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MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

By OCTAVE FEUILLET

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNTESS DE CAMORS

After passing the few weeks of the honeymoon at Reuilly, the Comte and Comtesse de Camors returned to Paris and established themselves at their hotel in the Rue de l'Imperatrice. From this moment, and during the months that followed, the young wife kept up an active correspondence with her mother; and we here transcribe some of the letters, which will make us more intimately acquainted with the character of the young woman.

Madame de Camors to Madame de Teclé.

"October.

"Am I happy? No, my dearest mother! No--not happy! I have only wings and soar to heaven like a bird! I feel the sunshine in my head, in my eyes, in my heart.

"It blinds me, it enchants me, it causes me to shed delicious tears! Happy? No, my tender mother; that is not possible, when I think that I am his wife! The wife--understand me--of him who has reigned in my poor thoughts since I was able to think--of him whom I should have chosen out of the whole universe! When I remember that I am his wife, that we are united forever, how I love life! how I love you! how I love God!

"The Bois and the lake are within a few steps of us, as you know. We ride thither nearly every morning, my husband and I!--I repeat,



I and my husband! We go there, my husband and I--I and my husband!

"I know not how it is, but it is always delicious weather to me, even when it rains--as it does furiously to-day; for we have just come in, driven home by the storm.

"During our ride to-day, I took occasion to question him quietly as to some points of our history which puzzled me. First, why had he married me?

"'Because you pleased me apparently, Miss Mary.' He likes to give me this name, which recalls to him I know not what episode of my untamed youth--untamed still to him.

"'If I pleased you, why did I see you so seldom?'

"'Because I did not wish to court you until I had decided on marrying.'

"'How could I have pleased you, not being at all beautiful?'

"'You are not beautiful, it is true,' replies this cruel young man, 'but you are very pretty; and above all you are grace itself, like your mother.'

"All these obscure points being cleared up to the complete satisfaction of Miss Mary, Miss Mary took to fast galloping; not because it was raining, but because she became suddenly--we do not know the reason why--as red as a poppy.

"Oh, beloved mother! how sweet it is to be loved by him we adore, and to be loved precisely as we wish--as we have dreamed--according to the exact programme of our young, romantic hearts!

"Did you ever believe I had ideas on such a delicate subject? Yes, dear mother, I had them. Thus, it seemed to me there were many different styles of loving--some vulgar, some pretentious, some foolish, and others, again, excessively comic. None of these seemed suited to the Prince, our neighbor. I ever felt he should love, like the Prince he is, with grace and dignity; with serious tenderness, a little stern perhaps; with amiability, but almost with condescension--as a lover, but as a master, too--in fine, like my husband!

"Dear angel, who art my mother! be happy in my happiness, which was your sole work. I kiss your hands--I kiss your wings!

"I thank you! I bless you! I adore you!

"If you were near me, it would be too much happiness! I should die, I think. Nevertheless, come to us very soon. Your chamber awaits you. It is as blue as the heavens in which I float. I have already told you this, but I repeat it.

"Good-by, mother of the happiest woman in the world!

"MISS MARY,

"Comtesse de Camors."

.....

"November.

"MY MOTHER:

"You made me weep--I who await you every morning. I will say nothing to you, however; I will not beg you. If the health of my grandfather seems to you so feeble as to demand your presence, I know no prayer would take you away from your duty. Nor would I make the prayer, my angel mother!

"But exaggerate nothing, I pray you, and think your little Marie can not pass by the blue chamber without feeling a swelling of the heart. Apart from this grief which you cause her, she continues to be as happy as even you could wish.

"Her charming Prince is ever charming and ever her Prince! He takes her to see the monuments, the museums, the theatres, like the poor little provincial that she is. Is it not touching on the part of so great a personage?

"He is amused at my ecstasies--for I have ecstasies. Do not breathe it to my Uncle Des Rameures, but Paris is superb! The days here count double our own for thought and life.

"My husband took me to Versailles yesterday. I suspect that this, in the eyes of the people here, is rather a ridiculous episode; for I notice the Count did not boast of it. Versailles corresponds entirely with the impressions you had given me of it; for there is not the slightest change since you visited it with my grandfather.

"It is grand, solemn, and cold. There is, though, a new and very curious museum in the upper story of the palace, consisting chiefly of original portraits of the famous men of history. Nothing pleases me more than to see these heroes of my memory passing before me in grand procession--from Charles the Bold to George Washington. Those faces my imagination has so often tried to evoke, that it seems to me we are in the Elysian Fields, and hold converse with the dead:

"You must know, my mother, I was familiar with many things that surprised M. de Camors very much. He was greatly struck by my knowledge of science and my genius. I did no more, as you may imagine, than respond to his questions; but it seemed to astonish him that I could respond at all.

"Why should he ask me these things? If he did not know how to distinguish the different Princesses of Conti, the answer is simple.

"But I knew, because my mother taught me. That is simple enough too.

"We dined afterward, at my suggestion, at a restaurant. Oh, my mother! this was the happiest moment of my life! To dine at a restaurant with my husband was the most delightful of all dissipations!

"I have said he seemed astonished at my learning. I ought to add in general, he seemed astonished whenever I opened my lips. Did he imagine me a mute? I speak little, I acknowledge, however, for he inspires me with a ceaseless fear: I am afraid of displeasing him, of appearing silly before him, or pretentious, or pedantic. The day when I shall be at ease with him, and when I can show him my good sense and gratitude--if that day ever comes--I shall be relieved of a great weight on my mind, for truly I sometimes fear he looks on me as a child.

"The other day I stopped before a toy-shop on the Boulevard. What a blunder! And as he saw my eye fixed on a magnificent squadron of dolls--

"Do you wish one, Miss Mary?" he said.

"Was not this horrible, my mother--from him who knows everything except the Princesses of Conti? He explained everything to me; but briefly in a word, as if to a person he despaired of ever making understand him. And I understand so well all the time, my poor little mother!

"But so much the better, say I; for if he loves me while thinking me silly, what will it be later!

"With fond love, your

"MARIE."

.....

"December.

"All Paris has returned once more, my dear mother, and for fifteen days I have been occupied with visits. The men here do not usually visit; but my husband is obliged to present me for the first time to the persons I ought to know. He accompanies me there, which is much more agreeable to me than to him, I believe.

"He is more serious than usual. Is not this the only form in which amiable men show their bad humor? The people we visit look on me with a certain interest. The woman whom this great lord has honored

with his choice is evidently an object of great curiosity. This flatters and intimidates me; I blush and feel constrained; I appear awkward. When they find me awkward and insignificant, they stare. They believe he married me for my fortune: then I wish to cry. We reenter the carriage, he smiles upon me, and I am in heaven! Such are our visits.

"You must know, my mother, that to me Madame Campvallon is divine. She often takes me to her box at the Italiens, as mine will not be vacant until January. Yesterday she gave a little fete for me in her beautiful salon: the General opened the ball with me.

"Oh! my mother, what a wonderfully clever man the General is! And I admire him because he admires you!

"The Marquise presented to me all the best dancers. They were young gentlemen, with their necks so uncovered it almost gave me a chill. I never before had seen men bare-necked and the fashion is not becoming. It was very evident, however, that they considered themselves indispensable and charming. Their deportment was insolent and self-sufficient; their eyes were disdainful and all-conquering.

"Their mouths ever open to breathe freer, their coat-tails flapping like wings, they take one by the waist--as one takes his own property. Informing you by a look that they are about to do you the honor of removing you, they whirl you away; then, panting for breath, inform you by another look that they will do themselves the pleasure of stopping--and they stop. Then they rest a moment, panting, laughing, showing their teeth; another look--and they repeat the same performance. They are wonderful!

"Louis waltzed with me and seemed satisfied. I saw him for the first time waltz with the Marquise. Oh, my mother, it was the dance of the stars!

"One thing which struck me this evening, as always, was the manifest idolatry with which the women regard my husband. This, my tender mother, terrifies me. Why--I ask myself--why did he choose me? How can I please him? How can I succeed?

"Behold the result of all my meditations! A folly perhaps, but of which the effect is to reassure me:

"Portrait of the Comtesse de Camors, drawn by herself.

"The Comtesse de Camors, formerly Marie de Teclé, is a personage who, having reached her twentieth year, looks older. She is not beautiful, as her husband is the first person to confess. He says she is pretty; but she doubts even this. Let us see. She has very long limbs, a fault which she shares with Diana, the Huntress, and which probably gives to the gait of the Countess a lightness it might not otherwise possess. Her body is naturally short, and on

horseback appears to best advantage. She is plump without being gross.

"Her features are irregular; the mouth being too large and the lips too thick, with--alas! the shade of a moustache; white teeth, a little too small; a commonplace nose, a slightly pug; and her mother's eyes--her best feature. She has the eyebrows of her Uncle Des Rameures, which gives an air of severity to the face and neutralizes the good-natured expression--a reflex from the softness of her heart.

"She has the dark complexion of her mother, which is more becoming to her mother than to her. Add to all this, blue-black hair in great silky masses. On the whole, one knows not what to pronounce her.

"There, my mother, is my portrait! Intended to reassure me, it has hardly done so; for it seems to me to be that of an ugly little woman!

"I wish to be the most lively of women; I wish to be one of the most distinguished. I wish to be one of the most captivating! But, oh, my mother! if I please him I am still more enchanted! On the whole, thank God! he finds me perhaps much better than I am: for men have not the same taste in these matters that we have.

"But what I really can not comprehend, is why he has so little admiration for the Marquise de Campvallon. His manner is very cold to her. Were I a man, I should be wildly in love with that superb woman! Good-night, most beloved of mothers!

.....

"January.

"You complain of me, my cherished one! The tone of my letters wounds you! You can not comprehend how this matter of my personal appearance haunts me. I scrutinize it; I compare it with that of others. There is something of levity in that which hurts you? You ask how can I think a man attaches himself to these things, while the merits of mind and soul go for nothing?

"But, my dearest mother, how will these merits of mind and of soul --supposing your daughter to possess them--serve her, unless she possesses the courage or has the opportunity to display them? And when I summon up the courage, it seems to me the occasion never comes.

"For I must confess to you that this delicious Paris is not perfect; and I discover, little by little, the spots upon the sun.

"Paris is the most charming place! The only pity is that it has inhabitants! Not but that they are agreeable, for they are only too

much so; only they are also very careless, and appear to my view to live and die without reflecting much on what they are doing. It is not their fault; they have no time.

"Without leaving Paris, they are incessant travellers, eternally distracted by motion and novelty. Other travellers, when they have visited some distant corner--forgetting for a while their families, their duties, and their homes--return and settle down again. But these Parisians never do. Their life is an endless voyage; they have no home. That which elsewhere is the great aim of life is secondary here. One has here, as elsewhere, an establishment--a house, a private chamber. One must have. Here one is wife or mother, husband or father, just as elsewhere; but, my poor mother, they are these things just as little as possible. The whole interest centres not in the homes; but in the streets, the museums, the salons, the theatres, and the clubs. It radiates to the immense outside life, which in all its forms night and day agitates Paris, attracts, excites, and enervates you; steals your time, your mind, your soul--and devours them all!

"Paris is the most delicious of places to visit--the worst of places to live in.

"Understand well, my mother, that in seeking by what qualities I can best attract my husband--who is the best of men, doubtless, but of Parisian men nevertheless--I have continually reflected on merits which may be seen at once, which do not require time to be appreciated.

"Finally, I do not deny that all this is miserable cynicism, unworthy of you and of myself; for you know I am not at heart a bad little woman. Certainly, if I could keep Monsieur de Camors for a year or two at an old chateau in the midst of a solitary wood, I should like it much. I could then see him more frequently, I could then become familiar with his august person, and could develop my little talents under his charmed eyes. But then this might weary him and would be too easy. Life and happiness, I know, are not so easily managed. All is difficulty, peril, and conflict.

"What joy, then, to conquer! And I swear to you, my mother, that I will conquer! I will force him to know me as you know me; to love me, not as he now does, but as you do, for many good reasons of which he does not yet dream.

"Not that he believes me absolutely a fool; I think he has abandoned that idea for at least two days past.

"How he came thus to think, my next letter shall explain.

"Your own  
"MARIE."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE REPTILE STRIVES TO CLIMB

"March.

"You will remember, my mother, that the Count has as secretary a man named Vautrot. The name is a bad one; but the man himself is a good enough creature, except that I somewhat dislike his catlike style of looking at one.

"Well, Monsieur de Vautrot lives in the house with us. He comes early in the morning, breakfasts at some neighboring cafe, passes the day in the Count's study, and often remains to dine with us, if he has work to finish in the evening.

"He is an educated man, and knows a little of everything; and he has undertaken many occupations before he accepted the subordinate though lucrative post he now occupies with my husband. He loves literature; but not that of his time and of his country, perhaps because he himself has failed in this. He prefers foreign writers and poets, whom he quotes with some taste, though with too much declamation.

"Most probably his early education was defective; for on all occasions, when speaking with us, he says, 'Yes, Monsieur le Comte!' or 'Certainly, Madame la Comtesse!' as if he were a servant. Yet withal, he has a peculiar pride, or perhaps I should say insufferable vanity. But his great fault, in my eyes, is the scoffing tone he adopts, when the subject is religion or morals.

"Two days ago, while we were dining, Vautrot allowed himself to indulge in a rather violent tirade of this description. It was certainly contrary to all good taste.

"My dear Vautrot,' my husband said quietly to him, 'to me these pleasantries of yours are indifferent; but pray remember, that while you are a strong-minded man, my wife is a weak-minded woman; and strength, you know, should respect weakness.'

"Monsieur Vautrot first grew white, then red, and finally green. He rose, bowed awkwardly, and immediately afterward left the table. Since that time I have remarked his manner has been more reserved. The moment I was alone with Louis, I said:

"You may think me indiscreet, but pray let me ask you a question. How can you confide all your affairs and all your secrets to a man who professes to have no principles?"

"Monsieur de Camors laughed.

"Oh, he talks thus out of bravado,' he answered. 'He thinks to make himself more interesting in your eyes by these Mephistophelian airs. At bottom he is a good fellow.'

"But,' I answered, 'he has faith in nothing.'

"Not in much, I believe. Yet he has never deceived me. He is an honorable man.'

"I opened my eyes wide at this.

"Well,' he said, with an amused look, 'what is the matter, Miss Mary?'

"What is this honor you speak of?'

"Let me ask your definition of it, Miss Mary,' he replied.

"Mon Dieu!' I cried, blushing deeply, 'I know but little of it, but it seems to me that honor separated from morality is no great thing; and morality without religion is nothing. They all constitute a chain. Honor hangs to the last link, like a flower; but if the chain be broken, honor falls with the rest.' He looked at me with strange eyes, as if he were not only confounded but disquieted by my philosophy. Then he gave a deep sigh, and rising said:

"Very neat, that definition-very neat.'

"That night, at the opera, he plied me with bonbons and orange ices. Madame de Campvallou accompanied us; and at parting, I begged her to call for me next day on her way to the Bois, for she is my idol. She is so lovely and so distinguished--and she I know it well. I love to be with her. On our return home, Louis remained silent, contrary to his custom. Suddenly he said, brusquely:

"Marie, do you go with the Marquise to the Bois to-morrow?'

"Yes.'

"But you see her often, it seems to me--morning and evening. You are always with her.'

"Heavens! I do it to be agreeable to you. Is not Madame de Campvallou a good associate?'

"Excellent; only in general I do not admire female friendships. But I did wrong to speak to you on this subject. You have wit and discretion enough to preserve the proper limits.'

"This, my mother, was what he said to me. I embrace you.

Ever your



"MARIE."

.....

"March.

"I hope, my own mother, not to bore you this year with a catalogue of fetes and festivals, lamps and girandoles; for Lent is coming. To-day is Ash-Wednesday. Well, we dance to-morrow evening at Madame d'Oilly's. I had hoped not to go, but I saw Louis was disappointed, and I feared to offend Madame d'Oilly, who has acted a mother's part to my husband. Lent here is only an empty name. I sigh to myself: 'Will they never stop! Great heavens! will they never cease amusing themselves?'

