she had just received, bearing the Italian postage-stamp, and containing only these two lines:

"I am staying at the Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli. I shall expect you to-morrow morning. No. 18."

"Darling, do you not know it is the custom of Florence to celebrate spring on the first day of May every year? Then you did not understand the meaning of Botticelli's picture consecrated to the Festival of Flowers. Formerly, darling, on the first day of May the entire city gave itself up to joy. Young girls, crowned with sweetbrier and other flowers, made a long cortege through the Corso, under arches, and sang choruses on the new grass. We shall do as they did. We shall dance in the garden."

"Ah, we shall dance in the garden?"

"Yes, darling; and I will teach you Tuscan steps of the fifteenth century which have been found in a manuscript by Mr. Morrison, the oldest librarian in London. Come back soon, my love; we shall put on flower hats and dance."

"Yes, dear, we shall dance," said Therese.

And opening the gate, she ran through the little pathway that hid its stones under rose-bushes. She threw herself into the first carriage she found. The coachman wore forget-me-nots on his hat and on the handle of his whip:

"Great Britain Hotel, Lungarno Acciaoli."

She knew where that was, Lungarno Acciaoli. She had gone there at sunset, and she had seen the rays of the sun on the agitated surface of the river. Then night had come, the murmur of the waters in the silence, the words and the looks that had troubled her, the first kiss of her lover, the beginning of incomparable love. Oh, yes, she recalled Lungarno Acciaoli and the river-side beyond the old bridge Great Britain Hotel she knew: a big stone facade on the quay. It was fortunate, since he would come, that he had gone there. He might as easily have gone to the Hotel de la Ville, where Dechartre was. It was fortunate they were not side by side in the same corridor. Lungarno Acciaoli! The dead body which they had seen pass was at peace somewhere in the little flowery cemetery.

"Number 18."

It was a bare hotel room, with a stove in the Italian fashion, a set of brushes displayed on the table, and a time-table. Not a book, not a journal. He was there; she saw suffering on his bony face, a look of fever. This produced on her a sad impression. He waited a moment for a word, a gesture; but she dared do nothing. He offered a chair. She refused it and remained standing.

"Therese, something has happened of which I do not know. Speak."

After a moment of silence, she replied, with painful slowness:

"My friend, when I was in Paris, why did you go away from me?"

By the sadness of her accent he believed, he wished to believe, in the expression of an affectionate reproach. His face colored. He replied, ardently:

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

"Ah, if I could have foreseen! That hunting party I cared little for it, as you may think! But your letter, that of the twenty-seventh" he had a gift for dates "has thrown me into a horrible anxiety. Something has happened. Tell me everything."

"My friend, I believed you had ceased to love me."

"But now that you know the contrary?"

"Now "

She paused, her arms fell before her and her hands were joined.

Then, with affected tranquillity, she continued:

"Well, my friend, we took each other without knowing. One never knows. You are young; younger than I, since we are of the same age. You have, doubtless, projects for the future."

He looked at her proudly. She continued:

"Your family, your mother, your aunts, your uncle the General, have projects for you. That is natural. I might have become an obstacle. It is better that I should disappear from your life. We shall keep a fond remembrance of each other."

She extended her gloved hand. He folded his arms:

"Then, you do not want me? You have made me happy, as no other man ever was, and you think now to brush me aside? Truly, you seem to think you have finished with me. What have you come to say to me? That it was a liaison, which is easily broken? That people take each other, quit each other well, no! You are not a person whom one can easily quit."

"Yes," said Therese, "you had perhaps given me more of your heart than one does ordinarily in such 180 cases. I was more than an amusement for you. But, if I am not the woman you thought I was, if I have deceived you, if I am frivolous you know people have said so well, if I have not been to you what I should have been "

She hesitated, and continued in a brave tone, contrasting with what she said:

"If, while I was yours, I have been led astray; if I have been curious; if I say to you that I was not made for serious sentiment "

He interrupted her:

"You are not telling the truth."

"No, I am not telling the truth. And I do not know how to lie. I wished to spoil our past. I was wrong. It was you know what it was. But "

"But?"

"I have always told you I was not sure of myself. There are women, it is said, who are sure of themselves. I warned you that I was not like them."

He shook his head violently, like an irritated animal.

"What do you mean? I do not understand. I understand nothing. Speak clearly. There is something between us. I do not know what. I demand to know what it is. What is it?"

