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By ÉMILE ZOLA.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE 44TH FRENCH EDITION.

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PREFACE.

CRITICISM has fallen fiercely upon most of the works of fiction which have proceeded from M. Émile Zola's busy pen—at times the criticism of envy, at others the criticism of prejudice, and again the criticism of the blind. Indeed, in the long series of volumes dealing with the Rougon-Macquart family there is but one which has commanded the approval of friends and foes alike; and that is the present story "La Joie de Vivre."

When this book first appeared in Paris its merits fairly took away the breath of the envious, and its superiority over every-day fiction was so manifest that the blindest began to see. As for the prejudiced, all that the most captious among them could lay hold of for rebuke was a few passages contained in the tenth chapter. Even M. Louis Ulbach, himself an eminent novelist of the old school, and at that time, perhaps, the fiercest of M. Zola's literary opponents, pronounced the story, taken in its broad lines, to be an admirable one. It is, indeed, a tale of singularly penetrating interest and pathos—not the pathos which may be attained by an extravagant use of fulsome adjectives, but the pathos which springs unassisted from the fountain of all human feeling, the

heart. The hero is a young man, seemingly born to success and gifted with high mental attainments. Life, to all appearance, offers him as fair a prospect as any of us could desire. But Lazare Chanteau, like Claude Lantier in "His Masterpiece?" is an incomplete genius; there is "that something more or less" in his brain which led Claude on to suicide; only in Lazare's case he would shrink, appalled, from the idea of self-destruction, for his life is blighted—transformed into crushing misery—by an incessant unreasoning fear of death. In the brightest moments of his existence, in the broad sunshine, amid the fairest scenes of nature, in the very transports of love, as in moments of anxiety and bereavement, and as in the gloom, the silence and the solitude of night, the terrible ever-recurring thought flashes from his brain: "My God, my God, so one must die!"

It cannot be contended that such a case is impossible. Professor Charcot has under his care in Paris poor creatures of both sexes who are similarly afflicted with an unreasoning fear of death. Our spiritual pastors and masters will tell us, perhaps, that religion would suffice to dispel such a dread, and in Lazare Chanteau's case they would have a free field for argument since M. Zola depicts him as an unbeliever. But it should be remembered that religion, though it may at times degenerate into mania, rightly appeals in its earlier teachings to healthy minds. It is powerless in contending with certain forms of insanity, the age of miracles being past; and it should be borne in mind that with many sufferers this all-absorbing fear of death constitutes a well-known and

perfectly defined disorder of the brain, rebellious alike to scientific and spiritual treatment.

In Lazare the germ of this disorder has existed from birth upwards, for his brain is tainted by the hereditary virus of the Rougon-Macquarts, and the development of this fantastic dread is greatly assisted by the death of his mother and that of his old dog. It may be mentioned that the passage in which M. Zola describes the last moments of Matthew, his hero's canine favourite, went the round of the French press at the time the story was first published; and this passage is indeed a little masterpiece —so brimful of observation, and simple, natural pathos, as to be worthy of insertion in the most fastidiously compiled volume of selected literary gems.

The reader of "La Joie de Vivre," will find himself carried far away from the scenes usually selected by M. Zola; for the story is one of provincial life by the seashore, near a little Norman fisher hamlet; however, in treating of these surroundings the author shows himself as much at home as when writing of his favourite Paris, or his native Provence. Besides Lazare Chanteau, so tormented by the fear of death that life virtually has no delights left, there is a young girl, his cousin, Pauline Quenu, whom he should have married, and whose story is peculiarly touching. She appears as abnegation and devotion personified. Lazare's parents—her guardians—rob her, but she pays no heed to it; he, himself, discards her for another woman, but she forgives him. It is she who infuses life into the lungs of her rival's puny babe; and when Lazare's mania attains full development, it is she

who tries to comfort him, who endeavours to dispel his gloomy thoughts. No sacrifice is too great for her; money, love, she relinquishes everything in the hope of securing a transient happiness for the man to whom she has given her heart. She may at times yearn for his affection, she may experience a momentary weakness, but her spirit is strong, and speedily subdues her rebellious flesh.

And besides this girl, so self-denying and so forgiving, we have Lazare's egotistical parents, his mother, who despoils and wrongs Pauline for his benefit; his father, whose only thought is his belly. Lazare, himself, is tainted with the paternal egotism, but his desertion of his cousin is terribly punished by the virtual wrecking of his life. As for the subordinate characters, the grumpy Norman servant, the rough, but kind-hearted old doctor, the sturdy tolerant priest, the artful village children, they are all drawn with marvellous skill, and admirably grouped around the central figures with which they form a perfect whole. From beginning to end, the story teems with observation and insight into human nature; to such a degree, indeed, that even if M. Zola's other admirable works of fiction had never been written, this one alone would have sufficed in the future to ensure him a living name.

HOW JOLLY LIFE IS!

CHAPTER I.

When the cuckoo-clock in the dining-room struck six, Chanteau lost all hope. He got up, with a painful effort, from the arm-chair in which he was sitting, warming his heavy gouty legs over a coke-fire. Ever since two o'clock he had been looking for the arrival of Madame Chanteau, who, after a five weeks' absence, was to-day expected to bring from Paris their little cousin, Pauline Quenu, an orphan girl of ten years of age, whose guardianship the Chanteaus had undertaken.

"I can't understand it at all, Véronique," he said, opening the kitchen-door. "Some accident must have happened to them."

The cook, a tall stout young woman of five-and-thirty, with hands like a man's and a face like a gendarme's, was just about to remove from before the fire a leg of mutton, which seemed in imminent danger of being over-done. She did not express her irritation in words, but, for all that, the paleness of her usually ruddy cheeks betokened her displeasure.

"Madame has, no doubt, stayed in Paris," she said shortly, "looking after this business that seems as though it were never going to end, and which is putting us all topsy-turvy."

"No! no!" answered Chanteau. "The letter we had yesterday evening said the little girl's affairs were completely settled. Madame was to arrive this morning at Caen, where she intended making a short stay to see Davoine. At one o'clock she was to take the train again; at two she would alight at Bayeux; at three, old Malivoire's coach would put her down at Arromanches. Even if Malivoire wasn't ready to start

at once, madame ought to have been here by four o'clock, or by half-past, at the latest. It is scarcely six miles from Arromanches to Bonneville."

The cook kept her eyes fixed on the joint, and only shook her head as all these calulations were thrown at her. After a slight hesitation, Chanteau added:

"I think you had better go to the corner of the road and look if you can see anything of them, Véronique."

She glared at him, growing still paler with repressed anger.

"Why? What for? Monsieur Lazare is already out there getting drenched, looking for them; and what's the good of my going and getting wet through also?"

"The truth is," murmured Chanteau, softly, "that I am beginning to feel a little uneasy about my son too, now. He ought to have been back by this time. What can he have been doing out on the road for more than an hour?"

Véronique, without vouchsafing any answer, took down from a nail an old black woollen shawl, which she threw over her head and shoulders. Then, as she saw her master following her out into the passage, she said to him, rather snappishly:

"Go back to your fire, if you don't want to be bellowing out all day to-morrow with pain."

She shut the door with a bang, and put on her clogs as she stood on the steps, crying out to the wind:

"The horrid little brat! Putting us to all this trouble!"

Chanteau's composure was perfectly unruffled. He was accustomed to Véronique's ebullitions of temper. She had entered his service in the first year of his married life, when she was fifteen years old. When the sound of her clogs had died away, he bolted off, like a school-boy at play-time, and planted himself before a glass-door at the other end of the passage, which looked upon the sea. There he stood for a moment, gazing out at the sky with his blue eyes. He was a short, stout man, with thick closely-cut white hair. He was scarcely fifty-six years old, but the gout, to which he was a martyr, had prematurely aged him. He was feeling anxious and troubled, and was hoping that little Pauline would be able to win Véronique's affection.

Besides, was it his fault that she was coming? When the Paris notary had written to tell him that his cousin Quenu, whose wife had died some six months before, had just died too, charging him in his will with the guardianship of his little daughter, he had not felt able to refuse the trust. It was true

they had not seen much of one another, as the family had been broken-up and separated. Chanteau's father had established a timber-yard at Caen, after having left the South and having wandered all over France as a journeyman carpenter; while, on the other hand, young Quenu, at his mother's death, had gone to Paris, where one of his uncles had subsequently given up to him a flourishing pork-butcher's business, right in the centre of the district of the Halles. They had only met each other some two or three times, on the occasions when Chanteau had been compelled by his gout to desert his business and go to Paris for special medical advice. But the two men had ever had a genuine respect for each other, and the dying father had probably thought that the sea-air would be a beneficial to his daughter. And the girl, too, as the heiress of the pork-butcher's business, would certainly be no charge upon them. Madame Chanteau, indeed, had fallen so heartily into the scheme, that she had insisted upon saving her husband all the dangerous fatigue of the journey to Paris, and had set off alone and bustled about and settled everything, in her perpetual craving for activity; and Chanteau was quite contented so long as his wife was pleased.

But what could be keeping the two? His anxiety began to disturb him again, as he looked out upon the dark sky, over which the west wind was driving huge masses of black clouds, like sooty rags whose tattered ends draggled, far away in the distance, in the sea. It was one of those March gales, when the equinoctial storms beat furiously upon the shores. The tide was only just beginning to rise, and all that could be seen of the sea was a thin white bar of foam, far away towards the horizon. The wide expanse of uncovered beach, dotted over with rocks and tracts of gloomy-looking weed, its level surface blotched here and there with mournful pools, had a weirdly melancholy appearance as it lay stretched out beneath the quickly increasing darkness and the black clouds that scudded head-long through the skies.

"Perhaps the wind has overturned them into some ditch," murmured Chanteau to himself.

He felt constrained to go and look out. He opened the glass-door, and ventured out in his list-slippers on to the gravelled terrace which commanded a view of the village. A few drops of rain were dashed against his face by the howling gale, and a terrific burst of wind almost tore his thick blue woollen dressing-

gown off his back. But he struggled on, bareheaded and bending down to cope with the force of the storm, and reached the parapet, on which he leaned and glanced out on to the road that ran beneath. This road descended between two steep cliffs, and looked almost as though it had been hewn out of the solid rock to afford a resting-place for the five-and-twenty or thirty houses of which Bonneville consisted. Every tide threatened to crush them from their narrow pebble-strewn anchorage against the rocky cliff. To the left there was a scanty landing-place, just a mere strip of sand, where the men were hoisting some half-score boats up on to the shore, timing their efforts by regularly repeated calls. The inhabitants did not number more than a couple of hundred souls. They made a bare living out of the sea, clinging to their native rocks with all the unreasoning persistence of limpets. On the cliffs above these miserable tenements, which every winter were battered and wrecked by the storms, there was nothing to be seen, except where, about half-way up, the church lay on the right-hand side of the road and the Chanteaus' house on the left. Bonneville contained nothing else.

"What a precious night it is!" cried a voice.

Chanteau raised his head and recognised the priest, the Abbé Horteur, a thick-set man of peasant-like build, whose red hair was still unsilvered by his fifty years. He had enclosed a plot of land in the grave-yard in front of the church for a vegetable-garden, and he was now engaged in examining his early salad-plants, tucking away his cassock between his legs to prevent the wind blowing it over his head. Chanteau, who could not make himself heard against the roaring of the gale, contented himself by waving his hand.

"They are doing quite right to get their boats up, I think," the priest roared out.

But just then a gust of wind caught hold of his cassock and wrapt it round his head, so he fled for refuge behind the church.

Chanteau turned round to escape the violence of the blast. He cast a glance, with eyes that were streaming with wet, at his garden over which the spray was sweeping, and at the brick-built house of two floors, pierced with five windows, whose shutters seemed in imminent danger of being torn away in spite of their fastenings. When the sudden squall had subsided, he bent down again to look at the road; and just at that moment Véronique returned. She shook her hands at him.

"What! you have actually come out!— Be good enough to go into the house again at once, sir!"

She pulled him back into the passage, scolding him the while like a child detected in wrong-doing. Wouldn't it be she who would have all the trouble of looking after him in the morning when he would be suffering agonies of pain from his indiscretion?

"Haven't you seen anything of them?" he asked, submissively.

"No, indeed, I have seen nothing— Madame is no doubt taking shelter somewhere."

He dared not tell her that she should have gone further on. He was beginning to feel especially anxious about his son now.

"I saw," continued the cook, "that all the neighbourhood is getting blown up into the air. They are quite afraid of stopping in their houses. Last September the Cuches' house was cracked from top to bottom, and Prouane, who was going up to the church to ring the *Angelus*, has just told me that he is sure it will be toppled over before morning."

Just as she spoke, a big lad of nineteen sprang up the three steps before the door at a leap. He had a spreading brow and sparkling eyes, and a fine chestnut down fringed his long oval face.

"Ah! here's Lazare at last!" said Chanteau, feeling much relieved. "How wet you are, my poor boy!"

The young man hung up in the passage his cloak that was quite saturated with sea-water.

"Well?" interrogated his father.

"I can see nothing of them," replied Lazare. "I have been right to Verchemont, and I waited under the shed at the inn there and kept my eyes on the road, which is a real river of mud. But I could see no signs of them. Then I began to be afraid that you might be getting uneasy about me, so I came back."

The previous August Lazare had left the college at Caen, having gained his Bachelor's degree, and for the last eight months he had been roaming about the cliffs, unable to make up his mind as to what profession he should adopt, feeling an enthusiasm for music only, a predisposition which distressed his mother extremely. She had gone away very much displeased, as he had refused to accompany her to Paris, where she thought she would be able to place him in some advantageous position.

"Now that I have let you know I am all right," the young man went on to say, "I should like to go on to Arromanches."

"No, no! it is getting late," said Chanteau. "We shall be having some news of your mother presently. I am expecting a message every moment. Listen! isn't that a carriage?"

Véronique hurried off to open the door.

"It is Doctor Cazenove's gig," she said. "Shall I bring him in, sir? Why! good gracious! it's madame that's in it!"

They all three hurried down the steps. A huge dog, a cross between a St. Bernard and a Newfoundland, which had been lying asleep in a corner of the passage, sprang forward and began to bark furiously. At the sound of the dog's barking, a small white cat of fastidious demeanour made its way to the door, but, at the sight of the wet and dirt outside, it gave a slight shudder of disgust with its tail, and sat down very sedately on the top of the steps and watched what was going to happen.

A lady of about fifty years of age sprang from the gig with all the agility of a young girl. She was short and slight, and her hair was still perfectly black. Her face was pleasant to look upon, though its beauty was perhaps spoiled by a too large nose. The dog sprang forward towards her and placed his big paws on her shoulders, as though he wanted to kiss her; but this mark of affection seemed to displease her.

"Down! down! Matthew. Get away, will you? Tiresome animal!"

Lazare ran across the yard behind the dog. He cried out as he ran—

"All right, mother?"

"Yes, yes!" replied Madame Chanteau.

"We have been in a tremendous state of mind about you," said Chanteau, who had followed his son, in spite of the wind. "What has happened to you to make you so late?"

"Oh! we've had nothing but troubles," she answered. "To begin with, the roads are so bad that it has taken us nearly two hours to come from Bayeux. Then, at Arromanches, one of Malivoire's horses went lame and he couldn't let us have another. At one time I really thought we should have to stay with him all night. But the doctor was kind enough to offer us his gig, and this good Martin here has driven us home."

The coachman, an old man with a wooden leg, who had formerly served in the navy, and had there had his limb ampu-

tated by Cazenove, who was then a naval surgeon, had taken service afterwards under the doctor. He was tethering the horse when Madame Chanteau suddenly checked her flow of speech and called out to him:

"Martin! help the little girl to get down!"

No one had yet given a thought to the child. The hood of the gig had been drawn very low, and only her black skirt and little black-gloved hands could be seen. She did not wait, however, for the coachman's assistance, but sprang lightly to the ground. Just then there came a fierce puff of wind which whirled her clothes about her and sent loose curls of her brown hair straying from beneath her crape-trimmed hat. She did not seem very strong for her ten years. Her lips were thick and her face was full and pale with the pallor of girls that are brought up in the rooms that are hidden away behind the shops of Paris. They all stared at her. Véronique, who had just bustled-up to welcome her mistress, checked herself, while her face assumed an icy and jealous expression. But Matthew was affected with none of this reserve. He reared himself up between the child's arms and kissed her with his tongue.

"Don't be afraid of him!" cried Madame Chanteau. "He won't hurt you."

"Oh! I'm not at all afraid of him," said Pauline, quietly. "I am very fond of dogs."

And, indeed, Matthew's boisterous welcome did not seem to disturb her in the slightest degree. Her grave little face broke out into a smile beneath her black hat, and she affectionately returned the Newfoundland's kiss.

"Aren't you going to kiss your relations?" exclaimed Madame Chanteau. "See, this is your uncle, since you call me your aunt; and this is your cousin, a great strapping scape-grace, who hasn't half as much brains as you've got."

The child manifested no awkward shyness. She kissed everyone, and found a word or two for each of them with all the grace of a young Parisian already schooled in politeness.

"I am very much obliged to you, uncle, for taking me to live with you— You will see that we shall get on very well together, cousin—"

"What a sweet little thing she is!" cried Chanteau, quite delighted.

Lazare looked at her in surprise, for he had imagined her to himself as much smaller and more shy and childish.

"Yes, indeed, she is a sweet child," said the elderly lady, "and you have no idea how brave she is! The wind blew straight in our faces as we drove along, and quite blinded us with the rain. A score of times I thought that the hood, which was flapping about just like a veil, would be carried away altogether. Well, the child there, instead of being alarmed, was quite amused at it all and enjoyed it. But what are we stopping out here for? It is no use getting any wetter than we are, and the rain is beginning again."

She turned round to see where Véronique was. When she saw her holding herself aloof, looking very cross-grained and surly, she said to her sarcastically—

"Good-evening, Véronique. How are you?— While you you are making up your mind to come and speak to me, you had better go and get a bottle of wine for Martin. We have not been able to bring our luggage with us, but Malivoire will bring it on early to-morrow."

Then she suddenly checked herself and returned hastily to the gig. "My bag! my bag! Ah, there it is! I was afraid it had slipped out into the road."

It was a large black leather bag, already whitened at the corners by wear. She would not trust it to her son, but persisted in carrying it herself. Just as they were at last proceeding to enter the house, another violent squall made them halt at the door, and struggle against its strength. The cat sat on the steps with an air of curiosity, watching them fighting their way onwards; and Madame Chanteau inquired if Minouche had behaved herself well during her absence. The name of Minouche made Pauline's serious little face break out into a smile again. She stooped down and fondled the cat, which had run up to rub itself against her skirts, holding its tail erect in the air. Matthew had begun to bark loudly again, in proclamation of the return home, as he saw the family mounting up the steps and sheltering themselves in the vestibule.

"Ah, it is pleasant to be home again!" said Madame Chanteau. "I really thought, once, that we should never get here. Yes, Matthew, you are a very good dog, but please be quiet— Lazare, do make him keep still. He is quite splitting my ears!"

But the dog went on with his barking, and the entry of the Chanteaus into their dining-room was accompanied by this lively music. They pushed Pauline, the new daughter of the house, on before them; Matthew came on behind, still



PAULINE'S ARRIVAL AT BONNEVILLE.

barking loudly, and Minouche followed last, bristling up her hair in the midst of the uproar.

In the kitchen, Martin had already bolted a couple of glasses of wine, one after the other, and he was hastening away, stamping over the floor with his wooden leg and calling out good-night to everybody. Véronique had just put the leg of mutton close to the fire again. It had got quite cold. She thrust her head into the room, and asked—

"Will you have dinner, now?"

"Yes, indeed we will," said Chanteau. "It is seven o'clock. But, my good girl, we must wait till madame and the little one have changed their things."

"But I haven't got Pauline's trunk here," said Madame Chanteau. "Fortunately, however, our underclothing is not wet. Take off your cloak and hat, my dear. There, take them away, Véronique. And take off her boots. I have some slippers here."

The cook knelt down before the child who had seated herself. Madame Chanteau took out of her bag a pair of small felt slippers and put them on to the girl's feet herself. Then she took off her own boots, and, plunging her hand once more into the bag, brought out a pair of shoes for herself.

"Shall I bring dinner up now?" asked Véronique, again.

"At once. Pauline, come into the kitchen and wash your hands and face. We will make more of a toilet later on, but, just now, we are dying of hunger."

Pauline came back the first, having left her aunt with her nose still buried in a bowl of water. Chanteau had resumed his place before the fire in his great arm-chair of yellow velvet. He was rubbing his legs mechanically, fearing another attack of pain; while Lazare was standing in front of the table, on which four plates had been placed more than an hour before, cutting bread. The two men, not quite at their ease, smiled at the child, without being able to find a word to say to her; while she calmly inspected the room, which was furnished in walnut-wood. Her glance of examination wandered from the side-board and the half-dozen chairs to the hanging lamp of polished brass, and then rested upon the finely framed lithographs which hung against the brown wall-paper. Four of them represented the seasons, and the fifth one was a view of Vesuvius. Probably the imitation wainscotting of oak-coloured paint, scratched all over so as to show the plaster underneath, and the faded

carpet, soiled and stained with old grease spots, and the general untidiness and shabbiness of this room where the family lived, were making her regret the pretty marble-fitted shop she had left the previous day, for her eyes assumed an expression of sadness, and she seemed to guess at the wearying cares that lay concealed beneath the homeliness of this her new dwelling-place. Then her eyes, after having been curiously interested in a very old barometer, mounted in a case of gilded wood, fixed themselves upon a strange-looking construction which monopolised the whole of the mantel-piece. It was shut up in a box made of glass-panes, fastened at the edges by strips of blue paper. At first sight, it looked like a toy, a wooden model of a bridge; but a bridge of extraordinarily complicated design.

"That was made by your great-uncle," explained Chanteau, who was delighted to find a subject of conversation. "My father, you know, began life as a carpenter, and I have always preserved his masterpiece."

He was not at all ashamed of his origin, and Madame Chanteau tolerated the presence of the bridge on the mantel-piece, in spite of the displeasure which this cumbersome curiosity always caused her, in reminding her of her marriage with a working-man's son. But the little girl was no longer paying any attention to her uncle's words, for she had just caught sight, out of the window, of the far-reaching horizon, and she stepped eagerly forward and planted herself close to the panes, whose muslin curtains were held back by cotton loops. Since her departure from Paris, her one continual thought had been of the sea. She dreamed of it and never ceased to question her aunt about it during their journey; inquiring, at every hill they came to, whether the sea lay at the other side of it. Then, when at last they arrived at the beach at Arromanches, she had been struck silent with wonder, and her eyes opened themselves to their fullest extent, and her heart heaved with a heavy sigh. From Arromanches to Bonneville, she had thrust her head out of the gig's hood every minute, in spite of the violent wind, to look at the sea, which still kept alongside them. And now the sea was still there; it would be always there, as though it belonged to her. With her clinging gaze she seemed to be slowly taking possession of it.

The night was falling from the grey sky, across which the wind was driving the clouds at headlong speed. Through the increasing darkness of that turbulent evening nothing of the

sea could be seen save the white line of the rising tide. It was a band of foam, which seemed to be ever widening itself, as the waves flowed up and poured themselves over the tracts of weed, and covered up the ridges of rock with their soft gliding motion, whose approach seemed like a caress. But, far away, the billows were roaring with a louder sound, dashing up into enormous crests, and at the foot of the cliff, where lonely Bonneville had stowed itself away as securely as possible behind its doors, a death-like gloom hovered. The boats, drawn up to the top of the shingle, were left there, alone and deserted, like the bodies of huge stranded fish. The rain was wrapping the village in a vaporous mist, and only the church stood out visible against a pale patch of sky.

Pauline stood by the window in silence. Her little heart was heaving anew. She seemed to be gasping for air; she sighed so deeply that all her breath appeared to be drained from her lips.

"Well! it's a good deal bigger than the Seine, isn't it?" said Lazare, who had just come to stand by her side.

The girl continued to be a source of much surprise to him; he felt, in her presence, all the shy awkwardness of a schoolboy.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, in a very low voice, without turning her head.

"You are not feeling frightened of it?"

Then she turned and looked at him with an expression of astonishment.

"No, indeed. Why should I be? The water won't come up so far as this!"

"Ah! one never knows what it will do," he said, yielding to an impulse to make fun of her. "Sometimes the water rises even over the church."

She broke out into a hearty laugh. Her reflective little mind recognised that Lazare's remark was an outburst of genuine intentional nonsense, an explosion of merriment on the part of a perfectly sensible person whom an occasional absurdity amuses.

"Ah! cousin, I'm not so foolish as you think I am. You wouldn't be stopping here if the sea were likely to come up over the church."

Lazare laughed in his turn, and clasped the child's hands; and the pair were henceforth hearty friends. In the midst of

their merriment, Madame Chanteau returned into the room. She appeared quite delighted, and exclaimed as she rubbed her hands—

"Ah! you have got to know each other, then?— I felt quite sure you would take to each other."

"Shall I bring up dinner, madame?" asked Véronique, standing by the kitchen door.

"Yes, certainly, my girl. But you had better light the lamp first, it is getting too dark to see."

The night, indeed, was falling so quickly that the interior of the gloomy dining-room was only visible by the red glow of the coke-fire. Lighting the lamp caused a further delay, but at last the operation was satisfactorily performed, and the table lay illuminated beneath the bright globe. They all quickly took their places. Pauline sat between her uncle and cousin and opposite to her aunt. The latter was no sooner seated than she rose from her chair again, with that continued restlessness of hers which kept her from ever being long still.

"Where is my bag? Wait a moment, my dear, I am going to give you your mug. Take the glass away, Véronique. The little girl is used to having her own mug."

She took a silver mug, already a little battered, out of her bag, and, having first wiped it with her napkin, placed it before Pauline. Then she put the bag away behind her, on a chair. The cook brought in some vermicelli soup, warning them, in her crabbed fashion, that it was much overboiled. No one dared to complain. They were all very hungry, and the oup hissed in their spoons. Next came some boiled beef. Chanteau scarcely took any of it, reserving himself for the leg of mutton. But when this was placed upon the table, there was a general out-cry. It was like fried leather, and was quite uneatable.

"I knew quite well how it would be," said Véronique, very placidly. "You oughtn't to have kept it waiting."

Pauline, with a laugh, cut her meat up into little bits, and managed to swallow it, in spite of its toughness. As for Lazare, he was quite unconscious of what it was he had upon his plate, and he would have eaten slices of bread without knowing that they were not cut from a fowl's breast. Chanteau, however, gazed at the leg of mutton with a mournful expression.

"And what sort of vegetables have you got, Véronique?"

"Fried potatoes, sir."

He made a gesture of despair and threw himself back in his chair.

"Shall I bring the beef back again, sir?" the cook asked.

But he answered her with a melancholy shake of his head, "As well have bread as boiled beef. Oh, my gracious! what a dinner! and just in this bad weather, too, when we can't get any fish."

Madame Chanteau, who was a very small eater, looked at him with pity.

"My poor dear," she said, suddenly, "you quite distress me. I have brought a little present with me for to-morrow, but as there seems to be a famine this evening—"

She had opened her bag as she was speaking and drew out of it a jar of *foie gras*. Chanteau's eyes flashed brightly. *Foie gras!* Ah, it was forbidden fruit! A luxury which he adored, but which his doctor had absolutely forbidden him to touch.

"But, you know," continued his wife, "you must have only a very little. Don't be foolish, now, or you shall never have any more."

Chanteau had seized the jar, and he began to open it with trembling hands. There were frequently tremendous struggles between his greediness and his fear of a fresh attack of gout; and almost invariably it was his greediness that got the upper hand. Never mind! it was too good to resist, and he would put up with the pain that would follow!

Véronique, who had watched him helping himself to a thick slice, took herself off to the kitchen, grumbling as she went, "Well, well! how he will bellow to-morrow!"

The word was habitually in her mouth, and her master and mistress had grown quite used and reconciled to it, so naturally and simply it seemed to flow from her lips. When the master had an attack of the gout he bellowed, according to Véronique, and she was never scolded for her want of respect. The dinner ended very merrily, and Lazare jokingly dispossessed his father of the jar. When the cheese and biscuits were put upon the table, Matthew's sudden appearance caused a boisterous commotion. Up to the present, he had been lying asleep under the table. The arrival of the biscuits had just awakened him. He seemed to have smelt them in his sleep. Every evening, just at this stage of the meal, it was his custom to get up and shake himself and make the round of the table, testing the

charity of the diners. Usually it was Lazare who first took pity upon him, but, this evening, Matthew, on his second circuit of the table, halted by Pauline's side and gazed up at her earnestly with his honest human-like eyes; and then, divining in her a friend both of men and beasts, he laid his huge head on the girl's little knee, without dropping his glance of mild supplication.

"Oh, what a shameful beggar you are!" said Madame Chanteau. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Matthew, to be so greedy?"

The dog swallowed at a single gulp the piece of biscuit which Pauline offered him, and then laid his head down again upon her little knee and asked for another piece, keeping his eyes constantly fixed upon those of his new friend. She laughed at him and kissed him and found him very amusing, with his flattened ears and the black spot under his left eye, the only spot of colour that marked his rough white hairy coat. Then there came a diversion of another character. Minouche, growing jealous, had just leapt up lightly on to the edge of the table, and began to purr and push her head against the little girl's chin, swaying her supple body about the while, with all the grace of a young kid. It was her feline way of caressing to poke you with her cold nose and kiss you lightly with her sharp teeth, while she pounded about with her feet like a baker kneading dough. Pauline was now quite delighted between the two animals. The cat on her left, the dog on her right, took possession of her and worried her shamefully to give them all her biscuits.

"Send them away," said her aunt. "They will leave you nothing for yourself."

"Oh! that doesn't matter," she said, very simply, feeling quite happy and delighted in being despoiled.

They quickly finished, and then Véronique removed the dishes. The two animals, seeing the table quite bare, took themselves off, without even saying thank you, giving their lips a last lick.

Pauline rose from her chair, and went to stand by the window, straining her eyes to look out into the darkness. Ever since the soup had been put upon the table she had been watching the window grow darker and darker, till it had gradually become as black as ink. Now it was nothing but an impenetrable wall, and the thick darkness had hidden every-

thing, the sky, the sea, the village, and even the church itself. Without feeling in the least disturbed by her cousin's joking remarks, she tried to make out the sea, and tormented herself by her desire to find out how far the tide was going to rise; but she could only hear its ever-increasing uproar, whose angry threatening voice seemed to swell louder every minute, in the midst of the howling of the wind and the splashing of the rain. Not a glimmer, not even the whiteness of the foam could be seen in that wilderness of darkness; nothing but the roaring thunder of the waves, lashed to madness by the driving gale, penetrated that pitchy veil.

"Dear me," said Chanteau, "it sounds as though it were coming up very swiftly, and it won't be high-water for another couple of hours yet."

"If the wind were to blow from the north," put in Lazare, explanatorily, "Bonneville would certainly be swept away Fortunately for us here, it is coming aslant."

The little maid had turned round and was listening to them, her big eyes filled with an expression of anxious pity.

"Bah!" said Madame Chanteau, "we are safe under shelter, and we must let other folks get out of their trouble as best they may— Tell me, my dear, would you like a cup of hot tea? And then, afterwards, we will go to bed."

Véronique had laid an old red cloth, with a faded pattern of big bunches of flowers, over the dinner-table, seated round which the family generally spent the evening. They took their accustomed places. Lazare, who had gone out of the room for a moment, came back carrying an ink-stand, a pen, and a whole handful of papers, and, seating himself beneath the full light of the lamp, he began to copy out music. Madame Chanteau, whose eyes had never ceased since her return to follow her son with their affectionate glance, suddenly became very stiff and surly.

"That music of yours again! You can't devote an evening to us, then, even on the night of my return home?"

"But, mother, I am not going out of the room. I am going to stay with you. You know very well that this doesn't interfere with my talking. Go along and talk to me, and I will answer you."

He went on with his work, covering half the table with his papers. Chanteau had stretched himself out comfortably in his arm-chair, with his hands hanging listlessly at his sides,

In front of the fire Matthew lay asleep, while Minouche, who had sprung up on to the cloth again, was performing an elaborate toilet, carefully licking her stomach, with one leg cocked-up high in the air. The hanging lamp seemed to pour out an influence of domesticity and unrestraint, and Pauline, who had been smiling out of her half-closed eye-lids upon her newly acquired family, could no longer keep herself from falling asleep, worn-out as she was with fatigue and rendered drowsy by the heat of the room. Her head slipped down on to the hollow of her arm that was resting upon the table, and lay there, still and motionless, beneath the bright glow of the lamp. Her delicate eye-lids were drawn across her eyes like a silk veil, and her soft even breath came gently through her pure lips.

"She ought not to stay up any longer," said Madame Chanteau, lowering her voice. "We will just wake her up to give her her tea, and then I will take her to bed."

They were all perfectly silent. No sound broke the howling of the storm except the scratching of Lazare's pen. It was a perfect quiet, the sleepy idleness of inveterate habits, of a life spent every evening in the same spot. For a long time the father and mother looked at each other without saying a word. At last Chanteau broke the silence, asking, in hesitating tones—

"And is Davoine doing well at Caen?"

"Bah! Doing well indeed! I told you that you were being taken in!"

Now that the child was fast asleep they could talk. They spoke in low tones, and they only seemed inclined, at first, to tell each other what there was to be told as shortly as possible. But presently anger got the better of them and carried them on, and, by degrees, all the discord of the household manifested itself.

At the death of his father, the former journeyman carpenter, who had carried on his timber-trade with an ambitious audacity, Chanteau had found that the business was considerably compromised. A very inactive man himself, unaspiring and careful, he had contented himself by simply putting matters on a safe basis, through good management, and living upon a moderate but sure profit. The one romance of his life was his marriage. He married a governess whom he had met in a friend's family. Eugénie de la Vignière, the orphan daughter of one of the ruined squireens of the Cotentin, reckoned upon fanning his indolent nature into ambition. But he, with his incomplete

education, for it was late on when he had been sent to school, recoiled before her vast schemes, and opposed his natural inertness to the ambitious plans of his wife. When their son was born, she transferred to him her hopes for the family's rise in life, and sent him to school, and superintended his studies every night herself. But a last disaster had upset all her plans. Chanteau, who had suffered from gout from the time he was forty years of age, had at last had such severe and painful attacks, that he began to talk about selling his business. To Madame Chanteau this portended straitened means, the gradual exhaustion of their little savings, and her son thrown, by-and-by, into the struggle for life, without the support of that income of twenty thousand francs which she had dreamed of for him.

Then Madame Chanteau had insisted upon having, at any rate, a hand in the sale. The profits were about ten thousand francs a year, on which the family made a considerable show, for Madame Chanteau was fond of giving parties. She had discovered a certain Davoine and had worked out the following scheme. Davoine was to buy the timber business for a hundred thousand francs, but he was only to actually pay fifty thousand; in consideration of allowing the other fifty thousand to remain unpaid, the Chanteaus were to be his partners in the business and were to share the profits. This Davoine appeared to be a man of sound common sense, and, even if he did not extend the business of the firm, they would still be sure of five thousand francs a year, which, added to the interest of the fifty thousand, invested in stock, would give them altogether an income of eight thousand francs. And on this they would have to get on as well as they could, waiting for the time when their son should attain some brilliant success and be able to extricate them from a life of mediocrity.

It was upon these principles that the business was sold. Two years previously, Chanteau had bought a house near the beach at Bonneville, which he had been able to get a bargain through the bankruptcy of an insolvent debtor. Instead of selling it again at a profit, as for a little time she had entertained the idea of doing, Madame Chanteau determined that the family should go and live there, at any rate until Lazare had attained his first successes. To give up her parties and to bury herself in such an out-of-the-way place seemed to her, indeed, nothing but suicide, but as she had agreed to give up the whole of their

house to Davoine, she would have had to rent another, and so she summoned up all her resolution to go in for a life of economy, with the firm hope of one day making a triumphal return to Caen, when her son should have gained an exalted position there. Chanteau gave his consent to everything. His gout would have to accommodate itself to the sea-air, and, besides, of the three doctors he had consulted, two had been good enough to declare that the fresh breezes would act as a splendid tonic to his system generally. So, one morning in May, the Chanteaus departed to settle down definitely at Bonneville, leaving Lazare, who was then fourteen years old, at the college at Caen.

Since this heroic exile, five years had passed away, and the affairs of the family had gone from bad to worse. As Davoine was constantly launching out into fresh speculations, he was ever telling them that it was absolutely necessary that he should have further advances; and the consequence was that all the profits were drained away and the balance-sheet generally showed a loss. The Chanteaus were reduced to living at Bonneville on their three thousand francs a year, and they were so hardly pressed that they had been obliged to sell their horse, and Véronique had had to undertake the management of the kitchen-garden.

"At any rate, Eugénie," Chanteau said, a little timorously, "if I have been let in, it is partly your fault."

But she repudiated the responsibility altogether. She was always able to conveniently forget that the partnership with Davoine was her own work.

"My fault indeed!" she replied drily. "How can that be? Is it I who am laid up? If you were not such an invalid, we might perhaps be millionaires."

Whenever his wife attacked him in this bitter fashion of hers, he always drooped his head with pain and shame that it was his illness that was ruining his family.

"We must wait and be patient," he murmured. "Davoine appears to be very confident of the success of his new scheme. If the price of deal goes up, we shall make a fortune."

"And what good will that be?" interrupted Lazare, who was still copying out his music. "We have plenty to eat as it is. It is very foolish of you worrying yourselves in this way. I don't care a bit about money."

Madame Chanteau shrugged her shoulders again.

"It would be a great deal better if you cared about it a little more, and didn't waste your time in foolish nonsense."

It was she herself who had taught him to play the piano, though the mere sight of a score was now sufficient to make her angry. Her last hope had fled. This son of hers, whom she had dreamed of seeing a prefect or a judge, talked of writing operas; and she foresaw that in the future he would be reduced to running about the streets giving lessons, as she herself had done once.

"Here is the balance-sheet," she said, "for the last three months which Davoine gave me. If things continue to go on in this way, it will be we who will be in debt to him by July."

She had put her bag upon the table, and she took out of it the paper, which she handed to Chanteau. He just took and turned it round, and then laid it down in front of him without opening it. At that moment Véronique brought in the tea. No one spoke for some time, and the cups remained empty. Minouche was dozing placidly by the sugar-basin, and Matthew was snoring like a man before the fire. The roar of the sea continued to sound outside like a mighty bass accompanying the soft peaceful echoes of this drowsy room.

"Won't you awaken her, mother?" said Lazare, at last. "It won't be good for her to go on sleeping there."

"Yes! yes!" murmured Madame Chanteau, who seemed buried in deep thought, fixing her eyes upon Pauline.

They all three looked at the sleeping girl. Her breathing was very calm, and her pale cheeks and rosy lips kept the soft constant hues of flowers beneath the glow of the lamp-light. Her chestnut curls, which the wind had disarranged, threw a slight shadow over her delicate brow. Madame Chanteau's thoughts reverted to her visit to Paris, and all the trouble and bother she had had there, and she was feeling quite astonished at the enthusiasm with which she had undertaken the child's guardianship, inspired with an instinctive consideration and regard for a wealthy ward, though her intentions of course were scrupulously honourable, and she had no thought whatever of benefiting herself by the fortune of which she would have the administration.

"When I alighted at the shop," she began to tell them slowly, "she was wearing a little black frock, and she came to kiss me, sobbing and crying. It is a very fine shop indeed; beautifully fitted up with marble and plate-glass, and just in front of the markets. And there was such a merry old woman there, about

as high as my boot, with a fresh red face. It was she who had given information to the notary, and had brought him to put everything under seal. When I got there she was going on quietly selling sausages and black puddings. It was Adèle who told me about our poor cousin Quenu's death. Ever since he had lost his wife, six months before, his blood seemed to be suffocating him. He was constantly fidgetting about his neck with his hand to loosen his neckerchief; and at last they found him one evening lying with his face all purple in a bowl of dripping. His uncle Gradelle died in just the same way."

She said no more, and they were all wrapped in silence again. Across Pauline's face, as she lay asleep, there played a passing smile, suggesting some pleasant dream.

"And the law business, that has all been transacted satisfactorily?" asked Chanteau.

"Oh! quite so. But your lawyer was very right in leaving the name in the power-of-attorney not filled-in; for it appears that I could not have acted in your stead, as women are not eligible for such matters. But, as I wrote and told you, on my arrival I went to consult the Paris lawyer who sent us the extract from the will, in which you were appointed guardian. He at once inserted the name of his chief clerk in the power-of-attorney, which is quite a common course, he tells me. Then we were able to get along. I went before a justice of the peace and nominated as the members of the family council three relations on Lisa's side: two young cousins, Octave Mouret and Claude Lantier, and a cousin by marriage, Monsieur Rambaud, who lives at Marseilles; then, on our side, that is Quenu's side, I chose his nephews, Naudet, Liardin, and Delorme. It will be a very convenient council, you see, and one which we can easily manage as we shall think best for the child's benefit. At their first meeting they nominated as surrogate-guardian Monsieur Saccard, whom I had chosen, out of necessity, from Lisa's relations."

"Hush! hush! She is waking-up," interrupted Lazare.

Pauline had just opened her eyes widely. Without moving, she gazed with a look of astonishment at the people who were talking around her, and then, with a smile that was full of sleepiness, she closed her eyes again, quite worn out with fatigue, and her quiet placid little face resumed its camellia-like transparency of tint.

"This Saccard," asked Chanteau, "isn't he the speculator?"

"Yes," answered his wife. "I saw him and we had a talk

together. He is a charming man. He has so many things to look after, he told me, that I must not reckon much on his assistance. But, you know, we really don't want anybody's help. From the moment we take the child—well, we do take her; and we shouldn't care about any one coming and interfering with us. All the other business was got through quickly. Your power-of-attorney conferred all the necessary authority. The seals were removed, an inventory of the property was made, and the business was sold by auction. The sale went off splendidly, as there were two parties bidding hotly one against the other, and we got ninety thousand francs, cash down. The notary had previously discovered scrip for sixty thousand francs in a desk. I begged him to buy more scrip, and so now we have a hundred and fifty thousand francs securely invested. I have brought the scrip along with me, having first given the chief clerk the full discharge and receipt, which I asked you to send me by return-messenger. See! here it is!"

She had thrust her hand into her bag and brought out a bulky packet. It was the scrip, tied-up between two pieces of thick card-board which had formed the back of one of the shop account-books. Their green marbled surface was still stained with great grease-spots. Both father and son looked attentively at the fortune which lay upon the shabby table-cloth.

"The tea is getting cold, mother," said Lazare, putting his pen down at last. "Hadn't I better pour it out?"

He got up from his seat and filled the cups. His mother had returned no answer to his question. Her eyes were still fixed on the scrip.

"Of course," she continued, in slow and deliberate tones, "at a subsequent meeting of the family council which I summoned, I asked to have my travelling expenses reimbursed, and the sum that we are to receive for the child's maintenance was fixed at eight hundred francs a year. We are not so rich as she is, and we cannot afford to take her for nothing. None of us would desire to make a farthing profit out of the girl, but it would have pressed us too much to have kept her out of our own income. The interest of her fortune will be banked and invested, and her capital will be almost doubled by the time she comes of age. Well, it is only our duty that we are doing. We are bound to obey the wishes of the dead. And if it costs us something to do it, perhaps the sacrifice may bring us better fortune, of which, I am sure, we stand in great need— The poor little dear

was so cut-up and sobbed so bitterly at leaving her old nurse! I trust she will be happy with us here."

The two men seemed quite affected.

"Certainly it is not I who will ever be unkind to her," said Chanteau.

"She is a charming little thing," added Lazare. "I love her very much already."

Matthew appeared to have smelt the tea in his dreams, and he gave himself a shake, and again came to thrust his big head upon the edge of the table. Minouche, too, got up and stretched herself and yawned, and, when she was quite awake, she craned out her neck to sniff at the packet of papers in their greasy covers. As the Chanteaus glanced at Pauline, they saw that her eyes were open and fixed upon the scrip and the old page-stripped ledger.

"Ah! she knows very well what there is inside there," said Madame Chanteau. "Don't you, my dear? I showed them all to you in Paris. That is what your poor father and mother have left you."

Tears trickled down the child's face. Her grief kept recurring to her in April-like showers. Already she was smiling again through the midst of her tears. She was amused at Minouche, who had smelt for a long time at the papers and was doubtless attracted by their odour, for she began to purr and rub her head against the corners of the ledger.

"Come away from there, Minouche!" cried Madame Chanteau. "Money isn't to be made a plaything of!"

Chanteau laughed, and so did Lazare. With his head resting on the edge of the table, Matthew was becoming very excited, looking eagerly with his flaming eyes at the packet of papers which he seemed to take for some great delicacy, and he began to bark at the cat. Then all the family grew animated and lively. Pauline seized Minouche and fondled her and petted her in her arms as though she were a doll.

For fear the child should drop off to sleep again, Madame Chanteau made her drink her tea at once. Then she called to Véronique.

"Bring us our candles. They would sit up and talk and never go to bed. Why! it is actually ten o'clock, and I am so tired that I could fall asleep as I eat!"

A man's voice sounded from the kitchen, and when the cook returned with four lighted candles, her mistress asked her—

"Who is it you are talking to?"

"It is Prouane, Madame. He came up to tell the master that things are in a very bad way down yonder. The sea is breaking everything to pieces apparently."

Chanteau had been prevailed upon to allow himself to be elected mayor of Bonneville, and Prouane, a tipsy scamp, who acted as the Abbé Horteur's beadle, fulfilled as well the duties of the mayor's clerk. He had been a non-commissioned officer in the navy, and wrote a copy-book hand. When they called out to him to come into the room, he made his appearance with his woollen cap in his hand and his jacket and boots streaming with water.

"Well! what's the matter, Prouane?"

"Sure, sir, the Cuches' house is completely flooded. And if it goes on like this much longer it will be the same with the Gonins'. We have all been down there, Tourmal, Houtelard, myself, and the others. But it is no use; we can't do anything against this thievish sea. They say that every year it will carry off a slice of the land."

Then they were all silent for a time. The four candles burned with tall flames, and the thundering of the devouring sea against the cliffs broke through the night air. It was now high-tide, and the house shook as every wave dashed itself against the rocky barrier. It was like the roaring of a giant artillery, tremendous consecutive explosions in the midst of a hail of pebbles swept over the rocks, sounding like the continuous crackling of a fusillade. And, to all this uproar, the wind added its mournful howling, and the rain every now and then poured down with mad violence and seemed to be sweeping the walls of the house with a shower of bullets.

"It is like the end of the world," Madame Chanteau murmured. "What are the Cuches going to do? Where are they going to take refuge?"

"They will have to find some place to go to," said Prouane. "In the meantime they are taking shelter at the Gonins.' What a sight it was! There was the little lad, who is only three years old, perfectly drenched through, and his mother with nothing on but a petticoat, which didn't hide anything of her—begging your pardons for mentioning it—and then there was the father, with his hand half split open by a falling beam, madly trying to save their poor rags."

Pauline had got up from the table and had returned to the

window. She was listening to what was being said with all the serious demeanour of a grown-up person. Her expression manifested a most distressful sympathy and pity, and her thick lips trembled with emotion.

"Oh! aunt," she said, "how very sad for the poor things!"

And then her gaze wandered through the window out into that inky darkness, where nothing was visible. They could hear that the sea had encroached upon the road, and that it was sweeping wildly and fiercely over it, but they could see nothing. The little village and the cliffs and the whole neighbourhood seemed to be submerged beneath a flood of ink. For the young girl it was a painful experience and surprise. The sea which she had thought so beautiful was hurling itself upon the poor folks and ruining them!

"I will go down with you, Prouane," cried Lazare. "Perhaps there will be something that I can do."

"Oh! yes, do go, cousin!" said Pauline, with flashing eyes.

But the man shook his head.

"There is no use your troubling yourself, Monsieur Lazare, you couldn't do anything more than they have done for themselves. We can only stand about and watch the sea work its will, and destroy whatever it likes, and when it has got tired of that, we shall have to be grateful that it has been no worse. I only came up to inform Monsieur Chanteau."

Then Chanteau began to feel bothered and distressed at this business, which was going to give him an uneasy night and would demand all his attention in the morning.

"I don't believe there ever was a village built in such an idiotic position," he cried. "You have buried yourselves right under the waves, and it is no wonder that the sea swallows up your houses one after the other. And why ever in the world do you stop in such a place? You should leave it and go somewhere else."

"Where can we go?" asked Prouane, who listened to Chanteau's words with an expression of stupefaction. "We are there, sir, and we have got to stop there. We must be somewhere."

"Yes, that is quite true," said Madame Chanteau, bringing the discussion to a conclusion. "And wherever you are, here or elsewhere, there will always be troubles— We are just going to bed. Good-night. To-morrow it will be fine again, I daresay."

The man made an obeisance and left the room, and they heard Véronique fastening the door behind him. They took their candles and gave a parting caress to Matthew and Minouche, who slept together in the kitchen. Lazare collected his music together, and Madame Chanteau put the scrip and its greasy covers beneath her arm, and she took up from the table Davoine's balance-sheet, which her husband had forgotten. It was a heart-breaking paper, and the sooner it was put out of sight the better.

"We are going to bed now, Véronique," she cried. "You ought not to be wandering up and down at this time of night." But, hearing nothing but a grunting noise proceed from the kitchen, she added in lower tones—

"What is the matter with her? I haven't brought a baby home for her to wean!"

"Leave her alone," said Chanteau. "She has her whims, you know. Well! we are all four here: so good-night!"

He himself slept on the ground floor, in a room at the other side of the passage. This arrangement had been made that, when he was suffering from one of his attacks of gout, he might be readily wheeled in his arm-chair to the table or out into the terrace. He opened the door, and then stood still for a moment. His legs were feeling very heavy and seemed to forebode another attack, of which the stiffness of his joints had been giving him warning since the previous day. He began to think that he had been really very foolish to eat that *foie gras*. The consciousness of this made him feel anything but happy just now.

"Good-night!" he repeated in a mournful voice. "You are half-asleep already. Good-night, my little dear. Have a good long rest; you want it at your age."

"Good-night, uncle," said Pauline in reply, as she kissed him. The door closed behind them. Madame Chanteau went upstairs first with the little girl. Lazare followed behind.

"I sha'n't want anyone to rock me to sleep to-night," said the elderly lady, "that's quite certain. And I don't at all object to all this uproar. I find it quite lulling. When I was in Paris I quite missed the shaking of my bed."

They all went up to the first floor. Pauline, who was very careful to hold her candlestick quite straight, was somewhat amused at the sight of this procession in file upstairs, each of its members holding a lighted candle, whose flame set all the

shadows dancing. When she reached the landing, she stood still, hesitating where to go, till her aunt gently pushed her forward.

"Go straight on," she said. "That room there is kept for visitors and this one opposite is mine. Come in for a minute; I want to show you something."

The bedroom was hung with yellow cretonne with a pattern of green leaves. It was very plainly furnished in mahogany. There was a bed, a wardrobe and a secrétaire. In the middle there stood a small table on a square of red carpet. When she had examined every corner carefully with her candle, Madame Chanteau went up to the secrétaire and opened it.

"Come and look!" she said.

She drew out one of the little drawers and placed Davoine's disastrous balance-sheet in it, with a sigh. Then she emptied the drawer above it, pulled it right out and shook it, to clear it of a few old scraps, and then, with Pauline looking on, she prepared to stow away the scrip in it.

"I am going to put it in here, you see. There is nothing else in the drawer and it will be quite by itself. Would you like to put it there yourself?"

Pauline felt a slight flush of shame, which she could not have accounted for. She blushed as she answered her aunt, "Oh! aunt dear, what difference does it make?"

But she had already taken up the old ledger-back in her hand, and she put it down in the drawer, while Lazare threw the light of the candle he was holding upon the secrétaire.

"There!" said Madame Chanteau, "you are quite sure about it now, and you may feel quite easy about them. It is the top drawer on the left, remember. They will stop there till the day when you are old enough to come and take them out and do what you like with them. Minouche won't be able to come and eat them here, will she?"

The idea of Minouche opening the secrétaire and eating the papers quite tickled the child's fancy, and she broke out into a merry laugh. Her momentary feeling of trouble altogether disappeared, and she began to joke with Lazare, who amused her by purring like a cat and pretending to make an attack upon the secrétaire. He, too, laughed gaily. His mother, however, very solemnly locked the lid down, turning the key round twice.

"It is quite safe, now," she said. "Come, Lazare, don't make yourself ridiculous. Now, Pauline, I will go up with you to your room to see that you have got everything you want."

Then they all three filed out again into the staircase. When they reached the second floor, Pauline with some hesitation opened the door of the room on her left, but her aunt immediately called out:

"No! no! not that one! That is your cousin's room. Yours is the one opposite to it."

Pauline, however, stood where she was, lost in amazement at the size of the room and the state of confusion it was in. It contained a piano, a couch, an immense table, besides a lot of books and images. And when at last she opened the opposite door, she was quite delighted to find that her own room was a very small one in comparison with the other. The wall-paper was a creamy yellow, flowered with blue roses. The furniture consisted of an iron bed-stead hung with muslin curtains, a dressing table, a chest of drawers, and three chairs.

"Yes; you have got everything there, I think," said Madame Chanteau, "water, sugar, towels and soap. I hope you will sleep well. Véronique has a little room at the side. If you feel at all frightened, knock on the wall."

"And I am close to you, as well," added Lazare. "If a ghost comes, I will fly at him with my sword."

The doors of both the rooms, which just faced each other, were open; Pauline's eyes strayed from one to the other.

"There are no ghosts," she said merrily. "You must keep your sword for robbers.—Good-night, aunt. Good-night, cousin."

"Good-night, my dear. You know how to undress yourself?"

"Oh! yes. I am getting a big girl, you know, now. I always did everything for myself in Paris."

They kissed her, and Madame Chanteau told her, as she left the room, that she might lock her door. But the child had already sprung to the window, impatient to find out whether it looked on to the sea. The rain was streaming so heavily down the panes that she dared not open it. It was pitchy dark outside, but she was quite happy when she heard the waves beating down beneath her. Then in spite of her fatigue, which almost prevented her keeping her eyes open, she walked round the room and examined the furniture. The thought that she was to have a room of her own, separate from any one else, where she might shut herself up entirely alone, quite flattered her and pleased her and made her feel as though she were quite grown up. Just as she was going to turn the key

in the lock, after she had taken off her dress, and was standing in her petticoats, she hesitated and felt a little uneasy. How was she going to escape, if she saw any one in the night? She trembled for a moment, and opened the door. Opposite to her, she saw Lazare standing in the middle of his room and looking at her.

"Well?" he said. "What's the matter? Do you want anything?"

She turned very red, and felt inclined to tell him a fib, but her natural frankness got the better of the inclination.

"No, nothing," she replied. "But I feel afraid, do you know, when the door is locked; so I am not going to fasten it, and if you hear me knock, it will be for you to come. You, mind, and not the cook!"

He had walked out of his room to her door, attracted by the charm of her child-like frankness and innocence.

"Good-night!" he repeated, stretching his arms out towards her. She threw her skinny little arms round his neck and pressed him to her, quite untroubled by the scantiness of her dress.

"Good-night, cousin!"

Five minutes later she bravely blew her candle out, and buried herself in the depths of her muslin-curtained bed. For a long time her slumber was light and broken from her very weariness. She heard Véronique come up-stairs, without taking the least care to hush her foot-steps, and then begin to push about the furniture in her room with noise enough to waken every one. After a while, there was nothing to be heard save the tumult of the storm outside. The rain beat down violently upon the slates; the wind made the windows rattle and whistled under the doors, and for a long time she heard this cannonading going on and felt herself tremble and quiver as each wave broke furiously against the cliff. It seemed to her that the house, buried now in such a deep silence, was being carried out to sea like a ship. As she grew warm and snug beneath her blankets, her wandering thoughts strayed off, with sympathetic pity and a longing to assist, to the poor people down in the village whom the sea was driving out from their beds. Then everything became dim and hazy, and she presently fell into a deep and undisturbed sleep.

CHAPTER II.

PAULINE'S presence in the house immediately proved a source of joy and pleasure to the family. Her robust and cheerful healthiness and her calm, tranquil smile spread a softening influence over the chilling asperities of the Chanteau household. In her the father found a nurse, while the mother was made happy by the fact that her son now spent more of his time at home. It was only Véronique who went on grumbling and growling. And the knowledge, too, that there were a hundred and fifty thousand francs locked up in the secrétaire, although they were to remain scrupulously untouched, seemed to add a delightful air of wealth to the family. There was a new influence in their midst, which gave birth to fresh hopes in their ruined condition, though of what it would have been difficult to say exactly.

On the third night after Pauline's arrival, the attack of gout, which Chanteau had foreseen was coming upon him, broke out in all its violence. For a week past he had been experiencing prickings in his joints, and tremblings and quiverings in his legs, and an utter distaste for all exercise. He had gone to bed feeling somewhat easier, but about three o'clock in the morning he was seized with a frightful pain in the great toe of his left foot. From thence it quickly spread to his heel, and then rose up to his ankle. He endured the agony as well as he could till the morning, sweating beneath his blankets, anxious not to disturb anyone. His attacks were the dread of the whole house, and he always put off calling for assistance till the last possible minute, feeling ashamed of his renewed helplessness, and hopelessly despondent at the angry reception which awaited the announcement of every fresh attack. But when he heard Véronique go past his door about eight o'clock in the morning, he could no longer restrain a groan, as a sharper spasm of pain than usual shot through his foot.

"There we are again!" growled the cook. "Just listen to him bellowing!"

She came into the room and watched him as he lay tossing his head about, and moaning, and her only attempt at consolation was to say:

"You don't suppose this will please the mistress, when she hears of it, do you?"

And, indeed, as soon as Madame Chanteau heard of her husband's fresh attack, she bounced into the room, and, letting her hands fall down by her side in an attitude of angry desperation, cried out:

"At it again! No sooner do I get back than this begins again!"

For the last fifteen years she had harboured a rancorous hatred against the gout. She cursed it as an enemy, as the thief that had blighted her existence, ruined her son, and blasted all her hopes. If it had not been for the gout, would they have all been living a life of exile in this forsaken hole? In spite of all her natural kindness, she always manifested a petulant and hostile attitude towards her husband's attacks, and declared that she was quite incapable of nursing him.

"Oh! what agony I am suffering!" groaned the poor man. "I know it is going to be much worse this time than it was the last. Don't stop there, as it puts you out so, but send for Doctor Cazenove at once."

The house was immediately in a state of commotion. Lazare set off to Arromanches, though the family retained but slight confidence in medical help. During the last fifteen years Chanteau had tried all sorts of medicines, and with each new kind he seemed only to grow worse. His attacks, which at first had been slight and infrequent, quickly multiplied themselves and became much more violent. To-day he was racked with pain in both his feet, and one of his knees was threatened too. Three times already had the sufferer seen his system of treatment changed, and his wretched body had become a mere laboratory for the trial of competing nostrums. After having been bled copiously, he was drenched with purgatives, and now they were cramming him with colchicum and lithium. The draining-away of his blood, and the weakening of his body by purgatives, had had the effect of turning what had been intermittent gout into chronic gout. Local treatment had been no more successful. Leeches had left his joints in a state of painful stiffness; opium only prolonged his attacks, and blisters brought on ulcerations. Wiesbaden and Carlsbad

had done him no good, and a season at Vichy had all but killed him.

"Oh dear! oh dear! what agony I am suffering!" repeated poor Chanteau. "It is just as though a lot of dogs were gnawing at my feet."

He was perpetually altering the position of his leg, hoping to gain some relief by the change, but he was still racked with agony, and each fresh movement drew another groan from him. Presently, as the paroxysms of his pain grew sharper, groans and cries broke from his lips in rapid succession. He grew quite feverish, and was shaken with fits of trembling, and his throat was parched with a burning thirst.

Pauline had just glided into his room. She stood by his bed and gazed at him with a sad mournful look, but she did not give way to tears. Madame Chanteau quite lost her head, distracted by her husband's cries and groans. Véronique wanted to arrange the bed-clothes differently, as the sufferer found their weight intolerable, but as she was about to lay hold of them with her great awkward hands, he screamed out still more loudly and forbade her to touch him. He was quite frightened of her, and said that she shook him as roughly as though he were a bundle of linen.

"Don't call for me again then, sir," she said, as she bounced angrily out of the room. "If you won't let anyone help you, you must attend to yourself!"

Then Pauline gently glided up close to the bed, and, with delicate skilfulness, she lightened the pressure of the bed-clothes with her childish fingers. The sufferer felt a short respite from his agony, and accepted the little girl's help with a smile.

"Thank you, my dear.—Stay! stay! Ah! that fold there weighs five hundred pounds.—Oh! not so quickly, my dear, you quite frightened me."

Then his agony returned in full force again; and as his wife, trying to find some occupation for herself in the room, first drew up the blinds and then bustled to his bed-side and placed a cup on the little table, he grew still more irritable and querulous.

"Oh! do keep still, and don't rush about so! You make everything shake and tremble. Every step you take is just like a blow on my head from a hammer."

She made no attempt at an apology, or to soothe him.

Matters always ended this way, and he was left to suffer in solitude.

"Come along, Pauline," she said, quite unconcernedly. "You see that your uncle can't endure to have any of us near him."

But Pauline stayed behind in the sick-room. She glided about with such a light step that her feet seemed to scarcely touch the ground. From that morning she installed herself as the sick man's nurse, and she was the only person whose presence in the room he could endure. She appeared to be able to read his thoughts, and she anticipated all his wants, softening the light as occasion seemed to require, and giving him his gruel which Véronique brought as far as the door. But what the poor man found especially soothing and comforting was to see her constantly before him, sitting thoughtfully and quietly on her chair, with her big, sympathetic eyes ever fixed upon him. He tried to find some distraction from his weariness in telling her of his sufferings.

"Just now I feel as if someone was sawing away at the joints of my toes with a jagged knife, and at the same time I could almost swear that I was being drenched with warm water."

Then the character of his agony changed. It was as though a steel wire was being twisted tightly round his ankle, and he felt his muscles being strained till they were on the point of breaking. Pauline listened to him with an affectionate complaisance and seemed to fully appreciate all he told her, keeping herself ever quiet and tranquil amidst all his agonized groanings, with no other thought than to do what she could to alleviate his pain. She even forced herself to appear quite gay and merry, and succeeded in making him laugh between his paroxysms.

When Doctor Cazenove at last arrived, he was filled with admiration of her, and gave the little nurse a hearty kiss upon her hair. The doctor was a man of fifty-four years of age, of a vigorous and lean habit, who, after thirty years' service in the navy, had just settled down at Arromanches, where an uncle of his had left him a house. He had been a friend of the Chanteaus ever since he had cured Madame Chanteau of an awkward sprain.

"Well! well! here I am again!" he said. "I have just come in to shake hands; but, you know, I can do nothing more for you than the little girl is already doing. When one has inherited gout, and has got past one's fiftieth year, one must

make up one's mind to be reconciled to it. And then, you know, you have ruined your constitution with the shopful of drugs you have swallowed. The only remedies are patience and flannel!"

The doctor affected an utter scepticism of the power of medicine. In thirty years he had seen so many poor sufferers racked with pain and disease in all sorts of climates and in all kinds of discomfort, that he had grown very modest about his power to afford any actual relief. He generally preferred to let nature work out its own cure. However, he carefully examined Chanteau's swollen great toe, whose gleaming skin had turned a deep red, and then went on to look at the knee which was threatened with inflammation, and took note of the presence of a little pearl-like spot, white and hard, on the edge of the patient's right ear.

"But, doctor," groaned the sufferer, "you are not going to leave me to be racked like this?"

Cazenove's demeanour became quite serious. That pearl of chalky matter interested him, and his faith in medical science returned to him at the sight of this new symptom. "Dear me!" he murmured, half to himself, "I had better try what salts and alkalies will do. It is evidently becoming chronic."

Then in louder and slightly angry tones he said:

"It is all your own fault, you know. You won't follow the directions I have given you. You are always glued to your arm-chair, and you never think of taking any exercise. And then I dare bet you have been drinking wine and eating too much meat. Eh! haven't you, now? Confess that you have been taking something heating!"

"Nothing but a tiny bit of *foie gras*," murmured Chanteau, very humbly.

The doctor raised both his arms, as though to call the elements to witness. Then he took some little phials from the pockets of his great overcoat, and began to prepare a potion. By way of local treatment he did nothing more than wrap the foot and knee in cotton-wool, which he kept in its place by twisting waxed thread round it. When he went away, it was to Pauline that he gave his directions. The invalid was to have a tablespoonful of the draught every two hours, and as much gruel as he liked, but he must observe the greatest strictness in the matter of diet.

"If you suppose that anyone can keep him from eating any-

thing he chooses, you are very much mistaken," said Madame Chanteau, as she went with the doctor to the door.

"No! no! aunt dear; he will be very good, you will see," Pauline ventured to assert. "I will make him do what is right."

Cazenove looked at her and was amused at her serious manner. He kissed her again, on both her cheeks this time.

"There's a good little girl," he said, "who came into the world on purpose to help others."

For a whole week Chanteau lay groaning. Just when the attack seemed about over, his right foot was seized by his foe, and all his agony returned with increased violence. The whole house rang with his cries. Véronique kept in the depths of her kitchen to be out of the way of the sound of them, and Madame Chanteau and Lazare sometimes actually ran out of the house, quite overcome with nervous excitement. It was only Pauline who stayed with the sick man, and she never left his room. She was ever struggling with his foolish whims and fancies; as, for instance, when he furiously insisted upon having a cutlet cooked for him, saying that he was very hungry, and roundly declaring that Doctor Cazenove was an ass and didn't know what was good for him. The night was the worst time, for then the paroxysms seemed to attack their victim with increased violence. Pauline could only snatch some two or three hours' sleep. But, in spite of it all, she still kept her spirits up, and her health did not seem in any way to suffer. Madame Chanteau readily accepted her services, until, when Chanteau was again convalescent, the girl at last regained her liberty; and then a close companionship sprang up between her and Lazare.