"I must confess to you, my darling mother, I amuse myself too much to be happy. I depended on Lent for some time to myself, and see how they efface the calendar!

"This dear Lent! What a sweet, honest, pious invention it is, notwithstanding. How sensible is our religion! How well it understands human weakness and folly! How far-seeing in its regulations! How indulgent also! for to limit pleasure is to pardon it.

"I also love pleasure--the beautiful toilets that make us resemble flowers, the lighted salons, the music, the gay voices and the dance. Yes, I love all these things; I experience their charming confusion; I palpitate, I inhale their intoxication. But always--always! at Paris in the winter--at the springs in summer--ever this crowd, ever this whirl, this intoxication of pleasure! All become like savages, like negroes, and--dare I say so?--bestial! Alas for Lent!

"HE foresaw it. HE told us, as the priest told me this morning: 'Remember you have a soul: Remember you have duties!--a husband --a child--a mother--a God!'

"Then, my mother, we should retire within ourselves; should pass the time in grave thought between the church and our homes; should converse on solemn and serious subjects; and should dwell in the moral world to gain a foothold in heaven! This season is intended as a wholesome interval to prevent our running frivolity into dissipation, and pleasure into convulsion; to prevent our winter's mask from becoming our permanent visage. This is entirely the opinion of Madame Jaubert.

"Who is this Madame Jaubert? you will ask. She is a little Parisian angel whom my mother would dearly love! I met her almost everywhere--but chiefly at St. Phillippe de Roule--for several months without being aware that she is our neighbor, that her hotel adjoins ours. Such is Paris!

"She is a graceful person, with a soft and tender, but decided air. We sat near each other at church; we gave each other side-glances; we pushed our chairs to let each other pass; and in our softest voices would say, 'Excuse me, Madame!' 'Oh, Madame!' My glove would fall, she would pick it up; I would offer her the holy water, and receive a sweet smile, with 'Dear Madame!' Once at a concert at the Tuileries we observed each other at a distance, and smiled recognition; when any part of the music pleased us particularly we glanced smilingly at each other. Judge of my surprise next morning when I saw my affinity enter the little Italian house next ours--and enter it, too, as if it were her home. On inquiry I found she was Madame Jaubert, the wife of a tall, fair young man who is a civil engineer.

"I was seized with a desire to call upon my neighbor. I spoke of it to Louis, blushing slightly, for I remembered he did not approve of intimacies between women. But above all, he loves me!

"Notwithstanding he slightly shrugged his shoulders--'Permit me at least, Miss Mary, to make some inquiries about these people.'

"A few days afterward he had made them, for he said: 'Miss Mary, you may visit Madame Jaubert; she is a perfectly proper person.'

"I first flew to my husband's neck, and thence went to call upon Madame Jaubert.

"It is I, Madame!

"Oh, Madame, permit me!

"And we embraced each other and were good friends immediately.

"Her husband is a civil engineer, as I have said. He was once occupied with great inventions and with great industrial works; but that was only for a short time. Having inherited a large estate, he abandoned his studies and did nothing--at least nothing but mischief. When he married to increase his fortune, his pretty little wife had a sad surprise. He was never seen at home; always at the club--always behind the scenes at the opera--always going to the devil! He gambled, he had mistresses and shameful affairs. But worse than all, he drank--he came to his wife drunk. One incident, which my pen almost refuses to write, will give you an idea. Think of it! He conceived the idea of sleeping in his boots! There, my mother, is the pretty fellow my sweet little friend transformed, little by little, into a decent man, a man of merit, and an excellent husband!

"And she did it all by gentleness, firmness, and sagacity. Now is not this encouraging?--for, God knows, my task is less difficult.

"Their household charms me; for it proves that one may build for one's self, even in the midst of this Paris, a little nest such as

one dreams of. These dear neighbors are inhabitants of Paris--not its prey. They have their fireside; they own it, and it belongs to them. Paris is at their door--so much the better. They have ever a relish for refined amusement; 'they drink at the fountain,' but do not drown themselves in it. Their habits are the same, passing their evenings in conversation, reading, or music; stirring the fire and listening to the wind and rain without, as if they were in a forest.

"Life slips gently through their fingers, thread by thread, as in our dear old country evenings.

"My mother, they are happy!

"Here, then, is my dream--here is my plan.

"My husband has no vices, as Monsieur Jaubert had. He has only the habits of all the brilliant men of his Paris-world. It is necessary, my own mother, gradually to reform him; to suggest insensibly to him the new idea that one may pass one evening at home in company with a beloved and loving wife, without dying suddenly of consumption.

"The rest will follow.

"What is this rest? It is the taste for a quiet life, for the serious sweetness of the domestic hearth--the family taste--the idea of seclusion--the recovered soul!

"Is it not so, my good angel? Then trust me. I am more than ever full of ardor, courage, and confidence. For he loves me with all his heart, with more levity, perhaps, than I deserve; but still--he loves me!

"He loves me; he spoils me; he heaps presents upon me. There is no pleasure he does not offer me, except, be it understood, the pleasure of passing one evening at home together.

"But he loves me! That is the great point--he loves me!

"Now, dearest mother, let me whisper one final word--a word that makes me laugh and cry at the same time. It seems to me that for some time past I have had two hearts--a large one of my own, and--another--smaller!

"Oh, my mother! I see you in tears. But it is a great mystery this. It is a dream of heaven; but perhaps only a dream, which I have not yet told even to my husband--only to my adorable mother! Do not weep, for it is not yet quite certain.

"Your naughty  
Miss MARY."

In reply to this letter Madame de Camors received one three mornings after, announcing to her the death of her grandfather. The Comte de Teclé had died of apoplexy, of which his state of health had long given warning. Madame de Teclé foresaw that the first impulse of her daughter would be to join her to share her sad bereavement. She advised her strongly against undertaking the fatigue of the journey, and promised to visit her in Paris, as soon as she conveniently could. The mourning in the family heightened in the heart of the Countess the uneasy feeling and vague sadness her last letters had indicated.

She was much less happy than she told her mother; for the first enthusiasm and first illusions of marriage could not long deceive a spirit so quick and acute as hers.

A young girl who marries is easily deceived by the show of an affection of which she is the object. It is rare that she does not adore her husband and believe she is adored by him, simply because he has married her.

The young heart opens spontaneously and diffuses its delicate perfume of love and its songs of tenderness; and enveloped in this heavenly cloud all seems love around it. But, little by little, it frees itself; and, too often, recognizes that this delicious harmony and intoxicating atmosphere which charmed it came only from itself.

Thus was it with the Countess; so far as the pen can render the shadows of a feminine soul. Such were the impressions which, day by day, penetrated the very soul of our poor "Miss Mary."

It was nothing more than this; but this was everything to her!

The idea of being betrayed by her husband--and that, too, with cruel premeditation--never had arisen to torture her soul. But, beyond those delicate attentions to her which she never exaggerated in her letters to her mother, she felt herself disdained and slighted. Marriage had not changed Camors's habits: he dined at home, instead of at his club, that was all. She believed herself loved, however, but with a lightness that was almost offensive. Yet, though she was sometimes sad and nearly in tears, she did not despair; this valiant little heart attached itself with intrepid confidence to all the happy chances the future might have in store for it.

M. de Camors continued very indifferent--as one may readily comprehend--to the agitation which tormented this young heart, but which never occurred to him for a moment. For himself, strange as it may appear, he was happy enough. This marriage had been a painful step to take; but, once confirmed in his sin, he became reconciled to it. But his conscience, seared as it was, had some living fibres in it; and he would not have failed in the duty he thought he owed to his wife. These sentiments were composed of a sort of indifference, blended with pity. He was vaguely sorry for this child, whose existence was absorbed and destroyed between those of two beings of nature superior to her own;

and he hoped she would always remain ignorant of the fate to which she was condemned. He resolved never to neglect anything that might extenuate its rigor; but he belonged, nevertheless, more than ever solely to the passion which was the supreme crime of his life. For his intrigue with Madame de Campvallou, continually excited by mystery and danger--and conducted with profound address by a woman whose cunning was equal to her beauty--continued as strong, after years of enjoyment, as at first.

The gracious courtesy of M. de Camors, on which he piqued himself, as regarded his wife, had its limits; as the young Countess perceived whenever she attempted to abuse it. Thus, on several occasions she declined receiving guests on the ground of indisposition, hoping her husband would not abandon her to her solitude. She was in error.

The Count gave her in reality, under these circumstances, a tete-a-tete of a few minutes after dinner; but near nine o'clock he would leave her with perfect tranquillity. Perhaps an hour later she would receive a little packet of bonbons, or a pretty basket of choice fruit, that would permit her to pass the evening as she might. These little gifts she sometimes divided with her neighbor, Madame Jaubert; sometimes with M. de Vautrot, secretary to her husband.

This M. de Vautrot, for whom she had at first conceived an aversion, was gradually getting into her good graces. In the absence of her husband she always found him at hand; and referred to him for many little details, such as addresses, invitations, the selection of books and the purchase of furniture. From this came a certain familiarity; she began to call him Vautrot, or "My good Vautrot," while he zealously performed all her little commissions. He manifested for her a great deal of respectful attention, and even refrained from indulging in the sceptical sneers which he knew displeased her. Happy to witness this reform and to testify her gratitude, she invited him to remain on two or three evenings when he came to take his leave, and talked with him of books and the theatres.

When her mourning kept her at home, M. de Camors passed the two first evenings with her until ten o'clock. But this effort fatigued him, and the poor young woman, who had already erected an edifice for the future on this frail basis, had the mortification of observing that on the third evening he had resumed his bachelor habits.

This was a great blow to her, and her sadness became greater than it had been up to that time; so much so in fact, that solitude was almost unbearable. She had hardly been long enough in Paris to form intimacies. Madame Jaubert came to her friend as often as she could; but in the intervals the Countess adopted the habit of retaining Vautrot, or even of sending for him. Camors himself, three fourths of the time, would bring him in before going out in the evening.

"I bring you Vautrot, my dear," he would say, "and Shakespeare. You can read him together."

Vautrot read well; and though his heavy declamatory style frequently

annoyed the Countess, she thus managed to kill many a long evening, while waiting the expected visit of Madame de Teclé. But Vautrot, whenever he looked at her, wore such a sympathetic air and seemed so mortified when she did not invite him to stay, that, even when wearied of him, she frequently did so.

About the end of the month of April, M. Vautrot was alone with the Countess de Camors about ten o'clock in the evening. They were reading Goethe's Faust, which she had never before heard. This reading seemed to interest the young woman more than usual, and with her eyes fixed on the reader, she listened to it with rapt attention. She was not alone fascinated by the work, but--as is frequently the case--she traced her own thoughts and her own history in the fiction of the poet.

We all know with what strange clairvoyance a mind possessed with a fixed idea discovers resemblances and allusions in accidental description. Madame de Camors perceived without doubt some remote connection between her husband and Faust--between herself and Marguerite; for she could not help showing that she was strangely agitated. She could not restrain the violence of her emotion, when Marguerite in prison cries out, in her agony and madness:

Marguerite.

Who has given you, headsman, this power over me? You come to me while it is yet midnight. Be merciful and let me live.

Is not to-morrow morning soon enough?

I am yet so young--so young! and am to die already! I was fair, too; that was my undoing. My true love was near, now he is far away.

Torn lies my garland; scattered the flowers. Don't take hold of me so roughly! spare me! spare me. What have I done to you? Let me not implore you in vain! I never saw you before in all my life; you know.

Faust.

Can I endure this misery?

Marguerite.

I am now entirely in thy power. Only let me give suck to the child. I pressed it this whole night to my heart. They took it away to vex me, and now say I killed it, and I shall never be happy again. They sing songs upon me! It is wicked of the people. An old tale ends so--who bids them apply it?

Faust.

A lover lies at thy feet, to unloose the bonds of wickedness.

What a blending of confused sentiments, of powerful sympathies, of vague apprehensions, suddenly seized on the breast of the young Countess! One can hardly imagine their force--to the very verge of distracting her. She turned on her fauteuil and closed her beautiful eyes, as if to keep back the tears which rolled under the fringe of the long lashes.

At this moment Vautrot ceased to read, dropped his book, sighed profoundly, and stared a moment.

Then he knelt at the feet of the Comtesse de Camors! He took her hand; he said, with a tragic sigh, "Poor angel!"

It will be difficult to understand this incident and the unfortunately grave results that followed it, without having the moral and physical portrait of its principal actor.

M. Hippolyte Vautrot was a handsome man and knew it perfectly. He even flattered himself on a certain resemblance to his patron, the Comte de Camors. Partly from nature and partly from continual imitation, this idea had some foundation; for he resembled the Count as much as a vulgar man can resemble one of the highest polish.

He was the son of a small confectioner in the provinces; had received from his father an honestly acquired fortune, and had dissipated it in the varied enterprises of his adventurous life. The influence of his college, however, obtained for him a place in the Seminary. He left it to come to Paris and study law; placed himself with an attorney; attempted literature without success; gambled on the Bourse and lost there.

He had successively knocked with feverish hand at all the doors of Fortune, and none had opened to him, because, though his ambition was great, his capacity was limited. Subordinate positions, for which alone he was fit, he did not want. He would have made a good tutor: he sighed to be a poet. He would have been a respectable cure in the country: he pined to be a bishop. Fitted for an excellent secretary, he aspired to be a minister. In fine, he wished to be a great man, and consequently was a failure as a little one.

But he made himself a hypocrite; and that he found much easier. He supported himself on the one hand by the philosophic society to be met at Madame d'Oilly's; on the other, by the orthodox reunions of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

By these influences he contrived to secure the secretaryship to the Comte de Camors, who, in his general contempt of the human species, judged Vautrot to be as good as any other. Now, familiarity with M. de Camors was, morally, fearfully prejudicial to the secretary. It had, it is true, the effect of stripping off his devout mask, which he seldom put on before his patron; but it terribly increased in venom the depravity which

disappointment and wounded pride had secreted in his ulcerated heart.

Of course no one will imagine that M. de Camors had the bad taste to undertake deliberately the demoralization of his secretary; but contact, intimacy, and example sufficed fully to do this. A secretary is always more or less a confidant. He divines that which is not revealed to him; and Vautrot could not be long in discovering that his patron's success did not arise, morally, from too much principle--in politics, from excess of conviction--in business, from a mania for scruples! The intellectual superiority of Camors, refined and insolent as it was, aided to blind Vautrot, showing him evil which was not only prosperous, but was also radiant in grace and prestige. For these reasons he most profoundly admired his master--admired, imitated, and execrated him!

Camors professed for him and for his solemn airs an utter contempt, which he did not always take the trouble to conceal; and Vautrot trembled when some burning sarcasm fell from such a height on the old wound of his vanity--that wound which was ever sore within him. What he hated most in Camors was his easy and insolent triumph--his rapid and unmerited fortune--all those enjoyments which life yielded him without pain, without toil, without conscience--peacefully tasted! But what he hated above all, was that this man had thus obtained these things while he had vainly striven for them.

Assuredly, in this Vautrot was not an exception. The same example presented to a healthier mind would not have been much more salutary, for we must tell those who, like M. de Camors, trample under foot all principles of right, and nevertheless imagine that their secretaries, their servants, their wives and their children, may remain virtuous--we must tell these that while they wrong others they deceive themselves! And this was the case with Hippolyte Vautrot.

He was about forty years of age--a period of life when men often become very vicious, even when they have been passably virtuous up to that time. He affected an austere and puritanical air; was the great man of the cafe he frequented; and there passed judgment on his contemporaries and pronounced them all inferior. He was difficult to please--in point of virtue demanding heroism; in talent, genius; in art, perfection.

His political opinions were those of Erostratus, with this difference--always in favor of the ancient--that Vautrot, after setting fire to the temple, would have robbed it also. In short, he was a fool, but a vicious fool as well.

If M. de Camors, at the moment of leaving his luxurious study that evening, had had the bad taste to turn and apply his eye to the keyhole, he would have seen something greatly to astonish even him.

