

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v3

Anatole France

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CHAPTER XXIII. "ONE IS NEVER KIND WHEN ONE IS IN LOVE"

The next day, in the hidden pavilion of the Via Alfieri, she found him preoccupied. She tried to distract him with ardent gayety, with the sweetness of pressing intimacy, with superb humility. But he remained sombre. He had all night meditated, labored over, and recognized his sadness. He had found reasons for suffering. His thought had brought together the hand that dropped a letter in the post-box before the bronze San Marco and the dreadful unknown who had been seen at the station. Now Jacques Dechartre gave a face and a name to the cause of his suffering. In the grandmother's armchair where Therese had been seated on the day of her welcome, and which she had this time offered to him, he was assailed by painful images; while she, bent over one of his arms, enveloped him with her warm embrace and her loving heart. She divined too well what he was suffering to ask it of him simply.

In order to bring him back to pleasanter ideas, she recalled the secrets of the room where they were and reminiscences of their walks through the city. She was gracefully familiar.

"The little spoon you gave me, the little red lily spoon, I use for my tea in the morning. And I know by the pleasure I feel at seeing it when I wake how much I love you."

Then, as he replied only in sentences sad and evasive, she said:

"I am near you, but you do not care for me. You are preoccupied by some idea that I do not fathom. Yet I am alive, and an idea is nothing."

"An idea is nothing? Do you think so? One may be wretched or happy for an idea; one may live and one may die for an idea. Well, I am thinking."

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask? You know very well I am thinking of what I heard last night, which you had concealed from me. I am thinking of your meeting at the station, which was not due to chance, but which a letter had caused, a letter dropped remember! in the postbox of San Michele. Oh, I do not reproach you for it. I have not the right. But why did you give yourself to me if you were not free?"

She thought she must tell an untruth.

"You mean some one whom I met at the station yesterday? I assure you it was the most ordinary meeting in the world."

He was painfully impressed with the fact that she did not dare to name the one she spoke of. He, too, avoided pronouncing that name.

"There, he had not come for you? You did not know he was in Florence? He is nothing more to you than a man whom you meet socially? He is not the one who, when absent, made you say to me, 'I can not?' He is nothing to you?"

She replied resolutely:

"He comes to my house at times. He was introduced to me by General Lariviere. I have nothing more to say to you about him. I assure you he is of no interest to me, and I can not conceive what may be in your mind about him."

She felt a sort of satisfaction at repudiating the man who had insisted against her; with so much harshness and violence, upon his rights of ownership. But she was in haste to get out of her tortuous path. She rose and looked at her lover, with beautiful, tender, and grave eyes.

"Listen to me: the day when I gave my heart to you, my life was yours wholly. If a doubt or a suspicion comes to you, question me. The present is yours, and you know well there is only you, you alone, in it. As for my past, if you knew what nothingness it was you would be glad. I do not think another woman made as I was, to love, would have brought to you a mind newer to love than is mine. That I swear to you. The years that were spent without you I did not live! Let us not talk of them. There is nothing in them of which I should be ashamed. To regret them is another thing. I regret to have known you so late. Why did you not come sooner? You could have known me five years ago as easily as to-day. But, believe me, we should not tire ourselves with speaking of time that has gone. Remember Lohengrin. If you love me, I am for you like the swan's knight. I have asked nothing of you. I have wanted to know nothing. I have not chided you about Mademoiselle Jeanne Tancrede. I saw you loved me, that you were suffering, and it was enough because I loved you."

"A woman can not be jealous in the same manner as a man, nor feel what makes us suffer."

"I do not know that. Why can not she?"

"Why? Because there is not in the blood, in the flesh of a woman that absurd and generous fury for ownership, that primitive instinct of which man has made a right. Man is the god who wants his mate to himself. Since time immemorial woman is accustomed to sharing men's love. It is the past, the obscure past, that determines our passions. We are already so old when we are born! Jealousy, for a woman, is only a wound to her own self-love. For a man it is a torture as profound as moral suffering, as continuous as physical suffering. You ask the reason why? Because, in spite of my submission and of my respect, in spite of the alarm you cause me, you are matter and I am the idea; you are the thing and I am the mind; you are the clay and I am the artisan. Do not complain of

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this. Near the perfect amphora, surrounded with garlands, what is the rude and humble potter? The amphora is tranquil and beautiful; he is wretched; he is tormented; he wills; he suffers; for to will is to suffer. Yes, I am jealous. I know what there is in my jealousy. When I examine it, I find in it hereditary prejudices, savage conceit, sickly susceptibility, a mingling of rudest violence and cruel feebleness, imbecile and wicked revolt against the laws of life and of society. But it does not matter that I know it for what it is: it exists and it torments me. I am the chemist who, studying the properties of an acid which he has drunk, knows how it was combined and what salts form it. Nevertheless the acid burns him, and will burn him to the bone."

"My love, you are absurd."

"Yes, I am absurd. I feel it better than you feel it yourself. To desire a woman in all the brilliancy of her beauty and her wit, mistress of herself, who knows and who dares; more beautiful in that and more desirable, and whose choice is free, voluntary, deliberate; to desire her, to love her for what she is, and to suffer because she is not puerile candor nor pale innocence, which would be shocking in her if it were possible to find them there; to ask her at the same time that she be herself and not be herself; to adore her as life has made her, and regret bitterly that life, which has made her so beautiful, has touched her Oh, this is absurd! I love you! I love you with all that you bring to me of sensations, of habits, with all that comes of your experiences, with all that comes from him—perhaps, from them—how do I know? These things are my delight and they are my torture. There must be a profound sense in the public idiocy which says that love like ours is guilty. Joy is guilty when it is immense. That is the reason why I suffer, my beloved."

She knelt before him, took his hands, and drew him to her.

"I do not wish you to suffer; I will not have it. It would be folly. I love you, and never have loved any one but you. You may believe me; I do not lie."

He kissed her forehead.

"If you deceived me, my dear, I should not reproach you for that; on the contrary, I should be grateful to you. Nothing is so legitimate, so human, as to deceive pain. What would become of us if women had not for us the pity of untruth? Lie, my beloved, lie for the sake of charity. Give me the dream that colors black sorrow. Lie; have no scruples. You will only add another illusion to the illusion of love and beauty."

He sighed:

"Oh, common—sense, common wisdom!"

She asked him what he meant, and what common wisdom was. He said it was a sensible proverb, but brutal, which it was better not to repeat.

"Repeat it all the same."

"You wish me to say it to you: 'Kissed lips do not lose their freshness.'"

And he added:

"It is true that love preserves beauty, and that the beauty of women is fed on caresses as bees are fed on flowers."

She placed on his lips a pledge in a kiss.

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"I swear to you I never loved any one but you. Oh, no, it is not caresses that have preserved the few charms which I am happy to have in order to offer them to you. I love you! I love you!"

But he still remembered the letter dropped in the post-box, and the unknown person met at the station.

"If you loved me truly, you would love only me."

She rose, indignant:

"Then you believe I love another? What you are saying is monstrous. Is that what you think of me? And you say you love me! I pity you, because you are insane."

"True, I am insane."

She, kneeling, with the supple palms of her hands enveloped his temples and his cheeks. He said again that he was mad to be anxious about a chance and commonplace meeting. She forced him to believe her, or, rather, to forget. He no longer saw or knew anything. His vanished bitterness and anger left him nothing but the harsh desire to forget everything, to make her forget everything.

She asked him why he was sad.

"You were happy a moment ago. Why are you not happy now?"

And as he shook his head and said nothing:

"Speak! I like your complaints better than your silence."

Then he said:

"You wish to know? Do not be angry. I suffer now more than ever, because I know now what you are capable of giving."

She withdrew brusquely from his arms and, with eyes full of pain and reproach, said:

"You can believe that I ever was to another what I am to you! You wound me in my most susceptible sentiment, in my love for you. I do not forgive you for this. I love you! I never have loved any one except you. I never have suffered except through you. Be content. You do me a great deal of harm. How can you be so unkind?"

"There, one is never kind when one is in love."

She remained for a long time immovable and dreamy. Her face flushed, and a tear rose to her eyes.

"There, you are weeping!"

"Forgive me, my heart, it is the first time that I have loved and that I have been really loved. I am afraid."

CHAPTER XXIV. CHOULETTE'S AMBITION

While the rolling of arriving boxes filled the Bell villa; while Pauline, loaded with parcels, lightly came down the steps; while good Madame Marmet, with tranquil vigilance, supervised everything; and while Miss Bell finished

dressing in her room, Therese, dressed in gray, resting on the terrace, looked once again at the Flower City.

She had decided to return home. Her husband recalled her in every one of his letters. If, as he asked her to do, she returned to Paris in the first days of May, they might give two or three dinners, followed by receptions. His political group was supported by public opinion. The tide was pushing him along, and Garain thought the Countess Martin's drawing-room might exercise an excellent influence on the future of the country. These reasons moved her not; but she felt a desire to be agreeable to her husband. She had received the day before a letter from her father, Monsieur Montessuy, who, without sharing the political views of his son-in-law and without giving any advice to his daughter, insinuated that society was beginning to gossip of the Countess Martin's mysterious sojourn at Florence among poets and artists. The Bell villa took, from a distance, an air of sentimental fantasy. She felt herself that she was too closely observed at Resole. Madame Marmet annoyed her. Prince Albertinelli disquieted her. The meetings in the pavilion of the Via Alfieri had become difficult and dangerous. Professor Arrighi, whom the Prince often met, had seen her one night as she was walking through the deserted streets leaning on Dechartre. Professor Arrighi, author of a treatise on agriculture, was the most amiable of wise men. He had turned his beautiful, heroic face, and said, only the next day, to the young woman "Formerly, I could discern from a long distance the coming of a beautiful woman. Now that I have gone beyond the age to be viewed favorably by women, heaven has pity on me. Heaven prevents my seeing them. My eyes are very bad. The most charming face I can no longer recognize." She had understood, and heeded the warning. She wished now to conceal her joy in the vastness of Paris.

Vivian, to whom she had announced her departure, had asked her to remain a few days longer. But Therese suspected that her friend was still shocked by the advice she had received one night in the lemon-decorated room; that, at least, she did not enjoy herself entirely in the familiarity of a confidante who disapproved of her choice, and whom the Prince had represented to her as a coquette, and perhaps worse. The date of her departure had been fixed for May 5th.

The day shone brilliant, pure, and charming on the Arno valley. Therese, dreamy, saw from the terrace the immense morning rose placed in the blue cup of Florence. She leaned forward to discover, at the foot of the flowery hills, the imperceptible point where she had known infinite joys. There the cemetery garden made a small, sombre spot near which she divined the Via Alfieri. She saw herself again in the room wherein, doubtless, she never would enter again. The hours there passed had for her the sadness of a dream. She felt her eyes becoming veiled, her knees weaken, and her soul shudder. It seemed to her that life was no longer in her, and that she had left it in that corner where she saw the black pines raise their immovable summits. She reproached herself for feeling anxiety without reason, when, on the contrary, she should be reassured and joyful. She knew she would meet Jacques Dechartre in Paris. They would have liked to arrive there at the same time, or, rather, to go there together. They had thought it indispensable that he should remain three or four days longer in Florence, but their meeting would not be retarded beyond that. They had appointed a rendezvous, and she rejoiced in the thought of it. She wore her love mingled with her being and running in her blood. Still, a part of herself remained in the pavilion decorated with goats and nymphs a part of herself which never would return to her. In the full ardor of life, she was dying for things infinitely delicate and precious. She recalled that Dechartre had said to her: "Love likes charms. I gathered from the terrace the leaves of a tree that you had admired." Why had she not thought of taking a stone of the pavilion wherein she had forgotten the world?

A shout from Pauline drew her from her thoughts. Choulette, jumping from a bush, had suddenly kissed the maid, who was carrying overcoats and bags into the carriage. Now he was running through the alleys, joyful, his ears standing out like horns. He bowed to the Countess Martin.

"I have, then, to say farewell to you, Madame."

He intended to remain in Italy. A lady was calling him, he said: it was Rome. He wanted to see the cardinals. One of them, whom people praised as an old man full of sense, would perhaps share the ideas of the socialist and

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revolutionary church. Choulette had his aim: to plant on the ruins of an unjust and cruel civilization the Cross of Calvary, not dead and bare, but vivid, and with its flowery arms embracing the world. He was founding with that design an order and a newspaper. Madame Martin knew the order. The newspaper was to be sold for one cent, and to be written in rhythmic phrases. It was a newspaper to be sung. Verse, simple, violent, or joyful, was the only language that suited the people. Prose pleased only people whose intelligence was very subtle. He had seen anarchists in the taverns of the Rue Saint Jacques. They spent their evenings reciting and listening to romances.

And he added:

"A newspaper which shall be at the same time a song—book will touch the soul of the people. People say I have genius. I do not know whether they are right. But it must be admitted that I have a practical mind."

Miss Bell came down the steps, putting on her gloves:

"Oh, darling, the city and the mountains and the sky wish you to lament your departure. They make themselves beautiful to-day in order to make you regret quitting them and desire to see them again."

But Choulette, whom the dryness of the Tuscan climate tired, regretted green Umbria and its humid sky. He recalled Assisi. He said:

"There are woods and rocks, a fair sky and white clouds. I have walked there in the footsteps of good Saint Francis, and I transcribed his canticle to the sun in old French rhymes, simple and poor."

Madame Martin said she would like to hear it. Miss Bell was already listening, and her face wore the fervent expression of an angel sculptured by Mino.

Choulette told them it was a rustic and artless work. The verses were not trying to be beautiful. They were simple, although uneven, for the sake of lightness. Then, in a slow and monotonous voice, he recited the canticle.

"Oh, Monsieur Choulette," said Miss Bell, "this canticle goes up to heaven, like the hermit in the Campo Santo of Pisa, whom some one saw going up the mountain that the goats liked. I will tell you. The old hermit went up, leaning on the staff of faith, and his step was unequal because the crutch, being on one side, gave one of his feet an advantage over the other. That is the reason why your verses are unequal. I have understood it."

The poet accepted this praise, persuaded that he had unwittingly deserved it.

"You have faith, Monsieur Choulette," said Therese. "Of what use is it to you if not to write beautiful verses?"

"Faith serves me to commit sin, Madame."

"Oh, we commit sins without that."

Madame Marmet appeared, equipped for the journey, in the tranquil joy of returning to her pretty apartment, her little dog Toby, her old friend Lagrange, and to see again, after the Etruscans of Fiesole, the skeleton warrior who, among the bonbon boxes, looked out of the window.

Miss Bell escorted her friends to the station in her carriage.