"There is the fact that I am not a woman sure of herself, and that you should not rely on me. No, you should not rely on me. I had promised nothing and then, if I had promised, what are words?"

"You do not love me. Oh, you love me no more! I can see it. But it is so much the worse for you! I love you. You should not have given yourself to me. Do not think that you can take yourself back. I love you and I shall keep you. So you thought you could get out of it very quietly? Listen a moment. You have done everything to make me love you, to attach me to you, to make it impossible for me to live without you.

"Six weeks ago you asked for nothing better. You were everything for me, I was everything for you. And now you desire suddenly that I should know you no longer; that you should be to me a stranger, a lady whom one meets in society. Ah, you have a fine audacity! Have I dreamed? All the past is a dream? I invented it all? Oh, there can be no doubt of it. You loved me. I feel it still. Well, I have not changed. I am what I was; you have nothing to complain of. I have not betrayed you for other women. It isn't credit that I claim. I could not have done it. When one has known you, one finds the prettiest women insipid. I never have had the idea of deceiving you. I have always acted well toward you. Why should you not love me? Answer! Speak! Say you love me still. Say it, since it is true. Come, Therese, you will feel at once that you love as you loved me formerly in the little nest where we were so happy. Come!"

He approached her ardently. She, her eyes full of fright, pushed him away with a kind of horror.

He understood, stopped, and said:

"You have a lover."

She bent her head, then lifted it, grave and dumb.

Then he made a gesture as if to strike her, and at once recoiled in shame. He lowered his eyes and was silent. His fingers to his lips, and biting his nails, he saw that his hand had been pricked by a pin on her waist, and bled. He threw himself in an armchair, drew his handkerchief to wipe off the blood, and remained indifferent and without thought.

She, with her back to the door, her face calm and pale, her look vague, arranged her hat with instinctive care. At the noise, formerly delicious, that the rustle of her skirts made, he started, looked at her, and asked furiously:

"Who is he? I will know."

She did not move. She replied with soft firmness:

"I have told you all I can. Do not ask more; it would be useless."

He looked at her with a cruel expression which she had never seen before.

"Oh, do not tell me his name. It will not be difficult for me to find it."

She said not a word, saddened for him, anxious for another, full of anguish and fear, and yet without regret, without bitterness, because her real soul was elsewhere.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

He had a vague sensation of what passed in her mind. In his anger to see her so sweet and so serene, to find her beautiful, and beautiful for another, he felt a desire to kill her, and he shouted at her:

"Go!"

Then, weakened by this effort of hatred, which was not natural to him, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

His pain touched her, gave her the hope of quieting him. She thought she might perhaps console him for her loss. Amicably and comfortably she seated herself beside him.

"My friend, blame me. I am to blame, but more to be pitied. Disdain me, if you wish, if one can disdain an unfortunate creature who is the plaything of life. In fine, judge me as you wish. But keep for me a little friendship in your anger, a little bitter-sweet reminiscence, something like those days of autumn when there is sunlight and strong wind. That is what I deserve. Do not be harsh to the agreeable but frivolous visitor who passed through your life. Bid good-by to me as to a traveller who goes one knows not where, and who is sad. There is so much sadness in separation! You were irritated against me a moment ago. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I only suffer for it. Reserve a little sympathy for me. Who knows? The future is always unknown. It is very gray and obscure before me. Let me say to myself that I have been kind, simple, frank with you, and that you have not forgotten it. In time you will understand, you will forgive; to-day have a little pity."

He was not listening to her words. He was appeased simply by the caress of her voice, of which the tone was limpid and clear. He exclaimed:

"You do not love him. I am the one whom you love. Then "

She hesitated:

"Ah, to say whom one loves or loves not is not an easy thing for a woman, or at least for me. I do not know how other women do. But life is not good to me. I am tossed to and fro by force of circumstances."

He looked at her calmly. An idea came to him. He had taken a resolution; he forgave, he forgot, provided she returned to him at once.

"There, you do not love him. It was an error, a moment of forgetfulness, a horrible and stupid thing that you did through weakness, through surprise, perhaps in spite. Swear to me that you never will see him again."

He took her arm:

"Swear to me!"

She said not a word, her teeth were set, her face was sombre. He wrenched her wrist. She exclaimed:

"You hurt me!"

However, he followed his idea; he led her to the table, on which, near the brushes, were an ink-stand, and several leaves of letter-paper ornamented with a large blue vignette, representing the facade of the hotel, with innumerable windows.