He would have seen this "honorable man" approach a beautiful Italian cabinet inlaid with ivory, turn over the papers in the drawers, and finally open in the most natural manner a very complicated lock, the key of which the Count at that moment had in his pocket.



It was after this search that M. Vautrot repaired with his volume of Faust to the boudoir of the young Countess, at whose feet we have already left him too long.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LIGHTNING FROM A CLEAR SKY

Madame de Camors had closed her eyes to conceal her tears. She opened them at the instant Vautrot seized her hand and called her "Poor angel!"

Seeing the man on his knees, she could not comprehend it, and only exclaimed, simply:

"Are you mad, Vautrot?"

"Yes, I am mad!" Vautrot threw his hair back with a romantic gesture common to him, and, as he believed, to the poets-"Yes, I am mad with love and with pity, for I see your sufferings, pure and noble victim!"

The Countess only stared in blank astonishment.

"Repose yourself with confidence," he continued, "on a heart that will be devoted to you until death--a heart into which your tears now penetrate to its most sacred depths!"

The Countess did not wish her tears to penetrate to such a distance, so she dried them.

A man on his knees before a woman he adores must appear to her either sublime or ridiculous. Unfortunately, the attitude of Vautrot, at once theatrical and awkward, did not seem sublime to the Countess. To her lively imagination it was irresistibly ludicrous. A bright gleam of amusement illumined her charming countenance; she bit her lip to conceal it, but it shone out of her eyes nevertheless.

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror. Otherwise, like Vautrot, he exposes himself to be laughed at.

"Rise, my good Vautrot," the Countess said, gravely. "This book has evidently bewildered you. Go and take some rest and we will forget this; only you must never forget yourself again in this manner."

Vautrot rose. He was livid.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said, bitterly, "the love of a great heart never can be an offence. Mine at least would have been sincere; mine would have been faithful: mine would not have been an infamous snare!"

The emphasis of these words displayed so evident an intention, the

countenance of the young woman changed immediately. She moved uneasily on her fauteuil.

"What do you mean, Monsieur Vautrot?"

"Nothing, Madame, which you do not know, I think," he replied, meaningly.

She rose.

"You shall explain your meaning immediately to me, Monsieur!" she exclaimed; "or later, to my husband."

"But your sadness, your tears," cried the secretary, in a tone of admirable sincerity--"these made me sure you were not ignorant of it!"

"Of what? You hesitate! Speak, man!"

"I am not a wretch! I love you and pity you!--that is all;" and Vautrot sighed deeply.

"And why do you pity me?" She spoke haughtily; and though Vautrot had never suspected this imperiousness of manner or of language, he reflected hurriedly on the point at which he had arrived. More sure than ever of success, after a moment he took from his pocket a folded letter. It was one with which he had provided himself to confirm the suspicions of the Countess, now awakened for the first time.

In profound silence he unfolded and handed it to her. She hesitated a moment, then seized it. A single glance recognized the writing, for she had often exchanged notes with the Marquise de Campvallon.

Words of the most burning passion terminated thus:

"--Always a little jealous of Mary; half vexed at having given her to you. For--she is pretty and--but !! I am beautiful, am I not, my beloved?--and, above all, I adore you!"

At the first word the Countess became fearfully pale. Finishing, she uttered a deep groan; then she reread the letter and returned it to Vautrot, as if unconscious of what she was doing.

For a few seconds she remained motionless--petrified--her eyes fixed on vacancy. A world seemed rolling down and crushing her heart.

Suddenly she turned, passed with rapid steps into her boudoir; and Vautrot heard the sound of opening and shutting drawers. A moment after she reappeared with bonnet and cloak, and crossed the boudoir with the same strong and rapid step.

Vautrot, greatly terrified, rushed to stop her.

"Madame!" he cried, throwing himself before her.

She waved him aside with an imperious gesture of her hand; he trembled and obeyed, and she left the boudoir. A moment later she was in the Avenue des Champs Elysees, going toward Paris.

It was now near midnight; cold, damp April weather, with the rain falling in great drops. The few pedestrians still on the broad pavement turned to follow with their eyes this majestic young woman, whose gait seemed hastened by some errand of life or death.

But in Paris nothing is surprising, for people witness all manner of things there. Therefore the strange appearance of Madame de Camors did not excite any extraordinary attention. A few men smiled and nodded; others threw a few words of raillery at her--both were unheeded alike. She traversed the Place de la Concorde with the same convulsive haste, and passed toward the bridge. Arriving on it, the sound of the swollen Seine rushing under the arches and against the pillars, caught her ear; she stopped, leaned against the parapet, and gazed into the angry water; then bowing her head she uttered a deep sigh, and resumed her rapid walk.

In the Rue Vanneau she stopped before a brilliantly lighted mansion, isolated from the adjoining houses by a garden wall. It was the dwelling of the Marquise de Campvallon: Arrived there, the unfortunate child knew not what to do, nor even why she had come. She had some vague design of assuring herself palpably of her misfortune; to touch it with her finger; or perhaps to find some reason, some pretext to doubt it.

She dropped down on a stone bench against the garden wall, and hid her face in both her hands, vainly striving to think. It was past midnight. The streets were deserted: a shower of rain was falling over Paris, and she was chilled to numbness.

A sergent-de-ville passed, enveloped in his cape. He turned and stared at the young woman; then took her roughly by the arm.

"What are you doing here?" he said, brutally.

She looked up at him with wondering eyes.

"I do not know myself," she answered.

The man looked more closely at her, discovered through all her confusion a nameless refinement and the subtle perfume of purity. He took pity on her.

"But, Madame, you can not stay here," he rejoined in a softer voice.

"No?"

"You must have some great sorrow?"

"Very great."

"What is your name?"

"The Comtesse de Camors," she said, simply.

The man looked bewildered.

"Will you tell me where you live, Madame?"

She gave the address with perfect simplicity and perfect indifference. She seemed to be thinking nothing of what she was saying. The man took a few steps, then stopped and listened to the sound of wheels approaching. The carriage was empty. He stopped it, opened the door, and requested the Countess to get in. She did so quietly, and he placed himself beside the driver.

The Comte de Camors had just reached his house and heard with surprise, from the lips of his wife's maid, the details of the Countess's mysterious disappearance, when the bell rang violently.

He rushed out and met his wife on the stairs. She had somewhat recovered her calmness on the road, and as he interrogated her with a searching glance, she made a ghastly effort to smile.

"I was slightly ill and went out a little," she said. "I do not know the streets and lost my way."

Notwithstanding the improbability of the explanation, he did not hesitate. He murmured a few soft words of reproach and placed her in the hands of her maid, who removed her wet garments.

During that time he called the sergent-de-ville, who remained in the vestibule, and closely interrogated him. On learning in what street and what precise spot he had found the Countess, her husband knew at once and fully the whole truth.

He went directly to his wife. She had retired and was trembling in every limb. One of her hands was resting outside the coverlet. He rushed to take it, but she withdrew it gently, with sad and resolute dignity.

The simple gesture told him they were separated forever.

By a tacit agreement, arranged by her and as tacitly accepted by him, Madame de Camors became virtually a widow.

He remained for some seconds immovable, his expression lost in the shadow of the bed-hangings; then walked slowly across the chamber. The idea of lying to defend himself never occurred to him.

His line of conduct was already arranged--calmly, methodically. But two blue circles had sunk around his eyes, and his face wore a waxen pallor. His hands, joined behind his back, were clenched; and the ring he wore sparkled with their tremulous movement. At intervals he seemed to cease breathing, as he listened to the chattering teeth of his young wife.

After half an hour he approached the bed.

"Marie!" he said in a low voice. She turned upon him her eyes gleaming with fever.

"Marie, I am ignorant of what you know, and I shall not ask," he continued. "I have been very criminal toward you, but perhaps less so than you think. Terrible circumstances bound me with iron bands. Fate ruled me! But I seek no palliation. Judge me as severely as you wish; but I beg of you to calm yourself--preserve yourself! You spoke to me this morning of your presentiments--of your maternal hopes. Attach yourself to those thoughts, and you will always be mistress of your life. As for myself, I shall be whatever you will--a stranger or a friend. But now I feel that my presence makes you ill. I would leave you for the present, but not alone. Do you wish Madame Jaubert to come to you tonight?"

"Yes!" she murmured, faintly.

"I shall go for her; but it is not necessary to tell you that there are confidences one must reserve even from one's dearest friends."

"Except a mother?" She murmured the question with a supplicating agony very painful to see.

He grew still paler. After an instant, "Except a mother!" he said. "Be it so!"

She turned her face and buried it in the pillow.

"Your mother arrives to-morrow, does she not?" She made an affirmative motion of her head. "You can make your arrangements with her. I shall accept everything."

"Thank you," she replied, feebly.

He left the room and went to find Madame Jaubert, whom he awakened, and briefly told her that his wife had been seized with a severe nervous attack--the effect of a chill. The amiable little woman ran hastily to her friend and spent the night with her.

But she was not the dupe of the explanation Camors had given her. Women quickly understand one another in their grief. Nevertheless she asked no confidences and received none; but her tenderness to her friend redoubled. During the silence of that terrible night, the only service she could render her was to make her weep.

Nor did those laggard hours pass less bitterly for M. de Camors. He tried to take no rest, but walked up and down his apartment until daylight in a sort of frenzy. The distress of this poor child wounded him to the heart. The souvenirs of the past rose before him and passed in sad procession. Then the morrow would show him the crushed daughter with her mother--and such a mother! Mortally stricken in all her best

illusions, in all her dearest beliefs, in all connected with the happiness of life!

He found that he still had in his heart lively feelings of pity; still some remorse in his conscience.

This weakness irritated him, and he denounced it to himself. Who had betrayed him? This question agitated him to an equal degree; but from the first instant he had not been deceived in this matter.

The sudden grief and half-crazed conviction of his wife, her despairing attitude and her silence, could only be explained by strong assurance and certain revelation. After turning the matter over and over in his own mind, he arrived at the conclusion that nothing could have thrown such clear light into his life save the letters of Madame de Campvallon.

He never wrote the Marquise, but could not prevent her writing to him; for to her, as to all women, love without letters was incomplete.

But the fault of the Count--inexcusable in a man of his tact--was in preserving these letters. No one, however, is perfect, and he was an artist. He delighted in these the 'chefs-d'oeuvre' of passionate eloquence, was proud of inspiring them, and could not make up his mind to burn or destroy them. He examined at once the secret drawer where he had concealed them and, by certain signs, discovered the lock had been tampered with. Nevertheless no letter was missing; the arrangement of them alone had been disturbed.

His suspicions at once reverted to Vautrot, whose scruples he suspected were slight; and in the morning they were confirmed beyond doubt by a letter from the secretary. In fact Vautrot, after passing on his part a most wretched night, did not feel his nerves equal in the morning to meeting the reception the Count possibly had in waiting for him. His letter was skilfully penned to put suspicion to sleep if it had not been fully roused, and if the Countess had not betrayed him.

It announced his acceptance of a lucrative situation suddenly offered him in a commercial house in London. He was obliged to decide at once, and to sail that same morning for fear of losing an opportunity which could not occur again. It concluded with expressions of the liveliest gratitude and regret.

Camors could not reach his secretary to strangle him; so he resolved to pay him. He not only sent him all arrears of salary, but a large sum in addition as a testimonial of his sympathy and good wishes.

This, however, was a simple precaution; for the Count apprehended nothing more from the venomous reptile so far beneath him, after he had once shaken it off. Seeing him deprived of the only weapon he could use against him, he felt safe. Besides, he had lost the only interest he could desire to subserve, for he knew M. Vautrot had done him the compliment of courting his Wife.

And he really esteemed him a little less low, after discovering this gentlemanly taste!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ONE GLEAM OF HOPE

It required on the part of M. de Camors, this morning, an exertion of all his courage to perform his duty as a gentleman in going to receive Madame de Tecle at the station. But courage had been for some time past his sole remaining virtue; and this at least he sought never to lose. He received, then, most gracefully his mother-in-law, robed in her mourning attire. She was surprised at not seeing her daughter with him. He informed her that she had been a little indisposed since the preceding evening. Notwithstanding the precautions he took in his language and by his smile, he could not prevent Madame de Tecle from feeling a lively alarm.

He did not pretend, however, entirely to reassure her. Under his reserved and measured replies, she felt the presentiment of some disaster. After first pressing him with many questions, she kept silent during the rest of the drive.

The young Countess, to spare her mother the first shock, had quitted her bed; and the poor child had even put a little rouge on her pale cheeks. M. de Camors himself opened for Madame de Tecle the door of her daughter's chamber, and then withdrew.

The young woman raised herself with difficulty from her couch, and her mother took her in her arms.

All that passed between them at first was a silent interchange of mutual caresses. Then the mother seated herself near her daughter, drew her head on her bosom, and looked into the depths of her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she said, sadly.

"Oh, nothing--nothing hopeless! only you must love your little Mary more than ever. Will you not?"

"Yes; but why?"

"I must not worry you; and I must not wrong myself either--you know why!"

"Yes; but I implore you, my darling, to tell me."

"Very well; I will tell you everything; but, mother, you must be brave as I am."

She buried her head lower still on her mother's breast, and recounted to

her, in a low voice, without looking up once, the terrible revelation which had been made to her, and which her husband's avowal had confirmed.

Madame de Teclé did not once interrupt her during this cruel recital. She only imprinted a kiss on her hair from time to time. The young Countess, who did not dare to raise her eyes to her, as if she were ashamed of another's crime, might have imagined that she had exaggerated the gravity of her misfortune, since her mother had received the confidence with so much calmness. But the calmness of Madame de Teclé at this terrible moment was that of the martyrs; for all that could have been suffered by the Christians under the claws of the tiger, or on the rack of the torturer, this mother was suffering at the hands of her best-beloved daughter. Her beautiful pale face--her large eyes upturned to heaven, like those that artists give to the pure victims kneeling in the Roman circus--seemed to ask God whether He really had any consolation for such torture.

When she had heard all, she summoned strength to smile at her daughter, who at last looked up to her with an expression of timid uncertainty--embracing her more tightly still.

"Well, my darling," said she, at last, "it is a great affliction, it is true. You are right, notwithstanding; there is nothing to despair of."

"Do you really believe so?"

"Certainly. There is some inconceivable mystery under all this; but be assured that the evil is not so terrible as it appears."

"My poor mother! but he has acknowledged it?"

"I am better pleased that he has acknowledged it. That proves he has yet some pride, and that some good is left in his soul. Then, too, he feels very much afflicted--he suffers as much as we. Think of that. Let us think of the future, my darling."

They clasped each other's hands, and smiled at each other to restrain the tears which filled the eyes of both. After a few minutes--"I wish much, my child," said Madame de Teclé, "to repose for half an hour; and then also I wish to arrange my toilet."

"I will conduct you to your chamber. Oh, I can walk! I feel a great deal better."

Madame de Camors took her mother's arm and conducted her as far as the door of the chamber prepared for her. On the threshold she left her.

"Be sensible," said Madame de Teclé, turning and giving her another smile.

"And you also," said the young woman, whose voice failed her.

Madame de Teclé, as soon as the door was closed, raised her clasped hands



toward heaven; then, falling on her knees before the bed, she buried her head in it, and wept despairingly.

The library of M. de Camors was contiguous to this chamber. He had been walking with long strides up and down this corridor, expecting every moment to see Madame de Teclé enter. As the time passed, he sat himself down and tried to read, but his thoughts wandered. His ear eagerly caught, against his will, the slightest sounds in the house. If a foot seemed approaching him, he rose suddenly and tried to compose his countenance. When the door of the neighboring chamber was opened, his agony was redoubled. He distinguished the whispering of the two voices; then, an instant after, the dull fall of Madame de Teclé upon the carpet; then her despairing sobs. M. de Camors threw from him violently the book which he was forcing himself to read, and, placing his elbows on the bureau which was before him, held, for a long time, his pale brow tightened in his contracted hands. When the sound of sobs abated little by little, and then ceased, he breathed freer. About midday he received this note:

"If you will permit me to take my daughter to the country for a few days, I shall be grateful to you.

"ELISE DE TECLE."