CHAPTER XXV. "WE ARE ROBBING LIFE"

Dechartre came to the carriage to salute the two travellers. Separated from him, Therese felt what he was to her: he had given to her a new taste of life, delicious and so vivid, so real, that she felt it on her lips. She lived under a charm in the dream of seeing him again, and was surprised when Madame Marmet, along the journey, said: "I think we are passing the frontier," or "Rose-bushes are in bloom by the seaside." She was joyful when, after a night at the hotel in Marseilles, she saw the gray olive-trees in the stony fields, then the mulberry-trees and the distant profile of Mount Pilate, and the Rhone, and Lyons, and then the familiar landscapes, the trees raising their summits into bouquets clothed in tender green, and the lines of poplars beside the rivers. She enjoyed the plenitude of the hours she lived and the astonishment of profound joys. And it was with the smile of a sleeper suddenly awakened that, at the station in Paris, in the light of the station, she greeted her husband, who was glad to see her. When she kissed Madame Marmet, she told her that she thanked her with all her heart. And truly she was grateful to all things, like M. Choulette's St. Francis.

In the coupe, which followed the quays in the luminous dust of the setting sun, she listened without impatience to her husband confiding to her his successes as an orator, the intentions of his parliamentary groups, his projects, his hopes, and the necessity to give two or three political dinners. She closed her eyes in order to think better. She said to herself: "I shall have a letter to-morrow, and shall see him again within eight days." When the coupe passed on the bridge, she looked at the water, which seemed to roll flames; at the smoky arches; at the rows of trees; at the heads of the chestnut-trees in bloom on the Cours-la-Reine; all these familiar aspects seemed to be clothed for her in novel magnificence. It seemed to her that her love had given a new color to the universe. And she asked herself whether the trees and the stones recognized her. She was thinking; "How is it that my silence, my eyes, and heaven and earth do not tell my dear secret?"

M. Martin-Belleme, thinking she was a little tired, advised her to rest. And at night, closeted in her room, in the silence wherein she heard the palpitations of her heart, she wrote to the absent one a letter full of these words, which are similar to flowers in their perpetual novelty: "I love you. I am waiting for you. I am happy. I feel you are near me. There is nobody except you and me in the world. I see from my window a blue star which trembles, and I look at it, thinking that you see it in Florence. I have put on my table the little red lily spoon. Come! Come!" And she found thus, fresh in her mind, the eternal sensations and images.

For a week she lived an inward life, feeling within her the soft warmth which remained of the days passed in the Via Alfieri, breathing the kisses which she had received, and loving herself for being loved. She took delicate care and displayed attentive taste in new gowns. It was to herself, too, that she was pleasing. Madly anxious when there was nothing for her at the postoffice, trembling and joyful when she received through the small window a letter wherein she recognized the large handwriting of her beloved, she devoured her reminiscences, her desires, and her hopes. Thus the hours passed quickly.

The morning of the day when he was to arrive seemed to her to be odiously long. She was at the station before the train arrived. A delay had been signalled. It weighed heavily upon her. Optimist in her projects, and placing by force, like her father, faith on the side of her will, that delay which she had not foreseen seemed to her to be treason. The gray light, which the three-quarters of an hour filtered through the window-panes of the station, fell on her like the rays of an immense hour-glass which measured for her the minutes of happiness lost. She was lamenting her fate, when, in the red light of the sun, she saw the locomotive of the express stop, monstrous and docile, on the quay, and, in the crowd of travellers coming out of the carriages, Jacques approached her. He was looking at her with that sort of sombre and violent joy which she had often observed in him. He said:

"At last, here you are. I feared to die before seeing you again. You do not know, I did not know myself, what torture it is to live a week away from you. I have returned to the little pavilion of the Via Alfieri. In the room you know, in front of the old pastel, I have wept for love and rage."

She looked at him tenderly.

"And I, do you not think that I called you, that I wanted you, that when alone I extended my arms toward you? I had hidden your letters in the chiffonier where my jewels are. I read them at night: it was delicious, but it was imprudent. Your letters were yourself too much and not enough."

They traversed the court where fiacres rolled away loaded with boxes. She asked whether they were to take a carriage.

He made no answer. He seemed not to hear. She said:

"I went to see your house; I did not dare go in. I looked through the grille and saw windows hidden in rose-bushes in the rear of a yard, behind a tree, and I said: 'It is there !' I never have been so moved."

He was not listening to her nor looking at her. He walked quickly with her along the paved street, and through a narrow stairway reached a deserted street near the station. There, between wood and coal yards, was a hotel with a restaurant on the first floor and tables on the sidewalk. Under the painted sign were white curtains at the windows. Dechartre stopped before the small door and pushed Therese into the obscure alley. She asked:

"Where are you leading me? What is the time? I must be home at half-past seven. We are mad."

When they left the house, she said:

"Jacques, my darling, we are too happy; we are robbing life."

CHAPTER XXVI. IN DECHARTRE'S STUDIO

A fiacre brought her, the next day, to a populous street, half sad, half gay, with walls of gardens in the intervals of new houses, and stopped at the point where the sidewalk passes under the arcade of a mansion of the Regency, covered now with dust and oblivion, and fantastically placed across the street. Here and there green branches lent gayety to that city corner. Therese, while ringing at the door, saw in the limited perspective of the houses a pulley at a window and a gilt key, the sign of a locksmith. Her eyes were full of this picture, which was new to her. Pigeons flew above her head; she heard chickens cackle. A servant with a military look opened the door. She found herself in a yard covered with sand, shaded by a tree, where, at the left, was the janitor's box with bird-cages at the windows. On that side rose, under a green trellis, the mansard of the neighboring house. A sculptor's studio backed on it its glass-covered roof, which showed plaster figures asleep in the dust. At the right, the wall that closed the yard bore debris of monuments, broken bases of columnettes. In the rear, the house, not very large, showed the six windows of its facade, half hidden by vines and rosebushes.

Philippe Dechartre, infatuated with the architecture of the fifteenth century in France, had reproduced there very cleverly the characteristics of a private house of the time of Louis XII. That house, begun in the middle of the Second Empire, had not been finished. The builder of so many castles died without being able to finish his own house. It was better thus. Conceived in a manner which had then its distinction and its value, but which seems to-day banal and outlandish, having lost little by little its large frame of gardens, cramped now between the walls of the tall buildings, Philippe Dechartre's little house, by the roughness of its stones, by the naive heaviness of its windows, by the simplicity of the roof, which the architect's widow had caused to be covered with little expense, by all the lucky accidents of the unfinished and unpremeditated, corrected the lack of grace of its new and affected antiquity and archeologic romanticism, and harmonized with the humbleness of a district made ugly by progress of population.

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In fine, notwithstanding its appearance of ruin and its green drapery, that little house had its charm. Suddenly and instinctively, Therese discovered in it other harmonies. In the elegant negligence which extended from the walls covered with vines to the darkened panes of the studio, and even in the bent tree, the bark of which studded with its shells the wild grass of the courtyard, she divined the mind of the master, nonchalant, not skilful in preserving, living in the long solitude of passionate men. She had in her joy a sort of grief at observing this careless state in which her lover left things around him. She found in it a sort of grace and nobility, but also a spirit of indifference contrary to her own nature, opposite to the interested and careful mind of the Montessuys. At once she thought that, without spoiling the pensive softness of that rough corner, she would bring to it her well-ordered activity; she would have sand thrown in the alley, and in the angle wherein a little sunlight came she would put the gayety of flowers. She looked sympathetically at a statue which had come there from some park, a Flora, lying on the earth, eaten by black moss, her two arms lying by her sides. She thought of raising her soon, of making of her a centrepiece for a fountain. Dechartre, who for an hour had been watching for her coming, joyful, anxious, trembling in his agitated happiness, descended the steps. In the fresh shade of the vestibule, wherein she divined confusedly the severe splendor of bronze and marble statues, she stopped, troubled by the beatings of her heart, which throbbed with all its might in her chest. He pressed her in his arms and kissed her. She heard him, through the tumult of her temples, recalling to her the short delights of the day before. She saw again the lion of the Atlas on the carpet, and returned to Jacques his kisses with delicious slowness. He led her, by a wooden stairway, into the vast hall which had served formerly as a workshop, where he designed and modelled his figures, and, above all, read; he liked reading as if it were opium.

Pale-tinted Gothic tapestries, which let one perceive in a marvellous forest a lady at the feet of whom a unicorn lay on the grass, extended above cabinets to the painted beams of the ceiling. He led her to a large and low divan, loaded with cushions covered with sumptuous fragments of Spanish and Byzantine cloaks; but she sat in an armchair. "You are here! You are here! The world may come to an end."

She replied "Formerly I thought of the end of the world, but I was not afraid of it. Monsieur Lagrange had promised it to me, and I was waiting for it. When I did not know you, I felt so lonely." She looked at the tables loaded with vases and statuettes, the tapestries, the confused and splendid mass of weapons, the animals, the marbles, the paintings, the ancient books. "You have beautiful things."

"Most of them come from my father, who lived in the golden age of collectors. These histories of the unicorn, the complete series of which is at Cluny, were found by my father in 1851 in an inn."

But, curious and disappointed, she said: "I see nothing that you have done; not a statue, not one of those wax figures which are prized so highly in England, not a figurine nor a plaque nor a medal."

"If you think I could find any pleasure in living among my works! I know my figures too well they weary me. Whatever is without secret lacks charm." She looked at him with affected spite.

"You had not told me that one had lost all charm when one had no more secrets."

He put his arm around her waist.

"Ah! The things that live are only too mysterious; and you remain for me, my beloved, an enigma, the unknown sense of which contains the light of life. Do not fear to give yourself to me. I shall desire you always, but I never shall know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses, caresses, anything else than the effort of a delightful despair? When I embrace you, I am still searching for you, and I never have you; since I want you always, since in you I expect the impossible and the infinite. What you are, the devil knows if I shall ever know! Because I have modelled a few bad figures I am not a sculptor; I am rather a sort of poet and philosopher who seeks for subjects of anxiety and torment in nature. The sentiment of form is not sufficient for me. My colleagues laugh at me because I have not their simplicity. They are right. And that brute Choulette is right too, when he says

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we ought to live without thinking and without desiring. Our friend the cobbler of Santa Maria Novella, who knows nothing of what might make him unjust and unfortunate, is a master of the art of living. I ought to love you naively, without that sort of metaphysics which is passionate and makes me absurd and wicked. There is nothing good except to ignore and to forget. Come, come, I have thought of you too cruelly in the tortures of your absence; come, my beloved! I must forget you with you. It is with you only that I can forget you and lose myself."

He took her in his arms and, lifting her veil, kissed her on the lips.

A little frightened in that vast, unknown hall, embarrassed by the look of strange things, she drew the black tulle to her chin.

"Here! You can not think of it."

He said they were alone.

"Alone? And the man with terrible moustaches who opened the door?"

He smiled:

"That is Fusellier, my father's former servant. He and his wife take charge of the house. Do not be afraid. They remain in their box. You shall see Madame Fusellier; she is inclined to familiarity. I warn you."

"My friend, why has Monsieur Fusellier, a janitor, moustaches like a Tartar?"

"My dear, nature gave them to him. I am not sorry that he has the air of a sergeant-major and gives me the illusion of being a country neighbor."

Seated on the corner of the divan, he drew her to his knees and gave to her kisses which she returned.

She rose quickly.

"Show me the other rooms. I am curious. I wish to see everything."

He escorted her to the second story. Aquarelles by Philippe Dechartre covered the walls of the corridor. He opened the door and made her enter a room furnished with white mahogany:

It was his mother's room. He kept it intact in its past. Uninhabited for nine years, the room had not the air of being resigned to its solitude. The mirror waited for the old lady's glance, and on the onyx clock a pensive Sappho was lonely because she did not hear the noise of the pendulum.

There were two portraits on the walls. One by Ricard represented Philippe Dechartre, very pale, with ruffled hair, and eyes lost in a romantic dream. The other showed a middle-aged woman, almost beautiful in her ardent slightness. It was Madame Philippe Dechartre.

"My poor mother's room is like me," said Jacques; "it remembers."

"You resemble your mother," said Th rese; "you have her eyes. Paul Vence told me she adored you."

"Yes," he replied, smilingly. "My mother was excellent, intelligent, exquisite, marvellously absurd. Her madness was maternal love. She did not give me a moment of rest. She tormented herself and tormented me."

Therese looked at a bronze figure by Carpeaux, placed on the chiffonier.

"You recognize," said Dechartre, "the Prince Imperial by his ears, which are like the wings of a zephyr, and which enliven his cold visage. This bronze is a gift of Napoleon III. My parents went to Compiègne. My father, while the court was at Fontainebleau, made the plan of the castle, and designed the gallery. In the morning the Emperor would come, in his frock-coat, and smoking his meerschaum pipe, to sit near him like a penguin on a rock. At that time I went to day-school. I listened to his stories at table, and I have not forgotten them. The Emperor stayed there, peaceful and quiet, interrupting his long silence with few words smothered under his big moustache; then he roused himself a little and explained his ideas of machinery. He was an inventor. He would draw a pencil from his pocket and make drawings on my father's designs. He spoiled in that way two or three studies a week. He liked my father a great deal, and promised works and honors to him which never came. The Emperor was kind, but he had no influence, as mamma said. At that time I was a little boy. Since then a vague sympathy has remained in me for that man, who was lacking in genius, but whose mind was affectionate and beautiful, and who carried through great adventures a simple courage and a gentle fatalism. Then he is sympathetic to me because he has been combated and insulted by people who were eager to take his place, and who had not, as he had, in the depths of their souls, a love for the people. We have seen them in power since then. Heavens, how ugly they are! Senator Loyer, for instance, who at your house, in the smoking-room, filled his pockets with cigars, and invited me to do likewise. That Loyer is a bad man, harsh to the unfortunate, to the weak, and to the humble. And Garain, don't you think his mind is disgusting? Do you remember the first time I dined at your house and we talked of Napoleon? Your hair, twisted above your neck, and shot through by a diamond arrow, was adorable. Paul Vence said subtle things. Garain did not understand. You asked for my opinion."

"It was to make you shine. I was already conceited for you."

"Oh, I never could say a single phrase before people who are so serious. Yet I had a great desire to say that Napoleon III pleased me more than Napoleon I; that I thought him more touching; but perhaps that idea would have produced a bad effect. But I am not so destitute of talent as to care about politics."

He looked around the room, and at the furniture with familiar tenderness. He opened a drawer:

"Here are mamma's eye-glasses. How she searched for these eye-glasses! Now I will show you my room. If it is not in order you must excuse Madame Fusellier, who is trained to respect my disorder."

The curtains at the windows were down. He did not lift them. After an hour she drew back the red satin draperies; rays of light dazzled her eyes and fell on her floating hair. She looked for a mirror and found only a looking-glass of Venice, dull in its wide ebony border. Rising on the tips of her toes to see herself in it, she said:

"Is that sombre and far-away spectre I? The women who have looked at themselves in this glass can not have complimented you on it."

As she was taking pins from the table she noticed a little bronze figure which she had not yet seen. It was an old Italian work of Flemish taste: a nude woman, with short legs and heavy stomach, who apparently ran with an arm extended. She thought the figure had a droll air. She asked what she was doing.