It took its rise in that vast room which the young man occupied. He had had a partition-wall knocked down, and so the extent of this room of his covered a whole half of the second storey. A little iron bedstead was hidden away behind a tattered old screen. Against the wall and on the bare boards of the flooring were piled up about a thousand volumes of imperfect sets of the classics, which had been discovered in a lumber-room at Caen and had been transported to Bonneville. Near the window there was an antique Normandy cupboard, crammed with all kinds of out-of-the-way objects, specimens of minerals, old-fashioned and useless tools and broken toys. There was a piano, too, in the room, over which were suspended a pair of foils and a fencing-mask; and there was an enormous

table in the centre, so completely littered over with papers and images and tobacco jars and pipes that it was difficult to find a hand's-breadth of room available for writing.

Pauline was delighted when she was given the freedom of this wild chaos. She spent a month in exploring it thoroughly, and every day she made some new discovery, such as an illustrated Robinson Crusoe which she had come upon in rummaging amongst the books, or a doll which she had fished out of the miscellaneous collection in the cupboard. As soon as she was dressed of a morning, she sprang out of her own room into her cousin's and settled herself there, and in the afternoon she returned there again.

From the days of her first visit to him, Lazare had received her as though she had been a boy, a younger brother, some nine years his junior, but so merry and amusing and with such big intelligent eyes as not to be at all in his way, and he went on smoking his pipe and lolling in his chair with his legs cocked up in the air as he read, or writing those long letters of his, into which he slipped flowers. Sometimes, indeed, they made a pretty riot between them, and Pauline had a habit of suddenly springing on to the top of the table or bounding at a leap through the split folds of the old screen. One morning as Lazare was wondering why he did not hear her, and turned round to see what she was about, he saw her with a foil in her hand and her face hidden beneath the mask, flourishing away at space. Whenever he told her to be still or threatened to turn her out of the room, the result was always a tremendous skirmish and a wild leaping pursuit through the disorderly room. Then she would fly at him and throw her arms round his neck, and he would seize hold of her and twirl her round like a top, with her petticoats circling-out round her, and he would feel quite a boy again himself, as the room echoed with their merry child-like laughter.

Then the piano afforded them employment and amusement. It was an old instrument by Érard, and dated from the year 1810, and upon it, in former times, Mademoiselle Eugénie de la Vignière had given lessons for fifteen years. The strings in its mahogany case, from which most of the polish was scratched off, sighed out far-away tones of a muffled softness. Lazare, who had never been able to persuade his mother to get him a new piano, strummed away on the old instrument with all his might, without ever succeeding in eliciting from it the sonorous

rhapsodies which were humming in his head, and he had got into the habit of adding his own notes to bring up the volume of sound to the required degree of loudness. His passion for music soon led him to abuse Pauline's easy complaisance. He had found a listener, and for whole afternoons he would keep her there while he went through his *répertoire*, which comprised all that was most complicated in music, and especially the then unacknowledged scores of Berlioz and Wagner. He shouted out his vocal accompaniment, and, as his enthusiasm increased, he rendered the piece quite as much with his throat as with his fingers. On these occasions the poor child used to get dreadfully weary of it all, but she went on listening with an air of wrapt attention that she might run no risk of hurting her cousin's feelings.

Sometimes darkness would surprise them still at the piano, and then Lazare would leave off playing and tell Pauline his dreams and ambitions for the future. He would be a great musician in spite of his mother, in spite of everybody. At the college at Caen he had had a professor of the violin who had been struck by his genius for music and had prophesied great things of him and a glorious career. He had taken private and secret lessons in composition, and now he was working hard by himself, and he had already a vague outline in his head of a symphony on the subject of the Earthly Paradise; and, indeed, he had actually written the score of one passage descriptive of Adam and Eve being driven out by the Angels, a march of a solemn and mournful character, which he promised to play some day to Pauline. The child quite approved of his schemes and thought them very delightful. Then she began to talk them over with him; of course it must be very nice, she said, to compose pretty music, but wouldn't it be more prudent if he were to obey the wishes of his parents who wanted to make him a prefect or a judge? The whole house was made unhappy by the quarrel between the mother and the son; he declaring that he would go to Paris to the Conservatoire, and she telling him that she would just give him till next October to make up his mind to embrace some respectable profession. Pauline backed up her aunt's designs, and had told her, with an air of tranquil conviction, that she would take it upon herself to bring her cousin round to a right view of the matter. She argued the matter with Lazare, who grew angry at her and slammed down the piano-lid violently, telling her that she was "a wretched shop-keeper."

For three days they sulked with each other, and then they made friends again. To win her over to his musical scheme, Lazare had undertaken to teach her to play on the piano. He showed her how to lay her fingers on the keys, and he kept her for hours running up and down the scales. But she discouraged him very much by her lack of enthusiasm. She was always on the look-out for something to laugh at and make a joke of, and she took great delight in making Minouche walk along the keyboard and execute barbaric symphonies with her feet, asserting that the cat was playing the famous banishment from the Earthly Paradise, and making the composer himself smile. Then they broke out into their boisterous fun again, and she threw herself round his neck, and he spun her round like a top, while Minouche, joining in the merriment, sprang from the table on to the top of the cupboard. As for Matthew, he was not admitted into the room, as he was apt to be too riotous and rampant when he got excited.

"Don't drive me crazy, you wretched little shop-keeper!" Lazare one day broke out, quite impatiently. "You had better go and get my mother to teach you, if you can persuade her to do it."

"All this music of yours will never do you any good, you know," Pauline told him quite roundly. "If I were you I would go and be a doctor."

He stared at her fiercely. A doctor, indeed! What had put that idea into her head? He wound himself up into a state of excitement that made him lose all control of himself.

"Listen to me!" he cried. "If they won't let me be a musician, I will kill myself!"

The summer had completed Chanteau's restoration to health, and Pauline was now at liberty to follow Lazare in his rambles out of doors. The great room was deserted and they set off on wild adventures together. For some days they confined themselves to the terraces which were clustered over with tufts of Tamarisks, which the salt winds had nipped and blighted. Then they invaded the yard and broke the chain belonging to the well, and terrified the dozen skinny fowls that lived upon grass-hoppers. They hid themselves in the empty stable and coach-house and knocked the plaster off the walls. Then they slipped into the kitchen-garden, a bit of poor dry ground, which Véronique dug and hoed like a peasant. There were four beds sown with tough vegetables and planted with miserable stumps

of pear-trees which were all bent the same way by the north-west gales. It was while they were roaming about here that, on pushing open a little gate, they found themselves on the cliffs, with the open sea in front of them. Pauline's absorbing interest in that mighty expanse of water, that now lay so soft and sparkling under the July sun, had never diminished. It was always the sea that she looked for from every window in the house. But she had never yet been near to it, and it was a new era in her life that commenced when she found herself alone with Lazare in the animated solitude of the shore.

What happy times they had together! Madame Chanteau grumbled and wanted to keep them in the house, in spite of all her confidence in Pauline's discretion and common-sense; and so they never went out through the yard, where Véronique would have been sure to see them, but stealthily glided through the kitchen garden, and so escaped, to appear no more till evening. Soon they began to find their rambles round the church and the grave-yard with its shadowing yews and the priest's salad-beds grow a little monotonous, and in a week they had quite exhausted all the attractions of Bonneville, with its thirty cottages sticking to the side of the cliff and its strip of sandy beach where the fishermen drew up their boats. When the tide was low they found it more amusing to wander along for a considerable distance at the foot of the cliffs, walking along over fine sand and frightening the little crabs that scudded away before them, or jumping from rock to rock on the thick sea-weed over sparkling pools where the prawns were skimming about, to say nothing about the fish they caught, and the mussels they ate, quite raw and even without bread, or of the strange-looking creatures they carried away in their handkerchiefs, or of the odd discoveries they sometimes made, such as a stranded dab or a little lobster lurking at the bottom of a hole. They would sometimes allow themselves to be caught by the rising tide and would rush merrily for refuge to some big rock and wait there till the wave ebbed and allowed them to go on their way again. They were perfectly happy as they came back home in the evening wet through and with their hair all tossed about by the wind. They grew so accustomed to this life in the fresh salt breezes that they found the atmosphere of the lamp-lighted room at night quite suffocating.

But their great pleasure of all was to bathe. The beach was too rocky to attract to it the inhabitants of Caen and Bayeux,

and, while every year new villas covered the cliffs at Arromanches, never a single bather made his appearance at Bonneville. Lazare and Pauline had discovered a delightful spot about half a mile from the village, a little bay shut in by two rocky cliffs and carpeted by soft and glittering sand. They called it the Golden Bay, as its secluded waves seemed to wash up pieces of glittering gold. They were quite alone and undisturbed there and undressed themselves without any feeling of shame. Lazare would just turn himself round for a moment, while he went on talking, and button his bathing-dress, while Pauline held the hem of her chemise between her teeth for a second or two, and then showed herself girded round the loins, like a boy, with a woollen band. In a week he had taught her to swim. She was much more enthusiastic about this than she had been about the piano, and her plucky attempts often caused her to swallow great mouthfuls of salt water. When a bigger wave than usual sent them tottering one against the other, they laughed gleefully, and when they came out of the salt water, all gleaming and sparkling, they went romping over the sand till the wind had dried them. It was much more amusing than fishing.

June slipped away and August came round, and as yet Lazare had come to no decision. In October Pauline was to go to a boarding-school at Bayeux. When their bathing had thrown them into a state of happy languor, they would lie down on the beach and talk over the state of their affairs very gravely and sensibly. Pauline had succeeded in interesting Lazare in her idea of his being a doctor by telling him that if she were a man she should think nothing could be nobler or more delightful than to be able to make people well. And then, for the last week, the Earthly Paradise had not been getting on satisfactorily, and Lazare was beginning to have doubts about his genius for music. At any rate there had been great glories won in the practice of medicine, and he bethought him of many illustrious names, Hippocrates, Ambrose Paré, and several others.

One afternoon, however, he burst out into a loud cry of delight. He was holding the score of his masterpiece in his hand at the time. It was all rubbish, he said, this Paradise of his, and could not be worked out. He would destroy it all, and write a quite new symphony on Sorrow, which should describe in sublime harmonies the hopeless wailings of Humanity groaning beneath the skies. He preserved the march of Adam and

Eve and transferred it bodily to his new work and called it the "March of Death." For a week his enthusiasm increased every hour, and he embraced the whole universe in the scheme of his symphony. But, when another week had passed away, Pauline was very much astonished to hear him say one evening that he was quite willing to go and study medicine at Paris. He was thinking that by doing so he would be near the Conservatoire, and then he would see what could be done. Madame Chanteau was delighted. She would certainly have preferred seeing her son hold some judicial or administrative office, but, at any rate, doctors were quite respectable persons and sometimes made a good deal of money. "You must be a little witch!" she said, kissing Pauline, "you have more than repaid us, my dear, for taking you."

Everything was settled. Lazare was to go away on the first of October. During the month of September that remained to them, they gave themselves up with greater fervour than ever to their romps and rambles, and the two comrades were resolved to finish up their term of freedom in a worthy manner, and they sported about in the Golden Bay, forgetful of the flight of time, till darkness often surprised them still there.

One evening they were lying on the beach, watching the stars come out like specks of gleaming pearl in the paling sky. Pauline was quietly gazing at them with the tranquil admiration of a healthy child, while Lazare, who had been in a state of feverish excitement ever since he had begun to prepare for his departure, was nervously blinking his eyes, as his mind revolved all kinds of wild schemes and ambitions for the future.

"How lovely the stars are!" said Pauline quietly, after a long interval of silence.

He made no reply. All his cheerfulness had left him and his staring eyes seemed troubled by some inward disquietude. Up in the sky the swarm of stars was growing thicker every minute, like gleaming sparks strewn across the heavens.

"You have never learned anything about them, have you?" he said at last. "Each star you see up yonder is a sun, round which there are planets wheeling like the earth. There are thousands and thousands of them; and far away beyond those you can see are legions of others. There is no end to them." Then he was silent for a moment. By-and-bye, he went on in a voice that quivered with emotion:

"I don't like to look at them. Somehow they make me feel afraid."

The rising tide was wailing in the distance, with a mournful cry like the groaning of a sorrow-stricken concourse. Over the vast horizon, black now with the fallen night, the spangled gold-dust of the wheeling worlds glittered and gleamed. In the sad wail that echoed round them beneath the countless stars, Pauline thought she heard a sound of bitter sobbing close by her side.

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

Lazare made no answer. He was, indeed, sobbing wildly, and he buried his face in his hands that twitched convulsively, as though he wanted to blot out the sight of everything. As soon as he was able to speak, he gasped out—

"Oh! to die! to die!"

This scene filled Pauline with a lasting sense of astonishment. Lazare got on to his feet with difficulty and they hastened back to Bonneville through the darkness of the evening, the rising tide pressing closely upon them. Neither spoke a word to the other. As Pauline watched Lazare stride on in front of her, he seemed to have grown shorter as he bent down before the freshly blowing wind from the west.

This evening they found a new-comer waiting for them in the dining-room, talking to Chanteau. For a week they had been expecting the arrival of a young girl called Louise, fifteen years and a half old, who came to spend a fortnight every year at Bonneville. They had gone to meet her twice at Arromanches, but she had not arrived there, and now, this evening when no one was looking for her, she had turned up quite unexpectedly. Her mother had died in Madame Chanteau's arms, recommending her daughter to her care. Her father, Monsieur Thibaudier, a banker at Caen, had married again six months after his first wife's death, and had already three children by his present wife. Absorbed by his new family and his head ever busied with figures, he sent the girl to a boarding-school, and was only too glad when he could get her off his hands in the holidays by sending her upon a round of visits to her friends. He gave himself as little trouble about her as possible, and she had come to the Chanteaus' a week behind her time, in the charge of a servant. The master had so much to worry him, the servant said, and she returned home again immediately after she had deposited her charge at Bonneville, with

an intimation that mademoiselle's father would do his best to try to come and bring her home again himself.

"Come along, Lazare!" cried Chanteau. "Here she is at last!"

Louise smiled and kissed the young man on both his cheeks, though the acquaintance between them was slight, for she had been constantly shut up in her school, and it was barely a year since he had left college. Their knowledge of each other only dated from their last holidays, and he had hitherto treated her somewhat ceremoniously, fancying that she already considered herself quite grown-up and despised any youthful display of boisterousness.

"Well, Pauline, aren't you going to kiss her?" said Chanteau, entering the room. "She is older than you by a year and a half, but you must be very fond of each other. It will please me very much to see you so."

Pauline looked keenly at Louise. She was slight and delicate, and her features were somewhat irregular, though very pleasing and attractive. Her hair was thick and fair, and it was coiled up and arranged quite as though she were a grown-up young lady Pauline had turned a little pale on seeing her kiss Lazare, and when she herself was kissed by Louise with a bright smile, it was with quivering lips that she returned it.

"What is the matter with you?" asked her aunt. "Are you cold?"

"Yes, I think I am a little. The wind was rather chill," she answered, blushing at the falsehood she was telling.

When they sat down to dinner she ate nothing. Her eyes never strayed from the faces of those who were present, and they gleamed with an angry expression whenever her uncle or her cousin or even Véronique paid any attention to Louise. But she seemed to be especially pained when Matthew, making his customary tour round the table, went and laid his huge head upon the new-comer's knee. It was quite in vain that she called him to her. He would not leave Louise, who was feeding him with sugar.

When they rose from the table, Pauline immediately left the room, and as Véronique, who was busy clearing the things away, came back from the kitchen, she said, with a triumphant expression:

"Ah! madame! I know you think Pauline quite perfect, but just go and look at her now in the yard."

They all went out to see. Hiding away behind the coach-

house, Pauline was holding Matthew tightly pressed against the wall, and, apparently quite mad with passion, was braying his head with all the strength of her clenched fists. The poor dog seemed quite stupefied and was offering no resistance to her blows, but simply hung down his head. They rushed out at her, but she did not desist from her cruel treatment of the poor animal at their approach, and they were obliged to seize hold of her and carry her off. She was found to be in such a feverish and over-wrought state, that she was at once put to bed, and for the greater part of the night her aunt dared not leave her.

"Oh! yes, she's a dear little thing, a very dear little thing!" sneered Véronique, who was quite delighted at having discovered a flaw in the diamond.

"I remember, now," said Madame Chanteau, "that they spoke to me about her outbursts of temper, when I was in Paris. She is quite jealous, the plain little thing! I have noticed during the six months she has been with us several trifling matters that haven't pleased me; but, really, to try to murder the poor dog beats everything."

When Pauline saw Matthew the next day, she clasped her trembling arms round him and, kissing him on the nose, broke out into such a flood of tears that they were afraid she was going to have another hysterical attack. In spite of her repentance, however, she could not restrain these outbursts of mad passion. It was as though some sudden storm within her sent all her blood boiling and hissing into her head. She had inherited them from a maternal ancestor in addition to the amiable disposition of her mother and father, of the latter of whom she was the very image. She had a good deal of common sense and reflection for a child of ten years old, and she used to say that she did all she could to struggle against these outbreaks of temper, but it was no use. They made her very miserable and depressed her spirits as though they had been some shameful disease.

"I love you so much, why do you love anyone but me?" she said to her aunt, who was scolding her, hiding her head upon her shoulder.

So, in spite of all her efforts and struggles, Pauline suffered much from Louise's presence in the family. Ever since her expected arrival had been mentioned, she had been looking forward to her coming with an uneasy curiosity, and now she was

impatiently counting the days to the date of her departure. She could not help, however, being won over by the charm of Louise's manner and the pretty seductiveness of her half-childish, half-womanish demeanour, and it was this very charm and seductiveness that troubled her and made her most angry when Lazare was present. Still it was for Pauline that the young man showed the greater preference, and he made jokes about Louise, saying that she wearied him with her grand airs, and that Pauline and he had better leave her alone to play the fine lady by herself, while they went off somewhere where they could amuse themselves as they liked. All their boisterous rompings had fallen into abeyance since Louise's arrival, and it was only furtive glances that they cast at the toys in the cupboard, and when they went out on to the beach, their demeanour there exhibited an irreproachable decorum. It was a fortnight utterly and absolutely wasted.

One morning Lazare announced his intention of anticipating his departure by five days. He was anxious, he said, to get settled down in Paris, where he expected to find one of his old Caen college-chums. Pauline, whom the thought of their approaching separation had been distressing for a month past, strongly approved of her cousin's determination, and gleefully assisted her aunt to pack his trunk. But as soon as he had been driven off in old Malivoire's ancient coach, she rushed away to her room, locked herself in and gave herself up to a long fit of weeping. In the evening she bore herself very kindly and affectionately towards Louise, and the remaining week which the latter spent at Bonneville passed away delightfully. When the maid came to fetch her home again, explaining that her father had not been able to get away from his bank, the two young friends threw themselves into each other's arms and swore an eternal friendship.

A year slowly passed away. Madame Chanteau had changed her mind, and, instead of sending Pauline to a boarding-school, she kept her at home with herself, being chiefly moved to this course by the complaints of Chanteau, who had grown so used to her that he declared he could not possibly get on without her. But she did not confess that any such reason of self-interest as this had anything to do with the alteration of her plans; and she talked about undertaking, herself, the child's education, feeling quite youthful again at the thought of renewing her old profession of tuition. And then, in bo- coach-

schools, she said, little girls became acquainted with all kinds of improper things, and she should like to be quite certain of her young ward's perfect innocence and purity. They hunted out from amongst Lazare's miscellaneous collection of books, a Grammar, an Arithmetic, a Treatise on History, and even an Abridgment of the Heathen Mythology, and Madame Chanteau resumed her functions of preceptress. Lazare's big room was turned into a schoolroom, and Pauline was compelled to resume her music lessons there, and she was put through a severe course of deportment to rid her of all the unladylike and boyish ways she had fallen into. She showed herself very docile and intelligent, and manifested a great willingness to learn, even when the subject-matter of her lessons was distasteful to her. There was only one book which seemed to weary her, and that was the catechism. She had not as yet supposed that her aunt would give herself the trouble of taking her to mass on Sundays. Why should she, indeed? When she lived in Paris, no one had ever taken her to Saint-Eustache, which was quite near to their house. It was only with difficulty that abstract ideas could force their way into her understanding, and her aunt had to explain to her that a well brought-up young lady's duty in the country was to set a proper example and show herself to be on good terms with the priest. Her own religion had never been anything more than a matter of appearance and respectability, and she looked upon it as part of a polite education, standing upon very much the same footing as the art of deportment.

Twice every day the tide ceased not to sweep up the cliffs of Bonneville and moan round them with its never silent voices, and Pauline's life passed on with that far-reaching horizon ever before her eyes. She had given over playing and romping, for she had no longer a companion. When she had had a run along the terrace with Matthew, or a stroll to the end of the kitchen-garden with Minouche, her only pleasure was to go and gaze at the sea, that seemed ever full of changing life, dark and gloomy in the stormy days of winter, and gleaming with bright blues and greens beneath the summer suns. The beneficent influence which seemed to flow from her presence in the house manifested itself in another form this year, when Chanteau ived from Davoine a quite unexpected and unlooked-for re- of five thousand francs, which threats of a dissolution nership had extorted from him. Every quarter Madame never missed going to Caen to receive her niece's

dividends, and when she had deducted her expenses and the sum which she was allowed for Pauline's board, she invested the balance in purchase of further stock. When she returned home she always took the little girl up into her room, and, opening the well-known drawer in the secrétaire, said to her: "There, you see, I am putting this with the others. Isn't it getting a big heap? Don't be at all uneasy about it. You will find it all there when you want it. There won't be a centime missing."

One fine morning in August Lazare suddenly made his appearance, bringing with him the news of his complete success in his examination. He had not been expected for another week, but he had wanted to take his mother by surprise. His arrival was a great delight to them all. In the letters which he wrote home every fortnight he had shown an increasing interest in medicine, and, now that he was amongst them again, he appeared to be completely changed from his former self. He never spoke a word about music, but was perpetually chattering about the professors and his scientific studies, dragging them in à propos of everything, even of the dishes that were served at dinner and the direction in which the wind was blowing. He was the victim, now, of another wildly enthusiastic ambition, and he dreamed, day and night, of becoming a physician, whose wonderful skill should be trumpeted through the whole world. Pauline, when she had thrown her arms round his neck and kissed him with a child-like frankness that did not care to disguise its affection, was more surprised than the others at this change in him. It almost grieved her, indeed, that he should have dropped all his interest in music, even as a recreation. Could it be possible, she asked herself, that, when one had really loved anything, one could grow to care nothing about it? One day when she asked him about his symphony, he only began to make fun of it, and told her that he had quite done with all such nonsense. She felt quite sad at his words. He seemed now, too, to be soon bored with her society, and he laughed with an unpleasant laugh, and his eyes and his gestures spoke of ten months' life whose details could not be related to little girls.

He had unpacked his trunk himself, that he might keep from view the books he had brought home with him, novels and copiously illustrated medical works. He no longer twirled her round like a top as he used to do, making her petticoats fly out

in a circle round her, and he even seemed quite confused sometimes when she persisted in coming into his room and staying there. She had grown scarcely at all since he went away, and she still looked him frankly in the face with her pure innocent eyes; and by the end of a week, his appearance of uneasiness had vanished, and they resumed all their old intimacy and comradeship. The fresh sea-breezes had swept all the unhealthy influences of the students' quarter out of Lazare's brain, and he felt once more a child himself as he romped about with his child-cousin, like her, full of vigorous health and gaiety. All the old life began again; the racing round the table, the scampers with Matthew and Minouche through the garden, the rambles to the Golden Bay and the unblushing bathings in the open air, with their shirts and chemises flapping about them like banners. And this year, too, Louise, who had paid a visit to Bonneville in May, had gone to spend her holidays with some other friends at Rouen; and so they had two utterly delightful months, without a single disagreement or misunderstanding to detract from their enjoyment. When October came, Pauline was one day watching Lazare pack his trunk for his return to Paris. He was gathering together the books he had brought home with him, which had been stowed away all the time in the cupboard without having been once opened.

"Are you going to take them all back with you?" she asked in a melancholy voice.

"Yes, indeed," he replied. "I shall want them all for my studies. You have no notion how hard I am going to work. I shall want them all."

The little house at Bonneville fell once more into a state of complete and monotonous quiet. Every day passed away in just the same way as its predecessors. Day by day the same regular round of life went on within sound of the ceaselessly ebbing and flowing sea. This year, however, was marked distinctly for Pauline. In the month of June she took her first communion, being then twelve and a half years old. By slow degrees the religious sentiment had taken possession of her, but it was a religious sentiment loftier than the one breathed by her catechism, whose answers she constantly repeated without understanding them. She had ended by picturing to herself, in her reflective young mind, the Deity as a very powerful, very wise ruler, who directed everything upon earth in accordance with the principles of strict justice, and this conception of hers

had been sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Abbé Horteur. The Abbé was a peasant's son, and into his hard head nothing but the letter of the law had ever been able to make its way, and he had grown to be contented with the observance of outward ceremonies and the maintenance of religious practices. He bestowed the greatest care and thought upon his own salvation, and if his parishioners were finally damned, well, it was their own fault. For fifteen years he had been trying to terrify them without success, and now all that he asked them to do was to come to church on the great feast days. And, in spite of the state of sin in which it was festering, all Bonneville did come up to church pretty regularly, drawn there by the influence of custom and old habit. The priest's tolerance had degenerated into a state of indifference as to the spiritual condition of his flock. Every Saturday it was his custom to go and play draughts with Chanteau, although the mayor, making his gout an excuse, never set his foot inside the church, and, besides, Madame Chanteau did all that was necessary by going to the services regularly and taking Pauline with her. It was the priest's great simplicity and frankness which had by degrees won Pauline over. When she was in Paris, she had heard the priests scoffed and sneered at as hypocrites whose black robes concealed all manner of sins and wickedness. But the priest of this little sea-side place seemed to her to be a thoroughly genuine honest fellow, with his heavy boots and sun-browned neck and farmer-like speech and manner. One little fact had especially impressed her. The Abbé Horteur was strongly addicted to puffing away at a big meerschaum pipe, but he seemed to be disturbed by some slight scruples as to the propriety of such a habit, for whenever he wanted to smoke he always retired into his garden and hid himself away in the solitude of his lettuce-beds. And it was the air of trouble with which he hastily tried to put his pipe out of sight when he had been taken unawares in his garden that quite touched the little girl, though she could scarcely have told why. She took her first communion in a very serious and reverent frame of mind, in company with two other little girls from the village and one boy. When the priest came to dine with the Chanteaus in the evening, he declared that never since he had been at Bonneville had he had a communicant who had conducted herself with such reverence at the Holy Table.

Financially, the year was not so prosperous for the Chanteaus. The rise in the price of deal, for which Davoine had been hoping

for a long time past, did not take place, and it was only bad news that came from Caen, and an intimation that if they were driven into selling at a loss the business would certainly soon be bankrupt. The family lived in the most meagre fashion, and were only just able to make their income of three thousand francs cover the necessary expenses of the establishment by the most rigid economy. Lazare, all whose letters to herself she kept strictly private, was Madame Chanteau's chief source of anxiety. He was apparently leading a life of extravagance and dissipation, for he was constantly asking her for money. When she went to Caen in July to receive Pauline's dividends, she made a fierce demand upon Davoine. Two thousand francs which she had previously received from him had been sent to Lazare, and now she succeeded in wringing another thousand francs out of him, and these she at once despatched to Paris. Lazare had written to tell her that he would not be able to come home unless he was provided with the means of paying his debts. Every day for a week they were expecting his arrival amongst them, but every morning a letter came announcing that his departure had been put off till the following day. When at last he did actually start for home, his mother and Pauline went as far as Verchemont to meet him. They met one another, and kissed each other on the high-road, and walked home together, followed by the tenantless coach, which carried Lazare's luggage.

His return home this year was not so bright and cheerful as his triumphal surprise of the previous one. He had failed to pass his examination in July, and he was embittered against all his professors, and all the evening he fell foul of them. The next morning, in Pauline's presence, he threw all his books on to one of the shelves in the cupboard, exclaiming that they might lie there and rot. This suddenly-acquired disgust for his studies alarmed her; and he went on to scoff bitterly at medicine, and denied its power to cure even a cold. One day when she was attempting to defend it from his attacks, in an impulse of youthful belief, he sneered so bitterly at her ignorance of what she was talking about, that his remarks called up a hot blush to her cheeks. But, all the same, he said, he had resigned himself to being a doctor; as well that kind of humbug as any other, everything was equally stupid at bottom. Pauline grew quite indignant and angry at all these new ideas he had brought home with him. Where had he got them from? From those wicked books he read, she was quite sure; but she did not dare

to discuss the matter with him fully, held back by her own deep ignorance, and feeling ill at ease at her cousin's sneers and innuendoes and pretences that he could not tell her everything. The holidays glided away in these perpetual misunderstandings and bickerings. In their walks together they only seemed to bore each other, and they found the sea wearisome and monotonous. Lazare, as a means of killing time, had taken to writing verses, and he composed sonnets on the sea with great elaboration and attention to his rhymes. He declined to bathe any more, saying that he had found that cold baths disagreed with his constitution, for, in spite of his denial of all value to medical science, he indulged in the most sweeping and authoritative opinions, killing or curing people with a word. About the middle of September, when they were expecting Louise's arrival, he suddenly declared his intention of returning to Paris, saying that he wanted to prepare for his examination. Pauline's manner to him became gentler and more submissive the more he did to vex her. When he was rude and seemed to be taking a pleasure in distressing her, she merely looked at him with those tender smiling eyes of hers, whose soft influence was able to soothe and calm Chanteau when he was groaning and moaning beneath one of his violent attacks of gout. She thought that her cousin was in some sort of way out of health, and that he looked upon life like a weary old man.

The day before his departure, Lazare manifested such delight at the prospect of leaving Bonneville that Pauline broke out into tears.

"You don't love me any more now!"

"Don't be a goose! Haven't I got to make my way in life? A great girl like you to be crying!"

Then she summoned up her courage again and smiled as she said to him:

"Work hard this year, so that when you come back again we may all be quite happy and satisfied."

"Oh! there's no good in working hard! Their examinations are nothing but foolery. I didn't pass because I didn't care to do so. I am going to hurry through with it all now, since my want of fortune prevents me living a life of ease and leisure, which is the only satisfactory life a man can lead."

In the early part of October, after Louise had returned to Caen, Pauline resumed her lessons again with her aunt. The curriculum of her third year's studies dealt chiefly with an

expurgated History of France and a Heathen Mythology adapted to the use of young persons. But the young girl, who had shown such application in the previous year, seemed now to have become quite sluggish and heavy. Sometimes she even went to sleep over her tasks and her face flushed with hot surgings of blood. A mad outburst of anger against Véronique, who didn't like her, she said, had made her so ill that she had to stop in bed for a couple of days. Then there were changes in herself which disquieted and distressed her; a gradual development of her whole body, swelling roundnesses which pained her with a feeling of bursting tightness, and a soft downy growth over hidden corners of her flesh. At night when she was undressing and cast hasty furtive glances upon herself, she experienced a strange feeling of confusion and uneasiness which made her hurry to extinguish the light of her candle. Her voice assumed a deeper tone whose sound was displeasing to her, and she passed the days in a sort of nervous expectation, hoping for she did not know what, and not daring to speak to anyone of all these things which were disquieting her.

But at last, about Christmas-time, Pauline's condition was such as to alarm Madame Chanteau. She complained of pains in her back from which she suffered much, and she was often very feverish. After Doctor Cazenove, who had become a great friend of hers, had questioned her about her symptoms, he took her aunt aside privately and advised her to explain to her niece what was ailing her. She was reaching puberty, he said, and he had seen girls throw themselves into dangerous illnesses in their alarm and ignorance of its symptoms and manifestations. Madame Chanteau at first combated the necessity of making any explanation to the girl; she thought it was quite unnecessary and undesirable, and she had always been opposed to such revelations. She had always advocated a perfect silence on such matters, and avoided all reference to such unpleasant subjects till their actual occurrence had forced them into notice. However, as the doctor insisted upon it, she promised to speak about the matter to Pauline; but she let the evening pass away without saying anything, and then the next day she put it off again, and so on from day to day. She told herself that the girl was not timid or nervous, and that plenty of other girls had never had these matters explained to them. When they actually occurred, it would be quite soon enough

to tell her that these things were a matter of course and inevitable, without exposing herself beforehand to inconvenient questions and explanations.

Early one morning, just as Madame Chanteau was leaving her bedroom, she heard groans and sobs proceeding from Pauline's room, and she hastily went up to her in a state of alarm. The girl was sitting up in the middle of the bed, from which she had cast off the sheets and blankets, and, white with fear, was calling out ceaselessly for her aunt.

"Oh! aunt! aunt!"

Madame Chanteau understood it at a glance.

"Oh! it's nothing, my dear. Make yourself quite easy and don't be frightened."

But Pauline did not even seem to hear her, and she still continued to wail out—

"Oh! aunt! aunt! I am dying! It is killing me!"

Her voice grew weak and she really thought she was dying. Her cousin's cry came to her lips, that cry, whose utter desperation she had not understood, extorted from him by the fear with which the limitless heavens inspired him.

"It is all over; I am going to die."

Quite frightened and troubled, her aunt tried to bethink her of some innocent story which might have the effect of calming her and relieving her of her fear without telling her anything of the real truth.

"Now, dear, don't frighten yourself and make yourself ill. If you were in any danger, don't you think I should be much more alarmed than I am? All this is only what happens to every woman. You needn't bother yourself about it any more than if your nose were to bleed a little."

"No! no! You only say that to keep me from being frightened. I am going to die. I know I am."

It was too late now for Madame Chanteau's explanations. When Doctor Cazenove came, he feared an attack of brain-fever. Pauline was put back to bed by her aunt, and it was not till after some days that the crisis passed away, and she got up again full of new and strange thoughts and ideas, secretly harbouring in her inmost mind a question to which she was trying to find an answer.

The following week she resumed her studies and began to manifest an enthusiastic interest in the Mythology. She shut herself up in Lazare's big room, which was still used as the

schoolroom, and she had to be sent for at meal-times. When she came down, she seemed buried in thought and quite indifferent to all that was going on. Upstairs, however, the Mythology was lying quite neglected on the table, and it was in poring over the medical treatises which Lazare had left in the cupboard that she spent her whole time, her eyes opened widely in her greediness after knowledge, and her brow supported by her two hands which grew cold and cramped from her persistent motionlessness. Lazare, in the days when his medical enthusiasm was at its height, had bought several books which were of no immediate use to him, and amongst these were Longuet's "Treatise on Physiology" and Cruveilhier's "Descriptive Anatomy" which he had left behind when he had taken away with him the books that were actually necessary for his studies. Whenever her aunt's back was turned, Pauline took these volumes out of the cupboard, replacing them at the slightest sound of any one coming, not hurriedly nor as though she had been doing anything of which she was ashamed, but as an earnest student who was afraid that she might possibly be thwarted in her studies if their object was known. At first she had not been able to understand what she read through her ignorance of the meaning of the technical expressions, which she had been obliged to look out in the dictionary. Divining the necessity of some sort of method in her studies, she had devoted herself enthusiastically to the "Descriptive Anatomy" before passing on to the "Treatise on Physiology." In this way the child acquired, as a matter of duty, a knowledge of matters which are concealed from girls until their wedding night.

She turned over and examined all the plates in the "Anatomy," magnificent plates of the most detailed exactitude She stopped to gaze at every single organ, and not the most secret ones escaped her minute examination. She felt not the least shame in the matter, and went on calmly and systematically from those organs which bestow life to those which regulate it, carried along and protected from all carnal thoughts by a wholesome craving after knowledge. This gradual discovery of the human mechanism filled her with delight and wonder. She pursued it with passionate earnestness, and never had her fairy tales nor "Robinson Crusoe" afforded her half the pleasure or interest. The "Treatise on Physiology" served as a commentary on the plates, and everything was made perfectly plain to her. She found, too, a "Manual of Pathology and Clinical Medicine,"

and her researches extended to the symptoms and treatment of every sort of disease and ailment. A good many things she passed by unheeded. She seemed to know intuitively what knowledge was necessary to enable her to be of assistance to those who were suffering. Her heart melted with pity as she read on, and she gave herself up again to her old dream of learning everything that she might be able to cure and set right all that had gone amiss.

Pauline knew now all about the symptoms which had frightened her so much, and the knowledge which had made all the mystery clear to her rendered her grave and thoughtful. She felt surprised and annoyed at her aunt's silence and at the perfect ignorance of the matter in which she had been kept. Why had she been allowed to alarm herself so unnecessarily? It was unkind and unjust, and there could have been no harm in telling her all about it.

There was no recurrence of the symptoms during the next two months. One day Madame Chanteau said to her:

"If you happen to be again as you were in December, you mustn't be frightened any more."

"Oh, no!" said the young girl, quite tranquilly, "I know all about it now."

Her aunt looked at her, full of alarm.

"What is it that you know? Tell me."

Pauline blushed, as the idea came into her head to tell a fib that she might conceal for a little longer her private studies. But all falsehood was intolerable to her, and she told her aunt the truth. When Madame Chanteau opened the books and saw the engravings she was perfectly petrified. To think that she had been all this time giving herself so much trouble in preparing an expurgated and innocent version of Jupiter's amours, while all the while Pauline was poring over these pictures! It was scandalous of Lazare to have left such abominations about! And then she proceeded to put the delinquent through a long series of questions, chosen with great precaution and capable of double meanings. But Pauline, with her outspoken frankness, quite routed her aunt and completed her embarrassment. Where was the harm of it? Wasn't that the way they were made? And how could it be wrong to know about it? Her enthusiasm was a perfectly mental one, and never a single sensual or carnal desire had ever disturbed the pure depths of her clear child-like eyes. On the same shelf with the medical

treatises she had found some novels whose first pages had repelled her and bored her, crammed, as they were, with words and expressions of whose meaning she was completely ignorant. Her aunt, who was growing more and more disconcerted, though she had recovered a little from her first shock, contented herself by locking the cupboard and taking away the key. But a week later it was hanging in the door again, and Pauline indulged herself in reading at intervals, by way of recreation, the chapteron neurosis, with her mind fixed upon her cousin, or the one relating to the treatment of gout, with the idea of undertakingher uncle's cure.

In spite of all Madame Chanteau's strictness, no very great restraint or reticence was practised in the girl's presence; and, besides, if she had not acquired the knowledge from the books, the animals in the house would have taught it to her. Minouche was an especial source of interest to her. Four times every year she gave herself up to the most disgraceful debauchery. She, who was so fastidious and for ever engaged in making an elaborate toilet and could not set her foot down out of doors without a shudder for fear of soiling it, would suddenly disappear altogether for two or three days. They could hear her squalling and struggling, and through the darkness of the night they could see the eyes of all the tom-cats of Bonneville flaring like so many candles. Then Minouche would come home again in the most abominably bedraggled state, with her fur so ragged and filthy that she had to spend a whole week in licking it to put it to rights again. Then she resumed all her disdainful princess-like airs once more, and began to rub her head again caressingly against her friends in the house without appearing to be aware that her belly was filling out. One fine morning she would be discovered with a family of kittens. Véronique came and carried them all off in her apron to drown them, and Minouche, abominable mother that she was, never took the trouble to look where they had gone to; and she had grown so accustomed to seeing them disappear in this way that she had come to believe that all the cares and duties of maternity ended at that stage of affairs. She began to lick herself again and to purr and to make herself as pretty as she could, till some night when another fit of shamelessness came upon her, and she started off amidst caterwaulings and scratchings to load herself with a fresh cargo. Matthew manifested a much greater affection for the little ones which he had not begotten, and he used to follow Véronique's apron and moan.

"Oh! aunt, do let her keep one this time!" Pauline used to say after the birth of each litter.

But Véronique would not hear of it.

"No! indeed!" she said, "we should be having it under our feet every minute. Besides, she doesn't want to keep one. She has all the pleasure without any of the trouble."

Every day an increasing love of life and its manifestations was exhibiting itself in Pauline and making of her, to use her aunt's phrase, the animals' mother. Everything that lived, everything that suffered, aroused in her a feeling of active tenderness and won from her abundant kindliness and thoughtful care. She had forgotten all about Paris, and she began to feel as though she had been born in this wild spot beneath the pure breezes from the sea. In less than a year the hobbledehoy girl had developed into a well-formed young woman, with firmly rounded hips and swelling breasts. The troubles and uneasiness which had attended the dawn of her womanhood, with all their disquieting symptoms, had vanished, and now, on the other hand, her development thrilled her with joy and with a triumphant sensation of reaching her full growth and sunny ripeness. The mounting tide of blood within her filled her with confidence and strength. From morning till night she made the house echo with the trills of her full-toned voice, whose deeper sound had now grown sweet to her ear; and when, at bed-time, she undressed herself, and her eyes wandered over the swelling bloom of her breasts down to the black patch which lay dark upon her rosy stomach, she smiled and breathed-in the scent of herself as of a newly gathered bouquet, rejoicing in the odour of her fresh womanhood. It was a full acceptance of life, of life beloved in all its functions, without any lurking distaste or fear, and welcomed with the triumphant greeting of vigorous health and soundness.

This year Lazare had remained for six months without writing home, with the exception of a slight note now and then to tell them he was all right. Then all at once he began to deluge his mother with letters. He had been plucked again at the examination in November, and had become still more disgusted than ever with the study of medicine, which concerned itself with too gloomy matters for his taste, and he had now gone-in enthusiastically for chemistry. He had chanced to make the acquaintance of the celebrated Herbelin, whose discoveries were then quite revolutionizing the science, and he had entered his

laboratory as an assistant. He dropped no hints, however, of his having relinquished medicine. But soon his letters were full of a new scheme, which he mentioned somewhat timidly at first, but gradually grew wildly enthusiastic about. It was a plan for turning sea-weed to a wonderfully profitable account, and one which, by the adoption and use of the new methods and reagents discovered by the illustrious Herbelin, would bring in an immense fortune. Lazare dwelt largely upon the great probability of the success of the scheme and all the chances there were in its favour; the great chemist's assistance, the ease with which the raw material could be obtained, and the very small expense that would be incurred for plant. In the end he frankly expressed his disinclination to be a doctor, and said jokingly that he should prefer to sell remedies to the sick rather than to kill them off himself. He finished all his letters with the argument founded upon the speedy gaining of a large fortune, and he held out as an additional lure to his parents that, if they would consent to his new scheme, he should always remain at home in the future and would set up his works quite close to Bonneville.

The months slipped away, and Lazare did not come home for the vacation. All through the winter he continued to unfold the details of his new scheme in closely written letters, which Madame Chanteau used to read aloud in the evening after dinner. One night in May they resolved themselves into a solemn family council to seriously discuss the matter, for Lazare had written to ask for a categorical reply. Véronique was bustling about the room, taking off the dinner-cloth and putting the faded red one on to the table in its place.

"He is his grandfather over again, always running after some fresh scheme and doing no good at anything," declared Madame Chanteau, glancing up at the former journeyman-carpenter's masterpiece, whose presence on the mantle-shelf was a perpetual source of annoyance to her.

"Well, he certainly doesn't get his flighty disposition from me, who detest all change," sighed out Chanteau between a couple of groans, as he lay back in his arm-chair, where he was just recovering from another attack of gout. "But you yourself, my dear, you know you are a little given to restlessness."

His wife shrugged her shoulders as though to convey that all her actions were dictated and carried out by reason and common-sense. Then she added slowly:

"Well, what are we to say? I suppose we shall have to write to him and tell him that he may have his own way. I wanted to see him in the magistracy, and I wasn't too well pleased at his being a doctor, and now he has got down to being an apothecary! Well, if he comes back home again and makes a lot of money, it will be better than nothing."

It was really this hope of money-making which decided her. She began to indulge in new dreams for the son she was so fond of. She foresaw him very wealthy, the owner of a fine house at Caen, a councillor-general, perhaps even a deputy. Chanteau, who had no opinion either one way or the other, was absorbed in his own sufferings, and left his wife to see after all the interests of the family. Pauline, in spite of her surprise at and silent disapprobation of her cousin's continual changes, thought that he had better be allowed to try his luck at this grand new scheme he had got into his head.

"At any rate we shall be all together," she said.

"And it's precious little good that Monsieur Lazare seems to be doing in Paris," Véronique ventured to add. "It will be better for him to come and live quietly here with us."

Madame Chanteau nodded assent. She took up again the letter which she had received that morning.

"He goes into the financial portion of his scheme in this," she said. Then she read the letter, commenting on it as she went along. Sixty thousand francs would be required for putting up the works. Lazare had met in Paris one of his old Caen friends, Boutigny, who had dropped his scholastic studies, and was now selling wine on commission. Boutigny was very enthusiastic about the new scheme, and had offered to invest thirty thousand francs in the business. He would make an admirable partner, and one whose practical business habits would ensure the success of the undertaking. There would still be thirty thousand francs to be borrowed somewhere, as Lazare was anxious to have half the business in his own hands.

"As you hear," continued Madame Chanteau, "he wants me to apply in his name to Thibaudier. It is a good idea, and I am sure Thibaudier will let him have the money at once. Louise is not very well just now, and I was intending to go and ask her to come and stay with us for a week, and, as I shall see her father, I will mention the matter to him."

An expression of trouble came into Pauline's eyes, and her lips quivered as she drew them tightly together. Véronique

was standing at the other side of the table wiping a tea-cup and watching her closely.

"I had, indeed, thought of another way," said Madame Chanteau in a low voice, "but as there is always some risk in business, I have come to the conclusion to say nothing about it."

Then turning to the young girl, she added:

"Yes, my dear, you might have lent the thirty thousand francs to your cousin yourself. You couldn't find a better investment, and you would very likely get twenty-five per cent. interest, for your cousin would share his profits with you, and it quite grieves me to think of all this money going into an outsider's pocket. But I shouldn't like you to run any risk with your fortune. It is a sacred deposit. It is quite safe upstairs, and I will restore it to you unimpaired."

Pauline grew pale as she listened to her aunt's words; there was a struggle going on within her. She had inherited a somewhat avaricious disposition, and Quenu's and Lisa's love of money. In the pork-butcher's shop she had been taught to reverence its power, and to guard against the want of it. Then her aunt had so frequently called her attention to the drawer in the secrétaire where her fortune was lying locked-up, that the thought of seeing it gradually squandered away by her erratic and flighty cousin was highly distasteful to her. So she kept silent, troubled by a vision of Louise handing a great bag of money to Lazare.

"You, my dear, wouldn't perhaps wish it to be so," Madame Chanteau continued, addressing her husband. "It is quite a matter of conscience."

"No! no!" said Chanteau with a deep groan as he tried to move his leg. "If things turned out badly, they would come upon us to make good the loss. No! no! we mustn't do that. Thibaudier will be glad to lend it, I have no doubt."

Then Pauline burst out in an impulse of kindness and affection:

"No! no! please don't take all that trouble. I certainly ought to lend the money to Lazare myself. Isn't he my brother? It would be very unkind of me if I wouldn't let him have it. How could you suppose I could have any objection? Give him the money at once, aunt; give him it all!"

Her eyes filled with tears at the effort she had just made; then her face broke out into a smile, while her feelings remained

in a state of confusion between her regret at having hesitated even for a moment, and a miserable fear that the money would be all lost. She had to struggle a little while against the protestations of her relations, who were honest enough to show her all the risks she was running.

"Come and kiss me then, my dear," her aunt finished by saying, yielding to the girl's tears. "You are a very good girl, and you shall lend Lazare your money, since it would vex you so much if he did not take it."

"Come and kiss me, too, dear, won't you?" added her uncle. They cried and kissed all round the table. Then, as Pauline went out of the room to call to Matthew, and Véronique was bringing in the tea, Madame Chanteau exclaimed, wiping the tears from her eyes:

"How delightful it is to find her so generous!"

"Stuff!" growled the servant, "she would strip her chemise off her back rather than that other one should have a chance of giving anything!"

It was a week later, on a Saturday, that Lazare returned to Bonneville. Doctor Cazenove, who had been invited to dine with the Chanteaus, brought the young man along with him in his gig. They found the Abbé Horteur, who was also dining there that evening, playing draughts with Chanteau, who was lying back in his invalid's chair. He had been suffering from the attack from which he was now recovering for three months. It had been a more painful and violent one than any of those he had been previously called upon to endure, and he was now, in spite of the terrible twinges he was constantly feeling in his feet, considering himself in a state of Paradise. His skin was scaling, and the swellings had almost disappeared. Véronique was busy roasting some pigeons in the kitchen, and every time the door was opened, he sniffed up their appetizing odour, overcome, again, by his irrepressible greediness, on which subject the priest began gravely to remonstrate with him.

"You are not attending to the game, Monsieur Chanteau. Now, do be advised by me, and be very careful of what you eat this evening. Rich food is bad for you, in your present condition."

Louise had arrived the previous day. When she and Pauline heard the doctor's gig approaching, they both rushed wildly out into the yard. But it was only his cousin that Lazare appeared to notice, and he looked at her with an expression of amazement.

"What! can this really be Pauline?"

"Yes, indeed, it is I."

"But, good gracious, what a lot you must have eaten to have grown like that! Why, you are quite big enough to get married now!"

She blushed and laughed gaily, and her eyes glistened with pleasure at seeing him take such notice of her. He had left her a hobbledehoy, a raw school-girl in a pinafore, and now he saw her again as a well grown young woman, with breasts and hips swelling out coquettishly under her white rose-sprayed summer dress. Presently she became quite serious as she examined him in turn. She thought he was looking much older, he stooped, and his laugh no longer sounded young, and his face twitched nervously every now and then.

"By the way," Lazare said, "I must really treat you a little more ceremoniously now. How do you do, partner?"

Pauline's blush assumed a deeper tint; the word "partner" made her feel intensely happy. When her cousin had kissed her, she felt no trouble at his kissing Louise afterwards. She experienced no feeling of jealousy now.

It was a delightful dinner. Chanteau, alarmed at the doctor's threats, ate with moderation. Madame Chanteau and the priest discussed magnificent schemes for the aggrandizement of Bonneville, when the sea-weed industry should have enriched the neighbourhood. It was eleven o'clock before they separated. As Lazare and Pauline were about to leave each other at the doors of their rooms, the young man asked her laughingly:

"Do young ladies, when they have grown-up, give over wishing good-night?"

"Ah! no indeed!" she cried; and, throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed him full on the lips with all her old impulsiveness.

CHAPTER III.

Two days later there was a very low tide, and the rocks were uncovered to an unusual extent. Lazare was brimming over with the wild enthusiasm which always filled him at the first contemplation of any of his new schemes, and he was impatient to be off at once to the sea-weed. So away he went, with bare legs and just a canvas jacket over his bathing-costume. Pauline went with him to share in his investigations. She, too, wore a bathing-costume, and the heavy shoes which she used when she went on shrimping expeditions. When they had got about half-a-mile from the cliffs and had reached the midst of the spreading tract of sea-weed, amongst which the ebbing tide was still splashing, the young man's enthusiasm, as he looked round upon this immense marine harvest, over which he and Pauline had rambled a hundred times before, knew no bounds.

"Look! look!" he cried; "what money we shall make out of it all; and nobody has ever thought of making any use of it!"

Then he began to point out to her the different species with a gleeful pedantry; the zosterias of a delicate green and shaped like long hairs, stretching far away in spreading lawns; the ulvæ, with large lettuce-like leaves of a transparent green; the serrated fuci and the bladder-bearing fuci, which grew in such thick profusion that they enveloped the rocks like a thick moss. As they followed along after the ebbing tide they came upon species of greater size and stranger forms than those they had already seen, such as various kinds of laminariæ, especially the one known as Neptune's Belt, a girdle-like strip of greenish leather, with wrinkled edges that looked as though it had been made to circle the waist of a giant.

"What wealth there is going to waste here!" exclaimed Lazare. "How stupid they all must be! In Scotland the people are sensible enough to make some use of the ulvæ, at any rate, and they turn it into food and eat it. But we here just



LAZARE'S ENTHUSIASM AT SIGHT OF THE SEAWEED NEAR BONNEVILLE.

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use the fuci to pack up fish with, and can't find anything better to do with all the rest than to make manure of it."

Pauline was in the water up to her knees, and she was perfectly happy, in the midst of all this sharp saltness; and her cousin's explanations, too, interested her extremely.

"Then," she asked, "you intend to distill all this?"

Lazare was very much amused at her using the word "distill."

"Yes; distill it, if you like to call it so. But the process is a very complicated one. Now, mark my words. We have subjugated terrestrial vegetation to our use; we eat and avail ourselves in other ways of trees and plants, don't we? Well, perhaps, we shall find that we can turn the marine vegetation to a still greater profit, when we begin to seriously try to do so."

They both busied themselves enthusiastically in gathering specimens. They crammed their arms full of them, and so excited did they become over the grand scheme, that they never noticed that they were wetting themselves completely through. Lazare went on pouring out a torrent of miscellaneous remarks and explanations, and repeated, for Pauline's information, all that his master, Herbelin, had told him. The sea was a vast reservoir of chemical compounds, and the sea-weed was perpetually engaged in condensing in its tissue the salt which the water held in very diluted solution. The problem that they had to solve was how to extract economically from the sea-weed its useful components. He talked about taking the ashes which resulted from its combustion, the impure soda of commerce, of sifting them, and finally extracting from them in a state of perfect purity the iodides and bromides of sodium and potassium, sulphate of soda, and various salts of iron and manganese, so as to turn to profitable use every particle of the original material. He waxed particularly enthusiastic over the fact, that by the system which had been discovered by the illustrious Herbelin, nothing that was of the slighest use would be lost. There was an immense fortune before them.

"Good gracious! what a mess you're in!" cried Madame Chanteau, as they came into the house again.

"Never mind about that," said Lazare, gaily, as he threw down his load of sea-weed on to the middle of the terrace. "We are bringing you back hundred-soupieces."

The next day one of the Verchemont peasants was sent with

his cart to bring back a whole load of weed, and the experiments were commenced in the big room on the second floor. Pauline was instituted assistant. For a month they were quite mad over the subject. The room was soon crammed with dried weed, jars filled with floating sprays, and instruments of all sorts of odd shapes. There was a microscope on the table, and the piano was hidden beneath retorts and flasks, and the cupboard groaned under the weight of technical works and collections that were being perpetually referred to. The experiments which were made with small quantities of material with the most scrupulous care gave encouraging results. Herbelin's system of cold was based upon the discovery that certain bodies crystallize at very low temperatures, and all that was required was to obtain the necessary lowness of temperature, when each particular substance deposited itself in crystals and could be easily separated from the others. Lazare burned the weeds in a pit, and then mixed the ashes with water and subjected them to a very low temperature, which he obtained by a refrigerative method based upon the rapid evaporation of ammonia. He would have, afterwards, to carry out these operations on a large scale and to transfer them from the laboratory to proper works, and to observe a careful economy in the method of manufacture and the requisite plant.

On the day when he succeeded in extracting five distinct substances from his crude liquor, the room rang with cries of triumph. They had obtained a quite surprising proportion of bromide of potassium. They would be able to supply this popular remedy as plentifully as bread. Pauline danced wildly round the table and then flew down the stairs and burst into the dining-room, where her uncle was reading his newspaper and her aunt was marking table-napkins.

"There!" she cried, "you can be as ill as you like now, and we will cure you with bromide of potassium; you can have as much as ever you want!"

Madame Chanteau had been suffering lately from nervous attacks and had just been put upon a bromide régime by Doctor Cazenove. She smiled as she said—

"Have you got enough to cure everyone, for everyone seems to be out of sorts just now?"

The young girl, with her vigorous limbs and her face beaming with robust health, spread out her arms as though she were casting the remedy to the four corners of the earth.

"Yes! we shall make enough for all the world."

Lazare decided that he would build his works near the Golden Bay, after a careful inspection and examination of the site. It satisfied all the necessary requirements. It had a wide spreading beach which facilitated the cartage of the weed; there was good communication from it; land was cheap; the necessary materials were at hand; and it was a convenient distance off, without being too far. Pauline joked about the name which they had given to the bay on account of its gleaming sand. They did not think then, she said, that they ever would find real gold there, as they were going to do now. They made a capital beginning, and bought about five acres of barren land at a low price, and obtained the prefect's authorization after only two months' delay. Then they got the building commenced. Boutigny had already arrived on the scene. He was a little ruddy-faced man of thirty, extremely unpolished, and the Chanteaus did not take to him at all. He declined to live at Bonneville, saying that he had found a very convenient house at Verchemont, and the family's coldness towards him increased when they heard that he had brought to live with him there a woman of loose character, whom he had probably picked up in some low haunt in Paris. Lazare shrugged his shoulders at what he called their provincial narrow-mindedness. She was a very nice pleasant sort of person, he thought, and she had shown a good deal of devotion in consenting to bury herself in such a wilderness; but he made no further protestations, on Pauline's account. What was expected from Boutigny was an active surveillance and intelligent supervision of the works, and in this respect he showed himself to be all that could be desired. He was never idle, and had a perfect genius for administration; and, under his direction, the building operations were quickly carried on. For the next four months, while the works and preparations for the installation of the machinery were going on, the Golden Bay Works, as they called them, were the goal of the young people's daily walk. Madame Chanteau never went with them, and Matthew was their only companion. He soon grew tired, and dragged his big feet wearily along till they reached the works, when he would lie down, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, and give himself up to heavy puffing and panting like a blacksmith's bellows. The dog was the only one of the party who ever bathed now, and he would rush into the sea when a stick was

thrown for him to fetch. Whenever he went, Lazare used to hurry on the workmen, and Pauline ventured to make practical observations which occasionally showed a good deal of common sense.

The apparatus had been ordered at Caen. It was constructed after designs drawn by Lazare himself, and the workmen came to set it up. Boutigny was beginning to show a good deal of uneasiness at the rapid rate at which the estimates were perpetually increasing. Why couldn't they, he asked, have commenced with as small a building as was possible, and with only the absolutely indispensable apparatus? Why launch into all these complicated work-shops and rooms and all this elaborate machinery and apparatus for a business which it would have been much more prudent to have commenced on a small scale and then to have gradually extended, when they had gained some experience of the conditions under which it was carried on and its requirements, and of what demand there was for their productions. But Lazare was quite carried away by his enthusiastic dreams, and, if he had been allowed to have his own way entirely, he would have added a magnificent façade to the works, which should look towards the sea and proclaim the grandeur of his plans to the limitless horizon. Each visit only seemed to increase his confidence and conviction of the absolute success of his schemes. What, then, was the good of being stingy and close over the place, since they were going to make such a fortune out of it? Their walks back home were delightfully gay and merry. Poor Matthew used to lag very far behind them, and then Pauline and Lazare would hide themselves behind a wall, and be as delighted as little children when the dog, suddenly finding himself alone and fearing that he was lost, began hunting about for them in a state of comical alarm.

Every evening, when they returned home, they were saluted with the same question—

"Well, how's it all getting on; satisfactorily, eh?"

The answer, too, was always the same.

"Oh, yes; but it is not finished yet."

It was a period of unruffled intimacy between the two young people.

Lazare showed a warm affection for Pauline, which a feeling of gratitude for the money she had advanced to him served to strengthen. He grew gradually to lose sight of her womanhood,

and to consider her as a sort of boyish companion, a younger brother, whose amiability and many good points became more manifest every day. She was so sensible and courageous, so cheerful and pleasant, that he could not refrain from entertaining for her an unconfessed feeling of respect and admiration, which he tried to conceal even from himself by chaffing and teasing her. In the most unconcerned and casual way she had told him of her private studies and her aunt's horror at the sight of the anatomical plates, and he had experienced a moment's wonder and vexation as the girl, who knew so much already, turned on him her big candid eyes. After that, a perfect understanding seemed to exist between them, and he talked to her quite freely and openly, as they worked together at their common studies, referring to things quite plainly by their technical names, as though there were no other way of describing them. She was continually asking him questions, for which she appeared to have no other object than the simple desire to acquire information and make herself useful to him. But she often amused her cousin by the many gaps which she showed in her knowledge, and by the extraordinary and strangely mated mixture of information, with which she was crammed. The prudish ideas and notions of her aunt, who had boiled down facts to the standard of school-girl modesty, were joined on to the exact and plain details which she had read in the medical treatises concerning the physiology and conformation of men and women and the physical processes. When she showed herself to be labouring under some ludicrous misconception, Lazare broke out into such peals of laughter that she grew quite angry with him and told him that it would be much better if, instead of laughing at her, he would show her where she was wrong; and the matter generally terminated in a lesson. She knew too much already to be prevented from knowing more; and she was still working hard at her education and was perpetually reading, and was comparing and co-ordinating all she heard and saw with what she read, while all the time she continued to pay a respectful attention to the decorous fables that Madame Chanteau told her. Only when she was in the great room with her cousin did she become a boy, an assistant and fellow-worker, to whom without any hesitation, he could say—

"Have you noticed this flower here? It has only [illegible]

"Yes, yes," she replied. "I see; big clusters of [illegible]

Pauline, however, was not quite easy in her mind; she felt herself suffering from some vague and indefinite uneasiness. When Lazare pulled her about in his free brotherly fashion, her heart would beat excitedly and she felt a strange kind of choking sensation. The woman whom they had both forgotten all about was waking up in her flesh with the pulsing of her blood. One day as Lazare was turning hastily round, he knocked her with his elbow. She gave a scream and clasped her hands against her breast. What was the matter?—he cried. He hadn't hurt her, had he? He had only just touched her, he said, and he was going to open her dress to look. But she stepped hastily back out of his reach, and they stood looking at each other, feeling confused and smiling uneasily. Another day, when they were engaged in making an experiment, she refused to dip her hands into some cold water. Lazare looked at her with some surprise and vexation. Why wouldn't she? What did she mean by such nonsense? If she didn't mean to help him, she had better go downstairs. Then, as he saw her blushing, it flashed upon him and he understood it all, and he looked at her with staring eyes, This play-fellow of his, this younger brother, had she really then turned into a woman? Yes, surely it must be so. She couldn't even be touched without breaking into a cry, and was not to be reckoned upon every day in the month. Each fresh incident came upon them as a surprise, like some unforeseen revelation which embarrassed them and made them feel uneasy in each other's presence and troubled their old boyish companionship. Lazare seemed rather disgusted and disappointed at the change, as it interfered with their working together, since she was not a man and was upset by the least trifle; while Pauline experienced a sort of vague disquietude and anxiety, with which a sweet joy was mingled increasingly.

From this time the young girl felt sensations within her of which she spoke to no one. She told no fibs, but she simply held her tongue, impelled thereto by a feeling of anxious pride and shame as well. She often believed that she was ill and on the point of breaking out in some serious malady, for she grew feverish at bed-time, and was worn out for want of sleep people by the wild unintelligible tumult that was raging within Lazare. In the day-time she felt merely weary and listless, and of gratitude no complaints to her aunt. She suffered, too, from strengthening, and from nervous excitement and sudden thoughts

which distressed her immediately they came into her mind, and especially from dreams from which she awoke vexed and angry with herself. In spite of her studies and the eagerness with which she had pored over the physiological treatises and anatomical plates, her body remained in such a virginal condition that at each of these experiences of hers she fell into a state of child-like stupefaction. But when she thought carefully over the matter she felt easier. She was like other people and must expect to feel within her the workings of that vital mechanism which she knew went on in others.

One evening, after dinner, she began to talk about the absurdity and annoyance of dreams. How tiresome it was that one was compelled to lie on one's back, quite defenceless and helpless, a prey to all sorts of idiotic ideas and fancies. But what vexed her most, she said, was the absolute loss and annihilation of the will, and the complete surrender and incapability of the body. Then her cousin, with his pessimistic views, fell foul of dreams, too, as disturbing the happiness and serenity of utter unconsciousness. Her uncle, however, proceeded to distinguish between different sorts of dreams. He liked to have pleasant ones, while he detested night-mares. She spoke so strongly on the subject that Madame Chanteau, in surprise, began to question her as to what she dreamed about at night. Then she stammered and hesitated, and said about all sorts of ridiculous things, trifles too vague to remember. And she was speaking the truth in this, for the incidents of her dreams enacted themselves in a dimly veiled and obscure way; visionary characters rustled up against her, and her womanhood felt the thrills of the flesh, all without her being conscious of any clearly defined image or sensation. She saw no one; it was like the kiss of the sea-breezes as they flew in at her window in the summer-time,

Every day Pauline's warm affection for Lazare seemed to increase. It was not merely the instinctive waking-up of her womanhood after their seven years' brotherly comradeship; she felt a need of devoting herself to some one, and her illusion presented him to her as the worthiest in his intelligence and strength of all she knew. By slow degrees her old feeling of fraternity was metamorphosing itself into love, with sweet touches of budding passion and secret thrills, furtive and lingering touchings, and all the fond delights that attend the heart's setting-out on its journey of affection, beneath the promptings

of the procreative instinct. Lazare, protected by his former dissoluteness in the students' quarter, and having no longer any further experiences to make, still looked upon her merely as a sister, and never thought of her in any way as an object of desire; while she, on the other hand, still a perfect virgin, in this lonely spot where she knew no other, grew to worship him more and more and to bestow herself entirely upon him. From morning to evening, when they were together, she seemed to live on his presence, and her eyes ever sought his, as she eagerly busied herself to serve him.

About this time Madame Chanteau became quite astonished at Pauline's piety. She saw her go twice to confession. Then the girl suddenly seemed to take a dislike to the Abbé Horteur, and for three Sundays she even refused to go to mass, and only resumed her attendance at the church that her absence might not displease her aunt. She gave no explanation of her conduct; but she had probably been offended and displeased at some of the Abbé's questions and remarks, as he was not a man of refined speech. It was at this period that Madame Chanteau, with her keen maternal instinct, discovered Pauline's growing love for Lazare; but she said not a word about it to anyone, not even to her husband. The knowledge of it came upon her as a surprise, for up to now an affection and possible marriage between them had not entered into her plans or thoughts. Like Lazare, she had gone on looking upon her ward as a mere schoolgirl. Now, she told herself, it was her duty to look sharply after them, but she did not do so, really feeling very little interest or care about a love which her son did not appear to return.