He returned immediately this simple reply:

"You can do nothing of which I do not approve to-day and always.  
CAMORS."

Madame de Teclé, in fact, having consulted the inclination and the strength of her daughter, had determined to remove her without delay, if possible, from the impressions of the spot where she had suffered so severely from the presence of her husband, and from the unfortunate embarrassment of their situation. She desired also to meditate in solitude, in order to decide what course to take under such unexampled circumstances. Finally, she had not the courage to see M. de Camors again--if she ever could see him again--until some time had elapsed. It was not without anxiety that she awaited the reply of the Count to the request she had addressed him.

In the midst of the troubled confusion of her ideas, she believed him capable of almost anything; and she feared everything from him. The Count's note reassured her. She hastened to read it to her daughter; and both of them, like two poor lost creatures who cling to the smallest twig, remarked with pleasure the tone of respectful abandonment with which he had reposed their destinies in their own hands. He spent his whole day at the session of the Corps Legislatif; and when he returned, they had departed.

Madame de Camors woke up the next morning in the chamber where her girlhood had passed. The birds of spring were singing under her windows in the old ancestral gardens. As she recognized these friendly voices,

so familiar to her infancy, her heart melted; but several hours' sleep had restored to her her natural courage. She banished the thoughts which had weakened her, rose, and went to surprise her mother at her first waking. Soon after, both of them were walking together on the terrace of lime-trees. It was near the end of April; the young, scented verdure spread itself out beneath the sunbeams; buzzing flies already swarmed in the half-opened roses, in the blue pyramids of lilacs, and in the clusters of pink clover. After a few turns made in silence in the midst of this fresh and enchanting scene, the young Countess, seeing her mother absorbed in reverie, took her hand.

"Mother," she said, "do not be sad. Here we are as formerly--both of us in our little nook. We shall be happy."

The mother looked at her, took her head and kissed her fervently on the forehead.

"You are an angel!" she said.

It must be confessed that their uncle, Des Rameures, notwithstanding the tender affection he showed them, was rather in the way. He never had liked Camors; he had accepted him as a nephew as he had accepted him for a deputy--with more of resignation than enthusiasm. His antipathy was only too well justified by the event; but it was necessary to keep him in ignorance of it. He was an excellent man; but rough and blunt. The conduct of Camors, if he had but suspected it, would surely have urged him to some irreparable quarrel. Therefore Madame de Teclé and her daughter, in his presence, were compelled to make only half utterances, and maintain great reserve--as much as if he had been a stranger. This painful restraint would have become insupportable had not the young Countess's health, day by day, assumed a less doubtful character, and furnished them with excuses for their preoccupation, their disquiet, and their retired life.

Madame de Teclé, who reproached herself with the misfortunes of her daughter, as her own work, and who condemned herself with an unspeakable bitterness, did not cease to search, in the midst of those ruins of the past and of the present, some reparation, some refuge for the future. The first idea which presented itself to her imagination had been to separate absolutely, and at any cost, the Countess from her husband. Under the first shock of fright which the duplicity of Camors had inflicted upon her, she could not dwell without horror on the thought of replacing her child at the side of such a man. But this separation--supposing they could obtain it, through the consent of M. de Camors, or the authority of the law--would give to the public a secret scandal, and might entail redoubled catastrophes. Were it not for these consequences she would, at least, have dug between Madame de Camors and her husband an eternal abyss. Madame de Teclé did not desire this. By force of reflection she had finally seen through the character of M. de Camors in one day--not probably more favorably, but more truly. Madame de Teclé, although a stranger to all wickedness, knew the world and knew life, and her penetrating intelligence divined yet more than she knew certainly. She then very nearly understood what species of moral monster M. de

Camors was. Such as she understood him, she hoped something from him still. However, the condition of the Countess offered her some consolation in the future, which she ought not to risk depriving herself of; and God might permit that this pledge of this unfortunate union might some day reunite the severed ties.

Madame de Teclé, in communicating her reflections, her hopes, and her fears to her daughter, added: "My poor child, I have almost lost the right to give you counsel; but I tell you, were it myself I should act thus."

"Very well, mother, I shall do so," replied the young woman.

"Reflect well on it first, for the situation which you are about to accept will have much bitterness in it; but we have only a choice of evils."

At the close of this conversation, and eight days after their arrival in the country, Madame de Teclé wrote M. de Camors a letter, which she read to her daughter, who approved it.

"I understood you to say, that you would restore to your wife her liberty if she wished to resume it. She neither wishes, nor could she accept it. Her first duty is to the child which will bear your name. It does not depend on her to keep this name stainless. She prays you, then, to reserve for her a place in your house. You need not fear any trouble or any reproach from her. She and I know how to suffer in silence. Nevertheless, I supplicate you to be true to her--to spare her. Will you leave her yet a few days in peace, then recall, or come for her?"

This letter touched M. de Camors deeply. Impassive as he was, it can easily be imagined that after the departure of his wife he had not enjoyed perfect ease of mind. Uncertainty is the worst of all evils, because everything may be apprehended. Deprived entirely of all news for eight days, there was no possible catastrophe he did not fancy floating over his head. He had the haughty courage to conceal from Madame de Campvallón the event that had occurred in his house, and to leave her undisturbed while he himself was sleepless for many nights. It was by such efforts of energy and of indomitable pride that this strange man preserved within his own consciousness a proud self-esteem. The letter of Madame de Teclé came to him like a deliverance. He sent the following brief reply:

"I accept your decision with gratitude and respect. The resolution of your daughter is generous. I have yet enough of generosity left myself to comprehend this. I am forever, whether you wish it or not, her friend and yours.

"CAMORS."

A week later, having taken the precaution of announcing his intention, he arrived one evening at Madame de Teclé's.

His young wife kept her chamber. They had taken care to have no witnesses, but their meeting was less painful and less embarrassing than they apprehended.

Madame de Teclé and her daughter found in his courteous reply a gleam of nobleness which inspired them with a shadow of confidence. Above all, they were proud, and more averse to noisy scenes than women usually are. They received him coldly, then, but calmly. On his part, he displayed toward them in his looks and language a subdued seriousness and sadness, which did not lack either dignity or grace.

The conversation having dwelt for some time on the health of the Countess, turned on current news, on local incidents, and took, little by little, an easy and ordinary tone. M. de Camors, under the pretext of slight fatigue, retired as he had entered--saluting both the ladies, but without attempting to take their hands. Thus was inaugurated, between Madame de Camors and her husband, the new, singular relation which should hereafter be the only tie in their common life.

The world might easily be silenced, because M. de Camors never had been very demonstrative in public toward his wife, and his courteous but reserved manner toward her did not vary from his habitual demeanor. He remained two days at Reuilly.

Madame de Teclé vainly waited for these two days for a slight explanation, which she did not wish to demand, but which she hoped for.

What were the terrible circumstances which had overruled the will of M. de Camors, to the point of making him forget the most sacred sentiments? When her thoughts plunged into this dread mystery, they never approached the truth. M. de Camors might have committed this base action under the menace of some great danger to save the fortune, the honor, probably the life of Madame de Campvallon. This, though a poor excuse in the mother's eyes, still was an extenuation. Probably also he had in his heart, while marrying her daughter, the resolution to break off this fatal liaison, which he had again resumed against his will, as often happens. On all these painful points she dwelt after the departure of M. de Camors, as she had previous to his arrival; confined to her own conjectures, when she suggested to her daughter the most consolatory appearances. It was agreed upon that Madame de Camors should remain in the country until her health was reestablished: only her husband expressed the desire that she should reside ordinarily on his estate at Reuilly, the chateau on which had recently been restored with the greatest taste.

Madame de Teclé felt the propriety of this arrangement. She herself abandoned the old habitation of the Comte de Teclé, to install herself near her daughter in the modest chateau which belonged to the maternal ancestors of M. de Camors, and which we have already described in another place, with its solemn avenue, its balustrades of granite, its labyrinths of hornbeams and the black fishpond, shaded with poplars.

Both dwelt there in the midst of their sweetest and most pleasant

souvenirs; for this little chateau, so long deserted--the neglected woods which surrounded it the melancholy piece of water--the solitary nymph all this had been their particular domain, the favorite framework of their reveries, the legend of their infancy, the poetry of their youth. It was doubtless a great grief to revisit again, with tearful eyes and wounded hearts and heads bowed by the storms of life, the familiar paths where they once knew happiness and peace. But, nevertheless, all these dear confidants of past joys, of blasted hopes, of vanished dreams--if they are mournful witnesses they are also friends. We love them; and they seem to love us. Thus these two poor women, straying amid these woods, these waters, these solitudes, bearing with them their incurable wounds, fancied they heard voices which pitied them and breathed a healing sympathy. The most cruel trial reserved to Madame de Camors in the life which she had the courage and judgment to adopt, was assuredly the duty of again seeing the Marquise de Campvallon, and preserving with her such relations as might blind the eyes of the General and of the world.

She resigned herself even to this; but she desired to defer as long as possible the pain of such a meeting. Her health supplied her with a natural excuse for not going, during that summer, to Campvallon, and also for keeping herself confined to her own room the day the Marquise visited Reully, accompanied by the General.

Madame de Teclé received her with her usual kindness. Madame de Campvallon, whom M. de Camors had already warned, did not trouble herself much; for the best women, like the worst, excel in comedy, and everything passed off without the General having conceived the shadow of a suspicion.

The fine season had passed. M. de Camors had visited the country several times, strengthening at every interview the new tone of his relations with his wife. He remained at Reully, as was his custom, during the month of August; and under the pretext of the health of the Countess, did not multiply his visits that year to Campvallon. On his return to Paris, he resumed his old habits, and also his careless egotism, for he recovered little by little from the blow he had received. He began to forget his sufferings and those of his wife; and even to felicitate himself secretly on the turn that chance had given to her situation. He had obtained the advantage and had no longer any annoyance. His wife had been enlightened, and he no longer deceived her--which was a comfortable thing for him. As for her, she would soon be a mother, she would have a plaything, a consolation; and he designed redoubling his attentions and regards to her.

She would be happy, or nearly so; as much so as two thirds of the women in the world.

Everything was for the best. He gave anew the reins to his car and launched himself afresh on his brilliant career--proud of his royal mistress, and foreseeing in the distance, to crown his life, the triumphs of ambition and power. Pleading various doubtful engagements, he went to Reully only once during the autumn; but he wrote frequently, and Madame de Teclé sent him in return brief accounts of his wife's health.

One morning toward the close of November, he received a despatch which made him understand, in telegraphic style, that his presence was immediately required at Reuilly, if he wished to be present at the birth of his son.

Whenever social duties or courtesy were required of M. de Camors, he never hesitated. Seeing he had not a moment to spare if he wished to catch the train which left that morning, he jumped into a cab and drove to the station. His servant would join him the next morning.

The station at Reuilly was several miles distant from the house. In the confusion no arrangement had been made to receive him on his arrival, and he was obliged to content himself with making the intermediate journey in a heavy country-wagon. The bad condition of the roads was a new obstacle, and it was three o'clock in the morning when the Count, impatient and travel-worn, jumped out of the little cart before the railings of his avenue. He strode toward the house under the dark and silent dome of the tufted elms. He was in the middle of the avenue when a sharp cry rent the air. His heart bounded in his breast: he suddenly stopped and listened attentively. The cry echoed through the stillness of the night. One would have deemed it the despairing shriek of a human being under the knife of a murderer.

These dolorous sounds gradually ceasing, he continued his walk with greater haste, and only heard the hollow and muffled sound of his own beating heart. At the moment he saw the lights of the chateau, another agonized cry, more shrill and alarming than the first, arose.

This time Camors stopped. Notwithstanding that the natural explanation of these agonized cries presented itself to his mind, he was troubled.

It is not unusual that men like him, accustomed to a purely artificial life, feel a strange surprise when one of the simplest laws of nature presents itself all at once before them with a violence as imperious and irresistible as a divine law. Camors soon reached the house, and receiving some information from the servants, notified Madame de Teclé of his arrival. Madame de Teclé immediately descended from her daughter's room. On seeing her convulsed features and streaming eyes, "Are you alarmed?" Camors asked, quickly.

"Alarmed? No," she replied; "but she suffers much, and it is very long."

"Can I see her?"

There was a moment's silence.

Madame de Teclé, whose forehead was contracted, lowered her eyes, then raised them. "If you insist on it," she said.

"I insist on nothing! If you believe my presence would do her harm--"  
The voice of Camors was not as steady as usual.

"I am afraid," replied Madame de Teclé, "that it would agitate her greatly; and if you will have confidence in me, I shall be much obliged to you."

"But at least," said Camors, "she might probably be glad to know that I have come, and that I am here--that I have not abandoned her."

"I shall tell her."

"It is well." He saluted Madame de Teclé with a slight movement of his head, and turned away immediately.

He entered the garden at the back of the house, and walked abstractedly from alley to alley. We know that generally the role of men in the situation in which M. de Camors at this moment was placed is not very easy or very glorious; but the common annoyance of this position was particularly aggravated to him by painful reflections. Not only was his assistance not needed, but it was repelled; not only was he far from a support on the contrary, he was but an additional danger and sorrow. In this thought was a bitterness which he keenly felt. His native generosity, his humanity, shuddered as he heard the terrible cries and accents of distress which succeeded each other without intermission. He passed some heavy hours in the damp garden this cold night, and the chilly morning which succeeded it. Madame de Teclé came frequently to give him the news. Near eight o'clock he saw her approach him with a grave and tranquil air.

"Monsieur," she said, "it is a boy."

"I thank you. How is she?"

"Well. I shall request you to go and see her shortly."

Half an hour later she reappeared on the threshold of the vestibule, and called:

"Monsieur de Camors!" and when he approached her, she added, with an emotion which made her lips tremble:

"She has been uneasy for some time past. She is afraid that you have kept terms with her in order to take the child. If ever you have such a thought--not now, Monsieur. Have you?"

"You are severe, Madame," he replied in a hoarse voice.

She breathed a sigh.

"Come!" she said, and led the way upstairs. She opened the door of the chamber and permitted him to enter it alone.

His first glance caught the eyes of his young wife fixed upon him. She was half sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, and whiter than the curtains whose shadow enveloped her. She held clasped to her breast her

sleeping infant, which was already covered, like its mother, with lace and pink ribbons. From the depths of this nest she fixed on her husband her large eyes, sparkling with a kind of savage light--an expression in which the sentiment of triumph was blended with one of profound terror. He stopped within a few feet of the bed, and saluted her with his most winning smile.

"I have pitied you very much, Marie," he said.

"I thank you!" she replied, in a voice as feeble as a sigh.

She continued to regard him with the same suppliant and affrighted air.

"Are you a little happier now?" he continued.

The glittering eye of the young woman was fastened on the calm face of her infant. Then turning toward Camors:

"You will not take him from me?"

"Never!" he replied.

As he pronounced these words his eyes were suddenly dimmed, and he was astonished himself to feel a tear trickling down his cheek. He experienced a singular feeling, he bent over, seized the folds of the sheet, raised them to his lips, rose immediately and left the room.

In this terrible struggle, too often victorious against nature and truth, the man was for once vanquished. But it would be idle to imagine that a character of this temperament and of this obduracy could transform itself, or could be materially modified under the stroke of a few transitory emotions, or of a few nervous shocks. M. de Camors rallied quickly from his weakness, if even he did not repent it. He spent eight days at Reuilly, remarking in the countenance of Madame de Teclé and in her manner toward him, more ease than formerly.

On his return to Paris, with thoughtful care he made some changes in the interior arrangement of his mansion. This was to prepare for the Countess and her son, who were to join him a few weeks later, larger and more comfortable apartments, in which they were to be installed.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE REPTILE TURNS TO STING

When Madame de Camors came to Paris and entered the home of her husband, she there experienced the painful impressions of the past, and the sombre preoccupations of the future; but she brought with her, although in a fragile form, a powerful consolation.