"She is doing what Madame Mundanity does on the portal of the cathedral at Basle."

But Therese, who had been at Basle, did not know Madame Mundanity. She looked at the figure again, did not understand, and asked:

"Is it something very bad? How can a thing shown on the portal of a church be so difficult to tell here?"

Suddenly an anxiety came to her:

"What will Monsieur and Madame Fusellier think of me?"

Then, discovering on the wall a medallion wherein Dechartre had modelled the profile of a girl, amusing and vicious:

"What is that?"

"That is Clara, a newspaper girl. She brought the Figaro to me every morning. She had dimples in her cheeks, nests for kisses. One day I said to her: 'I will make your portrait.' She came, one summer morning, with earrings and rings which she had bought at the Neuilly fair. I never saw her again. I do not know what has become of her. She was too instinctive to become a fashionable demi-mondaine. Shall I take it out?"

"No; it looks very well in that corner. I am not jealous of Clara."

It was time to return home, and she could not decide to go. She put her arms around her lover's neck.

"Oh, I love you! And then, you have been to-day good-natured and gay. Gayety becomes you so well. I should like to make you gay always. I need joy almost as much as love; and who will give me joy if you do not?"

CHAPTER XXVII. THE PRIMROSE PATH

After her return to Paris, for six weeks Therese lived in the ardent half sleep of happiness, and prolonged delightfully her thoughtless dream. She went to see Jacques every day in the little house shaded by a tree; and when they had at last parted at night, she took away with her adored reminiscences. They had the same tastes; they yielded to the same fantasies. The same capricious thoughts carried them away. They found pleasure in running to the suburbs that border the city, the streets where the wine-shops are shaded by acacia, the stony roads where the grass grows at the foot of walls, the little woods and the fields over which extended the blue sky striped by the smoke of manufactories. She was happy to feel him near her in this region where she did not know herself, and where she gave to herself the illusion of being lost with him.

One day they had taken the boat that she had seen pass so often under her windows. She was not afraid of being recognized. Her danger was not great, and, since she was in love, she had lost prudence. They saw shores which little by little grew gay, escaping the dusty aridity of the suburbs; they went by islands with bouquets of trees shading taverns, and innumerable boats tied under willows. They debarked at Bas-Meudon. As she said she was warm and thirsty, he made her enter a wine-shop. It was a building with wooden galleries, which solitude made to appear larger, and which slept in rustic peace, waiting for Sunday to fill it with the laughter of girls, the cries of boatmen, the odor of fried fish, and the smoke of stews.

They went up the creaking stairway, shaped like a ladder, and in a first-story room a maid servant brought wine and biscuits to them. On the mantelpiece, at one of the corners of the room, was an oval mirror in a flower-covered frame. Through the open window one saw the Seine, its green shores, and the hills in the distance bathed with warm air. The trembling peace of a summer evening filled the sky, the earth, and the water.

Therese looked at the running river. The boat passed on the water, and when the wake which it left reached the shore it seemed as if the house rocked like a vessel.

"I like the water," said Therese. "How happy I am!"

Their lips met.

Lost in the enchanted despair of love, time was not marked for them except by the cool splash of the water, which at intervals broke under the half-open window. To the caressing praise of her lover she replied:

"It is true I was made for love. I love myself because you love me."

Certainly, he loved her; and it was not possible for him to explain to himself why he loved her with ardent piety, with a sort of sacred fury. It was not because of her beauty, although it was rare and infinitely precious. She had exquisite lines, but lines follow movement, and escape incessantly; they are lost and found again; they cause aesthetic joys and despair. A beautiful line is the lightning which deliciously wounds the eyes. One admires and one is surprised. What makes one love is a soft and terrible force, more powerful than beauty. One finds one woman among a thousand whom one wants always. There was that woman whom one can not leave or betray.

She exclaimed, joyfully:

"I never shall be forsaken?"

She asked why he did not make her bust, since he thought her beautiful.

"Why? Because I am an ordinary sculptor, and I know it; which is not the faculty of an ordinary mind. But if you wish to think that I am a great artist, I will give you other reasons. To create a figure that will live, one must take the model like common material from which one will extract the beauty, press it, crush it, and obtain its essence. There is nothing in you that is not precious to me. If I made your bust I should be servilely attached to these things which are everything to me because they are something of you. I should stubbornly attach myself to the details, and should not succeed in composing a finished figure."

She looked at him astonished.

He continued:

"From memory I might. I tried a pencil sketch." As she wished to see it, he showed it to her. It was on an album leaf, a very simple sketch. She did not recognize herself in it, and thought he had represented her with a kind of soul that she did not have.

"Ah, is that the way in which you see me? Is that the way in which you love me?"

He closed the album.

"No; this is only a note. But I think the note is just. It is probable you do not see yourself exactly as I see you. Every human creature is a different being for every one that looks at it."

He added, with a sort of gayety:

"In that sense one may say one woman never belonged to two men. That is one of Paul Vence's ideas."

"I think it is true," said Therese.

It was seven o'clock. She said she must go. Every day she returned home later. Her husband had noticed it. He had said: "We are the last to arrive at all the dinners; there is a fatality about it!" But, detained every day in the Chamber of Deputies, where the budget was being discussed, and absorbed by the work of a subcommittee of

which he was the chairman, state reasons excused Therese's lack of punctuality. She recalled smilingly a night when she had arrived at Madame Garain's at half-past eight. She had feared to cause a scandal. But it was a day of great affairs. Her husband came from the Chamber at nine o'clock only, with Garain. They dined in morning dress. They had saved the Ministry.

Then she fell into a dream.

"When the Chamber shall be adjourned, my friend, I shall not have a pretext to remain in Paris. My father does not understand my devotion to my husband which makes me stay in Paris. In a week I shall have to go to Dinard. What will become of me without you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him with a sadness infinitely tender. But he, more sombre, said:

"It is I, Therese, it is I who must ask anxiously, What will become of me without you? When you leave me alone I am assailed by painful thoughts; black ideas come and sit in a circle around me."

She asked him what those ideas were.

He replied:

"My beloved, I have already told you: I have to forget you with you. When you are gone, your memory will torment me. I have to pay for the happiness you give me."

CHAPTER XXVIII. NEWS OF LE MENIL

The blue sea, studded with pink shoals, threw its silvery fringe softly on the fine sand of the beach, along the amphitheatre terminated by two golden horns. The beauty of the day threw a ray of sunlight on the tomb of Chateaubriand. In a room where a balcony looked out upon the beach, the ocean, the islands, and the promontories, Therese was reading the letters which she had found in the morning at the St. Malo post-office, and which she had not opened in the boat, loaded with passengers. At once, after breakfast, she had closeted herself in her room, and there, her letters unfolded on her knees, she relished hastily her furtive joy. She was to drive at two o'clock on the mall with her father, her husband, the Princess Seniavine; Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, the wife of the Deputy, and Madame Raymond, the wife of the Academician. She had two letters that day. The first one she read exhaled a tender aroma of love. Jacques had never displayed more simplicity, more happiness, and more charm.

Since he had been in love with her, he said, he had walked so lightly and was supported by such joy that his feet did not touch the earth. He had only one fear, which was that he might be dreaming, and might awake unknown to her. Doubtless he was only dreaming. And what a dream! He was like one intoxicated and singing. He had not his reason, happily. Absent, he saw her continually. "Yes, I see you near me; I see your lashes shading eyes the gray of which is more delicious than all the blue of the sky and the flowers; your lips, which have the taste of a marvellous fruit; your cheeks, where laughter puts two adorable dimples; I see you beautiful and desired, but fleeing and gliding away; and when I open my arms, you have gone; and I see you afar on the long, long beach, not taller than a fairy, in your pink gown, under your parasol. Oh, so small! small as you were one day when I saw you from the height of the Campanile in the square at Florence. And I say to myself, as I said that day: 'A bit of grass would suffice to hide her from me, yet she is for me the infinite of joy and of pain.'"

He complained of the torments of absence. And he mingled with his complaints the smiles of fortunate love. He threatened jokingly to surprise her at Dinard. "Do not be afraid. They will not recognize me. I shall be disguised as a vender of plaster images. It will not be a lie. Dressed in gray tunic and trousers, my beard and face covered

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with white dust, I shall ring the bell of the Montessuy villa. You may recognize me, Therese, by the statuettes on the plank placed on my head. They will all be cupids. There will be faithful Love, jealous Love, tender Love, vivid Love; there will be many vivid Loves. And I shall shout in the rude and sonorous language of the artisans of Pisa or of Florence: 'Tutti gli Amori per la Signora Teersinal!'

The last page of this letter was tender and grave. There were pious effusions in it which reminded Therese of the prayer-books she read when a child. "I love you, and I love everything in you: the earth that carries you, on which you weigh so lightly, and which you embellish; the light that allows me to see you; the air you breathe. I like the bent tree of my yard because you have seen it. I have walked tonight on the avenue where I met you one winter night. I have culled a branch of the boxwood at which you looked. In this city, where you are not, I see only you."

He said at the end of his letter that he was to dine out. In the absence of Madame Fusellier, who had gone to the country, he should go to a wine-shop of the Rue Royale where he was known. And there, in the indistinct crowd, he should be alone with her.

Therese, made languid by the softness of invisible caresses, closed her eyes and threw back her head on the armchair. When she heard the noise of the carriage coming near the house, she opened the second letter. As soon as she saw the altered handwriting of it, the lines precipitate and uneven, the distracted look of the address, she was troubled.

Its obscure beginning indicated sudden anguish and black suspicion: "Therese, Therese, why did you give yourself to me if you were not giving yourself to me wholly? How does it serve me that you have deceived me, now that I know what I did not wish to know?"

She stopped; a veil came over her eyes. She thought:

"We were so happy a moment ago. What has happened? And I was so pleased at his joy, when it had already gone; it would be better not to write, since letters show only vanished sentiments and effaced ideas."

She read further. And seeing that he was full of jealousy, she felt discouraged.

"If I have not proved to him that I love him with all my strength, that I love him with all there is in me, how am I ever to persuade him of it?"

And she was impatient to discover the cause of his folly. Jacques told it. While taking breakfast in the Rue Royale he had met a former companion who had just returned from the seaside. They had talked together; chance made that man speak of the Countess Martin, whom he knew. And at once, interrupting the narration, Jacques exclaimed: "Therese, Therese, why did you lie to me, since I was sure to learn some day that of which I alone was ignorant? But the error is mine more than yours. The letter which you put into the San Michele post-box, your meeting at the Florence station, would have enlightened me if I had not obstinately retained my illusions and disdained evidence.

"I did not know; I wished to remain ignorant. I did not ask you anything, from fear that you might not be able to continue to lie; I was prudent; and it has happened that an idiot suddenly, brutally, at a restaurant table, has opened my eyes and forced me to know. Oh, now that I know, now that I can not doubt, it seems to me that to doubt would be delicious! He gave the name the name which I heard at Fiesole from Miss Bell, and he added: 'Everybody knows about that.'

"So you loved him. You love him still! He is near you, doubtless. He goes every year to the Dinard races. I have been told so. I see him. I see everything. If you knew the images that worry me, you would say, 'He is mad,' and you would take pity on me. Oh, how I should like to forget you and everything! But I can not. You know very

well I can not forget you except with you. I see you incessantly with him. It is torture. I thought I was unfortunate that night on the banks of the Arno. But I did not know then what it is to suffer. To-day I know."

As she finished reading that letter, Therese thought: "A word thrown haphazard has placed him in that condition, a word has made him despairing and mad." She tried to think who might be the wretched fellow who could have talked in that way. She suspected two or three young men whom Le Menil had introduced to her once, warning her not to trust them. And with one of the white and cold fits of anger she had inherited from her father she said to herself: "I must know who he is." In the meanwhile what was she to do? Her lover in despair, mad, ill, she could not run to him, embrace him, and throw herself on him with such an abandonment that he would feel how entirely she was his, and be forced to believe in her. Should she write? How much better it would be to go to him, to fall upon his heart and say to him: "Dare to believe I am not yours only!" But she could only write. She had hardly begun her letter when she heard voices and laughter in the garden. Therese went down, tranquil and smiling; her large straw hat threw on her face a transparent shadow wherein her gray eyes shone.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Princess Seniavine. "What a pity it is we never see her! In the morning she is promenading in the alleys of Saint Malo, in the afternoon she is closeted in her room. She runs away from us."

The coach turned around the large circle of the beach at the foot of the villas and gardens on the hillside. And they saw at the left the ramparts and the steeple of St. Malo rise from the blue sea. Then the coach went into a road bordered by hedges, along which walked Dinard women, erect under their wide headdresses.

"Unfortunately," said Madame Raymond, seated on the box by Montessuy's side, "old costumes are dying out. The fault is with the railways."

"It is true," said Montessuy, "that if it were not for the railways the peasants would still wear their picturesque costumes of other times. But we should not see them."

"What does it matter?" replied Madame Raymond. "We could imagine them."

"But," asked the Princess Seniavine, "do you ever see interesting things? I never do."

Madame Raymond, who had taken from her husband's books a vague tint of philosophy, declared that things were nothing, and that the idea was everything.

Without looking at Madame Berthier-d'Eyzelles, seated at her right, the Countess Martin murmured:

"Oh, yes, people see only their ideas; they follow only their ideas. They go along, blind and deaf. One can not stop them."

"But, my dear," said Count Martin, placed in front of her, by the Princess's side, "without leading ideas one would go haphazard. Have you read, Montessuy, the speech delivered by Loyer at the unveiling of the Cadet-Gassicourt statue? The beginning is remarkable. Loyer is not lacking in political sense."

The carriage, having traversed the fields bordered with willows, went up a hill and advanced on a vast, wooded plateau. For a long time it skirted the walls of the park.

"Is it the Gueric?" asked the Princess Seniavine.

Suddenly, between two stone pillars surmounted by lions, appeared the closed gate. At the end of a long alley stood the gray stones of a castle.

"Yes," said Montessuy, "it is the Gueric."

And, addressing Therese:

"You knew the Marquis de Re? At sixty-five he had retained his strength and his youth. He set the fashion and was loved. Young men copied his frockcoat, his monocle, his gestures, his exquisite insolence, his amusing fads. Suddenly he abandoned society, closed his house, sold his stable, ceased to show himself. Do you remember, Therese, his sudden disappearance? You had been married a short time. He called on you often. One fine day people learned that he had quitted Paris. This is the place where he had come in winter. People tried to find a reason for his sudden retreat; some thought he had run away under the influence of sorrow or humiliation, or from fear that the world might see him grow old. He was afraid of old age more than of anything else. For seven years he has lived in retirement from society; he has not gone out of the castle once. He receives at the Gueric two or three old men who were his companions in youth. This gate is opened for them only. Since his retirement no one has seen him; no one ever will see him. He shows the same care to conceal himself that he had formerly to show himself. He has not suffered from his decline. He exists in a sort of living death."