"Write what I am about to dictate to you. I will call somebody to take the letter."

And as she resisted, he made her fall on her knees. Proud and determined, she said:

"I can not, I will not."

"Why?"

"Because do you wish to know? because I love him."

Brusquely he released her. If he had had his revolver at hand, perhaps he would have killed her. But almost at once his anger was dampened by sadness; and now, desperate, he was the one who wished to die.

"Is what you say true? Is it possible?"

"How do I know? Can I say? Do I understand? Have I an idea, a sentiment, about anything?"

With an effort she added:

"Am I at this moment aware of anything except my sadness and your despair?"

"You love him, you love him! What is he, who is he, that you should love him?"

His surprise made him stupid; he was in an abyss of astonishment. But what she had said separated them. He dared not complain. He only repeated:

"You love him, you love him! But what has he done to you, what has he said, to make you love him? I know you. I have not told you every time your ideas shocked me. I would wager he is not even a man in society. And you believe he loves you? You believe it? Well, you are deceiving yourself. He does not love you. You flatter him, simply. He will quit you at the first opportunity. When he shall have compromised you, he will abandon you. Next year people will say of you: 'She is not at all exclusive.' I am sorry for your father; he is one of my friends, and will know of your behavior. You can not expect to deceive him."

She listened, humiliated but consoled, thinking how she would have suffered had she found him generous.

In his simplicity he sincerely disdained her. This disdain relieved him.

"How did the thing happen? You can tell me."

She shrugged her shoulders with so much pity that he dared not continue. He became contemptuous again.

"Do you imagine that I shall aid you in saving appearances, that I shall return to your house, that I shall continue to call on your husband?"

"I think you will continue to do what a gentleman should. I ask nothing of you. I should have liked to preserve of you the reminiscence of an excellent friend. I thought you might be indulgent and kind to, me, but it is not possible. I see that lovers never separate kindly. Later, you will judge me better. Farewell!"

He looked at her. Now his face expressed more pain than anger. She never had seen his eyes so dry and so black. It seemed as if he had grown old in an hour.

"I prefer to tell you in advance. It will be impossible for me to see you again. You are not a woman whom one may meet after one has been loved by her. You are not like others. You have a poison of your own, which you have given to me, and which I feel in me, in my veins. Why have I known you?"

She looked at him kindly.

"Farewell! Say to yourself that I am not worthy of being regretted so much."

Then, when he saw that she placed her hand on the latch of the door, when he felt at that gesture that he was to lose her, that he should never have her again, he shouted. He forgot everything. There remained in him only the dazed feeling of a great misfortune accomplished, of an irreparable calamity. And from the depth of his stupor a desire ascended. He desired to possess again the woman who was leaving him and who would never return. He drew her to him. He desired her, with all the strength of his animal nature. She resisted with all the force of her will, which was free and on the alert. She disengaged herself, crumpled, torn, without even having been afraid.

He understood that everything was useless; he realized she was no longer for him, because she belonged to another. As his suffering returned, he pushed her out of the door.

She remained a moment in the corridor, proudly waiting for a word.

But he shouted again, "Go!" and shut the door violently.

On the Via Alfieri, she saw again the pavilion in the rear of the courtyard where pale grasses grew. She found it silent and tranquil, faithful, with its goats and nymphs, to the lovers of the time of the Grand Duchess Eliza. She felt at once freed from the painful, brutal world, and transported to ages wherein she had not known the sadness of life. At the foot of the stairs, the steps of which were covered with roses, Dechartre was waiting. She threw herself in his arms. He carried her inert, like a precious trophy before which he had become pallid and trembling. She enjoyed, her eyelids half closed, the superb humiliation of being a beautiful prey. Her fatigue, her sadness, her disgust with the day, the reminiscence of violence, her regained liberty, the need of forgetting, remains of fright, everything vivified, awakened her tenderness. She threw her arms around the neck of her lover.

They were as gay as children. They laughed, said tender nothings, played, ate lemons, oranges, and other fruits piled up near-them on painted plates. Her lips, half-open, showed her brilliant teeth. She asked, with coquettish anxiety, if he were not disillusioned after the beautiful dream he had made of her.

In the caressing light of the day, for the enjoyment of which he had arranged, he contemplated her with youthful joy. He lavished praise and kisses upon her. They forgot themselves in caresses, in friendly quarrels, in happy glances.

He asked her how a little red mark on her temple had come there. She replied that she had forgotten; that it was nothing. She hardly lied; she had really forgotten.