Assailed by grief, and ever menaced by new emotion she was obliged to renounce the nursing of her child; but, nevertheless, she never left him, for she was jealous even of his nurse. She at least wished to be loved by him. She loved him with an infinite passion. She loved him because he was her own son and of her blood. He was the price of her misfortune--of her pain. She loved him because he was her only hope of human happiness hereafter. She loved him because she found him as beautiful as the day. And it was true he was so; for he resembled his father--and she loved him also on that account. She tried to concentrate her heart and all her thoughts on this dear creature, and at first she thought she had succeeded. She was surprised at herself, at her own tranquillity, when she saw Madame de Campvallon; for her lively imagination had exhausted, in advance, all the sadness which her new existence could contain; but when she had lost the kind of torpor into which excessive suffering had plunged her--when her maternal sensations were a little quieted by custom, her woman's heart recovered itself in the mother's. She could not prevent herself from renewing her passionate interest in her graceful though terrible husband.

Madame de Teclé went to pass two months with her daughter in Paris, and then returned to the country.

Madame de Camors wrote to her, in the beginning of the following spring, a letter which gave her an exact idea of the sentiments of the young woman at the time, and of the turn her domestic life had taken. After a long and touching detail of the health and beauty of her son Robert, she added:

"His father is always to me what you have seen him. He spares me everything he can spare me, but evidently the fatality he has obeyed continues under the same form. Notwithstanding, I do not despair of the future, my beloved mother. Since I saw that tear in his eye, confidence has entered my poor heart. Be assured, my adored mother, that he will love me one day, if it is only through our child, whom he begins quietly to love without himself perceiving it. At first, as you remember, this infant was no more to him than I was. When he surprised him on my knee, he would give him a cold kiss, say, 'Good-morning, Monsieur,' and withdraw. It is just one month--I have forgotten the date--it was, 'Good-morning, my son--how pretty you are!' You see the progress; and do you know, finally, what passed yesterday? I entered Robert's room noiselessly; the door was open--what did I behold, my mother! Monsieur de Camors, with his head resting on the pillow of the cradle, and laughing at this little creature, who smiled back at him! I assure you, he blushed and excused himself: 'The door was open,' he said, 'and I came in.' I assured him that he had done nothing wrong.

"Monsieur de Camors is very odd sometimes. He occasionally passes the limits which were agreed upon as necessary. He is not only polite, but takes great trouble. Alas! once these courtesies would have fallen upon my heart like roses from heaven--now they annoy me a little. Last evening, for example, I sat down, as is my custom, at my piano after dinner, he reading a journal at the chimney-

corner--his usual hour for going out passed. Behold me, much surprised. I threw a furtive glance, between two bars of music, at him: he was not reading, he was not sleeping--he was dreaming. 'Is there anything new in the Journal?'--'No, no; nothing at all.' Another two or three bars of music, and I entered my son's room. He was in bed and asleep. I devoured him with kisses and returned--Monsieur de Camors was still there. And now, surprise after surprise: 'Have you heard from your mother? What does she say? Have you seen Madame Jaubert? Have you read this review?' Just like one who sought to open a conversation. Once I would willingly have paid with my blood for one of these evenings, and now he offers them to me, when I know not what to do with them. Notwithstanding I remember the advice of my mother, I do not wish to discourage these symptoms. I adopt a festive manner. I light four extra waxlights. I try to be amiable without being coquettish; for coquetry here would be shameful--would it not, my dear mother? Finally, we chatted together; he sang two airs to the piano; I played two others; he painted the design of a little Russian costume for Robert to wear next year; then talked politics to me. This enchanted me. He explained to me his situation in the Chamber. Midnight arrived; I became remarkably silent; he rose: 'May I press your hand in friendship?'--' Mon Dieu! yes.'--'Good-night, Marie.'--' Goodnight.' Yes, my mother, I read your thoughts. There is danger here! but you have shown it to me; and I believe also, I should have perceived it by myself. Do not fear, then. I shall be happy at his good inclinations, and shall encourage them to the best of my power; but I shall not be in haste to perceive a return, on his part, toward virtue and myself. I see here in society arrangements which revolt me. In the midst of my misfortune I remain pure and proud; but I should fall into the deepest contempt of myself if I should ever permit myself to be a plaything for Monsieur de Camors. A man so fallen does not raise himself in a day. If ever he really returns to me, it will be necessary for me to have much proof. I never have ceased to love him, and probably he doubts it: but he will learn that if this sad love can break my heart it can never abase it; and it is unnecessary to tell my mother that I shall live and die courageously in my widow's robe.

"There are other symptoms which also strike me. He is more attentive to me when she is present. This may probably be arranged between them, but I doubt it. The other evening we were at the General's. She was waltzing, and Monsieur de Camors, as a rare favor, came and seated himself at your daughter's side. In passing before us she threw him a look--a flash. I felt the flame. Her blue eyes glared ferociously. He perceived it. I have not assuredly much tenderness for her. She is my most cruel enemy; but if ever she suffers what she has made me suffer--yes, I believe I shall pity her. My mother, I embrace you. I embrace our dear lime-trees. I taste their young leaves as in olden times. Scold me as in old times, and love, above all things, as in old times, your

MARIE."

This wise young woman, matured by misfortune, observed everything saw

everything--and exaggerated nothing. She touched, in this letter, on the most delicate points in the household of M. de Camors--and even of his secret thoughts--with accurate justice. For Camors was not at all converted, nor near being so; but it would be belying human nature to attribute to his heart, or that of any other human being, a supernatural impassibility. If the dark and implacable theories which M. de Camors had made the law of his existence could triumph absolutely, this would be true. The trials he had passed through did not reform him, they only staggered him. He did not pursue his paths with the same firmness; he strayed from his programme. He pitied one of his victims, and, as one wrong always entails another, after pitying his wife, he came near loving his child. These two weaknesses had glided into his petrified soul as into a marble fount, and there took root--two imperceptible roots, however. The child occupied him not more than a few moments every day. He thought of him, however, and would return home a little earlier than usual each day than was his habit, secretly attracted by the smile of that fresh face. The mother was for him something more. Her sufferings, her youthful heroism had touched him. She became somebody in his eyes. He discovered many merits in her. He perceived she was remarkably well-informed for a woman, and prodigiously so for a French woman. She understood half a word--knew a great deal--and guessed at the remainder. She had, in short, that blending of grace and solidity which gives to the conversation of a woman of cultivated mind an incomparable charm. Habituated from infancy to her mental superiority as to her pretty face, she carried the one as unconsciously as the other. She devoted herself to the care of his household as if she had no idea beyond it. There were domestic details which she would not confide to servants. She followed them into her salons, into her boudoirs, a blue feather-brush in hand, lightly dusting the 'etageres', the 'jardinieres', the 'consoles'. She arranged one piece of furniture and removed another, put flowers in a vase--gliding about and singing like a bird in a cage.

Her husband sometimes amused himself in following her with his eye in these household occupations. She reminded him of the princesses one sees in the ballet of the opera, reduced by some change of fortune to a temporary servitude, who dance while putting the house in order.

"How you love order, Marie!" said he to her one day.

"Order" she said, gravely, "is the moral beauty of things."

She emphasized the word things--and, fearing she might be considered pretentious, she blushed.

She was a lovable creature, and it can be understood that she might have many attractions, even for her husband. Yet though he had not for one instant the idea of sacrificing to her the passion that ruled his life, it is certain, however, that his wife pleased him as a charming friend, which she was, and probably as a charming forbidden fruit, which she also was. Two or three years passed without making any sensible change in the relations of the different persons in this history. This was the most brilliant phase and probably the happiest in the life of M. de Camors.

His marriage had doubled his fortune, and his clever speculations augmented it every day. He had increased the retinue of his house in proportion to his new resources. In the region of elegant high life he decidedly held the sceptre. His horses, his equipages, his artistic tastes, even his toilet, set the law.

His liaison with Madame de Campvallon, without being proclaimed, was suspected, and completed his prestige. At the same time his capacity as a political man began to be acknowledged. He had spoken in some recent debate, and his maiden speech was a triumph. His prosperity was great. It was nevertheless true that M. de Camors did not enjoy it without trouble. Two black spots darkened the sky above his head, and might contain destroying thunder. His life was eternally suspended on a thread.

Any day General Campvallon might be informed of the intrigue which dishonored him, either through some selfish treason, or through some public rumor, which might begin to spread. Should this ever happen, he knew the General never would submit to it; and he had determined never to defend his life against his outraged friend.

This resolve, firmly decided upon in his secret soul, gave him the last solace to his conscience. All his future destiny was thus at the mercy of an accident most likely to happen. The second cause of his disquietude was the jealous hatred of Madame Campvallon toward the young rival she had herself selected. After jesting freely on this subject at first, the Marquise had, little by little, ceased even to allude to it.

M. de Camors could not misunderstand certain mute symptoms, and was sometimes alarmed at this silent jealousy. Fearing to exasperate this most violent feminine sentiment in so strong a soul, he was compelled day by day to resort to tricks which wounded his pride, and probably his heart also; for his wife, to whom his new conduct was inexplicable, suffered intensely, and he saw it.

One evening in the month of May, 1860, there was a reception at the Hotel Campvallon. The Marquise, before leaving for the country, was making her adieus to a choice group of her friends. Although this fete professed to be but an informal gathering, she had organized it with her usual elegance and taste. A kind of gallery, composed of verdure and of flowers, connected the salon with the conservatory at the other end of the garden.

This evening proved a very painful one to the Comtesse de Camors. Her husband's neglect of her was so marked, his assiduities to the Marquise so persistent, their mutual understanding so apparent, that the young wife felt the pain of her desertion to an almost insupportable degree. She took refuge in the conservatory, and finding herself alone there, she wept.

A few moments later, M. de Camors, not seeing her in the salon, became uneasy. She saw him, as he entered the conservatory, in one of those instantaneous glances by which women contrive to see without looking.

She pretended to be examining the flowers, and by a strong effort of will dried her tears. Her husband advanced slowly toward her.

"What a magnificent camellia!" he said to her. "Do you know this variety?"

"Very well," she replied; "this is the camellia that weeps."

He broke off the flowers.

"Marie," he said, "I never have been much addicted to sentimentality, but this flower I shall keep."

She turned upon him her astonished eyes.

"Because I love it," he added.

The noise of a step made them both turn. It was Madame de Campvallon, who was crossing the conservatory on the arm of a foreign diplomat.

"Pardon me," she said, smiling; "I have disturbed you! How awkward of me!" and she passed out.

Madame de Camors suddenly grew very red, and her husband very pale. The diplomat alone did not change color, for he comprehended nothing. The young Countess, under pretext of a headache, which her face did not belie, returned home immediately, promising her husband to send back the carriage for him. Shortly after, the Marquise de Campvallon, obeying a secret sign from M. de Camors, rejoined him in the retired boudoir, which recalled to them both the most culpable incident of their lives. She sat down beside him on the divan with a haughty nonchalance.

"What is it?" she said.

"Why do you watch me?" asked Camors. "It is unworthy of you!"

"Ah! an explanation? a disagreeable thing. It is the first between us-- at least let us be quick and complete."

She spoke in a voice of restrained passion--her eyes fixed on her foot, which she twisted in her satin shoe.

"Well, tell the truth," she said. "You are in love with your wife."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Unworthy of you, I repeat."

"What, then, mean these delicate attentions to her?"

"You ordered me to marry her, but not to kill her, I suppose?"

She made a strange movement of her eyebrows, which he did not see, for neither of them looked at the other. After a pause she said:

"She has her son! She has her mother! I have no one but you. Hear me, my friend; do not make me jealous, for when I am so, ideas torment me which terrify even myself. Wait an instant. Since we are on this subject, if you love her, tell me so. You know me--you know I am not fond of petty artifices. Well, I fear so much the sufferings and humiliations of which I have a presentiment, I am so much afraid of myself, that I offer you, and give you, your liberty. I prefer this horrible grief, for it is at least open and noble! It is no snare that I set for you, believe me! Look at me. I seldom weep." The dark blue of her eyes was bathed in tears. "Yes, I am sincere; and I beg of you, if it is so, profit by this moment, for if you let it escape, you never will find it again."

M. de Camors was little prepared for this decided proposal. The idea of breaking off his liaison with the Marquise never had entered his mind. This liaison seemed to him very reconcilable with the sentiments with which his wife could inspire him.

It was at the same time the greatest wickedness and the perpetual danger of his life, but it was also the excitement, the pride, and the magnificent voluptuousness of it. He shuddered. The idea of losing the love which had cost him so dear exasperated him. He cast a burning glance on this beautiful face, refined and exalted as that of a warring archangel.

"My life is yours," he said. "How could you have dreamed of breaking ties like ours? How could you have alarmed yourself, or even thought of my feelings toward another? I do what honor and humanity command me--nothing more. As for you--I love you--understand that."

"Is it true?" she asked. "It is true! I believe you!"

She took his hand, and gazed at him a moment without speaking--her eye dimmed, her bosom palpitating; then suddenly rising, she said, "My friend, you know I have guests!" and saluting him with a smile, left the boudoir.

This scene, however, left a disagreeable impression on the mind of Camors. He thought of it impatiently the next morning, while trying a horse on the Champs Elysees--when he suddenly found himself face to face with his former secretary, Vautrot. He had never seen this person since the day he had thought proper to give himself his own dismissal.

The Champs Elysees was deserted at this hour. Vautrot could not avoid, as he had probably done more than once, encountering Camors.

Seeing himself recognized he saluted him and stopped, with an uneasy smile on his lips. His worn black coat and doubtful linen showed a poverty unacknowledged but profound. M. de Camors did not notice these details, or his natural generosity would have awakened, and curbed the sudden indignation that took possession of him.

He reined in his horse sharply.

"Ah, is it you, Monsieur Vautrot?" he said. "You have left England then! What are you doing now?"

"I am looking for a situation, Monsieur de Camors," said Vautrot, humbly, who knew his old patron too well not to read clearly in the curl of his moustache the warning of a storm.

"And why," said Camors, "do you not return to your trade of locksmith? You were so skilful at it! The most complicated locks had no secrets for you."

"I do not understand your meaning," murmured Vautrot.

"Droll fellow!" and throwing out these words with an accent of withering scorn, M. de Camors struck Vautrot's shoulder lightly with the end of his riding-whip, and tranquilly passed on at a walk.

Vautrot was truly in search of a place, had he consented to accept one fitted to his talents; but he was, as will be remembered, one of those whose vanity was greater than his merit, and one who loved an office better than work.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE SECOND ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

Vautrot had at this time fallen into the depth of want and distress, which, if aggravated, would prompt him to evil and even to crime. There are many examples of the extremes to which this kind of intelligence, at once ambitious, grasping, yet impotent, can transport its possessor. Vautrot, in awaiting better times, had relapsed into his old role of hypocrite, in which he had formerly succeeded so well. Only the evening before he had returned to the house of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and made honorable amends for his philosophical heresies; for he was like the Saxons in the time of Charlemagne, who asked to be baptized every time they wanted new tunics. Madame de la Roche-Jugan had given a kind reception to this sad prodigal son, but she chilled perceptibly on seeing him more discreet than she desired on certain subjects, the mystery of which she had set her heart upon unravelling.

She was now more preoccupied than ever about the relations which she suspected to exist between M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallou. These relations could not but prove fatal to the hopes she had so long founded on the widowhood of the Marquise and the heritage of the General. The marriage of M. de Camors had for the moment deceived her, but she was one of those pious persons who always think evil, and whose suspicions are soon reawakened. She tried to obtain from Vautrot, who had so long been intimate with her nephew, some explanation of the mystery; but as Vautrot was too prudent to enlighten her, she turned him out of doors.

After his encounter with M. de Camors, he immediately turned his steps toward the Rue St. Dominique, and an hour later Madame de la Roche-Jugan had the pleasure of knowing all that he knew of the liaison between the Count and the Marquise. But we remember that he knew everything. These revelations, though not unexpected, terrified Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who saw her maternal projects destroyed forever. To her bitter feeling at this deception was immediately joined, in this base soul, a sudden thirst for revenge. It was true she had been badly recompensed for her anonymous letter, by which she had previously attempted to open the eyes of the unfortunate General; for from that moment the General, the Marquise, and M. de Camors himself, without an open rupture, let her feel their marks of contempt, which embittered her heart. She never would again expose herself to a similar slight of this kind; but she must assuredly, in the cause of good morals, at once confront the blind with the culpable, and this time with such proofs as would make the blow irresistible. By the mere thought, Madame de la Roche-Jugan had persuaded herself that the new turn events were taking might become favorable to the expectations which had become the fixed idea of her life.