And Therese, recalling the amiable old man who had wished to finish gloriously with her his life of gallantry, turned her head and looked at the Gueric lifting its four towers above the gray summits of oaks.

On their return she said she had a headache and that she would not take dinner. She locked herself in her room and drew from her jewel casket the lamentable letter. She read over the last page.

"The thought that you belong to another burns me. And then, I did not wish that man to be the one."

It was a fixed idea. He had written three times on the same leaf these words: "I did not wish that man to be the one."

She, too, had only one idea: not to lose him. Not to lose him, she would have said anything, she would have done anything. She went to her table and wrote, under the spur of a tender, and plaintive violence, a letter wherein she repeated like a groan: "I love you, I love you! I never have loved any one but you. You are alone, alone do you hear? in my mind, in me. Do not think of what that wretched man said. Listen to me! I never loved any one, I swear, any one, before you."

As she was writing, the soft sigh of the sea accompanied her own sigh. She wished to say, she believed she was saying, real things; and all that she was saying was true of the truth of her love. She heard the heavy step of her father on the stairway. She hid her letter and opened the door. Montessuy asked her whether she felt better.

"I came," he said, "to say good-night to you, and to ask you something. It is probable that I shall meet Le Menil at the races. He goes there every year. If I meet him, darling, would you have any objection to my inviting him to come here for a few days? Your husband thinks he would be agreeable company for you. We might give him the blue room."

"As you wish. But I should prefer that you keep the blue room for Paul Vence, who wishes to come. It is possible, too, that Choulette may come without warning. It is his habit. We shall see him some morning ringing like a beggar at the gate. You know my husband is mistaken when he thinks Le Menil pleases me. And then I must go to Paris next week for two or three days."

CHAPTER XXIX. JEALOUSY

Twenty-four hours after writing her letter, Therese went from Dinard to the little house in the Ternes. It had not

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been difficult for her to find a pretext to go to Paris. She had made the trip with her husband, who wanted to see his electors whom the Socialists were working over. She surprised Jacques in the morning, at the studio, while he was sketching a tall figure of Florence weeping on the shore of the Arno.

The model, seated on a very high stool, kept her pose. She was a long, dark girl. The harsh light which fell from the skylight gave precision to the pure lines of her hip and thighs, accentuated her harsh visage, her dark neck, her marble chest, the lines of her knees and feet, the toes of which were set one over the other. Therese looked at her curiously, divining her exquisite form under the miseries of her flesh, poorly fed and badly cared for.

Dechartre came toward Therese with an air of painful tenderness which moved her. Then, placing his clay and the instrument near the easel, and covering the figure with a wet cloth, he said to the model:

"That is enough for to-day."

She rose, picked up awkwardly her clothing, a handful of dark wool and soiled linen, and went to dress behind the screen.

Meanwhile the sculptor, having dipped in the water of a green bowl his hands, which the tenacious clay made white, went out of the studio with Therese.

They passed under the tree which studded the sand of the courtyard with the shells of its flayed bark. She said:

"You have no more faith, have you?"

He led her to his room.

The letter written from Dinard had already softened his painful impressions. She had come at the moment when, tired of suffering, he felt the need of calm and of tenderness. A few lines of handwriting had appeased his mind, fed on images, less susceptible to things than to the signs of things; but he felt a pain in his heart.

In the room where everything spoke of her, where the furniture, the curtains, and the carpets told of their love, she murmured soft words:

"You could believe do you not know what you are? it was folly! How can a woman who has known you care for another after you?"

"But before?"

"Before, I was waiting for you."

"And he did not attend the races at Dinard?"

She did not think he had, and it was very certain she did not attend them herself. Horses and horsey men bored her.

"Jacques, fear no one, since you are not comparable to any one."

He knew, on the contrary, how insignificant he was and how insignificant every one is in this world where beings, agitated like grains in a van, are mixed and separated by a shake of the rustic or of the god. This idea of the agricultural or mystical van represented measure and order too well to be exactly applied to life. It seemed to him that men were grains in a coffee-mill. He had had a vivid sensation of this the day before, when he saw Madame

Fusellier grinding coffee in her mill.

Therese said to him:

"Why are you not conceited?"

She added few words, but she spoke with her eyes, her arms, the breath that made her bosom rise.

In the happy surprise of seeing and hearing her, he permitted himself to be convinced.

She asked who had said so odious a thing.

He had no reason to conceal his name from her. It was Daniel Salomon.

She was not surprised. Daniel Salomon, who passed for not having been the lover of any woman, wished at least to be in the confidence of all and know their secrets. She guessed the reason why he had talked.

"Jacques, do not be cross at what I say to you. You are not skilful in concealing your sentiments. He suspected you were in love with me, and he wished to be sure of it. I am persuaded that now he has no doubt of our relations. But that is indifferent to me. On the contrary, if you knew better how to dissimulate, I should be less happy. I should think you did not love me enough."

For fear of disquieting him, she turned to other thoughts:

"I have not told you how much I like your sketch. It is Florence on the Arno. Then it is we?"

"Yes, I have placed in that figure the emotion of my love. It is sad, and I wish it were beautiful. You see, Therese, beauty is painful. That is why, since life is beautiful, I suffer."

He took out of his flannel coat his cigarette-holder, but she told him to dress. She would take him to breakfast with her. They would not quit each other that day. It would be delightful.

She looked at him with childish joy. Then she became sad, thinking she would have to return to Dinard at the end of the week, later go to Joinville, and that during that time they would be separated.

At Joinville, at her father's, she would cause him to be invited for a few days. But they would not be free and alone there, as they were in Paris.

"It is true," he said, "that Paris is good to us in its confused immensity."

And he added:

"Even in your absence I can not quit Paris. It would be terrible for me to live in countries that do not know you. A sky, mountains, trees, fountains, statues which do not know how to talk of you would have nothing to say to me."

While he was dressing she turned the leaves of a book which she had found on the table. It was The Arabian Nights. Romantic engravings displayed here and there in the text grand viziers, sultanas, black tunics, bazaars, and caravans.

She asked:

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"The Arabian Nights—does that amuse you?"

"A great deal," he replied, tying his cravat. "I believe as much as I wish in these Arabian princes whose legs become black marble, and in these women of the harem who wander at night in cemeteries. These tales give me pleasant dreams which make me forget life. Last night I went to bed in sadness and read the history of the Three Calendars."

She said, with a little bitterness:

"You are trying to forget. I would not consent for anything in the world to lose the memory of a pain which came to me from you."

They went down together to the street. She was to take a carriage a little farther on and precede him at her house by a few minutes.

"My husband expects you to breakfast."

They talked, on the way, of insignificant things, which their love made great and charming. They arranged their afternoon in advance in order to put into it the infinity of profound joy and of ingenious pleasure. She consulted him about her gowns. She could not decide to leave him, happy to walk with him in the streets, which the sun and the gayety of noon filled. When they reached the Avenue des Ternes they saw before them, on the avenue, shops displaying side by side a magnificent abundance of food. There were chains of chickens at the caterer's, and at the fruiterer's boxes of apricots and peaches, baskets of grapes, piles of pears. Wagons filled with fruits and flowers bordered the sidewalk. Under the awning of a restaurant men and women were taking breakfast. There were recognized among them, alone, at a small table against a laurel-tree in a box, Choulette lighting his pipe.

Having seen her, he threw superbly a five-franc piece on the table, rose, and bowed. He was grave; his long frock-coat gave him an air of decency and austerity.

He said he should have liked to call on Madame Martin at Dinard, but he had been detained in the Vendee by the Marquise de Rieu. However, he had issued a new edition of the Jardin Clos, augmented by the Verger de Sainte-Claire. He had moved souls which were thought to be insensible, and had made springs come out of rocks.

"So," he said, "I was, in a fashion, a Moses."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew from a book a letter, worn and spotted.

"This is what Madame Raymond, the Academician's wife, writes me. I publish what she says, because it is creditable to her."

And, unfolding the thin leaves, he read:

"I have made your book known to my husband, who exclaimed: 'It is pure spiritualism. Here is a closed garden, which on the side of the lilies and white roses has, I imagine, a small gate opening on the road to the Academie.'"

Choulette relished these phrases, mingled in his mouth with the perfume of whiskey, and replaced carefully the letter in its book.

Madame Martin congratulated the poet on being Madame Raymond's candidate.

"You should be mine, Monsieur Choulette, if I were interested in Academic elections. But does the Institute excite your envy?"

He kept for a few moments a solemn silence, then:

"I am going now, Madame, to confer with divers notable persons of the political and religious worlds who reside at Neuilly. The Marquise de Rieu wishes me to be a candidate, in her country, for a senatorial seat which has become vacant by the death of an old man, who was, they say, a general during his illusory life. I shall consult with priests, women and children oh, eternal wisdom! of the Bineau Boulevard. The constituency whose suffrages I shall attempt to obtain inhabits an undulated and wooded land wherein willows frame the fields. And it is not a rare thing to find in the hollow of one of these old willows the skeleton of a Chouan pressing his gun against his breast and holding his beads in his fleshless fingers. I shall have my programme posted on the bark of oaks. I shall say 'Peace to presbyteries! Let the day come when bishops, holding in their hands the wooden crook, shall make themselves similar to the poorest servant of the poorest parish! It was the bishops who crucified Jesus Christ. Their names were Anne and Caiph. And they still retain these names before the Son of God. While they were nailing Him to the cross, I was the good thief hanged by His side.'"

He lifted his stick and pointed toward Neuilly:

"Dechartre, my friend, do you not think the Bineau Boulevard is the dusty one over there, at the right?"

"Farewell, Monsieur Choulette," said Therese. "Remember me when you are a senator."

"Madame, I do not forget you in any of my prayers, morning and evening. And I say to God: 'Since, in your anger, you gave to her riches and beauty, regard her, Lord, with kindness, and treat her in accordance with your sovereign mercy.'"

And he went erect, and dragging his leg, along the populous avenue.

CHAPTER XXX. A LETTER FROM ROBERT

Enveloped in a mantle of pink broad cloth, Therese went down the steps with Dechartre. He had come in the morning to Joinville. She had made him join the circle of her intimate friends, before the hunting-party to which she feared Le Menil had been invited, as was the custom. The light air of September agitated the curls of her hair, and the sun made golden darts shine in the profound gray of her eyes. Behind them, the facade of the palace displayed above the three arcades of the first story, in the intervals of the windows, on long tables, busts of Roman emperors. The house was placed between two tall pavilions which their great slate roofs made higher, over pillars of the Ionic order. This style betrayed the art of the architect Leveau, who had constructed, in 1650, the castle of Joinville-sur-Oise for that rich Mareuilles, creature of Mazarin, and fortunate accomplice of Fouquet.

Therese and Jacques saw before them the flower-beds designed by Le Notre, the green carpet, the fountain; then the grotto with its five rustic arcades crowned by the tall trees on which autumn had already begun to spread its golden mantle.

"This green geometry is beautiful," said Dechartre.

"Yes," said Therese. "But I think of the tree bent in the small courtyard where grass grows among the stones. We shall build a beautiful fountain in it, shall we not, and put flowers in it?"

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Leaning against one of the stone lions with almost human faces, that guarded the steps, she turned her head toward the castle, and, looking at one of the windows, said:

"There is your room; I went into it last night. On the same floor, on the other side, at the other end, is my father's office. A white wooden table, a mahogany portfolio, a decanter on the mantelpiece: his office when he was a young man. Our entire fortune came from that place."

Through the sand-covered paths between the flowerbeds they walked to the boxwood hedge which bordered the park on the southern side. They passed before the orange-grove, the monumental door of which was surmounted by the Lorraine cross of Mareuilles, and then passed under the linden-trees which formed an alley on the lawn. Statues of nymphs shivered in the damp shade studded with pale lights. A pigeon, posed on the shoulder of one of the white women, fled. From time to time a breath of wind detached a dried leaf which fell, a shell of red gold, where remained a drop of rain. Therese pointed to the nymph and said:

"She saw me when I was a girl and wishing to die. I suffered from dreams and from fright. I was waiting for you. But you were so far away!"

The linden alley stopped near the large basin, in the centre of which was a group of tritons blowing in their shells to form, when the waters played, a liquid diadem with flowers of foam.

"It is the Joinville crown," she said.

She pointed to a pathway which, starting from the basin, lost itself in the fields, in the direction of the rising sun.

"This is my pathway. How often I walked in it sadly! I was sad when I did not know you."

They found the alley which, with other lindens and other nymphs, went beyond. And they followed it to the grottoes. There was, in the rear of the park, a semicircle of five large niches of rocks surmounted by balustrades and separated by gigantic Terminus gods. One of these gods, at a corner of the monument, dominated all the others by his monstrous nudity, and lowered on them his stony look.

"When my father bought Joinville," she said, "the grottoes were only ruins, full of grass and vipers. A thousand rabbits had made holes in them. He restored the Terminus gods and the arcades in accordance with prints by Perrelle, which are preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale. He was his own architect."

A desire for shade and mystery led them toward the arbor near the grottoes. But the noise of footsteps which they heard, coming from the covered alley, made them stop for a moment, and they saw, through the leaves, Montessuy, with his arm around the Princess Seniavine's waist. Quietly they were walking toward the palace. Jacques and Therese, hiding behind the enormous Terminus god, waited until they had passed.

Then she said to Dechartre, who was looking at her silently:

"That is amazing! I understand now why the Princess Seniavine, this winter, asked my father to advise her about buying horses."

Yet Therese admired her father for having conquered that beautiful woman, who passed for being hard to please, and who was known to be wealthy, in spite of the embarrassments which her mad disorder had caused her. She asked Jacques whether he did not think the Princess was beautiful. He said she had elegance. She was beautiful, doubtless.

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Therese led Jacques to the moss-covered steps which, ascending behind the grottoes, led to the Gerbe-de-l'Oise, formed of leaden reeds in the midst of a great pink marble vase. Tall trees closed the park's perspective and stood at the beginning of the forest. They walked under them. They were silent under the faint moan of the leaves.

He pressed her in his arms and placed kisses on her eyelids. Night was descending, the first stars were trembling among the branches. In the damp grass sighed the frog's flutes. They went no farther.

When she took with him, in darkness, the road to the palace, the taste of kisses and of mint remained on her lips, and in her eyes was the image of her lover. She smiled under the lindens at the nymphs who had seen the tears of her childhood. The Swan lifted in the sky its cross of stars, and the moon mirrored its slender horn in the basin of the crown. Insects in the grass uttered appeals to love. At the last turn of the boxwood hedge, Therese and Jacques saw the triple black mass of the castle, and through the wide bay-windows of the first story distinguished moving forms in the red light. The bell rang.

Therese exclaimed:

"I have hardly time to dress for dinner."