When the hot days of August came round, Lazare said, one evening, that they would have a bathe the next day, as they went to the works. Worked upon by her rigid notions of propriety, Madame Chanteau forced herself to accompany them, in spite of the terrible heat of the afternoon sun. She sat down on the burning pebbles, with Matthew by her side, sheltering herself beneath her umbrella, under whose shade the dog tried to stretch his head.

"Hallo! where's she off to?" cried Lazare, as he saw Pauline disappear behind a rock.

"She is going to undress herself, of course," said Madame Chanteau. "Turn your head away. It isn't proper; and she won't like it."

He looked quite astonished, and still kept his eyes fixed on the rock, from behind which he saw directly the end of a white chemise flapping. Then he looked again at his mother, and turned his back to the rock. Then he began to undress himself, and quickly threw off his clothes without saying another word.

"Are you ready?" he shouted, at last. "What a time you are!"

Pauline ran lightly towards him, with a laugh whose gaiety sounded a little forced and strained. They had never bathed together since Lazare's return home. She wore a swimming-costume, made in a single piece, fastened round her waist by a belt, and clinging closely to her hips, allowing their shape to be distinctly seen. With her lissom figure and swelling breast showing plainly beneath her tight-fitting dress, she looked like a marble statue. Her arms and legs were bare, and her small naked feet, white as a child's, were shod with sandals.

"Well," said Lazare, "shall we go out as far as the Picochets?"

"Yes, to the Picochets," she answered.

"Don't go far out!" cried Madame Chanteau. "I shall feel so frightened if you do."

But they were already in the water. The Picochets were a group of rocks which were not quite covered at high tide, and lay about half a mile off. The two young people swam leisurely along, side by side, like a couple of friends out for a walk on some smooth straight road. Matthew followed them for a little way, but when he saw them still going forward without any signs of returning, he swam back again to the shore and shook the water out of his coat, splashing the drops all over Madame Chanteau. Unnecessary exertion of this kind did not commend itself to his lazy nature.

"You are a sensible animal," said the elderly lady. "It is quite wicked to go risking their lives in this way."

She could only just make out the heads of Pauline and Lazare bobbing up in the water like tufts of floating sea-weed, rising and falling with the waves. There was a pleasant swell on, and they skimmed along with a gentle undulatory motion, talking quietly and examining the sea-weed that floated past them in the transparent water. Then Pauline, who was beginning to feel a little tired, turned herself on her back and floated, her face gazing up full on the sky, and seeing nought

but its blue depths. She still preserved all her old love for the sea that was now so softly cradling her. She loved its sharp fresh breath and its pure cold waves; and she abandoned herself entirely to it, happy in its ceaseless rippling and rustling against her flesh, and revelling in the exertion of her swimming, which kept down the throbbing of her heart. Suddenly she broke out into a slight cry. Her cousin glanced towards her uneasily and asked what was the matter.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that the bodice of my costume has split. I swung my left arm out too quickly."

Then they both laughed. Pauline had begun to swim again leisurely, and she was smiling a little uneasily as she contemplated the accident to her dress. The shoulder-strap had given way, and now all her shoulder and breast were bare and exposed. Her cousin merrily told her to feel in her pocket and see if she had not got some pins with her. Soon afterwards they reached the Picochets, when Lazare mounted up on to a ledge of rock, as it was their custom to do, to rest and get breath before swimming back to the shore. But Pauline remained in the water and went on swimming round the rocks.

"Aren't you coming up?"

"No. I'd rather stay where I am."

Lazare thought it was a mere whim of hers, and felt vexed with her. It was very foolish of her, he told her. If she didn't come out of the water and rest for a little, she would break-down on the journey back. But she persisted in staying where she was, and did not even answer her cousin, swimming gently on, with the water up to her chin and burying the snowy-whiteness of her naked shoulder, that shone through it milky and gleaming as the pearl of a shell. Towards the open sea the rocks were eaten out into a kind of grotto, where they had used to play at being Robinson Crusoe. Far away on the other side they could just distinguish Madame Chanteau sitting on the beach, and looking in the distance like a big black insect.

"Take your own way, then, you foolish, obstinate girl!" cried Lazare, springing into the water again. "I sha'n't help you, remember that."

Then they started slowly on their return to the shore. They sulked with each other and would not speak. When Lazare heard Pauline beginning to pant, he told her she had better

turn herself on to her back, and float, but she did not appear to hear him. The rent in her dress was widening. At the slightest attempt to turn herself on to her back her breasts would have burst clear out of the water. Lazare, at last, apparently began to understand, and seeing how tired she was, and fearing that she would never be able to reach the shore without assistance, swam close up to her, resolutely determined upon bearing her up. She tried to escape him and to go on swimming by herself. But at last she was obliged to yield herself up to him; and when they touched the shore again, Lazare was holding her to him in a clinging embrace.

Madame Chanteau had rushed down to the edge of the water in a terrible state of alarm, while Matthew was standing in the sea up to his stomach, barking loudly.

"How wicked and foolish of you! I told you that you were going too far!"

Pauline had fainted. Lazare carried her up to the beach as though she were a child, and he kept her, half naked as she now was, pressed close to his breast, while the salt water streamed down from both of them.

She breathed a deep sigh and then opened her eyes. As soon as she recognised her cousin, she burst out sobbing and nearly choked him with her hysterical embrace, as she kissed him full on the lips. She hardly knew what she was doing, and she was acting under the influence of a sudden impulse of love, which the consciousness of her escape from death had sent thrilling through her.

"Oh! how good you are, Lazare! Oh! how I love you!"

For a moment he halted, almost knocked off his balance by the impetuosity of his cousin's kiss. While Madame Chanteau was dressing her, he went away and remained apart of his own accord. Their walk back to Bonneville was slow and painful, as they were both thoroughly worn-out with fatigue. Madame Chanteau walked between, thinking that the time had come when she must take some decisive action.

There were other causes for uneasiness in the family. The works at Golden Bay were now finished, and for the last week they had been testing the apparatus, with the most deplorable results. Lazare was obliged to confess that he had made some serious mistakes in the designs of several portions of it. He set off to Paris to consult his master, Herbelin, and he came back in a very low and discouraged frame of mind. Everything

would have to be made over again. The celebrated chemist had introduced great improvements into his method, which necessitated a complete alteration of the apparatus. All the sixty thousand francs were spent, and Boutigny absolutely refused to advance another sou. From morning till night he talked sarcastically and bitterly of the foolish squandering of money over unsuccessful fads, with the unendurable pertinacity of a practical man who has turned out to be right. Lazare felt inclined to murder him. But what troubled him more than anything else, was the thought of leaving Pauline's thirty thousand francs to lie lost and useless at the bottom of this abyss of disaster. His honour and pride revolted against the idea. It was impossible to think of it. More money must be got from somewhere. They could not abandon an undertaking which would eventually be sure to bring them in millions.

"Don't make yourself unhappy about it," said his mother, as she saw him becoming quite ill beneath the weight of his uncertainty of obtaining more capital. "We haven't got down so low yet as not to be able to get a few thousand-franc notes."

Madame Chanteau was working out a plan of her own. The idea of a marriage between Pauline and Lazare struck her as being very feasible and desirable. There was only some nine years' difference between their ages, and that was only what one saw every day. It would be such a convenient way of settling matters. Lazare would be working for his wife, and would have no need to trouble himself further about the debt; and he would be able to take from Pauline's fortune whatever further sum he wanted. At the bottom of her heart, it is true, she felt some trifling scruples at the course she was meditating, having a lurking fear of the possibility of an utter catastrophe, and the consequent complete ruin of her ward. But she pooh-poohed the idea of such an ending to the great scheme. Wasn't it quite beyond doubt that Lazare was a very clever fellow who knew perfectly well what he was about? He would make Pauline very wealthy one of these days, and it was really she who would be benefited by the marriage. It mattered nothing that her son was without fortune at present. He was a fortune in himself.

The marriage was quickly agreed upon. One morning Madame Chanteau went into Pauline's room and sounded the young girl on the matter, who confessed, with smiling tranquil-

lity, her love for her cousin. Then her aunt told her she was to pretend to be tired, and in the afternoon she and her son went alone to the works. As they came back she unfolded to him all her scheme, telling him of his cousin's affection for him, the convenience and suitability of the proposed marriage, and the advantages to be derived from it. At first he was quite amazed. He had never entertained a notion of such a thing. The girl was quite a child, wasn't she? Then he wrapped himself up in deep thought and finally told his mother that he loved Pauline very much, and he would do all she wished.

As they came back into the house, they found Pauline laying the table, for want of something else to do. Her uncle, with his newspaper lying upon his knee, was watching Minouche, who was fastidiously licking her fur.

"Well, so there's a probability of a wedding, I hear," said Lazare, concealing his emotion beneath an affectation of gaiety.

Pauline stood quite still, holding a plate in her hands, and blushed deeply, unable to say a word.

"Who is going to be married?" asked her uncle, suddenly, as though he had just awoke.

His wife had told him all about it in the morning, but the dainty way in which the cat was licking herself had absorbed all his thought and attention. But he quickly recovered his recollection.

"Ah! yes, of course!" he said.

He looked at the two young people mischievously. Pauline had put the plate down, and, turning to Lazare, she said:

"If you wish it, I shall be very glad, indeed."

"There! that's settled, then. Give each other a kiss," exclaimed Madame Chanteau, hanging up her straw hat.

The girl went up to Lazare, holding out her hands to him. He took them laughingly within his own, and began to joke her.

"You have deserted your doll, then? And this is why you have become so secret and mysterious that one might not even look at you when you were washing your finger-ends! And it is poor Lazare that you have selected for your victim!"

"Oh! aunt, do make him give over, or I shall go away!" murmured Pauline, looking painfully confused and trying to make her escape.

Little by little, he drew her closer to him, playing with her as in the old days of their school-boy-like chumship. Then she

suddenly planted a smacking kiss on his cheek, which he returned with another on her ear. Some secret reflection just then seemed to cast a gloom over him, and he said, sadly:

"It's a sorry bargain you are making, my poor child. You don't know what a very old man I am, really. Still, if you really wish it—"

The dinner was wildly gay. They all talked at once, and made all kinds of plans for the future, as though they were meeting now for the first time. Véronique, who had just come into the room as the engagement was being announced, went back into the kitchen and banged the door after her without saying a single word. When the dessert was laid upon the table, their noisy gaiety had toned down a little and they began to talk about matters more seriously. Madame Chanteau said that the marriage could not take place for another two years, for she should prefer them to wait till Pauline was fully of age, that there might be no risk of any suspicion that she had in any way been unduly influenced or that any advantage had been taken of her youth. Pauline looked aghast at this announcement of a two years' delay, but her aunt's sense of honour touched her deeply and she got up from her chair to go and kiss her. A date for the wedding was fixed, and the two young people would have to learn to be patient, and, while they were thus learning, they would also be earning the first instalments of their future millions. No doubt at all was felt as to their ultimate great wealth.

"Pull out the drawer, aunt dear," said Pauline, "and give him as much as ever he wants. It is as much his as mine now."

But Madame Chanteau would not hear of this.

"No, indeed. Not a single sou of it shall be spent unnecessarily. You know you can fully trust me for that, and I would rather have my right hand cut off than that you should be a loser. You want ten thousand francs for the works. Well, those ten thousand francs I will give you, and the rest I will keep tightly locked up. Not a sou of it shall be touched."

"With ten thousand francs," said Lazare, "I am quite certain of success. All the heavy expenses are already paid, and it would really be wicked not to go on with it now. You will see presently. And you, my dear, I will have you dressed in a robe of cloth-of-gold like a queen, on our wedding-day."

Their happiness and gaiety were increased by the unexpected arrival of Doctor Cazenove. He had just been attending to the wounds of a fisherman, who had crushed his fingers underneath a boat, and the family insisted upon his remaining with them and having some tea. The great news did not appear to surprise him at all; but, as he heard the Chanteaus launching out so enthusiastically in the praise of the sea-weed scheme, he glanced uneasily towards Pauline, as he said:

"Yes, no doubt the idea is ingenious and worth a trial. But don't you think a safe investment in stock is better? If I were you, I should prefer being happy at once in a quiet sort of way—"

He stopped short on seeing a look of trouble pass over the young girl's face, and the warm affection which he felt for her induced him to speak against his own convictions.

"But money is a very pleasant thing; so, perhaps, you had better go on and make a lot of it. And I will certainly come and dance at the wedding. Yes, I will dance the Zambuco of the Carribeans, a dance I don't suppose you ever heard of. You stretch out your arms like the sails of a wind-mill, and then keep striking them on your legs as you dance round a captive, while he is being cooked and afterwards cut up by the women."

The months flew past. Pauline regained all her old calm cheerfulness. Doubt and uncertainty were the only things that could seriously trouble her candid and frank nature. The confession of her love and the fixing of a date for her marriage with Lazare seemed to have acted as a solace to the troubled feelings that had assailed her body; and now the bursting bloom of life and the gradual development of her body and her maturing puberty, which had once made her days a long torture and violated her repose at night, left her perfectly tranquil and untroubled. Her engagement caused little difference in her relations with Lazare, and they both went on with their old life of familiar companionship; he, ever busily engaged in the advancement of his great scheme, and quite protected by his former adventures in bachelor's quarters in Paris from any sudden impulse of desire, and she so simple and pure minded in her virginity and knowledge that she was fenced round by a double wall of protection.

Sometimes, indeed, they would take each other by the hand, in that great disorderly room, and smile lovingly at one another,

and while they were reading together some treatise on Marine Botany, their heads would perhaps rest tenderly against each other; or as they examined some flask browned with bromine or purple specimen of iodine, Pauline would lean gently against Lazare, or would bend down over the instruments that littered the table and piano and bring her face near to his, or would ask him to lift her up that she might be able to reach the topmost shelf of the cupboard. But in these hourly contacts of the one with the other, there was nothing beyond a perfectly decorous and permissible tenderness, such as might have been manifested openly before the members of their family, or a tranquil affection just tinged with such a sensual pleasure as might well show itself between cousins who were one day to be married. Madame Chanteau, herself, said that they conducted themselves in an extremely proper and sensible manner; and when Louise arrived, with all her pretty airs and graces, Pauline did not exhibit the slightest jealousy.

A whole year passed away in this fashion. The works were now in active operation, and the excitement which this caused kept Pauline and Lazare from thinking about anything else. The new apparatus had been obtained after considerable difficulties and the first results seemed excellent. Certainly, the yield was slight, but, when the system had been brought to greater perfection and greater care and energy were spent upon it, there was no doubt that they would quickly make an immense fortune. Boutigny had already found grand openings for their productions, beyond their power to supply, indeed. Success and fortune seemed quite ensured. This seeming certainty quite carried them off their heads, and from their former despondency they now rushed to the other extreme, and threw money by handfuls into extensions and alterations of the works, feeling not the least doubt that they would find it all again, melted up into a huge golden ingot. Every fresh outlay seemed only to hound them on to another.

The first few times, Madame Chauteau refused to make any advances from the drawer without notifying the fact to Pauline.

"There are some payments to be made on Saturday, my dear," she would say. "Will you come with me upstairs, and settle what scrip we shall sell?"

"Oh! there's no occasion for that, aunt," Pauline would reply. "You can settle that quite well yourself."

"No, my dear, you know that I never do anything without consulting you. It is your money."

But afterwards, Madame Chanteau grew less rigid in this respect. One evening Lazare told her of a debt which he had kept concealed from Pauline, five thousand francs for copper pipes, which had not even been used. She had only just returned from a visit to the drawer with her niece, so she went upstairs again by herself, seeing the despair her son was in, and withdrew the extra five thousand francs, on his solemnly promising to repay them out of the first profits.

But from this day her old strictness was broken down, and she began to take the scrip out of the drawer without consulting Pauline. She was beginning, too, to find it a little unpleasant and humiliating, at her age, to have to be continually taking the opinion of a mere child, and she rebelled against doing so. The money would all be paid back to her; and, even if it did belong to her, that was no reason why one should never be allowed to make the least move without obtaining her permission. And so from this time, she never insisted upon Pauline accompanying her on her visits to the drawer in the secrétaire. Pauline was really happier in consequence, for, in spite of her kind and generous heart, these perpetual withdrawals of money troubled her. Her common-sense began to warn her of the probability of a catastrophe, and her mother's prudence and economy stirred themselves up within her in opposition to all this reckless expenditure. At first, she was surprised at Madame Chanteau's silence, for she felt sure the money was going quite the same as before, and that the only difference was that she was not being consulted about it. After a little time, she felt that she preferred it to be so. It saved her, at any rate, the unhappiness of seeing the bundle of papers grow smaller at each visit to the drawer. Between herself and her aunt there was nothing but a quick exchange of glances at certain times; a steady gaze from troubled eyes on the girl's part, when she guessed that some further abstraction from her fortune had been made, and a vacillating look from Madame Chanteau, irritated that she had allowed herself to turn her head at all. It was the source of a rising feeling of bitterness and dislike between them.

This year, unfortunately, Davoine was declared a bankrupt. Though the disaster had been foreseen, it was none the less a terrible blow to the Chanteaus. They had still their three

thousand francs a year, arising from the dividends of their investments in stock; and all that they were able to save from the ruins of the timber business, some twelve thousand francs, was at once invested, and gave them a total income of three hundred francs a month. In the second fortnight Madame Chanteau was driven to take fifty francs of Pauline's money. The butcher from Verchemont was waiting with his bill, and she could not send him away without paying him. Then there were fifty francs wanted to pay for the washing-machine, and ten more for potatoes, and fifty sous for fish. She was reduced to supplying the needs of Lazare and the works by miserable little sums, which she doled out day by day. Towards the end of each month, she was constantly seen stealthily disappearing and then quickly coming back again with her hand in her pocket, from which she reluctantly drew single sous, one after the other, to make up the amount of a bill. The habit grew quickly upon her, and she soon allowed herself to depend entirely upon the contents of the drawer, helping herself to them, whenever occasion required, without any hesitation. As she opened the lid of the secrétaire with the nervous excitement that always possessed her on her visits to it, the old piece of furniture used to creak slightly, and this creaking used to affect her with an unpleasant feeling of confusion. The stupid old thing, she would say to herself. To think that during all these years she had never been able to buy a decent desk! The poor old secrétaire, which, when it had contained a fortune, had seemed to lend an air of wealth and light-heartedness to the house, now only irritated her, and she looked upon it as the pestilential receptacle of every evil, breathing misfortune from its every chink.

One evening Pauline ran into the house from the yard, crying out—

"The baker is here! He says we owe him for three days, two francs and eighty-five centimes."

Madame Chanteau began to fumble in her pockets.

"I shall have to go upstairs," she murmured.

"Stay here," said the young girl, carelessly. "I will go for you. Where is your money?"

"No, no, I'll go myself. You would never find it. It is put away."

Madame Chanteau stammered out the words in a state of confusion, and she and Pauline exchanged a silent glance, at which they both grew pale. There was a moment of painful

hesitation, and then Madame Chanteau went upstairs, quite shivering with suppressed anger, and feeling quite sure that her ward knew perfectly well where she was going to get those two francs eighty-five centimes. Why, she asked herself, had she always insisted upon her going with her to take the money from the drawer; and the memory of her old scrupulous probity quite angered her now, as she felt sure her niece was following her in imagination, and was watching her as she opened the drawer and took out the money, and then closed the secrétaire again. After she had come downstairs and paid the baker, her anger vented itself in an attack upon the young girl.

"Good gracious! what a state your dress is in! What have you been doing with yourself? You have been drawing water for the kitchen, surely. Eh? Be good enough to leave Véronique to do her own work, if you please. Upon my word, I believe you have gone out of your way on purpose to make a mess of yourself. You seem to have no idea that your clothes cost money. I don't get so much for your keep that it is easy to make both ends meet!"

And so she went on. Pauline had at first made some slight attempt to defend herself, but she soon refrained, and was now listening to her aunt in silence, with an aching heart. She was quite conscious that her aunt's affection for her had been on the wane for some time, and when she was alone with Véronique, she often gave way to tears. At these times the servant would rattle the saucepans about and affect to be very busy, in order to excuse herself from taking any notice or siding with one party or the other. Although she was continually growling at Pauline, she was now beginning to feel some qualms of conscience and to doubt whether the girl was receiving fair treatment.

When the winter came round again, Lazare grew quite despondent and discouraged. Once again his whim had varied, and his enthusiastic nature sought another object to expend itself upon. There had been fresh pecuniary embarrassments in the November, and he had fallen into a complete state of panic. He had got over previous ones, but this one seemed to reduce him to despair, and render him quite hopeless of everything, and he began to revile science and chemistry. The idea of making anything out of sea-weed was quite absurd and ridiculous. They might improve their system as much as they

liked, but they would never be able to drag anything out of nature that nature didn't want them to have. He even fell foul of his master, the great Herbelin himself, who had been good enough to turn aside from a journey he was making to come and visit the works at Golden Bay. He had seemed quite distressed when he saw all the elaborate apparatus, which he said he was afraid was on too great a scale to properly reproduce the effects which had been obtained by carefully working small experiments in his own laboratory. The truth of the matter was that there was no means known of maintaining, except in mere laboratory experiments on a small scale, that lowness of temperature which was necessary to the crystallization of the compound substances. Lazare had, indeed, succeeded in extracting a certain quantity of bromide of potassium from the sea-weed, but, as he could not manage to sufficiently isolate the four or five other bodies which were mixed with it, the result was a failure. He was quite sick of the whole business, and confessed himself completely beaten. One evening, when Madame Chanteau besought him to be calm and make one last effort, there was a very painful scene, when unkind recriminations were indulged in, and bitter tears were shed, and the doors were banged about with such noisy violence that poor old Chanteau jumped up in his arm-chair in sheer fright.

"You will end by killing me!" the young man screamed out, as he rushed away and locked himself up in his room, completely overwrought by a childish despair.

At breakfast-time, next morning, he brought down with him a paper thickly covered over with figures. Out of Pauline's hundred and eighty thousand francs, nearly a hundred thousand were already gone. Was there any sense in wasting any more money? It would all be lost. He was still under the influence of the previous evening's despondency and alarm. His mother, too, now seemed inclined to back him up. She had never been able to go against him and vex him, even in his faults. It was only Pauline who still tried to discuss the matter. The announcement of the expenditure of those hundred thousand francs had quite dazed her. What! they had taken more than half her fortune, and all those hundred thousand francs would be utterly lost if they refused to try and struggle on! But her arguments and persuasions were all in vain, and she went on talking to no purpose, till Véronique had cleared the table.

Then, to escape breaking out into reproaches against them, she sprang up from her seat and rushed off to her own room, quite sick at heart.

There was a short interval of embarrassed silence, which was broken by Madame Chanteau.

"The girl is evidently avaricious," she said. "It is a pitiful failing, but I won't have Lazare worried to death with all these bothers and vexations."

Then Chanteau broke in timidly—

"It was never mentioned to me that any such sum had been spent. It is quite dreadful to think of. A hundred thousand francs!"

"Well, what of that!" interrupted his wife, sharply. "It will be all repaid to her. If our son marries her, he is certainly capable of making a hundred thousand francs."

Then they began to discuss the best way out of this difficulty. What had alarmed Lazare more than anything else was a statement given to him by Boutigny, which showed a most desperate condition of affairs. His claim amounted now to almost twenty thousand francs, and, when he saw that his partner was determined to retire, he declared his intention of going to Algeria, where, he said, there was a splendid position awaiting him. But, afterwards, he came to the conclusion that the best thing he could do would be to get the works into his own possession, but he pretended such an unwillingness to do this, and so complicated the accounts, that in the end he managed to get the site and the buildings and the apparatus for his claim of twenty thousand francs; and when, ultimately, Lazare succeeded in wringing out of him bills for five thousand francs, to be paid at two intervals of three months, he looked upon it as a quite wonderful victory. On the very next day Boutigny sold off the apparatus and began to adapt the buildings for the manufacture of common commercial soda, to be made in the ordinary routine way, ignoring altogether any ultra-scientific systems.

Pauline, who felt a little ashamed at her impulsive movement in favour of prudence and econony, became quite cheerful again and submissive, as though she recognised that she had done something for which she ought to seek pardon. When Lazare produced his bills for the five thousand francs, Madame Chanteau was quite triumphant, and insisted upon her niece going upstairs with her to see them put away in the drawer.

"There, my dear, that's five thousand francs we've got back.

There they are; they are all for you. My son has refused to keep a single one of them to repay him for all the trouble he has had."

Chanteau had been feeling very much troubled in mind for some time. Although he dared not refuse his signature when it was demanded of him, the way in which his wife was dealing with their ward's fortune filled him with alarm. That total of a hundred thousand francs was for ever ringing in his ears. How could they possibly make up such a deficiency by the time when the accounts would have to be examined? And the worst of it all was that Saccard, the surrogate-guardian, with the fame of whose speculations all Paris was echoing, had just recalled Pauline's existence to his memory, after having, apparently, forgotten all about her for nearly eight years. He had written to ask after her, and had even spoken of calling at Bonneville some day, on his way to do some business at Cherbourg. What explanation could they possibly give him, if he were to ask for an account of how matters stood, as he undoubtedly had the right to do? This sudden waking-up of his, after such a long period of utter indifference, was very alarming.

When Chanteau at last spoke to his wife on the matter, he found that she was much more affected by curiosity than by alarm. For a moment, she felt quite sure that the truth of the matter was that Saccard, with his gigantic speculations, had suddenly found himself completely ruined, and that he had bethought himself of getting hold of Pauline's money to try and regain what he had lost. Then, directly after, she began to wonder whether it was not the girl herself who had written to her surrogate-guardian out of some feeling of vengeance. But, when she found that her husband expressed the deepest disgust at any such hypothesis, she began to indulge in complicated suppositions of the most unlikely kind. Perhaps, she said, that miserable Boutigny, the scoundrel with whom they had refused to have anything to do or to receive at their house, and who was disgracing them in all the shops in Verchemont and Arromanches, had written anonymous letters to Saccard.

"But they may do what they like, for all that," she said. "The girl is certainly not eighteen yet, but we have only got to marry her straight off to Lazare, and the marriage at once makes her complete mistress of her fortune."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Chanteau.

"Of course I am. I was only reading it in the Code this morning."

Madame Chanteau had taken to studying the Code lately. Her conscientious scruples were not quite extinct, and she sought about for reasons to allay them. The legal subtleties had a special interest for her just now in the advancing decadence of her honesty, which the temptation afforded by the large sum of money in her keeping was gradually and completely destroying.

But she seemed to hesitate about actually bringing the marriage scheme to an immediate issue. After the financial disaster at the sea-weed works, Pauline had wanted to hasten affairs. What was the good of waiting for another six months till she was eighteen? They had better be married at once, and not put it off while Lazare was looking out for some other employment. She ventured to say as much to her aunt, who, put out by the girl's frankness, had recourse to a lie. She closed the door, and whispered to Pauline that Lazare was really made very unhappy by a secret trouble. He was very sensitive, and it would pain him very much to marry her before he was able to bring her a fortune, now that he had compromised her own. The girl listened to all this with great astonishment, quite unable to understand any such romantic delicacy. What did it matter? If he had been very rich, she would have married him all the same, because she loved him. Besides, how long would they have to wait? For ever, very likely. Then Madame Chanteau said she would do what she could to persuade him to overcome this exaggerated sense of honour, if Pauline would keep quiet and not try to hurry matters; and, in conclusion, she made her niece swear not to say anything about the subject, as she feared that, if she did, the young man might do something foolish, perhaps suddenly leave home, when he discovered that his secret had been discovered and discussed. Pauline, whom her aunt's remarks had filled with uneasiness, promised to be quite silent and patient. Chanteau, however, continued to grow more afraid of Saccard, and one day he said to his wife:

"If it can be managed, Pauline and Lazare had much better be married at once."

"There is no hurry," she said. "The danger is far enough away yet."

"But, as they are to be married some day— You haven't

changed your mind about it, eh? It will kill them, if they are separated."

"Kill them, indeed! As long as a thing is not done, it need not be done at all, if it should turn out inadvisable. But they are quite free to do as they like, and we shall see if they go on in the same mind."

Pauline and Lazare had resumed all their old comradeship, and the terribly severe winter was keeping them both confined to the house. For the first week, Lazare seemed so melancholy and so ashamed of himself and embittered with his ill-fortune, that Pauline lavished all her tenderness upon him and treated him as gently as though he were an invalid. She felt a great degree of pity for this big young man, whose whimsical and enthusiastic temperament, and courage that was merely nervous, accounted for all his failures, and she gradually began to assume a sort of scolding mother-like authority over him. At first, he entirely lost his head and declared that he would go and be a farm-labourer; then he gave himself up to all kinds of wild projects for making an immediate fortune, and said that he would not remain a burden on his family for another day. But the days slipped on, and he continually deferred putting his plans into execution. Every morning he came down with some new scheme which would at once lead to the greatest wealth and honour. Pauline, frightened by her aunt's lying confidences, scolded him and asked if he supposed anyone wanted him to go bothering himself in this way. When the spring came, it would be quite soon enough for him to look out for something to do, and, no doubt, he would be quickly successful; but, till then, it was quite necessary for him to rest. By the end of a month, she seemed to have gained the better of him, and he gave himself up to a state of dreamy idleness and cynical resignation under what he called the stupidity of life.

Every day, Pauline found Lazare a source of increased pain and distress to her. His previous outbursts of temper and anger were preferable to his present moody cynicism and listless professions of scepticism of the worth of existence. The young girl was shrewd enough to understand that his angry disgust at his failure and the catastrophe of the sea-weed scheme were at the bottom of her cousin's railings at the emptiness and worthlessness of life. But she was not able to argue the matter with him, and was obliged to confine herself to indignant protestations, when he fell back upon his old philosophy—the denial of

all progress and the ultimate inutility of all science. Wasn't that beast of a Boutigny on the high-road to fortune with his wretched commercial soda? What was the good, then, of ruining one's self to make a purer kind and to discover new laws and systems, when empiricism did so much better for itself? This was the constant strain of his remarks, and he would finish by saying, while a bitter smile played across his lips, that the only good thing science could do would be to discover a way to blow the whole universe into atoms by means of some colossal cartridge. All life, he said, was pain and trouble, and he dwelt upon the doctrine of the Hindoo fakirs as to annihilation being the supreme blessing. When Pauline heard him affecting a horror and disgust of all active motion, and predicting the ultimate self-extinction of the nations of the world, who would one day, he said, when their intelligence had been highly enough developed to enable them to see the imbecile and miserable part which an unknown power was making them play, refuse to beget fresh generations, she was carried away with indignation and tried to find arguments to confute him, as she sat upon the floor, quite ignorant, indeed, of these matters, and not having, as her cousin told her, a metaphysical head. But she would not allow that she was beaten, and she roundly sent Schopenhauer to the devil, when he wanted to read some extracts from him to her. Schopenhauer, indeed! A man who had written such scandalous lies about women! If he had not shown a little affection for animals, she would have strangled him! Vigorous with robust health and full of cheerfulness and hope for the morrow, she reduced him to silence by her merry laughter, and scored a victory over him by force of her youthful freshness.

"Stop! stop!" she cried. "You are talking nothing but nonsense. We will think about dying when we have grown old."

The idea of death, which she spoke of so lightly, always affected him very painfully, and he quickly turned the conversation on to every-day topics, after having sighed out:

"People die at all ages."

Pauline grew to see that the thought of death was terrible to Lazare. She called to mind his fear-stricken cry that night as they lay on the beach gazing up at the stars. She saw his face turn sickly pale at the mention of certain words, as he shut himself up in a moody silence, as though he were concealing

some disease whose existence he dared not confess. She was greatly surprised at this pessimist's fear of extinction, who talked about snuffing out all the stars, like so many candles, amid the wreck of the whole universe. This mental disease of his was of old standing, and the girl did not guess the dangerous hold that it had obtained upon her cousin. In proportion as he grew older, Lazare morbidly looked upon himself as so much nearer the clutch of death. He saw it ever springing up before him to seize him. Till he was twenty years of age he had scarcely ever dared to keep his head uncovered by the bedclothes when he went to bed. And even now he could not lay his head on his pillow without the thought of death coming and freezing his very blood. He tossed about, a prey to sleeplessness, and struggled and wrestled against the fatal necessity which presented itself in morbid hideousness to his imagination.

And when, from sheer exhaustion, he at last went to sleep, he would wake up with a start, and spring up in his bed, his eyes staring widely with terror and his hands clutching one another, as he gasped out in the darkness: "Oh! my God! my God!" He would pant for breath and believe that he was dying; and it was not till he had struck a light and thoroughly awakened himself that he regained anything like calmness. After these outbreaks of panic, he always retained a feeling of shame that he had allowed himself to cry out to a God whose existence he denied, and had yielded to what he called the hereditary weakness of the human race in the hour of its great fear. Every night he suffered in this way, and even during the day a chance word or a momentary thought, rising from something he saw or read, was quite sufficient to throw him into a state of morbid and trembling terror. One evening, as Pauline was reading a newspaper to her uncle, Lazare hastily rushed from the room, completely overturned by the fancy of some story-teller who drew a picture of the skies of the twentieth century as being filled with troops of balloons conveying travellers from continent to continent. He had thought that he would no longer be living then, that his eyes would never gaze upon these floating balloons, which would, in their turn, be lost in the bottomless gulf of nothingness as the centuries went on, the thought of whose revolution, after the complete extinction of himself, filled him with horrible anguish. It was to no purpose that his philosophy reminded him that not a single spark of life becomes as though it had never been; he shuddered and

trembled as he thought of the death of his own individual personality. These inward struggles had deprived him of all his cheerful lightheartedness; and as Pauline, who could not always follow the twists and turns of his morbid mind, looked at him at times when a feeling of tormenting shame prompted him to conceal the thoughts that were troubling him, her heart melted with compassion for him and she burned to show her love for him and to do what she could to make him happier.

Their days were spent in the big room on the second floor, in the midst of its litter of sea-weed and wide-mouthed bottles and instruments, which Lazare had never had the energy to clear away. The sea-weed was falling to pieces and the bottles were growing discoloured, while the instruments were getting damaged by the dust. But in all this disorder, Pauline and Lazare were alone and undisturbed, and the room was warm. Frequently the December storms swept down a pitiless rainfall on to the slates of the roof from morning till night, and the west wind roared like organ-notes through the crevices of the woodwork. Whole weeks passed away without sight of the sun, and there was nothing for the eye to rest upon save the vast grey expanse of the sea, into which the land seemed to be melting away. Pauline found an amusement for the long unoccupied hours in classifying a collection of flowers which she had gathered during the previous spring. At first Lazare, with his ostentatious affectation of utter *ennui*, had merely watched her as she mounted the delicate forms, whose tender blues and reds showed like water-colours, but afterwards, growing weary of his monotonous idleness, and forgetting his theory of inaction, he unearthed the piano from the litter of damaged apparatus and dirty bottles beneath which it was buried. A week later his passion for music had resumed all its old sway over him. One morning, as he was playing his March of Death, the idea of his great symphony on the subject of Sorrow, which he had once thought of composing, recurred to him with all its pristine vigour. All that had been already written, except the March, was poor and worthless, he thought, and the March was the only portion he would retain. What a magnificent subject it was, and what a glorious task he had set himself! Then he began to think it out. He would commence by the description of the creation of life by the selfish caprice of some superior power. Then he would exhibit the delusiveness of all happiness and the mockery of existence in passages of thrilling pathos,

which should introduce an embrace of lovers, a massacre of soldiers, and the death of a God upon the cross. Throughout there should be heard a cry of wailing and lamentation; the groans of an agonised multitude should seem to mount upwards to the skies, until the final hymn of deliverance thundered forth victoriously in notes of joy, whose melting sweetness should express all the happiness that came of universal annihilation.

The next morning he set enthusiastically to work, jingling and strumming on the piano, and covering sheets of paper with black-looking bars. As the instrument was in a very feeble and toneless condition, he sang the notes himself with a droning sound. Never had any of his previous fads taken such strong hold of him as this symphony. He was so completely wrapped up in it that he forgot all about his meals, and he all but cracked the drums of poor Pauline's ears, who, in her desire to please him, pretended that she liked it all very much, and copied out for him fairly and neatly different portions of the score. This time he was quite sure that he was going to have a tremendous success.

But by-and-by his enthusiasm flagged. He had got all the score written except the introduction, and all inspiration for that quite failed him. He would have to let it wait for a time, he said, and he puffed away continually at his cigarettes, while his manuscript lay littered over the table in front of him. Pauline played little bits from it on the piano, with all a beginner's inaccuracy and clumsiness. It was just now that the intimacy between the two young people began to assume a dangerous character. Lazare's brain was no longer occupied, and his body was still weary from all his labour and trouble in connection with the sea-weed works; and, shut up with Pauline in a state of complete idleness as he now was, he began to feel towards her a warmer passion than ever before. She was so light-hearted and merry; so affectionate and devoted. At first he thought that all he felt for her was merely an impulse of gratitude, an amplification of that fraternal affection with which she had inspired him ever since his childhood. But by degrees a feeling of desire, which had hitherto lain dormant within him, woke up into life. In this younger brother, whose broad shoulders he had been so long accustomed to push and pull about, without the least disquieting feeling, he was at last beginning to recognise a woman; and he grew to blush as she did when he brushed against her. He dared not even allow

himself to go close to her nor to stoop over her to glance at the music she was copying. If their hands happened to meet, they both looked confused and their breath came quickly, while their cheeks crimsoned with a fiery blush. All the time, now, that they spent alone together, they felt troubled and ill at ease, and they left the room feeling weary and sick at heart with a vague longing for some happiness that seemed to escape them.

Sometimes, to relieve them from one of their painfully sweet embarrassments, Pauline would begin to joke with all the frank boldness of her innocent, though well-read, mind.

"By the way," she said, one day, "did I tell you that I dreamed that your favourite Schopenhauer had received tidings in the other world of our marriage, and that his ghost came to pay us a visit in the night?"

Lazare laughed uneasily. He saw very well that she was poking fun at his perpetual inconsistencies, but his whole being was now thrilled with a melting tenderness which did away with all his distaste for existence.

"Don't be naughty, dear," he said. "You know that I love you."

She assumed a chiding look.

"I am afraid you are inclined to put off the universal deliverance. You are grovelling in egotism and delusions again."

"Hold your tongue, you wicked tease!"

He sprang up and chased her round the room, as she continued to hurl at him fragments of pessimistic philosophy with all the solemnity of a doctor of the Sorbonne. But when he seized hold of her, he did not dare to keep her fast within his grasp, as he used to do, and pinch her for a punishment.

One day he was chasing her hotly round the room, and, when he succeeded in getting quite close to her, he clutched her by the hips. She broke out into a ringing laugh, and he held her pressed against the cupboard, and he quivered with excitement as he felt her struggling against him.

"Ah! I have got you fast, this time! What shall I do to you, now?"

Their faces were touching each other, and she was still laughing, though her laugh was now sounding uneasily.

"Please let me go," she entreated. "I won't be naughty any more."

He planted a smacking kiss on her lips. Then the whole room appeared to be swimming round them and a hot feverish

which seemed to be sweeping them away into space. She staggered backwards, and then, with a sudden effort, released herself from her cousin's grasp. They both stood silent and deeply confused for a moment, their cheeks crimsoned with fiery blushes as they avoided each other's glance. Then Pauline victoriously sank down to a chair to get her breath.

"You have hurt me, Lazare," she said, speaking as though she were really seriously displeased with him.

And strangely enough this day he guarded himself from coming into contact with the black-locked head, the warm stream of her breath and from the very touch of her hands and tones. His sense of honour rebelled against the thought of any unwatchful lapse, or the idea of sullying her purity; and, in the midst of her instinctive maidenly resistance, he was quite overcome by it, as he saw her giddy and dazed in the warmth of their embrace, that she was entirely his own and loved him passionately to surrender herself wholly to him, if he should have only copied Octave so far. He felt that it was demanded from him to score. It was for her honour equally as his own, and he recognized that it was he himself who would be chiefly guilty in indulging in a trembling.

But this serious dallying, of whose serious risks he alone had had the previous experience to be aware. But this very struggling against his inclinations only served to increase his passion, as he said, and everything lately had tended to fan its flame. The listlessness of the first few weeks, his assumed indifference to Pauline, the shame of him, his disgust with life, through which a stronger desire of life and love forced its way. And then intimacy had come to complete the exaltation of his mind, sweeping him away to the land of dreams and visions on wings that ceaselessly vibrated with soft flowing melody. He began to believe that a mighty passion possessed him, and he swore to himself that for its sake he would do all he could to make manifest the genius within him. He would play with it no longer. He would be a mighty musician, for, to be that, it seemed to him that he had only to give birth to the promptings and whisperings of his heart. Everything began to present itself to him with a purified nature, and all carnality dropped from his thoughts, and he felt that he was quite content to worship Pauline on his knees, and was in no way anxious to press on their marriage.

"Come and read this letter I have just received," said Chanteau one day, with an expression that was full of alarm, to his wife, who had just returned from the village.

It was another letter from Saccard, who had now become quite threatening. Ever since November he had been asking for a statement of the accounts of Pauline's fortune, and, as the Chanteaus had only replied by evasions and subterfuges, he now announced that he was going to lay the matter before the family-council. Madame Chanteau, though she would not confess it, was now quite as alarmed as her husband.

"The beast!" she growled, when she had read the letter.

They both stood looking at each other, quite pale and finding not a word to say. Already they seemed to be hearing in that dingy little dining-room the tones of an examination full of disgrace to them.

"There must be no more dilly-dallying," said Chanteau at last. "We must marry the girl off at once, since marriage releases her from all control and supervision."

But to his wife this expedient seemed to grow more distasteful every day. She affected to be afraid of such a course. Who could tell if the two young folks would get on well together? It was quite possible for them to agree very well as friends and yet to make each other perfectly miserable as man and wife. Lately, she said, they had seemed to be very snappish with each other.

"It would not be right, I think, to sacrifice them for the sake of our own peace of mind. Let us wait a little longer. And besides, should we gain any advantage by marrying her now? She was eighteen last month, and we can demand to have her put free from all control and supervision at once."

She was beginning to feel quite confident and easy again. She went upstairs to get the Code, and they both pored over it together. Article 478 tranquillised them, but they felt quite troubled and uneasy again as they read Article 480, for there it was enacted that the accounts of the administration of a ward's estate must be submitted to the examination of an auditor appointed by the family-council. It was quite true that she could easily manage all the members of the family-council and make them do whatever she wanted, but whom could she choose as auditor? The difficulty was to find some easy-going man to examine the accounts, instead of having to lay them before Saccard, the surrogate-guardian.

Suddenly she had an inspiration.

"I've got it," she cried, "Doctor Cazenove! He is somewhat in our confidence, and he won't refuse to do what we want."

Chanteau nodded approval. He continued, however, to look fixedly at his wife, as though he were turning over some pressing thought in his mind.

"And then," he said at last, "you will give her the money? What is left of it, I mean."

Madame Chanteau was silent for a moment or two. Her eyes were bent down upon the Code, whose pages she was rapidly turning over with nervous excitement.

"Of course I shall," she said, at last, with apparent effort. "It will be a great relief to me to do so, after the accusations that have already been made against us. Upon my word, if this sort of thing goes on much longer, one will really begin to suspect one's own honesty! I would give something never to have seen the tiresome things stowed away in my secrétaire. But anyway, of course, we should have had to give it up to her."

The next day, when Doctor Cazenove came to make his Saturday round in Bonneville, she mentioned to him the great service which they hoped from his friendship. She made an open breast of the situation, and told him how the money had been swallowed up in the sea-weed works, without the family-council ever having been consulted about the matter. Then she dwelt upon the intended marriage and the sadness of the possibility of the bonds of affection which united them all together being broken and torn asunder by the scandal of a law-suit.

Before promising his assistance, the doctor desired to have an interview with Pauline. For a long time he had suspected that she was being taken advantage of, and that her fortune was being gradually drained away; and he felt that, though up to the present he had prevailed upon himself to say nothing about the matter for fear of causing her any pain, now that he was being invited to become an accomplice, it was his duty to warn her of what was being contemplated. The interview took place in the young girl's own room. At the commencement of the conversation her aunt was present. She had accompanied the doctor to declare that the marriage entirely depended upon Pauline's emancipation from the family-council's control, as Lazare would never consent to marry his cousin as long as it was possible for him to be accused of doing so for the mere purpose of avoiding an examination of the accounts. Then she left the room, saying that she did not wish to do anything to

affect the decision of the dear girl whom she already considered as her own darling daughter. Then Pauline, quite overcome with emotion, immediately begged the doctor to render them this delicate service, the necessity of which had just been so fully made clear to him. It was to no purpose that Cazenove tried to explain the exact position of affairs to her, to show her that she was despoiling herself of all she had, and reducing herself to a condition of absolute dependence, or that he attempted to paint to her the possible ingratitude and suffering that might be in store for her when she had effected her own complete ruin. At every gloomy suggestion and expression of fear, she uttered indignant protestations, and refused to listen further, and showed a feverish haste to complete the sacrifice.

"No! no! don't try to persuade me into doing what I should be very sorry for afterwards. I am really very avaricious at heart, though I don't let it appear. It has given me a world of trouble to keep it down as well as I have done. Let them have everything. If they will only leave me their love, they may have all that belongs to me!"

"Then," asked the doctor, "it is affection for your cousin that is leading you to strip yourself of your fortune?"

She made no reply, and only blushed.

"But suppose that after a time your cousin should cease to love you."

She stared at him with a frightened look. Her eyes filled with big tears, and her heart broke out into a cry of protesting love.

"No! no! it is impossible! Why do you torture me like this?"

Then Doctor Cazenove consented to do as she wished. He could not summon up the courage to probe further this generous heart that was so sweetly deluded by its great love. Trouble would come to her soon enough.

Madame Chanteau opened the campaign with an astonishing brilliance of intrigue. The thought of the struggle made her feel quite young again. She set off once more to Paris, taking along with her all the necessary powers and authorizations. She quickly won over all the members of the family-council to her own way of thinking. These good people, indeed, had never manifested any great enthusiasm for their duties, and they showed great indifference about the whole matter. The

members of the council who came from the Quenu side of the family, the cousins Naudet, Liardin, and Delorme, sided with her at once, and in the case of the three from Lisa's side, it was only upon Octave Mouret that she had to expend anything like argument; the two others, Claude Lantier and Rambaud, who were both then living in Marseilles, having contented themselves with forwarding to her their written consent. To all of them she had poured out a moving, if somewhat confused, story, and had spoken of the old Arromanches surgeon's love for Pauline, and his manifest intention to leave her all his money if he were permitted to take her under his care. As for Saccard, he, too, acquiesced, as the others had done, after three visits from Madame Chanteau, who suggested a brilliant new idea to him, the monopolizing the supply of butter from the Cotentin, by availing himself of a new system of transport. Pauline's emancipation was formerly pronounced by the family-council, and the ex-naval surgeon Cazenove, of whom the justice of the peace had received the most satisfactory account, was nominated trustee.

A fortnight after Madame Chanteau's return to Bonneville, the auditing of the guardianship accounts took place in the simplest way. The doctor had breakfasted with them, and they sat lingering round the table, discussing the latest news from Caen, from whence Lazare had just returned after a two days' visit, taken there by the threat of an action on the part of "that scamp of a Boutigny."

"By the way," added the young man, "Louise will take you all by surprise when you see her next week. When I saw her, I positively didn't recognise her. She is living with her father now, and she has grown into a quite fashionable young lady. We had a very merry laugh over it."

Pauline looked at him, feeling some surprise at the warmth of his tones.

"Talking of Louise," interrupted Madame Chanteau, "reminds me that I travelled with a lady from Caen who knew the Thibaudiers. I was quite thunderstruck when she told me that Thibaudier would give his daughter a dowry of a hundred thousand francs. With the other hundred thousand she had from her mother, the girl will have two hundred thousand. Two hundred thousand francs! She will be quite wealthy!"

"She could do very well without all that," said Lazare, "for she is as beautiful as Venus, and so bright and graceful too!"

A gloomy expression passed across Pauline's eyes, and her lips were slightly pinched with a nervous contraction. The doctor, who had never ceased to watch her, lifted up his little glass of rum, saying:

"Ah, we haven't clinked glasses yet! Here's to your health, my young friends! Get yourselves married quickly and have a lot of children."

Madame Chanteau slowly raised her glass, and smiled; while her husband, to whom all liqueurs were forbidden, had to content himself with nodding his head approvingly. Lazare had just seized Pauline's hand with such an expression of affection as had sent all the blood from her heart pulsing through the young girl's cheeks. Was she not, indeed, what he called her, his good angel, whose love for him he would adorn with the brilliance of his genius? She returned the pressure of his grasp. Then they all clinked glasses.

"May you live to be a hundred years old!" continued the doctor, who considered that a hundred years was a good and proper age for man to attain to.

Lazare turned pale. The mention of the hundred years by the doctor sent a painful thrill through him, reminding him of the time when he would have ceased to exist, the dread of which was everlastingly lurking within his mind. In a hundred years where would he be? What would he be? What stranger would be sitting drinking wine at this table where he was now sitting? He drained his little glass with a trembling hand, while Pauline, who had grasped hold of the other one, pressed it again with a kind of maternal encouragement, as though she had seen the icy breath of eternity rushing over his pallid face. After a short interval of silence, Madame Chanteau said very seriously,

"Hadn't we better get our piece of business finished now?"

She had settled that the formalities should be gone through in her own room. It would lend an additional solemnity to them, she thought. Chanteau had been able to walk better since he had begun to take salicylic acid. He mounted up the stairs behind his wife, aiding himself by grasping the balustrade. Lazare talked about going out on to the terrace to smoke a cigar, but his mother called him back, and insisted upon his presence. It was only seemly and proper, she said.

The doctor and Pauline had already gone on before. Matthew, who looked at the procession with wondering eyes, followed on behind.

"The dog is quite a nuisance," cried Madame Chanteau, as she tried to shut the door. "One can't go anywhere without being followed by him. Well well! come in then; I can't have you scratching outside. There! no one will come and disturb us now. Everything, you see, is quite ready."

Pens and an inkstand were already laid upon the table. The room was pervaded with all the feeling of closeness and mournful silence that clings round places that are rarely occupied. It was only Minouche who spent her idle hours there, when she could manage to glide inside in a morning; and just now she happened to be lying asleep on the middle of the eider-down quilt. She raised her head in surprise at this invasion, and stared out of her green eyes.

"Sit down! Sit down!" said Chanteau.

Then all the necessary formalities were quickly gone through. Madame Chanteau affected to refrain from all share in the proceedings, leaving her husband to play the part in which she had been carefully coaching him since the day before. In conformity with the requirements of the law, the latter had, ten days previously, delivered to Pauline and the doctor the accounts of his guardianship. The expenses were noted on one side and the receipts on the other, and they formed a quite bulky volume. Everything was charged for, not only Pauline's board and lodging, but also the cost of the journeys to Paris and Caen. All that had to be done was to accept the accounts by a private deed. But Cazenove, taking his office of trustee somewhat seriously, wanted an explanation of the expenses that had been incurred in connection with the sea-weed works, and he made Chanteau enter into certain details. Pauline cast a supplicating glance at the doctor. What was the use of all this? She had herself assisted at the preparation of the accounts, which her aunt had copied out in her most elegantly angular hand.

Minouche was lying all the while on the middle of the eider-down, from whence she had the best view of this strange performance. Matthew, after having lain with his huge head sticking out over the carpet with an air of great wisdom, had just thrown himself over on his back and was rolling and twisting himself about with noisy manifestations of joy.

"Oh, do make him be still, Lazare!" cried Madame Chanteau, quite impatient of the disturbance the dog was making. "One can't hear one's self speak!"

The young man was standing looking out of the window, following a far-off white sail with his eyes in order to conceal the vexation he was suffering. He experienced a feeling of deep shame as he listened to his father, who was giving a detailed account of the moneys which had been lost in the works.

"Make a little less noise, Matthew!" he cried, reaching out his foot.

The dog thought he was going to have his belly rubbed, a proceeding which he dearly loved, and he grew more demonstrative than ever. Happily there was nothing more to be done now than to affix the signatures. Pauline, by a stroke of her pen, hastened to signify her approval of everything. Then the doctor, with an appearance of regret, scrawled an immense flourish over the stamped paper. After this there was an interval of painful silence.

"The assets," said Madame Chanteau, breaking the silence, "amount, then, to seventy-five thousand two hundred and ten francs, thirty centimes. I am going now to hand this sum over to Pauline."

She stepped towards the secrétaire and threw back the lid, which creaked in the dull heavy way that had so often distressed her. But just now she was very grave and formal, and, when she opened the drawer, they saw lying in it the back of the old ledger. It was in just the same condition as before, with its green marbled pattern stained with grease spots, but it was not nearly so bulky. The scrip no longer swelled it out as thickly as it had originally done.

"No! no! aunt," exclaimed Pauline, "keep that!"

Madame Chanteau put on an air of great formality.

"We are giving in our accounts," she said, "and we must give up the money as well. It is your property. You remember what I said to you when I put it there eight years ago? We don't want to take a copper of it for ourselves."

She drew out the papers and insisted on her niece counting them. There was scrip for seventy-five thousand francs, and a small packet of gold, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper, completed the balance.

"But where am I to put it all?" asked Pauline, whose cheeks flushed at the handling of so much money.

"Lock it up in one of your drawers," her aunt replied. "You are big enough now to be able to take care of your own

money. I never want to see it again myself.—Stay! if you really find it so troublesome, give it to Minouche, who is looking very attentively at you."

Now that the Chanteaus had settled their accounts, their cheerfulness returned to them. Lazare, quite at his ease again, was playing with the dog, pulling him round, with his back bent into a circle, after his tail, and making him spin like a top. Doctor Cazenove had already commenced his duties as trustee and was promising Pauline to go and receive her dividends and advise her on the question of investments. At the same time Véronique was bustling about amongst her pans and dishes. She had crept upstairs and had listened, with her ear at the keyhole, to the statement of the accounts. For several weeks past a slowly growing feeling of pity and affection for Pauline had been driving out her remaining prejudices against her.

"To think that they have swindled her out of half of it!" she growled out angrily. "It is abominable! Although she had no right to come settling herself down here, still that was no reason why they should strip her as naked as a worm. No! no! I know what is right and just, and I shall end by quite loving the poor child!"

CHAPTER IV.

On the following Saturday when Louise, who had come on a two months' visit to the Chanteaus, stepped on to the terrace, she found all the family sitting out together there in perfect amity. The hot August day was drawing to a close, and a cool breeze floated up from the sea. The Abbé Horteur had already made his appearance, and was playing draughts with Chanteau. Madame Chanteau was sitting near them, embroidering a handkerchief; and, a few yards further away, Pauline was standing in front of a slab of stone, on which were seated four young urchins from the village, two little lads, and two little girls.

"Hallo! you have got here already," cried Madame Chanteau. "I was just folding up my work to come and meet you at the cross-roads."

Louise gaily explained that old Malivoire had flown along like the wind. She was all right, she said, and did not even want to change her dress; and, while her god-mother went off to see about her room, she hung up her hat on the hasp of one of the shutters. She kissed them all round, and then, all smiling and caressing, she went and threw her arms round Pauline's waist.

"Now let me have a good look at you," she said. "Good gracious! how you have grown. I'm turned nineteen now, you know, and am getting quite an old maid."

Then, after a moment's silence, she added rapidly:

"By the way, I must congratulate you. Oh! don't look so shy! I hear it is settled for next month."

Pauline had returned her caresses with the calm undemonstrative affection of an elder sister, although in reality she was the younger of the two by some eighteen months. A slight blush mantled to her cheeks at the reference to her marriage with Lazare.

"Oh, no! you have been misinformed, really," she replied.

Nothing is definitely fixed, but it will probably be some time in the autumn."

Madame Chanteau, when she was pressed on the subject, had, indeed, in spite of her unwillingness to commit herself to the match in any way, an unwillingness which the two young people were beginning to notice, spoken of the autumn. She was beginning to harp upon her old excuse for delay again, saying that she should much prefer them waiting till Lazare had attained some definite position.

"Ah! I see," said Louise, "you want to make a secret of it. Well, never mind then; but you'll ask me to come, won't you? Where's Lazare? Isn't he here?"

Chanteau, who had just suffered a defeat at the hands of the Abbé, here joined in the conversation, saying:

"Haven't you seen anything of him, Louise? We were expecting you to get here together. He has gone to Bayeux to make an application to the sub-prefect, but he will be back again this evening, almost directly, I should think."

Then he turned to the board again to commence a fresh game.

"I move first this time, I think, Abbé. We shall manage to get some famous dykes made, I fancy; for the department cannot, surely, refuse to make us a grant to help us on with the undertaking."

He was referring to a new scheme which Lazare had taken up with his usual head-long enthusiasm. During the spring-tides of the last March the sea had again carried away a couple of houses at Bonneville. Unless some substantial protecting works were quickly built, it was quite clear that the whole village was threatened with complete destruction by this gradual process of demolition. But the little place, with its thirty cottages, was of so slight importance in the world, that Chanteau, in his capacity of mayor, had been for the last ten years in vain calling the attention of the sub-prefect to the perilous position of the villagers. At last Lazare, spurred on by Pauline, whose great wish was to see her cousin actively employed, had just conceived a grand idea of a system of piles and stakes which would keep back the ravages of the sea. All that was wanted was money, and at least twelve thousand francs would be necessary.

"Ah! I must huff you, my dear sir," said the priest, taking one of Chanteau's pieces.

Then he launched out into details of old Bonneville.

"The old folks say that there was once a farm below the church, and that it was half-a-mile and more from the beach. For five hundred years the sea has been gradually eating away the land. It is surely a punishment for the sins of their ancestors, and the sons are being visited for their fathers' wickedness."

Pauline had now returned to the stone seat, where her four dirty young ragged urchins had been waiting for her.

"Who is it you've got there?" Louise asked of her, not daring to venture too near them.

"Oh! they are some little friends of mine," Pauline replied.

The girl's lively charity found objects in which to interest itself all over the neighbourhood. She had an instinctive affection for the poor and wretched, and she was never repelled by their outcast condition. She even carried this feeling so far as to patch up the broken legs of the fowls with splinters of wood, and to put out at night bowls of soup for homeless cats. Distress of every kind was a source of continual care and occupation to her, and to alleviate it was her great pleasure. So the poor flocked round her with outstretched hands, just as pilfering sparrows swarm round the open windows of a corn loft. The whole of Bonneville, with its handful of fishermen thrown into great distress by the sweeping spring-tides, came up to see the young lady, as they called her. But it was the children who were her especial favourites, the little things with their ragged clothes, through which their pink flesh peeped, poor frail-looking, half-fed creatures, whose eyes glistened wolfishly at the thick slices of bread that Pauline brought out for them. Their cunning parents took advantage of this love of Pauline for the children, and they made a custom of sending up to her the most sickly and ragged ones that they had, that they might gain the greater advantage from her pity and commiseration.

"You see," she said, with a smile, "I have my day at home, Saturday, just like a fashionable lady, and my friends come to see me. Now, now! you little Gonin, just give over pinching that silly little Houtelard. I shall be very cross with you if you don't behave yourselves better. Now, we will begin in order."

Then the distribution commenced. She lectured them, and hustled them about in a quite maternal manner. The first one she called up to her was Houtelard's son, a lad of some ten

years of age, with a sallow complexion and a gloomy and timid expression. He began to show her his leg. He had got a big bruise on his knee, and his father had sent him up to let the young lady see it, that she might give him something for it. It was Pauline who supplied arnica and liniments to all the country round. The pleasure she took in healing had resulted in her gradually acquiring a complete collection of drugs, of which she was very proud. When she had attended to the lad's knee, she lowered her voice and proceeded to give Louise some particulars about the boy's relations.

"They are quite well-to-do people, these Houtelards; the only well-to-do fisher-folks in Bonneville. That big smack, you know, belongs to them. But they are frightfully avaricious and miserly, and they live real dogs' lives in the midst of the most horrible filth and foulness. And the worst of it all is that the father, after having beaten his wife to death, has married his servant, a dreadful woman, who is even more cruel than himself, and between them they are gradually murdering the poor child."

Then, without taking any notice of her friend's expression of disgust, she raised her voice again, and called to another of the children.

"Now, little one, you come here; have you finished your bottle of quinine-wine?"

It was the little daughter of Prouane the verger. She looked like an infant Saint Theresa, marked all over with scrofula, flushed and frightfully thin, with big eyes, in which hysteria was already gleaming. She was eleven years old, but scarcely seemed to be seven.

"Yes, mademoiselle," she stammered out; "I have drunk it all."

"Little story-teller!" cried the Abbé, without glancing away from the draught-board. "Your father smelt quite strongly of spirit last night."

Pauline looked extremely annoyed. The Prouanes had not a boat, but made their living by catching crabs and shrimps, and gathering mussels. With the additional profits of the vergership, they might have lived in decent comfort if it had not been for their drinking habits. The father and mother were often to be seen through the doorway brutally stupefied with calvados, the strong, raw, Normandy brandy, while the little girl stepped over their legs to lick the inside of their

glasses. When no calvados was to be had, Prouane drank his daughter's quinine-wine.

"And when I've taken so much trouble to make it for you!" Pauline said. "Well, for the future, I shall keep the bottle myself, and you will have to come up here every afternoon at five o'clock. I am going to give you a little minced raw meat. The doctor has ordered it for you."

It was a big twelve-year-old boy's turn next, Cuche's son, a lanky stripling, lean and scraggy from his precocious vices. Pauline gave him a loaf and some stewed-meat, and a five-franc piece. His was another miserable story. After the destruction of their house, Cuche had deserted his wife, and had gone to live with a female cousin of his, and his wife was now taking refuge in a ruined old coast-guard watch-house, where, in spite of her ugly looks, she prostituted herself to all the country round. They paid her in food, and sometimes she got two or three sous as well. The lad, who kept with her and shared what she had, was almost starving, but whenever any suggestion was made of rescuing him from this wretched hole, he bolted off like a wild goat. Louise turned her head away with an air of disgust, while Pauline, without the slightest appearance of embarrassment, told her the boy's story. She had grown up in a free and unrestrained way, and she looked with charity's unflinching eye upon the vices of humanity, and recognised their existence, and spoke of them with all the frankness of her own perfect innocence. Louise, on the other hand, initiated by ten years of boarding-school life, blushed at the ideas which Pauline's words suggested to her mind, sophisticated by her dormitory dreams. These were matters which one thought of, but should not mention.

"The other little girl there," Pauline went on, "that fair-haired little child, who is so rosy and bonny, is the daughter of the Gonins, with whom that rascally Cuche has taken up his quarters. She is nine years old. The Gonins were once very comfortably off, and they had a smack of their own, but the father was attacked with paralysis in the legs, a very common complaint in our villages about here, and Cuche, who was only a common sailor to begin with, soon made himself master of both the boat and the wife. Now the whole house belongs to him, and he bullies the poor old man, who passes his days and nights lying inside an old coal chest, while the sailor and his cousin have taken possession of the bed, which

is in the same room. I look after the child myself, but I am sorry to say she comes in for a good many cuffings at home, and she is unfortunately much too shrewd and noticing."

Here Pauline stopped and turned to the child to question her.

"How are they all getting on at home?" she asked.

The child had followed with her eyes Pauline's half-whispered relation. Her pretty rakish face smiled slyly at what she guessed was being said.

"Oh, they've been fighting again," she said, still continuing to smile. "Last night mother got up and seized hold of a log of wood. Ah! mademoiselle, it would be very kind of you if you would give father a little wine, for they have put an empty jug by the chest, telling him that he may drink till he bursts."

Louise turned away in disgust. What horrible people! How could Pauline take any interest in all these dreadful things? Was it really possible that so near a big town like Caen there could exist such hideous places, where people lived in this utterly barbarous fashion? For, surely, they could be nothing less than savages, to thus trample under foot all law, both divine and human.

"There! there! I have had quite enough of your young friends now," she said, in low tones, as she went to sit down near Chanteau. "I should not mourn for them very much, if the sea were to sweep them all away."

The Abbé had just crowned a king.

"Sodom and Gomorrah!" he cried. "I have been warning them for the last twenty years. Well, it will be so much the worse for them."

"I have asked to have a school built here," said Chanteau, feeling a little distressed, as he saw the game going against him; "but there aren't people enough. The children ought to go to Verchemont, but they won't go to school, and they only play about on the roads when they are sent."

Pauline looked up in surprise. If the poor things were clean, she was thinking, there would be no necessity to attempt to make them so. Wickedness and wretchedness existed, and she felt in no way repelled by suffering, even when it seemed to be the consequence of vice. But she confined herself to asserting her charitable tolerance by a gesture of protest. Then she went on to promise the little Gonin that she would come and see her father; and while she was doing so,

Véronique appeared upon the scene, pushing along in front of her another little girl.

"Here's another of them, mademoiselle."

This last comer, who was very young, certainly not more than five years old, was completely in rags, with black face and matted hair. With all the readiness of one already quite accustomed to begging along the high-roads, she at once began to whine and groan.

"Please take pity upon me. My poor father has broken his leg—"

"It's the Tourmals' girl, isn't it?" asked Pauline of Véronique.

But, before the servant could reply, the priest broke out angrily:

"The little hussy! Don't take any notice of her. Her father has been pretending to break his leg for the last five-and-twenty years. They are a family of swindlers, who only live by thieving. The father helps the smugglers. The mother pilfers all the fields about Verchemont, and the grandfather prowls about at night stealing oysters from the Government beds at Roqueboise. You can see for yourselves what they are making of their daughter—a little thief and a beggar whom they send to peoples' houses to lay her hands upon anything that may happen to be lying about. Just look how she is casting glances out of the corner of her eyes at my snuff box!"

The child's eyes had, indeed, after having inquisitively examined every corner of the terrace, flashed brightly upon catching sight of the priest's old snuff-box. She was not in the slightest degree abashed by the Abbé's account of her family history, and resumed her petition as calmly as though he had not spoken a word.