Madame de Campvallon destroyed, M. de Camors set aside, the General would be alone in the world; and it was natural to suppose he would turn to his young relative Sigismund, if only to recognize the far-sighted affection and wounded heart of Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

The General, in fact, had by his marriage contract settled all his property on his wife; but Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had consulted a lawyer on this question, knew that he had the power of alienating his fortune during life, and of stripping his unworthy wife and transferring it to Sigismund.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan did not shrink from the probability--which was most likely--of an encounter between the General and Camors. Every one knows the disdainful intrepidity of women in the matter of duels. She had no scruple, therefore, in engaging Vautrot in the meritorious work she meditated. She secured him by some immediate advantages and by promises; she made him believe the General would recompense him largely. Vautrot, smarting still from the cut of Camors's whip on his shoulder, and ready to kill him with his own hand had he dared, hardly required the additional stimulus of gain to aid his protectress in her vengeance by acting as her instrument.

He resolved, however, since he had the opportunity, to put himself, once for all, beyond misery and want, by cleverly speculating, through the secret he held, on the great fortune of the General. This secret he had already given to Madame de Camors under the inspiration of another sentiment, but he had then in his hands the proofs, which he now was without.

It was necessary, then, for him to arm himself with new and infallible proofs; but if the intrigue he was required to unmask still existed, he did not despair of detecting something certain, aided by the general



knowledge he had of the private habits and ways of Camors. This was the task to which he applied himself from this moment, day and night, with an evil ardor of hate and jealousy. The absolute confidence which the General reposed in his wife and Camors after the latter's marriage with Marie de Teclé, had doubtless allowed them to dispense with much of the mystery and adventure of their intrigue; but that which was ardent, poetic, and theatrical to the Marquise's imagination had not been lost. Love alone was not sufficient for her. She needed danger, scenic effect, and pleasure heightened by terror. Once or twice, in the early time, she was reckless enough to leave her house during the night and to return before day. But she was obliged to renounce these audacious flights, finding them too perilous.

These nocturnal interviews with M. de Camors were rare, and she had usually received him at home. This was their arrangement: An open space, sometimes used as a woodyard, was next the garden of the Hotel Campvallon. The General had purchased a portion of it and had had a cottage erected in the midst of a kitchen-garden, and had placed in it, with his usual kind-heartedness, an old 'sous-officier', named Mesnil, who had served under him in the artillery. This Mesnil enjoyed his master's confidence. He was a kind of forester on the property; he lived in Paris in the winter, but occasionally passed two or three days in the country whenever the General wished to obtain information about the crops. Madame de Campvallon and M. de Camors chose the time of these absences for their dangerous interviews at night. Camors, apprised from within by some understood signal, entered the enclosure surrounding the cottage of Mesnil, and thence proceeded to the garden belonging to the house. Madame de Campvallon always charged herself with the peril that charmed her--with keeping open one of the windows on the ground floor. The Parisian custom of lodging the domestics in the attics gave to this hardihood a sort of security, notwithstanding its being always hazardous. Near the end of May, one of these occasions, always impatiently awaited on both sides, presented itself, and M. de Camors at midnight penetrated into the little garden of the old 'sous-officier'. At the moment when he turned the key in the gate of the enclosure, he thought he heard a slight sound behind him. He turned, cast a rapid glance over the dark space that surrounded him, and thinking himself mistaken, entered. An instant after, the shadow of a man appeared at the angle of a pile of lumber, which was scattered over the carpenter's yard. This shadow remained for some time immovable in front of the windows of the hotel and then plunged again into the darkness.

The following week M. de Camors was at the club one evening, playing whist with the General. He remarked that the General was not playing his usual game, and saw also imprinted on his features a painful preoccupation.

"Are you in pain, General?" said he, after they had finished their game.

"No, no!" said the General; "I am only annoyed--a tiresome affair between two of my people in the country. I sent Mesnil away this morning to examine into it."

The General took a few steps, then returned to Camors and took him aside: "My friend," he said, "I deceived you, just now; I have something on my mind--something very serious. I am even very unhappy!"

"What is the matter?" said Camors, whose heart sank.

"I shall tell you that probably to-morrow. Come, in any case, to see me to-morrow morning. Won't you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Thanks! Now I shall go--for I am really not well."

He clasped his hand more affectionately than usual.

"Adieu, my dear child," he added, and turned around brusquely to hide the tears which suddenly filled his eyes. M. de Camors experienced for some moments a lively disquietude, but the friendly and tender adieus of the General reassured him that it did not relate to himself. Still he continued astonished and even affected by the emotion of the old man.

Was it not strange? If there was one man in the world whom he loved, or to whom he would have devoted himself, it was this one whom he had mortally wronged.

He had, however, good reason to be uneasy; and was wrong in reassuring himself; for the General in the course of that evening had been informed of the treachery of his wife--at least he had been prepared for it. Only he was still ignorant of the name of her accomplice.

Those who informed him were afraid of encountering the blind and obstinate faith of the General, had they named Camors.

It was probable, also, after what had already occurred, that had they again pronounced that name, the General would have repelled the suspicion as a monstrous impossibility, regretting even the thought.

M. de Camors remained until one o'clock at the club and then went to the Rue Vanneau. He was introduced into the Hotel Campvallon with the customary precautions; and this time we shall follow him there. In traversing the garden, he raised his eyes to the General's window, and saw the soft light of the night-lamp burning behind the blinds.

The Marquise awaited him at the door of her boudoir, which opened on a rotunda at an elevation of a few feet. He kissed her hand, and told her in few words of the General's sadness.

She replied that she had been very uneasy about his health for some days. This explanation seemed natural to M. de Camors, and he followed the Marquise through the dark and silent salon. She held in her hand a candle, the feeble light of which threw on her delicate features a strange pallor. When they passed up the long, echoing staircase, the rustling of her skirt on the steps was the only sound that betrayed her

light movement.

She stopped from time to time, shivering--as if better to taste the dramatic solemnity that surrounded them--turned her blonde head a little to look at Camors; then cast on him her inspiring smile, placed her hand on her heart, as if to say, "I am fearful," and went on. They reached her chamber, where a dim lamp faintly illumined the sombre magnificence, the sculptured wainscotings, and the heavy draperies.

The flame on the hearth which flickered up at intervals, threw a bright gleam on two or three pictures of the Spanish school, which were the only decorations of this sumptuous, but stern-looking apartment.

The Marquise sank as if terrified on a divan near the chimney, and pushed with her feet two cushions before her, on which Camors half reclined; she then thrust back the thick braids of her hair, and leaned toward her lover.

"Do you love me to-day?" she asked.

The soft breath of her voice was passing over the face of Camors, when the door suddenly opened before them. The General entered. The Marquise and Camors instantly rose to their feet, and standing side by side, motionless, gazed upon him. The General paused near the door. As he saw them a shudder passed over his frame, and his face assumed a livid pallor. For an instant his eye rested on Camors with a stupefied surprise and almost bewilderment; then he raised his arms over his head, and his hands struck together with a sharp sound. At this terrible moment Madame de Campvallou seized the arm of Camors, and threw him a look so profound, supplicating, and tragic, that it alarmed him.

He roughly pushed her from him, crossed his arms, and waited the result.

The General walked slowly toward him. Suddenly his face became inflamed with a purple hue; his lips half opened, as if about to deliver some deadly insult. He advanced rapidly, his hand raised; but after a few steps the old man suddenly stopped, beat the air with both hands, as if seeking some support, then staggered and fell forward, striking his head against the marble mantelpiece, rolled on the carpet, and remained motionless. There was an ominous silence. A stifled cry from M. de Camors broke it. At the same time he threw himself on his knees by the side of the motionless old man, touched first his hand, then his heart. He saw that he was dead. A thin thread of blood trickled down his pale forehead where it had struck the marble; but this was only a slight wound. It was not that which had killed him. It was the treachery of those two beings whom he had loved, and who, he believed, loved him. His heart had been broken by the violence of the surprise, the grief, and the horror.

One look of Camors told Madame de Campvallou she was a widow. She threw herself on the divan, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed aloud. Camors still stood, his back against the mantelpiece, his eyes fixed, wrapped in his own thoughts. He wished in all sincerity of heart that he

could have awakened the dead and restored him to life. He had sworn to deliver himself up to him without defence, if ever the old man demanded it of him for forgotten favors, betrayed friendship, and violated honor. Now he had killed him. If he had not slain him with his own hand, the crime was still there, in its most hideous form. He saw it before him, he inhaled its odor--he breathed its blood. An uneasy glance of the Marquise recalled him to himself and he approached her. They then conversed together in whispers, and he hastily explained to her the line of conduct she should adopt.

She must summon the servants, say the General had been taken suddenly ill, and that on entering her room he had been seized by an apoplectic stroke.

It was with some effort that she understood she was to wait long enough before giving the alarm to give Camors sufficient time to escape; and until then she was to remain in this frightful tete-a-tete, alone with the dead.

He pitied her, and decided on leaving the hotel by the apartment of M. de Campvallou, which had a private entrance on the street.

The Marquise immediately rang violently several times, and Camors did not retire till he heard the sound of hastening feet on the stairs. The apartment of the General communicated with that of his wife by a short gallery. There was a suite of apartments--first a study, then his sleeping-room. M. de Camors traversed this room with feelings we shall not attempt to describe and gained the street. The surgeon testified that the General had died from the rupture of a vessel in the heart. Two days after the interment took place, at which M. de Camors attended. The same evening he left Paris to join his wife, who had gone to Reuilly the preceding week.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE FEATHER IN THE BALANCE

One of the sweetest sensations in the world is that of a man who has just escaped the fantastic terrors of night mare; and who, awaking, his fore head bathed with icy sweat, says to himself, "It was only a dream!" This was, in some degree, the impression which Camors felt on awaking, the morning after his arrival at Reuilly, when his first glance fell on the sunlight streaming over the foliage, and when he heard beneath his window the joyous laugh of his little son. He, however, was not dreaming; but his soul, crushed by the horrible tension of recent emotions, had a moment's respite, and drank in, almost without alloy, the new calm that surrounded him. He hastily dressed himself and descended to the garden, where his son ran to meet him.

M. de Camors embraced the child with tenderness; and leaning toward him,

spoke to him in a low voice, and asked after his mother and about his amusements, with a singularly soft and sad manner. Then he let him go, and walked with a slow step, breathing the fresh morning air, examining the leaves and the flowers with extraordinary interest. From time to time a deep, sad sigh broke from his oppressed chest; he passed his hand over his brow as if to efface the importunate images. He sat down amid the quaintly clipped boxwood which ornamented the garden in the antique fashion, called his son again to him, held him between his knees, interrogating him again, in a low voice, as he had done before; then drew him toward him and clasped him tightly for a long time, as if to draw into his own heart the innocence and peace of the child's. Madame de Camors surprised him in this gush of feeling, and remained mute with astonishment. He rose immediately and took her hand.

"How well you bring him up!" he said. "I thank you for it. He will be worthy of you and of your mother."

She was so surprised at the soft, sad tone of his voice, that she replied, stammering with embarrassment, "And worthy of you also, I hope."

"Of me?" said Camors, whose lips were slightly tremulous. "Poor child, I hope not!" and rapidly withdrew.

Madame de Camors and Madame de Teclé had learned, the previous morning, of the death of the General. The evening of the Count's arrival they did not speak to him on the subject, and were cautious not to make any allusion to it. The next day, and the succeeding ones, they practised the same reserve, though very far from suspecting the fatal circumstances which rendered this souvenir so painful to M. de Camors. They thought it only natural he should be pained at so sudden a catastrophe, and that his conscience should be disturbed; but they were astonished when this impression prolonged itself from day to day, until it took the appearance of a lasting sentiment.

They began to believe that there had arisen between Madame de Campvallon and himself, probably occasioned by the General's death, some quarrel which had weakened the tie between them.

A journey of twenty-four hours, which he made fifteen days after his arrival, was to them a confirmation of the truth they before suspected; but his prompt return, his new tastes, which kept him at Reuilly during the summer, seemed to them favorable symptoms.

He was singularly sad, pensive, and more inactive than usual in his habits. He took long walks alone. Sometimes he took his son with him, as if by chance. He sometimes attempted a little timid tenderness with his wife; and this awkwardness, on his part, was quite touching.

"Marie," he said to her one day, "you, who are a fairy, wave your wand over Reuilly and make of it an island in mid-ocean."

"You say that because you know how to swim," said she, laughing and shaking her head; but the heart of the young woman was joyful.

"You embrace me now every moment, my little one," said Madame de Teclé to her. "Is this really all intended for me?"

"My adorable mother," while embracing her again, "I assure you he is really courting me again. Why, I am ignorant; but he is courting me and you also, my mother. Observe it!"

Madame de Teclé did observe it. In his conversation with her, M. de Camors sought, under every pretext, to recall the souvenirs of the past, common to them both. It seemed he wished to link the past with his new life; to forget the rest, and pray of them to forget it also.

It was not without fear that these two charming women abandoned themselves to their hopes. They remembered they were in the presence of an uncertain person; they little trusted a change so sudden, the reason of which they could not comprehend. They feared it was some passing caprice, which would return to them, if they were its dupes, all their misfortunes, without the dignity which had hitherto attended them.

They were not the only ones struck by this transformation. M. des Rameures remarked it to them. The neighboring country people felt in the Count's language something new--as it were, a tender humility; they said that in other years he had been polite, but this year he was angelic. Even the inanimate things, the woods, the trees, the heavens, should have borne the same testimony, for he looked at and studied them with a benevolent curiosity with which he had never before honored them.

In truth, a profound trouble had invaded him and would not leave him. More than once, before this epoch, his soul, his philosophy, his pride, had received a rude shock, but he had no less pursued his path, rising after every blow, like a lion wounded, but unconquered. In trampling under his feet all moral belief which binds the vulgar, he had reserved honor as an inviolable limit. Then, under the empire of his passions, he said to himself that, after all, honor, like all the rest, was conventional. Then he encountered crime--he touched it with his hand--horror seized him--and he recoiled. He rejected with disgust the principle which had conducted him there--asked himself what would become of human society if it had no other.

The simple truths which he had misunderstood now appeared to him in their tranquil splendor. He could not yet distinguish them clearly; he did not try to give them a name, but he plunged with a secret delight into their shadows and their peace. He sought them in the pure heart of his child, in the pure love of his young wife, in the daily miracles of nature, in the harmonies of the heavens, and probably already in the depths of his thoughts--in God. In the midst of this approach toward a new life he hesitated. Madame de Campvallón was there. He still loved her vaguely. Above all, he could not abandon her without being guilty of a kind of baseness. Terrible struggles agitated him. Having done so much evil, would he now be permitted to do good, and gracefully partake of the joys he foresaw? These ties with the past, his fortune dishonestly acquired, his fatal mistress--the spectre of that old man would they permit it?

And we may add, would Providence suffer it? Not that we should lightly use this word Providence, and suspend over M. de Camors a menace of supernatural chastisement. Providence does not intervene in human events except through the logic of her eternal laws. She has only the sanction of these laws; and it is for this reason she is feared. At the end of August M. de Camors repaired to the principal town in the district, to perform his duties in the Council-General. The session finished, he paid a visit to Madame de Campvallon before returning to Reuilly. He had neglected her a little in the course of the summer, and had only visited Campvallon at long intervals, as politeness compelled him. The Marquise wished to keep him for dinner, as she had no guests with her. She pressed him so warmly that, reproaching himself all the time, he consented. He never saw her without pain. She always brought back to him those terrible memories, but also that terrible intoxication. She had never been more beautiful. Her deep mourning embellished yet more her languishing and regal grace; it made her pale complexion yet more fair, and it heightened the brilliancy of her look. She had the air of a young tragic queen, or of an allegory of Night. In the evening an hour arrived when the reserve which for some time had marked their relations was forgotten. M. de Camors found himself, as in olden time, at the feet of the young Marquise--his eyes gazing into hers, and covering with kisses her lovely hands. She was strange that evening. She looked at him with a wild tenderness, instilling, at pleasure, into his veins the poison of burning passion then escaping him, the tears gathering in her eyes. Suddenly, by one of those magical movements of hers, she enveloped with her hands the head of her lover, and spoke to him quite low beneath the shadow of this perfumed veil.