And she passed swiftly between the stone lions, leaving her lover under the impression of a fairy-tale vision.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, M. Berthier d'Eyzelles read the newspaper, and the Princess Seniavine played solitaire. Therese sat, her eyes half closed over a book.

The Princess asked whether she found what she was reading amusing.

"I do not know. I was reading and thinking. Paul Vence is right: 'We find only ourselves in books.'"

Through the hangings came from the billiard-room the voices of the players and the click of the balls.

"I have it!" exclaimed the Princess, throwing down the cards.

She had wagered a big sum on a horse which was running that day at the Chantilly races.

Therese said she had received a letter from Fiesole. Miss Bell announced her forthcoming marriage with Prince Eusebia Albertinelli della Spina.

The Princess laughed:

"There's a man who will render a service to her."

"What service?" asked Therese.

"He will disgust her with men, of course."

Montessuy came into the parlor joyfully. He had won the game.

He sat beside Berthier-d'Eyzelles, and, taking a newspaper from the sofa, said:

"The Minister of Finance announces that he will propose, when the Chamber reassembles, his savings-bank bill."

This bill was to give to savings-banks the authority to lend money to communes, a proceeding which would take from Montessuy's business houses their best customers.

"Berthier," asked the financier, "are you resolutely hostile to that bill?"

Berthier nodded.

Montessuy rose, placed his hand on the Deputy's shoulder, and said:

"My dear Berthier, I have an idea that the Cabinet will fall at the beginning of the session."

He approached his daughter.

"I have received an odd letter from Le Menil."

Therese rose and closed the door that separated the parlor from the billiard-room.

She was afraid of draughts, she said.

"A singular letter," continued Montessuy. "Le Menil will not come to Joinville. He has bought the yacht Rosebud. He is on the Mediterranean, and can not live except on the water. It is a pity. He is the only one who knows how to manage a hunt."

At this instant Dechartre came into the room with Count Martin, who, after beating him at billiards, had acquired a great affection for him and was explaining to him the dangers of a personal tax based on the number of servants one kept.

CHAPTER XXXI. AN UNWELCOME APPARITION

A pale winter sun piercing the mists of the Seine, illuminated the dogs painted by Oudry on the doors of the dining room.

Madame Martin had at her right Garain the Deputy, formerly Chancellor, also President of the Council, and at her left Senator Loyer. At Count Martin-Belleme's right was Monsieur Berthier-d'Eyzelles. It was an intimate and serious business gathering. In conformity with Montessuy's prediction, the Cabinet had fallen four days before. Called to the Elysee the same morning, Garain had accepted the task of forming a cabinet. He was preparing, while taking breakfast, the combination which was to be submitted in the evening to the President. And, while they were discussing names, Therese was reviewing within herself the images of her intimate life.

She had returned to Paris with Count Martin at the opening of the parliamentary session, and since that moment had led an enchanted life.

Jacques loved her; he loved her with a delicious mingling of passion and tenderness, of learned experience and curious ingenuity. He was nervous, irritable, anxious. But the uncertainty of his humor made his gayety more charming. That artistic gayety, bursting out suddenly like a flame, caressed love without offending it. And the playful wit of her lover made Therese marvel. She never could have imagined the infallible taste which he exercised naturally in joyful caprice and in familiar fantasy. At first he had displayed only the monotony of passionate ardor. That alone had captured her. But since then she had discovered in him a gay mind, well stored and diverse, as well as the gift of agreeable flattery.

"To assemble a homogeneous ministry," exclaimed Garain, "is easily said. Yet one must be guided by the tendencies of the various factions of the Chamber."

He was uneasy. He saw himself surrounded by as many snares as those which he had laid. Even his collaborators became hostile to him.

Count Martin wished the new ministry to satisfy the aspirations of the new men.

"Your list is formed of personalities essentially different in origin and in tendency," he said. "Yet the most important fact in the political history of recent years is the possibility, I should say the necessity, to introduce unity of views in the government of the republic. These are ideas which you, my dear Garin, have expressed with rare eloquence."

M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles kept silence.

Senator Loyer rolled crumbs with his fingers. He had been formerly a frequenter of beer-halls, and while moulding crumbs or cutting corks he found ideas. He raised his red face. And, looking at Garain with wrinkled eyes wherein red fire sparkled, he said:

"I said it, and nobody would believe it. The annihilation of the monarchical Right was for the chiefs of the Republican party an irreparable misfortune. We governed formerly against it. The real support of a government is the Opposition. The Empire governed against the Orleanists and against us; MacMahon governed against the Republicans. More fortunate, we governed against the Right. The Right what a magnificent Opposition it was! It threatened, was candid, powerless, great, honest, unpopular! We should have nursed it. We did not know how to do that. And then, of course, everything wears out. Yet it is always necessary to govern against something. There are to-day only Socialists to give us the support which the Right lent us fifteen years ago with so constant a generosity. But they are too weak. We should reinforce them, make of them a political party. To do this at the present hour is the first duty of a State minister."

Garain, who was not cynical, made no answer.

"Garain, do you not yet know," asked Count Martin, "whether with the Premiership you are to take the Seals or the Interior?"

Garain replied that his decision would depend on the choice which some one else would make. The presence of that personage in the Cabinet was necessary, and he hesitated between two portfolios. Garain sacrificed his personal convenience to superior interests.

Senator Loyer made a wry face. He wanted the Seals. It was a long-cherished desire. A teacher of law under the Empire, he gave, in cafes, lessons that were appreciated. He had the sense of chicanery. Having begun his political fortune with articles skilfully written in order to attract to himself prosecution, suits, and several weeks of imprisonment, he had considered the press as a weapon of opposition which every good government should break. Since September 4, 1870, he had had the ambition to become Keeper of the Seals, so that everybody might see how the old Bohemian who formerly explained the code while dining on sauerkraut, would appear as supreme chief of the magistracy.

Idiots by the dozen had climbed over his back. Now having become aged in the ordinary honors of the Senate, unpolished, married to a brewery girl, poor, lazy, disillusioned, his old Jacobin spirit and his sincere contempt for the people surviving his ambition, made of him a good man for the Government. This time, as a part of the Garain combination, he imagined he held the Department of Justice. And his protector, who would not give it to him, was an unfortunate rival. He laughed, while moulding a dog from a piece of bread.

M. Berthier–d'Eyzelles, calm and grave, caressed his handsome white beard.

"Do you not think, Monsieur Garain, that it would be well to give a place in the Cabinet to the men who have followed from the beginning the political principles toward which we are directing ourselves to–day?"

"They lost themselves in doing it," replied Garam, impatiently. "The politician never should be in advance of circumstances. It is an error to be in the right too soon. Thinkers are not men of business. And then let us talk frankly if you want a Ministry of the Left Centre variety, say so: I will retire. But I warn you that neither the Chamber nor the country will sustain you."

"It is evident," said Count Martin, "that we must be sure of a majority."

"With my list, we have a majority," said Garain. "It is the minority which sustained the Ministry against us. Gentlemen, I appeal to your devotion."

And the laborious distribution of the portfolios began again. Count Martin received, in the first place, the Public Works, which he refused, for lack of competency, and afterward the Foreign Affairs, which he accepted without objection.

But M. Berthier–d'Eyzelles, to whom Garain offered Commerce and Agriculture, reserved his decision.

Loyer got the Colonies. He seemed very busy trying to make his bread dog stand on the cloth. Yet he was looking out of the corners of his little wrinkled eyelids at the Countess Martin and thinking that she was desirable. He vaguely thought of the pleasure of meeting her again.

Leaving Garain to his combination, he was preoccupied by his fair hostess, trying to divine her tastes and her habits, asking her whether she went to the theatre, and if she ever went at night to the coffee–house with her husband. And Therese was beginning to think he was more interesting than the others, with his apparent ignorance of her world and his superb cynicism.

Gamin arose. He had to see several persons before submitting his list to the President of the Republic. Count Martin offered his carriage, but Garain had one.

"Do you not think," asked Count Martin, "that the President might object to some names?"

"The President," replied Garain, "will be inspired by the necessities of the situation."

He had already gone out of the door when he struck his forehead with his hand.

"We have forgotten the Ministry of War."

"We shall easily find somebody for it among the generals," said Count Martin.

"Ah," exclaimed Garain, "you believe the choice of a minister of war is easy. It is clear you have not, like me, been a member of three cabinets and President of the Council. In my cabinets, and during my presidency the greatest difficulties came from the Ministry of War. Generals are all alike. You know the one I chose for the cabinet that I formed. When we took him, he knew nothing of affairs. He hardly knew there were two Chambers. We had to explain to him all the wheels of parliamentary machinery; we had to teach him that there were an army committee, finance committee, subcommittees, presidents of committees, a budget. He asked that all this information be written for him on a piece of paper. His ignorance of men and of things amazed and alarmed us. In a fortnight he knew the most subtle tricks of the trade; he knew personally all the senators and all the deputies,

and was intriguing with them against us. If it had not been for President Grevy's help, he would have overthrown us. And he was a very ordinary general, a general like any other. Oh, no; do not think that the portfolio of war may be given hastily, without reflection."

And Garain still shivered at the thought of his former colleague.

Therese rose. Senator Loyer offered his arm to her, with the graceful attitude that he had learned forty years before at Bullier's dancing-hall. She left the politicians in the drawing-room, and hastened to meet Dechartre.

A rosy mist covered the Seine, the stone quays, and the gilded trees. The red sun threw into the cloudy sky the last glories of the year. Therese, as she went out, relished the sharpness of the air and the dying splendor of the day. Since her return to Paris, happy, she found pleasure every morning in the changes of the weather. It seemed to her, in her generous selfishness, that it was for her the wind blew in the trees, or the fine, gray rain wet the horizon of the avenues; for her, so that she might say, as she entered the little house of the Ternes, "It is windy; it is raining; the weather is pleasant;" mingling thus the ocean of things in the intimacy of her love. And every day was beautiful for her, since each one brought her to the arms of her beloved.

While on her way that day to the little house of the Ternes she thought of her unexpected happiness, so full and so secure. She walked in the last glory of the sun already touched by winter, and said to herself:

"He loves me; I believe he loves me entirely. To love is easier and more natural for him than for other men. They have in life ideas they think superior to love faith, habits, interests. They believe in God, or in duties, or in themselves. He believes in me only. I am his God, his duty, and his life."

Then she thought:

"It is true, too, that he needs nobody, not even me. His thoughts alone are a magnificent world in which he could easily live by himself. But I can not live without him. What would become of me if I did not have him?"

She was not alarmed by the violent passion that he had for her. She recalled that she had said to him one day: "Your love for me is only sensual. I do not complain of it; it is perhaps the only true love." And he had replied: "It is also the only grand and strong love. It has its measure and its weapons. It is full of meaning and of images. It is violent and mysterious. It attaches itself to the flesh and to the soul of the flesh. The rest is only illusion and untruth." She was almost tranquil in her joy. Suspicions and anxieties had fled like the mists of a summer storm. The worst weather of their love had come when they had been separated from each other. One should never leave the one whom one loves.

At the corner of the Avenue Marceau and of the Rue Galilee, she divined rather than recognized a shadow that had passed by her, a forgotten form. She thought, she wished to think, she was mistaken. The one whom she thought she had seen existed no longer, never had existed. It was a spectre seen in the limbo of another world, in the darkness of a half light. And she continued to walk, retaining of this ill-defined meeting an impression of coldness, of vague embarrassment, and of pain in the heart.

As she proceeded along the avenue she saw coming toward her newspaper carriers holding the evening sheets announcing the new Cabinet. She traversed the square; her steps followed the happy impatience of her desire. She had visions of Jacques waiting for her at the foot of the stairway, among the marble figures; taking her in his arms and carrying her, trembling from kisses, to that room full of shadows and of delights, where the sweetness of life made her forget life.

But in the solitude of the Avenue MacMahon, the shadow which she had seen at the corner of the Rue Galilee came near her with a directness that was unmistakable.

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She recognized Robert Le Menil, who, having followed her from the quay, was stopping her at the most quiet and secure place.

His air, his attitude, expressed the simplicity of motive which had formerly pleased Therese. His face, naturally harsh, darkened by sunburn, somewhat hollowed, but calm, expressed profound suffering.

"I must speak to you."

She slackened her pace. He walked by her side.

"I have tried to forget you. After what had happened it was natural, was it not? I have done all I could. It was better to forget you, surely; but I could not. So I bought a boat, and I have been travelling for six months. You know, perhaps?"

She made a sign that she knew.

He continued:

"The Rosebud, a beautiful yacht. There were six men in the crew. I manoeuvred with them. It was a pastime."

He paused. She was walking slowly, saddened, and, above all, annoyed. It seemed to her an absurd and painful thing, beyond all expression, to have to listen to such words from a stranger.

He continued:

"What I suffered on that boat I should be ashamed to tell you."

She felt he spoke the truth.

"Oh, I forgive you I have reflected alone a great deal. I passed many nights and days on the divan of the deckhouse, turning always the same ideas in my mind. For six months I have thought more than I ever did in my life. Do not laugh. There is nothing like suffering to enlarge the mind. I understand that if I have lost you the fault is mine. I should have known how to keep you. And I said to myself: 'I did not know. Oh; if I could only begin again!' By dint of thinking and of suffering, I understand. I know now that I did not sufficiently share your tastes and your ideas. You are a superior woman. I did not notice it before, because it was not for that that I loved you. Without suspecting it, I irritated you."

She shook her head. He insisted.

"Yes, yes, I often wounded your feelings. I did not consider your delicacy. There were misunderstandings between us. The reason was, we have not the same temperament. And then, I did not know how to amuse you. I did not know how to give you the amusement you need. I did not procure for you the pleasures that a woman as intelligent as you requires."

So simple and so true was he in his regrets and in his pain, she found him worthy of sympathy. She said to him, softly:

"My friend, I never had reason to complain of you."

He continued:

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"All I have said to you is true. I understood this when I was alone in my boat. I have spent hours on it to which I would not condemn my worst enemy. Often I felt like throwing myself into the water. I did not do it. Was it because I have religious principles or family sentiments, or because I have no courage? I do not know. The reason is, perhaps, that from a distance you held me to life. I was attracted by you, since I am here. For two days I have been watching you. I did not wish to reappear at your house. I should not have found you alone; I should not have been able to talk to you. And then you would have been forced to receive me. I thought it better to speak to you in the street. The idea came to me on the boat. I said to myself: 'In the street she will listen to me only if she wishes, as she wished four years ago in the park of Joinville, you know, under the statues, near the crown.'"

He continued, with a sigh:

"Yes, as at Joinville, since all is to be begun again. For two days I have been watching you. Yesterday it was raining; you went out in a carriage. I might have followed you and learned where you were going if I wished to do it. I did not do it. I do not wish to do what would displease you."

She extended her hand to him.

"I thank you. I knew I should not regret the trust I have placed in you."

Alarmed, impatient, fearing what more he might say, she tried to escape him.