They recalled to each other their short but beautiful history, all their life, which began upon the day when they had met.

"You know, on the terrace, the day after your arrival, you said vague things to me. I guessed that you loved me."

"I was afraid to seem stupid to you."

"You were, a little. It was my triumph. It made me impatient to see you so little troubled near me. I loved you before you loved me. Oh, I do not blush for it!"

He gave her a glass of Asti. But there was a bottle of Trasimene. She wished to taste it, in memory of the lake which she had seen silent and beautiful at night in its opal cup. That was when she had first visited Italy, six years before.

He chided her for having discovered the beauty of things without his aid.

She said:

"Without you, I did not know how to see anything. Why did you not come to me before?"

He closed her lips with a kiss. Then she said:

"Yes, I love you! Yes, I never have loved any one but you!"

CHAPTER XXII. A MEETING AT THE STATION

Le Menil had written: "I leave tomorrow evening at seven o'clock. Meet me at the station."

She had gone to meet him. She saw him in long coat and cape, precise and calm, in front of the hotel stages. He said only:

"Ah, you have come."

"But, my friend, you called me."

He did not confess that he had written in the absurd hope that she would love him again and that the rest would be forgotten, or that she would say to him: "It was only a trial of your love."

If she had said so he would have believed her, however.

Astonished because she did not speak, he said, dryly:

"What have you to say to me? It is not for me to speak, but for you. I have no explanations to give you. I have not to justify a betrayal."

"My friend, do not be cruel, do not be ungrateful. This is what I had to say to you. And I must repeat that I leave you with the sadness of a real friend."

"Is that all? Go and say this to the other man. It will interest him more than it interests me."

"You called me, and I came; do not make me regret it."

"I am sorry to have disturbed you. You could doubtless find a better employment for your time. I will not detain you. Rejoin him, since you are longing to do so."

At the thought that his unhappy words expressed a moment of eternal human pain, and that tragedy had illustrated many similar griefs, she felt all the sadness and irony of the situation, which a curl of her lips betrayed. He thought she was laughing.

"Do not laugh; listen to me. The other day, at the hotel, I wanted to kill you. I came so near doing it that now I know what I escaped. I will not do it. You may rest secure. What would be the use? As I wish to keep up appearances, I shall call on you in Paris. It will grieve me to learn that you can not receive me. I shall see your husband, I shall see your father also. It will be to say good-by to them, as I intend to go on a long voyage. Farewell, Madame!"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

At the moment when he turned his back to her, Therese saw Miss Bell and Prince Albertinelli coming out of the freight-station toward her. The Prince was very handsome. Vivian was walking by his side with the lightness of chaste joy.

"Oh, darling, what a pleasant surprise to find you here! The Prince, and I have seen, at the customhouse, the new bell, which has just come."

"Ah, the bell has come?"

"It is here, darling, the Ghiberti bell. I saw it in its wooden cage. It did not ring, because it was a prisoner. But it will have a campanile in my Fiesole house.

When it feels the air of Florence, it will be happy to let its silvery voice be heard. Visited by the doves, it will ring for all our joys and all our sufferings. It will ring for you, for me, for the Prince, for good Madame Marmet, for Monsieur Choulette, for all our friends."

"Dear, bells never ring for real joys and for real sufferings. Bells are honest functionaries, who know only official sentiments."

"Oh, darling, you are much mistaken. Bells know the secrets of souls; they know everything. But I am very glad to find you here. I know, my love, why you came to the station. Your maid betrayed you. She told me you were waiting for a pink gown which was delayed in coming and that you were very impatient. But do not let that trouble you. You are always beautiful, my love."

She made Madame Martin enter her wagon.

"Come, quick, darling; Monsieur Jacques Dechartre dines at the house to-night, and I should not like to make him wait."

And while they were driving through the silence of the night, through the pathways full of the fresh perfume of wildflowers, she said:

"Do you see over there, darling, the black distaffs of the Fates, the cypresses of the cemetery? It is there I wish to sleep."

But Therese thought anxiously: "They saw him. Did they recognize him? I think not. The place was dark, and had only little blinding lights. Did she know him? I do not recall whether she saw him at my house last year."

What made her anxious was a sly smile on the Prince's face.