"We might be so happy!" she said.

"Are we not so?" said Camors.

"No! I at least am not, for you are not all mine, as I am yours. This appears harder, now that I am free. If you had remained free--when I think of it! or if you could become so, it would be heaven!"

"You know that I am not so! Why speak of it?"

She drew nearer to him, and with her breath, more than with her voice, answered:

"Is it impossible? Tell me!"

"How?" he demanded.

She did not reply, but her fixed look, caressing and cruel, answered him.

"Speak, then, I beg of you!" murmured Camors.

"Have you not told me--I have not forgotten it--that we are united by ties stronger than all others; that the world and its laws exist no longer for us; that there is no other good, no other bad for us, but our

happiness or our unhappiness? Well, we are not happy, and if we could be so--listen, I have thought well over it!"

Her lips touched the cheek of Camors, and the murmur of her last words was lost in her kisses.

Camors roughly repelled her, sprang up, and stood before her.

"Charlotte," he said, sternly, "this is only a trial, I hope; but, trial or no, never repeat it--never! Remember!"

She also quickly drew herself up.

"Ah! how you love her!" she cried. "Yes, you love her, it is she you love-I know it, I feel it, and I-I am only the wretched object of your pity, or of your caprice. Very well, go back to her--go and protect her, for I swear to you she is in peril!"

He smiled with his haughty irony.

"Let us see your plot," he said. "So you intend to kill her?"

"If I can!" she said; and her superb arm was stretched out as if to seize a weapon.

"What! with your own hand?"

"The hand shall be found."

"You are so beautiful at this moment!" said Camors; "I am dying with the desire to fall at your feet. Acknowledge only that you wished to try me, or that you were mad for a moment."

She gave a savage smile.

"Oh! you fear, my friend," she said, coldly; then raising again her voice, which assumed a malignant tone, "You are right, I am not mad, I did not wish to try you; I am jealous, I am betrayed, and I shall revenge myself--no matter what it costs me--for I care for nothing more in this world!--Go, and guard her!"

"Be it so; I go," said Camors. He immediately left the salon and the chateau; he reached the railway station on foot, and that evening arrived at Reuilly.

Something terrible there awaited him.

During his absence, Madame de Camors, accompanied by her mother, had gone to Paris to make some purchases. She remained there three days. She had returned only that morning. He himself arrived late in the evening. He thought he observed some constraint in their reception of him, but he did not dwell upon it in the state of mind in which he was.



This is what had occurred: Madame de Camors, during her stay in Paris, had gone, as was her custom, to visit her aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Their intercourse had always been very constrained. Neither their characters nor their religion coincided. Madame de Camors contented herself with not liking her aunt, but Madame de la Roche-Jugan hated her niece. She found a good occasion to prove this, and did not lose it. They had not seen each other since the General's death. This event, which should have caused Madame de la Roche-Jugan to reproach herself, had simply exasperated her. Her bad action had recoiled upon herself. The death of M. Campvallon had finally destroyed her last hopes, which she had believed she could have founded on the anger and desperation of the old man. Since that time she was animated against her nephew and the Marquise with the rage of one of the Furies. She learned through Vautrot that M. de Camors had been in the chamber of Madame de Campvallon the night of the General's death. On this foundation of truth she did not fear to frame the most odious suspicions; and Vautrot, baffled like her in his vengeance and in his envy, had aided her. A few sinister rumors, escaping apparently from this source, had even crept at this time into Parisian society.

M. de Camors and Madame de Campvallon, suspecting that they had been betrayed a second time by Madame de la Roche-Jugan, had broken with her; and she could presume that, should she present herself at the door of the Marquise, orders would have been given not to admit her. This affront made her angrier still. She was still a prey to the violence of her wrath when she received a visit from Madame de Camors. She affected to make the General's death the theme of conversation, shed a few tears over her old friend, and kissed the hand of her niece with a burst of tenderness.

"My poor little thing!" she said to her; "it is for you also I weep--for you will yet be more unhappy than heretofore, if that can be possible."

"I do not understand you, Madame," answered the young woman, coldly.

"If you do not understand me, so much the better," replied Madame de la Roche-Jugan, with a shade of bitterness; then, after a moment's pause--"Listen, my dear! this is a duty of conscience which I comply with. You see, an honest creature like you merits a better fate; and your mother too, who is also a dupe. That man would deceive the good God. In the name of my family, I feel bound to ask your pardon for both of them."

"I repeat, Madame, that I do not understand you."

"But it is impossible, my child--come!--it is impossible that all this time you have suspected nothing."

"I suspect nothing, Madame," said Madame de Camors, "because I know all."

"Ah!" continued Madame de la Roche-Jugan, dryly; "if this be so, I have nothing to say. But there are persons, in that case, who can accommodate their consciences to very strange things."

"That is what I thought a moment ago, Madame," said the young woman, rising.

"As you wish, my dear; but I speak in your own interest, and I shall reproach myself for not having spoken to you more clearly. I know my nephew better than you will ever know him; and the other also. Notwithstanding you say so, you do not know all; let me tell you. The General died very suddenly; and after him, it is your turn! Be very careful, my poor child!"

"Oh, Madame!" cried the young woman, becoming ghastly pale; "I shall never see you again while I live!" She left on the instant--ran home, and there found her mother. She repeated to her the terrible words she had just heard, and her mother tried to calm her; but she herself was disturbed. She went immediately to Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and supplicated her to have pity on them and to retract the abominable innuendo she had thrown out, or to explain it more fully. She made her understand that she would inform M. de Camors of the affair in case of need, and that he would hold his cousin Sigismund responsible. Terrified in her turn, Madame de la Roche-Jugan judged the best method was to destroy M. de Camors in the estimation of Madame de Teclé. She related what had been told her by Vautrot, being careful not to compromise herself in the recital. She informed her of the presence of M. de Camors at the General's house the night of his death. She told her of the reports that were circulated, and mingling calumny with truth, redoubling at the same time her affection, her caresses, and her tears, she succeeded in giving Madame de Teclé such an estimate of the character of M. de Camors, that there were no suspicions or apprehensions which the poor woman, from that moment, did not consider legitimate as connected with him.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan finally offered to send Vautrot to her, that she might herself interrogate him. Madame de Teclé, affecting an incredulity and a tranquillity she did not feel, refused and withdrew.

On her returning to her daughter, she forced herself to deceive her as to the impressions she had received, but she did not succeed; for her anxious face belied her reassuring words. They separated the following night, mutually concealing the trouble and distress of their souls; but accustomed so long to think, feel, and suffer together, they met, so to speak, in the same reflections, the same reasonings, and in the same terrors. They went over, in their memories, all the incidents of the life of Camors--all his faults; and, under the shadow of the monstrous action imputed to him, his faults took a criminal character which they were surprised they had not seen before. They discovered a series and a sequence in his designs, all of which were imputed to him as crimes--even his good actions. Thus his conduct during the last few months, his strange ways, his fancy for his child and for his wife, his assiduous tenderness toward her, were nothing more than the hypocritical meditation of a new crime--a mask which he was preparing in advance.

What was to be done? What kind of life was it possible to live in common, under the weight of such thoughts? What present--what future?

These thoughts bewildered them. Next day Camors could not fail remarking the singular change in their countenances in his presence; but he knew that his servant, without thinking of harm, had spoken of his visit to Madame de Campvallon, and he attributed the coldness and embarrassment of the two women to this fact. He was less disquieted at this, because he was resolved to keep them entirely safe. As a result of his reflections during the night, he had determined to break off forever his intrigue with Madame de Campvallon. For this rupture, which he had made it a point of honor not to provoke, Madame de Campvallon had herself furnished him a sufficient pretext.

The criminal thought she had suggested was, he knew, only a feint to test him, but it was enough to justify his abandonment of her. As to the violent and menacing words the Marquise had used, he held them of little value, though at times the remembrance of them troubled him. Nevertheless, for many years he had not felt his heart so light. This wicked tie once broken, it seemed as if he had resumed, with his liberty, his youth and virtue. He walked and played a part of the day with his little son. After dinner, just as night fell, clear and pure, he proposed to Madame de Camors a tete-a-tete excursion in the woods. He spoke to her of a view which had struck him shortly before on such a night, and which would please, he said laughingly, her romantic taste.

He would not permit himself to be surprised at the disinclination she manifested, at the disquietude which her face indicated, or at the rapid glance she exchanged with her mother.

The same thought, and that a most fearful one; entered the minds of both these unfortunate women at the same moment.

They were still under the impression of the shock which had so weakened their nerves, and the brusque proposition of M. de Camors, so contrary to his usual habits--the hour, the night, and the solitary walk--had suddenly awakened in their brains the sinister images which Madame de la Roche-Jugan had laid there. Madame de Camors, however, with an air of resolution the circumstances did not seem entitled to demand, prepared immediately to go out, then followed her husband from the house, leaving her little son in charge of her mother. They had only to cross the garden to find themselves on the edge of the wood which almost touched their dwelling, and which stretched to the old fields inherited from the Comte de Teclé. The intention of Camors in seeking this tete-a-tete was to confide to his wife the decisive determination he had taken of delivering up to her absolutely and without reserve his heart and life, and to enjoy in these solitudes his first taste of true happiness. Surprised at the cold distraction with which his young wife replied to the affectionate gayety of his language, he redoubled his efforts to bring their conversation to a tone of more intimacy and confidence. While stopping at intervals to point out to her some effects of light and shadow in their walk, he began to question her on her recent trip to Paris, and on the persons she had seen there. She named Madame Jaubert and a few others; then, lowering her voice against her will, mentioned Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

"That one," said Camors, "you could very well have dispensed with. I forgot to warn you that I no longer recognize her."

"Why?" asked she, timidly.

"Because she is a bad woman," said Camors. "When we are a little more intimate with each other, you and I," he added, laughing, "I shall edify you on this character, I shall tell you all--all, understand."

There was so much of nature, and even of goodness in the accent with which he pronounced these words, that the Countess felt her heart half comforted from the oppression which had weighed it down. She gave herself up with more abandon to the gracious advances of her husband and to the slight incidents of her walk.

The phantoms disappeared little by little from her mind, and she began to say to herself that she had been the sport of a bad dream, and of a true madness, when a singular change in her husband's face renewed all her terrors. M. de Camors, in his turn, had become absent and visibly preoccupied with some grave care. He spoke with an effort, made half replies, meditated; then stopped quickly to look around him, like a frightened child. These strange ways, so different from his former temper, alarmed the young woman, the more so as she just then found herself in the most distant part of the wood.

There was an extraordinary similarity in the thoughts which occupied them both. At the moment when Madame Camors was trembling for fear near her husband, he was trembling for her.

He thought he detected that they were followed; at different times he thought he heard in the thicket the cracking of branches, rattling of leaves, and finally the sound of stealthy steps. These noises always ceased on his stopping, and began again the moment he resumed his walk. He thought, a moment later, he saw the shadow of a man pass rapidly among the underwood behind them. The idea of some woodman came first to his mind, but he could not reconcile this with the persistence with which they were followed.

He finally had no doubt that they were dogged--but by whom? The repeated menaces of Madame de Campvallan against the life of Madame de Camors, the passionate and unbridled character of this woman, soon presented itself to his thoughts, suggested this mysterious pursuit, and awakened these frightful suspicions.

He did not imagine for a moment that the Marquise would charge herself personally with the infliction of her vengeance; but she had said--he then remembered--that the hand would be found. She was rich enough to find it, and this hand might now be here.

He did not wish to alarm his wife by calling her attention to this spectre, which he believed at her side, but he could not hide from her his agitation, which every movement of his caused her to construe as falsely as cruelly.

"Marie," he said, "let us walk a little faster, I beg of you! I am cold."

He quickened his steps, resolved to return to the chateau by the public road, which was bordered with houses.

When he reached the border of the woods, although he thought he still heard at intervals the sound which had alarmed him, he reassured himself and resumed his flow of spirits as if a little ashamed even of his panic. He stopped the Countess to look at the pretext of this excursion. This was the rocky wall of the deep excavation of a marl-pit, long since abandoned. The arbutus-trees of fantastic shape which covered the summit of these rocks, the pendant vines, the sombre ivy which carpeted the cliffs, the gleaming white stones, the vague reflections in the stagnant pool at the bottom of the pit, the mysterious light of the moon, made a scene of wild beauty.

The ground in the neighborhood of the marl-pit was so irregular, and the thorny underbrush so thick, that when pedestrians wished to reach the nearest highway they, were compelled either to make a long detour or to cross the deepest part of the excavation by means of the trunks of two great trees, which had been cut in half, lashed together, and thrown across the chasm. Thus they formed a crude bridge, affording a passage across the deep hollow and adding to the picturesque aspect of this romantic spot.

Madame de Camors never had seen anything like this peculiar bridge, which had been laid recently at her husband's orders. After they had gazed in silence a moment into the depths of the marl-pit, Camors called his wife's attention to the unique construction.

"Do you intend to cross that?" she asked, briefly.

"Yes, if you are not afraid," said Camors; "I shall be close beside you, you know."

He saw that she hesitated, and, looking at her closely in the moonlight, he thought her face was strangely pale, and could not refrain from saying:

"I believed that you had more courage."

She hesitated no longer, but stepped upon the dangerous bridge. In spite of herself, she turned her head half around, in a backward glance, and her steady step faltered. Suddenly she tottered. M. de Camors sprang forward, and, in the agitation of the moment, seized her in an almost violent grasp. The unhappy woman uttered a piercing shriek, made a gesture as if to defend herself, repelling his touch; then, running wildly across the bridge, she rushed into the woods. M. de Camors, astounded, alarmed, not knowing how to interpret his wife's strange conduct, immediately followed her. He found her a short distance beyond the bridge, leaning against the first tree she had been able to reach.

She turned to face him, with an expression of mingled terror and menace, and as he approached, she shot forth the single word:

"Coward!"

He stared at her in sheer amazement. At that moment there was a sound of hurried footsteps; a shadowy form glided toward them from the depth of the thicket, and the next instant Camors recognized Madame de Teclé. She ran, dishevelled and breathless, toward her daughter, seized her by the hand and, drawing herself up, said to Camors:

"If you kill one of us, kill both!"

He understood the mystery in a flash. A stifled cry escaped him; for an instant he buried his face in his hands; then, flinging out his arms in a gesture of despair, he said:

"So you took me for a murderer!"

There was a moment of dead silence.

"Well!" he cried, stamping his foot with sudden violence, "why do you stay here, then? Run! Fly! Save yourselves from me!"

Overcome with terror, the two women fled, the mother dragging her daughter. The next moment they had disappeared in the darkness of the woods.

Camors remained in that lonely spot many hours, without being aware of the passage of time. At intervals he paced feverishly to and fro along the narrow strip of land between the woods and the bridge; then, stopping short, with fixed eyes, he became lost in thought, and stood as motionless as the trunk of the tree against which he leaned. If, as we hope, there is a Divine hand which measures justly our sorrows according to our sins, the unhappy man, in this dark hour, must have rendered his account.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CURTAIN FALLS

The next morning the Marquise de Campvallou was strolling beside a large circular sheet of water which ornamented the lower part of her park, the metallic gleam of the rippling waves being discernible from afar through the branches of the surrounding trees.

She walked slowly along the bank of the lake, her head bowed, and the long skirt of her mourning-robe sweeping the grass. Two large and dazzlingly white swans, watching their mistress eagerly, in expectation of receiving their usual titbits from her hands, swam close to the bank,

following her steps as if escorting her.

Suddenly the Comte de Camors appeared before her. She had believed that she never should see him again. She raised her head quickly and pressed one hand to her heart.