"Farewell! You have all life before you. You should be happy. Appreciate it, and do not torment yourself about things that are not worth the trouble."

He stopped her with a look. His face had changed to the violent and resolute expression which she knew.

"I have told you I must speak to you. Listen to me for a minute."

She was thinking of Jacques, who was waiting for her. An occasional passer-by looked at her and went on his way. She stopped under the black branches of a tree, and waited with pity and fright in her soul.

He said:

"I forgive you and forget everything. Take me back. I will promise never to say a word of the past."

She shuddered, and made a movement of surprise and distaste so natural that he stopped. Then, after a moment of reflection:

"My proposition to you is not an ordinary one, I know it well. But I have reflected. I have thought of everything. It is the only possible thing. Think of it, Therese, and do not reply at once."

"It would be wrong to deceive you. I can not, I will not do what you say; and you know the reason why."

A cab was passing slowly near them. She made a sign to the coachman to stop. Le Menil kept her a moment longer.

"I knew you would say this to me, and that is the reason why I say to you, do not reply at once."

Her fingers on the handle of the door, she turned on him the glance of her gray eyes.

It was a painful moment for him. He recalled the time when he saw those charming gray eyes gleam under half-closed lids. He smothered a sob, and murmured:

"Listen; I can not live without you. I love you. It is now that I love you. Formerly I did not know."

And while she gave to the coachman, haphazard, the address of a tailor, Le Menil went away.

The meeting gave her much uneasiness and anxiety. Since she was forced to meet him again, she would have preferred to see him violent and brutal, as he had been at Florence. At the corner of the avenue she said to the coachman:

"To the Ternes."

CHAPTER XXXII. THE RED LILY

It was Friday, at the opera. The curtain had fallen on Faust's laboratory. From the orchestra, opera-glasses were raised in a surveying of the gold and purple theatre. The sombre drapery of the boxes framed the dazzling heads and bare shoulders of women. The amphitheatre bent above the parquette its garland of diamonds, hair, gauze, and satin. In the proscenium boxes were the wife of the Austrian Ambassador and the Duchess Gladwin; in the amphitheatre Berthe d'Osigny and Jane Tulle, the latter made famous the day before by the suicide of one of her lovers; in the boxes, Madame Berard de La Malle, her eyes lowered, her long eyelashes shading her pure cheeks; Princess Seniavine, who, looking superb, concealed under her fan panther like yawnings; Madame de Morlaine, between two young women whom she was training in the elegances of the mind; Madame Meillan, resting assured on thirty years of sovereign beauty; Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles, erect under iron-gray hair sparkling with diamonds. The bloom of her cheeks heightened the austere dignity of her attitude. She was attracting much notice. It had been learned in the morning that, after the failure of Garain's latest combination, M. Berthier-d'Eyzelles had, undertaken the task of forming a Ministry. The papers published lists with the name of Martin-Belleme for the treasury, and the opera-glasses were turned toward the still empty box of the Countess Martin.

A murmur of voices filled the hall. In the third rank of the parquette, General Lariviere, standing at his place, was talking with General de La Briche.

"I will do as you do, my old comrade, I will go and plant cabbages in Touraine."

He was in one of his moments of melancholy, when nothingness appeared to him to be the end of life. He had flattered Garain, and Garain, thinking him too clever, had preferred for Minister of War a shortsighted and national artillery general. At least, the General relished the pleasure of seeing Garain abandoned, betrayed by his friends Berthier-d'Eyzelles and Martin-Belleme. It made him laugh even to the wrinkles of his small eyes. He laughed in profile. Weary of a long life of dissimulation, he gave to himself suddenly the joy of expressing his thoughts.

"You see, my good La Briche, they make fools of us with their civil army, which costs a great deal, and is worth nothing. Small armies are the only good ones. This was the opinion of Napoleon I, who knew."

"It is true, it is very true," sighed General de La Briche, with tears in his eyes.

Montessuy passed before them; Lariviere extended his hand to him.

"They say, Montessuy, that you are the one who checked Garain. Accept my compliments."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v3

Montessuy denied that he had exercised any political influence. He was not a senator nor a deputy, nor a councillor-general. And, looking through his glasses at the hall:

"See, Lariviere, in that box at the right, a very beautiful woman, a brunette."

And he took his seat quietly, relishing the sweets of power.

However, in the hall, in the corridors, the names of the new Ministers went from mouth to mouth in the midst of profound indifference: President of the Council and Minister of the Interior, Berthier-d'Eyzelles; justice and Religions, Loyer; Treasury, Martin-Belleme. All the ministers were known except those of Commerce, War, and the Navy, who were not yet designated.

The curtain was raised on the wine-shop of Bacchus. The students were singing their second chorus when Madame Martin appeared in her box. Her white gown had sleeves like wings, and on the drapery of her corsage, at the left breast, shone a large ruby lily.

Miss Bell sat near her, in a green velvet Queen Anne gown. Betrothed to Prince Eusebio Albertinelli della Spina, she had come to Paris to order her trousseau.

In the movement and the noise of the kermess she said:

"Darling, you have left at Florence a friend who retains the charm of your memory. It is Professor Arrighi. He reserves for you the praise- which he says is the most beautiful. He says you are a musical creature. But how could Professor Arrighi forget you, darling, since the trees in the garden have not forgotten you? Their unleaved branches lament your absence. Even they regret you, darling."

"Tell them," said Therese, "that I have of Fiesole a delightful reminiscence, which I shall always keep."

In the rear of the opera-box M. Martin-Belleme was explaining in a low voice his ideas to Joseph Springer and to Duviquet. He was saying: "France's signature is the best in the world." He was inclined to prudence in financial matters.

And Miss Bell said:

"Darling, I will tell the trees of Fiesole that you regret them and that you will soon come to visit them on their hills. But I ask you, do you see Monsieur Dechartre in Paris? I should like to see him very much. I like him because his mind is graceful. Darling, the mind of Monsieur Dechartre is full of grace and elegance."

Therese replied M. Jacques Dechartre was doubtless in the theatre, and that he would not fail to come and salute Miss Bell.

The curtain fell on the gayety of the waltz scene. Visitors crowded the foyers. Financiers, artists, deputies met in the anteroom adjoining the box. They surrounded M. Martin-Belleme, murmured polite congratulations, made graceful gestures to him, and crowded one another in order to shake his hand. Joseph Schmall, coughing, complaining, blind and deaf, made his way through the throng and reached Madame Martin. He took her hand and said:

"They say your husband is appointed Minister. Is it true?"

She knew they were talking of it, but she did not think he had been appointed yet. Her husband was there, why not ask him?

Sensitive to literal truths only, Schmoll said:

"Your husband is not yet a Minister? When he is appointed, I will ask you for an interview. It is an affair of the highest importance."

He paused, throwing from his gold spectacles the glances of a blind man and of a visionary, which kept him, despite the brutal exactitude of his temperament, in a sort of mystical state of mind. He asked, brusquely:

"Were you in Italy this year, Madame?"

And, without giving her time to answer:

"I know, I know. You went to Rome. You have looked at the arch of the infamous Titus, that execrable monument, where one may see the seven-branched candlestick among the spoils of the Jews. Well, Madame, it is a shame to the world that that monument remains standing in the city of Rome, where the Popes have subsisted only through the art of the Jews, financiers and money-changers. The Jews brought to Italy the science of Greece and of the Orient. The Renaissance, Madame, is the work of Israel. That is the truth, certain but misunderstood."

And he went through the crowd of visitors, crushing hats as he passed.

Princess Seniavine looked at her friend from her box with the curiosity that the beauty of women at times excited in her. She made a sign to Paul Vence who was near her:

"Do you not think Madame Martin is extraordinarily beautiful this year?"

In the lobby, full of light and gold, General de La Briche asked Lariviere:

"Did you see my nephew?"

"Your nephew, Le Menil?"

"Yes Robert. He was in the theatre a moment ago."

La Briche remained pensive for a moment. Then he said:

"He came this summer to Semanville. I thought him odd. A charming fellow, frank and intelligent. But he ought to have some occupation, some aim in life."

The bell which announced the end of an intermission between the acts had hushed. In the foyer the two old men were walking alone.

"An aim in life," repeated La Briche, tall, thin, and bent, while his companion, lightened and rejuvenated, hastened within, fearing to miss a scene.

Marguerite, in the garden, was spinning and singing. When she had finished, Miss Bell said to Madame Martin:

"Darling, Monsieur Choulette has written me a perfectly beautiful letter. He has told me that he is very celebrated. And I am glad to know it. He said also: 'The glory of other poets reposes in myrrh and aromatic plants. Mine bleeds and moans under a rain of stones and of oyster-shells.' Do the French, my love, really throw stones at Monsieur Choulette?"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: The Red Lily, v3

While Therese reassured Miss Bell, Loyer, imperious and somewhat noisy, caused the door of the box to be opened. He appeared wet and spattered with mud.

"I come from the Elysee," he said.

He had the gallantry to announce to Madame Martin, first, the good news he was bringing:

"The decrees are signed. Your husband has the Finances. It is a good portfolio."

"The President of the Republic," inquired M. Martin Belleme, "made no objection when my name was pronounced?"

"No; Berthier praised the hereditary property of the Martins, your caution, and the links with which you are attached to certain personalities in the financial world whose concurrence may be useful to the government. And the President, in accordance with Garain's happy expression, was inspired by the necessities of the situation. He has signed."

On Count Martin's yellowed face two or three wrinkles appeared. He was smiling.

"The decree," continued Loyer, "will be published tomorrow. I accompanied myself the clerk who took it to the printer. It was surer. In Grevy's time, and Grevy was not an idiot, decrees were intercepted in the journey from the Elysee to the Quai Voltaire."

And Loyer threw himself on a chair. There, enjoying the view of Madame Martin, he continued:

"People will not say, as they did in the time of my poor friend Gambetta, that the republic is lacking in women. You will give us fine festivals, Madame, in the salons of the Ministry."

Marguerite, looking at herself in the mirror, with her necklace and earrings, was singing the jewel song.

"We shall have to compose the declaration," said Count Martin. "I have thought of it. For my department I have found, I think, a fine formula."

Loyer shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Martin, we have nothing essential to change in the declaration of the preceding Cabinet; the situation is unchanged."

He struck his forehead with his hand.

"Oh, I had forgotten. We have made your friend, old Lariviere, Minister of War, without consulting him. I have to warn him."

He thought he could find him in the boulevard cafe, where military men go. But Count Martin knew the General was in the theatre.

"I must find him," said Loyer.

Bowing to Therese, he said:

"You permit me, Countess, to take your husband?"

They had just gone out when Jacques Dechartre and Paul Vence came into the box.

"I congratulate you, Madame," said Paul Vence.

But she turned toward Dechartre:

"I hope you have not come to congratulate me, too."

Paul Vence asked her if she would move into the apartments of the Ministry.

"Oh, no," she replied.

"At least, Madame," said Paul Vence, "you will go to the balls at the Elysees, and we shall admire the art with which you retain your mysterious charm."

"Changes in cabinets," said Madame Martin, "inspire you, Monsieur Vence, with very frivolous reflections."

"Madame," continued Paul Vence, "I shall not say like Renan, my beloved master: 'What does Sirius care?' because somebody would reply with reason 'What does little Earth care for big Sirius?' But I am always surprised when people who are adult, and even old, let themselves be deluded by the illusion of power, as if hunger, love, and death, all the ignoble or sublime necessities of life, did not exercise on men an empire too sovereign to leave them anything other than power written on paper and an empire of words. And, what is still more marvellous, people imagine they have other chiefs of state and other ministers than their miseries, their desires, and their imbecility. He was a wise man who said: 'Let us give to men irony and pity as witnesses and judges.'"

"But, Monsieur Vence," said Madame Martin, laughingly, "you are the man who wrote that. I read it."

The two Ministers looked vainly in the theatre and in the corridors for the General. On the advice of the ushers, they went behind the scenes.

Two ballet-dancers were standing sadly, with a foot on the bar placed against the wall. Here and there men in evening dress and women in gauze formed groups almost silent.

Loyer and Martin-Belleme, when they entered, took off their hats. They saw, in the rear of the hall, Lariviere with a pretty girl whose pink tunic, held by a gold belt, was open at the hips.

She held in her hand a gilt pasteboard cup. When they were near her, they heard her say to the General:

"You are old, to be sure, but I think you do as much as he does."

And she was pointing disdainfully to a grinning young man, with a gardenia in his button-hole, who stood near them.

Loyer motioned to the General that he wished to speak to him, and, pushing him against the bar, said:

"I have the pleasure to announce to you that you have been appointed Minister of War."

Lariviere, distrustful, said nothing. That badly dressed man with long hair, who, under his dusty coat, resembled a clown, inspired so little confidence in him that he suspected a snare, perhaps a bad joke.

"Monsieur Loyer is Keeper of the Seals," said Count Martin.

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"General, you cannot refuse," Loyer said. "I have said you will accept. If you hesitate, it will be favoring the offensive return of Garain. He is a traitor."

"My dear colleague, you exaggerate," said Count Martin; "but Garain, perhaps, is lacking a little in frankness. And the General's support is urgent."

"The Fatherland before everything," replied Lariviere with emotion.

"You know, General," continued Loyer, "the existing laws are to be applied with moderation."

He looked at the two dancers who were extending their short and muscular legs on the bar.

Lariviere murmured:

"The army's patriotism is excellent; the good-will of the chiefs is at the height of the most critical circumstances."

Loyer tapped his shoulder.

"My dear colleague, there is some use in having big armies."

"I believe as you do," replied Lariviere; "the present army fills the superior necessities of national defence."

"The use of big armies," continued Loyer, "is to make war impossible. One would be crazy to engage in a war these immeasurable forces, the management of which surpasses all human faculty. Is not this your opinion, General?"

General Lariviere winked.

"The situation," he said, "exacts circumspection. We are facing a perilous unknown."

Then Loyer, looking at his war colleague with cynical contempt, said:

"In the very improbable case of a war, don't you think, my dear colleague, that the real generals would be the station-masters?"

The three Ministers went out by the private stairway. The President of the Council was waiting for them.

The last act had begun; Madame Martin had in her box only Dechartre and Miss Bell. Miss Bell was saying:

"I rejoice, darling, I am exalted, at the thought that you wear on your heart the red lily of Florence. Monsieur Dechartre, whose soul is artistic, must be very glad, too, to see at your corsage that charming jewel.

I should like to know the jeweller that made it, darling. This lily is lithe and supple like an iris. Oh, it is elegant, magnificent, and cruel. Have you noticed, my love, that beautiful jewels have an air of magnificent cruelty?"

"My jeweller," said Therese, "is here, and you have named him; it is Monsieur Dechartre who designed this jewel."

The door of the box was opened. Therese half turned her head and saw in the shadow Le Menil, who was bowing to her with his brusque suppleness.

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"Transmit, I pray you, Madame, my congratulations to your husband."

He complimented her on her fine appearance. He spoke to Miss Bell a few courteous and precise words.