"He has broken his leg. Please, kind young lady, to help us with a trifle."

This time Louise broke out into a laugh. This miserable little five-year-old impostor, who was already as scampish as her parents, quite amused her. Pauline, however, remained perfectly grave and serious, and took out a new five-franc-piece from her purse.

"Now, listen to me," she said, "I will give you as much every Saturday, if I hear a good account of you during the week."

"Look after the silver," the Abbé Horteur cried, "or she will walk off with some of it."

Pauline made no reply to this remark of the priest, and dismissed the children, who slouched off with exclamations of "Thank you, kindly," and "May God reward you."

While this scene had been taking place, Madame Chanteau, who had just come back from the house, where she had been to give a glance at Louise's room, was muttering with vexation at Véronique. It was quite intolerable that the servant should begin to take upon herself to introduce these wretched beggars. Mademoiselle herself brought quite sufficient of them to the house. A lot of scum who robbed her of her money and then laughed at her. Of course the money was her own, and she could play ducks and drakes with it, if she were so disposed, but it was really becoming quite immoral to encourage vice in this way. She had heard the young girl promise a hundred sous a week to the little Tourmal girl. Another twenty francs a month! The fortune of an emperor would not be sufficient for such perpetual extravagance!

"You know very well," she said to Pauline, "that I hate to see that little thief here. Though you are now the mistress of your fortune, I cannot allow you to ruin yourself so foolishly. I am morally responsible. Yes, my dear, I repeat that you are ruining yourself, and that more quickly than you have any notion of."

Véronique, who had gone back to her kitchen, fuming with anger at Madame Chanteau's reprimand, now reappeared.

"The butcher is here!" she cried out roughly. "He wants his bill settled; forty-six francs, ten centimes."

A pang of vexation cut short Madame Chanteau's remarks. She fumbled in her pocket, and then assuming an expression of surprise, she whispered to Pauline—

"Have you got as much about you, my dear? I have no change here, and I shall have to go upstairs. I will give it you back very shortly."

Pauline went away with the servant to pay the butcher. Since she had begun to keep her money in her chest of drawers, the same old comedy had been enacted every time a bill was presented for payment. It was a systematic levy of a series of small amounts which had become to be quite a matter of course. Her aunt no longer gave herself the trouble of going and withdrawing the money herself, but she asked Pauline for it, and

made the girl rob herself with her own hands. At first there had been a pretence of settling accounts, and sums of ten and fifteen francs had been repaid to her, but afterwards they got so complicated that the settlement was deferred till later on, when the marriage should take place; but, in spite of all this, they took care that she should pay for her board with the greatest punctuality on the first day of every month, the sum payable for which had now been raised to ninety francs.

"There's some more of your money making itself scarce!" growled Véronique in the passage. "If I had been you, I would have told her to go and find her change. It is abominable that you should be plundered in this way!"

When Pauline came back with the receipted account, which she handed to her aunt, the priest was radiant with triumph. Chanteau was vanquished; there was not a piece which he could move. The sun was setting, and the sea was crimsoned by its oblique rays, while the tide mounted lazily up. Louise, with a far-off look in her eyes, gazed out with a smile of joy on the wide stretching horizon.

"There's our little Louise up in the clouds," said Madame Chanteau. "I have had your trunk taken upstairs, Louise. We are next-door neighbours again."

Lazare was not expected at home till the following day. After his visit to the sub-prefect at Bayeux, he had taken it into his head to go on to Caen and see the prefect. Though he was not going to bring an actual subvention back with him in his pocket, he was quite convinced, he said, that the council would vote at the very least a sum of twelve thousand francs. The prefect had accompanied him to the door and had bound himself by formal promises, saying that it was quite impossible that Bonneville should be left to its fate, and assuring him that the administration was quite prepared to back up the efforts of the inhabitants of the parish. Lazare, however, could not help feeling very despondent, for he foresaw all sorts of delays, and the least procrastination in the carrying out of one of his schemes was pain and agony to him.

"Upon my word of honour!" he cried, "if I had the twelve thousand francs myself, I should be delighted to advance them. For the first experimental proceedings, indeed, so much would not be necessary. And when we actually do get the money voted, you will see what a heap of worries and delays we shall have to go through. We shall have all the engineers in the

department down here upon our backs. But if we were to make a start without them, they would be obliged to acquiesce in what had actually been done. The prefect, to whom I briefly explained our plans, was quite struck with their advantages and simplicity."

The hope of being able to overpower the sea was now thrilling him with a wild fever of enthusiasm. He had been possessed with a bitter feeling against it, ever since he had considered it responsible for his failure in his scheme for the utilisation of sea-weed; and though he did not venture to openly revile it as the source of his troubles, he harboured within himself the thought of his coming vengeance. And what revenge could be better than to stay it in its course of blind destruction, and to call out to it, as its master, "Thus far shalt thou come and no farther?"

There was, also, in this enterprise which he was undertaking, a spice of philanthropy which joined with the grandeur of his contemplated struggle with the sea to complete his state of mental exaltation. As his mother saw him spending his days in cutting pieces of wood and burying his nose in treatises on mechanics, she thought, with trembling, of his grandfather, the enterprising but blundering carpenter, whose useless masterpiece lay slumbering in its glass case on the mantel-piece. Was the old man going to live over again in his grandson to consummate the ruin of his family? Then she gradually allowed herself to be convinced and won over by the son whom she worshipped. If he were successful, and, of course, he would be successful, it would be the first step to fame, a magnificent accomplishment and a glorious and disinterested work which would make him celebrated. With this as a starting point, he might soar easily as high as he wished, till he had attained whatever position he should care to seek for. Henceforth the whole family dreamt of nothing but conquering the sea and of chaining it to the foot of the terrace, submissive and obedient as a whipped dog.

Lazare's scheme was, indeed, as he had said, one of great simplicity. He proposed to drive great piles into the sand, and to cover them with planks. Behind these, the shingle swept up by the tide would form a sort of impregnable wall against which the waves would break powerlessly; and, by this means, the sea would be forced into building the barrier which shut it out. Posts and long beams carried along upon strong supports, form-

ing a break-water in front of the wall of shingle, would complete the works. Afterwards, if they had the necessary funds, they could construct two or three big stockades by laying bulky beams over an inner framework, whose solid mass would hurl back the very highest tides. Lazare had found the first idea of his scheme in a "Carpenter's Complete Handbook," a little volume with quaint engravings, which had probably been bought long ago by his grandfather. He elaborated and perfected this initial idea, and went into the matter pretty deeply, studying the theory of forces and the resistance of which the different materials were capable, and manifested considerable pride in a novel construction and inclination of the beams, which, he said, could not fail to insure absolute success.

Pauline once more showed great interest in her cousin's studies. Like the young man's, her own curiosity was kept perpetually on the alert by the experiments which they were constantly making in matters to which they had hitherto been strangers. But, with her nature that was more coldly calculating than her cousin's, she did not deceive herself as to the possibility of failure. When she saw the tide mounting up, her eyes wandered with an expression of doubt to the models which Lazare had made and to his miniature piles and stakes and stockades. The big room was now quite filled with them.

One night the young girl lingered till very late at her window. For the last two days her cousin had been talking of burning all his models; and one evening, as they were all seated round the table, he had burst out that he was going to set off to Australia, as there was no room for him in France. She was meditating over all this by her window, while the flood-tide dashed against Bonneville in the darkness. As each wave broke with a shock, she seemed to hear, at regular intervals, the cries of poor creatures whom the sea was swallowing up. Then the struggle which was still waging within her between her love of money and her natural kindness became unendurable, and she closed the window, that she might no longer hear. But the far-away reverberations still seemed to shake her as she lay in her bed. Why not try to attempt even what seemed impossible? What did it matter, throwing all this money into the sea, if there was yet a single chance of saving the village? Then she fell asleep and dreamed till morning of the joy of her cousin, when he should find himself released from all his brooding anxieties and at last embarked, by her help, on a useful career.

In the morning, before going downstairs, she called out to him. There was a happy smile on her face.

"Do you know that last night I dreamt that I had lent you twelve thousand francs?"

Lazare, however, sturdily refused to encourage her in her design.

"Do you want to drive me into setting off and never coming back again? No! we lost quite enough over the sea-weed works. I am really dying with the shame of it!"

Two hours later, however, he accepted Pauline's offer, and pressed her hands in a passionate outburst of gratitude. It was to be an advance and nothing more. His cousin's money would be running no risk, for there was not the least doubt that the subvention would be voted by the council, the more especially when they saw that operations had been actually commenced. That very evening the carpenter from Arromanches was called in. There were endless consultations and walks along the beach, with perpetual making of estimates. The whole family was quite wild over the scheme.

Madame Chanteau, however, had been very indignant when she learned of the loan of twelve thousand francs. Lazare was quite astonished and unable to understand her attitude. His mother attacked him with strange arguments and reasons. No doubt, she said, Pauline had advanced small sums to them at different times, but, if this kind of thing were to go on, she would begin to think herself quite indispensable to them. It would have been very much better to have asked Louise's father to let them open a credit at his bank. Louise herself, who would have a dowry of two hundred thousand francs, did not make nearly so much fuss about her money. Those two hundred thousand francs of Louise's were ever on Madame Chanteau's lips, and seemed to fill her with an angry contempt for the ruins of that other fortune, which had dwindled so much in the secrétaire and was still continuing to dwindle in the chest of drawers.

Chanteau, too, instigated by his wife, pretended to be greatly vexed at the matter. Pauline felt very much hurt. She recognised that they loved her less now, when she was giving them her money, than they had done formerly. There seemed to be a bitter feeling against her, which increased day by day, at the cause of which she could not even guess. Doctor Cazenove found fault with her, too, when she mentioned the subject to

him as a matter of form, but he had been obliged to acquiesce in all the loans, the large ones as well as the small ones. His office of trustee was a mere fiction, and he found himself quite disarmed in this house where he was always received as an old friend. On the day of the loan of the twelve thousand francs he renounced all further responsibility.

"My dear," he said, as he took Pauline aside, "I cannot go on being your accomplice. Don't consult me any more, but ruin yourself just as you like. You know very well that I can never resist your entreaties; and I am really very much troubled about it afterwards, and my conscience feels by no means easy. I had much rather remain ignorant of what I cannot approve."

Pauline looked at him and seemed deeply moved. After a moment's silence, she said:

"Thank you, my dear friend. But am I not really taking the right course? If it makes me happy, what does anything else matter?"

He took her hands within his own and pressed them in a father-like fashion, with an expression of affection that was tinged with sadness.

"Well! well! if it makes you happy. One has to pay quite as much sometimes to make one's self miserable."

As might have been expected, in the enthusiasm of his approaching struggle with the sea, Lazare had entirely abandoned his music. There was a coating of dust upon the piano, and the score of his great symphony was folded away at the bottom of a drawer; a service which he owed to Pauline, who had collected the different sheets together, finding some of them hidden away behind the furniture. With certain portions of it he had grown very much dissatisfied, and he had begun to think that the celestial joy at the final catastrophe, which he had expressed in a somewhat common-place fashion by a valse movement, would be better rendered by the slower time of a march; and one evening he had declared that he would re-write it altogether when he had the leisure.

His blaze of desire and feeling of uneasiness in the close society of his young cousin seemed to have disappeared at the time when his engineering enthusiasm drooped despondently. His great master-piece must be deferred to a more suitable time and his grand passion, which he appeared to be equally conpostponeither to advance or retard, must be similarly ous by began again to treat Pauline as an elderly female friintinually

his recognised and lawful wife, who would give herself to him as soon as ever he opened his arms to her. Since April, they had not shut themselves up in the house so much, and the fresh air was bringing life and colour to their cheeks. The great room was deserted, and the young couple rambled about the rocky beach that spread itself before Bonneville, studying the best situations for the piles and stockades. And, after dabbling about in the water, they came home as tired and as easy in their minds as they had done in the far away days of their childhood. When Louise used sometimes to play the famous March of Death to tease him, Lazare would cry out:

"Will you be quiet, and have done with that rubbish!"

On the evening of the carpenter's visit, Chanteau was seized with another attack of the gout. He had a fresh attack, now, almost every month. The salicylic treatment, though it had at first given him some relief, seemed only in the end to have added to the violence of his seizures. For a fortnight Pauline was a close prisoner at her uncle's bed-side. Lazare, who continued his investigations on the beach, invited Louise to go with him, in order to get her away from the neighbourhood of the sick man, whose cries and groans quite frightened her. As she occupied the guests' bedroom, the one just underneath Chanteau's, she was obliged to stuff her fingers into her ears and to bury her head in the pillows to be able to get any sleep. But when she got out-of-doors, she grew quite beaming and radiant again, enjoying the walk immensely and forgetting all about the poor man who lay groaning inside the house.

They had a delightful fortnight. The young man had at first contemplated his companion with surprise. She was a great change from Pauline, crying out when a crab scuttled past her shoe, and being so frightened of the sea that she thought she was going to be drowned whenever it was necessary for her to jump over a pool. The shingle hurt her little feet, and she never relinquished her hold of her sun-shade, and was for ever gloved up to her elbows, being in a constant state of fear lest the least atom of her delicate skin should get exposed to the sun's rays. But, after his first astonishment, Lazare allowed himself to be attracted by her pretty airs of timidity, and that weakness of hers that seemed to be always appealing to him for toleration. She did not, like Pauline, content herself with the causing-in the fresh breezy air, but she saturated it with her found fauntrope emanations; and it was no longer a boy-like com-

panion that Lazare had at his side, but a young woman, the glimpses of whose stockings, as now and then the wind uncovered them, sent the blood pulsing hotly through his veins. She was not, however, as pretty as Pauline; she was older and seemed already a little faded, but there was a bewitching charm about her, and her small limbs moved with an easy supple motion, and her whole coquettish figure seemed budding out with promises of bliss. She seemed to Lazare to be something quite new and fresh, and he could recognise no trace in her of the scraggy little girl he had formerly known. Could it really be possible that those long years at the boarding-school had been able to turn that very ordinary looking child into such a disquieting young lady, who, virgin though she was, seemed by no means too shy to lay herself out to charm him, and in the depths of whose limpid eyes the falseness of her education glistened. Little by little, Lazare found himself being possessed by a growing admiration of her, and a disturbing passion, which was transforming his old childish friendship into a feeling of refined carnality.

When Pauline was able to leave her uncle's bed-room and resume her companionship with Lazare, she immediately noticed that a new demeanour had sprung up between him and Louise, and unaccustomed glances and laughs, in which she had no share. For the first few days she maintained a sort of maternal attitude, treating them as foolish young things whom a mere nothing was sufficient to amuse. But she soon appeared to grow low-spirited, and the walks seemed only to weary her. She never made any complaint though, and only spoke of persistent headaches; but, later on, when her cousin advised her to stay at home, she seemed vexed, and kept continually with him, even in the house. Once, about two o'clock in the morning, Lazare, who had sat up in his room busily engaged in working out a plan, thought he heard steps outside, and opened his door to look. He was astonished to see Pauline in her petticoats leaning over the balustrade in the dark, listening to the sounds in the rooms below. She explained that she had thought she had heard a cry. But she blushed as she uttered this fib, and Lazare did the same, as a doubt flashed through his mind. From this night, without anything being said, there was a breach in their friendly relationships with each other. Lazare considered that Pauline was making herself very ridiculous by pouting and sulking about mere nothings, while she, continually

growing more gloomy, never left her cousin alone for a moment with Louise, but kept a strict watch over their slightest gestures, and tortured herself the whole evening up in her room, if she had caught them speaking softly to each other as they walked home from the beach.

The operations were commenced. A body of carpenters, after having nailed heavy planks across a framework of piles, succeeded in completing a first buttress against the sea's attack. It was simply meant as a trial, and they hurried along with it, in expectation of a high tide. If the timbers were able to resist the sea's approach, then the system of defence would be completed. It unfortunately happened that the weather was execrable. Heavy downpours of rain fell continually, and all Bonneville got soaked to the skin in coming out to see the piles driven in by the ram. Then, on the morning of the day when the high tide was expected, an inky sky hung gloomily over the sea, and, from eight o'clock, the rain fell with redoubled violence, hiding away the horizon beneath a cold mist. It was an immense disappointment, for the Chanteaus had been planning to make up a family-party to go and watch the victory which their beams and piles were about to win over the attacking flood.

Madame Chanteau determined to remain at home with her husband, who was still far from well. Great efforts, too, were made to induce Pauline to stay indoors, as she had been suffering from a sore throat for a week, and she had caught a slight cold as well, and grew a little feverish towards the evenings. But she rejected all the prudent advice that was offered to her, and was determined to go down to the beach, since Lazare and Louise were going. Louise, fragile as she appeared to be, and seeming continually on the verge of fainting, was really a girl of great physical endurance, whenever any kind of pleasure lent her the strength of excitement.

They all three set off together after breakfast. A breeze of wind had begun to break up the clouds, and glad smiles hailed this unexpected pleasure. The patches of blue sky overhead were so large, though they were still broken by black masses, that the young girls refused to take any other protection than their sun-shades. Lazare alone took an umbrella. He would see that they came to no harm, he said, and would take care to get them under shelter somewhere, if the rain began to fall again.

Pauline and Louise walked on in front. On the steep decline that sloped down towards Bonneville, the latter stumbled on the wet and slippery soil, and Lazare rushed up to her to support her. Pauline followed off behind them. The high spirits she had been in on setting out quickly fell, and her jealous glance noticed that her cousin's arm pressed closely against Louise's waist. This contact between the two was soon the only thing that she had eyes for, and all else had no existence for her; the beach where the fishermen of the neighbourhood were waiting in a somewhat scoffing mood, the mounting tide and the stockade already whitened with foam remained quite unnoticed and unregarded. Away on the horizon there was a black mass of driving storm-clouds.

"What a nuisance!" said the young man, "we are going to have another downpour. But we shall have time to see before the rain comes on, and then we can take refuge close at hand with the Houtelards."

the waves carried off the beams like so many straws. Even if all the neighbourhood was dashed to pieces at the same time, it would still be very amusing.

Suddenly the rain began to pour down in great drops from the mass of black clouds which had covered up three quarters of the sky.

"Oh! this won't do us any harm!" cried Lazare, who was in a state of wild enthusiasm. "Let us stay a little longer. Just look! there isn't a single pile giving!" He had spread out his umbrella over Louise's head. She was pressing close up to his side with the air of a frightened turtle-dove. Pauline, whom they seemed to have quite forgotten, never ceased to watch them. She was feeling morose and angry, and the warmth of the others' pressure against each other seemed to flash out in her cheeks. The rain was now coming down in a perfect torrent. Lazare suddenly turned round and cried out to Pauline:

"What are you thinking of? Are you mad? At any rate open out your sun-shade!"

She was standing up stiff and erect beneath the deluge, which she did not seem to notice. She answered him in a hoarse-sounding voice:

"Don't disturb yourself about me. I am all right."

"Oh! Lazare!" cried Louise, quite distressed, "do make her come here! There is room under the umbrella for all three of us."

But Pauline, in her angry obstinacy, did not even condescend to take any notice of the invitation. She was all right; why couldn't they let her alone? And when Lazare, at the conclusion of his fruitless entreaties, finished by saying:

"It is nothing but folly! Let us run to the Houtelards'!" She answered rudely, "Run wherever you like. I came here to see, and I mean to stop and see."

The fishermen had taken themselves off. Pauline remained alone beneath the pouring rain, with her eyes turned towards the piles, which were now completely covered by the waves. The spectacle seemed to absorb all her attention, in spite of the rainy mist which was now rising up from the sea and obscuring everything. Her streaming dress was stained with big black marks on her shoulders and arms, but she would not leave her place till the west wind had swept away the storm-clouds.

They all three returned homewards in silence. Not a word



LAZARE FINDING PAULINE IN A SWOON

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of what had happened was mentioned to either the uncle or the aunt. Pauline hurried off to change her clothes, while Lazare related the complete success of the experiment. In the evening, as they sat at table, Pauline had a feverish attack, but she pretended that there was nothing the matter with her, in spite of the evident difficulty she had in swallowing every mouthful of food, and she even allowed herself to reply very rudely to Louise, who was distressing herself in her caressing way, and was perpetually asking her how she felt.

"Really the girl is growing quite unbearable with her bad disposition," Madame Chanteau murmured behind Pauline's back. "We had better give over speaking to her."

About one o'clock that night, Lazare was awakened by a hoarse coughing, of such a dry and distressing nature that he sat up in bed to listen. At first he thought it was his mother; then, as he went on straining his ear, he heard a sudden sound of something falling, which made the floor shake. He jumped out of bed and hastily put on his clothes. It could only be Pauline, who must have fallen on the other side of the partition-wall. He broke the matches with his trembling hands, but, at last, when he had succeeded in lighting his candle and came out of his room, he was surprised to find the door opposite open. Lying on her side and barring the entrance was the young girl in her chemise, with her arms and legs quite bare.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "Have you fallen?"

It had just flashed through his mind that she was prowling about again, playing the spy. She made no reply and lay without stirring, and she seemed to him, with her closed eyes, as though she were dead. There could be no doubt that just at the moment when she was leaving her room to seek assistance a fainting-fit had thrown her to the ground.

"Pauline, speak to me, I beg of you! What is the matter with you?"

He had bent down and was holding the light to her face. She was very much flushed, and seemed to be burning with a violent fever. The instinctive feeling of uneasiness which kept him hesitating at the sight of this nude girl without daring to take her up in his arms and carry her off to her bed, gave way before a fraternal anxiety. He no longer observed her nakedness, and he took her up by her back and legs, without for a moment being affected by the contact of her woman's flesh with his own breast. When he had placed her in her bed again, he

began to question her once more, before thinking of covering her up with the bed-clothes.

"For goodness sake, do speak to me! Have you hurt yourself?"

She had just opened her eyes, but she could not speak yet, and she only looked at him with fixed gaze. Then, as he still continued to press her with questions, she put her hand to her throat.

"It is your throat that hurts you, is it?"

Then, in a strange voice, that seemed to come with difficulty and in gasps, she said in very low tones:

"Don't make me speak, please. It hurts me so."

As she said this, she was seized with an attack of coughing, the same hoarse guttural cough as he had heard from his bedroom. Her face turned bluish, and her distress was so great that her eyes filled with tears. She lifted her hands to her poor trembling brow, which was quivering with the hammer-like throbs of a frightful headache.

"You caught that to-day!" he stammered out, in his distress. "It was very foolish of you to do as you did, when you were already far from well!" But he checked himself, as he saw her looking up at him with a gaze of entreaty. With one of her trembling hands she was searching for the bed-clothes. He covered her up closely to the chin.

"Just open your mouth and let me look at your throat."

It was all she could do to separate her jaws. Lazare brought the candle close to her, and with difficulty was able to get a glimpse of the back of her throat, which was dry and gleaming with a bright crimson. Her throat was evidently very sore, and her burning fever and terrible headache, coupled with this soreness of her throat, filled him with alarm. The poor girl's face was racked with such an agonized appearance of choking, that he was torn with a horrible fear of seeing her suffocated before his very eyes. She was not able to swallow, and every attempt to do so made her whole body quiver and tremble. A fresh attack of coughing threw her into another fainting-fit. This drove Lazare into a state of complete panic, and he flew off to thunder with his fists at Véronique's door.

"Véronique! Véronique! Get up! Pauline is dying."

When Véronique, half-dressed and in a terrible scare, entered the young girl's room, she found Lazare excitedly talking to himself in the middle of it.

"What a forsaken hole to be in! One is left to die like a dog! There is no help to be had for at least a couple of miles!"

He strode up to Véronique.

"Try and get some one sent off to the doctor immediately."

The servant stepped up to the bed and looked at the sick girl. She was quite alarmed at seeing her looking so flushed, and her increasing affection for Pauline, whom she had at first so cordially detested, received a painful shock.

"I will go myself," she said quietly. "That will be the quickest way. Madame will be quite able to light a fire downstairs, if you want one."

Then, scarcely yet fully awake, she put on her heavy boots and wrapped her shawl round her; and, after having told Madame Chanteau what was the matter as she went downstairs, she set off with her long strides on the muddy road. Two o'clock rang out from the church, and the night was so dark that she stumbled against the heaps of stones.

"What is the matter?" asked Madame Chanteau, as she came upstairs.

Lazare scarcely answered her. He had just been excitedly ferreting about in the cupboard looking for his old medical treatises, and he was now bending down before the chest of drawers, turning over the pages with his trembling fingers, as he tried to remember something of what he had formerly learned. But everything seemed to be obscure and confused, and he perpetually turned to the index without being able to find what he wanted.

"It's nothing more than a bad sick headache," said Madame Chanteau, who had sat down. "The best thing we can do is to leave her to sleep."

Then Lazare burst out angrily.

"A sick headache! A sick headache, indeed! You are driving me quite mad, mother, by standing there so unconcernedly. Go down stairs and boil some water."

"There is no necessity to disturb Louise, is there?" she asked.

"No, indeed, not the least. I don't require anybody's assistance. If I want anything, I will call to you."

When he was alone again, he went and took hold of Pauline's wrist to count the pulsations. There were one hundred and fifteen; and he felt her burning hand clinging closely and lingeringly to his own. The girl, whose heavy eyelids re-

mained shut, was thanking him and forgiving him in this pressure of her hand. Though she was not able to smile, she still wanted to let him understand that she had heard and was pleased to know that he was there alone with her, without a thought for any one else. Generally, he had a horror of all suffering, and took himself off at the slightest appearance of indisposition in any of his relations, saying that he was a shockingly bad nurse, and was so uncertain of being able to control his nervous excitement that he was afraid of breaking out crying. And so it was a pleasant surprise to Pauline to see him so anxious and devoted. He himself could not have explained the warmth of feeling that was supporting him, or the necessity he felt of trusting to himself only for his cousin's relief. The pressure of her little hand seemed to quite upset him, and he tried to encourage her and cheer her.

"It's nothing at all, my dear. I am expecting Cazenove directly; but we needn't feel the least alarm."

She still kept her eyes closed as she murmured, apparently still in pain:

"Oh! I'm not at all frightened. What troubles me most is to see you so much disturbed."

Then, in a still lower voice that was scarcely above a whisper, she added:

"Have you forgiven me yet? I behaved very wickedly this morning."

He bent down and kissed her brow, as though she were his wife. Then he stepped hastily aside, for his tears were blinding him. The idea occurred to him that he might as well prepare a sleeping-draught while he was waiting for the doctor's arrival. Pauline's little medicine-chest was in a small cupboard in the room. He felt a little afraid lest he should make any mistake, and he looked narrowly at the different phials, and he ended by pouring a few drops of morphia into a glass of sugared water. When she swallowed a spoonful of it, the pain in her throat was so great that he hesitated about giving her a second. There was nothing else he could do. This period of inactive waiting was becoming terribly painful. When he could no longer endure to stand by her bed and watch her suffering, he turned to his books again, hoping to be able to find an account of her sufferings and their remedy. Could it be diptheria that she had got? He had certainly not been able to discover any diseased growth on the roof of her

mouth, but he absorbed himself in the description and treatment of this complaint, and lost himself in a wilderness of long sentences whose meaning he could not gather, and set himself with determination to grope through a series of useless details, like a child who is learning by heart some lesson he cannot understand. By and by, the sound of a sigh brought him hurrying back to the bedside, with his head throbbing and buzzing with scientific terms, whose heavy sounding syllables only served to increase his anxiety.

"Well, how is she going on?" inquired Madame Chanteau, who had come softly upstairs.

"Oh! she keeps just the same," Lazare replied.

Then, in a burst of impatience, he added:

"It is terrible this delay of the doctor! The girl migh die twenty times over!"

The doors had been left open, and Matthew, who slept under the table in the kitchen, had just come up the stairs, with his habit of following people into every room in the house. His big feet pattered on the floor like old woollen slippers. He seemed quite gay in all this commotion in the middle of the night, and he wanted to jump up to Pauline, and sent himself wheeling round after his tail, like an animal quite unconscious of his master's trouble. But Lazare, irritated by this inopportune gaiety, kicked at him with his foot.

"Be off with you, or I'll choke you! Can't you understand you idiot?"

The dog, afraid of a beating, and seeming suddenly to grasp the situation, went to lie down quietly beneath the bed. But Lazare's rough treatment of him had aroused Madame Chanteau's indignation. Without waiting any longer, she went down again to the kitchen, saying, in dry tones, as she went:

"The water will be ready whenever you want it."

Lazare heard her muttering, as she descended the stairs, that it was abominable to strike an animal in such a way, and that he would have gone on to strike her herself if she had remained in the room. Every moment he came to the bedside to glance at Pauline. She seemed now to be quite overcome with fever and utterly prostrate, and the only sign of life was the wheezing of her breath in the mournful silence of the room, a wheezing that was beginning to sound like a death rattle. A wild unreasoning fear again seized upon Lazare

He felt quite certain that the girl would choke very soon if help did not quickly arrive. He fidgeted about the room on tip-toe, glancing perpetually at the time-piece. It was not three o'clock, and Véronique could hardly have got to the doctor's yet. He followed her in imagination through the black night all along the road to Arromanches. By this time she would be passing the oak-wood; now she would be crossing the little bridge, and she would save five minutes by running down the hill. Then a violent desire of tidings of some sort led him to throw open the window, though it was quite impossible to distinguish anything in the midst of the profound darkness. Down in the depths of Bonneville only a single light was gleaming, the lantern, probably, of some fisherman preparing to put off to sea. Everything seemed wrapped in a mournful sadness, like a gloomy far-reaching wilderness in which all life appeared to have laid itself down to die. He closed the window, and then opened it again, only to close it quickly once more. He began to grow forgetful of the passage of time, and he was startled hear three o'clock strike. By this time the doctor must have to got his horse harnessed, and his gig would be spinning along the road, piercing the darkness with the yellow glare of its lamp. Lazare grew so stupefied with impatience as he watched the sick girl's increasing suffocation that he started up as if from a dream, when, about four o'clock, he heard the sound of rapid footsteps on the stairs.

"Ah! here you are, at last!" he cried.

Dr. Cazenove ordered a second candle to be lighted at once that he might see to examine Pauline. Lazare held one of them, while Véronique, whose hair the wind had thrown into wild disorder and who was splashed with mud to the waist, stood at the head of the bed with the other. Madame Chanteau looked on. The sick girl seemed overwhelmed with drowsiness, and could not open her mouth without groaning with pain. When he had laid her gently back in bed again, the doctor, who upon his first entrance had shown signs of great uneasiness, stepped into the middle of the room with an expression of relief.

"That Véronique of yours put me into a pretty fright," he said. "She told me such a lot of terrible things that I thought the girl must have got poisoned, and you see that I have come with my pockets crammed with drugs"

"It is a sore throat, is it not?" Lazare asked.

"Yes, a simple sore throat. There is no occasion for alarm at present."

Madame Chanteau indulged in a little gesture of triumph, as much as to say that she had known that quite well.

"No occasion for alarm at present!" repeated Lazare, his fears rising again. "Are you afraid of complications?"

"No," answered the doctor, after a slight hesitation, "but with these tiresome throat complaints one can never feel quite sure of anything."

He told them that there was nothing more to be done just then, and that he would prefer waiting till the next day to bleed the patient. But as the young man pressed him to take at any rate some alleviating measures, he expressed his readiness to apply sinapisms. Véronique brought up a bowl of warm water, and the doctor himself placed the damped leaves in position, slipping them along the girl's legs from her ankles to her knees. But they were only a discomfort the more for her, for the fever continued unabated and her head went on throbbing frightfully. Emollient gargles were also suggested, and Madame Chanteau prepared a decoction of briar leaves, which had to be laid aside after the first attempt to administer it, for Pauline was quite unable to endure the least motion of her throat from pain. It was nearly six o'clock, and the day was breaking when the doctor went away.

"I will come back about noon," he said to Lazare on the landing. "Be quite easy. She is all right, except for the pain."

"And is the pain nothing?" cried the young man. "One should never have to suffer like that!"

Cazenove glanced at him, and then raised up his hands to heaven at such an extraordinary pretension.

When Lazare returned to Pauline's room, he sent away his mother and Véronique to get a little sleep. He himself could not have slept if he had tried. He watched the day breaking in the disordered room with all the sad mournfulness of dawn after a night of agony. With his brow pressed against the window, he was looking out hopelessly at the gloomy sky, when a sudden noise made him turn his head. He thought it was Pauline getting up in bed, but it was Matthew who had been forgotten by every one, and who had, at last, crept from under the bed to go to the young girl, whose hand was hanging down over the counterpane. The dog was licking Pauline's hand

with such affectionate gentleness that Lazare, quite touched at the sight, put his arm round his neck, as he said:

"Ah! my poor fellow, your mistress is ill, you see; but she will soon be all right again, and then we three will set off on our rambles once more."

Pauline had opened her eyes, and in spite of the painful contraction of her face, she broke out into a smile.

A period of suffering and sadness followed. Lazare, acting upon an impulse of wild affection, refused access to the sick room to everyone. He would barely allow his mother and Louise to enter it in the morning to inquire how Pauline was; and Véronique, in whom he recognised a genuine affection for his cousin, was the only one whose presence he tolerated At the commencement of Pauline's illness, Madame Chanteau tried to make him understand the impropriety of a young man thus taking upon himself the office of nurse to a young girl, but he retorted by asking if he were not her husband, and by saying that doctors attended women equally as men. Between the two young people themselves there was not the slightest feeling of uneasiness. Suffering and, it might be, the approach of death, overwhelmed their senses. Lazare rendered his cousin all necessary little services. He raised her up in her bed and assisted her to lie down again, like a pitying brother who saw no object of desire in this poor body all quivering with fever. It was like a continuation of their healthy-minded childhood, a revival of the chaste nakedness of their early bathings, when he used to treat her simply as a comrade. The world ceased to have any existence for them. The only matters that had any interest for them were seeing that the draughts were taken at the proper times, and waiting hour by hour for the more favourable report of the sick girl's progress, which they had been so long vainly expecting. The minor details of the mere physical life assumed suddenly an enormous importance, as on them depended their joy or sorrow. The nights followed the days, and Lazare's existence seemed to be hanging suspended over a deep abyss into the black darkness of which he was momentarily in terror of falling.

Doctor Cazenove came to see Pauline every morning, and sometimes he came again in the evening after his dinner. Upon his second visit to her he had determined to bleed her freely. The fever, however, which was checked for a time, reappeared. Two days passed by, and he was evidently disturbed

in his mind, not being able to understand the tenacity with which this fever clung to her. And as the girl felt an ever-increasing pain in opening her mouth, he was not able to make an examination of the back of her throat, which seemed to him to be much swollen and of a deep crimson colour. At last, as Pauline complained of an increasing tightness, which made her neck feel as though it were going to burst, the doctor said to Lazare one morning:

"I am beginning to suspect that there is a phlegmon."

The young man drew him aside into his own room. He had just been reading the previous evening, as he was sitting and turning over the pages of his old Manual of Pathology, the chapter on retro-pharyngial abscesses which project into the œsophagus, and are apt to cause death by suffocation from compressing the wind-pipe.

He turned very pale as he asked:

"Then she is going to die?"

"I trust not," the doctor answered. "We must wait and see what happens."

But the doctor himself could not conceal his uneasiness. He confessed that he was almost powerless in the present circumstances of the case. How could they search for an abscess at the back of this contracted mouth? And, besides, to open it too soon was attended with grave danger. The best thing they could do seemed to be to leave the matter in the hands of nature; which, however, would probably result in the affair being very protracted and painful.

"I am not God," he exclaimed, when Lazare reproached him with the uselessness of his science.

The affection and anxiety with which Doctor Cazenove felt for Pauline showed itself in an increased affectation of brusque carelessness. The tall old man, who seemed to be as dry as a branch of briar, was really much affected. For more than thirty years he had knocked about in the world, changing from vessel to vessel, and labouring in hospitals all over the colonies. He had followed his calling amidst epidemics on board ship and the frightful diseases of the tropics; he had tended elephantiasis at Cayenne and serpent bites in India; he had killed men of every colour; had studied the effects of poison on the bodies of Chinese, and had risked the lives of negroes in delicate experiments in vivisection. And now this young girl, with a soreness in her throat, so wrought upon his

feelings that he could not sleep, and his iron hands shook and trembled, and his callousness to death failed him, fearful as he was of a fatal issue to her illness. And so, wishing to conceal an emotion which he considered unworthy of him, he made a pretence of affecting a heedlessness and contempt of suffering. People were born to suffer, he said, so why make a fuss about it?

Every morning Lazare said to him:

"Do try something else, doctor, I beg of you. It is terrible. She cannot get a moment's ease. She has been crying out all the night."

"Well, but confound it all, it isn't my fault!" the doctor replied, working himself up to a high pitch of indignation. "I can't cut off her neck to cure her."

Then the young man grew vexed in his turn, as he said:

"Then it seems that medicine is worth nothing."

"Nothing at all, when the machine is out of order. Quinine arrests fever, and purgatives act upon the bowels, and bleeding is useful in apoplexy, but it's a happy-go-lucky business with almost everything else. We must leave it to nature."

These remarks were extorted from him by his anger at not being able to discover what course of treatment to adopt. It was not his ordinary custom to so roundly deny the power of medicine, having practised it too much to be sceptical or modest as to its merits. For whole hours he would sit by the girl's bedside, watching her and studying her, and then he would go away without even leaving a single instruction behind him, not knowing what to do, and compelled to leave the abscess to complete its development, while he recognised that a line's breadth more or less in its size might make all the difference between life and death.

For a whole week Lazare gave himself up to the most terrible alarm. He, too, was in perpetual fear of seeing a cessation of the vital operations. At every painful and difficult respiration he thought that all was over. He formed in his mind a vivid picture of the phlegmon, and saw it blocking up Pauline's wind-pipe with its huge dimensions; if it were only to swell out a very little more her breath would no longer be able to pass. His two years of scarcely understood medical study served to increase his alarm. His fears made him lose his head, and he broke out into a sort of nervous mutiny and excited protest against life. Why was this frightful suffering permitted? Was not all this bodily torture, all this writhing

and burning pain horribly useless and purposeless when disease attacked a poor girl's frail body with all its delicate pallor? He was for ever at her bedside, questioning her perpetually, even at the risk of fatiguing her. Was she still in pain? How was she feeling now?

Sometimes he would take her hand and lay it upon his neck. It felt like an intolerable weight, like a ball of molten lead, which throbbed till it almost choked him. Her headache never left her. She did not know where or how to lay her head, and she was tortured by sleeplessness. In the ten days during which the fever had racked her, she had scarcely slept for a couple of hours. One evening, to make things still worse, she had a frightful pain in her ears, and she fainted from very suffering, feeling as though her jaw-bones were being crushed. But she did not confess to Lazare all the agony she was enduring. She showed great courage and fortitude, recognising that he was almost as ill as she was herself, with her blood burnt up with fever, and her throat choked with the abscess. She frequently even told fibs, and forced a smile to her lips when racked by the keenest suffering. She was feeling easier, she would say, and she would beg him to go and take a little rest. One of the most painful features was that she could not swallow her saliva without breaking out into a cry, so much was the back of her throat swollen. At the sound of her cry Lazare would start up suddenly in alarm, and would begin to question her afresh as to what was the matter, and where did she feel pain? Then, with her eyes closed, and her face torn by pain, she would try to deceive him and whisper that it was a mere nothing, that something had tickled her, and that was all.

"Go to sleep and don't make yourself uneasy. I am going to sleep myself, now."

Every evening she went through this pretence of going to sleep, in order to induce him to go and lie down, but he persisted in watching over her in his arm-chair. The nights were so full of anguish that they never saw the evening coming on without a sort of superstitious terror. Would they ever see the sun again?

One night Lazare was leaning against the bed, holding Pauline's hand in his own, as he often did, to let her know that he was there and was not deserting her. Doctor Cazenove had gone away at ten o'clock, angrily exclaiming that he

could answer for nothing any longer. The young man was deriving some consolation from the fact that Pauline herself was not aware that she was in any imminent danger. In her hearing a mere inflammation of the throat was only spoken of, which, though it was very painful, would pass away as easily as a cold in the head. The girl herself seemed quite easy and tranquil, and she bravely kept up a cheerful countenance in spite of her suffering. She smiled brightly as she heard them making plans and projects for the time when she would be well again. To-night she had listened once more to Lazare as he had arranged a walk on the beach for the first day that she was able to go out. Then they grew silent, and she seemed to be asleep, but after an interval of a quarter of an hour or so she said in clear tones:

"You will have to marry some other girl, I think, my dear."

He stared at her without being able to reply for some time, feeling chilled to his bones.

"Why do you say that?" he asked at last.

She had opened her eyes, and was looking at him with her expression of brave resignation.

"Ah! I know what is the matter with me, and I am glad that I do, for I shall be able to kiss you all good-bye."

Then Lazare grew quite angry. It was insane to think such things. Before a week was over she would be walking about. He let go her hand and made an excuse for hurrying away to his own room, for he felt as though he were going to choke. When he got there he threw himself down in the darkness upon his bed, on which he had not slept for a long time. A frightful feeling of certainty had suddenly frozen his heart. Pauline was going to die, perhaps that very night. And the thought that she knew it, and that her silence on the subject hitherto was owing to her courageous consideration for the feelings of others, even in the imminent presence of death, completed his despair. Already he saw them saying their last good-bye. All the mournful scene unfolded itself before his eyes with heart-rending detail in the darkness of his room. It was the end of everything, and he grasped his pillow in his arms convulsively, and buried his head in it to drown the sound of his sobs.

The night, however, passed away without any catastrophe. Then two days went by without any noticeable change in the patient's condition. Between her and Lazare a new bond had now sprung up, the continual nearness of death. Pauline made

no further allusion to her critical state and forced herself to look cheerful, while Lazare succeeded in feigning a perfect tranquillity of demeanour and a complete confidence in seeing her able to leave her bed in a few days, though they knew that they were ever bidding each other good-bye in the long, loving glances of their meeting eyes. At night-time, especially, as he sat watching by her bedside, they recognised that each other's thoughts were full of their threatened eternal separation which kept them reflective and silent. Never before had they experienced such a melting sadness or felt such a complete union existing between them.

One morning, as the sun was rising, Lazare felt quite astonished at the calmness with which he was able to contemplate the idea of death. He ransacked his memory and he could only recall one occasion since the commencement of Pauline's illness when he had felt a cold shudder from his head to his feet at the thought of ceasing to be. He had trembled, indeed, at the idea of losing his companion, but that was another kind of fear into which no thought of the destruction of his own personality entered. His heart bled within him, indeed, but it seemed as though this combat which he was waging with death put him upon an equality with the foe and gave him courage to look it calmly in the face. Perhaps, too, his fatigue and anxiety filled him with a drowsiness and weariness which numbed his fears. He closed his eyes that he might not see the rising sun, and tried to make himself feel all his old thrills of horror, as he sought to excite his fears by telling himself that he, too, would have to die some day. But no reply came; all that seemed to have become quite indifferent to him and to have ceased to have any power to affect him. Even his pessimism seemed to be extinguished in the presence of this sick-bed; and far from hounding him on to expressions of hatred and contempt of the world, his mutinous outbursts against pain and suffering arose only from a passionate longing for robust health and a wild love of life. He no longer talked of blowing the earth into bits, as a worn-out and uninhabitable planet. The one image which ever haunted his mind was Pauline, well and hearty, walking along with him beneath the bright sunshine with her arm passed through his; and the only necessity he felt was that of once more taking her, with her step again firm and her laugh gay and ringing, along the walks over which they had formerly rambled together.

It was on this day that Lazare felt sure that the presence of death was at hand. Ever since eight o'clock in the morning Pauline had been seized with attacks of sickness, and each successive one brought on dangerous symptoms of suffocation. Soon trembling fits supervened, and the poor girl shook so terribly that her teeth could be heard clattering against each other. Lazare, in a state of frightful alarm, shouted out orders from the window for a lad to be sent at once to Arromanches, although the doctor was expected, as usual, at eleven o'clock. The house was wrapped in a mournful silence, and there was a sad sense of emptiness about it, now that Pauline's gay activity no longer animated it. Chanteau spent his days downstairs in moody silence, with his eyes fixed on his legs, fearing lest he should be seized with another attack of gout while there was no one to nurse him. Madame Chanteau forced Louise to go out of the house, and the two of them spent most of their time in the open air, and had by this time become very intimate and familiar with each other. It was only Véronique's heavy step that was everlastingly going up and down stairs that broke the silence of the landings and empty rooms. Lazare had gone three times to lean over the balustrade, in his impatience to learn whether the servant had been able to get any one to take the message to the doctor. He had just come back into Pauline's room and was looking at the sick girl, who appeared to be a little easier, when the door, which he had left half-open, creaked slightly.

"Well, Véronique?" he said.

But it was not Véronique, it was his mother. During the day she was intending to take Louise to stay with some of her friends in the neighbourhood of Verchemont.

"Little Cuche has just gone," she said. "He can run very quickly."

Then, after a short interval of silence, she asked:

"Is she no better?"

Lazare made no answer, but with a hopeless gesture he pointed to Pauline, who was lying as motionless as though she were quite dead, with her pale face bathed in a cold perspiration.

"Ah! we won't go to Verchemont, then," his mother continued. "It seems very tenacious, this mysterious disease which no one seems to understand. The poor girl has been sorely tried."

She sat down and went on chattering in the same subdued monotonous voice.

"And we had meant to start by seven o'clock, but it happened that Louise overslept herself. Everything seems to be coming at once this morning; it almost looks as though it were done on purpose. The grocer from Arromanches has just been with his bill, and I have been obliged to pay him, and now the baker is downstairs. We have spent forty francs again during the last month in bread. I can't imagine where it all goes to!"

Lazare was paying not the least attention to what she was saying; he was too much absorbed by his fear of seeing a return of the shivering-fits. But the dull sound of this flood of talk irritated him, and he tried to get his mother to leave the room.

"Will you go and give Véronique a couple of towels and tell her to bring them up to me?" he said.

"Of course I shall have to pay the baker," his mother resumed, as though she had not heard him. "He has spoken to me, and so they can't tell him that I have gone out. If Pauline were not unfortunately so ill she would advance me the ninety francs for her board. It is the twentieth to-day, so that it is only ten days before it is due. The poor child seems so very weak—"

Lazare turned suddenly round towards her.

"Well, what is it you want?"

"You don't happen to know where she keeps her money, do you?"

"No!"

"I dare say it's in her chest of drawers. You might just look."

He refused with an angry gesture, and his hands quivered.

"I beseech you, mother, for pity's sake, to go away."

These last remarks had been hurriedly muttered at the far end of the room. There was a moment of painful silence, which was broken by a clear voice speaking from the bed.

"Lazare, just come and take the key from under my pillow, and give my aunt what she wants."

They were both quite startled. Lazare began to protest, being very unwilling to open the drawer; but he was obliged to give way, in order not to distress Pauline. When he had given his mother a hundred-franc-note, and had slipped the key under

Pauline's pillow again, he saw that the poor girl was seized with another trembling-fit, which shook her like a young aspen, and seemed to nearly break her into pieces. Two big tears trickled out of her closed eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

Doctor Cazenove did not arrive before his usual time. He had seen nothing of little Cuche, who was probably larking about amongst the hedges. As soon as he had heard what Lazare had to say and had cast a hasty glance at Pauline, he cried out:

"She is saved!"

The sickness and the alarming fits of trembling were merely indications that the abscess had at last broken. There was no more occasion to fear suffocation, and the complaint would now gradually cure itself. Their joy was very great, and Lazare accompanied the doctor out of the room; and as Martin, the old sailor who had taken service with the doctor, drank a bumper of wine in the kitchen, everyone wanted to clink glasses with him. Madame Chanteau and Louise were stripping the husks off some walnuts.

"I never felt really alarmed," said the former. "I felt quite sure there was nothing serious the matter with her."

"That didn't prevent the poor dear from having an awful time of it," Véronique exclaimed. "I'm more pleased than if some one had given me a hundred sous."

Just at that moment the Abbé Horteur came in. He had called to make inquiries, and he drank a glass of wine that he might do as all the rest were doing. Every day he had come in this way like a kindly neighbour; for, on his first visit, Lazare had told him that he could not see the patient for fear of alarming her, and the priest had quietly replied that he quite understood that, and he had contented himself with mentioning the poor girl's name when he was saying his masses. Chanteau, as he clinked glasses with him, complimented him upon his tolerance.

"Well, you see, she is coming nicely round without the help of an *Oremus!*"

"Every one is saved after his own fashion," the priest declared sententiously, as he emptied his glass.

When the doctor had left, Louise wanted to go upstairs to kiss Pauline. The poor girl was still suffering much pain, but it did not seem to be considered of much account now. Lazare cried out to her gaily to take courage, and he quite dropped

all pretences now, and even began to exaggerate the danger she had passed through, telling her that three times he had believed that she was lying dead in his arms. Pauline, however, manifested no exuberant delight at being saved; but she was fully penetrated with the sweet joy of life, though she had had the courage to look calmly upon the approach of death. Expressions of loving emotion passed over her worn sad face as as she pressed her cousin's hand and murmured to him smilingly:

"Ah! my dear, you can't escape, after all, you see. I shall be your wife yet."

Her convalescence was heralded in by long slumbers. She slept for whole days, quite calmly, breathing easily and regularly, and buried in a strength-restoring torpor. Minouche, who had been banished from the room during the invalid's period of prostration, took advantage of this time of quietness to slip in again. She jumped up lightly on to the bed, and lay down immediately, with her body curved round into a circle close to her mistress's side. She spent her days there, revelling in the warmth of the blankets, and sometimes she would devote herself to the making of interminable toilets, wearing away her fur by constant licking, but performing her operations so quietly and carefully that Pauline could not even tell that she was moving at all. At the same time Matthew, who, equally with Minouche, was now granted free access to the room, snored like a human being on the carpet by the side of the bed.

One of Pauline's first fancies was to have, on the following Saturday, her young friends from the village brought up to her room. She had just began to be allowed to eat boiled eggs after the very spare diet to which she had been subjected for three weeks. She was able to sit up to receive the children, though she was still very weak. Lazare had had to go to the drawer again to find her some hundred-sou-pieces. After she had questioned her pensioners and had insisted upon paying off what she called her arrears, she was so thoroughly exhausted that she had to be put back to bed in a fainting condition. She manifested a great interest in the piles and stockades, and asked every day if they still remained firmly in position. Some of the timbers had already given way, and her cousin told her a fib when he said that only a plank or two had got a little loose. One morning, when she was alone, she slipped out of bed, wishing to see the high tide dashing against the stockades

in the distance; and, this time again, her budding strength played her false, and she would have fallen to the ground if Véronique had not come into the room just in time to catch her in her arms.

"Ah! you naughty girl! I shall have to fasten you down if you don't behave yourself more sensibly!" Lazare said to her with a smile.

He still persisted in watching over her, but, completely worn out with fatigue, he used to drop asleep in his arm-chair. At first he had felt a lively joy in seeing her drink her broth. The young girl's restored health was a source of exquisite pleasure to him; it was a renewal of life of which he felt that he himself partook. But afterwards, when he had grown accustomed to it, and all the pain and suffering had past away, he ceased to rejoice over it as over some unhoped-for blessing. And all that was left to him was a sort of stupor-like feeling, and a nervous relief that the struggle was over, and a confused notion that the hollowness of everything was making itself manifest again.

One night as he was sleeping soundly Pauline heard him start up with a sigh of agony. By the feeble glimmer of the night-light she caught a glimpse of his terror-stricken face, of his eyes staring wildly with horror, and his hands clasped together in an attitude of supplication. He stammered out some incoherent words:

"Oh God! God!"

She stretched herself towards him with hasty anxiety, as she cried out:

"What is the matter with you, Lazare? Are you in pain?"

The sound of her voice made him start. He had been observed then! He sat silent and vexed, and could hit upon nothing to say but a clumsy fib.

"There's nothing at all the matter with me. It was you yourself who were crying out just now."

The horror of death had just come back to him in his sleep, a horror without any exciting cause which had been born of blank nothingness, and whose icy breath had awakened him with a horrible shudder. Oh God! he thought, he would have to die one day. This thought took possession of him, and seemed to be choking him, while Pauline, who had laid her head back again on her pillow, watched him with an air of motherly pity and compassion.

CHAPTER V.

EVERY evening, in the dining-room, when Véronique had cleared the table, Madame Chanteau and Louise chatted together, while Chanteau, buried in his newspaper, confined himself to giving monosyllabic replies to his wife's rare questions. During the whole fortnight when he was so much alarmed about Pauline, Lazare had never joined the family at dinner, but he had now begun to dine downstairs again; though, directly the meal was over, he went back to his post at the invalid's bed-side. He scarcely closed the door behind him before Madame Chanteau began with her old complaints.

At first she affected a loving anxiety.

"Poor boy!" she said, "he is quite wearing himself out It is really foolish of him going on endangering his health in this way. He has scarcely had any sleep for the last three weeks. He is paler than ever to-day."

Then she would have a word or two of pity for Pauline. The poor dear seemed to suffer so much that it was impossible to stay in her room for a minute without a heart-ache. But she soon began to harp upon the trouble and disturbance the sick girl was causing in the house. Everything was kept, she said, in a state of confusion; their meals were always cold, and there was no relying upon anything. Here she broke off suddenly, and, turning to her husband, she asked him:

"Has Véronique been able to find time to give you your marsh-mallow-water?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, from behind his newspaper.

Then she lowered her voice, and addressed herself to Louise.

"It is very peculiar, but that poor Pauline seems to have brought us nothing but misfortune. And yet there are some people who persist in looking upon her as our good angel. I know the stories that are floating about. At Caen, they say, don't they, Louise, that we have grown quite rich through her. Rich, indeed! I should just think so! You may speak to me

quite frankly, for I am quite above taking any notice of their slanderous gossip."

"Well, indeed, they do talk about you, just as they talk about everybody else," the girl murmured. "Only last month I was obliged to snub a notary's wife, who allowed herself to begin speaking on the subject, without knowing anything at all about it. You can't prevent people talking, you know."

After that, Madame Chanteau made no attempt to veil her real feelings. There was no doubt, she said, that they were suffering from their own generosity. Had they wanted anyone's assistance before Pauline came? And where would she have been now, in what Paris slum, if they had not consented to take her into their house? It was all very fine for people to talk about her money, but that money had never been anything but a source of trouble and misfortune to them all, and it seemed to have brought nothing but ruin to them. The facts spoke clearly enough for themselves. Her son would never have launched out into those idiotic speculations in sea-weed, and would never have wasted his time in trying to prevent the sea from sweeping Bonneville away, if that unlucky Pauline had not turned his head. If she had lost her money, well, it was her own fault. Her poor son had wrecked both his health and his future. Madame Chanteau could hardly find words strong enough with which to inveigh against those hundred and fifty thousand francs of which her secrétaire still reeked. It was the large sums which had been swallowed up and lost, and the small amounts which were still being daily abstracted and increasing the deficit, that threw her off her head and made her so bitter, as though her nose was catching a whiff from a mass of putrescence in which she felt that her own honesty was rotting away. By this time the putrefaction was complete, and she execrated Pauline for all the money that she owed her.

"What is the good of talking to such a pig-headed creature?" she resumed, bitterly. "She is horribly miserly at heart, and, at the same time, she is recklessness itself. She will toss twelve thousand francs to the bottom of the sea for the Bonneville fishermen, who only laugh at us, and will support all the filthy brats in the neighbourhood, while I perfectly tremble, upon my word of honour I do, if I have to ask her for forty sous. What do you think of that? For all her pretence of charity to others, she has got a heart of stone!"

Véronique was often in and out of the room, clearing away

the dishes or bringing in the tea, and she loitered to listen to what was being said, and sometimes she even ventured to hazard a remark.

"Mademoiselle Pauline got a heart of stone! Oh, madame! how can you say so?"

Madame Chanteau reduced her to silence by a sternly angry look. Then, leaning her elbows upon the table, she commenced a series of complicated calculations, as though she were talking to herself.

"I've got nothing more to do with her money now, thank goodness, but I should like to know how much of it there is left. Not more than seventy thousand francs, I'll be bound. Just let us reckon it up a little. There are three thousand gone already in this experimental stockade; then there are, at least, two hundred francs going every month in charity, in addition to the ninety francs for her board here. All that counts up quickly. It would be very safe to bet that she will ruin herself, Louise. You will see her reduced to lying on straw one of these days. And when she has quite ruined herself, who will take her in, and how will she manage to live?"

Véronique could not restrain herself, and she broke out:

"I'm sure madame could never think of turning her out of doors?"

"What do you mean? What are you speaking about?" her mistress demanded angrily. "There's no talk of anyone being turned out of doors. I never turned anyone out of doors. What I said was that nothing can be more foolish, when one has had a fortune of one's own, to go and fritter it all away and become dependent upon other people's bounty. Go away to your kitchen."

The servant went off, grinding out muttered protests from between her teeth. Then there was an interval of silence, during which Louise poured out the tea. The only sound in the room was the slight rustling of the newspaper, which Chanteau was reading completely through, not missing even the advertisements. Now and then he spoke a work or two to the young girl.

"You might give me another piece of sugar, please.— Have you had a letter from your father yet?"

"No, indeed," she answered, with a smile. "But if I am in the way, I can leave at any time, you know. You have quite sufficient trouble with Pauline's illness. I would rather have gone away before, but you insisted upon my staying."

"You mustn't talk like that," he interrupted. "It is only too kind of you to give us the pleasure of your society till poor Pauline can get downstairs again."

"I can easily go to Arromanches till my father comes, if I am in the way," she continued, as though she had not heard him, and merely for the sake of teasing him. "My aunt Léonie has taken a villa there, and there are plenty of people there, and a good beach where one can at any rate bathe. But she is a little wearisome and monotonous, my aunt Léonie."

Chanteau laughed at the girl's pretty fondling manner. Though he dare not confess it to his wife, he was entirely on the side of Pauline, who nursed and tended him so kindly and carefully. He buried himself in his newspaper again, while Madame Chanteau, who had been immersed in deep reflections, started up suddenly, as though she had just awakened from a dream.

"There is one thing which I cannot forgive her. She has completely taken possession of my son. He scarcely stops at the table for a quarter-of-an-hour, and I can hardly get a single word with him."

"That will soon be over," said Louise. "She must have some one to be with her."

Madame Chanteau shook her head, and her lips were closely compressed; but the words, which she seemed to be trying to suppress, broke out, apparently in spite of her.

"It is all very well to say that, but it's a little peculiar for a young man to be perpetually shut up with a sick girl. There! I've said what I mean, and haven't kept it back, and if it doesn't please everybody, I can't help it."

Then, seeing Louise's embarrassed look, she added:

"It isn't healthy to breathe the atmosphere of a sick-room. She may very easily infect him with her sore throat. These young girls who seem so vigorous have sometimes all sorts of impurities in their blood. Well, I don't know why I shouldn't say it, but I don't think she is quite sound and healthy."

Louise went on gently to defend her friend. She had always found her so nice and kind; and that was the only argument which she contrived to bring forward in reply to the accusation of a stony heart and ill health. An instinctive desire for tranquil peace and quietness induced her to try to mitigate Madame Chanteau's too noisy ill-feeling, although every day she listened to her, with a smile on her face, exceeding her bitterness of the

day before. She made some kind of protest against the harshness of Madame Chanteau's language, but she flushed with concealed pleasure at finding herself now preferred to Pauline, and being promoted to the position of favourite. She was like Minouche in that, she was perfectly willing to adopt a caressing, affectionate attitude towards other people, so long as they did not interfere with her own enjoyment.

Every evening the conversation, after having flowed along in the same channels, always ended in the same way, by Madame Chanteau saying slowly and deliberately:

"No, my little Louise, the girl that my son should marry—"

And then from that starting-point she would launch out into a disquisition upon the qualities of the ideal daughter-in-law, while her eyes would all the time remain fixed upon Louise, as she tried to make her understand more than she was willing to actually say. It was the girl's own self that was being gradually described. A young girl, who had been well brought up and educated, who had acquired a knowledge of society and who was fitted to play the part of hostess, who was graceful rather than pretty, and, what was especially desirable, who was truly feminine and lady-like, for the boy-like girl, who made frankness a pretence for being rough and rude, was, she said, her detestation. Then there was the question of money, which was really the only one that influenced her, and this she affected to dismiss with a word, saying that though, of course, she made no account of a dowry, still her son had great schemes and aims for the future, and could not afford to contract any marriage that would be likely to lead to ruin.

"I may tell you, my dear, that if Pauline had come here without a sou and with nothing but the chemise she wore, the marriage would probably have taken place years ago. But you can't be surprised at my hesitation and distrust, when I see the money slipping through her hands like water. The sixty thousand francs she has still left won't trouble her very much longer, I fancy. No! Lazare is worthy of a better fate than that, and I will never consent to his marrying a fool who is so close and niggardly about the cost of her board, only that she may ruin herself with idiotic follies."

"Ah, no! money counts for nothing," said Louise, bending down her eyes, "and yet it is quite necessary."

Without Louise's dowry being directly referred to, her two

hundred thousand francs seemed to be lying there upon the table, glistening beneath the subdued glow of the hanging lamp. It was because she saw them and was conscious of them that Madame Chanteau was becoming thus excited, and scorned and swept aside by a gesture Pauline's poor sixty thousand, and dreamed of winning this new-comer for her son with her great fortune still quite intact. She had noticed Lazare's attraction towards Louise before all this tiresome business happened, which was now keeping him in seclusion upstairs. If the girl was equally attracted towards him, why shouldn't they make a match of it? Her husband would give his consent, and that the more readily when he saw it was a case of mutual affection. She did all she could to fan Louise's love into life, and during the rest of the evening she gave utterance to such remarks as she thought were likely to excite the girl's passion.

"My Lazare is so good! No one knows half how good he is. You yourself, my little Louise, have no notion how affectionate he is. No one will have to pity the girl who gets him for a husband. She will be quite certain of being passionately loved. And he is such a handsome vigorous fellow, too! His flesh is as white as a chicken's. My grandfather, the Chevalier de la Vignière, had such a white skin that he used to wear his clothes cut quite low so as to expose his neck, just like a woman's, when he went to masked balls."

Louise blushed and smiled, and was much amused with Madame Chanteau's details. The mother's advocacy of her son, and the confidences which she was pouring out to Louise with the object of inclining her to a union with Lazare, might have kept her all night, if Chanteau had not begun to feel very drowsy over his newspaper.

"Isn't it about time we were all going to bed?" he asked with a great yawn.

Then, as though he had been quite unconscious for some time of what had been going on, and was taking up the thread of Madame Chanteau's earlier conversation, he added:

"You are quite mistaken. She is a good girl, and I shall be very glad when she is able to come downstairs again and eat her soup at my side."

"We shall all be glad," his wife cried, with considerable bitterness. "We may speak and say what we think, without ceasing to be fond of those of whom we talk."

"The poor little dear!" exclaimed Louise, in her turn, "I should be very glad to bear half the pain for her, if such a thing were possible. She is so sweet and amiable!"

Véronique, who was just bringing them their candles, once more put in her word.

"You are quite right to be her friend, Mademoiselle Louise, for no one, who hadn't got a paving-stone for a heart, could ever wish her unkindly."

"That will do," said Madame Chanteau. "We didn't ask for your opinion. It would be very much better if you went and cleaned the candle-sticks. This one here is quite filthy."

They all rose from their seats. Chanteau lost no time in escaping from his wife's snappishness, and went off and shut himself up in his room on the ground floor. But when the two women reached the next landing, where their rooms adjoined each other, they did not go to bed at once. Madame Chanteau almost always took Louise into her own room for a little time and there resumed her remarks about Lazare, showing the girl his portrait, and even producing and exhibiting little memorials and souvenirs of him, such as a tooth which had been extracted when he was quite young, or a lock of the pale hair of his infancy, or even some of his old clothes, the bow he wore at his first communion, or his first pair of trousers.

"See!" she said, one night, "these are locks of his hair. I have them of all stages of his life."

When Louise got to bed she could not sleep for thinking of the young man whom his mother was trying to drive into her arms. She turned restlessly about, feverish from sleeplessness, and saw him outlining himself in the darkness with his white skin. She often strained her ear to try and catch the sound of his footsteps in the room above her, and the thought that he was probably still watching by Pauline's bed-side so increased her feverishness that she was constrained to throw off the bed-clothes and go to sleep with her breast uncovered.

Up above, Pauline's convalescence was progressing gradually. Although the patient was now out of danger, she still continued very feeble, worn out and exhausted by feverish attacks which astonished the doctor. As Lazare said, doctors were always being astonished. He himself was growing more irritable every hour. The sudden lassitude which fell upon him when the crisis was over seemed to be increasing and turning into a kind of restless disquietude. Now that he was no longer struggling and

wrestling against death, he was beginning to be distressed by the close and confined atmosphere of the apartment and by the spoonfuls of physic which had to be administered at regular hours, and all the other little duties and restraints of the sick-room, which he had so enthusiastically taken upon himself at first. Pauline was able to do without him now, and he sank down again into a weariness of his aimless empty existence—a weariness which kept him restlessly fidgeting from chair to chair, with his hands hanging listlessly by his side or in front of him, or set him wandering about the room, staring hopelessly at the walls, or left him buried in gloomy abstraction in front of the window, looking out, but seeing nothing.

"Lazare," Pauline said to him one day, "you must go out. Véronique will be quite able to do everything."

But he hotly refused. "Couldn't she bear his presence any longer," he asked, "that she wanted to send him away? It would be very nice of him, wouldn't it, if he were to desert her like that before she was quite strong again?" But he allowed himself to be soothed again, as she gently explained to him:

"You wouldn't be deserting me by just going out to get a little fresh air. Go out in the afternoon. We should be in a pretty way if you were to fall ill, too."

But then she unfortunately added:

"I have seen you yawning all the morning."

"You've seen me yawning!" he cried. "Say at once that I have got no heart! This is a nice way to thank me!"