"Darling, do you wish a place near me in that rustic cemetery? Shall we rest side by side under a little earth and a great deal of sky? But I do wrong to extend to you an invitation which you can not accept. It will not be permitted to you to sleep your eternal sleep at the foot of the hill of Fiesole, my love. You must rest in Paris, in a handsome tomb, by the side of Count Martin-Belleme."

"Why? Do you think, dear, that the wife must be united to her husband even after death?"

"Certainly she must, darling. Marriage is for time and for eternity. Do you not know the history of a young pair who loved each other in the province of Auvergne? They died almost at the same time, and were placed in two tombs separated by a road. But every night a sweetbrier bush threw from one tomb to the other its flowery branches. The two coffins had to be buried together."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

When they had passed the Badia, they saw a procession coming up the side of the hill. The wind blew on the candles borne in gilded wooden candlesticks. The girls of the societies, dressed in white and blue, carried painted banners. Then came a little St. John, blond, curly-haired, nude, under a lamb's fleece which showed his arms and shoulders; and a St. Mary Magdalene, seven years old, crowned only with her waving golden hair. The people of Fiesole followed. Countess Martin recognized Choulette among them. With a candle in one hand, a book in the other, and blue spectacles on the end of his nose, he was singing. His unkempt beard moved up and down with the rhythm of the song. In the harshness of light and shade that worked in his face, he had an air that suggested a solitary monk capable of accomplishing a century of penance.

"How amusing he is!" said Therese. "He is making a spectacle of himself for himself. He is a great artist."

"Darling, why will you insist that Monsieur Choulette is not a pious man? Why? There is much joy and much beauty in faith. Poets know this. If Monsieur Choulette had not faith, he could not write the admirable verses that he does."

"And you, dear, have you faith?"

"Oh, yes; I believe in God and in the word of Christ."

Now the banners and the white veils had disappeared down the road. But one could see on the bald cranium of Choulette the flame of the candle reflected in rays of gold.

Dechartre, however, was waiting alone in the garden. Therese found him resting on the balcony of the terrace where he had felt the first sufferings of love. While Miss Bell and the Prince were trying to fix upon a suitable place for the campanile, Dechartre led his beloved under the trees.

"You promised me that you would be in the garden when I came. I have been waiting for you an hour, which seemed eternal. You were not to go out. Your absence has surprised and grieved me."

She replied vaguely that she had been compelled to go to the station, and that Miss Bell had brought her back in the wagon.

He begged her pardon for his anxiety, but everything alarmed him. His happiness made him afraid.

They were already at table when Choulette appeared, with the face of an antique satyr. A terrible joy shone in his phosphorous eyes. Since his return from Assisi, he lived only among paupers, drank chianti all day with girls and artisans to whom he taught the beauty of joy and innocence, the advent of Jesus Christ, and the imminent abolition of taxes and military service. At the beginning of the procession he had gathered vagabonds in the ruins of the Roman theatre, and had delivered to them in a macaronic language, half French and half Tuscan, a sermon, which he took pleasure in repeating:

"Kings, senators, and judges have said: 'The life of nations is in us.' Well, they lie; and they are the coffin saying: 'I am the cradle.'

"The life of nations is in the crops of the fields yellowing under the eye of the Lord. It is in the vines, and in the smiles and tears with which the sky bathes the fruits on the trees.

"The life of nations is not in the laws, which were made by the rich and powerful for the preservation of riches and power.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

"The chiefs of kingdoms and of republics have said in their books that the right of peoples is the right of war, and they have glorified violence. And they render honors unto conquerors, and they raise in the public squares statues to the victorious man and horse. But one has not the right to kill; that is the reason why the just man will not draw from the urn a number that will send him to the war. The right is not to pamper the folly and crimes of a prince raised over a kingdom or over a republic; and that is the reason why the just man will not pay taxes and will not give money to the publicans. He will enjoy in peace the fruit of his work, and he will make bread with the wheat that he has sown, and he will eat the fruits of the trees that he has cut."

"Ah, Monsieur Choulette," said Prince Albertinelli, gravely, "you are right to take interest in the state of our unfortunate fields, which taxes exhaust. What fruit can be drawn from a soil taxed to thirty–three per cent. of its net income? The master and the servants are the prey of the publicans."

Dechartre and Madame Martin were struck by the unexpected sincerity of his accent.

He added:

"I like the King. I am sure of my loyalty, but the misfortunes of the peasants move me."