Therese listened anxiously, her mouth half open in the painful effort to say insignificant things in reply. He asked her whether she had had a good season at Joinville. He would have liked to go in the hunting time, but could not. He had gone to the Mediterranean, then he had hunted at Semanville.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Menil," said Miss Bell, "you have wandered on the blue sea. Have you seen sirens?"

No, he had not seen sirens, but for three days a dolphin had swum in the yacht's wake.

Miss Bell asked him if that dolphin liked music.

He thought not.

"Dolphins," he said, "are very ordinary fish that sailors call sea-geese, because they have goose-shaped heads."

But Miss Bell would not believe that the monster which had earned the poet Arion had a goose-shaped head.

"Monsieur Le Menil, if next year a dolphin comes to swim near your boat, I pray you play to him on the flute the Delphic Hymn to Apollo. Do you like the sea, Monsieur Le Menil?"

"I prefer the woods."

Self-contained, simple, he talked quietly.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Menil, I know you like woods where the hares dance in the moonlight."

Dechartre, pale, rose and went out.

The church scene was on. Marguerite, kneeling, was wringing her hands, and her head drooped with the weight of her long tresses. The voices of the organ and the chorus sang the death-song.

"Oh, darling, do you know that that death-song, which is sung only in the Catholic churches, comes from a Franciscan hermitage? It sounds like the wind which blows in winter in the trees on the summit of the Alverno."

Therese did not hear. Her soul had followed Dechartre through the door of her box.

In the anteroom was a noise of overthrown chairs. It was Schmoll coming back. He had learned that M. Martin-Belleme had recently been appointed Minister. At once he claimed the cross of Commander of the Legion of Honor and a larger apartment at the Institute. His apartment was small, narrow, insufficient for his wife and his five daughters. He had been forced to put his workshop under the roof. He made long complaints, and consented to go only after Madame Martin had promised that she would speak to her husband.

"Monsieur Le Menil," asked Miss Bell, "shall you go yachting next year?"

Le Menil thought not. He did not intend to keep the Rosebud. The water was tiresome.

And calm, energetic, determined, he looked at Therese.

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On the stage, in Marguerite's prison, Mephistopheles sang, and the orchestra imitated the gallop of horses. Therese murmured:

"I have a headache. It is too warm here."

Le Menil opened the door.

The clear phrase of Marguerite calling the angels ascended to heaven in white sparks.

"Darling, I will tell you that poor Marguerite does not wish to be saved according to the flesh, and for that reason she is saved in spirit and in truth. I believe one thing, darling, I believe firmly we shall all be saved. Oh, yes, I believe in the final purification of sinners."

Therese rose, tall and white, with the red flower at her breast. Miss Bell, immovable, listened to the music. Le Menil, in the anteroom, took Madame Martin's cloak, and, while he held it unfolded, she traversed the box, the anteroom, and stopped before the mirror of the half-open door. He placed on her bare shoulders the cape of red velvet embroidered with gold and lined with ermine, and said, in a low tone, but distinctly:

"Therese, I love you. Remember what I asked you the day before yesterday. I shall be every day, at three o'clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini."

At this moment, as she made a motion with her head to receive the cloak, she saw Dechartre with his hand on the knob of the door. He had heard. He looked at her with all the reproach and suffering that human eyes can contain. Then he went into the dim corridor. She felt hammers of fire beating in her chest and remained immovable on the threshold.

"You were waiting for me?" said Montessuy. "You are left alone to-day. I will escort you and Miss Bell."

CHAPTER XXXIII. A WHITE NIGHT

In the carriage, and in her room, she saw again the look of her lover, that cruel and dolorous look. She knew with what facility he fell into despair, the promptness of his will not to will. She had seen him run away thus on the shore of the Arno. Happy then in her sadness and in her anguish, she could run after him and say, "Come." Now, again surrounded, watched, she should have found something to say, and not have let him go from her dumb and desolate. She had remained surprised, stunned. The accident had been so absurd and so rapid! She had against Le Menil the sentiment of simple anger which malicious things cause. She reproached herself bitterly for having permitted her lover to go without a word, without a glance, wherein she could have placed her soul.

While Pauline waited to undress her, Therese walked to and fro impatiently. Then she stopped suddenly. In the obscure mirrors, wherein the reflections of the candles were drowned, she saw the corridor of the playhouse, and her beloved flying from her through it.

Where was he now? What was he saying to himself alone? It was torture for her not to be able to rejoin him and see him again at once.

She pressed her heart with her hands; she was smothering.

Pauline uttered a cry. She saw drops of blood on the white corsage of her mistress.

Therese, without knowing it, had pricked her hand with the red lily.

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She detached the emblematic jewel which she had worn before all as the dazzling secret of her heart, and, holding it in her fingers, contemplated it for a long time. Then she saw again the days of Florence the cell of San Marco, where her lover's kiss weighed delicately on her mouth, while, through her lowered lashes, she vaguely perceived again the angels and the sky painted on the wall, and the dazzling fountain of the ice-vender against the bright cloth; the pavilion of the Via Alfieri, its nymphs, its goats, and the room where the shepherds and the masks on the screens listened to her sighs and noted her long silences.

No, all these things were not shadows of the past, spectres of ancient hours. They were the present reality of her love. And a word stupidly cast by a stranger would destroy these beautiful things! Happily, it was not possible. Her love, her lover, did not depend on such insignificant matters. If only she could run to his house! She would find him before the fire, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, sad. Then she would run her fingers through his hair, force him to lift his head, to see that she loved him, that she was his treasure, palpitating with joy and love.

She had dismissed her maid. In her bed she thought of only one thing.

It was an accident, an absurd accident. He would understand it; he would know that their love had nothing to do with anything so stupid. What folly for him to care about another! As if there were other men in the world!

M. Martin-Belleme half opened the bedroom door. Seeing a light he went in.

"You are not asleep, Therese?"

He had been at a conference with his colleagues. He wanted advice from his wife on certain points. He needed to hear sincere words.

"It is done," he said. "You will help me, I am sure, in my situation, which is much envied, but very difficult and even perilous. I owe it to you somewhat, since it came to me through the powerful influence of your father."

He consulted her on the choice of a Chief of Cabinet.

She advised him as best she could. She thought he was sensible, calm, and not sillier than many others.

He lost himself in reflections.

"I have to defend before the Senate the budget voted by the Chamber of Deputies. The budget contains innovations which I did not approve. When I was a deputy I fought against them. Now that I am a minister I must support them. I saw things from the outside formerly. I see them from the inside now, and their aspect is changed. And, then, I am free no longer."

He sighed:

"Ah, if the people only knew the little that we can do when we are powerful!"

He told her his impressions. Berthier was reserved. The others were impenetrable. Loyer alone was excessively authoritative.

She listened to him without attention and without impatience. His pale face and voice marked for her like a clock the minutes that passed with intolerable slowness.

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Loyer had odd sallies of wit. Immediately after he had declared his strict adherence to the Concordat, he said: "Bishops are spiritual prefects. I will protect them since they belong to me. And through them I shall hold the guardians of souls, curates."

He recalled to her that she would have to meet people who were not of her class and who would shock her by their vulgarity. But his situation demanded that he should not disdain anybody. At all events, he counted on her tact and on her devotion.

She looked at him, a little astonished.

"There is no hurry, my dear. We shall see later."

He was tired. He said good-night and advised her to sleep. She was ruining her health by reading all night. He left her.

She heard the noise of his footsteps, heavier than usual, while he traversed the library, encumbered with blue books and journals, to reach his room, where he would perhaps sleep. Then she felt the weight on her of the night's silence. She looked at her watch. It was half-past one.

She said to herself: "He, too, is suffering. He looked at me with so much despair and anger."

She was courageous and ardent. She was impatient at being a prisoner. When daylight came, she would go, she would see him, she would explain everything to him. It was so clear! In the painful monotony of her thought, she listened to the rolling of wagons which at long intervals passed on the quay. That noise preoccupied, almost interested her. She listened to the rumble, at first faint and distant, then louder, in which she could distinguish the rolling of the wheels, the creaking of the axles, the shock of horses' shoes, which, decreasing little by little, ended in an imperceptible murmur.

And when silence returned, she fell again into her reverie.

He would understand that she loved him, that she had never loved any one except him. It was unfortunate that the night was so long. She did not dare to look at her watch for fear of seeing in it the immobility of time.

She rose, went to the window, and drew the curtains. There was a pale light in the clouded sky. She thought it might be the beginning of dawn. She looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

She returned to the window. The sombre infinity outdoors attracted her. She looked. The sidewalks shone under the gas-jets. A gentle rain was falling. Suddenly a voice ascended in the silence; acute, and then grave, it seemed to be made of several voices replying to one another. It was a drunkard disputing with the beings of his dream, to whom he generously gave utterance, and whom he confounded afterward with great gestures and in furious sentences. There she could see the poor man walk along the parapet in his white blouse, and she could hear words recurring incessantly: "That is what I say to the government."

Chilled, she returned to her bed. She thought, "He is jealous, he is madly jealous. It is a question of nerves and of blood. But his love, too, is an affair of blood and of nerves. His love and his jealousy are one and the same thing. Another would understand. It would be sufficient to please his self-love." But he was jealous from the depth of his soul. She knew this; she knew that in him jealousy was a physical torture, a wound enlarged by imagination. She knew how profound the evil was. She had seen him grow pale before the bronze St. Mark when she had thrown the letter in the box on the wall of the old Florentine house at a time when she was his only in dreams.

She recalled his smothered complaints, his sudden fits of sadness, and the painful mystery of the words which he repeated frequently: "I can forget you only when I am with you." She saw again the Dinard letter and his furious despair at a word overheard at a wine-shop table. She felt that the blow had been struck accidentally at the most sensitive point, at the bleeding wound. But she did not lose courage. She would tell everything, she would confess everything, and all her avowals would say to him: "I love you. I have never loved any one except you!" She had not betrayed him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed. She had lied so little, as little as possible, and then only not to give him pain. How could he not understand? It was better he should know everything, since everything meant nothing. She represented to herself incessantly the same ideas, repeated to herself the same words.

Her lamp gave only a smoky light. She lighted candles. It was six o'clock. She realized that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and mingled with the earth in a chaos of thick darkness. Then she was curious to know exactly at what hour the sun would rise. She had had no idea of this. She thought only that nights were long in December. She did not think of looking at the calendar. The heavy step of workmen walking in squads, the noise of wagons of milkmen and marketmen, came to her ear like sounds of good augury. She shuddered at this first awakening of the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV. "I SEE THE OTHER WITH YOU ALWAYS!"

At nine o'clock, in the yard of the little house, she observed M. Fusellier sweeping, in the rain, while smoking his pipe. Madame Fusellier came out of her box. Both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"Monsieur Jacques is not at home." And, as Therese remained silent, immovable, Fusellier came near her with his broom, hiding with his left hand his pipe behind his back

"Monsieur Jacques has not yet come home."

"I will wait for him," said Therese.

Madame Fusellier led her to the parlor, where she lighted the fire. As the wood smoked and would not flame, she remained bent, with her hands on her knees.

"It is the rain," she said, "which causes the smoke."

Madame Martin said it was not worth while to make a fire, that she did not feel cold.

She saw herself in the glass.

She was livid, with glowing spots on her cheeks. Then only she felt that her feet were frozen. She approached the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing her anxious, spoke softly to her:

"Monsieur Jacques will come soon. Let Madame warm herself while waiting for him."

A dim light fell with the rain on the glass ceiling.

Upon the wall, the lady with the unicorn was not beautiful among the cavaliers in a forest full of flowers and birds. Therese was repeating to herself the words: "He has not yet come home." And by dint of saying this she lost the meaning of it. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without a movement, without a thought, for a time the duration of which she did not know;

perhaps half an hour. The noise of a footstep came to her, the door was opened. He came in. She saw that he was wet with rain and mud, and burning with fever.

She fixed on him a look so sincere and so frank that it struck him. But almost at once he recalled within himself all his sufferings.

He said to her:

"What do you want of me? You have done me all the harm you could do me."

Fatigue gave him an air of gentleness. It frightened her.

"Jacques, listen to me!"

He motioned to her that he wished to hear nothing from her.

"Jacques, listen to me. I have not deceived you. Oh, no, I have not deceived you. Was it possible? Was it "

He interrupted her:

"Have some pity for me. Do not make me suffer again. Leave me, I pray you. If you knew the night I have passed, you would not have the courage to torment me again."

He let himself fall on the divan. He had walked all night. Not to suffer too much, he had tried to find diversions. On the Bercy Quay he had looked at the moon floating in the clouds. For an hour he had seen it veil itself and reappear. Then he had counted the windows of houses with minute care. The rain began to fall. He had gone to the market and had drunk whiskey in a wine-room. A big girl who squinted had said to him, "You don't look happy." He had fallen half asleep on the leather bench. It had been a moment of oblivion. The images of that painful night passed before his eyes. He said: "I recalled the night of the Arno. You have spoiled for me all the joy and beauty in the world." He asked her to leave him alone. In his lassitude he had a great pity for himself. He would have liked to sleep not to die; he held death in horror but to sleep and never to wake again. Yet, before him, as desirable as formerly, despite the painful fixity of her dry eyes, and more mysterious than ever, he saw her. His hatred was vivified by suffering.

She extended her arms to him. "Listen to me, Jacques." He motioned to her that it was useless for her to speak. Yet he wished to listen to her, and already he was listening with avidity. He detested and rejected in advance what she would say, but nothing else in the world interested him.

She said:

"You may have believed I was betraying you, that I was not living for you alone. But can you not understand anything? You do not see that if that man were my lover it would not have been necessary for him to talk to me at the play-house in that box; he would have a thousand other ways of meeting me. Oh, no, my friend, I assure you that since the day when I had the happiness to meet you, I have been yours entirely. Could I have been another's? What you imagine is monstrous. But I love you, I love you! I love only you. I never have loved any one except you."

He replied slowly, with cruel heaviness:

"I shall be every day, at three o'clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.' It was not a lover, your lover, who said these things? No! it was a stranger, an unknown person."

She straightened herself, and with painful gravity said:

"Yes, I had been his. You knew it. I have denied it, I have told an untruth, not to irritate or grieve you. I saw you so anxious. But I lied so little and so badly. You knew. Do not reproach me for it. You knew; you often spoke to me of the past, and then one day somebody told you at the restaurant and you imagined much more than ever happened. While telling an untruth, I was not deceiving you. If you knew the little that he was in my life! There! I did not know you. I did not know you were to come. I was lonely."

She fell on her knees.

"I was wrong. I should have waited for you. But if you knew how slight a matter that was in my life!"

And with her voice modulated to a soft and singing complaint she said:

"Why did you not come sooner, why?"

She dragged herself to him, tried to take his hands. He repelled her.

"I was stupid. I did not think. I did not know. I did not wish to know."