The next morning Pauline was more diplomatic. She pretended that she was very anxious that the construction of the piles and stockades should be proceeded with; the high winter tides were coming on, and the experimental works would be swept away, if the system of defence was not completed. Lazare was no longer burning with his early enthusiasm; he was dissatisfied with the resisting and cohesive powers of the timbers, which were less than he had calculated upon, and fresh study would be necessary. Then, too, the estimate would be exceeded, and the administration had not yet voted a single sou. For two days Pauline tried to fan into fresh life his inventive *amour propre*. She asked him if he was going to let himself be beaten by the sea, with all the neighbourhood looking on and smiling; and as for the money, it would certainly be paid back, if she advanced it, as they had settled she should. By degrees Lazare seemed to work himself up to his old pitch of

enthusiasm. He made fresh designs and called in again the carpenter from Arromanches, and had long consultations with him in his room, the door of which he kept open that he might be ready to dash out at the first summons.

"Now," he said, one morning as he kissed Pauline, "the sea won't be able to spoil as much as a single chip. I am quite sure we shall be successful. As soon as you are able to walk, you shall go and see how the works are getting on."

Louise had just come up into the room to inquire after Pauline, and as she, too, kissed her, the latter whispered to her:

"Take him away with you."

Lazare at first refused to go. He was expecting the doctor, he said. But Louise laughed and told him that she was sure he was much too gallant to let her go alone to the Gonins', where she was going to choose some lobsters to send to Caen, and he could give a look, as they went, at the works.

"Yes, do go," said Pauline. "It will please me if you do. Take his arm, Louise. There, now, don't let him get away again."

She grew quite merry as the two others jokingly pushed each other about, but when they had left the room, she became very serious and thoughtful, and leaned over the edge of the bed to listen to their laughter and footsteps as they died away on the stairs.

A quarter-of-an-hour later Véronique came in with the doctor. By-and-by she installed herself at Pauline's bed-side, but without abandoning her sauce-pans, for she kept perpetually running to and fro between the kitchen and the bedroom, and spending an hour or so there, as she was able, in the intervals of her work. She did not, however, assume the office of nurse all at once Lazare came back again in the evening after he had been out with Louise, but he set off again the next morning; and every succeeding day, carried away and absorbed more and more by the life out of doors, his visits to Pauline grew shorter and shorter, and he soon stayed only just long enough to inquire how she was. Pauline, too, always told him to go away, if he merely spoke of sitting down, and when he and Louise returned together, she made them tell her all about their walk, and grew quite bright and happy with their animation and the fresh breezes that still seemed to cling around their hair. They seemed to be such good chums and nothing else, that all her suspicions

of them had vanished. And when she saw Véronique coming towards her, with her draught in her hand, she cried out to her gaily:

"Oh! be off with you! I don't like it!"

Sometimes she called Lazare to her to tell him to look after Louise, as though she had been a child.

"See that she doesn't get bored. She wants amusing. Take her for a good long walk; I shall get on very well without you for the rest of the day."

When she was left alone, her gazing eyes seemed to be following them from the distance. She spent her time in reading, waiting till she should be strong again, for she was still so weak and shattered that it quite exhausted her to sit up for two or three hours in an easy-chair. She would often let her book slip down into her lap, while her thoughts wandered off dreamily after her cousin and her friend. She wondered whether they were going along the beach, and if they had got to the caves, and whether it was pleasant out on the sands with the fresh breezes and the rising tide. In these long reveries she fancied that the feeling of sorrow which depressed her arose merely from the fact that she was not able to be with them. She soon grew weary of reading. The novels which lay about the house, love-stories abounding in romantic falsehood and treason, had always offended her strict notions of honour and her sense of how impossible it would be, after having once given her heart, ever to withdraw it again. Could it be possible that one's heart could lie so, and that, after having once loved, one could ever cease to love? She threw the book from her in disgust; and her gazing eyes pierced the walls and saw, in imagination, her cousin bringing her friend home, as, leaning one against the other, he supported her weary steps, while they were both beaming with merry smiles and laughter.

"Here is your draught, mademoiselle," said Véronique, suddenly; her deep voice, as she came from behind, waking up Pauline from her reverie with a start.

By the end of the first week Lazare never came into her room without first knocking. One morning as he opened the door he caught sight of Pauline, her arms bare, combing her hair as she sat up in bed.

"Oh! I beg your pardon!" he cried, stepping back.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "Are you frightened of me?" Then he took courage, but he was afraid lest he should

embarrass her, and he turned his head aside until she had finished fastening up her hair.

"Just get me a cape," she said to him quite unconcernedly. "You will find one there in the top drawer. Now that I am getting better, I am beginning to feel quite coquettish."

Lazare grew quite troubled and confused, and could find nothing but chemises; and, when he had at last found the cape, he stood and looked out of the window till Pauline had buttoned herself up to the chin. A fortnight before, when he had thought that she was dying, he had lifted her in his arms as though she had been a child, without even noticing her nakedness. But now the very disorder of the room disquieted him. And the girl herself, infected by his feeling of uneasiness, soon refrained from asking of him any of the delicate little services he had lately been accustomed to render her.

"Shut the door, Véronique!" she cried one morning, as she heard the young man's step on the landing. "Put all these things out of sight and give me my cape." She was gradually growing stronger, and her great pleasure was, when she was able to stand or lean against the window, to watch in the distance the progress that was being made with the defensive works. She could distinctly hear the blows of the hammers, and could see the gang of seven or eight men, whose black-looking forms seemed to be bustling about like great ants over the yellowish shingle on the beach. Between the tides they worked very energetically, but they were obliged to retire before the rising water. It was with special interest that Pauline's eyes followed Lazare's white jersey and Louise's rose-coloured dress, both of which shone conspicuously in the sun. She pursued them constantly with her gaze and could have told their every action, almost their every gesture, throughout the day. Now that the operations were being pushed so vigorously forward they could no longer wander together so far afield, or ramble off to the caves or behind the cliffs; and Pauline had them constantly within about half a mile of her, always plainly visible beneath the wide expanse of sky, with their proportions rather amusingly reduced to those of dolls. Quite unconsciously to herself, this jealous pleasure of constantly accompanying them did much towards the recruiting of her strength and adding cheerfulness and life to her convalescence.

"It's a fine amusement for you to watch the workmen," Véronique used to say every day as she dusted the room, "and

it's much better for you than reading. Whenever I try to read I get a headache. And, besides, when it's your strength you are wanting to get back, you must go and open your mouth in the sunshine like the turkeys, and drink in great mouthfuls of it."

Véronique was not naturally of a talkative nature, and she was even considered a little morose and taciturn; but, with Pauline, she chatted freely from an impulse of kindness, believing that it was good for the girl.

"It's a funny piece of business all the same! But it seems to please Monsieur Lazare. Though, indeed, he does not appear to be quite so full of it just now as he was. But he is so proud and obstinate that he will go on persisting in a thing, even if he is really sick to death of it. And if he just leaves those drunken fellows for a single minute, they drive the nails in all crooked."

After she had swept under the bed, she added:

"And as for the duchess — "

Pauline, who was scarcely listening to what Véronique was saying, caught this word with surprise.

"The duchess! Whom are you talking of?"

"Mademoiselle Louise, of course! Wouldn't anyone say that she had sprung straight from Jupiter's thigh? If you were to go and look in her room and see all her little pots and pomades and scents— Why, as soon as ever you open the door, you get a whole mouthful, the place reeks with them so!— But she can't match you in good looks, for all that!"

"Oh! nonsense! I am only a mere country girl," Pauline said with a smile; "Louise is very graceful and refined."

"Well, she may be all that, but she hasn't got a pretty face, all the same. I have had a good look at her when she has been washing herself; and I know that, if I were a man, I shouldn't be long in making up my mind between you."

Worked upon by her feeling of enthusiastic conviction, she came and leaned against the window, close to Pauline.

"Just glance at her there out on the beach! Doesn't she look like a mere shrimp? She is certainly a long way off and can't be expected to appear as big as a church, but she ought to show a figure of some sort! Ah! there's Monsieur Lazare lifting her up, so that she mayn't wet her pretty little shoes. She won't weigh very much in his arms, that's certain? But there are some men who seem to prefer bones!"

Véronique checked herself suddenly, as she felt Pauline quivering by her side. She was ever harping on this subject,

and seemed always itching to talk of it. All that she heard about this time, and all that she saw, stuck in her throat and made her feel as though she were choking: the conversations in the evenings when the girl was libelled and calumniated, the furtive smiles of Lazare and Louise, and the utter ingratitude of the family, which was rapidly growing into treason. If she had gone up into the sick girl's room when her honest heart was burning hotly with some fresh injustice, she could not have restrained herself from revealing everything to Pauline, but her fear of making her ill again forced her to confine herself to stamping about in her kitchen, knocking her pots and pans about violently, and swearing that she could not go on much longer in this way, but would soon be driven into telling them very roundly what she thought about them all. But when she got upstairs, into Pauline's room whenever a word that might vex or disturb the girl escaped from her lips, she tried to recall it or explain it away with a touching awkwardness.

"But, thank goodness, Monsieur Lazare isn't the kind to fall in love with a bag of bones. He has been in Paris, and he has got good taste. Look! he has let her slip on the ground, just as if he were throwing a match away!"

Then Véronique, in her fear of letting her tongue slip again, began to flourish her brush once more, and go on with her sweeping; while Pauline, buried in deep thought, followed with her eyes, till the evening, Louise's blue dress and Lazare's white jersey, that gleamed far away in the distance amidst the dark forms of the workmen. As soon as she was beginning to feel fairly well again, Chanteau was seized with a violent attack of the gout; and this induced the young girl to come downstairs at once, in spite of her still weak condition. The first time that she left her room it was to go and sit by the sick man's bedside. As Madame Chanteau said very bitterly, the house was becoming nothing but a hospital. For some time her husband had not left his invalid's chair. After his repeated seizures his whole body was now attacked by his foe; and the disease mounted up from his feet to his knees, and then to his elbows and hands. The little white pearl in his ear had fallen away, but others, of larger size, had appeared. All his joints were swollen, and chalk-stones forced their white points, like lobster's eyes, through his skin in every direction. It was chronic gout that he had now, chronic and incurable; the kind of gout which stiffens and deforms the body.

"Good heavens! what agony I am in!" Chanteau kept repeating. "My left leg is as stiff as a log; I can't move either my foot or my knee; and my elbow burns as though it were on fire. Just look at it!"

Pauline looked and observed a very much inflamed swelling on his left elbow. He complained bitterly of the agony he was suffering in this spot, which seemed likely very soon to become quite unendurable. He held his arm stiffly stretched out, as he sighed and groaned, keeping his eyes constantly fixed upon his hand, which was, indeed, a pitiable sight, with all the finger-joints knotted and swollen, and the thumb warped and looking bruised, as though it had been brayed with a hammer.

"I cannot keep still in one position. You must come and help me to move. I thought just now that I had got myself fairly comfortable, but I am as bad again now as ever I was. It is just as though my bones were being jagged with a saw. Try to raise me up a little."

Twenty times in an hour he had to be helped to change his position. He was in a continual state of anxious restlessness, and was always hoping to find relief in some new change. But Pauline was still feeling too weak to be able to undertake to move him without assistance.

"Véronique," she would say softly, "take hold of him very gently and help me to move him."

"No! no! not Véronique!" Chanteau would cry out, "she shakes me so!"

Then Pauline was obliged to make the effort herself, and her shoulders cracked under the strain. And, however gently she turned him round, he groaned and screamed so terribly that Véronique rushed hastily out of the room. She said that one wanted to be a saint, like Mademoiselle Pauline, to be able to put up with such a piece of work, for the good God Himself would run away, if He were to hear her master at his bellowings.

The paroxysms, however, became less acute, though they did not cease, but were constantly recurring all through the day and night, keeping the sick man in a state of perpetual exasperation and disquietude, goading him into a condition of indescribable torture from his constrained and painful motionlessness. It was now no longer merely his feet that felt as though sharp teeth were gnawing at them, but his whole body felt bruised and brayed, as though it was being crushed beneath a

millstone. It was impossible to afford him any relief, and Pauline could do nothing more than remain by his side and yield herself submissively to all his caprices, changing his position for him perpetually, though without ever succeeding in procuring for him any lasting ease or calm. The worst of the matter was that his pain made him unjust and violent, and he spoke to her harshly, as though she were a very clumsy servant.

"Oh! stop! stop! you are as awkward as Véronique! Can't you do without digging your fingers into my body like that? Your hands are as clumsy as a gendarme's. Go away and leave me alone. I don't want you to touch me any more."

Pauline, without uttering a word in self-defence and with a submissive resignation which nothing could ruffle, resumed her efforts to assist him with increased care and gentleness. When she imagined he was getting into a state of irritation with her she would conceal herself for a moment behind the curtains, hoping that his anger would cool when he no longer saw her. Often she would give way to silent tears in her hiding-place, not on account of the poor man's harshness towards her, but on account of the frightful martyrdom which made him so hasty and violent. She listened to him as he spoke to himself in low tones, in the midst of his sighings and groanings.

"She has gone away, the heartless girl! Ah! if I were to die, there would only be Minouche who would come to close my eyes. It is abominable to desert a human being in this way! I'll be bound she's gone off to the kitchen to have some broth!"

Then, after a little wrestling and struggling, he groaned out more loudly, and ended by saying:

"Pauline, are you there? Come and raise me up a little. I can't get easy as I am. Let us try how the left side will do, shall we?"

Every now and then he would be suddenly seized with deep compunction, and would ask the girl's pardon for having treated her so unkindly. Sometimes he would tell her to fetch Matthew, for the sake of the additional society, fancying that the dog's presence would somehow or other soothe him and alleviate his pain. But it was in Minouche rather than in Matthew that he found a faithful companion, for the cat revelled in the close warm atmosphere of sick rooms, and she spent her days lying on a couch near the bed. The patient's more than usually loud cries and groans seemed to surprise her, and, when she heard them, she turned upon him, as she remained quietly seated upon her tail, her big round eyes, in

which was glistening the indignant astonishment of a sober philosophic nature, whose tranquillity had just been deeply disturbed. What was possessing him to make all that disagreeable and perfectly useless uproar?

Every time that Pauline went out of the room with Doctor Cazenove she preferred the same request.

"Can't you inject a little morphia? It makes my heart bleed to hear him."

But the doctor refused. It would do no good, and the paroxysms would occur again with increased violence. Since the salicylic treatment appeared only to have aggravated the disease, he preferred not to try any other drug. He spoke, however, of seeing what a milk diet would do, as soon as the violence of the crisis was over. But until that time the patient was to adhere to the most sparing diet and diuretic drinks, and that was the only treatment that he would sanction.

"The truth is," he said, "that your uncle is a gourmand who is now paying dearly for all his fine dishes. He has been eating some game; I know he has, for I have seen the feathers. It will be so much the worse for him in the end. I have warned him over and over again that the reason of his suffering so is that, instead of denying himself, he prefers to give way to his appetite and to take the consequences. But you will be still more foolish, my dear, if you over exert yourself and make yourself ill again. Do be careful. You will, won't you? Your health still requires looking after."

But it was very little, indeed, that she did look after it, and she devoted herself to her uncle entirely, and all notion of time and even of life itself seemed to slip away from her during the long days and nights that she passed by his bed-side, with her ears buzzing confusedly with the groans and cries with which the room was ever ringing. Her devotion and self-sacrifice were so complete and absorbing that she forgot all about Louise and Lazare. She just exchanged a few words with them now and then, as she ran across them while she was hurrying along on some necessary errand or other, seeing nothing of them except for a moment or two in this way, as she passed through the dining-room. By this time the operations on the beach were concluded, and the heavy rains had kept the young people confined to the house for the past week; and, when the idea that they were together had once suddenly occurred to Pauline, she felt quite happy to know that they were near her.

Never before had Madame Chanteau appeared so busy. She was taking advantage, she said, of the disturbance in the family arrangements which was being caused by her husband's illness, to go through her papers, make up her accounts and clear off the arrears of her correspondence. So, in the afternoons, she shut herself up in her own room, leaving Louise to her own resources, who immediately went upstairs to Lazare, for she detested being alone. They got into a way of being thus together, and they remained undisturbed till dinner time in the big room on the second floor, that great room that had so long served Pauline both for a place of study and a place of amusement. The young man's narrow iron bedstead was still there, hidden away behind the screen. The piano was covered with dust, and the table was buried beneath an immense accumulation of papers, books and pamphlets. On the middle of it, between two heaps of dry sea-weed, there was a model of a stockade, cut out in deal with a knife, that recalled the grandfather's masterpiece of the bridge, which, in its glazed case, adorned the mantelpiece in the dining-room.

For some time Lazare had appeared to be falling into a nervous condition. His gang of workmen had irritated and annoyed him, and he had just found himself rid of the works on the beach with a feeling similar to that which he would have experienced on being released from a burden beyond his strength, and without deriving any pleasure from seeing his plans carried into execution. Other schemes now filled his head, vague projects for the future, public improvements at Caen, operations which would bring him great fame. But he never took any definite or active steps, and he sank down again into a state of weary lassitude which seemed to render him weaker and more timid every hour. The great shock which he had received from Pauline's illness added to his mental disquietude a perpetual craving for the fresh air and a peculiar physical excitement, as though he were under some imperious necessity of recouping himself for his period of seclusion and sorrow. The presence of Louise still further excited his feverishness. She did not seem able to speak to him without leaning upon his shoulder, and she breathed out her pretty smiles close upon his face, while her cat-like graces and the coquettish atmosphere that exhaled from her, and all the disturbing friendly freedom of her manner quite turned his head. He was seized with a feeling of unhealthy desire, against which his conscience struggled.

With a friend of his childhood, in his mother's house, any idea of the sort, he told himself, was not to be thought of for a moment; and his sense of honour made his arms tingle with pain whenever he caught hold of Louise as they were playing together, and a quick thrill of desire sent the blood surging to his skin. It was no thought of Pauline that kept him back. She would never have known anything about the matter. A husband can completely blind his wife to his intrigues with a servant-maid. During the nights he imagined all sorts of strange fancies, such as that Véronique, having become quite intolerable, had been dismissed, and that Louise was now only a pretty little servant, to whose room he was going to creep with bare feet. From morning to night he gave vent in ferocious sallies to his exaggerated pessimist views about women and love. Every evil originated in women, who were, he said, foolish and fickle, perpetuating grief by desire; while love was nothing but a delusion and the egotistic pressing-forward of future generations which wanted to come into existence. He retailed the whole of Schopenhauer, over whose blunt remarks the blushing girl grew very merry.

By degrees, Lazare became more deeply enamoured of her, and a genuine passion set him free from his bitterly disdainful prejudices, and he threw himself into his fresh love with all his early enthusiasm, which was still straining after a happiness that seemed ever to evade it.

With Louise it had been for a long time nothing but a mere piece of every-day coquetting. She delighted in receiving attentions and whispered compliments, and in flirting with pleasant men; and when they ceased to appear specially interested in her she seemed quite melancholy and out of her element. When Lazare neglected her for a moment or two, to write a letter, or to bury himself in one of his sudden and apparently groundless fits of melancholy, she felt so unhappy that she began to tease and provoke him, preferring danger to neglect. But once, however, she experienced a thrill of alarm as she felt the young man's breath burning against the back of her neck like a flame. The long years she had spent at her boarding-school had taught her sufficient to make her fully aware of the danger she was exposing herself to, and from that moment she had lived in a state of expectation, that was at once delicious and alarming, of something dreadful happening; not that she in any way desired such a thing, nor even really

thought that it would ever actually occur, for she reckoned upon always being able to get off unscathed, though she never thought of withdrawing herself from the risk she was daily running, so entirely did her happiness consist in this struggling familiarity, and in this alternate partial surrender and refusal.

When they were upstairs in the big room, Lazare and Louise felt more especially that they belonged to each other. The rest of the family seemed to be in a league to bring about their overthrow, leaving them two there alone; Lazare with nothing in the world to occupy him, and weary of solitude, and Louise, disturbed by the private and detailed confidences and enthusiastic relations which Madame Chanteau had poured out to her about her son. They hid themselves away up there, making the painful cries and groans of Chanteau, who was agonized with gout down below, their reason for doing so; and there they remained without ever opening the piano or touching a book, utterly absorbed in their own society, and dazing themselves with their ceaseless chatter.

The day when Chanteau's attack was at its worst, the whole house shook with his screams; prolonged, heart-rending, groaning plaints, like the death-cries of a beast under the hands of the slaughterer. After breakfast, which she had hastily swallowed down in a state of nervous irritation, Madame Chanteau hurriedly rushed from the room, saying:

"I can't endure it any longer; I shall begin to scream myself if I stop here. If anyone wants me, I shall be in my own room writing. And you, Lazare, take Louise up at once to your room, and shut yourselves up there, and try to amuse her, for it isn't a very gay time the poor girl is having here."

They heard her bang her door violently on the first floor, while her son and the young girl mounted up still higher.

Pauline had gone back to her uncle. She, in her pity for so much suffering, was the only one who retained her calmness. If she could do nothing but just sit with him, she wished, at any rate, to afford the poor man whatever comfort could be derived from not being left to suffer in solitude. She fancied that he bore up more bravely against his pain when she was looking at him, even if she did not speak a single word to him. For hours she would sit in this way by his bedside, and the gaze of her big compassionate eyes seemed to soothe him somewhat. But on this day, with his head hanging over the bolster, his arm

stretched out, and his elbow racked with agony, he did not even see her, and he screamed out still more loudly as she approached him.

About four o'clock, in a state of complete desperation, Pauline went into the kitchen to find Véronique, leaving the door open behind her, as she intended returning immediately.

"Sómething must really be done," she said. "I should like to try cold compresses. The doctor says they are dangerous, though they are successful sometimes. Can you give me some linen?"

Véronique was in a frightfully bad temper.

"Linen? I've just been upstairs to get some dusters, and a nice reception I got! I had no business to come disturbing them up there! Oh, yes! it was very pleasant indeed!"

"But you might go and ask Lazare for some," Pauline continued, without understanding Véronique's remarks.

But the servant, carried away by her anger, planted her fists on her hips, and without giving herself any time to think of what she was saying, burst out:

"Yes, I should think so, indeed! They are much too busy in licking each other's faces up there!"

"What do you mean?" the young girl stammered, growing very pale.

Véronique, alarmed at what she had allowed herself to say, attempted to recall the revelation which she had so long been keeping to herself, and she tried to think of some explanation or fib to tell Pauline, but she could hit upon nothing that was of any service. By way of precaution she had grasped hold of the girl's wrists, but Pauline freed herself with a sudden jerk, and bounded up the staircase like a mad creature, appearing so choked and convulsed with anger that Véronique did not dare to follow her, trembling as she was with fear at the sight of that pallid mask-like face which she could scarcely recognise. The house seemed to be asleep and the upper floors were wrapped in silence, and nothing but Chanteau's groans came up from below to disturb the perfect quietude. The young girl sprang with a bound on to the landing of the first floor, where she jostled against her aunt, who was standing there, like a sentinel, barring any further advance. She had probably been keeping guard in this way for some time.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Pauline, who was choking with emotion, and exasperated at this hindrance to her progress, could not answer.

"Let me pass!" she at last succeeded in stammering out.

She made an angry gesture, before which Madame Chanteau gave way. Then, with another bound she rushed up to the second floor, while her aunt, rooted to the spot, threw up her arms, but made no sound. Pauline was possessed by one of those stormy fits of furious rebellion which broke out in the midst of the gentle gaiety of her nature, and which, even when she was a mere child, left her in a prostrate fainting condition. For some years past she believed that she had cured herself of them. But an impulse of jealousy had just thrilled so vehemently through her that she could not have restrained herself without shattering herself completely.

When she reached Lazare's door on the top floor, she threw herself violently against it. The key was bent by her impetuous onset, and the door itself clattered back against the wall. And then the sight that she beheld completed her condition of mad indignation. Lazare was clasping Louise in his arms against the cupboard and was raining kisses on her chin and neck, while she herself, half-fainting and thrilled with a kind of fear of him, was surrendering herself unhesitatingly to his embrace. They had begun, no doubt, by merely sporting with each other, but the sport seemed likely to have a disastrous ending. At Pauline's appearance there was a moment of stupefied silence. They all three looked at each other. Then, at last, Pauline burst out:

"Oh! you hussy! you hussy!"

It was the girl's treason that angered her more than anything. With a scornful gesture she pushed Lazare aside, as though he were a child of whose pitiful weakness she was well aware. But this girl, who was her own familiar friend, had stolen her husband from her while she was busy nursing a sick man down below! She seized her by the shoulders and shook her, and was scarcely able to keep from striking her.

"What do you mean by this? Tell me! You have been behaving infamously, shamelessly! Do you hear me?"

Louise, in a state of stupor, and with her eyes wandering vacantly, stammered out:

"It was he who made me. He held me so tightly that he nearly broke my bones."

"He! Why he would have burst into tears if you had just pushed him with your little finger!"

The sight of the room itself increased her anger, this room

in which she and Lazare had loved each other, where she, too, had felt the blood pulse hotly through her veins at the warm touch of the young man's breath. What should she do to this girl to satisfy her vengeance?

Lazare, who was stupefied and dazed with embarrassment, had just prevailed upon himself to attempt some interference, when Pauline dashed Louise so violently from her that the girl's shoulders struck against the cupboard.

"Ah! I'm afraid of myself. Get out of my way!"

And this was all that she could now find to say. She chased the girl through the room, threw her out on to the landing and drove her down the staircase, crying after her perpetually:

"Get out of my way! Be off about your business, and get out of my way!"

Madame Chanteau was still standing on the landing of the first floor. The rapidity of the scene had given her no opportunity to interfere. But she recovered her power of speech and signed to Lazare to go and shut himself up in his own room, while she herself tried to soothe Pauline, pretending, at first, to be very much surprised at what had happened. Pauline, having driven Louise before her till she had taken refuge in her bedroom, still kept on repeating:

"Get out of my way! Get out of my way!"

"What do you mean?" her aunt asked her. "Why is she to get out of your way?"

Then the young girl stammered out the whole story. She was overcome with disgust. To her frank honourable nature Louise's conduct was utterly shameless and incapable of either excuse or pardon. The more she thought about it the more angry and indignant she felt; her whole truthful and faithful nature rising in revolt within her. When one had once bestowed one's self, one could not withdraw the gift.

"Get out my way! Pack up your things at once and get out of my sight!"

Louise, who was completely overcome and could not find a word to say in her own defence, had already opened her drawers to get her clothes together. But Madame Chanteau was now beginning to show signs of anger.

"Stay where you are, my dear Louise. Am I the mistress of my own house? Who is it that presumes to give orders here and allows herself to send my guests away? It is infamous such behaviour! We are not living in a slum, here!"

"Ah! you don't know what has happened, then?" cried Pauline. "I have just caught her up there with Lazare. He had her in his arms, and was kissing her!"

Madame Chanteau shrugged her shoulders. All her stored-up bitterness broke out in a sentence that breathed a base suspicion.

"They were only playing; where was the harm of it? When you kept him always shut up in your bedroom, did we ever come poking our noses into the room to see what you were doing?"

The young girl's excitement suddenly subsided. She stood quite motionless and turned very pale, astounded at the accusation which was now being launched against her. It was she who was now being arraigned as the guilty one, and her aunt appeared to suspect her of the most disgraceful conduct.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "If you had really thought anything of that sort, you would not have permitted it for a moment!"

"Well! you weren't either of you children! But I don't want my son to go on in such ways, and you had better, for the future, refrain from disturbing and harrassing those who have got the power of turning you into an honest woman."

For a moment Pauline remained silent, with her great pure eyes turned full upon Madame Chanteau, who returned her niece's gaze. Then she went up the staircase to her own room, saying in a soft, quiet voice:

"Very well, it is I who will leave."

There was another interval of silence of straining, utter silence, in which the whole house seemed to be dying away. Through this sudden quiet, Chanteau's groans wailed out like the cries of an agonized deserted animal. They seemed to grow louder and louder, making themselves distinctly heard through the other rising sounds till they drowned all else.

Madame Chanteau was now regretting the suspicion which she had allowed herself to express. She recognised the irreparable nature of the insult, and she was feeling much disturbed in her mind lest Pauline should actually carry out her threat of immediate departure. To a mind like hers every wild scheme was possible, and what would people say of herself and her husband if their ward should set off scouring the country and telling the story of their rupture? Perhaps she would take refuge with Doctor Cazenove, which would certainly give rise to a dreadful scandal in the neighbourhood. At the bottom of

Madame Chanteau's distress and embarrassment lurked a fear of the past and of the money which had been lost, which might be distressingly raked up against them.

"Don't cry, dear Louise," she said, feeling angry with Pauline again. "We've got into an awkward bother, all through her folly. She's always going on in this mad, violent way. It's quite impossible to live quietly with her. But I will try to make matters straight and comfortable."

"Oh, no, let me go away! I beg of you," Louise cried. "It would be too painful for me to stop here. She is right; I had better go away."

"Not to-night, at any rate. I must see you safely to your father's house. Just wait a moment, and I will go upstairs and see if she is really packing her things up."

Madame Chanteau went gently upstairs and listened at Pauline's door. She heard her walking hurriedly about the room, opening and shutting her drawers. For a moment she thought of going in and provoking an explanation and bringing the affair to an end in a flood of tears. But she was afraid, and felt that she would stammer and blush before the girl, and this feeling served to increase her hatred of her. Then, instead of knocking at the door, she went down-stairs to the kitchen, treading as silently as she could. An idea had just struck her.

"Have you heard the row which Mademoiselle Pauline has just been treating us to?" she asked of Véronique, who had set to work furiously polishing her brass-ware.

The servant, with her head bent intently over the sandstone, made no answer.

"She is getting quite unendurable! I can do nothing with her. Would you believe that she is actually talking about leaving us at once? She is packing up her things at the present moment. I wish you would go upstairs and try to reason with her."

Then, as she still got no answer, she added:

"Are you deaf?"

"If I don't answer, it's because I don't want to do," Véronique cried snappishly, bursting with angry excitement, and rubbing a candlestick so violently that she quite burned her fingers with the friction. "She is quite right to go away. If I had been in her place, I would have taken myself off long ago."

Madame Chanteau listened to her with gaping lips, quite stupefied at this mutinous outburst.

"I'm not fond of gossip or talking, but you mustn't press me too far or I shall let out all I think. I should have liked to fling Mademoiselle Pauline into the sea the day you first brought her here as a little girl, but I can't bear to see anyone ill-treated, and you have all of you treated her so abominably that one of these days I shall be fond enough of her to give anyone who hurts her a swinging box on the ears. You can give me warning if you like, I don't care a button, but I will let her to some nice secrets. Yes, she shall know all about how you have treated her, with all your fine pretences to honour and honesty."

"Hold your tongue! You are quite mad!" cried Madame Chanteau, much disquieted by this fresh explosion.

"No, I will not hold my tongue! It is all too shameful! Shameful, I say! Do you hear me? I have been choking with it all for years and years! Wasn't it bad enough of you to rob her of her money? Couldn't you have been contented with that, and done without tearing her poor little heart into shreds? Oh yes, I know all about it; I have seen through all your underhand plottings and schemes. But Monsieur Lazare is not quite as calculating as you are, though, in other respects, he's not much better than you, and he wouldn't much mind giving her heart-blow out of mere selfishness, and to save himself from being bothered and worried. Ah, me! there are some people come into this world only to be preyed upon and devoured by others."

She flourished the candlestick about, and then she seized hold of a chair which rumbled like a drum under the violent rubbing she gave it. Madame Chanteau had been sorely tempted to turn her out of the house at once, but she succeeded in restraining herself and said to her very icily:

"You won't go up and speak to the girl, then? It would be for your own good to get her to give up this folly."

Lucie was silent again for a short time, then she growled out:

"Well, then, I will go up to her. Reason is reason, but hard words never do any good."

She waited for a minute or two to wash her hands, and then shook off her dirty apron. When she opened the door in the hall to make her way to the staircase, a flood of wailing overwhelmed in. It was the ceaseless heart-rending groaning of Chanteau. Madame Chanteau, who was following

Véronique, seemed struck with an idea, and she said to her in low earnest tones:

"Tell her that she cannot think of leaving her uncle in dreadful state in which he is now. Do you hear?"

"Well, he certainly is bellowing pretty hard; there's no doubt about that," Véronique replied.

She went up the stairs, while her mistress, who had stretched out her head towards her husband's room, took care to see that the door was kept open. The sick man's groans and cries rose up through the cage of the staircase, and seemed to increase in volume as they echoed on the landings. When Véronique reached Pauline's room, she found her just on the point of leaving, having fastened up in a bundle what little linen she would absolutely require, and intending to send old Malivoire to fetch the rest in the morning. She had grown quite calm again, though she was still very pale and seemed very low-spirited, but she was perfectly cool and there was no trace of anger remaining in her.

"Either she or I must go," was the only answer she made to all that Véronique said, and she sedulously avoided mentioning Louise's name.

When Véronique conveyed this reply to Madame Chanteau, she found the latter in Louise's room, which she had just recently entered to find the young girl already dressed and persisted to determined to go away immediately, trembling from her lame foot, and alarmed at the slightest creaking of the door. Madame Chanteau was obliged to yield to the girl's determination, and that she sent to Verchemont for the baker's trap, and settled she would take Louise herself to her Aunt Léonie's at Arrothis manches. They would have to invent some story to tell for lady, and they would make Chanteau's illness a pretext really Louise's sudden departure, alleging that his screams had re become quite unendurable.

After the departure of the two ladies, whom Lazare had seen safely seated in the baker's trap, Véronique shouted out in the passage at the top of her voice:

"You can come downstairs now, Mademoiselle Pauline; there is no one here."

The house seemed quite empty, and a gloomy silence brooded over it, broken only by Chanteau's perpetual groans. Pauline came down the last step, Lazare, who had just returned to the house from the yard, met her face to face. His wh

body shook with a nervous trembling, and he stood still for a moment as though he wanted to confess his fault and to ask pardon for it, but a gush of tears choked his voice, and he hurriedly rushed up the staircase to his own room, without having been able to say a word.

Chanteau was still lying with his head across the bolster and his arm stretched rigidly out. He dared not make the slightest movement, and he could not even have been aware of Pauline's absence, as he lay there with his eyes closed and his mouth ever opened with his cries and groans. None of the sounds of the house ever reached him, and he had nothing to occupy himself with, except screaming out as long and as loudly as his breath would let him. His screams grew more piercing and desperate till at last they began to disturb Minouche, who had had a fresh family of four kittens thrown away that morning, and who, already quite forgetful of them, had been purring lazily on an arm-chair.

When Pauline took her place again in her uncle's room, he was screaming so loudly that the cat got up, quite disturbed by the din. She fixed her eyes steadily on the sick man, with that expression of hers which suggested a steady philosophic person whose serenity was being disturbed. If she could not be allowed to go on purring in peace, she really could not stop there, she seemed to say. And then she took herself off, with her tail in the air.

CHAPTER VI.

When Madame Chanteau returned home again in the evening, a few minutes before dinner-time, no further mention was made of Louise. She merely called to Véronique to come and take her boots off. Her left foot was paining her.

"Little wonder of that!" the servant murmured. "It's quite swollen."

The seams of the leather had left crimson marks in her soft white flesh. Lazare, who had just come downstairs, looked at his mother's foot and said:

"You have been walking too much."

But she had really only walked through Arromanches. Besides the pain in her foot, she was suffering from a feeling of suffocation, which had been increasingly affecting her at intervals for some months past. Presently she began to blame her boots for the pain she was enduring.

"Those tiresome bootmakers don't seem as though they could make them wide enough! As soon as ever I get my boots on, I'm in a state of torture."

But as she felt no more pain after she had put on her slippers, nothing more was thought about the matter. By the morning, however, the swelling had extended to her ankle, but, by the following night, it disapppeared altogether.

A week passed away. From the time of the first dinner at which Pauline had again found herself in the presence of Madame Chanteau and Lazare on the evening of the great explosion they had all forced themselves to resume their ordinary demeanour towards each other. No allusion was made to what had occurred, and everything seemed to be just the same as usual. The life of the family went on in its old mechanical way, with the same customary expressions of affection, the same good mornings and good nights, and the same lifeless kisses given at fixed hours. It was with a feeling of great relief, however, that they were at last able to wheel

Chanteau to his place at the table. This time his knees had remained stiff, and he could not stand upright. But none the less did he seem to enjoy his freedom from actual pain, and so entirely was he wrapped up in egotistic self-satisfaction at his own well-being, that he never gave a thought to the joys or cares of the members of his family. When Madame Chanteau ventured to talk to him about Louise's sudden departure, he begged her not to speak to him of such melancholy matters. Pauline, now freed from her attendance in her uncle's room, tried to find some means of occupying herself and distracting her thoughts, but she could not conceal the grief she was feeling. She found the evenings especially painful, and her distress was plainly to be seen through her affectation of ordinary calmness. Ostensibly everything was just the same as usual, and the old every-day routine was gone through, but every now and then a nervous gesture or even a momentary silence would make them all conscious of the hidden breach, and the rift of which they never spoke, but which was, all the same, ever widening.

At first Lazare had felt some contempt for himself. The moral superiority of Pauline, who was so upright and just, had filled him with shame and vexation. Why hadn't he gone to her and confessed his fault and asked for her pardon? He might have told her the whole truth, how he had been suddenly excited and lifted out of himself by the influence of Louise, whose glamour had intoxicated him, and his cousin was too generous and large-hearted not to understand and make allowances. But an insurmountable feeling of embarrassment had kept him back, and he was afraid of cutting a still more contemptible figure in the girl's eyes by entering upon an explanation in which he would very likely find himself stammering and hesitating like a child. His fear of finding himself betrayed into telling another falsehood increased, too, his disinclination to discuss the matter with Pauline, for his thoughts were still full of Louise, and her image was perpetually haunting him, especially at night-time, and filling him with a burning regret that he had not actually possessed her when he held her faint and yielding under his hot kisses. In spite of himself, his long walks always seemed to lead him into the neighbourhood of Arromanches. One evening he went right on to Aunt Léonie's little villa and prowled round it, hurriedly taking flight as he heard a shutter move, in a state of trembling confusion

at the baseness he was contemplating. It was the sense of his own unworthiness that doubled his feeling of shame in Pauline's presence, and he freely condemned himself, though he could not quench his desire for Louise. The struggle was perpetually going on within his mind, and never before had his irresolution been such a source of pain to him. Soon he had not even sufficient honesty and strength of purpose left him to avoid Pauline's society and so escape the last dishonour of perjuring himself. It was quite possible that he still retained some love for his cousin, but the alluring image of her friend was ever present before him, blotting out the past and barring the future.

Pauline, on her side, was waiting to hear her cousin's defence and apology. In her first outburst of indignation she had sworn that she would never pardon him. Then she had begun to suffer secretly that her forgiveness had not yet been asked. Why did he keep this silence, and seem so feverish and restless, spending all his time out-of-doors, as though he were afraid to find himself alone with her? She was quite ready to listen to him and to forget everything, if only he would show that he was a little sorry and penitent. As the hoped-for explanation continued unmade, she racked her brains to find reasons for her cousin's silence, while her own pride kept her from making the first advance; but, as the days passed painfully and slowly by, she so far succeeded in hiding her feelings as to resume all her old appearance of cheerful activity. But beneath this brave outward show of calmness there lurked a perpetual unhappiness; and, when she shut herself up in her own room at night, she used to burst into a fit of tears, and had to stifle the sound of her sobs by burying her head in her pillow. No one spoke about the wedding, though they all thought about it. The autumn was coming on; what was going to be done? Nobody seemed to care to say anything about the matter, and all reference to it was put off till they felt able to venture to discuss it again.

It was about this time that Madame Chanteau completely lost her head. She had always been excitable and restless, but the hard life which she had led and which had undermined all her charity and integrity of purpose, had now altogether destroyed them and thrown her completely off her balance, and given her up as a prey to such a feverish excitement as she had never suffered from before. The pecuniary embarrassments in

which she found herself aggravated her condition still more. She had a mad longing for money, which grew stronger day by day and ended by quite drowning both her reason and her affection. She was continually attacking Pauline, whom she now began to blame for Louise's departure and to accuse her of it as a robbery from her son. It was an ever-open wound that would not be closed, and which the least trifle seemed to increase. She had not forgotten the slightest incident of the scene, and could still hear Pauline crying, "Get out of my way!" and she began to have visions of driving her niece out, too, and of turning her who had been the joy and the fortune of the family into the streets. At night-time, as she rolled about in her bed in her troubled half-sleeping state, she even regretted that death had not freed them from that accursed Pauline. Plans and schemes and intricate calculations sprang up in wild confusion in her brain, without her ever being able to hit upon any practicable way of getting rid of the young girl. At the same time a kind of reaction of feeling seemed to double her affection for her own son, and she adored him now almost more than she had done when she had held him in her arms as an infant and had possessed his undivided love. From morning to night she followed him with the gaze of her unquiet eyes; and, when they were alone together, she threw her arms round him and kissed him and begged him not to distress himself. She swore to him that everything should be put all right, and that she would strangle those who opposed her rather than that he should not be made happy. After a fortnight of this continued wrestling and struggling, her face had grown as pale as a wax candle, though her flesh remained unwasted. The swelling in her feet had appeared again twice, and had then subsided.

One morning she rang for Véronique and showed her her legs, which had swollen up to the thighs during the night.

"Just look at the state I'm in! Isn't it provoking? I wanted to go out so to-day, and now I shall be obliged to stay in bed! Don't say anything about it for fear of alarming Lazare."

She did not seem to be at all afraid herself. She merely said that she was feeling a little tired, and the members of the family supposed she was only suffering from a slight attack of lumbago. As Lazare was off on one of his rambles, and Pauline refrained from going into her aunt's room, knowing that her

presence there would be unwelcome, the sick women occupied herself by dinning into the servant's ears furious accusations against her niece. She seemed to have lost all control of herself. The state of motionlessness to which she was confined, and the palpitations which constantly threatened to choke her at the slightest movement, goaded her into an ever-increasing exasperation.

"What's she doing downstairs? Up to some fresh wickedness, I'm sure! She'll never think of coming near me or bringing me even a glass of water!"

"But, madame," Véronique urged, "it is you who drive her from you."

"Ah! you don't know all! There never was such a hypocrite as she is. Before people she pretends to be so kind and generous, but there's nothing she wouldn't do or say when your back's turned. Yes, my good girl, you were the only one whose eyes were open on the day I first brought her here. If she had never come here, we shouldn't now be in the state we are. She will be the complete ruin of us all. Your master has suffered all the agonies of the damned while she has been in the house, and she has worried and distressed me till she has quite undermined my health; while, as for my son, she has been the means of his being thrown quite off his head—"

"Oh! madame! how can you say so, when she is so kind and good to you all?"

Right up till the evening Madame Chanteau went on thus unburdening herself of her anger. She raved about everything and dwelt bitterly upon the abominable way in which Louise had been turned out of the house, but it was the money question that aroused her most rancorous anger. When Véronique was able, after dinner, to go down to the kitchen again, she found Pauline there, occupying herself by putting the crockery away; and so the servant, in her turn, took the opportunity of unburdening herself of the angry indignation which was choking her.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Pauline, it is very good of you to be bothering yourself about their plates. If I were you, I should smash the whole lot into bits!"

"What for?" the girl asked in astonishment.

"Because whatever you were to do, you couldn't come up to half of what they accuse you of!"

Then she broke out angrily, and bitterly raked up all her mistress's injustice to Pauline.

"It would put God Almighty Himself into a rage to see such things! She has drained your money away sou by sou, and she has done it in the most shameless manner imaginable. Upon my word, to hear her talk one would suppose that it was she who had been keeping you. When she had your money in her secrétaire she made as much fuss and talk about keeping it safe and untouched as though it was a girl's maidenhead she had got in her keeping, but all that didn't prevent her greedy hands from making pretty big holes in it. It's a nice piece of play-acting she's been keeping up all this time, contriving to make you pay for those workshops and then keeping the pot boiling with what was left! Ah! I daresay you don't know, but if it hadn't been for you the whole lot of them would have died of hunger! She got into a pretty flurry when the people in Paris began to worry her about the accounts! Yes, indeed, you could have had her sent right off to the assizes if you had liked. But all that didn't teach her a lesson, and she's still going on robbing you, and she will end by stripping you of your very last sou. I daresay you think I am not speaking the truth, but I swear that I am! I have seen it with my eyes and heard it with my ears; and I have too much respect for you, Mademoiselle Pauline, to tell you the worst things, such as how she went on just because you were ill and she couldn't get rummaging in your chest of drawers."

Pauline listened without interrupting by a single word. The thought that the family were actually living upon her and rapaciously plundering her had, indeed, frequently occurred to her and had cast a gloom over her happiest days. But she had always refused to allow her mind to dwell on the subject, and she had preferred to go on living in ignorance and to accuse herself secretly of avarice. But to-day she was determined to hear the whole truth of the matter, and Véronique's plain and unvarnished outspokenness seemed to aggravate the facts. At each fresh sentence the young girl's memory awoke within her, and she recalled old incidents, the exact meaning of which she had not understood at the time, and she saw clearly now through all Madame Chanteau's machinations to get hold of her money. She had dropped slowly down into a chair, as though she were suddenly overcome with great fatigue, and her lips were tightly drawn with an expression of grief and vexation.

"You are exaggerating!" she murmured.

"Exaggerating! I!" Véronique continued violently. "It

isn't so much the money part of the business that makes me so angry. What I can't forgive her is for having taken Monsieur Lazare from you after having once given him to you. Oh yes! it was very nice of her to rob you of your money and then to turn against you because you were no longer rich enough, and Monsieur Lazare must marry an heiress! Yes, indeed, that's the truth! They first pillage you and then toss you aside because you are no longer rich enough for them! No! Mademoiselle Pauline, I will not give over! There is no need to tear people's hearts into shreds after robbing them of all their money! You loved your cousin, and the least he could have done was to have paid you back with affection and kindness, and it is abominable for them to have stolen him from you too! It is she who has done it; I have seen through it all! Yes, yes, every night she has excited the girl and made her hot for the young man by her indecent talk about him. As certainly as that lamp is shining, it is she who has thrown them into each other's arms. Bah! she would have been only too glad to have seen them do what would have compelled them to marry each other; and it isn't her fault that they haven't gone as far as that yet. Try and defend her if you can, she who has trampled you under her feet and has caused you such grief that I can hear you sobbing in the night like a Magdalene! I am perfectly beside myself with all these cruelties and injustices!"

"Don't say any more, I beseech you!" stammered Pauline, whose courage was giving way. "You are giving me too great pain."

Big tears rolled down her cheeks. She felt quite conscious that Véronique was only telling her the truth, and her heart bled within her. All the past scenes sprang up before her eyes in lively reality, and she saw again Lazare straining the yielding Louise to his breast, while Madame Chanteau kept guard by the door. What had she done that every one should join in deceiving her, while she herself kept faith with all?

"I beg of you, don't say any more! I am choking with it all!"

When Véronique saw that the girl was so painfully overcome, she contented herself by just saying:

"Well, it's for your sake and not for hers that I don't go on. She's been spitting out up there a string of abominations about you ever since morning. She quite exhausted my patience and made my blood boil when I heard her turning all the kind-

nesses you have done her into evil. Yes, indeed! She pretends that you have been the ruin of the family, and that now you are killing her son! Come and listen at the door, if you don't believe me!"

Then, as Pauline broke out into a fit of sobbing, Véronique clasped her arms round her neck and kissed her hair, as she said:

"Well, well, Mademoiselle Pauline, I won't say any more. But it is only right that you should know it all. It is too shameful for you to be treated in such a way. But I won't say another word, so try to calm yourself, and don't take on so."

They were silent for a time, and the servant raked out the live embers that still burned in the grate, but she could not refrain from growling out:

"I know very well why she's swelling out like that! All her wickedness has sunk down into her knees!"

Pauline, whose head was bent in deep thought towards the kitchen floor, her mind pained and racked with grief, raised her eyes and asked Véronique what she meant. Had the swelling come back again? The servant showed some embarrassment as she was obliged to break her promise of silence. Though she allowed herself full liberty to pass judgment upon her mistress, still she obeyed her orders, but she was obliged to admit that her legs had again become badly swollen during the night, though she cautioned Pauline against letting Monsieur Lazare know. While the servant was relating the details of Madame Chanteau's condition, the expression of Pauline's face changed, and its sad depression gave way to an air of anxiety. In spite of all that she had just learned, she was painfully alarmed at the appearance of symptoms which she knew betokened grave danger.

"But she mustn't be left alone like this!" she exclaimed, springing up. "She is in danger!"

"In danger, indeed?" cried Véronique, unfeelingly. "She doesn't look at all like it, and she certainly doesn't think so herself, for she's far too busy in befouling other folks and giving herself airs in her bed like a pasha. Besides, she's asleep just now, and we must wait till to-morrow, which happens to be the day when the doctor comes to Bonneville."

The next day it was impossible any longer to conceal from Lazare his mother's condition. All the night through Pauline had been listening, and she woke up constantly, believing that

she had heard groans sounding through the floor, and in the morning she fell into such a deep sleep that it was not till nine o'clock that she awoke with a start upon hearing a door slammed. As she went downstairs to make inquiries; after having hastily dressed herself, she ran against Lazare on the landing of the first floor. He had just come out of his mother's room. The swelling had mounted up to her stomach, and Véronique had come to the conclusion that the young man must be told of it.

"Well?" asked Pauline.

At first Lazare, whose face wore an expression of troubled anxiety, made no reply. After a habit that was customary with him, he grasped his chin with his trembling fingers, and when at last he spoke, he stammered out with difficulty:

"It is all over with her!"

He went upstairs to his own room with a dazed air. Pauline followed him. When they reached the big room on the second floor, which she had never entered since the day she had surprised Louise there in her cousin's arms, Pauline closed the door and tried to re-assure Lazare.

"You don't even know what is the matter with her. Wait till the doctor has been, at any rate, before you begin to alarm yourself. She is very strong, and we may always hope for the best."

But her cousin was possessed by a presentiment of a fatal issue, and he only repeated with an expression of complete conviction:

"It is all over with her."

It was a perfectly unexpected blow, the shock of which quite overcame him. When he had got up that morning, he had gone and looked at the sea, as he always did, yawning with weariness of life, and cursing the idiotic emptiness of his existence. Then, when his mother had shown him her knees, the sight of her poor swollen limbs, all puffed out and pallid and looking as though they were already dead, had thrilled him with a burst of panic-stricken tenderness. It was ever like this. Every minute some fresh trouble came. And now, as he sat upon the edge of his big table, with his body all trembling and quivering, he did not dare to speak aloud the name of the disease whose symptoms he had just recognised. He had ever been haunted by a terror of heart-disease seizing upon himself and the members of his family, without his two years of

medical study having demonstrated to him the equality of all diseases upon the approach of death. To be stricken at the heart, at the very source of life, had always seemed to him the most terrible and distressing form of death. And it was this death that his mother was going to die, and which he himself would infallibly die also in his turn.

"Why should you distress yourself in this way?" Pauline asked him. "Plenty of dropsical people live for a very long time. Don't you remember Madame Simonnot? She died in the end of inflammation of the lungs."

But Lazare only shook his head. He was not a child to be deceived in this way. His hanging feet went on dangling in the air, and his body continued to quiver and tremble, as he kept his eyes fixed persistently on the window. Then, for the first time since their rupture, Pauline kissed him on the brow in her old manner. They were together again, side by side, in this big room, where they had grown up, and all their feeling against each other had died away before the great grief which was threatening them. The young girl wiped the tears from her eyes, but Lazare could not cry, and he only went on repeating mechanically:

"It is all over with her. It is all over with her."

When Doctor Cazenove called about eleven o'clock, as he generally did every week after his round through Bonneville, he appeared very much astonished at finding Madame Chanteau in bed. "What was the matter with the dear lady?" he asked. He even grew jocular, and said they were apparently quite turning the house into an ambulance. But when he had examined and sounded the patient, he became more serious, and he had need of all his great experience not to allow it to be seen that he was much alarmed.

Madame Chanteau herself had no idea of the gravity of her condition.

"I hope you are going to get me out of this, doctor," she said, gaily. "There's only one thing I'm frightened about, and that is that this swelling will suffocate me, if it goes on mounting higher and higher."

"Oh! keep yourself quite easy about that," he replied, smiling in turn. "It won't get any higher, and if it does, we shall be quite able to stop it."

Lazare, who had come into the room after the doctor's examination, stood trembling as he listened to what was being

said, and he was burning to take the doctor aside and question him, that he might know the worst.

"Now, my dear madame," Doctor Cazenove resumed, "don't worry yourself or make yourself anxious. I will come and have a little chat with you again to-morrow. Good morning; I will go and write my prescription downstairs."

When they got downstairs, Pauline prevented the doctor and Lazare from going into the dining-room, for in Chanteau's presence his wife's illness had never been mentioned as being anything more serious than ordinary lumbago. The young girl had already put ink and paper on the table in the kitchen. Seeing their impatient anxiety, Doctor Cazenove confessed that the case was a grave one, but he used long and complicated expressions and seemed trying to avoid telling them anything definite.

"You mean that it is all over with her, don't you?" Lazare cried at last, in a kind of irritation. "It is the heart, isn't it?"

Pauline looked at the doctor with a glance of supplication which was not thrown away upon him.

"The heart? Well, I'm not quite so sure about that," the doctor replied. "But, at any rate, even if we can't quite cure her of it, she may go on for a long time yet, with care."

The young man shrugged his shoulders and assumed an expression like that of an angry child who is not to be taken in by its nurse's fine stories. Then he exclaimed:

"And you never gave me any warning, doctor, though you have been attending her quite recently. These dreadful diseases never come on all at once. Had you no idea of it?"

"Well, yes," Cazenove murmured, "I had indeed noticed some slight indications."

Then, as Lazare broke out into a sneering laugh, he added:

"Listen to me, my fine fellow. I don't think that I'm a greater fool than my fellows, and yet this is not the first time that it has happened to me to have had no inkling of what was coming, and to find myself taken quite by surprise. It is absurd of you to expect us to be able to know everything, when we are very thankful just to be able to spell out the first few lines of what is going on in that very complicated piece of mechanism—the human body."

He seemed vexed, and he dashed his pen angrily as he wrote his prescription, tearing the thin paper he was using. The

naval-surgeon cropped up in the brusque movements of his big body. But when he stood up again with his old face tanned brown with the sea air, he softened as he saw Pauline and Lazare hopelessly hanging their heads.

"My poor children," he said, "we will try our best to bring her round. You know that I never put on grand airs before you, and I tell you frankly that I can answer for nothing. But it seems to me that there is, at any rate, no immediate danger."

Then he left the house, having ascertained that Lazare had a supply of tincture of digitalis. The prescription simply ordered applications of this tincture to the patient's legs, and a few drops of it to be taken in a glass of sugar and water. This treatment, the doctor said, would be sufficient for the present, and he would bring some pills with him in the morning. It was possible, too, that he might determine to bleed her. Pauline went out with him to his gig in order to ask him to tell her the real truth, but the real truth was what he did not dare to say. When she returned into the kitchen she found Lazare reading the prescription through again. The single word, digitalis, made him turn pale again.

"Don't distress yourselves so much," said Véronique, who had begun to pare potatoes, as an excuse for remaining where she was, and hearing what was said. "The doctors are all croakers. And surely there can't be much the matter, when they can't tell you what it is."

They began to discuss the matter round the bowl in which the cook was paring the potatoes, and Pauline appeared to grow a little easier in her mind. She had been in the morning to kiss her aunt, and she had found her looking well, and anyone who had cheeks like hers could not surely be dying. But Lazare went on twisting the prescription about in his feverish fingers. The word digitalis blazed before his eyes. His mother was doomed.

"I am going upstairs again," he said at last.

As he reached the door, he seemed to hesitate and he turned to his cousin and asked:

"Won't you come too, just for a minute?"

Pauline seemed then to hesitate in her turn for a moment, as she said:

"I'm afraid that she mightn't be pleased if I did."

Then, after a short interval of embarrassed silence, Lazare went upstairs by himself, without saying another word.

Lazare appeared again at luncheon for fear his father should be disquieted by his absence, but he was very pale. From time to time a ring of the bell summoned Véronique, who ran off with platefuls of soup which the patient could scarcely be induced to taste, and when she came downstairs again she told Pauline that the poor young man was growing quite distracted up above. It was heart-breaking, she said, to see him shivering with fever by his mother's bedside, wringing his hands and with his face racked with grief, as though he feared to see her torn from him every moment. About three o'clock the servant came downstairs again and, leaning over the balustrade, called to Pauline. When the young girl reached the first-floor-landing, Véronique said to her:

"You will have to come in, Mademoiselle Pauline, and assist us. We can't help it if it displeases her. She wants Monsieur Lazare to turn her round, and he can only groan without daring to touch her. And she won't let me go near her!"

Pauline entered the room. Madame Chanteau was lying propped up by three pillows, and, as far as appearances went, she might have been keeping her bed for no other reason than mere idleness, if it had not been for the quick and distressed breathing which set her shoulders heaving. Lazare was standing before her and was just stammering:

"It's on your right side, then, that you want me to turn you?"

"Yes; just turn me over a little. Ah! my poor boy, how difficult it seems to make you understand!"

But Pauline had already taken gently hold of her aunt and turned her very carefully round, as she said:

"Let me do it! I am used to doing it for my uncle. There! is that right? Are you comfortable now?"

But Madame Chanteau irritably exclaimed that they were shaking her to pieces. She did not seem able to make the slightest movement without being almost suffocated, and for a moment she lay panting with her face quite livid. Lazare had stepped behind the bed-curtains to conceal his expression of despair, but he looked on while Pauline rubbed her aunt's legs with the tincture of digitalis. At first he had turned his head aside, but the necessity he felt of seeing how matters actually were, forced him to bend his eyes upon these monstrously swollen limbs which were mere inert masses of pale flesh, the sight of which almost made him choke with agony.

When his cousin saw that he was so utterly upset, she thought it safer to send him out of the room. She went up to him, and as Madame Chanteau was now asleep, completely fatigued with the mere changing of her position, she whispered to him softly:

"I think it would be better if you were to go away now."

For a moment or two he resisted, and his tears blinded him. Then he yielded and went downstairs, feeling ashamed of his excessive emotion and sobbing out:

"Oh, God! God! I cannot endure it! I cannot endure it!"

When the sick woman woke up again, she did not at first notice her son's absence. She seemed to be in a state of stupor and to be absorbed in herself from an egotistic necessity of realizing that she really lived. Pauline's presence alone appeared to exercise any disquieting influence upon her, although the young girl remained aside and neither spoke nor moved. As her aunt bent her head forward, she felt that she must just say a word to let her know who it was that was there.

"It is I. Don't bother yourself. Lazare has gone to Verchemont, where he has to see the miller."

"Oh! very well," Madame Chanteau murmured.

"You are not ill enough to keep him from his business, are you?"

"Oh! certainly not."

From that moment she spoke but seldom of her son, notwithstanding the adoration she had manifested for him the previous night. He was obliterated from the remainder of her life, after having been the sole reason and object of her existence. The softening of her brain, which was now beginning to take place, left her merely a physical anxiety about her health. She accepted her niece's care and attendance, without apparently being conscious of the change, merely following her constantly with her eyes, as though she were troubled by the increasing suspicions which she felt as she saw the girl passing to and fro before the bed.

Lazare had gone down into the kitchen, where he remained in a nerveless and panic-stricken state. Every part of the house seemed to fill him with fear. He could not stay in his own room, the emptiness of which oppressed him, and he dared not go through the dining-room, where the sight of his father, quietly reading his newspaper, threw him into a burst of sobs. So it was to the kitchen that he constantly betook himself, as

being the one warm and cheerful spot in the house, and where he was comforted by the society of Véronique, who went on bustling about amongst her pans, just as in the old tranquil times. As she saw him seat himself near the fire-place in the wicker chair which he generally used, she frankly told him what she thought about his lack of courage.

"It's not much use you are, Monsieur Lazare, and it's poor Mademoiselle Pauline who has everything to do again. Anyone would suppose, to see you, that there had never been a sick woman in the house before, and yet, when your cousin nearly died of her sore throat, you nursed her most attentively. Yes, you know you did, and you stayed with her for a whole fortnight and found no difficulty in waiting upon her and helping her to change her position whenever it was necessary."

Lazare listened to Véronique with a feeling of surprise. This inconsistency of his had not struck him before, and he could not understand his own illogical and varying feelings and thoughts.

"Yes; that is quite true," he said, "quite true."

"You would not let anyone enter the room," the servant continued, "and Mademoiselle Pauline was even a more distressing sight than Madame Chanteau is, her suffering was so great. When I used to come away from her room I was completely upset and couldn't have eaten a mouthful of anything. But now the mere sight of your mother in bed makes your heart faint and you can't even take her a cup of gruel. Whatever your mother may be, you ought to remember that she still is your mother."

Lazare seemed as though he no longer heard what she was saying and his eyes were gazing before him into space. At last he said:

"I cannot help it; I really cannot. It's perhaps because it is my mother, but I cannot help being as I am. When I see her and those poor legs of hers and she says that she is dying, there seems to be something breaking inside me, and I should burst out crying if I did not rush out of the room."

He began to tremble all over again. He had picked up from the floor a knife which had fallen off the table, and his tear-dimmed eyes were gazing upon it without seeing it. For some time neither of them spoke. Véronique busied herself over her cooking to conceal the emotion which was overcoming her. Then, after a long interval of silence, she resumed:

"You had better go down on to the beach for a little time, Monsieur Lazare. You bother me by always being here in my

way. And take Matthew with you. He is very tiresome and doesn't know what to do with himself, like you, and I have no end of trouble in keeping him from going upstairs to Madame Chanteau's room."

The next morning Doctor Cazenove was still very doubtful and uncertain. A sudden catastrophe was possible, he said, or the patient might recover for a longer or shorter time, if the swelling could be reduced. He gave up the idea of bleeding her and confined himself to ordering her to take some pills which he brought with him and to continue the use of the tincture of digitalis. His air of annoyed vexation showed that he felt but little confidence in these remedies in the case of one of those organic disorders where the successive derangements of all the organs renders the skill of the physician of no avail. However, he was able to assure them that the sick woman suffered no pain; and, indeed, Madame Chanteau no longer made any complaints of actual suffering. Her legs felt as heavy as lead, and she breathed with constantly increasing difficulty when she moved herself, but, as she lay there quietly upon her back, her voice was so firm and strong, and her eyes were so bright and clear, that even she herself was deceived as to the gravity of her condition. Her son was the only one of those around her who did not venture to be hopeful at seeing her look so calm and undisturbed. When the doctor went away in his gig, he told them not to grieve too much, for that it was a great mercy both for herself and for them that she was quite unaware of her danger.

The first night had been a very hard one for Pauline. Reclining in an easy-chair, the girl had not been able to get any sleep with the heavy breathing of the sick woman constantly racking her ears. Whenever she was on the point of dropping asleep, her aunt's breath seemed to shake the house and make everything crack and strain; and then, when she opened her eyes again, she felt sad and oppressed, and all the troubles which had been marring her life for the last few months sprang up in her mind with fresh force again. Even by the side of this death-bed, she could not feel at peace and she could not constrain herself to pardon. In her night-mare-like vigil during the mournful night-hours, Véronique's statements caused her great torture. Her old outbursts of anger and bitter jealousy surged up in her again, as she mentally went over all their painful details. To be no more loved! To find herself

betrayed by those she had loved! These thoughts filled her, as she sat there alone, with angry scorn and rebellion. Her heart's wound opened and bled afresh, and never before had she felt such bitter pain from Lazare's insulting faithlessness. Since they had, so to say, murdered her, it mattered little to her now who died! And, in the midst of her aunt's heavy breathing, she went on brooding ceaselessly over the robbery of her money and her affections till her heart almost broke.

The next morning she still felt rebellious and mutinous, and she experienced no return of affection, and it was a sense of duty alone which kept her in her aunt's room. The consciousness of this made her unhappy, and she asked herself if she too was growing as wicked as the others. In this troubled state the day passed away, and the young girl, discontented with herself, and repelled by her aunt's suspicions, forced herself into attentive activity. Madame Chanteau received all her attentions snappishly, and followed her movements with suspicious eyes, as she minutely watched her every action. If she asked her niece for a handkerchief, she always smelt at it before using it, and when she saw the girl bringing her a jug of hot water, she wanted to examine the jug.

"What's the matter with her?" Pauline whispered very softly to Véronique. "Does she think me capable of trying to do her any harm?"

When Véronique gave her a dose of her draught after the doctor had gone away, Madame Chanteau, not noticing her niece, who was looking for some linen in the cupboard, said to the servant:

"Did the doctor prepare this?"

"No, madame, it was Mademoiselle Pauline."

Then the sick woman just sipped it with the edge of her lips, and made a grimace as she did so.

"Ah! it tastes of copper. I don't know what she has been making me take, but I've never had the taste of copper out of my mouth since yesterday."

Then she suddenly tossed the spoon away behind the bed. Véronique looked on in amazement.

"Whatever's the matter? What an idea to get into your head!"

"I don't want to go away before my time," Madame Chanteau said, as she laid her head back again upon her pillow. "Listen! my lungs are quite sound; and it's not impossible that she may go before I do, for she isn't very healthy."

Pauline had heard all this. She turned round, with a pang of pain shooting through her heart, and looked at Véronique; but, instead of coming any nearer, she stepped further away, feeling quite ashamed of her aunt for her abominable suspicion of her. A sudden change came over her feelings, and the sight of this unhappy woman, a prey to fear and hate, excited her to the deepest pity; and far from feeling any increase of bitterness against her, she was moved rather with a compassionate sorrow, as, when she bent her head down, her eyes caught sight of a heap of medicaments which the sick woman had thrown away under the bed, for fear of being poisoned. Up till the evening she showed a determined and persevering gentleness towards her aunt, and did not appear to notice the suspicious gaze that followed every motion of her hands. She was feeling very anxious to overcome the dying woman's fears of her by her affectionate attention to her, that she might not carry down to her grave such frightful suspicions of her. She forbade Véronique to further distress Lazare by telling him about the matter.