The truth was, he pursued with obstinacy a single aim: to reestablish the domain of Casentino that his father, Prince Carlo, an officer of Victor Emmanuel, had left devoured by usurers. His affected gentleness concealed his stubbornness. He had only useful vices. It was to become a great Tuscan landowner that he had dealt in pictures, sold the famous ceilings of his palace, made love to rich old women, and, finally, sought the hand of Miss Bell, whom he knew to be skilful at earning money and practised in the art of housekeeping. He really liked peasants. The ardent praises of Choulette, which he understood vaguely, awakened this affection in him. He forgot himself enough to express his mind:

"In a country where master and servants form one family, the fate of the one depends on that of the others. Taxes despoil us. How good are our farmers! They are the best men in the world to till the soil."

Madame Martin confessed that she should not have believed it. The country of Lombardy alone seemed to her to be well cultivated. Tuscany appeared a beautiful, wild orchard.

The Prince replied, smilingly, that perhaps she would not speak in that way if she had done him the honor of visiting his farms of Casentino, although these had suffered from long and ruinous lawsuits. She would have seen there what an Italian landscape really is.

"I take a great deal of care of my domain. I was coming from it to–night when I had the double pleasure of finding at the station Miss Bell, who had gone there to find her Ghiberti bell, and you, Madame, who were talking with a friend from Paris."

He had the idea that it would be disagreeable to her to hear him speak of that meeting. He looked around the table, and saw the expression of anxious surprise which Dechartre could not restrain. He insisted:

"Forgive, Madame, in a rustic, a certain pretension to knowing something about the world. In the man who was talking to you I recognized a Parisian, because he had an English air; and while he affected stiffness, he showed perfect ease and particular vivacity."

"Oh," said Therese, negligently, "I have not seen him for a long time. I was much surprised to meet him at Florence at the moment of his departure."

She looked at Dechartre, who affected not to listen.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v2

"I know that gentleman," said Miss Bell. "It is Monsieur Le Menil. I dined with him twice at Madame Martin's, and he talked to me very well. He said he liked football; that he introduced the game in France, and that now football is quite the fashion. He also related to me his hunting adventures. He likes animals. I have observed that hunters like animals. I assure you, darling, that Monsieur Le Menil talks admirably about hares. He knows their habits. He said to me it was a pleasure to look at them dancing in the moonlight on the plains. He assured me that they were very intelligent, and that he had seen an old hare, pursued by dogs, force another hare to get out of the trail so as to deceive the hunters. Darling, did Monsieur Le Menil ever talk to you about hares?"

Therese replied she did not know, and that she thought hunters were tiresome.

Miss Bell exclaimed. She did not think M. Le Menil was ever tiresome when talking of the hares that danced in the moonlight on the plains and among the vines. She would like to raise a hare, like Phanion.

"Darling, you do not know Phanion. Oh, I am sure that Monsieur Dechartre knows her. She was beautiful, and dear to poets. She lived in the Island of Cos, beside a dell which, covered with lemon-trees, descended to the blue sea. And they say that she looked at the blue waves. I related Phanion's history to Monsieur Le Menil, and he was very glad to hear it. She had received from some hunter a little hare with long ears. She held it on her knees and fed it on spring flowers. It loved Phanion and forgot its mother. It died before having eaten too many flowers. Phanion lamented over its loss. She buried it in the lemon-grove, in a grave which she could see from her bed. And the shade of the little hare was consoled by the songs of the poets."

The good Madame Marmet said that M. Le Menil pleased by his elegant and discreet manners, which young men no longer practise. She would have liked to see him. She wanted him to do something for her.

"Or, rather, for my nephew," she said. "He is a captain in the artillery, and his chiefs like him. His colonel was for a long time under orders of Monsieur Le Menil's uncle, General La Briche. If Monsieur Le Menil would ask his uncle to write to Colonel Faure in favor of my nephew I should be grateful to him. My nephew is not a stranger to Monsieur Le Menil. They met last year at the masked ball which Captain de Lassay gave at the hotel at Caen."

Madame Marmet cast down her eyes and added:

"The invited guests, naturally, were not society women. But it is said some of them were very pretty. They came from Paris. My nephew, who gave these details to me, was dressed as a coachman. Monsieur Le Menil was dressed as a Hussar of Death, and he had much success."

Miss Bell said that she was sorry not to have known that M. Le Menil was in Florence. Certainly, she should have invited him to come to Fiesole.

Dechartre remained sombre and distant during the rest of the dinner: and when, at the moment of leaving, Therese extended her hand to him, she felt that he avoided pressing it in his.