He rose and exclaimed, in an explosion of hatred:

"I did not wish him to be that man."

She sat in the place which he had left, and there, plaintively, in a low voice, she explained the past. In that time she lived in a world horribly commonplace. She had yielded, but she had regretted at once. If he but knew the sadness of her life he would not be jealous. He would pity her. She shook her head and said, looking at him through the falling locks of her hair:

"I am talking to you of another woman. There is nothing in common between that woman and me. I exist only since I have known you, since I have belonged to you."

He walked about the room madly. He laughed painfully.

"Yes; but while you loved me, the other woman the one who was not you?"

She looked at him indignantly:

"Can you believe

"Did you not see him again at Florence? Did you not accompany him to the station?"

She told him that he had come to Italy to find her; that she had seen him; that she had broken with him; that he had gone, irritated, and that since then he was trying to win her back; but that she had not even paid any attention to him.

"My beloved, I see, I know, only you in the world." He shook his head.

"I do not believe you."

She revolted.

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"I have told you everything. Accuse me, condemn me, but do not offend me in my love for you."

He shook his head.

"Leave me. You have harmed me too much. I have loved you so much that all the pain which you could have given me I would have taken, kept, loved; but this is too hideous. I hate it. Leave me. I am suffering too much. Farewell!"

She stood erect.

"I have come. It is my happiness, it is my life, I am fighting for. I will not go."

And she said again all that she had already said. Violent and sincere, sure of herself, she explained how she had broken the tie which was already loose and irritated her; how since the day when she had loved him she had been his only, without regret, without a wandering look or thought. But in speaking to him of another she irritated him. And he shouted at her:

"I do not believe you."

She only repeated her declarations.

And suddenly, instinctively, she looked at her watch:

"Oh, it is noon!"

She had often given that cry of alarm when the farewell hour had surprised them. And Jacques shuddered at the phrase which was so familiar, so painful, and was this time so desperate. For a few minutes more she said ardent words and shed tears. Then she left him; she had gained nothing.

At her house she found in the waiting-room the marketwoman, who had come to present a bouquet to her. She remembered that her husband was a State minister. There were telegrams, visiting-cards and letters, congratulations and solicitations. Madame Marmet wrote to recommend her nephew to General Lariviere.

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"Do not forget, my dear friend, to call on Madame Berthier d'Eyzelles. You know how sensitive she is."

She made no answer. While he was dipping his fingers in the glass bowl, he saw she was so tired that he dared not say any more. He found himself in the presence of a secret which he did not wish to know; in presence of an intimate suffering which one word would reveal. He felt anxiety, fear, and a certain respect.

He threw down his napkin.

"Excuse me, dear."

He went out.

She tried to eat, but could swallow nothing.

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At two o'clock she returned to the little house of the Ternes. She found Jacques in his room. He was smoking a wooden pipe. A cup of coffee almost empty was on the table. He looked at her with a harshness that chilled her. She dared not talk, feeling that everything that she could say would offend and irritate him, and yet she knew that in remaining discreet and dumb she intensified his anger. He knew that she would return; he had waited for her with impatience. A sudden light came to her, and she saw that she had done wrong to come; that if she had been absent he would have desired, wanted, called for her, perhaps. But it was too late; and, at all events, she was not trying to be crafty.

She said to him:

"You see I have returned. I could not do otherwise. And then it was natural, since I love you. And you know it."

She knew very well that all she could say would only irritate him. He asked her whether that was the way she spoke in the Rue Spontini.

She looked at him with sadness.

"Jacques, you have often told me that there were hatred and anger in your heart against me. You like to make me suffer. I can see it."

With ardent patience, at length, she told him her entire life, the little that she had put into it; the sadness of the past; and how, since he had known her, she had lived only through him and in him.

The words fell as limpid as her look. She sat near him. He listened to her with bitter avidity. Cruel with himself, he wished to know everything about her last meetings with the other. She reported faithfully the events of the Great Britain Hotel; but she changed the scene to the outside, in an alley of the Casino, from fear that the image of their sad interview in a closed room should irritate her lover. Then she explained the meeting at the station. She had not wished to cause despair to a suffering man who was so violent. But since then she had had no news from him until the day when he spoke to her on the street. She repeated what she had replied to him. Two days later she had seen him at the opera, in her box. Certainly, she had not encouraged him to come. It was the truth.

It was the truth. But the old poison, slowly accumulating in his mind, burned him. She made the past, the irreparable past, present to him, by her avowals. He saw images of it which tortured him. He said:

"I do not believe you."

And he added:

"And if I believed you, I could not see you again, because of the idea that you have loved that man. I have told you, I have written to you, you remember, that I did not wish him to be that man. And since "

He stopped.

She said:

"You know very well that since then nothing has happened."

He replied, with violence:

"Since then I have seen him."

They remained silent for a long time. Then she said, surprised and plaintive:

"But, my friend, you should have thought that a woman such as I, married as I was every day one sees women bring to their lovers a past darker than mine and yet they inspire love. Ah, my past if you knew how insignificant it was!"

"I know what you can give. One can not forgive to you what one may forgive to another."

"But, my friend, I am like others."

"No, you are not like others. To you one can not forgive anything."

He talked with set teeth. His eyes, which she had seen so large, glowing with tenderness, were now dry, harsh, narrowed between wrinkled lids and cast a new glance at her. He frightened her. She went to the rear of the room, sat on a chair, and there she remained, trembling, for a long time, smothered by her sobs. Then she broke into tears.

He sighed:

"Why did I ever know you?"

She replied, weeping:

"I do not regret having known you. I am dying of it, and I do not regret it. I have loved."

He stubbornly continued to make her suffer. He felt that he was playing an odious part, but he could not stop.

"It is possible, after all, that you have loved me too."

She answered, with soft bitterness:

"But I have loved only you. I have loved you too much. And it is for that you are punishing me. Oh, can you think that I was to another what I have been to you?"

"Why not?"

She looked at him without force and without courage.

"It is true that you do not believe me."

She added softly:

"If I killed myself would you believe me?"

"No, I would not believe you."

She wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief; then, lifting her eyes, shining through her tears, she said:

"Then, all is at an end!"

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She rose, saw again in the room the thousand things with which she had lived in laughing intimacy, which she had regarded as hers, now suddenly become nothing to her, and confronting her as a stranger and an enemy. She saw again the nude lence; acute, and then grave, it seemed to be made of several voices replying to one another. It—was a drunkard disputing with the beings of his dream, to whom he generously gave utterance, and whom he confounded afterward with great gestures and in furious sentences. Therese could see the poor man walk along the parapet in his white blouse, and she could hear words recurring incessantly: "That is what I say to the government."

Chilled, she returned to her bed. She thought, "He is jealous, he is madly jealous. It is a question of nerves and of blood. But his love, too, is an affair of blood and of nerves. His love and his jealousy are one and the same thing. Another would understand. It would be sufficient to please his self-love." But he was jealous from the depth of his soul. She knew this; she knew that in him jealousy was a physical torture, a wound enlarged by imagination. She knew how profound the evil was. She had seen him grow pale before the bronze St. Mark when she had thrown the letter in the box on the wall of the old Florentine house at a time when she was his only in dreams.

She recalled his smothered complaints, his sudden fits of sadness, and the painful mystery of the words which he repeated frequently: "I can forget you only when I am with you." She saw again the Dinard letter and his furious despair at a word overheard at a wine-shop table. She felt that the blow had been struck accidentally at the most sensitive point, at the bleeding wound. But she did not lose courage. She would tell everything, she would confess everything, and all her avowals would say to him: "I love you. I have never loved any one except you!" She had not betrayed him. She would tell him nothing that he had not guessed. She had lied so little, as little as possible, and then only not to give him pain. How could he not understand? It was better he should know everything, since everything meant nothing. She represented to herself incessantly the same ideas, repeated to herself the same words.

Her lamp gave only a smoky light. She lighted candles. It was six o'clock. She realized that she had slept. She ran to the window. The sky was black, and mingled with the earth in a chaos of thick darkness. Then she was curious to know exactly at what hour the sun would rise. She had had no idea of this. She thought only that nights were long in December. She did not think of looking at the calendar. The heavy step of workmen walking in squads, the noise of wagons of milkmen and marketmen, came to her ear like sounds of good augury. She shuddered at this first awakening of the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV. "I SEE THE OTHER WITH YOU ALWAYS!"

At nine o'clock, in the yard of the little house, she observed M. Fusellier sweeping, in the rain, while smoking his pipe. Madame Fusellier came out of her box. Both looked embarrassed. Madame Fusellier was the first to speak:

"Monsieur Jacques is not at home." And, as Therese remained silent, immovable, Fusellier came near her with his broom, hiding with his left hand his pipe behind his back

"Monsieur Jacques has not yet come home."

"I will wait for him," said Therese.

Madame Fusellier led her to the parlor, where she lighted the fire. As the wood smoked and would not flame, she remained bent, with her hands on her knees.

"It is the rain," she said, "which causes the smoke."

Madame Martin said it was not worth while to make a fire, that she did not feel cold.

She saw herself in the glass.

She was livid, with glowing spots on her cheeks. Then only she felt that her feet were frozen. She approached the fire. Madame Fusellier, seeing her anxious, spoke softly to her:

"Monsieur Jacques will come soon. Let Madame warm herself while waiting for him."

A dim light fell with the rain on the glass ceiling.

Upon the wall, the lady with the unicorn was not beautiful among the cavaliers in a forest full of flowers and birds. Therese was repeating to herself the words: "He has not yet come home." And by dint of saying this she lost the meaning of it. With burning eyes she looked at the door.

She remained thus without a movement, without a thought, for a time the duration of which she did not know; perhaps half an hour. The noise of a footstep came to her, the door was opened. He came in. She saw that he was wet with rain and mud, and burning with fever.

She fixed on him a look so sincere and so frank that it struck him. But almost at once he recalled within himself all his sufferings.

He said to her:

"What do you want of me? You have done me all the harm you could do me."

Fatigue gave him an air of gentleness. It frightened her.

"Jacques, listen to me!"

He motioned to her that he wished to hear nothing from her.

"Jacques, listen to me. I have not deceived you. Oh, no, I have not deceived you. Was it possible? Was it—"

He interrupted her:

"Have some pity for me. Do not make me suffer again. Leave me, I pray you. If you knew the night I have passed, you would not have the courage to torment me again."

He let himself fall on the divan. He had walked all night. Not to suffer too much, he had tried to find diversions. On the Bercy Quay he had looked at the moon floating in the clouds. For an hour he had seen it veil itself and reappear. Then he had counted the windows of houses with minute care. The rain began to fall. He had gone to the market and had drunk whiskey in a wine-room. A big girl who squinted had said to him, "You don't look happy." He had fallen half asleep on the leather bench. It had been a moment of oblivion. The images of that painful night passed before his eyes. He said: "I recalled the night of the Arno. You have spoiled for me all the joy and beauty in the world." He asked her to leave him alone. In his lassitude he had a great pity for himself. He would have liked to sleep—not to die; he held death in horror—but to sleep and never to wake again. Yet, before him, as desirable as formerly, despite the painful fixity of her dry eyes, and more mysterious than ever, he saw her. His hatred was vivified by suffering.

She extended her arms to him. "Listen to me, Jacques." He motioned to her that it was useless for her to speak. Yet he wished to listen to her, and already he was listening with avidity. He detested and rejected in advance what she would say, but nothing else in the world interested him.

She said:

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"You may have believed I was betraying you, that I was not living for you alone. But can you not understand anything? You do not see that if that man were my lover it would not have been necessary for him to talk to me at the play-house in that box; he would have a thousand other ways of meeting me. Oh, no, my friend, I assure you that since the day when I had the happiness to meet you, I have been yours entirely. Could I have been another's? What you imagine is monstrous. But I love you, I love you! I love only you. I never have loved any one except you."

He replied slowly, with cruel heaviness:

"I shall be every day, at three o'clock, at our home, in the Rue Spontini.' It was not a lover, your lover, who said these things? No! it was a stranger, an unknown person."

She straightened herself, and with painful gravity said:

"Yes, I had been his. You knew it. I have denied it, I have told an untruth, not to irritate or grieve you. I saw you so anxious. But I lied so little and so badly. You knew. Do not reproach me for it. You knew; you often spoke to me of the past, and then one day somebody told you at the restaurant—and you imagined much more than ever happened. While telling an untruth, I was not deceiving you. If you knew the little that he was in my life! There! I did not know you. I did not know you were to come. I was lonely."

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"Why did I ever know you?"

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"I do not regret having known you. I am dying of it, and I do not regret it. I have loved."

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"But I have loved only you. I have loved you too much. And it is for that you are punishing me. Oh, can you think that I was to another what I have been to you?"

"Why not?"

She looked at him without force and without courage.

"It is true that you do not believe me."

She added softly:

"If I killed myself would you believe me?"

"No, I would not believe you."

She wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief; then, lifting her eyes, shining through her tears, she said:

"Then, all is at an end!"

She rose, saw again in the room the thousand things with which she had lived in laughing intimacy, which she had regarded as hers, now suddenly become nothing to her, and confronting her as a stranger and an enemy. She saw again the nude woman who made, while running, the gesture which had not been explained to her; the Florentine models which recalled to her Fiesole and the enchanted hours of Italy; the profile sketch by Dechartre of the girl who laughed in her pretty pathetic thinness. She stopped a moment sympathetically in front of that little newspaper girl who had come there too, and had disappeared, carried away in the irresistible current of life and of events.

She repeated:

"Then all is at an end?"

He remained silent.

The twilight made the room dim.

"What will become of me?" she asked.

"And what will become of me?" he replied.

They looked at each other with sympathy, because each was moved with self-pity.

Therese said again:

"And I, who feared to grow old in your eyes, for fear our beautiful love should end! It would have been better if it had never come. Yes, it would be better if I had not been born. What a presentiment was that which came to me, when a child, under the lindens of Joinville, before the marble nymphs! I wished to die then."

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Her arms fell, and clasping her hands she lifted her eyes; her wet glance threw a light in the shadows.

"Is there not a way of my making you feel that what I am saying to you is true? That never since I have been yours, never— But how could I? The very idea of it seems horrible, absurd. Do you know me so little?"

He shook his head sadly. "I do not know you."

She questioned once more with her eyes all the objects in the room.

"But then, what we have been to each other was vain, useless. Men and women break themselves against one another; they do not mingle."

She revolted. It was not possible that he should not feel what he was to her. And, in the ardor of her love, she threw herself on him and smothered him with kisses and tears. He forgot everything, and took her in his arms—sobbing, weak, yet happy—and clasped her close with the fierceness of desire. With her head leaning back against the pillow, she smiled through her tears. Then, brusquely he disengaged himself.

"I do not see you alone. I see the other with you always." She looked at him, dumb, indignant, desperate. Then, feeling that all was indeed at an end, she cast around her a surprised glance of her unseeing eyes, and went slowly away.