"Yes, it is !!" said Camors. "Give me your hand."

She gave it to him.

"You were right, Charlotte," he said, after a moment of silence. "Ties like ours can not be broken. I have reflected on everything. I was seized with a momentary cowardice, for which I have reproached myself bitterly, and for which, moreover, I have been sufficiently punished. But I come to you to ask your forgiveness."

The Marquise led him tenderly into the deep shadow of the great plane-trees that surrounded the lake; she knelt before him with theatric grace, and fixed on him her swimming eyes. She covered his head with kisses. He raised her and pressed her to his heart.

"But you do not wish that crime to be committed?" he said in a low voice.

She bent her head with mournful indecision.

"For that matter," he added, bitterly, "it would only make us worthier of each other; for, as to myself, they have already believed me capable of it."

He took her arm and recounted to her briefly the scene of the night before.

He told her he had not returned home, and never should. This was the result of his mournful meditations. To attempt an explanation with those who had so mortally outraged him--to open to them the depth of his heart --to allude to the criminal thought they had accused him of--he had repelled with horror, the evening before, when proposed by another. He thought of all this; but this humiliation--if he could have so abased himself--would have been useless. How could he hope to conquer by these words the distrust capable of creating such suspicions?

He confusedly divined the origin, and understood that this distrust, envenomed by remembrance of the past, was incurable.

The sentiment of the irreparable, of revolted pride, indignation, and even injustice, had shown him but one refuge, and it was this to which he had fled.

The Comtesse de Camors and Madame de Teclé learned only through their servants and the public of the removal of the Count to a country-house he had rented near the Chateau Campvallón. After writing ten letters--all of which he had burned--he had decided to maintain an absolute silence.

They sometimes trembled at the thought he might take away his son. He thought of it; but it was a kind of vengeance that he disdained.

This move, which publicly proclaimed the relations existing between M. de Camors and the Marquise, made a sensation in the Parisian world, where it was soon known. It revived again the strange recollections and rumors that all remembered. Camors heard of them, but despised them.

His pride, which was then exasperated by a savage irritation, was gratified at defying public opinion, which had been so easily duped before. He knew there was no situation one could not impose upon the world providing one had wealth and audacity. From this day he resumed energetically the love of his life, his habits, his labors, and his thoughts for the future. Madame de Campvallou was the confidante of all his projects, and added her own care to them; and both occupied themselves in organizing in advance their mutual existence, hereafter blended forever. The personal fortune of M. de Camors, united to that of the Marquise, left no limits to the fancies which their imagination could devise. They arranged to live separately at Paris, though the Marquise's salon should be common to both; but their double influence would shine at the same time, and they would be the social centre of a sovereign influence. The Marquise would reign by the splendor of her person over the society of letters, art, and politics. Camors would there find the means of action which could not fail to accomplish the high destiny to which his talent and his ambition called him.

This was the life that had appeared to them in the origin of their liaison as a sort of ideal of human happiness--that of two superior beings, who proudly shared, above the masses, all the pleasures of earth, the intoxication of passion, the enjoyment of intellectual strength, the satisfaction of pride, and the emotions of power. The eclat of such a life would constitute the vengeance of Camors, and force to repent bitterly those who had dared to misunderstand him. The recent mourning of the Marquise commanded them, notwithstanding, to adjourn the realization of their dream, if they did not wish to wound the conscience of the public. They felt it, and resolved to travel for a few months before settling in Paris. The time that passed in their preparations for the future, and in arrangements for this voyage, was to Madame de Campvallou the sweetest period of her life. She finally tasted to the full an intimacy, so long troubled, of which the charm, in truth, was very great; for her lover, as if to make her forget his momentary desertion, was prodigal in the effusion of his tenderness. He brought to private studies, as well as to their common schemes, an ardor, a fire, which displayed itself in his face, in his eyes, and which seemed yet more to heighten his manly beauty. It often happened, after quitting the Marquise in the evening, that he worked very late at home, sometimes until morning. One night, shortly before the day fixed for their departure, a private servant of the Count, who slept in the room above his master's, heard a noise which alarmed him.

He went down in great haste, and found M. de Camors stretched apparently lifeless on the floor at the foot of his desk. The servant, whose name was Daniel, had all his master's confidence, and he loved him with that



singular affection which strong natures often inspire in their inferiors.

He sent for Madame de Campvallon, who soon came. M. de Camors, recovering from his fainting-fit, was very pale, and was walking across the room when she entered. He seemed irritated at seeing her, and rebuked his servant sharply for his ill-advised zeal.

He said he had only had a touch of vertigo, to which he was subject. Madame de Campvallon soon retired, having first supplicated him not to overwork himself again. When he came to her next day, she could not help being surprised at the dejection stamped on his face, which she attributed to the attack he had had the night before. But when she spoke of their approaching departure, she was astonished, and even alarmed by his reply:

"Let us defer it a little, I beg of you," he said. "I do not feel in a state fit for travelling."

Days passed; he made no further allusion to the voyage. He was serious, silent, and cold. The active ardor, almost feverish, which had animated until then his life, his speech, his eyes, was suddenly quenched. One symptom which disquieted the Marquise above all was the absolute idleness to which he now abandoned himself.

He left her in the evening at an early hour. Daniel told the Marquise that the Count worked no longer; that he heard him pacing up and down the greater part of the night. At the same time his health failed visibly. The Marquise ventured once to interrogate him. As they were both walking one day in the park, she said:

"You are hiding something from me. You suffer, my friend. What is the cause?"

"There is nothing."

"I pray you tell me!"

"Nothing is the matter with me," he replied, petulantly.

"Is it your son that you regret?"

"I regret nothing." After a few steps taken in silence--" When I think," he said, quickly, "that there is one person in the world who considers me a coward--for I hear always that word in my ear--and who treated me like a coward, and who believed it when it was said, and believes it still! If it had been a man, it would be easy, but it was a woman."

After this sudden explosion he was silent.

"Very well; what do you desire?" said the Marquise, with vexation. "Do you wish that I should go and tell her the truth--tell her that you were ready to defend her against me--that you love her, and hate me? If it be that you wish, say so. I believe if this life continues I shall be

capable of doing anything!"

"Do not you also outrage me! Dismiss me, if that will give you pleasure; but I love you only. My pride bleeds, that is all; and I give you my word of honor that if you ever affront me by going to justify me, I shall never in my life see you or her. Embrace me!" and he pressed her to his heart.

She was calm for a few hours.

The house he occupied was about to be taken again by its proprietor. The middle of September approached, and it was the time when the Marquise was in the habit of returning to Paris. She proposed to M. de Camors to occupy the chateau during the few days he purposed passing in the country. He accepted; but whenever she spoke of returning to Paris:

"Why so soon?" he would say; "are we not very well here?"

A little later she reminded him that the session of the Chamber was about to open. He made his health a pretext for delay, saying that he felt weak and wished to send in his resignation as deputy. She induced him only by her urgent prayer to content himself with asking leave of absence.

"But you, my beloved!" he said, "I am condemning you to a sad existence!"

"With you," she replied, "I am happy everywhere and always!"

It was not true that she was happy, but it was true that she loved him and was devoted to him. There was no suffering she would not have resigned herself to, no sacrifice she would not make, were it for him.

From this moment the prospect of worldly sovereignty, which she thought she had touched with her hand, escaped her. She had a presentiment of a melancholy future of solitude, of renunciation, of secret tears; but near him grief became a fete. One knows with what rapidity life passes with those who busy themselves without distraction in some profound grief--the days themselves are long, but the succession of them is rapid and imperceptible. It was thus that the months and then the seasons succeeded one another, for Camors and the Marquise, with a monotony that left hardly any trace on their thoughts. Their daily relations were marked, on the part of the Count with an invariably cold and distant courtesy, and very often silence; on the part of the Marquise by an attentive tenderness and a constrained grief. Every day they rode out on horseback, both clad in black, sympathetic by their beauty and their sadness, and surrounded in the country by distant respect. About the beginning of the ensuing winter Madame de Campvallou experienced a serious disquietude. Although M. de Camors never complained, it was evident his health was gradually failing. A dark and almost clayey tint covered his thin cheeks, and spread nearly to the whites of his eyes. The Marquise showed some emotion on perceiving it, and persuaded him to consult a physician. The physician perceived symptoms of chronic

debility. He did not think it dangerous, but recommended a season at Vichy, a few hygienic precautions, and absolute repose of mind and body.

When the Marquise proposed to Camors this visit to Vichy, he only shrugged his shoulders without reply.

A few days after, Madame de Campvallou on entering the stable one morning, saw Medjid, the favorite mare of Camors, white with foam, panting and exhausted. The groom explained, with some awkwardness, the condition of the animal, by a ride the Count had taken that morning. The Marquise had recourse to Daniel, of whom she made a confidant, and having questioned him, drew out the acknowledgment that for some time his master had been in the habit of going out in the evening and not returning until morning. Daniel was in despair with these nightly wanderings, which he said greatly fatigued his master. He ended by confessing to Madame de Campvallou the goal of his excursions.

The Comtesse de Camors, yielding to considerations the details of which would not be interesting, had continued to live at Reuilly since her husband had abandoned her. Reuilly was distant twelve leagues from Campvallou, which could be made shorter by a crosscut. M. de Camors did not hesitate to pass over this distance twice in the same night, to give himself the emotion of breathing for a few minutes the same air with his wife and child.

Daniel had accompanied him two or three times, but the Count generally went alone. He left his horse in the wood, and approached as near as he could without risking discovery; and, hiding himself like a malefactor behind the shadows of the trees, he watched the windows, the lights, the house, the least signs of those dear beings, from whom an eternal abyss had divided him.

The Marquise, half frightened, half irritated, by an oddity which seemed to border on madness, pretended to be ignorant of it. But these two spirits were too accustomed to each other, day by day, to be able to hide anything. He knew she was aware of his weakness, and seemed no longer to care to make a mystery of it.

One evening in the month of July, he left on horseback in the afternoon, and did not return for dinner. He arrived at the woods of Reuilly at the close of the day, as he had premeditated. He entered the garden with his usual precaution, and, thanks to his knowledge of the habits of the household, he could approach, without being noticed, the pavilion where the Countess's chamber was situated, and which was also that of his son. This chamber, by a particular arrangement of the house, was elevated at the side of the court by the height of an entresol, but was level with the garden. One of the windows was open, owing to the heat of the evening. Camors hid himself behind the shutters, which were half closed, and gazed eagerly into the chamber.

He had not seen for two years either his wife, his child, or Madame de Teclé. He now saw all three there. Madame de Teclé was working near the chimney. Her face was unchanged. She had the same youthful look, but

her hair was as white, as snow. Madame de Camors was sitting on a couch nearly in front of the window and undressing her son, at the same time talking to and caressing him.

The child, at a sign, knelt down at his mother's feet in his light night-garments, and while she held his joined hands in her own, he began in a loud voice his evening prayers. She whispered him from time to time a word that escaped him. This prayer, composed of a number of phrases adapted to a youthful mind, terminated with these words: "O God! be good and merciful to my mother, my grandmother, to me--and above all, O God, to my unfortunate father." He pronounced these words with childish haste, but under a serious look from his mother, he repeated them immediately, with some emotion, as a child who repeats the inflection of a voice which has been taught him.

Camors turned suddenly and retired noiselessly, leaving the garden by the nearest gate. A fixed idea tortured him. He wished to see his son--to speak to him--to embrace him, and to press him to his heart. After that, he cared for little.

He remembered they had formerly the habit of taking the child to the dairy every morning to give him a cup of milk. He hoped they had continued this custom. Morning arrived, and soon came the hour for which he waited. He hid himself in the walk which led to the farm. He heard the noise of feet, of laughter, and of joyous cries, and his son suddenly appeared running in advance. He was a charming little boy of five or six years, of a graceful and proud mien. On perceiving M. de Camors in the middle of the walk he stopped, he hesitated at this unknown or half-forgotten face; but the tender and half-supplicating smile of Camors reassured him.

"Monsieur!" he said, doubtfully.

Camors opened his arms and bent as if to kneel before him.

"Come and embrace me, I beg of you," he murmured.

The child had already advanced smiling, when the woman who was following him, who was his old nurse, suddenly appeared. 'She made a gesture of fright:

"Your father!" she said, in a stifled voice.

At these words the child uttered a cry of terror, rushed back to the nurse, pressed against her, and regarded his father with frightened eyes.

The nurse took him by the arm, and earned him off in great haste.

M. de Camors did not weep. A frightful contraction distorted the corners of his mouth, and exaggerated the thinness of his cheeks. He had two or three shudderings as if seized with sudden fever. He slowly passed his hand over his forehead, sighed profoundly, and departed.

Madame de Campvallon knew nothing of this sad scene, but she saw its consequences; and she herself felt them bitterly. The character of M. de Camors, already so changed, became after this unrecognizable. He showed her no longer even the cold politeness he had manifested for her up to that period. He exhibited a strange antipathy toward her. He fled from her. She perceived he avoided even touching her hand.

They saw each other rarely now. The health of Camors did not admit of his taking regular meals. These two desolate existences offered then, in the midst of the almost royal state which surrounded them, a spectacle of pity.

In this magnificent park--across these beautiful gardens, with great vases of marble--under long arcades of verdure peopled with more statues--both wandered separately, like two sad shadows, meeting sometimes but never speaking.

One day, near the end of September, Camors did not descend from his apartment. Daniel told the Marquise he had given orders to let no one enter.

"Not even me?" she said. He bent his head mournfully. She insisted.

"Madame, I should lose my place!"

The Count persisted in this mania of absolute seclusion. She was compelled from this moment to content herself with the news she obtained from his servant. M. de Camors was not bedridden. He passed his time in a sad reverie, lying on his divan. He got up at intervals, wrote a few lines, then lay down again. His weakness appeared great, though he did not complain of any suffering.

After two or three weeks, the Marquise read in the features of Daniel a more marked inquietude than usual. He supplicated her to call in the country physician who had once before seen him. It was so decided. The unfortunate woman, when the physician was shown into the Count's apartment, leaned against the door listening in agony. She thought she heard the voice of Camors loudly raised, then the noise ceased.

The doctor, when departing, simply said to her: "Madame, his sad case appears to me serious--but not hopeless. I did not wish to press him to-day, but he allows me to return tomorrow."

In the night which followed, at two o'clock, Madame de Campvallon heard some one calling her, and recognized the voice of Daniel. She rose immediately, threw a mantle around her, and admitted him.

"Madame," he said, "Monsieur le Comte asks for you," and burst into tears.

"Mon Dieu! what is the matter?"

"Come, Madame--you must hasten!"

She accompanied him immediately. From the moment she put her foot in the chamber, she could not deceive herself--Death was there. Crushed by sorrow, this existence, so full, so proud, so powerful, was about to terminate. The head of Camors, turned on the pillow, seemed already to have assumed a death-like immobility. His beautiful features, sharpened by suffering, took the rigid outline of sculpture; his eye alone yet lived and looked at her.

She approached him hastily and wished to seize the hand resting on the sheet.

He withdrew it. She gave a despairing groan. He continued to look fixedly at her. She thought he was trying to speak, but could not; but his eyes spoke. They addressed to her some request, at the same time with an imperious though supplicating expression, which she doubtless understood; for she said aloud, with an accent full of sadness and tenderness:

"I promise it to you."

He appeared to make a painful effort, and his look indicated a large sealed letter lying on the bed. She took it, and read on the envelope--"To my son."

"I promise you," she said, again, falling on her knees, and moistening the sheet with her tears.

He extended his hand toward her. "Thanks!" was all he said. Her tears flowed faster. She set her lips on this hand already cold. When she raised her head, she saw at the same instant the eyes of Camors slightly moist, rolling wildly--then extinguished! She uttered a cry, threw herself on the bed, and kissed madly those eyes still open--yet void of light forever!

Thus ended Camors, who was a great sinner, but nevertheless a MAN!

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A man never should kneel unless sure of rising a conqueror  
One of those pious persons who always think evil

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of Monsieur de Camors, v3  
by Octave Feuillet

berg Etext of Monsieur de Camors, v3

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