Only once since morning had Madame Chanteau asked for her son, and she had appeared quite contented with the first excuse that had been made for his absence and showed no surprise at not seeing him. She said nothing at all about her husband and expressed no uneasiness whatever about his being left alone in the dining room. All the world was gradually disappearing for her, and, minute by minute, the icy cold in her legs seemed to be mounting higher and chilling her very heart. As each meal-time came round, Pauline had to go downstairs and tell some fib to her uncle. In the evening she told one to Lazare as well, and assured him that the swelling was subsiding.

In the night, however, the disease made alarming strides, and the next morning, soon after daybreak, when Pauline and the servant came to see the sick woman, they were terrified at the wandering look in her eyes. Her face was not changed, and the feverishness seemed to have subsided, but her mind appeared to be failing her, and her one fixed idea seemed to be destroying her reason. She was in the last phase, and her mind, gradually wrought upon by a single absorbing passion, had now become a prey to insanity.

That morning, before Doctor Cazenove's arrival, they had a terrible time. Madame Chanteau would not even let her niece come anywhere near her.

"Do let me help you, I beg of you," Pauline said. "Just let me raise you a little, as you are lying so uncomfortably."

But her aunt began to struggle as though they were trying to suffocate her.

"No! no! You have got a pair of scissors there! Ah! you are sticking them into me! I can feel them! I can feel them! I'm bleeding all over!"

The heart-broken girl was obliged to keep at a distance from her aunt. She was quite overcome with fatigue and distress, and she broke down with her useless endeavours to be of assistance. She was obliged to put up with insults and accusations which made her burst into a flood of tears before she could induce her aunt to accept the slightest service from her. Sometimes all her efforts were in vain, and the poor girl fell weeping into a chair, despairing of ever winning back again that affection of former days, which seemed now to be replaced by an insane animosity against her. Then she would be all resignation again and rack her brains to find some way of making her assistance acceptable to her aunt, and manifest an even greater care and tenderness for her than before. This morning, however, her persistent entreaties had the effect of working her aunt up to such a pitch of mad excitement that the girl trembled with alarm for long afterwards.

"Aunt dear," she said, as she was preparing the dose of medicine, "it's time for you to take your draught. The doctor, you know, said that you were to be very particular to take it regularly."

Madame Chanteau insisted upon having the bottle given to her, and then she smelt at its contents.

"Is it the same as I had yesterday?"

"Yes, aunt dear."

"Then I won't have any of it!"

But, by much affectionate wheedling and entreaties, her niece prevailed upon her to take just one spoonful. The sick woman's face wore an expression of deep suspicion, and as soon as she had taken the spoonful of physic into her mouth, she spat it all out again on to the floor, torn by a violent fit of coughing, and screaming out between the paroxysms:

"It is vitriol you have given me! It is burning my throat out."

Her hatred and terror of Pauline, which had gradually increased since the time when she had first abstracted a twenty-

franc-piece from her niece's money, now broke out, in this complete derangement of hers, in a wild flood of mad words, to which the poor girl listened, almost petrified and without being able to say a single syllable in her own defence.

"Ah ! you flattered yourself that I shouldn't find it out ! You have put verdigris and vitriol into everything ! It's that that's killing me ! There was nothing the matter with me, and I should have been able to get up this morning if you hadn't mixed my broth with verdigris yesterday evening. Yes, I know all about it ; you are tired of me and want to get me buried and done with. But I'm very tough, and it is I who will bury you yet."

Her speech got gradually thicker and she appeared to be choking, while her lips became so black that there seemed danger of an immediate catastrophe.

"Oh ! aunt, aunt dear ! " Pauline cried, overcome with terror, "you are making yourself so much worse by going on like this ! "

"Well, you'll be all the better pleased for that, I'm sure ! Be off with you ! I can see plainly what you are scheming after. You have been plotting and planning for a long time, and ever since you have been here your only thought has been how to kill us off and get hold of our money. You want to have the house for your own, and I am in your way. Ah ! hussy, I ought to have choked you the first day you came here ! —I hate you ! I hate you ! "

Pauline stood quite motionless, her eyes streaming with silent tears. But one word rose to her lips, which she kept repeating as though in involuntary protest against her aunt's accusations.

"Oh God ! God ! "

Madame Chantcau grew completely exhausted by the violence of her fury, and her mad outburst gave place to a childish terror. She fell back on her pillow crying :

"Don't come near me ! Don't touch me !— If you do touch me, I will scream out for help !— No ! no ! I won't drink it, it's poison ! "

She dragged the bed-clothes over her with her twitching hands, buried her head amongst the pillows and shut her mouth tightly. When her niece, who was terribly alarmed, came up to her bedside to try to calm her, she broke out into frightful screams.

"Aunt dear, do be reasonable. I won't make you take any against your will."

"Yes, you will! You have got the bottle there! Oh! I am terrified! I am terrified!"

She struggled violently in her bed, and her head got too low in her terror, while her face, agonised with fear, was spotted with purple stains. Pauline, imagining that her aunt was dying before her face, rang the bell for Véronique; and it was all that the two of them could do to raise her up and lay her properly on her pillow.

Pauline's own personal troubles and heart-aches were completely swamped in this general grief of the family. She thought no more about the last wound which her heart had received, though it was quite fresh and open only the night before, and all her violence and jealousy drooped away and vanished before this great sorrow. Every other feeling was lost in a flood of deep pity, and she would have gladly endured injustice and insult and sacrificed herself altogether if she could, by so doing, have given comfort and consolation to the others. She set herself bravely to bear all that she had to suffer, and from this time she never for a moment gave way to her indignation, and she manifested by her aunt's bedside all the quiet resignation which she had shown when she was threatened by death herself. She was always ready and never recoiled at anything. All her old gentle affection came back to her, and she forgave her aunt for all her mad violence during her paroxysms, and wept with pity at seeing her gradually becoming quite insane, and forced herself to think of her as she had been in earlier years, loving her as she had done in the days of her childhood when she had first come with her on that stormy night to Bonneville.

On this day Doctor Cazenove did not come till after luncheon. An accident had detained him at Verchemont, where a farmer had broken his arm, and the doctor had stayed to set it. After he had seen Madame Chanteau and had come down into the kitchen, he made no attempt to conceal his alarm. Lazare was there, sitting by the fire, a prey to the feverish lassitude which was devouring him.

"There is no more hope, is there?" he asked. "I was reading again last night Bouillaud's Treatise on the Diseases of the Heart—"

Pauline, who had come downstairs with the doctor, again

glanced at him with a look of supplication, which prompted him to interrupt the young man in his brusque fashion. Whenever an illness was turning out badly, he always showed himself a little angry.

"Ah! the heart, my good sir, the heart seems to be the only idea you have got! One can't be certain of anything. For my own part, I believe it is rather the liver that is affected. But when any part of the machine gets out of order, the rest follows suit, the lungs, the stomach, and the heart itself. Instead of reading Bouillaud last night, which has only upset you, you would have done much better to go to sleep."

This speech of the doctor's became a sort of authority in the house, and in Lazare's presence it was always said that his mother was suffering from a diseased liver; but he refused to believe this and turned over the pages of his old books in his sleepless hours. He grew quite confused and mystified with the different symptoms, and the remark of the doctor that the different organs became successively deranged only served to still further increase his alarm.

"Well," he said at last, seeming to speak with great pain, "how long, then, do you think she will be able to go on like this?"

Cazenove made a gesture of vague doubt.

"A fortnight, perhaps; perhaps a month. You had better not question me, or I might deceive you, and then you would be right in saying that we know nothing and can do nothing. It is terrible, the progress that the disease has made since yesterday."

Véronique, who was washing some glasses, looked at him in alarm. Could it really be true, then, that madame was so very ill and that she was going to die? Up till then she had not been able to believe that there was any actual danger, and she went about her work muttering to herself of people trying to frighten folks only for the sake of making fools of them. She seemed stupefied and dazed, and when Pauline told her to go upstairs to Madame Chanteau, that there might be some one with her if she wanted anything, she wiped her hands in her apron and left the kitchen, unable to say more than:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"We must not forget my uncle, doctor," said Pauline, who seemed to be the only one of them who preserved her coolness.

"Don't you think we ought to warn him? Will you see him before you go?"

Just at this moment, the Abbé Horteur came in. He had only heard that morning of what he called Madame Chanteau's indisposition. When he learned how seriously ill she really was, an expression of unaffected grief passed over his weather-browned face that had come in cheerful and smiling from the fresh air. The poor lady! Could it be possible? She who had seemed so well and strong only three days ago!

After a moment's silence he asked if he could see her; and, at the same time, he glanced anxiously at Lazare, whom he knew to be little given to religious practices, and seemed to anticipate a refusal. But the young man, who was quite broken down with his emotion, did not appear to have noticed the priest's question and it was Pauline who answered it.

"No, not to-day, your reverence. She does not know the danger she is in, and your presence might have an alarming effect upon her. We will see about it to-morrow."

"Very well," the priest at once replied, "there is no great urgency, I hope. But we must all do our duty, you know. And as the doctor here refuses to believe in a God—"

For the last moment or two the doctor had been gazing earnestly at the table-leg, absorbed in thought and quite lost in a maze of doubt. He had just caught, however, the Abbé's last words and he interrupted him by saying:

"Who told you that I didn't believe in God? God is not an impossibility, and one sees very strange things! And, after all, who can be sure?"

He shook his head and seemed to be rousing himself from his reverie.

"Stay!" he went on to say, "you shall come with me and shake hands with our good friend Monsieur Chanteau. He will soon stand in need of all the courage he can muster."

"If you think it will cheer him at all," the priest said kindly, "I shall be very glad to stay with him and have a few games of draughts."

Then they both went away to the dining-room, while Pauline hastened back to her aunt. Lazare, when he was left alone, rose up and hesitated for a moment as to whether he too should not go to the sick woman's room, and then he went to listen at the dining-room door to his father's voice, without being able to summon up the courage to go inside. Then he went back to

the kitchen again, and threw himself down on the same chair where he had sat before and abandoned himself to his despair.

The priest and the doctor found Chanteau rolling about on the table a ball of paper, which he had made by wrapping up a prospectus inside his newspaper. Minouche, who was lying near, was looking on with her green eyes. She appeared to disdain this very elementary plaything as she lay with her feet stowed away beneath her, not deigning to take the trouble to strike out at it with her claws. The ball had just rolled close to her nose.

"Hallo! is it you?" cried Chanteau. "It is very good of you to come and see me. I was feeling a little dull, all by myself. Well, doctor, she's getting on all right, I hope? I don't feel at all uneasy about her; she's much the strongest of the whole lot of us, and she will see us all buried."

It occurred to the doctor that this would be a good opportunity for informing Chanteau of the real state of affairs.

"Well, certainly, there's nothing very alarming in her condition, but she seems to me to be in a very weak state."

"Ah! doctor," Chanteau exclaimed, "you don't know her. She has an incredible fund of strength, and you will see her on her feet again in a day or two."

In his complete belief in his wife's vigorous constitution, he quite failed to understand the doctor's hints, and the latter, not wishing to tell him the dreadful truth in plain words, was obliged to say no more about the matter; and he thought, besides, that it would be as well to wait a little longer; for just now Chanteau was in a state of cheerfulness and freedom from pain, and his gout was only troubling him in his legs, though the latter were sufficiently incapacitated to make it necessary for him to be wheeled to his bed in his chair.

"If it were not for these confounded legs of mine," he said, "I would go upstairs and see her myself."

"Resign yourself, my friend," said the Abbé Horteur, who in his turn now began to try to carry out his office of consoler. "We have each of us our own cross to bear, and we are all in the hands of God—"

But he did not fail to notice that these words, so far from consoling Chanteau, only appeared to weary him and even to disquiet him, so he cut short his exhortation and substituted for it a more efficacious means of cheering him.

"Would you like to have a game at draughts? It will do you good."

He went himself to get the draught-board from the cupboard. Chanteau was delighted, and shook hands with the doctor who then took his departure. The two men were already deep in their game and quite forgetful of all else in the world, when Minouche, who had probably got tired of seeing the ball of paper remaining constantly under her nose, suddenly sprang forward and sent it spinning away with a blow from her foot, and then bounded off in wild antics after it round the room.

"Botheration take the capricious creature!" cried Chanteau, put out in his play. "She wouldn't have a game with me on any account a little while ago, and now she is quite preventing one from thinking by playing all by herself."

"Never mind her," said the priest mildly; "cats have their own way of amusing themselves."

On his way back through the kitchen, Doctor Cazenove was carried away by a sudden flow of emotion upon seeing Lazare still brooding in despair in the same chair, and he seized the young man in his great arms and kissed him paternally without saying a word. Just at that moment Véronique came downstairs again, driving Matthew before her. He was perpetually prowling about the stair-case, making a sort of hissing sound through his nose, which somewhat resembled a bird's plaint, and, whenever he found the door of the sick woman's room open, he went in and continued wailing out his sharp notes that were quite ear-piercing in their persistency.

"Get away with you, then! Be off!" the servant cried. "That noise of yours isn't likely to do her any good."

Then as she caught sight of Lazare, she added: "Take him for a walk somewhere. He will be out of our way and it will do you good, too."

It was really an order of Pauline's that Véronique was conveying. The young girl had told her to get Lazare to go out of the house and take some long walks. But he refused to go, and it seemed to require an effort even for him to get onto his feet. Then the dog came and stood before him, and re-commenced its wailing.

"That poor Matthew isn't as young as he was once," said the doctor, who was watching him.

"No indeed!" said Véronique. "He is fourteen years old now, but that doesn't prevent him from being as wild as ever

after the mice. Look how he has rubbed the skin off his nose and how red his eyes are! He scented a mouse under the grate last night, and he never closed his eyes afterwards; he turned all my kitchen upside-down with his nose. Oh! he is quite young enough, yet, for all that! And such a great big dog, too, to go on so about such a tiny little creature, it's quite ridiculous! But it isn't only mice! Anything that's little or crawls, newly hatched chickens or Minouche's kittens, anything of that sort is quite sufficient to excite him so that he even forgets to eat and drink. Just now I'm sure he scents something out-of-the-common in the house—."

She checked herself, as she caught sight of Lazare's eyes filling with tears.

"Go out for a walk, my lad," the doctor said to him. "You can't be of any use in the house, and it will do you good to go out for a little."

The young man at last rose painfully to his feet. "Well, we'll go," he said. "Come along, my poor old Matthew."

When he had accompanied the doctor to his gig, he set off along the cliffs with the dog. From time to time he had to stop and wait for Matthew, for the dog was really ageing quickly. His hind-quarters were getting paralysed, and his heavy feet sounded like slippers as the dog dragged them along after him. He was no longer able to go scooping out holes in the kitchen-garden and he quickly rolled over with dizziness when he set himself spinning round after his tail. He very soon grew tired now, and had fits of coughing whenever he plunged into the water, and a quarter of an hour's walking was sufficient to make him want to lie down and snore. He trudged along on the beach just in front of his master's legs.

Lazare stood stationary for a moment watching a fishing-smack from Port-au-Bessin, whose brown sail was skimming over the sea like the wing of a gull. Then he went on his way again. The thought that his mother was dying kept thrilling and pulsing painfully through him; and, if ever it left him for a moment, it was only to return again immediately and rack him more violently than before. It recurred to him like a perpetual surprise, an idea to which he could not grow reconciled, and which prevented him from thinking about anything else. Sometimes for a few seconds it seemed to lose its distinctness, and he only felt a vague night-mare-like depression in which nothing stood out clearly, and he experienced merely a sensation

of some great indefinite evil having fallen upon him; and then everything around him seemed to disappear for a time, and when he again became conscious of the sands and the sea-weed and the sea in the distance and the far-reaching horizon, he started as though they were all new and strange to him. Could they be the objects that were so familiar to him! Everything seemed to have changed in some way; their colours and their shapes seemed somehow different. His mother was dying! He walked on and on, trying to escape from this buzzing refrain within him which was ever singing in his ears.

Suddenly he heard a deep sigh behind him. He turned round and saw the dog completely exhausted, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

"Ah! my poor old Matthew," he said to him, "you can't get on any further. Well, we'll go back home again. However far I go, I sha'n't walk out of my thoughts."

That evening they hurried quickly over dinner. Lazare, whose constipated stomach could endure nothing more than a few mouthfuls of bread, hastened away upstairs to his own room, excusing himself to his father by alleging a pressing piece of work. When he reached the first floor, he went into his mother's room, where he forced himself to sit for some five minutes before kissing her and wishing her good-night. She seemed to be forgetting all about him and never expressed the least anxiety as to what he was doing during the day. When he bent over her, she reached out her cheek towards him and seemed to consider this hasty good-night of his quite natural, absorbed as she was in the instinctive egotism of approaching death. Then he hurried away, and Pauline took care to cut his visit as short as she could by inventing some excuse for sending him out of the room.

When he had shut himself up alone in his big room on the second floor, his mental torment increased two-fold. It was in the night, the long weary night, that his trouble weighed heaviest upon him. He had brought up a supply of candles, that he might never be without light, and be kept them burning, one after another, till morning, terror-stricken at the thought of darkness. When he got into bed, he tried in vain to read. His old medical treatises were the only books that had now any interest for him, but they only filled him with fear and he threw them away from him. Then he lay on his back, with his eyes wide open, conscious of nothing but a feeling that close to him,

on the other side of the wall, some awful thing was happening, whose presence weighed upon him and suffocated him. The panting breath of his dying mother was for ever in his ears, that panting breath which had become so heavy that for the last two days he had heard it as he mounted up each step of the stair-case, which he never ascended now without hurried hasty strides.

The whole house seemed to be breathing out a great groan, which thrilled through him as he lay in his bed, while the occasional intervals of quiet filled him with alarmed anxiety, and he at last ran out on to the landing with bare feet and bent over the balustrade to listen. Pauline and Véronique, who were keeping watch together below, had left the door of the room open for the sake of ventilation, and Lazare could see the pale patch of glimmering light which the night-lamp threw upon the floor, and could hear again his mother's heavy panting breath, which seemed louder and more prolonged in the darkness. And when he went back to his bed, he, too, left his door open, for he felt a necessity of continuing to hear his mother's rattling breathing, which so beset him that, even in the snatches of sleep into which he fell towards morning, he still continued conscious of it. His personal horror of death had vanished again as it had done at the time of his cousin's illness. His mother was going to die; everyone was going to die! He abandoned himself to the contemplation of this sweeping extinction of life without any other feeling than one of exasperation at his impotence in any way to avert it.

The next morning saw the commencement of Madame Chanteau's death-agony, a rambling agony which lasted for twenty-four hours. She was calm and no longer racked with a terror of being poisoned, but she rambled on ceaselessly, speaking rapidly and in clear tones without raising her head from her pillow. What she said was in no way a conversation and was not addressed to anyone, but it was as though, in the general derangement of the body, her brain was hurriedly performing its functions like a watch that is running down, and this flood of rapid words was the last tick-tacks of the almost unwound chain of her intelligence. All the events of her past life seemed to be defiling before her, but she never said a word about the present, about her husband, or her son, or her niece, or her home at Bonneville, where her ambitious nature had suffered for half-a-score years. She was still Mademoiselle de la Vignière

at the time when she gave music-lessons in the most distinguished families in Caen, and she pronounced familiarly names which neither Pauline nor Véronique had ever heard before. She broke out into long rambling stories whose details were quite new even to the servant who had grown old in her service. She seemed to be emptying her brain of the recollections of her youth before she died, just as one might turn out the faded letters of former days from a desk where they have been lying through long years.

In spite of her courage, Pauline could not help shuddering a little as all these unknown and involuntary confessions were poured out in the very throes of death. It was no longer with the sound of panting and difficult breathing that the room was filled, but with a weird and rambling babble. As Lazare passed the door, he caught fragments of it and turned them over in his mind without being able to understand them, and he grew full of strange alarm, as though his mother were already speaking from the other side of the grave and was surrounded by invisible beings.

When Doctor Cazenove arrived, he found Chanteau and the Abbé Horteur playing draughts in the dining-room. From all appearances, they might have still been going on with the game they had commenced the day before and never have stirred out of the room since the doctor's last visit. Minouche was sitting near them, intently studying the draught-board. The priest had arrived at an early hour in the morning to resume his duties as consoler. Pauline no longer felt that his visiting her aunt would be attended with any inconvenience, and when the doctor went upstairs to see her, the priest left his game and accompanied him to the sick woman's bedside, where he presented himself simply as a friend who was anxious to know how she was.

Madame Chanteau knew them both and had herself raised up on her pillow and smilingly welcomed them with all the airs of a fashionable Caen lady holding a reception. The dear doctor was quite satisfied with her, she was sure he was, she said; and she would very soon be able to leave her bed. Then she questioned the Abbé about his own health. The latter, who had come upstairs with the intention of fulfilling his priestly duties, was so overcome with emotion at hearing the dying woman's rambling chatter that he could not open his mouth; and, besides, Pauline, who was in the room as well, would have stopped

him if he had begun to mention certain subjects. The young girl had sufficient control over herself to feign an appearance of confident cheerfulness. When the two men went away, she went out on to the landing with them, where the doctor, in low tones, gave her instructions as to what she was to do in the last instance. The words, "rapid decomposition," and "carbolic acid," were mentioned, while the ceaseless torrent of chatter from the dying woman's lips flowed and buzzed through the open door.

"You think, then, that she will see the day out?" the young girl asked.

"Yes, I feel sure that she will live till to-morrow," Cazenove answered. "But don't lift her up any more, or she might die in your arms. I shall come again this evening."

It was settled that the Abbé Horteur should remain with Chanteau and gradually prepare him for the approaching fatal issue. Véronique stood listening near the door while this was being agreed upon, and her face wore a scared expression. Now that the probability of her mistress's death had become quite clear to her, she never opened her lips, but busied herself anxiously to render her all possible service with the silent devotion of a faithful animal. All voices were hushed, and Lazare wandered up the stair-case and about the rooms, lacking the courage to be present when the doctor came and to inquire the truth as to his mother's danger. But the mournful silence in which the house was wrapped forced the knowledge upon him in spite of himself and he grew very pale.

"My dear boy," the doctor said to him, "you had better come along with me. I will give you some lunch and bring you back with me in the evening."

A pallor spread over the young man's face, as he answered the doctor.

"No, thank you," he said; "I would rather not go away."

From that moment Lazare felt a terrible feeling of pressure on his breast, as if an iron band were drawn tightly round him. The day seemed as though it would never end, and yet it passed away without his being conscious of how the hours went by. He had no recollection of how he had spent them, wandering restlessly up and down the stairs and gazing out upon the distant sea, whose ceaseless rocking served to complete his trance-like state. The irresistible flight of the minutes seemed to materialize itself for him and to assume the

appearance of a granite mass which drove everything before it into the abyss of nothingness. Then he became possessed with a feeling of exasperation and longed for the end to come, that he might be released from the strain of this terrible waiting and expectation. About four o'clock, as he was creeping up once more to his own room, he turned suddenly aside and entered his mother's. He felt a desire to see her and a necessity of kissing her again. But, as he bent down over her, she went on pouring out her flood of incoherent talk and did not even now reach her cheek towards him with that weary manner with which she had received him since the commencement of her illness. Perhaps she did not see him, he thought, for it was no longer his mother who lay there with that livid face and lips already blackened.

"Go away!" Pauline said to him gently. "Go out for a little. I assure you that the hour has not yet come."

And then, instead of going up to his own room, Lazare rushed away downstairs. He ran out of the house, with the sight of that sad face, which he could no longer recognize, still before his eyes. He told himself that his cousin had lied to him, that the hour was really at hand, but he felt suffocated and a necessity of being in the open air, and he rushed on as though he were mad. The thought that he would never, never again, see his mother tortured him terribly. Then he fancied he heard some one running after him, and when he turned round and saw Matthew, who was trying to overtake him with his heavy steps, he became possessed with a groundless anger and picked up stones and hurled them at the dog, storming at him madly the while, to drive him back to the house. Matthew, amazed at this reception, trotted back for some distance, and then turned round and gazed at his master with his gentle eyes, in which tears seemed to be glistening. He persisted in following Lazare at a distance, as though to keep watch over his despair, and the young man could not drive him away. The immensity of the sea, too, had an irritating effect upon Lazare, and he rushed off into the fields and wandered about, looking for out-of-the-way corners where he could feel alone and concealed. He prowled up and down till the night fell, tramping over ploughed fields and breaking his way through hedges. At last, quite worn out, he returned homewards. On his way back he beheld a sight which thrilled him with superstitious terror. On the edge of a lonely road there stood

a solitary poplar, lofty and black, over which the rising moon appeared like a yellow flame, and it looked like a gigantic taper burning in the dusky darkness at the head of some mighty dead one, lying out there in the open country.

"Come, Matthew! Come!" he cried with a choking voice. "Let us get on!"

He reached the house running, as he had left it. The dog had ventured to come close to him, and was licking his hands.

Although the night had now fallen, there was no light in the kitchen. It was empty and dark, with only the glow of the cinder-fire reddening the ceiling. The gloom weighed upon Lazare, and he had not the courage to go any further. Overcome with fear and emotion, he remained standing in the midst of the disordered pots and dusters, and he strained his ears to catch the sounds with which the house was throbbing. On one side he heard a slight cough; it came from his father, to whom the Abbé Horteur was talking in low continuous tones. But what most of all thrilled the young man with terror were the hushed voices and hasty steps on the stairs, and a muffled sound on the upper floor, which he could not account for, and which seemed to suggest that some task was being hurriedly performed there with as little noise as possible. He did not dare to go and see what it meant. Could it be, he thought, that all was over? He continued standing where he was, perfectly motionless, without being able to summon up the courage to go and inquire the truth, when he saw Véronique coming from upstairs. She ran into the kitchen and lighted a candle and carried it away with her so hurriedly that she neither spoke to nor looked at the young man. The kitchen, which had been lighted up for a moment, fell back into darkness. Up above the sounds were ceasing. Once more the servant appeared in the kitchen for a moment. This time she came to get a bowl, with all her former silent haste and scared appearance. Lazare no longer felt any doubt. All must be over, he was sure. Then, feeling quite faint and overcome, he sank down upon the edge of the table, and waited in the midst of the darkness without knowing for what he was waiting, while his ears buzzed with the unbroken silence that had just fallen round him.

Upstairs, Madame Chanteau had been in her last agony for two hours past, an agony so awful that it thrilled Pauline and Véronique with horror. Her dread of being poisoned had

re-appeared and she raised herself up in bed, still rambling on wildly and rapidly, and ever increasingly shaken with furious delirium. She wished to jump out of bed and escape from the house, where, she said, there was someone who wanted to kill her; and it was all that the young girl and the servant could do to restrain her.

"Let me go! Let me go! If you don't, I shall be murdered! I must escape at once, at once!"

Véronique tried to calm her.

"Oh! madame, don't you see us here? You can't suppose that we should let any harm come to you."

The dying woman was quite exhausted with her violent struggles, and lay quiet for a moment, panting. Her troubled eyes, now dimmed by the approach of death, wandered anxiously round the room as though she were looking for something. Then she said:

"Shut up the secretaire! It is in the drawer. Ah! there she is coming up the stairs! Oh! I am afraid! I tell you that I hear her coming! Don't give her the key. Let me go away at once, at once!"

Then she began to struggle and wrestle again in her bed, while Pauline held her in her arms.

"Aunt, dear aunt, there is no one here. There are only ourselves."

"No! no! Listen! There she is! Oh, God! God! I am dying! The murderess has made me drink it all—I am dying! I am dying!"

Her teeth clattered together, and she rushed for protection into the arms of her niece, whom she did not recognize. Pauline strained her mournfully to her heart, no longer fighting against her aunt's horrible suspicion of her, and resigning herself to the knowledge that she would carry it with her to her grave.

Fortunately Véronique was watching the sick woman attentively, and she rushed forward crying:

"Take care, mademoiselle! Take care!"

It was the supreme convulsive struggle. By a violent effort Madame Chanteau had succeeded in throwing her swollen legs out of the bed, and, if it had not been for the servant's presence, she would have fallen out altogether on to the floor. Her whole body was shaken with an insane delirium, and she broke out into incoherent spasmodic cries, while her fists were tightly clenched as though she were engaging in a close struggle with

some enemy; and she seemed to be defending herself against an invisible foe who was clutching her by the throat. In this supreme moment she opened widely her intelligent eyes, that were now dilated with horror, as though to see herself die. A frightful spasm of pain made her press her hands to her breast for an instant. Then she fell back on her pillow and her flesh turned black. She was dead.

There was an unbroken silence for a time. Pauline was utterly exhausted and broken down, but she still summoned up her strength to close her aunt's eyes. Then she recognized that she was capable of nothing further. When she left the room, leaving there, together with Véronique, Prouane's wife, whom she had sent for after the doctor's visit, her strength gave way as she reached the stairs; she was obliged to sit down for a moment on one of the steps, and she no longer felt the courage to go and tell Lazare and Chanteau of her aunt's death. The walls seemed to be turning round her. In a few minutes she again laid her hand upon the balustrade, but, hearing the Abbé Horteur's voice in the dining-room, she made her way to the kitchen. Here she found Lazare, whose gloomy face was outlined against the red glow of the embers in the grate. Without speaking a word, she stepped towards him and spread out her arms. He understood, and threw himself upon the young girl's shoulder, and she strained him to her in a long embrace. Then they kissed each other on the brow. Pauline wept silently, but Lazare could not shed a single tear, and felt such a choking sensation that he could scarcely breathe. At last the young girl unclasped her arms, saying the first words that came to her lips.

"Why are you here without a light?"

He made a motion with his hands, as though he meant to signify that he was in too great trouble to have any need of a light.

"We must light a candle," she said.

Lazare had fallen down on a chair again, quite incapable of keeping on his feet. Matthew was restlessly wandering about in the yard, sniffing the damp night-air. He came back into the kitchen and looked keenly at them in turn, and then went and put his big head on his master's knee, where he remained, silently questioning him, with his eyes fixed upon the young man's. Lazare began to tremble at the dog's presistent gaze, and suddenly the tears streamed out of his eyes and he burst into

sobs, while he threw his arms closely round the neck of the old dog, that his mother had loved for fourteen years.

He began to stammer out in broken words:

"Ah! my poor old fellow! my poor old fellow! We shall never see her again!"

Notwithstanding her trouble, Pauline had succeeded in finding and lighting a candle. She made no attempt to console Lazare, glad to find him able to shed tears. There was still a painful task before her, that of informing her uncle of his wife's death. Just at the time when she was making up her mind to go into the dining-room, where Véronique had taken a lamp at the beginning of the evening, the Abbé Horteur had managed to succeed in explaining to Chanteau, in long ecclesiastical phrases, that there was no chance of his wife's recovery, and that her death was only a question of hours. So, when the old man saw his niece enter the room, overcome with emotion and with her eyes red from weeping, he knew what had happened, and his first words were:

"Oh! there was only one thing that I would have asked for, to have been able to see her once more while she lived!—Oh! these miserable legs of mine! These miserable legs!"

He said scarcely anything more than this. He shed a few bitter tears which quickly dried up, and he broke out into a few groans, but he speedily returned to the subject of his legs, falling foul of them and ending by pitying himself. For a few moments they discussed the possibility of carrying him up to the first floor that he might give the dead woman a last kiss; but, apart from the difficulties of such a task, they considered that the emotion, which such a farewell would probably give rise to in him, might have a dangerous effect upon him; and, besides, he did not seem very anxious about it himself. So he remained in the dining-room by the disordered draught-board, not knowing how to occupy his poor weak hands, and not having a clear enough head, as he said, to be able to read and understand the newspaper. When they carried him to bed, old memories seemed to awaken in him, for he shed many tears.

Then two long nights and a day that seemed endless passed by, those terrible hours during which death dwells in the house. Cazenove had only returned to certify the death, once more taken by surprise by the rapidity with which the end came. Lazare did not go to bed the first night, and spent the hours till morning in writing to his relations at a distance.

The body was to be taken to the cemetery at Caen and was to be buried in the family vault there. The doctor had kindly taken upon himself to see that all the formalities were carried out, and the only painful matter that occurred in connection with them at Bonneville was the necessity of Chanteau, as mayor, receiving the declaration of his wife's death. As Pauline had no suitable black dress, she hastened to make one up with the help of an old skirt and a merino shawl, out of which she cut a bodice. In the midst of these occupations the first night and the following day passed away, but the second night seemed endless, rendered more seemingly interminable by the mournful prospect of the morrow. No one was able to get any sleep, the doors were all kept open and lighted candles were placed upon the stairs and tables, while even the most distant rooms were permeated with the odour of carbolic acid. The whole family was overwhelmed with gloomy grief; and they went about with troubled eyes and clammy lips, now that there was no longer any necessity for exerting themselves.

At last, about ten o'clock the next morning, the bell of the little church on the other side of the road began to toll. Out of respect to the Abbé Horteur, who had behaved so well and kindly under the sad circumstances, the family had determined that the religious ceremony should be performed at Bonneville, before the body was taken to the cemetery at Caen. As soon as Chanteau heard the bell toll, he began to struggle about in his chair.

"I must see her go away, at any rate," he said. "Oh! these wretched legs of mine! What a misery it is to have such wretched legs as mine are!"

It was to no purpose that they tried to keep him from seeing the mournful spectacle. As the bell began to toll more quickly, he grew distressed and exclaimed:

"Wheel me out into the passage. I can hear them bringing her down. Be quick! be quick! I must see her go away!"

Pauline and Lazare, who had their full mourning on and had already put on their gloves, were obliged to do as he wished. Standing, the one on his right and the other on his left, they wheeled the arm-chair to the foot of the stair-case. Four men were just carrying the corpse downstairs, bending beneath its great weight. As Chanteau caught sight of the coffin, with its new wood and glittering handles and engraved brass name-plate, he made an instinctive effort to rise, but his leaden legs

nailed him to the ground, and he was obliged to remain seated in his chair, shaken by such a convulsive trembling that his jaws clattered one against the other. The narrowness of the stair-case made the descent difficult, and he gazed at the great yellow box as it came slowly towards him, and, as it passed by his feet, he bent over it to read the inscription on the plate. There was more room in the passage, and the bearers moved quickly on towards the bier, which was standing before the door. Chanteau, with his eyes still fixed on the coffin, was seeing forty years of his life go away with it, happy ones and unhappy ones, which he was sadly regretting, as one ever does regret past-away youth. Pauline and Lazare were weeping behind his chair.

"No! no! Leave me here!" he said to them, as he saw them preparing to wheel him back again to his place in the dining-room. "You go along; I will stay here and watch."

The bearers had laid the coffin upon the bier, which was lifted up by some other attendants. The procession was formed in the yard, which was filled with the people of the neighbourhood. Matthew, who had been shut up since the morning, was whining from under the door of the coach-house in the midst of the surrounding silence, while Minouche, who was sitting by the kitchen window, was observing with an air of surprise all this crowd of people and the box that they were carrying. As they still continued to linger, the cat grew tired of watching them and began to lick her stomach.

"You are not going, then?" Chanteau said to Véronique, whom he had just caught sight of, near to him.

"No, sir," she replied in a choking voice. "Mademoiselle has told me to stay with you."

The church bell was still tolling, and at last the coffin left the yard in the full sunlight, followed by Pauline and Lazare, dressed in deep mourning. And, sitting in his invalid's chair in the open door-way, Chanteau watched his wife's body being borne away.



CHANTEAU ASSISTING AT HIS WIFE'S FUNERAL.

CHAPTER VII.

THE matters connected with the funeral ceremonies and certain business affairs that had to be attended to detained Lazare and Pauline in Caen for a couple of days. When they set out on their journey home again after having paid a farewell visit to the cemetery, the weather had broken up and there was a strong gale blowing. They left Arromanches in a driving storm of rain, and the wind blew so strongly as to threaten to carry away the hood of their trap. Pauline thought of their first journey when Madame Chanteau had brought her from Paris. It was just such a stormy day as this, and her poor aunt kept warning her not to lean out of the conveyance, and was perpetually fastening the handkerchief that she wore round her neck. Lazare, too, in his corner of the trap sat thinking of the past, and saw in his mind's eye his mother waiting to welcome him after each of his journeys home along this road. One December, he remembered, she had walked a couple of leagues to meet him, and he had found her seated on yonder milestone waiting for him. The rain poured down unceasingly, and the young girl and her cousin did not exchange a single word between Arromanches and Bonneville.

Just as they were reaching home, however, the rain stopped, but the wind redoubled its violence, and the coachman was obliged to get off his seat and take hold of the horse's bridle. At the moment of arriving at the house, Houtelard, the fisherman, ran past them.

"Ah! Monsieur Lazare!" he cried; "it's a pretty kind of a day this! It's breaking all your timbers to bits down there!"

The sea was not visible from this bend of the road. The young man who had raised his head had just caught sight of Véronique standing upon the terrace and gazing towards the beach. On the other side, sheltering himself behind his garden-wall, for fear the wind should tear his cassock, the Abbé

Horteur was straining his eyes in the same direction. He bent forward and cried out:

"It is washing your piles away!"

Then Lazare walked down the hill, followed by Pauline, in spite of the storminess of the weather. When they came out at the foot of the cliff they stood petrified at the sight which they beheld. It was one of the September spring-tides, and the sea was flowing up in terribly wild commotion. No warning had been issued of any probable danger, but the gale which had been blowing from the north since the previous day had thrown the sea into such a tremendous tumult that mountains of water towered up away in the distance and rolled along and broke with a mighty roar over the rocks. In the far distance the sea looked quite black beneath the shadow of the clouds that raced headlong over the gloomy sky.

"Go and get into the trap again!" the young man said to his cousin. "I will just see how things look, and will be back directly."

Pauline made no reply, but she followed Lazare as far as the beach. There the piles and a great stockade which had been quite recently constructed were being subjected to a furious assault. The waves, which seemed to be ever growing larger, threw themselves against them in quick succession, like so many battering-rams. They came on like a perfectly innumerable army, rolling along their masses without a moment's cessation. Their mighty green backs, crested with foam, rose up far as the eye could reach, and sped forward with their giant bulk; and, as they dashed themselves against the stockades, they flew into a mighty rain of drops with the force of the shock and fell back again in a mass of boiling foam, which the sea seemed to suck in and carry away. The timbers cracked and strained loudly beneath the violence of each of these furious onsets. The supports of one of the stockades were already broken, and the great central beam, secured only at one end, was swaying hopelessly backwards and forwards, like the dead trunk of a tree whose branches had been stripped off by a discharge of grape-shot. Two others offered a stronger resistance, but they could be seen to shake and tremble in their fixings as though they were being gradually overpowered in their struggle against the surging mass, which seemed to be first wearing out their strength in order to dash them to pieces afterwards.

"I told you how it would be!" Prouane was saying. He was very drunk and was leaning against the broken shell of an old boat. "I told you how it would be when the wind blew like this. A great lot the sea cares about the young man and his bits of sticks!"

The bystanders received his words with titters. All Bonneville was there, the men, the women, and the children; and they were all very much amused at seeing the thundering blows which fell upon the stockades. The sea might smash their cottages into fragments, but they still loved it with an admiring awe, and they would have felt it a personal insult if the first young man who tried had been able to conquer it with a few beams and a couple of dozen bolts. They grew excited and puffed up with a feeling of individual triumph as they saw the sea wake up and hurl itself forward with all its wild impetuosity.

"Look! look!" cried Houtelard. "That's a smasher! It's swept a couple of beams clean away!"

They called out to each other, and Cuche began to reckon up the waves.

"It will take three more, and then you'll see! There's one! That's loosened it! There's two! Ah! that's swept it away! Two have been sufficient to do it, you see! Well done, old slut!"

The word was spoken as though it were a caress. Affectionate oaths were heard on all sides, and the children began to dance whenever a heavier wave than usual dashed up and snapped another of the timbers. "There goes another! There goes another!" they cried, and gleefully told each other that there wouldn't be one left, and that they would be all crushed and squashed like fleas under a shoe. But though the tide went on getting higher and higher, the great stockade still remained firm. It was the sea's struggle against this that was most anxiously awaited and was considered as being the decisive contest. At last the mounting waves dashed against the timbers, and the spectators prepared themselves to break out into a laugh.

"It's a pity the young man isn't down there himself," said the scoundrelly Tourmal in a jeering voice, "or he might lean against it and try to keep it up."

A "hush! hush!" made him silent, for some of the fishermen had just caught sight of Lazare and Pauline. The latter were

very pale, and had heard Houtelard's sneer, and they continued to gaze in silence on the broken piles. It was a mere trifle, all these smashed beams, but the tide would yet go on rising for another two hours, and the village would certainly suffer if the stockade did not hold out. Lazare had put his arm round his cousin's waist, and was holding her close to him to protect her from the squalls which blew against them as cutting as knife-blades. A mournful gloom fell down from the black sky and the waves towered up and rushed wildly on, but the two young people, in their deep mourning, stood perfectly motionless in the midst of the flying foam and the turmoil that was ever growing louder. The fishermen were all waiting anxiously, looking on with a jeering expression on their lips, though they were beginning to feel an increasing anxiety as to the effects of the storm.

"It won't last much longer, now!" Houtelard murmured. The stockade, however, still resisted the sea's attack. As every wave struck against it and covered it with foam, and then ebbed back, its black, pitch-coated timbers appeared again out of the whitened waters. But as soon as any one of the beams was broken, the adjoining timbers began to fall away, one by one. For fifty years past the oldest men there had not known such a heavy sea. Soon the spectators had to retire before the advancing tide, and the beams which had been washed away were dashed violently against the others, and gradually wrought the complete destruction of the stockade, whose fragments the waves hurled furiously ashore. There was only a single beam left upright, standing there like a post marking a sand-bank. The Bonneville folks had given over laughing now, and the women were crying as they carried off their children. The "slut" had fallen upon them again, and the stupor that came of despairing resignation to the ruin that was certainly coming upon them brooded over the little spot which nestled so closely to the sea that both supported it and destroyed it. There was a hasty retreat and a gallop of heavy boots. Everyone took refuge behind the walls of shingle, by which alone, now, the houses were protected. Already some of the piles here were yielding, and some of the planks had been knocked out, while enormous waves swept right over the walls that were too low to stay their course. Soon there was nothing left to offer any resistance, and a mass of water dashed up against Houtelard's house, smashing the windows and deluging

the kitchen. It was a perfect rout, now, and the sea remained completely victorious as it dashed unimpeded up the beach.

"Don't go inside!" the men shouted to Houtelard. "The roof is falling in."

Lazare and Pauline had slowly retired before the advancing flood. It was impossible to render any assistance, and they began to climb up the hill towards home. The young girl turned round when they were half-way up, and gave a last look at the threatened village.

"Poor things!" she murmured.

But Lazare could not pardon them for their idiotic laughter. He was wounded to the heart by this disaster, which seemed to him to be a personal defeat and humiliation, and it was with an angry gesture that at last he opened his mouth and growled out:

"Let it come and lie in their beds, since they're so fond of it! I certainly won't try to prevent it!"

Véronique came to meet them with an umbrella, for the rain had commenced falling heavily again. The Abbé Horteur, who was still sheltering himself behind his wall, called out a few words to them which they could not catch. The frightful weather, the destruction of the stockades, and the miserable condition in which they were leaving the village, threw an additional feeling of gloom and sadness round their return home. The house seemed cold and deserted as they entered it, and nothing but the wind, with its ceaseless moaning, disturbed the silence of the mournful-looking rooms. Chanteau, who was dozing before the coke-fire, began to cry as soon as they appeared. They both refrained from going upstairs to change their clothes that they might escape the terrible associations of the staircase. The table was already laid and the lamp lighted, and they sat down to dinner immediately. It was a gloomy, depressing night, and the thundering shocks of the waves, which made the walls tremble, interrupted the few words that were spoken. When Véronique brought the tea into the room she announced that Houtelard's house and five others were already swept away, and that half the village would certainly share the same fate this time. Chanteau, who had not yet recovered his mental equilibrium after the sufferings he had gone through, reduced her to silence by telling her that he had quite enough troubles of his own, and didn't want to hear about those of other people. When they had put him to bed,

the others went off to rest too, feeling quite worn out with fatigue. Lazare kept a light burning till morning; and half-a-score times, at least, during the night Pauline anxiously got out of bed and opened her door very gently and listened, but there only ascended a death-like silence from the now empty first floor.

The next day there commenced for the young man a succession of those lingering, poignant hours which come in the train of great sorrows. He awoke with the sensation of recovering from unconsciousness after some painful fall, from which his body was still feeling stiff and bruised. Now that the troubled dreams which had oppressed him during the night had passed away, his mind recalled vividly all the past. Each little detail presented itself clearly before him, and he lived all his griefs over again. The reality of death, which had never before been within his own personal experience, was now brought home to him in the loss of his poor mother, who had been so suddenly ravished from him after only a few days' illness. His horror of ceasing to be seemed to assume a more tangible form. There had been four of them, but now there was a yawning gap in their midst, and three of them were left behind to shiver painfully in their wretchedness, and to cling desperately to each other in the attempt to get back some fragment of their lost vital warmth. This, then, was death: this departure never to return, this circling of trembling arms around a shadow, of which nothing remained save a wild regret.

Every hour, as the image of the dead woman perpetually recurred to him, he seemed to be losing his poor mother over again. At first he had not suffered so much, not even when his cousin came down just after her aunt's death and threw herself into his arms, nor during the prolonged misery of the funeral. It was only since his return to the empty house that he had felt the full weight of his loss, and he grew wild with remorse that he had not wept more and manifested a greater grief, while there still remained in the house something of her who had gone. Sometimes he would almost choke with a fit of sobbing as he reproached himself with not having loved his mother sufficiently. He was perpetually evoking her image, and her form was ever before his eyes. When he went up the stairs, he half expected to see her come out of her room with the quick, short steps with which she used to hurry along the land-

ing. He often turned round, fancying he heard her behind him, and he was so absorbed in thinking of her, that sometimes he even felt sure he heard the rustling of her dress behind the door. At night, he did not dare to extinguish his candle, and in the dim light he fancied that he heard furtive sounds approaching his bed, and a slight breath skimming over his brow. His grief, instead of becoming assuaged, grew continually keener, and the least thing that reminded him of his mother thrilled him with a nervous shock, and evoked before him a vivid image of her, which, as it faded away, left him writhing in all the agony with which the thought of death filled him.

Everything in the house reminded him of his mother. Her room remained untouched; nothing had been changed, and a thimble was still lying upon the table by the side of a piece of embroidery. The clock on the mantel-piece had been stopped at twenty-three minutes to eight, the time of her death. He shunned the room, though sometimes, as he was hastily rushing up the stairs, a sudden impulse constrained him to enter it; and then, as his heart throbbed wildly within him, it seemed to him that the old familiar furniture—the secrétaire, the table, and especially the bed—had acquired an awe-inspiring appearance, which made them different from what they used to be. Through the shutters, that were kept constantly closed, there streamed a pale light whose vague glimmer added to his trouble as he went to kiss the pillow on which his mother's head had lain in the icy cold of death. One morning when he went into the room he stood transfixed. The shutters were thrown wide open and allowed the full light of day to pour into the apartment. A bright ray of sunshine was streaming across the bed and over the pillow, and the room was decked with flowers, placed in all the vases that the house possessed. Then he recollected that it was an anniversary, the birthday of her who had gone away; a day which had been observed every year, and which his cousin had remembered. There were only the flowers of autumn there, asters, marguerites, and the last lingering roses, already touched with frost, but they seemed sweetly redolent of life, and they wreathed their joyous colours round the dead dial, which seemed to mark the arrest of time's progress. This pious feminine observance filled him with emotion, and he stayed there in tears for a long time.

The dining-room, the kitchen, and the terrace, too, equally

reminded him of his mother. All the little objects he saw lying about suggested her to him. He was quite beset with this perpetual possession of his mother's image, but he never spoke of it, and seemed to try to conceal, with a feeling of uneasy shame, the constant torture which he experienced from his ceaseless pre-occupation with the dead woman. He even avoided mentioning her name, and it might have been supposed that he had already forgotten her, and that no thought of her ever entered his mind, while all the time never a moment passed without his heart being pierced by some sad suggestion of her. It was only his cousin who seemed to penetrate his secret, and when she spoke to him about it, he would take refuge in a falsehood, and protest that he had put out his light at midnight, and assert that he had been very busy over some piece of work, and seemed on the point of working himself up into an angry passion, if he were further pressed. He took refuge in his own room, where he shut himself up and abandoned himself to his reflections, feeling calmer in this room, where he had grown up, than anywhere else in the house, and free from the fear of revealing to others the secret of the trouble that overwhelmed him.

At first he had tried to force himself to go out and resume his long walks, thinking that, by doing so, he would at any rate escape Véronique's grumpy taciturnity and the painful sight of his father, as he listlessly lay back in his chair, not knowing how to occupy himself. But he felt an invincible distaste for walking, and he grew weary out-of-doors with a weariness that almost amounted to a disquietude. The sea, with its perpetual rocking motion, its never-ceasing ebb and flow, and its waves that washed up against the cliffs twice a day, irritated him as being a mere senseless force that recked nothing of his grief, and had gone on wearing away the same rocks for long centuries, without ever having shed a single tear for the death of a human being. It was too immense, too cold; and he hurried back home again and shut himself up in his room, that he might be less conscious of his own littleness and less crushed down between the infinite sea and the infinite sky. There was only one spot that had an attraction for him, and that was the graveyard that surrounded the church. His mother was not there, and he could think of her there with a melting tenderness, and, in spite of his horror of death, the place had a singularly calming effect upon him. The tombs lay sleeping amongst the

grass, the yew-trees cast their protecting shade over the church, and there was not a sound to be heard, save the call of the curlews, as they skimmed through the fresh sea-air. Here he forgot himself for hours, amongst the old tombstones, from which the very names of those who had long ago passed away had been obliterated by the biting rains from the west.

If Lazare had retained any belief in another world, if he had been able to comfort himself with the hope that he would one day meet again those he loved at the other side of the grave's black gulf, he would have been far happier; but he was entirely without this consolation, and he felt no doubt as to death being the end and extinction of individual life. And yet his own individuality, which ill-brooked the thought of being snuffed out, rose up in mutiny against his convictions, and filled him with thoughts of the joy there would be in entering upon a fresh life elsewhere, far away amongst the stars, a new existence where he would once again be surrounded by all he loved. Ah! if he could only believe this, how the agony he was now suffering would be turned to sweetness, as he looked forward to joining once more his lost loved ones, and to their thrilling kisses at meeting, and all their great joy at finding themselves together again in a land where there should be no more death. The thought of it all racked him with agony, for it was nothing, he told himself, but a charitable falsehood of the creeds, designed in pity to hide the terrible truth from those too weak to bear it. No! Death was the end of everything; nothing that we had loved could ever bud out into fresh life, and the good-bye was said for ever. Oh! those awful words—for ever! They seemed to send his brain wheeling with the dizzy vertigo of utter empty nothingness.

One morning as Lazare was brooding beneath the shadow of the yews, he caught sight of the Abbé Horteur at the bottom of his vegetable-garden, which was only separated from the grave-yard by a low wall. Wearing an old grey blouse and a pair of wooden shoes, the priest was digging a cabbage-bed; and, with his face browned by the keen sea-air and the back of his neck darkly tanned by the sun, he looked like an old peasant bending over his work. With a miserable stipend, and without any extra remuneration in the shape of fees in this out-of-the-way parish, he would have died of sheer starvation if he had not been able to eke out his livelihood by growing a few vegetables. What little money he had went in charity, and he

lived quite alone, assisted only by a young girl from the village, and often being obliged to cook his own meals. To make matters worse, the soil in this rocky spot was scarcely good for anything, and the wind withered up his plants, and it was really scarcely worth while to go on struggling and cultivating the stony ground for the sake of the very meagre return he got. When he put his blouse on, he always tried to keep himself hidden away from notice, for fear it should give anyone cause to scoff at religion, and Lazare, knowing this, was about to slip away, when he saw the priest take his pipe out of his pocket and fill it with tobacco and then light it with a loud smacking of his lips. As he was puffing out the first mouthful of smoke, the Abbé caught sight of the young man. He made a hasty movement, as though he were going to hide his pipe, but then he broke out into a laugh, and called out:

"Ah! you are enjoying the fresh air. Come in and have a look at my garden."

And, as Lazare came up to him, he added gaily:

"Well, you see, you are finding me in the midst of a debauch. It is the only pleasure I get, my friend, and I am sure it is not displeasing to God."

Then he put his pipe back into his mouth and puffed away freely, only taking it out now and then to make a short remark. It was in this way that the priest of Verchemont found occupation and distraction. He was a happy man as he told himself that he had got a really fine garden with fertile and fruitful soil; and, whenever anything happened to annoy him, he would come out here and set to work with his spade. Just now, he was complaining to Lazare a little about his potatoes, which had been falling off for the last two years, though the soil, he said, was exactly suited to them.

"Don't let me disturb you," Lazare said to him. "Please go on with what you were doing."

The Abbé resumed his digging.

"Yes, indeed, I must get on," he said. "The youngsters will be here to say their catechism presently, and I want to get this bed finished before they come."

Lazare had seated himself on a slab of granite, an ancient tombstone, that leaned against the low wall of the churchyard. He watched the Abbé Horteur struggling on against the stones and listened to him while he talked in that shrill voice of his that sounded almost like a child's; and, as he watched and

listened, he wished that he could be as poor and as simple-minded as the priest, with a brain as calm and a body as tranquil. The mere fact that his bishop had allowed him to grow old in this miserable cure was a plain proof of how innocent and guileless he had the reputation of being; and he was, indeed, one of those who never complain, and whose every ambition is satisfied when they have bread to eat and water to drink.

"It isn't very cheerful living amongst all these tombs," the young man said, thinking aloud.

The priest stopped digging in surprise.

"What! not cheerful?"

"Well, you have got death perpetually before your eyes. I should think you must dream about it at nights."

The priest took his pipe out of his mouth and spat upon the ground.

"No, indeed, I never dream about it at all. We are all in the hands of God."

Then he began to dig again, driving his spade into the ground with a blow from his foot. His faith kept him free from fear, and his imagination never strayed beyond what was revealed in the catechism. Good folks died and went to heaven. Nothing could be simpler and more encouraging. He smiled in a convinced sort of way; his stolid, unwavering theory of salvation was quite sufficient to fill his narrow brain-pan.

From this time Lazare visited the priest almost every morning in his garden. He used to sit down on the old tombstone and forget his thoughts as he watched the Abbé cultivating his vegetables, and gained a temporary tranquillity by the contemplation of his blind faith which enabled him to live in the midst of death without being disquieted by it. Why couldn't he, he thought, become a simple child again, like this old man was? In the bottom of his heart he harboured some lurking hope that his dead faith would be fanned into life again by his converse with this guileless and simple-minded priest, whose tranquil ignorance had an immense charm for him. He began to bring a pipe with him, and the two of them smoked together while they chatted about the slugs that were devouring the plants, or of the manure that was too expensive, for it was but seldom that the priest spoke of God, whom his tolerance and long experience led him to reserve for his own personal salvation. Other people looked after their affairs in their own way

and he looked after his in his way. After thirty years of unavailing preaching and warning, he now confined himself to the strict observance of his own ministerial duties. It was very kind of the young man, he thought, to come and see him every day, and as, with his tolerant and charitable disposition, he did not want to cavil with him nor to inveigh against the theories which he had brought back from Paris, he preferred to talk with him perpetually about the garden; while Lazare, with his head buzzing with all the priest's simple gossip, sometimes thought that he was really on the point of entering again that happy age of ignorance where fear is unknown.

But though the mornings glided away one after another in this manner, Lazare still brooded every night, up in his room, over the memory of his mother, without being able to summon up the courage to put out his light. His faith was quite dead. One day, as he was sitting smoking with the Abbé Horteur, the latter hastily hid his pipe out of sight on hearing the sound of footsteps behind the pear-trees. It was Pauline, who had come to look for her cousin.

"The doctor is in the house," she said, "and I have asked him to stay to lunch. You'll come in soon, won't you?"

She was smiling, for she had caught sight of the Abbé's pipe beneath his blouse. The priest quickly pulled it out again with that cheerful laugh that he broke into whenever he was discovered smoking.

"It is very silly of me to do so," he said. "People would think I had been committing a crime. See! I am going to light it again before you!"

"I tell you what, your reverence!" Pauline exclaimed gaily, "you shall come and lunch with us and the doctor, and you shall smoke your pipe afterwards."

The priest was delighted, and said with much heartiness:

"I accept gladly. I will follow you directly. I must just go and put my cassock on. And I will certainly bring my pipe with me; I promise I will."

It was the first luncheon since Madame Chanteau's death at which the dining-room had rung with the sound of laughter. The Abbé Horteur smoked his pipe over the dessert, and this made them all very merry, a merriment which the priest's genial humour over this indulgence made seem quite natural. Chanteau had eaten heartily, and he grew quite lively under the cheering influence of this fresh stir of life in the house.

Doctor Cazenove launched out into stories and anecdotes of savages, while Pauline beamed with pleasure at hearing all this laughing and talking, hoping that it might perhaps have the effect of withdrawing Lazare from his moody despondency.

After this luncheon, Pauline determined to commence again the Saturday dinners, which had been broken off by her aunt's death. The Abbé and the doctor resumed their regular attendance at them, and the life of the family went along on its old lines once more. They grew quite merry and gay again, and the widower would clap his hands on his legs and protest that, if it wasn't for that confounded gout, he would get up and dance, so jovial did he yet feel. It was only Lazare who still remained unhinged. His talk still manifested the morbid fancies that possessed him, and he often broke out into a sudden shudder while he was speaking.

One Saturday evening, in the middle of dinner, the Abbé Horteur was summoned to the bedside of a dying man. He did not even wait to empty his glass, but set off at once, without paying any heed to the doctor, who had visited the man before coming to dine and told the Abbé that he would find him already dead. The priest had shown himself so weak in intellect this evening that Chanteau said, when his back was turned:

"There are times when there seems to be very little in him."

"I would willingly change with him," Lazare said shortly. "He is much happier than we are."

The doctor laughed.

"That may be so. Matthew and Minouche are also happier than we are. Ah! I recognise in that remark of yours the young man of to-day, who has nibbled at the sciences and filled himself with discontent because they have not enabled him to satisfy his old ideas of the absolute, ideas which he sucked in with his mother's milk. You want to discover in the sciences, at the first attempt and all alone, all the truths, while we are content to go on painfully and slowly deciphering them, recognising that it will take an eternity before they are thoroughly mastered. Then you begin to deny that there is anything in them, and you try to fall back upon your old faith, but it will have nothing more to do with you, and so you drop down into pessimism. Yes! pessimism is the disease of this latter end of the century. You are a set of revived Werthers!"

It was the doctor's favourite subject, and he grew quite

animated over it. Lazare, on his side, unreservedly asserted the impossibility of all certainty and his belief in the final universality of evil.

"How can we go on enduring life," he asked, "when every moment things are giving way beneath our feet?"

The old man yielded to an impulse of youthful passion as he retorted:

"Why, just go on living! Isn't life itself sufficient! Happiness consists in action."

Then he abruptly turned round and addressed himself to Pauline, who was listening to them with a smile on her face.

"Come now!" he said, "tell us what you do to be always contented and cheerful!"

"Oh!" she replied, in a joking tone, "I try to forget all about myself, for fear I should grow melancholy and low-spirited, and to think about others, which occupies my mind and makes me bear my troubles patiently."

This reply seemed to irritate Lazare, who, prompted by a spirit of malicious contradiction, asserted that woman ought to be religious; and he pretended not to be able to understand why Pauline had ceased to fulfil her duties for so long a time. Then the young girl gave her reasons in her calm, tranquil manner.

"It is very easily explained," she said. "Confession is very distasteful to me and wounds my feelings, and it affects many women, I think, in the same way. Then, again, I can't bring myself to believe things that seem contrary to reason. And that being so, why should I tell a lie by pretending that I do believe them? And, besides, the unknown in no way disquiets me, and it seems to me best to await it as tranquilly as possible."

"Hush! Hush! Here's the Abbé!" interrupted Chanteau, whom this conversation was beginning to bore a little.

The man was dead, and the Abbé tranquilly finished his dinner, and then they each drank a little glass of chartreuse.

Pauline had now assumed the management of the household. All the purchases and every detail of the establishment came under her inspection, and the bunch of keys dangled from her waist. She took over the control quite as a matter of course, and Véronique showed not the slightest sign of displeasure. The servant, however, had been very morose since Madame Chanteau's death, and almost appeared to be in a state of

stupor. Her affection for the dead woman seemed to be springing into new life again within her, while she was once more beginning to treat Pauline with a suspicious surliness. It was to no purpose that the latter spoke softly and soothingly to her; she took offence at a word, and she could be heard muttering and grumbling to herself in the kitchen. And whenever, after long intervals of obstinate silence, she indulged in these muttered soliloquies, she always appeared to be overwhelmed by the same appearance of stupefaction as manifested itself in her on the day of Madame Chanteau's death. Could she tell that her mistress was going to die, she moaned to herself? If she had had any notion of such a thing, she would never have thought of saying what she did. Justice before everything, and it wasn't right to kill people, even if they had their faults. But she washed her hands of it all, she growled to herself, and it would be so much the worse for the person who was the real cause of it. But this assurance which she gave to herself did not seem to have any soothing effect upon her, and she went on muttering and growling and defending herself against imaginary accusations.

"What's the matter with you that you are perpetually worrying yourself like this?" Pauline asked her one day. "We both did all we could; but we can do nothing against death."

Véronique shook her head.

"Ah! people don't usually die like that. Madame Chanteau was what she was, but she took me in when I was quite a little girl, and I could cut my tongue out if I thought that anything I had said had aught to do with her death. Don't let us talk about it any more."

No further reference had been made to the marriage of Pauline and Lazare. Chanteau, who was desirous of bringing the matter to a conclusion, now that the main obstacle to it had disappeared, had once ventured in making an allusion to it one day when Pauline came and sat near him with her sewing to keep him company. He felt a keen desire to keep her with him and a great horror of falling again into the hands of Véronique in case his niece should ever leave him. Pauline gave him to understand that nothing could be settled until the completion of the period of mourning. It was not a feeling of propriety alone that prompted her to make this vague reply, but she was also looking to the lapse of time to answer her a

question which she did not dare to attempt to answer herself. The suddenness of her aunt's death, that terrible blow from which neither she nor her cousin had yet recovered, had overwhelmed their sorrow-stricken hearts with a kind of stagnation, from which they were gradually waking up again, only to suffer the more on finding themselves, in addition to the irreproachable loss they had suffered, face to face with their own troubled story. Louise had been taken by surprise and driven out of the house; their love had been shattered, and, perhaps, the whole course of their existence changed. What was to be done now? Supposing that they still loved each other, was their marriage possible or advisable? Questions like these floated through their minds which the sudden blow that had fallen upon them had numbed and dazed, without either the one or the other manifesting any anxiety for their speedy solution.

With Pauline, however, the recollection of the insult that had been offered to her had lost much of its bitterness. She had long ago forgiven Lazare, and was quite ready to lay her hand in his whenever he should come and ask for her pardon. She had not the least desire to see him humiliate himself before her, and her only thought was for him, that she might give him back his promise if he no longer loved her. Her whole trouble lay in this doubt: did he still love Louise?—or had he forgotten her and returned to the old affections of his early youth? As she brooded thus over giving Lazare up rather than make him unhappy, her heart sank within her, and, though she felt she would have the courage to do so if it were necessary, she hoped she would die soon afterwards.

Ever since her aunt's death she had been moved by an impulse of generosity, and had made up her mind to bring about a reconciliation between herself and Louise. Chanteau could write to her, and she herself would just add a line to say that she had forgotten what had happened. They were all feeling so lonely and dull that the presence of the girl would serve to distract them from their gloomy thoughts; and, after the terrible shock of her aunt's death, all that had happened before it seemed very far away, and she had often since regretted that she had behaved so violently. But, whenever she thought of speaking to her uncle on the subject, a feeling of repugnance held her back from actually doing so. Wouldn't it be, she thought, imperilling the future, and tempting Lazare, and perhaps losing him altogether? But perhaps she would have

still been brave and proud enough to be willing to run this risk, if her sense of justice had not risen in revolt against it within her. It was the treason alone that seemed to her so unpardonable. And then, again, she thought, was not she herself capable of restoring happiness and life to the house? Why call in a stranger, when she was conscious that she herself was brimming over with willing devotion and affection? Without her being aware of it, there was a touch of pride in her self-sacrifice and abnegation, and she was a little jealous in her devotion, while her heart yearned that she alone should be her relatives' solace.

From this time all Pauline's endeavours were bent in this direction. She devoted herself and laid herself out in every way to make those about her cheerful and happy. Never before had she shown herself so persistently cheerful and kindly. Every morning she came down with a bright smile and a fixed determination to conceal her own griefs that she might do nothing to add to those of others. Her gentle amiability seemed to set all troubles at defiance, and she possessed a sweet evenness of disposition which disarmed all feeling against her. She was now in perfect health again, strong and sound as a young tree, and the happiness that she spread around her was the emanation of her own healthy brightness. The beginning of each fresh day delighted her, and she found a pleasure in doing in it what she had done in the one before it, perfectly contented and quiet in mind, and looking forward to the morrow calmly and without any touch of feverish expectation. Though Véronique went on muttering in her kitchen and indulged in strange and inexplicable caprices, her eccentricities had no power to affect the others painfully, for a fresh burst of life was driving all mournfulness out of the house, and the merry laughter of former days rang through the rooms and echoed cheerily up the staircase. Chanteau himself seemed particularly delighted by the change, for the sad gloominess of the house had always wearied and depressed him. Existence, in his case, had really become an infliction and a curse, yet he clung to it with the desperate clutch of a sick man who holds dearly to life, though it be nothing but pain to him. Every day that he went on living seemed to be a victory achieved, and his niece appeared to him to brighten and warm the house like a beam of sunlight, beneath whose rays it was impossible for death to lay its chilling touch upon him.

Pauline, however, had one source of trouble. Lazare seemed proof against all her attempts to console him, and she grew distressed as she saw him falling a prey again to his moody broodings. Lurking behind his grief for his mother, there was a revival of his terror of death. Now that the lapse of time was beginning to mitigate the pungency of his first sorrow, this terror of death was asserting all its old sway over him, and was becoming heightened by the fear of hereditary disease. He felt quite sure that he too would succumb to some derangement of his heart, and he brooded over the certainty of a speedy and tragic end. He was constantly listening to the sounds of life within him in a state of nervous excitement, and feverishly observed the painful contractions of his stomach, the red secretions of his kidneys, and the dull burning of his liver ; but it was the sound of his heart-beats which seemed to him to peal echoingly through his every limb, right up to his finger-tips, that absorbed him beyond everything else. If he laid his elbow upon the table, he heard his heart beating in his elbow ; if he leant his neck against the back of a chair, he heard his heart beating in the back of his neck ; if he sat down, if he went to bed, he heard his heart beating in his thighs, in his sides, in his stomach ; and ever and ever its throbbing beat seemed to him to be telling out the passage of his life with the sound of a clock that was running down. Dazed by this constant study and observation of his body, he was perpetually alarming himself with the fear that it was on the point of entirely breaking down, that all his organs were worn out, and that his heart, which disease, he imagined, had swollen out to a monstrous size, was going to rend his whole frame in pieces by its hammer-like blows. He no longer now so much lived as listened to himself live, racked with trembling terror at the frailness of the vital machine, and nervously and fearfully awaiting the little grain of sand which should stop the wheels of his life.

In this way Lazare's mental sufferings had gone on ever increasing. For many years past, every night as he lay down in his bed, the thought of death thrilled through him and froze him to the very marrow, and now he did not even dare to go to sleep, racked with the fear of never waking again. Sleep was hateful to him, and he experienced all the horror of dying as he felt himself growing drowsy and falling off into the unconsciousness of slumber. His sudden wakings-up shattered him still more, seeming to drag him out of black darkness, as though

some giant-hand had clutched him by the hair and hurled him back into life again, shivering and stammering with horror of the mysterious unknown through which he had passed; and he clasped his hands together convulsively, more desperate and panic-stricken than ever at the thought that he must surely die. He suffered such torture every night that he hated the thought of going to bed. He found that he could lie down on the couch and sleep in the day-time in perfect peace, and it was probably these heavy slumbers during the day which made his night so restless and disturbed. By degrees, he gave over going to bed at night at all, getting sufficient sleep in his long afternoon dozes on the couch to prevent him feeling drowsy until daybreak drove away the darkness which made his sleep so terrible.

He had, however, intervals of calmness, and sometimes he would remain free from his haunting fears of death for two or three nights in succession. One day Pauline found an almanack in his room, dotted over with red ink. She asked him the meaning of the marks.

"What have you marked it for like this? Why are all those days dotted?"

"I haven't marked anything," he stammered. "I know nothing about it."

Then his cousin said gaily:

"I thought it was only girls who trusted to their diaries things that they wouldn't tell to anyone else. If you have been thinking about us on all these days that you have marked, it is very nice of you indeed. Ah! I see you have secrets of your own!"

But as she saw him becoming more and more troubled, she was good-natured enough to press him no further. Across the young man's brow there was brooding the shadow which she knew so well, the shadow which was left by that secret trouble which she seemed so powerless to alleviate.

For some time past he had also been astonishing her by a fresh eccentricity. Possessed by a firm conviction that his end was close at hand, he never left a room, or closed a book, or used anything without thinking that it was the last time he would do so, and that he would never see the thing he had used, or the book he had closed, or the room that he had left again, and he had, in consequence, contracted a habit of bidding continual farewells, and he felt a morbid constraint to take up and handle

different objects that he might be certain of thus seeing them once more. He did this in a systematic sort of a way, taking three steps to the right and then as many to the left, touching the different articles of furniture at each side of a window or door the same number of times, having a sort of superstitious feeling that a certain number of touchings, some five or seven, for instance, distributed in a particular fashion, prevented the farewell from being a definite one. In spite of his keen intelligence and his disbelief in the supernatural, he carried out these foolish superstitious practices with an animal-like docility, which he tried to hide as though it were some shameful failing. It was the revenge taken by the deranged nervous system of this pessimist and positivist, who declared that he believed only in what was actually known. He was becoming quite bewitched by it.

"What in the world are you pacing up and down like that for?" Pauline cried. "That's three times you've gone up to that cupboard and touched the key. It won't run off!"

In the evening he seemed as though he would never be able to get away from the dining-room. He arranged all the chairs in a certain order, tapped the door a particular number of times, and then entered the room again to lay his hands, first the right one and then the left, on his grandfather's masterpiece. Pauline was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, and at last she broke out into a peal of laughter.

"What an idiotic way for a man of twenty-four to be going on! Where is the sense, I should like to know, in tormenting things in that way?"

But after a time she ceased to make a jest of him, growing much distressed at the disquietude to which he was a prey. One morning she surprised him as he kissed seven times the framework of the bed on which his mother had died. The sight filled her with alarm, and she began to guess the torture which embittered his existence. When she saw him turn pale as he came upon a reference in a newspaper to the twentieth century, she fixed upon him a compassionate gaze which made him turn his head aside. He recognised that she understood him, and he rushed off and hid himself in his own room, with all the shame and confusion of a woman who has been suddenly surprised in a state of nakedness. Over and over again did he reproach himself as a coward and swear that he would struggle to resist the influence of this weakness of his. He would argue

with himself and bring himself to look death in the face, and then, in a spirit of bravado, instead of passing the night awake on his couch, he would quickly undress and jump into his bed. Death, he would say to himself, was welcome to come, and he would wait it there as a deliverance. But then immediately the throbbing of his heart drove all his oaths away into oblivion, and an icy breath seemed to freeze his bones, and he frantically stretched out his hands as he broke into his despairing cry of "Oh, God! God!" It was these terrible back-slidings which filled him with shame and despair. His cousin's tender pity, too, only served to further overwhelm him. The days began to seem so lingering and heavy, that he saw them begin with a hopeless feeling that they would never end. In this gradual decay of his vitality, his cheerfulness had been the first to go, now his physical strength seemed to be failing him in its turn.

Pauline, however, in the pride of her self-devotion, was determined to gain the victory. She recognised the source of her cousin's disease, and tried to impart to him some of her own courage by implanting in him a love of life. But her compassionate kindliness seemed to receive a continual check. At first she made an open attack upon him and began again with her old jests and jokes against "that silly, stupid pessimism." "What!" she said, "was it she now who was to chant the praises of the great Saint Schopenhauer, while he, like all the humbugging pessimists, was quite in favour of blowing all the world into little bits, but absolutely refused to be blown up himself?" These jests of hers wrung a constrained smile from the young man, but he seemed to suffer so much from them that she did not continue them. Then she tried the effect of such caressing consolations as might have been lavished upon a troubled child, and surrounded him with cheerful amiability and tranquil laughter. She always let him see her beaming with happiness and revelling in the pleasantness of life. The house seemed filled with sunshine. There was nothing more required of him than just to take advantage of it and let his life flow tranquilly on, but this he could not do; and the happiness that was offered to him only made his feeling of horror at what was to come all the keener. Then Pauline tried stratagem, and racked her brain to interest him enthusiastically in something or other which should have the effect of making him forget himself. But his idleness had become a sort of disease, and he had no taste or inclination for anything whatever, and found even read-

ing too great an exertion, so he spent his whole time in gnawing at his own vitals.

For a moment, Pauline had a glimpse of hope. They had gone one day to take a short walk on the sands, when Lazare, as they reached the ruins of the stockades, a few of the beams of which were still standing upright, began to explain to her a new system of protective works which, he assured her, could not fail to be successful. The failure of the former ones had been caused by the weakness of the supporting timbers. It would only be necessary to double their thickness and to give a greater inclination to the central beams. His voice vibrated and his eyes lighted up with all his old enthusiasm, and his cousin besought him eagerly to take up the task again and make another effort. The village was gradually being destroyed; every high tide swept away a further portion of it; and there could be no doubt that, if he went to see the prefect, he would succeed in obtaining the subvention, while she herself would be only too glad to make further advances, and be delighted to be able to assist such a noble work. She was so anxious to spur him into action that she would willingly have sacrificed the remains of her fortune to bring about that end. But he only shrugged his shoulders. What would be the good of it, he asked? He turned pale as the thought struck him that, if he were to commence the work, he would be dead before he could finish it; and, to hide the trouble which this reflection caused him, he began to inveigh against the Bonneville fishermen.

"A pack of grinning idiots who jeered at me when that wolf of a sea swept everything away! No! no! they may do it for themselves now! I won't give them another chance of laughing at my bits of sticks, as they called them."

Pauline gently tried to soothe him. The poor folks were in a terrible state of wretchedness. Since the sea had carried off the Houtelards' house, which was the most solidly built of all in the village, and three others, cottages of the poorer fishermen, their misery had increased. Houtelard, who had once been the rich man of the district, had now taken up his quarters in an old barn, some twenty yards behind his former dwelling; but the others, who had no refuge to take to, were housing themselves in clumsy huts, made out of the shells of old boats. They were living in a miserable state of nudity and savage promiscuousness, in which the women and children were wallowing in vice and vermin. All that was bestowed upon them in charity

went in brandy. The wretched creatures sold all the food that was given to them, their clothes and pots and pans and what bit of furniture they had, to buy drams of the terrible calvados, which stretched them on the ground across their doorways like so many dead people. Pauline was the only one who still continued to say a word for them. The Abbé Horteur had given them up and Chanteau talked of sending in his resignation, being unwilling to remain any longer the mayor of such a pack of swine. Lazare, too, when his cousin tried to excite his pity on behalf of this little colony of drunkards, crushed down by the fierceness of the weather, only repeated his father's eternal refrain:

"No one compels them to remain here. All that they have got to do is to go somewhere else. No one but a pack of idiots would come and stick themselves right under the waves."

This was the general feeling of the neighbourhood, and every one looked upon them as a set of obstinate fools. The villagers, on the other hand, were mistrustfully unwilling to go elsewhere. They had been born there, they said, and why should they have to leave the place? The same sort of thing had been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years, and there was nothing for them to do anywhere else. And Prouane, when he was exceptionally tipsy, used always to conclude by saying that wherever one went one would always be devoured by something or other.

Pauline used to smile at this and nod her head in approval, for happiness, in her opinion, depended neither upon people nor circumstances, but on the more or less reasonable way in which people conformed themselves to their surrounding circumstances. She redoubled her care and attention to them and distributed still larger doles and alms than before. At last she had the happiness of getting Lazare to associate himself with her in her charities, and she hoped that she would be able to distract him from his gloomy broodings and lead him to forget his own troubles by awaking in him a pity for those of others. Every Saturday afternoon he remained at home with her, and they received, from four o'clock till six, the young folks from the village, the ragged draggle-tail urchins whom their parents sent up to get what they could out of Mademoiselle Pauline. It was an invasion of snivelling little lads and lousy little girls.

One Saturday it was raining, and Pauline could not distribute her alms out on the terrace, as was her custom. Lazare had to go and hunt up a bench to put in the kitchen,

"Good gracious, sir!" Véronique exclaimed. "Mademoiselle Pauline surely isn't going to bring all that lousy lot in here It's a sweet idea, indeed, especially if you want to find a lot of insects swimming in your soup!"

The young girl came in with her bag of silver and her medicine-chest. She replied merrily to Véronique's indignant outbreak.

"Oh! a turn of your broom will make all right again; and, besides, it's raining so heavily that they will all get a good washing before they come in, poor little things!"

And, indeed, the cheeks of the first to enter were quite bright and rosy from the drenching rain. They were so soaked that pools of water trickled from their ragged clothes on to the flags of the kitchen-floor and increased the servant's wrath, which was by no means diminished when Pauline told her to kindle a faggot of wood to dry them a little. The bench was carried up to the fire, and it was quickly occupied by a tight-packed shivering row of impudent, leering brats, who cast greedy eyes at what was lying about, some half-emptied wine bottles, the remains of a joint, and a bunch of carrots that lay on a block.

"Children indeed!" Véronique went on growling. "Children that are grown up and ought to be earning their own living, if one may say so without having one's head bitten off! They'll go on pretending to be children till they're five-and-twenty, if only you'll let them!"

Pauline was obliged to tell her to be silent.

"There! have you done now? Talking like that won't fill their mouths or help them to grow up."

The young girl sat down at the table, with her money and the other articles she intended to distribute in front of her; and she was just going to begin calling the children up to her in turn, when Lazare, who had remained standing, caught sight of Houtelard's boy amongst the row of youngsters, and shouted out:

"Didn't I forbid you to come here again, you young vulture? Your parents ought to be ashamed of themselves for sending you here, when they are quite able to feed you, while there are so many others who are dying of hunger."

Houtelard's son, a lad of fifteen, who had grown too quickly, with a timid and sad expression, began to cry.

"They beat me, if I don't come," he said. "The missis got hold of the rope and father drove me out."

He turned up his sleeve to show a great violet bruise on his arm caused by a blow from a piece of knotted rope. The "missis" was the old servant whom the lad's father had married, and who was gradually killing the boy by her ill-treatment. Since their ruin, the harshness and miserly filthiness of the pair had increased, and now their home was a perfect sewer wherein they were constantly torturing the young lad.

"Put an arnica compress on his arm," Pauline said softly to Lazare.

Then she herself gave the lad a hundred-sou-piece. "Here! give them this not to beat you any more, and tell them that if they strike you again, and if there are any bruises on your body next Saturday, they will never get another sou out of me."

All along the bench the rest of the children, cheered and animated by the warming blaze, were tittering and sniggering and digging each other in the ribs with their elbows. One tiny little thing had stolen a carrot and was munching it furtively.

"Come here, Cuche!" said Pauline. "Have you told your mother that I hope to get her admitted very soon into the Hospital for Incurables at Bayeux?"

Cuche's wife, the miserable abandoned woman who prostituted herself to all comers in the holes and ditches of the neighbourhood for three sous or a bit of cold bacon, had broken her leg in July, and she had been deformed ever since, and limped frightfully, though even the addition of this infirmity to her repulsively ugly appearance had by no means diminished the number of her patrons.

"Yes, I told her," the lad replied in a hoarse voice; "but she says she won't go."

He had grown up into a strong young fellow, and he was nearly seventeen years old. As he stood up, with his hands swinging at his sides, he waddled forward in an awkward manner.

"What! She won't go!" cried Lazare. "And you won't come, either; for I told you to come up this week and help a little in the garden, and I'm still waiting for you."

The lad still went on waddling. "I haven't had any time," he replied.

Then Pauline, seeing her cousin about to lose his temper, interposed, and said to the lad:

"Sit down again now, and we will speak about it presently.

Just try and think a little or you will make me angry too."

It was the turn of the little Gonin girl next. She was thirteen years old, and still preserved her pretty rosy face beneath her mop of fair hair. Without waiting to be questioned, she poured out a flood of prattle, and told them how her father's paralysis was mounting up to his arms and into his tongue, and that he could now only grunt like an animal. Cousin Cuche, the sailor who had deserted his wife and had installed himself in Gonin's house and bed, had made a violent attack upon the old man that very morning, in the hope of finishing him off.

"Mother sets on him too. She gets up at night in her chemise with the cousin and empties bowls of cold water on to father, because he snores so loud and disturbs them. If you could only see, Mademoiselle Pauline, what a state they have left him in! He is quite naked, and he wants some sheets very badly, for all his skin is getting grazed and rubbed off!"

"There! That will do; hold your tongue!" said Lazare, interrupting her flow of words, while Pauline, moved to pity, sent Véronique off to look for a pair of sheets.

Lazare considered the girl much too wide-awake for her age, and he believed that, although perhaps she did sometimes ward off an occasional blow from her father, she treated him no better than the others did, and he felt quite sure that whatever was given to her, whether it was money, or meat, or bed-linen, instead of being of any service to the infirm old man, would only serve for the gratification of his wife and the cousin.

He began to question her sternly.

"What were you doing the day before yesterday in Houtelard's boat with that man who ran off?"

The girl smiled in a leering manner.

"It wasn't a man; 'twas him," she said, motioning with her chin towards Cuche's boy. "He pushed me down on my back."

Lazare interrupted her again.

"Oh, yes! indeed! I saw it all. You had got your petticoats over your head. You are losing no time in beginning at thirteen years old!"

Pauline laid her hand upon her cousin's arm, for all the other children, even the youngest amongst them, were opening wide their sniggering eyes, in which the fires of precocious vices were already glistening. How was it possible to arrest this spreading

rottenness while the men and women and their families all festered filthily together? When Pauline had given the girl a pair of sheets and a bottle of wine, she whispered to her for a moment or two, trying to frighten her by warning her of the consequences which would follow evil practices like these, which would ruin her health and make her ugly before she had reached womanhood. Threats of this kind were the only ones that could hold her in check.

Lazare, wishing to hasten this distribution, the length of which was beginning to disgust and irritate him, called up Prouane's daughter.

"Your father and mother were tipsy again last night," he said, "and I hear that you were worse than either of them."

"Oh! no, sir! I had a very bad headache."

He placed a plate before her, in which were laid some lumps of raw meat.

"Eat that!"

She was devoured with scrofula again, and her nervous disorders had reappeared once more at the critical period of her attaining the age of puberty. Drunkenness increased her maladies, for she had acquired the habit of drinking with her parents. When she had swallowed three lumps of the meat, she stopped and made a grimace of disgust.

"I've had enough; I cannot eat any more."

Pauline had taken up a bottle.

"Very well," she said; "if you don't eat the meat, you sha'n't have your glass of quinine-wine."

On hearing this, the girl fixed her glistening eyes on the filled glass and overcame her repugnance against the meat. Then she seized the glass and tossed its contents down her throat, with all a drunkard's knowing readinesss. But she did not retire after this, but begged Pauline to let her take the bottle away with her, saying that it interfered too much with what she had to do to come up to the house every day; and she promised to take it to bed with her, and to keep it so securely hidden amongst her petticoats that her father and mother would never be able to find it and drink it. But Pauline distinctly refused to let her have it.

"You'd swallow every drop of it before you got to the bottom of the hill," said Lazare. "It's yourself that we suspect now, you little wine-cask!"

The bench was growing empty, as the children left it one by

one to receive money, or bread, or meat. Some of them, after having received their share of the distribution, seemed inclined to linger before the blazing fire, but Véronique, who had just detected that half her carrots had been devoured, drove them off and pitilessly dismissed them out into the rain. Had anyone ever seen anything like it before? she cried. Carrots that still had all the earth sticking to them!

Soon there was no one left but young Cuche, who was looking heavy and depressed in the expectation of receiving a severe lecture from Pauline. She called him to her, and spoke to him for a long time in low tones, and finished by giving him his loaf and the hundred sous which he received from her every Saturday. Then he went away with his clumsy waddle, having promised to work, but not having the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind.

The servant was just breaking out into a great sigh of relief, when she suddenly cried out:

"Hallo! they haven't all gone yet, then! There's one of them over there in the corner still!"

It was the little Tourmal girl, the little abortion of the high-roads, who, notwithstanding her ten years, was still no bigger than a dwarf. It was only her shamelessness and effrontery that seemed to grow, and she groaned more miserably than ever and seemed more wretched, brought up to, and trained for, the profession of begging from her cradle, just like the phenomenal infants whose bones are manipulated for tumbling feats in the circus. She was crouching between the dresser and the fireplace, as though she had stowed herself in this corner out of harm's way for fear of being surprised in some wrong-doing.

"What are you doing there?" Pauline asked her.

"I am warming myself."

Véronique cast an anxious glance round her kitchen. On previous Saturdays, even when the children had assembled out on the terrace, various little articles had disappeared. To-day, however, everything seemed in its place, and the little girl, who had hurriedly risen to her feet, began to pierce their ears with her shrill voice.

"Father is in the hospital, and grandfather has hurt himself at his work, and mother hasn't a dress to go out in—Please have pity upon us, kind young lady—"

"Do you want to split our ears, you little liar?" Lazare cried angrily. "Your father is in gaol for smuggling, and when

your grandfather sprained his wrist he was robbing the oyster-beds at Roqueboise, and, if your mother hasn't got a dress, she manages to go out stealing in a chemise, for she is charged with having strangled five fowls belonging to the inn-keeper at Verchemont. Do you think you can befool us with your lies about matters that we know more of than you do yourself?"

The child did not even appear to have heard him. She went on immediately to say with all her impudent coolness:

"Have pity upon us, kind young lady! my father and grandfather are both ill, and my mother dare not leave them. God Almighty will bless you for it."

"There! that will do! Now go away and don't tell any more lies!" Pauline said to her, giving her a piece of money to get rid of her.

She did not want telling twice, but hurried away from the kitchen and ran through the yard as quickly as her short legs would carry her. Just at that moment the servant uttered a cry.

"Ah! the cup that was on the dresser! She's gone off with your cup, Mademoiselle Pauline!"

Then she bolted out of doors in pursuit of the young thief. A couple of minutes afterwards she dragged her back into the kitchen with all the stern ferocity of a gendarme. It was all they could do to search her, for she struggled and bit and scratched and screamed as though they were trying to murder her. The cup was not in any of her pockets, but they discovered it hidden away in the rag which served her as a chemise, lying next to her skin. Then, stopping her weeping, she impudently asserted that she did not know it was there, and that it must have dropped into her clothes while she was sitting on the floor.

"His reverence was quite right when he said she would rob you," Véronique exclaimed. "I will go and send some one for a policeman."

Lazare, too, began to speak about sending her to prison, provoked by the irritating expression of the girl, who perked herself up like a young viper whose tail has been trodden upon.

"Hand back the money that was given to you!" he cried. "Where is it?"

The child had already lifted the piece of money to her lips to swallow it, when Pauline set her free, saying:

"Well, you may keep it this time, but you can tell them at home that it is the last they will get. In future, I shall come myself to see what you are in need of. Now, be off with you!"

They could hear the girl's naked feet splash through the puddles, and then all was silent. Véronique pushed the bench away and stooped down to wipe up with a sponge the pools of water that had trickled from the children's rags. Her kitchen was in a fine state, indeed, she grumbled, and so poisoned with all that filth that she would have to keep all the windows and doors open. Pauline, who seemed very grave and thoughtful, gathered up her money and drugs without saying a word, while Lazare, with an air of disgust and yawning with ennui, went out to wash his hands at the spring.

It was a great grief to Pauline to see that her cousin took but the slightest interest in her young friends from the village. Though he was willing to help her on the Saturday afternoons, it was only out of mere complaisance, and his heart was not in the work. While neither poverty nor vice repelled her, their unloveliness depressed and annoyed Lazare. She could remain cheerful and tranquil in her love for others, while he could not cease to be absorbed in himself without finding fresh causes, exterior to himself, for gloomy thoughts and broodings. Little by little, these disorderly, ill-behaved children, in whom all the sins of grown-up men and women were already fermenting, were beginning to cause him real pain and suffering. This brood of miserable brats was an additional blight upon his existence, and he left them hopeless and weary and filled with hatred and disgust of the human race. These two hours spent in good works only made him hard, and left him denying all good in alms-giving and jeering at charity. He protested that it would be a much more sensible thing to crush this nest of pernicious vermin under foot than to help them to grow up. Pauline listened to him, surprised at his violence, and pained to find how far asunder their views were.

On this Saturday, when they were alone again, the young man showed all that he was suffering by a single remark.

"I feel as though I had just come out of a sewer," he said.

Then he added:

"How can you like such horrible monsters?"

"I like them for their own good and not for mine," the

young girl replied. "You yourself would pick up a mangy dog in the road."

Lazare made a gesture of protestation.

"A dog is not a man," he said.

"To do good that good may come of it, is not that something?" Pauline resumed. "It is vexing that they don't improve in their conduct, for if they did, perhaps they might suffer less. But it is sufficient for me and I am contented when they have got food and warmth; it is one trouble less, at any rate. Why should you want them to recompense us for what we do for them?"

Then she concluded sadly:

"My poor boy, I see that all this only bores you, and it will be better for you not to come and help me in future. I don't want to harden your heart and make you more uncharitable than you already are."

Lazare eluded all her attempts at consolation, and she was heart-broken at finding how utterly powerless she was to free him from his condition of fear and ennui. When she saw him so nervous and despondent, she could scarcely believe that it was the result merely of his concealed trouble, but she imagined there must be other causes for his sadness and depression, and the idea of Louise recurred to her again. He must, she felt sure, be still thinking about the girl, and suffered from not seeing her. A cold chill froze her as this thought passed through her mind, and then she tried to recover her old feeling of proud self-sacrifice, telling herself that she was quite capable of spreading sufficient brightness and joy about her to make them all happy.

One evening Lazare made a remark that hurt her cruelly.

"How very lonely it is here!" he said, with a yawn.

She looked at him. Had he got Louise in his mind? But she had not the courage to question him on the subject. Her kindliness seemed all unavailing, and her life was becoming a torture again.

There was another shock awaiting Lazare. His old dog, Matthew, was far from well. The poor animal, who had completed his fourteenth year in the previous March, was getting more and more paralysed in his hind-quarters. His paralytic attacks left him so numb and stiff that he could scarcely crawl along, and he used to lie out in the yard, stretching himself in the sun, and watching the members of

the family go out with his melancholy eyes. It was the eyes of the old dog, eyes that were now troubled and dimmed with a bluish cloudiness, and blank as those of a blind man, that especially wrought upon Lazare's feelings. The poor old animal, however, was still able to see, and he used to drag himself along and lay his big head upon his master's knee, and then look up at him with straining gaze, and with a sad expression that seemed to say that he understood all. His beauty had deserted him. His curly white coat had turned yellow, and his nose, that was once so black, was becoming white. His dirtiness and a kind of expression of shame that hung about him—for they dared not wash him any more on account of his great age—rendered him a still more pitiable-looking object. All his playfulness had vanished, and he never now rolled about on his back or circled round after his tail, and he was excited no more with impulses of pity for Minouche's kittens, when Véronique carried them off to be drowned. He spent all his days now in drowsing like an old man, and it gave him so much pain to get up on to his legs, and he dragged so heavily on his poor soft feet, that often some one of the family, moved to pity at the sight, stooped down to help him and support him for a moment or two that he might be able to walk for a little.

He was growing weaker every day from the loss of blood. They had sent for a veterinary surgeon, who had burst out laughing at seeing him. What! were they making a fuss about a dog like this? The best thing they could do was to put him out of the way at once. It was all very well to try and keep a human being alive as long as possible, but what was the good of allowing a dying animal to linger on in pain? They quickly bustled him out of the house, after having paid him his fee of six francs.

One Saturday Matthew lost so much blood that it was found necessary to shut him up in the coach-house. A stream of big red drops trickled behind him. Doctor Cazenove, who had arrived rather early, offered to Lazare to go and see the dog, who was treated quite as a member of the family. They found him lying down, with his head raised up very high, in a state of great weakness, but with the light of life still shining in his eyes. The doctor made a long examination of him, with all the care and thoughtfulness which he manifested at the bedside of one of his human patients. At last, he said:

"This abundant passage of blood denotes a cancerous degeneration of the kidneys. There is no hope for him, but he may linger for a few days yet, unless some sudden hemorrhage carries him off."

Matthew's hopeless condition threw a gloom over the dinner-table. They called to mind how fond Madame Chanteau had been of him, the dogs he had worried, all the wild romps of his youth, the cutlets he had stolen off the gridiron, and the eggs that he gobbled up warm from the nest. But at dessert, when the Abbé Horteur brought out his pipe, they grew lively again, and listened with attention to the priest as he told them about his pear-trees, which were promising to do splendidly this year. Chanteau, notwithstanding the dull prickings which foreboded another attack, finished off by singing one of the merry songs of his youth. The evening past away delightfully, and even Lazare himself grew cheerful.

About nine o'clock, just as the tea was being served, Pauline suddenly cried out:

"Oh look! There's poor Matthew!"

And, in truth, the poor dog was dragging himself, all bleeding and shrunken, on his tottering legs into the dining-room. Then immediately afterwards they heard Véronique, who was rushing after him with a cloth. She burst into the room, crying out:

"I had to go into the coach-house, and he made his escape. Right up to the last he insists upon being where the rest of us are, and one can't take a step without finding him against one's legs. Come! come! you can't stop here."

The dog bent down his old trembling head with an expression of affectionate entreaty.

"Oh! let him stop, do!" Pauline cried.

But the servant seemed displeased.

"No! indeed, in such a state as he is. I have had quite enough to do, as it is, with wiping up the blood after him. For the last two days the kitchen has been streaming with it. It's really quite disgusting. You'll have the dining-room in a nice state if he goes dragging himself all over it in this way. Come along! come along! Be a little quicker, do!"

"Let him stay here, and you go away!" said Lazare.

Then, as Véronique furiously banged the door behind her, Matthew, who seemed to perfectly understand the situation, came and laid his head on his master's knee. Everyone

wanted to lavish dainties upon him, and they broke up lumps of sugar for him, and tried to brighten him up into liveliness. In times past they had been accustomed every evening to amuse themselves by placing a lump of sugar upon the table on the opposite side to that at which the dog was, and then as Matthew quickly ran round they caught up the sugar and put it down on the other side, and in this way the dog went on rushing continually round the table in pursuit of the dainty which was ever being removed from one side to the other, till at last he grew quite dizzy and confused with the perpetual flitting about of the sugar, and broke out into wild and noisy barking. Lazare tried to set this little game going again, in the kindly hope of cheering the poor sad animal. The dog wagged his tail for a moment, went once round the table, and then staggered and fell against Pauline's chair. He could not see the sugar, and his poor shrunken body rolled over on its side, and his blood streamed in red drops about the floor. Chanteau had stopped humming, and everyone felt a keen pang of sorrow at the sight of the poor dying dog, who was vainly trying to summon up the romping energies of past-away days.

"Don't do anything to tire him," the doctor said gently, "or you will kill him."

Then the priest, who was smoking in silence, let fall a remark which was probably intended to account for his émotion.

"One could almost imagine," he said, "that these big dogs were human beings."

About ten o'clock, after the priest and the doctor had gone away, Lazare went to lock Matthew up again in the coach-house, before going upstairs to his own room. He laid him carefully down upon some fresh straw and saw that his bowl was filled with water; then he kissed him and was going to leave him. But the dog raised himself on to his feet with a painful effort, and began to follow the young man. Lazare had to put him back on his bed of straw three times, and then, at last, the dog yielded, but he raised his head to watch his master go away with such a sad expression, that Lazare, who felt heart-broken at the sight, came back and kissed him again.

When he reached his room at the top of the house, Lazare tried to read till midnight, and then he went to bed. But he could not sleep, and his mind dwelt continually upon Matthew, and the image of the poor animal, lying on his bed of straw with his failing eyes turned toward the door, never ceased to

haunt him. To-morrow, he thought, the dog would be dead. Every minute he caught himself involuntarily rising up in bed and listening, fancying that he heard the sound of barking in the yard. His straining ears caught all sorts of imaginary voices. About two o'clock in the morning, he heard a groaning sound which made him jump out of bed. Who could it be that was moaning like that? He rushed out on to the landing, but the house was wrapped in darkness and silence, and not a breath stirred in Pauline's room. Then he could no longer resist an impulse which seemed to drag him down the stairs. The hope of once more seeing his old dog made him hasten his steps, and he scarcely gave himself time to thrust his legs into a pair of trousers, before he started off hurriedly down stairs, taking his his candle with him.

When he got into the coach-house, Matthew was no longer lying on the straw, but he had dragged himself some distance away from it and was stretched upon the hard ground. When he saw his master enter, he had no longer the strength to raise his head. Lazare put his candle down upon some old boards, and was filled with astonishment when he bent down and saw the floor all stained dark and black; and then, a spasm of pain shot through his heart as he knelt down and saw that the poor animal was weltering in his death-throes in a perfect pool of blood. His life was quickly ebbing from him, and he wagged his tail very feebly, while a light seemed to glisten in the depths of his eyes.

"Oh! my poor old dog!" Lazare sobbed, "oh! my poor old dog!"

Then, in a louder voice, he said to the dying animal:

"Wait a moment! I will move you. Ah! I'm afraid it hurts you, but you are so drenched with lying here; and I haven't even got a sponge. Would you like something to drink?"

Matthew still continued to gaze earnestly at him. Gradually the death-rattle began to shake his sides, and the pool of blood grew bigger and bigger, quite silently and as though it were fed by some hidden spring.

The ladders and broken barrels in the coach-house cast great shadows, and the candle was burning very dimly. There was a rustling sound amongst the straw. It was the cat, Minouche, who was reposing on the bed that had been made for Mattew, and who had been disturbed by the light.

"Would you like something to drink, my poor old dog?" Lazare repeated.

He had found a cloth, and he dipped it in the pan of water and pressed it against the dying animal's mouth. It seemed to relieve him; and his nose, which was excoriated from fever, grew a little cooler. Half-an-hour passed away, during which Lazare kept constantly dipping the cloth in the water, while his eyes were filled with tears at the painful sight before him, and his heart ached with the bitterness of his grief. Wild hopes coursed through him, as they do through the watchers at a human death-bed; perhaps, he thought, he might stay the ebbing life by this simple application of cold water.

"Ah! what is the matter? What do you want to do?" he cried suddenly. "You want to get on to your feet, eh?"

Matthew was shaken by a fit of shivering and made struggling efforts to raise himself up. His limbs stretched out stiffly, while his neck was swollen and puffed out with hiccoughing rushes of wind. But the end was close at hand, and he lay motionless across his master's knees, still straining his eyes from beneath their heavy lids to catch sight of him. Quite overcome by the dying dog's gaze that was so full of intelligence, Lazare held him on his knees, and the animal's great body, big and heavy as that of a man, was racked with a human-like death-agony in the sorrowing embrace of his master's arms. It lasted for several minutes, and then Lazare saw heavy tears roll down from the dying Matthew's mournful eyes, while his tongue showed from his convulsed mouth, as though he were trying to make one last caress.

"Oh! my poor old doggie!" he cried, breaking out into sobs.

Matthew was dead. A slight bloody foam frothed round his jaws. As Lazare laid him down on the floor, he looked as though he were asleep.

Then once more the young man felt that all was over. His dog was dead now, and this filled him with an unreasonable grief and seemed to cast a gloom over his whole life. The dog's death awoke in him the memory of other deaths, and he had not felt more heart-broken when he walked through the yard behind his mother's coffin than he did now. Some portion of her seemed to be torn away from him afresh; she had gone from him now entirely. The recollection of his months of concealed trouble, of his nights tormented by night-mare visions, of his walks to the little grave-yard, and of all his terrors at the thought of annihilation, surged up torturingly in his mind.



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He heard a sound, and, when he turned round, he saw Minouche tranquilly making her toilet on the straw. But the door had creaked and Pauline entered the coach-house, impelled by a similar impulse to that which had led her cousin there. When he saw her, his tears fell faster, and he, who had carefully concealed all his grief at his mother's death, as though it had been some shameful folly, now cried out:

"Oh, God! God! She loved him so dearly! You remember, don't you? She got him when he was such a tiny little thing, and it was she who fed him and he used to follow her all over the house!"

Then he added:

"There is no one left now, and we are quite alone!"

Tears sprang up in Pauline's eyes. She had stooped down to look at poor Matthew's body lying in the dim glimmer of the candle. A hopeless expression passed over her, and she made no attempt to console Lazare, for she felt that it would have been useless and unavailing.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was ennui that was the real source of Lazare's gloomy sadness, a weary, continuous ennui to which everything seemed to give rise, and which flowed around him like the troubled waters from some poisoned spring. He grew weary and bored both with work and with idleness, and with himself even more than he did with others. However, he took himself to task for his idleness and want of energy, and felt ashamed of it. It was disgraceful, he told himself, for a man of his age to be wasting the best years of his life in such a hole as Bonneville. Up to the present he had had some excuse for doing so, but now there was no longer anything to keep him at home, and he despised himself for staying on there, leading a useless existence, and living upon his family, who were scarcely able to keep themselves. He told himself that he ought to be making a fortune for them, and that he was shamefully failing in not doing so, as he had formerly sworn that he would. Great schemes for the future, however, and grand enterprises, and a vast fortune acquired by some brilliant stroke of genius still filled his mind ; but, when he rose up from his reveries, he lacked the courage and energy to turn his thoughts into action.

"I can't go on like this," he often said to Pauline. "I must really do something. I should like to start a newspaper at Caen."

And his cousin always made the same reply.

"Wait till the time of mourning is over. There is no hurry. You had better think it well over before you launch out into an undertaking like that."

The truth was that, notwithstanding her desire to see him occupy himself with some kind of work, she was alarmed at this scheme of founding a newspaper. Another failure, she feared, might kill him, and she thought of all his many previous ones—music, medicine, the sea-weed works, everything, in fact, that he had ever taken in hand. And, besides, a

couple of hours after he had mentioned this last plan to her, he had refused even to write a letter, on the ground that he was too tired and weary.

The weeks passed away, and another high spring-tide carried off three more of the houses at Bonneville. Now, when the fishermen met Lazare, they asked him if he had had enough of it. Though it was really quite useless trying to do anything, they said, yet it grieved them to see so much good timber lying useless there. There was a touch of banter in their expressions of condolence and in the manner in which they besought him not to leave the place an unprotected prey to the waves, as though their sailor-natures felt a savage pride in the sea's smashing blows. By degrees Lazare grew so annoyed with their remarks that he avoided passing through the village, and the sight of the ruins of the piles and stockades in the distance was becoming intolerable to him.

One day, as he was on his way to see the priest, Prouane stopped him.

"Monsieur Lazare," he said obsequiously, while a mischievous smile played round the corners of his eyes, "you know those pieces of timber which are rotting away down yonder on the beach?"

"Well, what about them?"

"If you're not going to use them again, you might give them to us. They will serve at any rate to keep us warm."

The young man was carried away by his anger, and, without even thinking of what he was saying, he answered sharply:

"That's quite impossible. I am going to set the men to work again next week."

Then all the neighbourhood shouted. They were going to have all the fun over again, since young Chanteau was showing himself so pig-headed. A fortnight went by, and the fishermen never met Lazare without asking him if he was unable to find workmen, and so he ended by being goaded into seriously commencing operations again, being induced thereto, also, by the entreaties of his cousin, who was very anxious that he should have some occupation which would keep him near her. But he entered into the matter without the least spark of enthusiasm, and it was only his feeling of revengeful enmity against the sea which kept him going, for he told himself that he was quite certain to triumph over it this time, and would make it come and lick the pebbles on the beach as submissively as a dog.

Once again Lazare set to work preparing plans. He calculated afresh the angles of resistance and he doubled the strength of his supports. No excessive expense was going to be incurred, as most of the old timbers could be used again. The carpenter sent in an estimate which came to four thousand francs; and, seeing that the sum was so small, Lazare made no objection to Louise advancing it, being quite certain, he said, of getting a subvention from the Council-General; and he further observed that this was the only means of getting their previous expenditure re-imbursed, for the council would certainly refuse to advance a single sou so long as the works remained in their present ruined condition. This consideration seemed to infuse a little warmth into his proceedings, and the operations were pressed on. In other ways, too, he was very busy, and went over to Caen every week to see the prefect and the influential members of the council.

While the piles were being laid, an intimation was received that an engineer would be sent down to inspect the operations and to make a report on the subject, upon the receipt of which the council would vote a subvention. The engineer spent a whole day at Bonneville. He was a very pleasant man and gladly accepted an invitation from the Chanteaus to lunch with them after his visit to the beach. They refrained from making any reference to the subvention, as they were unwilling to appear in any way desirous of influencing his judgment, but he showed himself so polite and attentive to Pauline at table that she began to feel no doubt as to their success in obtaining the subvention. And so, a fortnight later, when Lazare returned from one of his visits to Caen, the whole house was thrown into amazement and consternation by the news which he brought back with him. He was bursting with anger. Would they believe that that silly fop of an engineer had sent in a simply disgraceful report? Oh, yes! he was very polite and civil, but he had ridiculed every single piece of timber in an absurd rhodomontade of technical terms. But it was only what they might have expected, for these fine fellows didn't believe that any one could put together even a rabbit-hutch without their advice and assistance! But the worst of the matter was that the council had refused, after reading the report, to vote any grant.

This blow was a source of fresh despondency and discouragement to the young man; but the works were carried on to

completion, and he swore that they would resist the heaviest tides, and that the whole of the Engineering Department would go wild with angry jealousy when they saw them. All this, however, would do nothing towards repaying Pauline the money that she had advanced, and her cousin bitterly reproached himself for having led her into this disastrous situation. But she herself, rising victorious over the instincts of her economical nature, claimed the entire responsibility for the course she had taken, and impressed upon him that it was she who had insisted upon making the advances. The money had gone in a charitable purpose, she said, and she did not regret a sou of it, but would have gladly given more for the sake of saving the unhappy village. However, when the carpenter sent in his bill, she could not suppress a look of grieved astonishment. The four thousand francs of the estimate had grown to nearly eight thousand. Altogether, these piles and stockades, which the first storm might sweep completely away, had cost her more than twenty thousand francs.

By this time Pauline's fortune was reduced to forty thousand francs, which produced a yearly income of two thousand francs, a sum on which she would be barely able to live, if ever she should find herself homeless and friendless. Her money had gone on trickling away in small sums in the expenses of the house, which she still continued freely to pay. But she began now to exercise a strict and watchful supervision over all the expenses of the household. The Chanteaus no longer had even their three hundred francs a month, for, after Madame Chanteau's death, it was found that a certain amount of stock had been sold without there being any clue as to how the sum realized by its sale had been applied. When her own income was added to that of the family, Pauline had little more than four hundred francs a month with which to keep the house going, and the expenses of the establishment were heavy and she had to perform miracles of economy in order to save the money that was wanted for her charities. Doctor Cazenove's trusteeship had terminated during the winter, and Pauline was now of age, and her money and herself were entirely at her own disposal; though the doctor had never, during the term of his power, refused to let her have her own way, and his authority had legally ceased for some weeks before either of them remembered the fact. But, notwithstanding that she had been practically her own mistress for some time, she felt more

thoroughly free and independent and grown-up, now that she found herself the uncontrolled mistress of the house, with no accounts to render, and entreated by her uncle to manage everything and to consult him about nothing. Lazare, like his father, also hated having anything to do with the practical details of the house and its expenses, and so Pauline held the common purse and entirely stepped into her aunt's place, and performed her duties as mistress with such practical common sense as sometimes quite amazed the two men. It was only Véronique who made any complaints, and thought that Mademoiselle Pauline was very stingy, and grumbled at being restricted to a single pound of butter a week.

The days succeeded each other with monotonous regularity. The perpetual sameness and the unvarying habits and order of the household, which constituted Pauline's happiness, only tended to increase Lazare's feeling of ennui and weariness. Never had the house affected him with such uneasy disquietude as now, when every room seemed basking beneath some cheerful smiling influence. The completion of the operations on the beach was a great relief to him, for all responsibility and enforced attention to anything had become intolerable to him, and he had no sooner fallen back again into a state of complete idleness and inactivity than he once more became the prey of shame and disquietude. Every morning he made a fresh set of plans for the future. The idea of starting a newspaper he had abandoned as unworthy of him, and he inveighed against the poverty which prevented him quietly devoting himself to some great literary and historical work. He had lately become enamoured of the notion of preparing himself for becoming a tutor, and so earning a livelihood and enabling himself to carry out his literary ambition. There no longer seemed to exist between himself and Pauline anything beyond their old feeling of comradeship and quiet affection which made them, as it were, brother and sister. The young man never made any reference to their marriage, either because he never thought of it, or, perhaps, because he took it for granted and considered any discussion of the matter unnecessary; while the girl herself was equally reticent on the subject, feeling quite certain that her cousin would willingly acquiesce in the first suggestion of their union. Lazare's desire for her, however, was gradually diminishing; a fact of which she was quite conscious, though without recognising that it was this alone which rendered her powerless to free him from his weary ennui.

One evening she had gone upstairs in the dusk to tell him that dinner was ready, and she surprised him in the act of hastily hiding some object, whose nature she could not distinguish.

"What is that?" she asked, with a laugh. "Some verses for my birthday?"

"No!" he replied, with much emotion and in wavering tones. "It's nothing at all."

It was an old glove which Louise had left behind her, and which he had just discovered behind a pile of books. The glove had retained a strong odour of the original kid-skin of which it was made, and this was softened down to a musky fragrance by the young girl's favourite perfume, heliotrope. Lazare, who was very impressionable to the influence of odours, was violently agitated by this mixture of the scent of blossom and flesh, and he was in a state of troubled emotion, with the glove pressed close to his lips, draining from it a draught of sweet recollections.

From this day he began to yearn for Louise over the yawning chasm which his mother's death had left gaping within him. He had never indeed forgotten her, but her image had been dimmed somewhat by his grief, and it only wanted this little thing that had once belonged to her to bring her back warm and breathing to his mind. He took up the glove again, when he was alone, kissed it and breathed-in its scent, and fancied that he was still holding the girl in his embrace with his lips seeking her warm flesh. His state of nervous excitement and the mental feverishness which resulted from his long-continued inactivity, tended to intensify this species of carnal intoxication. It was a veritable debauch in which he was indulging. He recovered from it, feeling vexed and ill-content with himself, but, notwithstanding this, he succumbed to it again and again, carried away by a passion which quite over-powered him. All this increased his gloomy moodiness, and he even began to get snappish and surly with his cousin, as though she were in some way to blame for his passionate trances. She herself was in no way an object of desire to him, and often, in the midst of some tranquilly merry conversation they were having together, he would suddenly rush off to his vicious joys and shut himself up in his room and wallow in his passionate recollections and thoughts of the other girl. Then he would come downstairs again, weary and disgusted with life.

In a month's time he was so completely changed that Pauline grew quite hopeless about him and spent nights of torment. In the day-time she forced herself to put on a brave face and kept herself perpetually busied, with an air of gentle authority, about the house of which she was now the mistress. But at night, when she had closed the door of her room behind her, she allowed herself to dwell upon her troubles, and gave way completely and wept like a child. She had no hope left, and all her kindliness only met with an increasingly chilling reception. Could it really be, she wondered, that kindness and affection were insufficient, and that it was possible to love a person and yet cause him unhappiness; for she saw that her cousin was really unhappy and she was beginning to be afraid that it might somehow be her own fault. And then, beneath her doubts of herself, there lurked increasing fears of a rival influence. She had for a long time explained Lazare's gloomy moodiness to herself as springing from grief at his mother's death, but now she was again beginning to be haunted with the idea of Louise, an idea which had occurred to her on the very next day after Madame Chanteau's death, but which she had scornfully dismissed in her pride in the power of her own affection, though every night now it forced itself into her thoughts as she found the efforts of her own love so unavailing.

The girl was miserably unhappy. As soon as she had put down her candle after entering her room, she threw herself upon her bed, without having the energy to undress herself. All the gaiety of spirit which she had shown during the day, all her calmness and restraint, crushed her down and weighed upon her like a too heavy robe. The day, like those which had preceded it, and like those which would follow it, had passed away in the midst of the feeling of hopelessness with which Lazare's moody ennui contaminated the whole house. What was the good of her straining to appear bright and cheerful, when she was so utterly unable to cast a gleam of sunshine on the spot which she so dearly loved? Lazare's cruel remark still rankled in her heart. They were too dull and lonely, and it was her jealousy that was to blame for it; it was she who had sent their friends away. She would not name Louise to herself, and she tried not to think about her, but she could not succeed in banishing the image of the girl, with her winning ways and the coquettish airs which amused Lazare, who grew brighter at the mere rustling of her dress. The minutes glided on and still

she could not drive out Louise from her thoughts. She felt sure that it was she for whom Lazare was anxiously longing, and that all that was wanted to set him right again was to send for the girl. Every evening when Pauline shut herself up in her room and threw herself down wearily upon her bed, she was continually racked by these same thoughts and visions, and was tortured by the idea that the happiness of her dear ones depended upon another than herself.

Now and then her spirit would rise within her in angry rebellion against the thought of having Louise back again, and she would spring up from her bed and rush to the window and open it, feeling choked and suffocated. And there, gazing out into the far spreading darkness and the ocean that rolled beneath her, whose moaning fell distinctly upon her ear, she would remain for hours, leaning on her elbows, while the sea-air played upon her burning breast. No! never could she be unhappy enough, she told herself, to tolerate the girl's return! Had she not suprised them in each other's arms? Was it not an act of treason, treason of the basest kind, and committed, too, close to her, in the next room, that room which she almost considered her own? It was a quite unpardonable meanness, and she would only be making herself their accomplice if she did anything to bring them together again. She grew feverish and excited with angry jealousy at the ideas which she called up, and shook with choking sobs as she buried her face in her naked arms, with her lips sealed fast to her flesh. The night sped on, and the breezes fanned her neck and played with her hair without calming the angry pulsing of her blood. But even in these moments when her indignation most mastered her, her natural kindliness still made its voice heard and struggled pertinaciously against her jealous passion. It whispered to her in gentle tones of the blessedness of charity, of the sweetness of sacrificing one's self for others. She tried to hush this inner voice, telling herself that to carry self-sacrifice to the extent of encouraging baseness was nothing but idiotic, but yet she still heard its pleading, which refused to be silenced. By degrees, she grew to recognise it as the voice of her own better nature, and she began to ask herself what, after all, did her suffering matter, if she could only secure the happiness of those who were dear to her? Weary and ill with her long vigil, she sobbed in silence as she listened to the moan of the sea mounting up through the dark night-air, still determined not to yield.

One night, after a long vigil at her window, she at last got into bed. As soon as she had blown her candle out and lay staring into the darkness with her widely opened eyes, she made a sudden resolution. The very first thing in the morning she would get her uncle to write to Louise and invite her to come and stay at Bonneville for a month. It all seemed quite natural and easy to her just then. She quickly fell into a sound sleep, a deeper and calmer one than she had known for weeks. But when she came down to breakfast the next morning and saw herself sitting between her uncle and cousin round the family table, there came a sudden choking sensation in her throat, and she felt all her courage and resolution forsaking her.

"You are eating nothing," Chanteau said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing at all," she replied. "On the contrary, I have had a remarkably good sleep."

The mere sight of Lazare renewed all her mental struggle. He was eating in silence, weary already of the new day that had begun, and the girl could not bring herself to yield him up to another. The thought of another taking him from her and kissing him and trying to console and comfort him was intolerable to her. But when he left the room, she made an effort to carry out her resolution.

"Are your hands any worse to-day?" she asked her uncle.

He gazed at his hands, which the chalky deposit was again attacking, and he painfully bent the joints.

"No," he answered. "My right hand is even more supple than usual. If the priest comes, we will have a game at draughts."

Then, after a moment's silence, he added:

"What makes you ask?"

She had been hoping that he would not be able to write, and now she blushed deeply as she weakly determined to put off the letter till the next day.

"Oh! I only wanted to know!" she said to her uncle.

From this day all her calmness deserted her. Up in her own room at nights, after her fits of tears and sobs, she used to gain the mastery over herself, and vow that she would dictate a letter for her uncle to write in the morning, but, when the morning came and she again joined in the family life and went about amongst those she loved, all her resolution failed her.

The most trivial little details sent a pang through her heart; the bread that she cut for her cousin, his shoes which she gave to Véronique to be cleaned, and all the other petty events of the daily routine. They might surely still be very happy by themselves in their old way, she thought. What was the good of calling in a stranger, and why disturb the affectionate way in which they had been living for so many years past? The thought that it would no longer be she herself who would cut the bread and mend the linen, made her choke with grief and pain, and she saw all her hoped-for happiness crumble away. This torture, which lurked in every little homely detail of her work in the house, made all her duties as mistress a torment and an anguish.

"What can it be that is wrong?" she would sometimes ask herself aloud. "We love each other, and yet we are not happy. Our affection for each other only seems to make us wretched."

It was a problem she was constantly trying to solve. Perhaps, she thought, that all the trouble arose from the fact that her own character and that of her cousin did not harmonize. But, though she would willingly have adapted herself in conformity with him and divested herself of all her own personality, she found that it was impossible to do so, for her reason rebelled and prevented her, even when she tried to make it submit to what she persuaded herself was not unreasonable. Her patience often gave way, and there were days of pouting and coldness. She tried to be merry and to drown her wretchedness in gaiety and laughter, but she could now no longer do this, and she, in her turn, grew moody and despondent.

"It's very nice and pleasant this!" Véronique used to repeat from morning till night. "There are only three of you now, and you'll end by eating each other up! Madame used to have her bad days, but, at any rate, while she was alive, you managed to keep off banging things at each other's heads."

Chanteau himself was also beginning to suffer from the influence of this slow and, to him, inexplicable disintegration of the family affection. When he had an attack of the gout, he bellowed, as the servant said, more loudly than ever, and his invalid's caprices and violence were a perpetual torment to every one in the place. The whole house was becoming a hell again.

Then Pauline, in the last throes of her jealousy, began to ask herself if she had a right to try to compel Lazare to be happy

only after her own fashion. Certainly, she told herself, it was his happiness alone that she desired, even at the cost of pain and grief to herself. Why, then, should she go on keeping him in this seclusion, and forcing him into a solitude which seemed to make him suffer? He must and, doubtless, he did still love her, and he would come back to her when he was better able to appreciate her after comparison with that other girl. But, any way, she ought to let him make his own choice. It was only just, and the idea of justice was still undimmed and paramount with her.

Every three months Pauline went to Caen to receive the dividends. She started in the morning and returned in the evening, after having worked off a list of purchases and errands which she had been compiling during the previous quarter. On her visit to Caen in the June of this year, the family had gone on vainly looking for her return and putting off dinner till nine o'clock. Chanteau, who had become very uneasy about her, had sent off Lazare to go along the road, fearing that some accident had occurred; while Véronique said, with an air of perfect tranquillity, that it was foolish of them to distress themselves, for Mademoiselle Pauline, finding herself behind-hand, and being anxious to complete her purchases, had no doubt determined to stay all night. They spent a very uneasy time at Bonneville, and the next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, their alarm and anxiety recommenced. About noon, when Chanteau could scarcely keep himself any longer sitting in his chair, and Lazare had just determined to set off to Arromanches, Véronique, who had been gazing out into the road, rushed into the room and cried out:

"Here she is! Mademoiselle Pauline is coming!"

Chanteau insisted upon his chair being wheeled on to the terrace, and the father and son waited there together, while Véronique gave them particulars of what she had seen.

"It is Malivoire's coach. I could tell it was Mademoiselle Pauline by her crape ribbons. But, what I couldn't understand was that there seemed to be somebody with her. What can be keeping the broken-winded old hack, I wonder?"

At last the coach drove up before the door. Lazare had stepped forward towards it and had opened his mouth to question Pauline, who had sprung lightly down, when he stood riveted to the ground. Behind his cousin there appeared another young girl, dressed in lilac silk. Both the girls were

laughing and smiling in the most friendly fashion. The young man's surprise was so great that he at once ran back to his father, crying:

"She has brought Louise with her!"

"Louise! Ah! that's a capital idea!" Chanteau exclaimed.

And, when the two girls stood side by side before him, the one still in her deep mourning and the other in her gay summer toilette, delighted with this new distraction, he went on to say:

"Ah then! you have made it up! Well, I never quite understood what was the matter—some nonsense, I suppose. How naughty it was of you, my little Louise, still to keep yourself estranged from us in all the trouble we've been through! Well! it's all at an end now, eh?"

A feeling of embarrassment kept the two girls silent. They blushed and avoided looking at each other. Then Louise stepped forward and kissed Chanteau to hide her confusion. But he wanted to have some explanation.

"You met each other, I suppose."

Then Louise turned towards her friend, while her eyes filled with tears.

"It was Pauline who came to see us. I was just going back into the house myself at the time. You mustn't scold her for staying the night with us, for it was my fault. I made her stay. And as the telegraph goes no further than Arromanches, we thought we should get here ourselves quite as soon as a message. Do you forgive her?"

She kissed Chanteau again with all her old caressing manner. He inquired no further. When what happened contributed to his pleasure, he had no fault to find with it.

"But there's Lazare there," he added; "aren't you going to speak to him?"

The young man had kept himself in the background, with an embarrassed smile on his face. His father's remark completed his confusion, the more especially, as Louise only blushed again and made no step towards him. Why was she there, he was asking himself? Why had his cousin brought back this rival with her, whom she had previously so violently turned away? He had not yet recovered from his confusion at the sight of her.

"Kiss her, Lazare!" Pauline said softly, "since she is too timid to kiss you."

Her face was quite white, as she stood there in her deep mourning, but her expression was perfectly peaceful again, and her eyes clear and untroubled. She looked at them both with the maternal and serious expression which she assumed in her graver moments of household responsibility, and she only smiled when the young man took courage to brush with the tips of his lips the cheek which Louise bent towards him.

When Véronique saw this, she rushed off and shut herself up in her kitchen, perfectly thunderstruck. It was altogether beyond her comprehension. After all that had passed, Mademoiselle Pauline was showing herself to have very little heart. She was getting quite ridiculous and absurd in her desire to please others. It wasn't sufficient to bring all the dirty little drabs in the neighbourhood into the house and put them in the way of walking off with the silver, but now she must bring mistresses for Monsieur Lazare! The house was getting into a nice state, indeed!

When she had liberated a little of her indignation in this explosion over her fire, she went out on to the terrace again, and cried:

"Don't you know that lunch has been ready for more than an hour? The potatoes are fried to cinders!"

They all ate with good appetite, but Chanteau was the only one whose mirth flowed freely, and he was too gay to notice the persistent constraint of the three others. Though they showed themselves very affectionate towards each other, still, beneath it all, there lurked a touch of that uneasy sadness which manifests itself in one who forgives, but cannot altogether forget, an irreparable insult. They spent the afternoon in installing the new-comer in her room. She again occupied her old one on the first floor. If Madame Chanteau could only have come downstairs to dinner with her quick, short step, nothing would have appeared to have undergone any change.

For nearly a week longer this feeling of uneasy constraint lasted amongst the young people. Lazare, who did not dare to question Pauline about the matter, was completely unable to understand what he considered a most extraordinary caprice of hers; for any idea of a sacrifice, and of a determination deliberately and magnanimously taken, never occurred to him. He himself, in the midst of the desires which excited his listless idleness, had never thought of marrying Louise; and so now, when they all three found themselves together again, they

were in a false position, which caused them much distress. There were pauses of embarrassed silence, and sentences that remained unspoken on their lips from fear of seeming an allusion to the past. Pauline, who was surprised at this unexpected state of affairs, was obliged to exaggerate and force her gaiety, in the hope of bringing back a semblance of the careless merriment of former days. At first she felt a great wave of joy rise up in her, for she thought Lazare was coming back to her. The presence of Louise had calmed him; he almost avoided her, and shunned being alone with her, horrified at the thought that he might even yet be weak enough to again betray his cousin's confidence; and, tortured by a feverish affection for Pauline, he attached himself to her, and in deeply affected tones he proclaimed her to be the best of girls and a true saint of whom he was utterly unworthy. And so she was very happy, and rejoiced greatly in what she thought was her victory, when she saw her cousin so little attentive to Louise. At the end of the week she even began to reproach him for his want of amiability towards her.

"Why do you always run off and leave us? It really quite vexes me. She isn't here for us to be rude to her."

Lazare avoided replying by a vague gesture. Then his cousin allowed herself to make an allusion to what had happened, the only one which had ever escaped her.

"I brought her here that you might know that I have long ago forgiven you. I wanted to wipe out every remembrance of it as though it were all some horrid dream. It is all done with now. I am no longer afraid, you see. I have perfect confidence in you both."

He threw his arms round her and strained her closely to his breast. Then he promised to be courteous and amiable towards Louise.

From this moment they spent their days in a delightful intimacy with each other. Lazare no longer seemed to suffer from his ennui. Instead of shutting himself up in his room at the top of the house like a recluse, and making himself ill from very loneliness, he invented amusements and arranged long walks and rambles, from which they came back home again glowing and invigorated with the fresh air. And it was now that Louise by insensible degrees began to resume all her old sway over him. The young man grew quite at his ease with her again, and ventured once more to offer his arm, and

allowed himself to be thrilled afresh with those disturbing odours which every fold of the girl's lace seemed to exhale. At first he struggled against her growing influence over him, and tried to escape from her as soon as he found himself becoming intoxicated with her witchery for him. But Pauline herself bade him go to the girl's assistance when they had to leap over a pool as they skirted along by the cliffs; jumping over it boldly herself, like a boy, and disdaining all help, while Louise, with a soft scream like the cry of a wounded lark, surrendered herself to the young man's arms. Then, as they returned home again, and he supported her, all the suppressed laughs and whispered confidences of former days recommenced. But Pauline was in no way distressed by them now, and she maintained her appearance of brave unconcern, without guessing that she was endangering and risking her happiness by not feeling weary or requiring the assistance of her cousin's arm. It was with a kind of smiling bravado that she made them walk along in front of her, arm-in-arm, as though she wanted to show them how great her confidence was in them.

Neither Lazare nor Louise, indeed, had the slightest desire to take advantage of the trust she reposed in them. Though the young man allowed himself again to be bewitched by Louise, he was perpetually struggling against her influence over him, and made a point of showing himself more affectionate than before to his cousin. In Louise's society he seemed to be ever finding some fresh trap for the carnal part of his nature, into which he allowed himself to be deliciously beguiled, always protesting and swearing to himself that this time the game should not go beyond the limits of a permissible flirtation. Why, he asked himself, should he deny himself this pleasant little amusement, since he was quite determined not to go beyond what honour permitted him? Louise, too, felt more scruples than formerly; not that she accused herself of previous coquetry, for she was naturally of a caressing disposition, and abandoned herself quite unconsciously in a gesture or a breath, but now she would neither have done or said anything that she thought would have been in the least degree distasteful to Pauline. Her friend's forgiveness of what had past had moved her to tears. She wanted to show that she was worthy of it, and she had sworn for her one of those exuberant feminine adorations, which express themselves in vows and kisses and all kinds of passionate caresses. She kept a continual watch upon

her that she might run up to her at the first appearance of any indication of displeasure, and she would abruptly leave Lazare's arm and come and take Pauline's, and try to banish all touch of gloom from her, and even pretend to sulk with the young man; while Pauline would be vexed with herself for having shown even the least shade of vexation. Never before had Louise appeared so charming as she did now in this constant state of emotion, which arose from the necessity she felt of pleasing, and which quite overpowered her and rendered her pathetic and tearful; and the whole house seemed alive with the rustle of her skirts and her pretty wheedling ways.

Little by little, however, Pauline became quite wretched again; and her temporary hope and momentary feeling of triumph only served to increase her pain. It was no longer the violent paroxysms and the wild outbursts of jealousy which used to turn her quite distracted for a time that she now suffered from. It was rather a sensation of having the life slowly crushed out of her, as though some heavy mass had enveloped her whose weight bore down increasingly upon her every passing minute. She felt that everything was now over, that hope was no longer possible for her. And yet she had no reasonable ground of complaint against the two others. They showed the greatest thoughtfulness and affection for her, and struggled earnestly against the influences which were attracting them towards each other. But it was their very thoughtfulness and show of affection for her which especially pained her, for she began to see that they were prompted by their desire to prevent her being pained by their love for each other. The pity of these young lovers was unendurable to her. When she left them together she knew well that there were soft confessions and rapid whisperings, and then, when she joined them again, a sudden relapse into silence, while Louise lavished her kisses upon her and Lazare treated her with an affectionate devotion. She would have preferred to know that they were really in the wrong and were betraying her in some secret corner, for all these honourable scruples and these compensatory caresses which were lavished upon her, and plainly told her the real truth, quite disarmed her and left her neither the will nor the energy to try to win back her own happiness. On the day when she had brought back her rival she intended to hold her own against her, if she found any struggle was necessary; but what could she do against a couple of children whose love for each other

was only a source of distress to them? It was her own doing, too; and she might, if she had liked, have married Lazare, without troubling herself about his possible preference for someone else. But, in spite of her jealous torture, her heart rebelled against the idea of exacting from him the fulfilment of his promise—a promise which he no doubt now regretted. Though it should kill her to do so, she would give him up rather than marry him if he loved another.

She still went on, however, playing the part of mother to her little family; nursing Chanteau, who was not going on very satisfactorily, soothing Véronique, whose sense of propriety was seriously offended, to say nothing of pretending to treat Lazare and Louise as a pair of disorderly children, that she might be able to smile at their escapades. She succeeded in forcing herself to laugh even more loudly than they did, with that clear, ringing laugh of hers, whose limpid notes testified to her healthy courage. The whole house seemed gay and animated. She herself affected an exaggerated activity from morning till night, refusing to accompany the young couple in their walks, on the pretence that she had to undertake a general cleaning of the house, or to see after the washing, or to superintend the making of preserves. It was Lazare who had now become especially noisy and energetic. He went whistling up and down the stairs, drummed on the doors, and found the days too short and uneventful. Although he did not actually do anything, his new passion seemed to find him more occupation than he had either time or strength for. Once more he was going to conquer the world, and every day at dinner he enunciated fresh extraordinary schemes for the future. He had already grown disgusted with the idea of literature, and had abandoned all notion of reading for the examinations which he had intended to pass in order to enable him to take up the profession of teaching. For a long time he had made this intention of studying an excuse for shutting himself up in solitude in his room, but he had felt so hopeless and discouraged that he had never opened a book, and now he began to scoff at his own foolishness in ever contemplating such a thing. Could anything be more idiotic than to chain himself down to a life like that in order to be able at some future time to write a lot of plays and novels? No! Politics alone were worthy of his ambition; and he had quite made up his mind now. He had a slight acquaintance with the deputy for Caen, and he would go with him to Paris

as his secretary, and, doubtless, in a very few months he would make his way. The Empire was in great want of intelligent young men.

When Pauline, whom this wild whirl of ideas made uneasy, tried to calm his ambitious fever by advising him to look out for some smaller but safer berth, he scoffed at her prudence and jokingly called her "an old grandmother."

One day, when Lazare and Louise had gone by themselves to Verchemont, Pauline had need of a recipe for restoring velvet, and she went upstairs to search for it in her cousin's big cupboard, where she thought she recollected having seen it on a scrap of paper between the pages of a book. While she was looking for it, she discovered amongst some pamphlets Louise's old glove, that forgotten glove from which Lazare had so often drained a kind of carnal intoxication. It was a ray of light to Pauline. She recognised in it the object which her cousin had hidden from her with such an appearance of troubled emotion that evening when she had suddenly entered his room to tell him that dinner was ready. She fell down upon a chair, quite overcome by this revelation. Ah! he had desired this girl before ever she had returned to the house; he lived on her recollection, and he had worn this glove away with his lips because it retained some scent of her! Her whole body was shaken with her sobs, while her streaming eyes remained fixed upon the glove which she still held in her trembling hands.

"Well, mademoiselle, have you found it yet?" asked the strong voice of Véronique, who had just come upstairs from the landing. "The best thing you can do is to rub it with a piece of bacon-rind."

She came into the room and seemed quite amazed at finding Pauline in tears, with her fingers clutching the old glove. But as she glanced round the room, she at last guessed the cause of the girl's despair.

"Well! well!" she said, in the rough way that was becoming more and more habitual to her, "you might have expected what has happened. I warned you how it would be, long ago. You bring them together again and they amuse themselves. And perhaps my mistress was right after all; this kitten of a girl brightens him up more than you do."

Then she shook her head, and added in a grave voice, as though she were speaking to herself:

"Ah! my mistress saw very clearly, in spite of her faults. But I can't approve of that, though she is dead."

That evening when Pauline had locked herself up in her room and had placed her candlestick on the chest of drawers, she threw herself down on her bed, and told herself that she must let Louise and Lazare be married. All through the day a buzzing sensation had been throbbing in her head and had prevented her from thinking clearly, and it was only now, in the quiet night-time, when she was able to suffer without witnesses of her trouble, that this inevitable consequence to what had happened presented itself clearly to her mind. It was absolutely necessary that they should marry each other. The thought rang through her like an order, like the voice of reason and justice to which she could no longer turn a deaf ear. For a moment, she, who was so courageous, gave way to terror, fancying she heard the voice of her dead aunt calling out to her to obey her. Then, all dressed as she was, she turned herself over and covered herself up with the bed-clothes to drown the sound of her sobs. Oh! to have to surrender him to another! To know that another's arms were clasped round him and would keep him from her for ever! To lose all hope of ever winning him back! No! she could never have the courage for it, and she would prefer continuing to lead her present life of wretchedness. No one at all should have him; neither herself nor that other girl, and Lazare himself should grow old and withered with waiting! For a long time she lay struggling with herself, racked by a jealous madness which suggested to her mind the most horribly carnal ideas. Her impetuous temperament still led her on with a violence which neither years nor reflection had been able to subdue. Then she remained quite prostrate and worn-out, and the carnal part of her nature was too exhausted to struggle further.

Too tired and weary to undress Pauline lay for a long time on her back, arguing with herself. She succeeded in proving to herself that Louise could do more to secure Lazare's happiness than she ever could. Had not this child, weak and feeble as she was, already been able to free him from his weary ennui with her loving caresses? Doubtless it was necessary for him to have her continually clinging to his neck that she might drive away from him with her kisses all his gloomy thoughts and terror of death. Then Pauline fell to depreciating herself, telling herself that she was too cold and had none of the loving

graces of a woman, but only kindliness, which was not sufficient to satisfy a young man's requirements. One other consideration brought about her complete conviction as to the necessity of what she was contemplating. She was ruined, and her cousin's plans for the future, those plans which had caused her so much anxiety, would require a large amount of money for their accomplishment. Would it be right for her to impose upon him the narrow, sordid life they were now obliged to lead, and to condemn him to a mediocrity which she could see was painful to him? Their life together would be an unhappy one, poisoned by continual regrets and the querulous bitterness of disappointed ambition. She could only give him a narrow, sordid life of poverty, while Louise, who was wealthy, could open out to him the great career of which he dreamed. It was said that the girl's father was keeping some good berth vacant for his future son-in-law, probably some lucrative position in the bank; and, though Lazare affected to despise financiers, matters would no doubt be satisfactorily arranged. She felt that she could hesitate no longer, now that it seemed clear to her that she would be committing an unworthy action if she prevented their marriage, and as she lay awake on her bed, this union of Lazare and Louise seemed to her to be a necessity, which she must do what she could to hasten, if she wanted to preserve her own self-respect.

The whole night passed away while she was thus wrestling with herself. When the day broke, Pauline at last undressed. She was perfectly calm now, and she enjoyed a profound repose in her bed, though still unable to sleep. She had never before felt so easy and so satisfied with herself, and so free from all anxiety. All was over; she had just cut the bonds of her egotism, and she had no hopes now centred in any person or thing, and within her there lurked all the subtle pleasure that comes of self-sacrifice. She did not even experience any longer her old craving to be in herself sufficient for the happiness of her people. Her proud feeling of abnegation had vanished, and she was willing that those she loved should be happy through other instrumentality than her own. It was the loftiest height to which the love for others could reach, to suppress one's self, to give up everything and still think: one had not given enough, to love so deeply as to rejoice in a happiness which one has neither bestowed nor shares. The sun was rising as she dropped off into a deep sleep.

Pauline came downstairs very late the next morning. When she awoke, it made her happy to find that all the resolutions she had made during the night remained fixed and unwavering within her. Then she began to reflect that she had forgotten all about what was going to become of herself, and that it would be necessary for her to make some plan for the future in the new condition of affairs which was going to be established. Though she might have the courage to bring about the marriage of Lazare and Louise, she would certainly never be brave enough to remain with them and watch day by day their happiness together. Self-devotion has its limits, and she was afraid of some return of her violent outbursts, some terrible scene which would kill her. Besides, had she not really done all that could possibly be demanded of her, and could anyone have the cruelty to wish to impose upon her this quite useless torture? She came to an immediate and irrevocable decision. She would go away and leave the house, which was so full of disquieting and troubling associations for her. This meant a complete change in her whole manner of life, but she did not shrink from it.

At breakfast she showed all her old calm cheerfulness, which she henceforth maintained. She sustained bravely the sight of Lazare and Louise, sitting side by side, whispering and smiling, without any other feeling of weakness than a sensation of chilly coldness at her heart. As it was Saturday, she made up her mind to send them out for a long walk together, that she might be alone when Doctor Cazenove came. They went off, and then Pauline took the precaution of going out into the road to meet the doctor. As soon as he caught sight of her, he wanted her to get up into his gig and drive to the house with him. But she begged him to get out and they walked along slowly together, while Martin, a hundred yards behind them, brought on the empty vehicle.

Then Pauline in a few simple words unbosomed herself to the doctor. She told him everything, her plan of giving Lazare to Louise and her determination to leave the house. This confession had seemed to be quite necessary to her; she was unwilling to act upon her own mere inspiration, and the old doctor was the only person who could understand her.

Cazenove suddenly halted in the middle of the road and clasped the girl in his long bony arms. He was trembling with emotion, and he kissed her on the hair, as he said affectionately:

"You are quite right, my dear; you are quite right. And

it pleases me very much to hear it, for matters might have had a very much worse ending. For months and months I have been grieved and pained, and I was longing to come and talk to you, for I knew you were very unhappy. Ah! they have plundered you and stripped you nicely, these good folks! First your money and now your heart!"

The young girl tried to stop him.

"My dear friend, I beg of you— You are judging them unfairly."

"Very possibly, but that does not prevent me being glad on your account. Yes! yes! Give up your Lazare! It is not a very valuable present that you are making to the other one! I daresay that he is a very charming fellow, and that he has the best intentions in the world, but I prefer that the other girl should be unhappy with him and not you. These fine fellows who grow weary and bored with everything are too heavy weights even for broad shoulders like yours to support. I would rather see you marry some sturdy butcher lad; yes, I mean it, some sturdy butcher lad who would shake his sides day and night with honest, merry laughter."

Then, as he saw her eyes filling with tears, he added:

"Ah, well! you love him, I suppose, and so I won't say anything more about him. Give me a kiss again, since you are brave enough to act so sensibly. Ah! what a fool he is not to see what he is doing!"

He took the girl's arm and drew her closely to his side. Then they began to talk seriously together, as they resumed their walk. The doctor told her that she would certainly do best to leave Bonneville, and he undertook to find her a situation somewhere. He happened, he said, to have a rich old relative living at Saint-Lô, who was looking out for a young lady as a companion. Pauline would be perfectly happy with her, and it was very probable that the old lady, who had no children of her own, might grow much attached to her and subsequently adopt her. They arranged everything between themselves, and the doctor promised Pauline a definite reply from his relative in a few days; and, in the meantime, they settled that she should say nothing about her determination to leave Bonneville. She was afraid that if she did it might seem in some sort of way a threat, and she was anxious to bring the marriage to an issue and then to leave the house on the very next day, as one who could no longer be of any use there.

On the third day Pauline received a letter from the doctor. She was expected at Saint-Lô as soon as she could get away. It was on this same day, during Lazare's absence, that she led Louise to an old seat beneath a clump of tamarisks at the bottom of the kitchen garden. In front of them, over the top of the low wall, they could see nothing but the sea and sky, a measureless expanse of blue, intersected by the far-stretching line of the horizon.

"My dear girl," Pauline said to Louise with her maternal air, "let us talk for a little as though we were two sisters. You love me a little, don't you?"

Louise threw her arms round her friend's waist as she exclaimed:

"Indeed I do! You know I do!"

"Well, then, since you love me, it was very wrong of you not to tell me everything. Why do you keep secrets from me?"

"Indeed, I have no secrets."

"Ah! yes; think again now. Come, open your heart to me."

Both the girls looked into each other's face so closely for a moment that they felt the warmth of each other's breath. The eyes of the one grew gradually troubled and disturbed beneath the clear, unruffled gaze of the other. The silence was growing painful.

"Tell me everything. When things are discussed openly it is possible to arrange them satisfactorily, but dissimulation is apt to have an unhappy ending. Isn't that so, eh? It would be very painful for us to disagree again and to have a repetition of what has caused us so much grief and trouble."

Then Louise broke out into a violent fit of sobbing. She clasped Pauline round the waist with a convulsive pressure, and bowed her head and buried it in her friend's shoulder while she sobbed out in the midst of her tears:

"Oh! it is very unkind of you to speak of that again! You ought never to have mentioned it again, never! Send me away at once, rather than pain me like this!"

It was all in vain that Pauline tried to soothe her.

"No! no!" the weeping girl went on; "I understand it all. You still suspect me. Why do you speak to me of secrets? I have no secret at all. I do everything quite openly that you may have no cause to find fault with me or reproach me. I am not to blame, because there are things happen which disturb you, I who even am careful how I laugh,

though you don't know it—· But if you don't believe me, I had better go away at once. Let me go! Let me go!"

They were quite alone in this far-reaching space. The kitchen-garden, scorched by the west wind, lay at their feet like a piece of waste land, while, further way, the calm sea spread out its boundless surface.

"But listen to what I have got to say," Pauline cried. "I am not reproaching you at all; on the contrary, I want to encourage you."

Then, taking Louise by the shoulders and forcing her to raise her eyes, she said to her gently, like a mother questioning her daughter:

"You love Lazare? And he, too, loves you, I am sure."

The blood surged hotly up to Louise's cheeks. She was trembling violently all over, and she tried to liberate herself and escape.

"Good gracious! How clumsily I must express myself if you can't understand me," Pauline resumed. "Do you think it is likely that I should talk to you on such a subject only to torture you? You love each other, don't you? Well, I want to get you married to one another! That's all!"

Louse, who seemed quite dazed, ceased to struggle. A sort of stupor checked the flow of her tears and rendered her quite nerveless and motionless, while her hands hung down inertly at her side.

"What? You?" she gasped.

"Yes, I, my dear. I have been examining myself very seriously for some weeks past, and at night-time especially, during those waking hours when one's mind sees things in a clearer light. And I have recognised that I feel nothing more than a sincere friendship for Lazare. Haven't you been able to see as much for yourself? We are comrades, chums; like a couple of boys, in fact. We do not feel for each other those loving transports—"

She hesitated, trying to find some suitable phrase which would give an appearance of probability to the falsehood she was telling. Her rival still continued to gaze at her with fixed eyes, as though she had discovered the meaning that was hidden beneath her words.

"Why are you lying to me?" she at last murmured. "Is it possible you can cease to love where you have once loved?"

Pauline grew troubled and distressed.

"Well! well!" she said; "what does all that matter? You love each other, and it is perfectly right and natural that he should marry you. I—I have been brought up with him, and I shall continue to be a sister to him. One's ideas alter when one has been waiting so long— And, then, there are several other reasons—"

She was conscious that she was growing confused and rambling in what she was saying; and so, carried away by her frankness, she broke out quickly:

"Well! well! my dear, let me have my own way. If I still love him sufficiently to want to see him your husband, it is because I now believe that you are necessary to his happiness. That doesn't vex you, does it? You would do the same if you were in my place, would you not? Come now, let us talk it quietly over. Will you join in the little plot, and let us come to an understanding together to force him into being happy? Even if he seems vexed about it and persists in believing that he is yet bound to me, you must still help me to persuade him, for it is you that he loves, and it is you who are necessary to him. Be my accomplice, I beg of you, and let us get everything arranged at once, now, while we are alone."

But Louise saw that she was trembling and heart-broken in spite of her entreaties to her to marry Lazare, and she could not bring herself to take her cousin from her.

"No! no! I couldn't think of such a thing! It would be abominable. You still love him; I am quite sure of it, and you are only planning your own torment. Instead of helping you, I will tell him everything. Yes, as soon as ever he comes back—"

Pauline threw her arms round her again to prevent her continuing, and drew her head close to her breast.

"Hold your tongue, you wicked child! It must be so. It is he we have to think about."

Then they were silent again, while Pauline still held Louise in her embrace. Her powers of resistance already exhausted, the girl gave way to Pauline's solicitations and lay in her arms in her affectionately languid manner, while the tears mounted to her eyes, but they were happy tears, and trickled slowly down her cheeks. She did not say a word, but kept pressing her friend to her, as though she could find no discreeter or more sincere way of expressing her gratitude to her. She recognised that Pauline was so much above her, so calm and proud in the

midst of her grief, that she did not dare to raise her eyes to meet her gaze. A few minutes afterwards, however, she ventured to lift her head in smiling confusion, and then put up her lips and gave her friend a silent kiss. In the distance the vast blue expanse of the sea stretched out beneath the cloudless sky, with its smooth surface unruffled by a single wave.

When Lazare returned to the house, Pauline went up to him in his room, that big chamber where they had both grown up. She was anxious that this very day should see the completion of her task. With her cousin she indulged in no preliminary remarks, but went straight to the point. The room teemed with associations of their old life together. Pieces of dry seaweed were still lying about, the model of the stockade lay upon the piano, and the table was strewn with scientific treatises and scores of music.

"Lazare," she began, "I want to talk to you. I have something very serious to say to you."

He looked at her in surprise, and then came and stood before her.

"What is the matter? Is my father going to have another attack?"

"No, it is nothing of that kind. Please listen to me. It is quite necesssay that the subject should now be mentioned; keeping silence about it cannot do any good. You know that my aunt intended us two to be married. We have frequently spoken about it, and for months past it has been considered a settled matter. Well, I think that it would be better now if all thought of it were abandoned."

The young man had turned pale, but he did not allow his cousin to finish what she had to say, and he exclaimed excitedly:

"What? What nonsense are you talking? Are you not already my wife? We will go to-morrow, if you like, and ask the priest to put the finishing stroke to the matter. And this is what you call something very serious!"

Then the girl replied in her tranquil tones:

"It is very serious; and though it displeases you, I repeat that it is quite necessary we should speak about it. We are two old friends and comrades, but I am afraid we should never be two lovers. What is the good of our obstinately persisting in an idea which it is more than likely would never result in happiness for either of us?"

Then Lazare burst out into a torrent of incoherent words. Was she trying to quarrel with him? She couldn't expect him to spend his whole time clinging round her neck! And, though the marriage had been put off from month to month, she knew quite well that it wasn't his fault. It was unjust of her to say that he no longer loved her. He had loved her so warmly, and in this very room too, that he had not dared to allow himself to touch her even with his finger-tips, lest he should lose all control of himself and be carried away into the commission of some baseness. At this reference to the past a hot blush mounted to Pauline's cheeks. Her cousin was right. She recollected that passing paroxysm of desire, and his hot breath enveloping her. But ah! how far off were those moments of delicious thrillings, and what an unimpassioned, brotherly friendship he manifested for her now! So it was with an expression of sadness that she replied to him:

"My poor dear, if you really loved me, instead of arguing with me as you are doing, you would be clasping me in your arms and would find some very different way of persuading me."

He turned still paler, and threw up his hands with a vague expression of protestation as he let himself fall into a chair.

"No!" the girl went on; "it is quite clear that you love me no longer. Well, what do you want us to do? It is plain that we are not made for each other. When we were shut up here together, you were almost driven into thinking about me. But all your fancy for me vanished later on; it did not last, because there was nothing in me that could keep you to me."

A final paroxysm of angry exasperation shook him, and he swayed himself about in his chair as he cried out:

"Well! what is it, then, that you want? What is the meaning of all this? I insist upon being told. I come quietly home, and come up here to put on my slippers, and then you suddenly fall upon me, and without the least notice or warning, you launch out into an extravagant harangue— I don't love you any longer—We are not made for each other—the wedding must be broken off—Once more I ask you, what is the meaning of it all?"

Pauline stepped slowly up to him and said:

"It means that you love someone else, and that I advise you to marry her."

For a moment Lazare remained silent. Then he began to sneer. Bah! They were going to have all the old scenes over

again, were they? Everything was going to be turned topsy-turvey once more by her idiotic jealousy! She couldn't bear to see him cheerful even for a single day without wanting to banish everyone from coming near him.

Pauline heard him with an expression of profound melancholy; then she suddenly laid her trembling hands upon his shoulders, and her heart seemed to be breaking as she exclaimed passionately:

"Oh! my dear, can you believe that I want to distress you? Can't you see that my only desire is to make you happy? I would endure anything to win you a single hour's happiness. You love Louise! Well, I tell you to marry her. I stand in the way no longer. Marry her; I give her to you!"

Her cousin looked at her in speechless amazement. With his nervous and ill-balanced nature, his feelings rushed to opposite extremes at the slightest impulses. His eyelids quivered and he burst into a fit of sobbing.

"Oh! don't talk like that!" he cried; "I am an utterly worthless fellow! Yes, indeed, I despise myself bitterly for all that has happened in this house for years past. I am deeply in your debt. Don't say I am not! We have stolen your money, and I have squandered it like a fool, and now I have got so low that you make me alms of my word and promise, and give them back to me out of sheer pity, as to a man destitute of courage and honour!"

"Lazare! Lazare!" she murmured, quite alarmed at her cousin's excitement.

He sprang furiously to his feet and began striding about the room, drumming on his breast with his fists.

"Go and leave me! I should kill myself straight off, if I treated myself as I deserve. Do I not owe you my love? Isn't it a disgrace and an abomination for me to desire this other girl who was not meant for me and isn't nearly so good or so pretty as you are? When a man descends to conduct like this, there must be mud in his soul! You see that I am hiding nothing from you and that I am not attempting to defend myself. Listen to me! Rather than accept your sacrifice, I would myself turn Louise out of the house, and then go off to America and never see either one or other of you again!"

For a long time Pauline tried to calm him and to reason with him. Couldn't he try for once, she asked, to consider matters quietly, as she did, and without exaggeration? Couldn't he see

that the advice she was offering was good advice? She had resolved upon it after long deliberation. The marriage she was advocating would be good for everyone. She was able to speak of it in such calm tones, because the thought of it was now far from paining her, and she sincerely wished it. Then, carried away by her desire to convince him, she unfortunately made an allusion to Louise's fortune and hinted that Thibaudier, when the marriage had taken place, would certainly find some post for his son-in-law.

"Ah! that's it!" he broke out violently. "You want to sell me! Say plainly that I must no longer want to have you, because I have ruined you, and that it only remains for me now to commit the baseness of turning to some other quarter to marry a rich girl. No! no! indeed, that is too mean and disgraceful! Never will I do it, never! Do you hear me? Never!"

Pauline, whose strength was exhausted, ceased her entreaties. Lazare had thrown himself down again into the chair, quivering with excitement, while the girl began to pace slowly up and down the big room, lingering before each piece of furniture. These old familiar things, the table which she had worn away with the pressure of her elbows, the cupboard where her childish playthings were still stowed, all the old souvenirs which were littered about the room, made a feeling of hope, which she strove to crush, spring up in her heart, and whose sweetness, in spite of herself, thrilled her with a doubting joy. Suppose he did really love her sufficiently to refuse to give himself to another! But she knew too well all the neglect of her that would follow this passionate outburst of sentiment. No! it was very weak and foolish of her to harbour the slightest hope, and she must be on her guard against allowing herself to yield to the pretences of his nerveless and vacillating nature.

"You must think it all over," she said in conclusion, coming and standing before him. "I won't bother you any more at present. I am sure you will be more reasonable in the morning."

The next day, however, was passed in painful constraint. The house seemed once more to be under the depressing influence of a vague and wearying sorrow. Louise's eyes were red, and Lazare avoided her and spent whole hours shut up by himself in his room. As the days went on, however, this feeling of gloom began to disappear, and the sound of laughter

was once more heard in the house, and gigglings and tender whisperings. Pauline still waited on, indulging in foolish hopes against her own convictions. Racked by this condition of terrible doubt, she thought that she had never before really known what suffering was. But, at last, as she was going down to the kitchen one evening in the dusk to get a candle, she surprised Lazare and Louise kissing each other in the passage. Louise made her escape laughing, while Lazare, emboldened by the darkness, seized hold of Pauline and imprinted two brotherly kisses on her cheeks.

"I have thought it over," he murmured. "You are better and wiser than she is; and I still love you, but I love you as I loved my mother."

She was just able to say:

"It is all settled then. I am very glad."

She felt that she had turned so pale, and her face was so cold, that she dared not go into the kitchen for fear she should faint; so, without waiting to get a candle, she went upstairs again to her own room, saying that she had forgotten something. When she shut herself up in the darkness there, she felt so choked and suffocated that she thought she was going to die, and she could not shed a single tear. What had she done, she cried to herself, that he should have been cruel enough to make her torture still greater? Why couldn't he have accepted her sacrifice on the very day that she proposed it to him, when she had forced her strength up to the pitch of bearing it, and not taken her courage away by beguiling her with hope? Now the sacrifice had become a double one. She had lost him a second time, and this second loss was all the more painful since she had allowed herself to hope that she would win him back. She would be brave and bear it, but it was cruel and wicked of him to make her task such a torture to her.

Everything was speedily arranged. Véronique gaped and could make nothing out of it, and thought that things had got turned upside-down since her mistress's death. It was Chanteau who was most taken by surprise at the news. He who usually took no interest in anything and just nodded his head in approbation of any scheme that was mentioned to him, as though he were completely absorbed in a selfish enjoyment of the moments of calmness he stole from his tormenting pain, burst into tears when Pauline herself announced to him this new arrangement. He gazed at her, and broke out into

stammering and incoherent protestations. It wasn't his fault; he had wanted to do very differently long ago, both about the money and about the marriage, but as she knew, he was too ill. Then the girl kissed him, protesting that it was she herself who was making Lazare marry Louise for very good reasons. At first he could scarcely believe her, and blinking his eyes sadly, he asked her:

"Is that really the truth? Really?"

Then, when he saw her smile, he quickly consoled himself, and grew quite gay. It was really a great relief to have something settled, for the subject had long been distressing him, and he had never dared to open his mouth about it. He kissed Louise on the cheeks, and in the evening, over the dessert, he sang a merry song. Just as he was going to bed, however, he was troubled with a last disquieting thought.

"You will stay with us, eh?" he asked Pauline.

The girl hesitated for a moment, and then blushing at the lie she was telling, she answered:

"Oh, yes! certainly."

A whole month was required for the completion of the necessary formalities. Thibaudier, Louise's father, had at once consented to the proposal of Lazare, who was his godson. There was only one dispute between them, a couple of days before the wedding, when the young man roundly refused to go up to Paris and manage an Insurance Company, in which the banker was the principal shareholder. He intended remaining for a year or two longer at Bonneville and writing a romance, which was going to be a masterpiece, before starting off to bring Paris to his feet. Thibaudier just shrugged his shoulders, and, in his friendly way, treated him as though he were a great simpleton.

It was arranged that the marriage should take place at Caen. During the previous fortnight there were continual comings and goings, and a perfect fever of journeyings. Pauline used to go about with Louise in a sort of dazed condition, and returned home from their expeditions quite exhausted and done-up. As Chanteau was not able to leave Bonneville she had been obliged to promise to be present at the ceremony, where she would be the only representative of her cousin's family. The near approach of the day filled her with terror. She had arranged not to spend the night at Caen, for she thought that she would suffer less if she returned to sleep in her own room

at Bonneville, lulled to rest by the sea she so dearly loved. She pretended that her uncle's state of health made her very uneasy, and that she was unwilling to be so long away from him. Chanteau himself vainly pressed her to go and spend a few days at Caen. He wasn't ill at all, he urged. On the contrary, he was very much excited by the idea of the approaching wedding and the thought of the banquet at which he would not be present, and he was craftily meditating making Véronique supply him with some forbidden dish, a young partridge served with truffles, for instance, which he never could eat without the absolute certainty of a fresh attack of gout. But, in spite of all that could be urged, the young girl declared that she would return in the evening; and she was also reckoning that this course would allow her greater facilities for packing her trunk the next morning and disappearing.

A drizzling rain was falling and midnight had just struck as Malivoire's old coach brought Pauline back to Bonneville on the evening of the wedding. Wearing a blue silk dress, and ill protected by a slight shawl, she was pale and shivering, though her hands were hot. In the kitchen she found Véronique, who was sitting up for her, leaning on the edge of the table, asleep. The tall flame of the candle made her eyes blink, still affected as they were by the darkness of the journey, during which they had remained opened widely all the way from Arromanches. She could only drag a few incoherent words from the drowsy servant: her master had been very foolish, he was asleep now, no one had called. Then Pauline took a candle and went upstairs, feeling chilled by the emptiness of the house, and utterly heart-sick and despondent in the gloom and silence which seemed to crush her with their weight.

When she reached the second floor she was hastening to take refuge in her own room, but an irresistible impulse, at which she felt surprise, constrained her to open Lazare's door. She raised her candle to enable her to see, as though she fancied the room was full of smoke. Nothing was changed. Every piece of furniture was in its accustomed place, but she felt a sensation of calamity and disaster and a vague terror, as though she were in a chamber of death. With slow steps she walked up to the table and looked at the ink-stand, the pen and an unfinished page of manuscript, which was still lying there. Then she went away. All was over, and the door closed on the echoing emptiness of the room.

When she reached her own chamber, the same vague sensation of strangeness that she had felt in Lazare's, still affected her. Could this be her own room, with its wall paper of blue roses and its little muslin-curtained iron bed? Was it really here that she had lived so many years? Still keeping her candle in her hand, she, who was usually so courageous, made a minute inspection of the apartment, pushed the curtains aside and looked under the bed and behind the furniture. She felt overcome by a strange kind of stupor, which kept her standing in front of the different things in the room and gazing at them. She could not have believed that such a keen anguish could ever have possessed her beneath that ceiling, whose every stain was familiar to her. She began to regret now that she had not stayed at Caen. She was feeling frightened in her old home that was so empty, and yet so thronged with memories of the past, and was so cold and dark in this stormy night. The thought of going to bed was intolerable to her. She sat down without even taking off her hat, and for several minutes she kept perfectly motionless, with her staring eyes fixed upon the candle-flame which dazzled them. Suddenly she seemed to start up in astonishment. What was she doing here, with her head throbbing wildly with a violence that quite prevented her thinking? It was one o'clock. She ought to be in bed. And she began to undress herself with slow, feverish hands.

Her instinct of order still showed itself even in this crisis of her life. She carefully put away her hat, and glanced anxiously at her boots to see if they had sustained any damage. She had folded her dress and laid it over the back of a chair, and had nothing on but her chemise and a petticoat when her glance fell upon her virgin bosom. Gradually a flaming flush crimsoned her cheeks. In her troubled brain images and phantoms rose up clearly and distinctly of those two others in their room over yonder, a room which she knew well, and where she had that very morning carried flowers. She saw the bride in bed, and the bridegroom entering the room and approaching her with a tender smile. Then, with a violent movement, she dragged off her petticoat and chemise, and, now perfectly naked, still continued to gaze upon herself. This harvest of love, then, was not to be for her! Never, probably, would the marriage joys be hers! Her gaze wandered down from her breasts, that were so firm and full and bursting with life, to her spreading hips and her stomach, where a fertile

maternity lay unawakened. She was ripe now, and she felt life thrilling through her and glowing in the secret recesses of her body with their dark, downy fleece, and she breathed-in the scent of her womanhood that was waiting like a spreading blossom to be fertilized. Ah! it was not she, it was the other girl, whose image rose up clearly before her, that lay panting and sighing in the arms of that husband whose coming she herself had been looking forward to for so many years!

When she bent her eyes still lower down she was surprised to see a red streak of blood across her thigh. Suddenly she understood its meaning. Her chemise that had fallen on to the floor was stained with crimson. Ah! this then was why she had been feeling so faint and weak in her whole body since her departure from Caen! She had not expected it so soon, this draining wound which the loss of her love had just opened in the very springs of her vitality. The contemplation of this vitality, which was destined to pass away purposelessly and wasted, completed her feeling of hopeless despair. The first time that she had thus found herself stained with blood she remembered she had cried out in terror. And, later on, in the evenings, before she put out her candle, she had fondly and furtively watched the ripening of her flesh and womanhood. She had felt foolishly proud of it all, and had rejoiced in the happiness of her ripe development. Alas! alas! the red dew of her puberty was trickling to-day like the vain tears of her virginity! Henceforth each month would bring with it this gushing forth of the ripened fruit, ready for the vintage; yet never would she be a wife, but would grow old in barren sterility!

Then a wild jealousy seized her again at the images which her excited fancy called up before her. She yearned to live, to live to the full, and to drain the joys of life, she who loved life so dearly! What was the good of life if one could not enjoy it with another? As she saw in her mind's eye those two others, a wild impulse to gash and mutilate her nakedness caused her to look about for her scissors. Why shouldn't she cut this throat of hers, and mangle these thighs, and tear open this stomach, and let the blood pour out to the very last drop? She was more beautiful than that scraggy, fair-haired girl, and she was stronger and healthier, and yet her cousin had not chosen her. Never now would he be hers, and no part of her, neither her arms, nor her hips, nor her lips could now go on

expecting him and waiting for him. All might now be tossed away like an old rag. Was it possible that they two were really together at this moment, while she remained all alone in this cold, gloomy house, shivering with fever?

Suddenly she threw herself down on her stomach on the bed. She seized the pillow within her convulsive grasp, and bit it with her teeth to stifle her sobs, and she tried to still her mutinous flesh by crushing it against the mattress. Long convulsive shivers shook her from her head to her heels. It was in vain that she pressed her eye-lids tightly down that she might shut out all sight, she saw just the same, and torturing images rose up before her in the gloom. Oh! what was she to do? If she were to tear her eyes out she would still go on seeing, would go on seeing these things perhaps for ever.

The minutes glided on, and she seemed to be suffering an eternity of torture. A paroxysm of fear made her spring to her feet. Some one must be in the room, for she fancied that she had heard the sound of laughter. But she found that it was only her candle, which was nearly burnt out and had made the socket creak. But if any one really had seen her! That imaginary laugh still thrilled wildly through her flesh. Could it be really herself who was lying in this utter nakedness? A feeling of shame took possession of her, and she folded her arms over her breast, in a forlorn attitude, that she might no longer see herself. Then at last she quickly slipped a night-dress over her, and springing back into bed buried herself in the clothes which she pulled up to her chin, while she drew up her shivering body into as little room as possible. When the candle died out, she lay perfectly still, quite exhausted and overcome with the shame she felt for her wild conduct.

In the morning Pauline packed her trunk, but she could not summon up courage to tell Chanteau of her speedy departure. In the evening, however, she was obliged to inform him of it, for Doctor Cazenove was to come the next day and conduct her to his relative's house. When her uncle grasped the situation he was quite overcome, and reached out his poor, weak hands with a wild gesture as though he were trying to prevent her leaving him, and, in broken and stammering sentences, he besought her to stay with him. She could surely never really think of such a thing, he cried; she could not possibly desert him; it would be nothing less than a murder, for it would certainly kill him at once. Then, when he saw her gently resolute upon

going and divined her reasons, he determined to confess his wrong-doing of the previous day in eating the partridge. He was already feeling sharp burning pains in his joints. It was always the same old story. He had yielded once more in the struggle. He knew what the consequences would be if he ate, but he ate all the same, quite certain that agony would follow, in a state of mingled pleasure and terror. But he thought that Pauline would never be able to desert him in the midst of one of his attacks.

And so it happened that about six o'clock in the morning, Véronique came upstairs to inform her that she could hear bellowing in her master's bed-room. She was in a shockingly bad temper and went growling about the house that if Mademoiselle Pauline were going she would certainly be off as well, as she had grown quite tired of looking after such a perverse and unreasonable old man.

Pauline was once more obliged to take up her position by her uncle's bedside; and when the doctor arrived to take her away with him, she showed him the sick man, who was feeling quite triumphant as he bellowed out his loudest, and cried out to her to leave him, if she could find it in her heart to do so. Everything had to be postponed.

Every day the young girl trembled at the thought of seeing Lazare and Louise come back. Their new room, the one which had formerly been the guest-chamber, had been specially fitted up for their occupation, and had been waiting ready for them ever since their marriage. They were lingering on at Caen, and Lazare wrote to say that he was making notes on the financial world there, before coming back to Bonneville and shutting himself up there to commence a grand romance, in which he was going to reveal the truth about the way their business was carried on. At last he arrived one morning without his wife, and unconcernedly announced that he was going to settle down with her in Paris. His father-in-law, he said, had prevailed upon him to accept the post in the Insurance Company on the ground that he would have a good opportunity in that position for making his notes from actual observation. Later on, he added, he might perhaps come back and devote himself to literature.

When Lazare had filled a couple of trunks with the various articles he was going to take away with him, and Malivoire's coach had taken him off with his luggage, Pauline went back

into the house, feeling strangely confused and no longer swayed by her old wishes and desires. Chanteau, who was still suffering great pain, turned to her and exclaimed:

"You will stop, now, I hope! Stay and see me buried!"

She was unwilling to make an immediate reply. Her trunk was still packed in her bedroom. She used to sit gazing at it for hours. Now that the others were going to Paris, it would be unkind of her, she thought, to desert her uncle. She felt but little confidence in her cousin's resolutions, but, at any rate, if he and his wife did come back, she would then be quite free again to take her departure. And when Cazenove angrily told her that she was throwing away a splendid position for the sake of ruining her life amongst people who had lived upon her ever since her childhood, she immediately made up her mind.

"Be off with you!" Chanteau now began to say. "If you are so bent upon gaining money and making yourself happy that way, I won't keep you here bothering yourself with an old cripple like me. Be off with you!"

One morning she replied to one of her uncle's speeches of this kind:

"No, uncle dear, I am going to stay with you."

The doctor, who happened to be there, went out of the room, throwing up his hands into the air.

"Ah! there is no doing anything with her! And what a hornet's nest it is she has got into; she will never get free of it, never!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE weeks glided by. A very cold winter was succeeded by a rainy spring at Bonneville. The sea was stirred up and disturbed by the heavy down-falls till it looked like a huge lake of mud. Then, later on, the tardy summer had prolonged itself into the middle of autumn, with heavy, oppressive suns, whose overwhelming heat made the very sea slumbrous and drowsy. Then the winter came round again, and then another spring followed, and now the summer was once more slipping away, as the hours glided by with monotonous regularity.

Pauline had recovered all her old calm, and her life went on with the same even regularity as the seasons. The placid sameness of her days, which were passed in the same unvarying occupations, had lulled the keenness of her sorrow. She came downstairs in the morning and kissed her uncle, said the same things to the servant as she had said the day before, sat down twice at the table, spent the afternoon in sewing, and then, early in the evening, went to bed. The next day the same programme was gone through, without ever any unexpected event happening to break the monotony of her life. Chanteau, who was getting more and more disfigured by his gout, which had puffed out his legs and warped and deformed his hands, sat in perfect silence, when he was not bellowing, quite absorbed in the beatitude of being free from pain. Véronique, who seemed almost to have lost her tongue, had fallen into a state of gloomy surliness. It was only the Saturday dinners that broke the monotonous silence of the household. Cazenove and the Abbé Horteur dined there with the greatest regularity, and the sound of voices was heard till about ten o'clock, when the priest's wooden shoes clattered away over the stones of the yard, and the doctor's gig started off behind his slowly trotting old horse. Pauline's gaiety—that gaiety which she had so bravely maintained during all her troubles—had assumed a subdued

character. Her ringing laughter no longer echoed through the rooms and the staircase, though she still remained the house's centre of kindliness and activity, and every morning she inspired it with fresh courage and zest for life. By the end of a year, her heart had grown lulled and tranquil, and she had come to believe that the days would now flow on in peaceful and pleasant monotony, without anything ever happening to again wake up within her her slumbering sorrow.

For some time after Lazare's departure, every letter from him had troubled Pauline, though it was only for his letters that she lived, looking out for them with impatience, reading them over and over again, and even adding to them something from her own imagination beyond what was actually there. For three months he had written very regularly, sending, once a fortnight, very long letters, full of detail and breathing the liveliest hope. Once more he was wildly enthusiastic. He had launched out into business and was dreaming of a colossal fortune in the immediate future. According to his account, the Insurance Company could not fail to return enormous profits. He was not, however, confining himself only to this, but was engaging in all kinds of speculations. He appeared to have become quite charmed with the financial and mercantile world, which he now reproached himself for having judged so absurdly. All his literary schemes seemed to be quite abandoned. He was never tired of writing about his domestic joys, and related in detail all his loving passages with his wife, the kisses he had given her, and the fun they had had with each other, and setting forth at length all his happiness, while he expressed his gratitude to her, whom he called "my dear sister." It was these details, these little familiar accounts, which made Pauline's fingers tremble feverishly. The odour of love which the paper breathed out, the perfume of heliotrope, Louise's favourite scent, seemed to stupefy her. This sheet of paper that she was holding had slept near where they slept; and she closed her eyes and saw the lines shining out brightly, and adding to themselves, and enabling her to share in the intimate privacy of the honeymoon. But the letters became gradually fewer and shorter, and Lazare ceased to say anything about his business affairs, and confined himself to sending his wife's love to Pauline. He said nothing in explanation, but simply ceased to tell them anything. Was he discontented with his position and already sick of finance? Was his domestic

happiness compromised by misunderstandings? Pauline was afraid it must be so, and she was made sad and uneasy by the evidence of her cousin's weariness and despondency, which she thought she could detect in some of his expressions that seemed to have been reluctantly written. About the end of April, after a six weeks' silence, she received a short note of four lines, in which her cousin told her that Louise was three months advanced in pregnancy. Then his silence commenced again, and she had no further news.

May and June passed away. A heavy tide swept away one of the stockades, an incident which afforded subject for talk for a long time. All the Bonneville folk jeered and grinned, and the fishermen stole the broken timbers. There was another excitement, also. The little Gonin girl, who was not quite thirteen and a half, was confined of a daughter, of which it was not certain that Cuche's son was the father, for she had been seen with an old man. Then all the old monotony returned again, and the village vegetated at the foot of the cliffs as lifelessly as a tract of sea-weed. In July it became necessary to repair the terrace-wall and the whole of one of the gable-ends of the house. As soon as the workmen began to remove the first stones, the whole of it threatened to fall, and they were kept at work for an entire month, and an expense of nearly ten thousand francs was incurred.

It was still Pauline who had to find the money. There was another great hole in her hoard in the chest of drawers, and her fortune was now reduced to under forty thousand francs. She made the family's three thousand francs a month go as far as possible by economical housekeeping, but she had been obliged to sell out some of her own stock, in order to avoid encroaching upon her uncle's capital. The latter told his niece, as his wife had done before, that it would all be paid back to her some day. The girl would not have hesitated to part with all she had, for the gradual crumbling away of her fortune had destroyed all her tendency to cupidity, and her only effort now was to be able to keep a sufficient sum in hand for her charities. The thought that she might possibly be compelled to discontinue her Saturday distributions greatly distressed her, for they constituted her great pleasure of the week. Since the last winter she had commenced to knit stockings, and all the young urchins in the neighbourhood now went about with warm feet.

One morning towards the end of July, as Véronique was sweeping up the rubbish left by the workmen, Pauline received a letter which quite upset her. It was addressed from Caen, and contained only a few words. In it Lazare informed her that he should arrive at Bonneville on the evening of the next day, but gave not the least explanation of his coming. She ran off to tell the news to her uncle. They both looked at each other. Chanteau's eyes expressed his fear that his niece would leave him, if Lazare and his wife should contemplate a long residence in the house. He did not dare to question her on the subject, for he could read in her face her firm resolution to go away. In the afternoon she even went upstairs to look over her clothes; but she did not want to seem to be contemplating immediate flight.

It was about five o'clock, in lovely weather, when Lazare stepped out of a trap at the door of the yard. Pauline hastened to meet him, but, before even kissing him, she stopped short in astonishment.

"What! Have you come by yourself?"

"Yes," he replied quietly.

And then he kissed her on both her cheeks.

"But where is Louise?"

"At Clermont, with her sister-in-law. The doctor has recommended her to go to a mountainous neighbourhood. Her pregnancy has made her weak and languid."

As he spoke, he walked on to the house, casting long glances about the yard. He scrutinized his cousin, too, and his lips quivered with an emotion which he struggled to suppress. He showed surprise as a dog rushed out of the kitchen and barked round his legs.

"What dog is that?" he asked.

"Oh! that's Loulou," Pauline replied. "He doesn't know you yet, you see. Down! Loulou! You mustn't want to bite your master."

The dog went on growling.

"He is dreadfully ugly, my dear. Where did you manage to pick up such a fright?"

The dog was, indeed, a wretched mongrel, under-sized and mangy. And he had, too, an abominable temper, and was perpetually snarling, and presented the most pitiable out-cast appearance.

"Oh! when I got him, they told me that he would grow up

into a huge magnificent animal, but he has always kept just like that. It is the fifth one that we have tried to rear. All the others have died, and this is the only one that has managed to go on living."

Loulou by this time had sulkily made up his mind to lie down in the sun, and he turned his back upon Pauline and her cousin. The flies began to settle upon him. Then Lazare thought of the old days and of the dog that was dead and of this new and ugly one which now occupied his place. He glanced round the yard once more.

"My poor old Matthew!" he murmured very softly.

On the steps of the house Véronique received him with a nod of her head, without desisting from her occupation of paring carrots. Then he walked straight on to the dining-room, where his father, excited by the sound of voices, was anxiously awaiting him. Pauline shouted through the door:

"Do you know he has come by himself? Louise is at Clermont."

Chanteau, whose anxious eyes glistened brightly, began to question his son even before he had kissed him.

"Are you expecting her to follow you? When will she join you here?"

"Oh no! She's not coming here at all," Lazare replied. "It is I who will go to join her at her sister-in-law's before I return to Paris. I shall stay a fortnight with you, and then I shall be off."

Chanteau's expression silently manifested his extreme satisfaction at what he heard, and when at last Lazare embraced him, he returned the salute by two hearty kisses. However, he still considered that it behoved him to express some regret.

"It is a great pity that your wife cannot come. We should have been delighted to have her here. However, I hope we shall see her some other time. You must certainly bring her."

Pauline kept silent, and concealed her feeling of uneasiness beneath an affectionate smile of welcome. A second time her plans were being altered, and she would not have to go away. She scarcely knew whether she was glad or sorry, so accustomed had she now become only to consider others. What pleasure she felt in seeing Lazare again was tinged with sadness at his aged appearance. His eyes were dull and his mouth had grown hard and stern. The lines across his brow and cheeks had been there before, but there were deep wrinkles there now, in

which she read the evidence of increased ennui and terror. The young man scrutinized his cousin with equal minuteness. She appeared to him to have developed, and to have gained additional beauty and vigour, and he smilingly exclaimed:

"Well, you certainly don't seem to have been any the worse for my absence. You are all of you looking very well. Father is growing young again, and Pauline is quite superb. And really, it is very funny, but the house certainly seems bigger than it used to be."

He glanced round the dining-room, as he had previously done round the yard, with an appearance of surprise and emotion. His eyes at last rested upon Minouche, who was lying upon the table, with her feet tucked under her, in such a state of restful beatitude that she had not moved.

"Even Minouche doesn't seem to have grown any older," the young man resumed. "Well, you ungrateful animal, you might rouse yourself to welcome me!"

He stroked her as he spoke, and she began to purr, but still without moving.

"Oh! Minouche is only interested in herself," Pauline said merrily. "The day before yesterday five more of her kittens were drowned, and, you see, she doesn't seem to mind it at all."

The dinner was hastened, as Lazare had made an early breakfast. In spite of all the young girl's efforts, the evening was a dull and gloomy one. The efforts they made to avoid certain subjects embarrassed their conversation, and there were awkward intervals of silence. Pauline and Chanteau refrained from questioning Lazare, as they saw it embarrassed him to reply, and they made no attempt to ascertain how his business at Paris was getting on, nor how it came about that his letter to them was written from Caen. With a vague gesture he put aside their too direct questions as though he meant to reply to them later on. When the tea was brought into the room, a great sigh of satisfaction escaped him. How happy and peaceful they must all be here, he said, and what a grand place it would be for working, where all was so quiet and calm. He dropped a word or two about a drama in verse, upon which he had been engaged for the last six months. His cousin felt amazed when he added that he intended finishing it at Bonneville. Twelve days would be sufficient, he said.

At ten o'clock Véronique entered to say that Monsieur Lazare's room was ready. But when they had reached the first

floor, and she wanted to install him in the former guest-chamber which had been subsequently fitted up for the occupation of the young couple, he seemed vexed.

"You're quite mistaken," he said, "if you suppose that I am going to sleep in there! I am going up to the top of the house to my old little iron bedstead."

Véronique began to grumble and growl. Why couldn't he sleep there? The bed had been got ready for him, and, surely, he wasn't going to give her the trouble of preparing another one."

"Very well," he said, "I will sleep in an easy-chair."

While Véronique angrily tore off the sheets and carried them up to the top floor, Pauline experienced a sudden thrill of joy which impelled her to throw her arms round her cousin's neck in an outburst of the old chummish feeling of their youth as she wished him good-night.

He was going once more to occupy his big room, and he was so close to her that for a long time she could hear him pacing about, as though he were brooding over the recollections which were keeping her awake too.

It was only the next morning that Lazare began to take Pauline into his confidence; and even then he made no clear statement of anything, and at first she had to make what she could out of a few short sentences which he let slip in the course of their conversation. By-and-by she took courage and asked him direct questions, with an expression of affectionate concern. Were he and Louise still getting on happily together? He replied in the affirmative, but he complained about certain little domestic disagreements and spoke of various trifling matters which had led to quarrels. Without having come to a definite rupture, they were suffering from the perpetual jarrings of two highly-strung temperaments, which were incapable of being in equilibrium in either joy or sorrow. There existed between them a sort of unconfessed bitterness as though they were surprised and angry at having mistaken each other and at discovering each other's real feelings so soon, after all the passionate love of their first days together. For a moment Pauline thought she could discover that it was pecuniary troubles that had embittered them, but in this she was mistaken, for their income of ten thousand francs a year remained very nearly undiminished. Lazare had become quite disgusted with business, just as he had previously grown disgusted with music and medicine and

manufactures; and on this subject he launched out in strong language. Never, he said, never had he come across such a stupid and uninteresting set of people as those connected with finance. He would prefer anything, the dulness of the country and the mediocrity of small means, to the perpetual superintendence of money and the brain-softening wild tangle of figures. He had just retired from the Insurance Company, he said, and he was going to try what he could do as a play-writer when he returned to Paris in the following winter. His drama would avenge him; in it he had portrayed the chancre of money eating away modern society.

Pauline did not distress herself much about this new failure, which she had already inferred from Lazare's embarrassed manner in his last letters. What grieved her most was the gradually increasing misunderstanding between her cousin and his wife. She strove to find out the real cause of it, and how it came about that these two young people of ample means and with no other care than to make themselves happy had so quickly got to disagree with each other. She returned to the subject over and over again, and she only ceased to question her cousin about it when she saw the embarrassment she was causing him. He stammered and grew pale and turned his face away from her as she interrogated him. She knew well that expression of shame and fear, and of terror at the notion of death, which he had formerly struggled to conceal as though it were some disgraceful disease; but could it be possible, she asked herself, that the cold shadow of nothingness had already stretched itself out between them in the bed that still retained the glowing warmth of their nuptials? For several days she lingered in a state of doubt, and then, without his having made any further confession on the subject, she read the truth in his eyes as he rushed downstairs from his room one evening in the dark, as though he were pursued by ghosts.

In Paris, in the midst of his love-fever, Lazare had forgotten all about death. He lost all thought of trouble in Louise's embraces and in her arms he slept as peacefully as a child. She, too, loved him in her passionate manner with those voluptuous allurements and graces of hers, and grew quite miserable and despondent if he seemed to neglect her for a single hour. The bliss that came of satisfaction of their old desires and the sweet trances they enjoyed as they clung round each other's necks, had so long preserved their pristine delights that they had

begun to think they would never exhaust these sensual joys. But satiety came at last, and Lazare was astonished at finding he could no longer reach the heights of his sweet delirium of their earlier days together; while Louise, to whom everything but caressing endearments was worthless, and who neither asked nor gave anything beyond them, yielded him neither support nor courage. Were these carnal joys then so fleeting, they wondered? couldn't they go on perpetually finding out some new voluptuous experience and sensation, whose progressive discoveries would be sufficient to give a semblance of happiness to life? One night Lazare awoke with a start, fancying he felt an icy breath playing over his brow, and making his hair stand on end. He shivered and wailed out his cry of bitter anguish: "Oh, God! God! oh! to have to die!" Louise was sleeping by his side. It was death that he had found again at the end of their kisses.

Then other nights followed, and all his old torture had him in its grasp again. It seized him suddenly as he lay sleepless in his bed, coming upon him irregularly without his being able to foresee it or prevent it. All at once, while he was lying in perfect calmness, a fearful shudder would convulse him; while, on the other hand, when he was irritable and weary, he would perhaps escape altogether the least thrill of terror. It was more than the mere start of earlier times that he suffered from now; his nervous excitement had increased and his whole being was shaken and torn by each fresh shock. He could not sleep without a night-light, in spite of his continued fear lest his wife should discover his secret suffering. This very fear, indeed, increased his distress and aggravated the effects of his attacks of terror; for, in the old days, when he lay alone, he had been able to let his fear express itself, but now this living creature at his side, whose warm breath he could feel playing upon him, was a source of additional disquietude to him. When he started in terror from his pillow, his eyes heavy with sleep, his glance turned itself towards her, fearing to find her eyes widely opened and fixed upon his own. But she never moved, and in the glimmer of the night-light he could distinguish her quietly slumbering, with her tranquil face and thick lips and slight, blue-veined eyelids. And so, as she never awoke, he began to grow less disturbed on her account, until one night what he had so long feared really happened, and he saw her eyes staring wide open. She said not a single word as she saw him all pale and

trembling. She, too, like him, must just then have been thrilled with the horror of death, for she seemed to understand what was passing through him, and she threw herself against him with all the clinging closeness of a frightened woman seeking protection. Then, being still anxious to deceive each other, they pretended that they had heard the sound of footsteps, and they got out of bed to go and look under the furniture and behind the curtains.

From this time they were both haunted with nervous fear. Never a word of confession escaped the lips of either of them. They felt that it was a shameful secret of which they must not speak; but, as they lay on their backs in bed with their eyes staring widely into space, they knew quite well what each was thinking of. Louise was now quite as nervous as Lazare; and they infected each other just as two lovers are sometimes carried off by the same fever. If he awoke, while she still continued to sleep, he grew alarmed at her very sleeping. Was she still breathing? He could not hear the sound of any respiration. Perhaps she had suddenly died! He would glance keenly at her face for a moment and touch her hands, but even when he had satisfied himself that she was alive and well, he could not go to sleep again. The thought that she would certainly die some day plunged him into a mournful reverie. Which of them would go first, he or she? Then his mind dwelt lengthily on the alternative suppositions, and minutely detailed scenes of death, of the last agonized throes, of hideous shroudings and layings out, of the final heart-breaking separation, presented themselves to his mind. It was that thought of never seeing each other again, when they had lived in such close intimacy, flesh clinging to flesh, that filled him with an especial horror and feeling of revolt; and he feared lest the dreadful idea, which his brain refused to contemplate, should end by sending him mad. His very fear made him wish that he himself might be the first to go. Then his heart ached with bitter grief for Louise, as he pictured her to himself as a widow, still carrying on the old routine of life when he should no longer be there. Sometimes, to free himself from these haunting thoughts, he would take her gently in his arms without awaking her; but he could not endure to keep her there long, for he became still more terrified than before as he felt the motion of her life within his arms. If he leaned his head over her breast and listened to her heart beating, he could not hear its pulsing without un-

easy alarm, and being painfully racked with the fear of a sudden cessation of its action. Her legs, round which he had twined his own, her bosom which yielded softly beneath his embrace, her whole body, so soft and so beloved, quickly became a torture to his touch, thrilling him with straining alarm in his dread and terror of death and nothingness. And even when she awoke, and an impulse of desire pressed them clingingly to each other, lips sealed to lips, as they yielded themselves up to a paroxysm of love in the hope of forgetting their misery in it, they emerged from it trembling and fearsome as before, and lay stretched out on their backs, sleepless and sick of the joys of love, while in the gloom of their curtained bed their staring eyes opened once more on the vision of death.

About this time Lazare began to grow weary of business. He fell back into his old state of indolence, and spent whole days in perfect idleness, excusing himself on the ground of the contempt and dislike he felt for money-grubbing. The real truth was that his constant preoccupation with the thought of death was daily withdrawing from him the desire and the strength to live. He was falling back upon his old question of "What's the good of it all?" Since it would all end in complete extinction sooner or later, perhaps to-morrow, or even to-day, or a single hour hence, what was the use of troubling and exciting one's self and bothering about one thing more than another? It was all quite purposeless. His existence itself had become a slow, lingering death, going on day after day, to the sounds of whose progress he strained his ears to listen, as he had done before in earlier days, and thought that he could recognise that the mechanism of his life was quickly running down. His heart, he thought, no longer beat so strongly as it had done, and the action of his other organs was becoming feebler, and soon everything would doubtless come to a dead stop; and he noted with a shudder the gradual diminution of the vitality which growing age was bringing in its train. His very frame was perishing; its component parts were constantly disappearing. His hair was falling off, he had lost several of his teeth, and he could feel his muscles and sinews shrinking away, as though they were already returning to dust. His progress towards his fortieth year filled him with gloomy melancholy; old age would be quickly upon him and make a speedy end of him. He had already begun to believe that his system was altogether deranged and that some vital part would certainly

very soon give way; and his days were spent in a morbid expectation of some catastrophe. He took anxious note of those who died about him, and, every time he heard of the death of an acquaintance, he received a fresh shock. Could it be possible that such an one was really dead? Why, he was three years younger than himself and seemed likely to last for a hundred years! And then that other man he knew so well, had he, too, really gone? A man who was so careful of himself, and who even weighed the very food he ate! For a couple of days after occurrences like these, his mind dwelt entirely upon them, and he could think of nothing else, and he remained in a condition of horrified stupor at what had happened; feeling his pulse and carefully observing all his own symptoms, and then ending by falling foul of the poor fellows who had gone. He felt constrained to find some means of re-assuring himself, and so he accused his deceased friends of having died from their own fault. One had been guilty of an inexcusable imprudence, while another had succumbed to a disease so extremely rare that the doctors did not even know its name.

But it was all in vain that he tried to banish the grim spectre from his mind; he never ceased to hear within himself the grating of the wheels that he fancied had so nearly run down, and he felt himself ever helplessly slipping down the slope of years, and the thought of the deep, black pit that lay at the bottom of it, made him break out into an icy perspiration and his hair stand on end with horror.

When Lazare gave over going to his office, quarrels broke out at home. He manifested an excessive irritability, which flared up at the very slightest opposition. His increasing mental disease, which he tried so carefully to conceal, revealed itself in his angry snappishness and fits of moody sulking and wild mad actions. At one time he was so possessed by the fear of fire that he removed from a third-floor flat which he was then occupying to one on the ground-floor, that he might be more easily able to escape when the house took fire. His perpetual anticipation of coming evil completely poisoned the present and prevented him from deriving any enjoyment from it. He lived in a constant state of alarm, and every time the door was opened rather noisily he started up in fear; and his heart throbbed wildly whenever a letter was put into his hand. He suspected every one. His money was hidden in small sums in all sorts of places, and he kept his simplest plans and intentions in the

most absolute secrecy. He felt embittered, too, against the world, thinking that he was misunderstood and underrated, and that all his successive failures were the result of a general conspiracy against him. But his ever-growing ennui dominated and overspread everything else. It quite overwhelmed him. It was the ennui of an ill-balanced mind, to which the ever-present idea of approaching death made all action distasteful and hateful, and caused him to drag himself listlessly and uselessly through life on the plea of its utter nothingness and worthlessness. What was the use of troubling one's self about anything? The powers of science were miserably limited; it could neither prevent nor foresee. He was possessed by the sceptical ennui of his generation, not the romantic ennui of Werther or René, who regretfully yearned after the old beliefs, but the ennui of the younger doubters, the young scientists who worry themselves and declare that the world is an impossibility because they have not been at once able to manufacture life in their retorts.

In Lazare this unavowed terror of ceasing to be was, with an apparent though unreal consistency, united with a ceaseless braggart insistence upon the nothingness of life. It was his very terror, the want of equilibrium in his morbid temperament, that drove him into pessimistic ideas and a mad hatred of existence. As it could not last for ever, he looked upon it as a mere fraud and delusion. Was not the first half of one's days spent in dreaming of happiness and the latter half in regrets and fears? He fell back again upon the theories of "the old man," as he called Schopenhauer, whose most violent passages he used to recite from memory. He expatiated on the desirability of destroying the wish to live, and so bringing to an end the barbarous and imbecile exhibition of existence, with which the master-force of the world, for some incomprehensible egotistical reason, amused itself. He wanted to do away with life in order to do away with fear. He was always harping upon the great deliverance. He occupied himself in trying to discover some practicable method of general suicide, some sudden and complete disappearance to which all created beings should consent. It was perpetually recurring to his mind, even in the midst of ordinary conversation, and he freely gave vent to it on the least provocation. The slightest jar or discord was sufficient to make him cry out that he was sorry that he was not yet annihilated; a mere headache set him raging

furiously at his body. If he talked with a friend, his conversation immediately turned upon the weariness and wretchedness of life, and the unhappy experience of those who were already fattening the dandelions in the cemetery. He had a perfect mania for mournful subjects, and he was much interested in an article by a fanciful astronomer, in which was announced the arrival of a comet whose tail might possibly sweep away the earth like a grain of sand. This was going to be the cosmical catastrophe to which he was so eagerly looking forward, the colossal cartridge which was going to blow the world to bits like a rotten old boat. This desire of his for death, and his inclination to theorizing upon the desirability of universal annihilation were nothing but the expression of his hopeless and desperate struggle with his terror, a mere chatter of empty words, by which he tried to veil the awful fear which the expectation of his end caused him.

His wife's pregnancy now occurred to add to his disturbances. It caused him an indefinable sensation, made up of a great joy and an increase of his morbid disquietude. Notwithstanding the contrary views of "the old man," the thought that he was a father, that he had bestowed life, thrilled him with pride; and while he still continued to assert that they were imbeciles who took advantage of their ability to do the same thing, he seemed filled with a vain wonder, as though he were the first person who had brought such a thing about. But his joy quickly became poisoned and he tormented himself with forebodings that his wife's confinement would have a disastrous issue; and he had already made up his mind that the mother would die, while the child would not even be born. And, indeed, it happened that Louise's pregnancy was attended with painful incidents; and the confused state of the house and the derangement of their ordinary habits and their frequent quarrels and bickerings, combined together to make them both thoroughly miserable. The child, which ought to have had the effect of bringing the husband and wife more closely together again, only served to increase the misunderstandings between them and the jarrings of their life together. Lazare was especially exasperated by Louise's vague sufferings, of which she complained from morning to night. And so, when the doctor suggested a visit to the mountains, he was delighted to take her to her sister-in-law's and get a fortnight's freedom for himself on the plea of going to see his father at Bonneville

At the bottom of his heart, he was really feeling ashamed of himself for this flight, but he discussed the matter with his conscience, and he persuaded himself that a short separation would have a tranquillizing effect upon both of them, and that it would be quite sufficient if he joined his wife in time for her confinement.

On the evening when Pauline at last learned the whole history of the past eighteen months, she sat for a moment without being able to speak, quite overcome with the pitiable story. They were sitting in the dining-room; she had put Chanteau to bed, and Lazare had just finished making his confession in front of the chilled tea-pot and beneath the lamp that was now burning dim.

After a short interval of silence, Pauline at last exclaimed:

"Then you don't love each other any longer!"

Her cousin had risen from his chair to go up-stairs to his room, and he replied, with an uneasy smile:

"We love each other as much as is possible, my dear girl. You don't understand things, shut up here in this hole. Why should love fare better than anything else?"

As soon as she had closed the door of her bedroom behind her, Pauline fell into one of those fits of despondency which had so often tortured her there and kept her awake, in the very same chair, while all the rest of the house was sleeping. Was there going to be a recommencement of trouble? She had hoped that it was all done with, both for others and herself, when she had torn her heart asunder and given Lazare to Louise; and now she had just been painfully shocked to find how useless her sacrifice had been. They had already ceased to love each other, and it was all to no purpose that she had wept her bitter tears and martyred herself. It was all going to end miserably in fresh trouble and strife, the presentiment of which added much to her present grief of mind. There seemed to be no end to suffering!

And, as with her arms hanging listlessly in front of her she sat watching her candle burn away, she began to accuse herself of being alone guilty of the present unhappy condition of affairs, and the idea that this was so weighed heavily upon her. She tried, but in vain, to struggle against the facts. It was she alone who had brought about this marriage between Lazare and Louise, without seeing that the girl would never make the wife that was necessary for her cousin. She saw it

now clearly enough, and recognised that she was much too nervously excitable ever to be able to steady him, losing her head herself at the merest trifle, while her only charm lay in her caressing nature,—a charm of which Lazare had already grown weary. Why was it that all this only occurred to her for the first time to-day? Were not these, indeed, the very reasons which had determined her to allow Louise to take her place? She had considered that she possessed a more amorous nature than her own, and she had believed that the girl, with her kisses and caresses, would be able to free Lazare from his gloomy despondency. Alas! the pity of it all! To have brought about evil when she was striving to accomplish good, and to have shown such ignorance as to have brought ruin upon those she was yearning to save! And she had felt so sure that she was right and was putting the coping-stone on to the structure of her good works on the day when their happiness had cost her such bitter tears! Now she felt nothing but contempt for her goodness, since goodness did not always make happiness.

The house was wrapped in sleep and silence. In the quiet of her room she could hear nothing but the throbbing of her blood as it pulsed hotly through her temples. Within her there was gradually surging up a rebellious regret. Why had she not married Lazare herself? He was hers and she had no right to give him to another. Perhaps he might have been wretched and despondent at first, but she would have been able by-and-by to restore his courage to him and to protect him from his insane fancies. She had always felt foolishly doubtful of herself, and from that alone all the unhappiness had arisen. The consciousness of her own robust health and strength and all her power of affection forced itself upon her again. Was she not superior in every way to that other girl? How foolish, then, she had been to so weakly efface herself! She loved her cousin sufficiently well to be willing to suppress herself if the other girl had made him happy, but since that other one had not known how to keep the great boon of his love, was she still to obliterate herself and do nothing to break this wicked union? Her angry indignation went on increasing, and she gazed upon her breast and virgin abdomen with the flushing pride of the wife she might have been if she had chosen. A complete, unhesitating conviction thrilled through her; it was she who ought to have married Lazare.

Then she became the prey of an overwhelming regret. The

hours of the night passed over her, one by one, without her ever thinking of seeking her bed. She sat there, with her eyes widely open and staring at the tall flame of the candle without seeing it, in a vivid waking dream. She was no longer in her old bedroom. She thought she had married Lazare, and their life together unrolled itself before her eyes in a series of pictures of love and delight. They were at Bonneville, by the edge of the blue sea, or in Paris, in some busy street. They were in a peaceful little room, with books lying about it and sweet roses on the table; the lamp gave out a soft, clear light, while the ceiling slept in the shadow. Every moment their hands sought each other. He had recovered all the careless gaiety of his early youth, and she loved him so much that he had come again to believe in the eternity of existence. Just now they were sitting down at table; now, they were going out together; to-morrow she would go over the week's accounts with him. She loved these little domestic details, and made them the foundation of their happiness, which knew no break from their laughing toilet in the morning to their last kiss at night. In the summer they travelled. Then, one morning she discovered that she was pregnant. But just then a shivering shudder dissipated her dream, and she was no longer far away, but in her own room at Bonneville, staring at her expiring candle. Pregnant! Ah! the misery of it! It was that other one who was pregnant, and never would all those things happen to herself, and never would all those joys be hers! The shock was so painful that the tears burst from her eyes, and she wept distractedly with heart-broken sobs. The candle burnt itself out and she had to seek her bed in darkness.

This feverish night filled Pauline with a lasting feeling of emotion and of charitable pity for the disunited husband and wife, and for herself. Her trouble and vexation gave way to a kind of affectionate hope. She could not have told on what she was reckoning, and she did not dare to analyse her feelings in the midst of the confused sentiments which were agitating her heart. Why should she be troubling herself in this way, she asked herself? Hadn't she at least ten days before her yet? It would be time enough to think of matters by-and-by. What was of immediate importance was to tranquillize Lazare, so that he might derive benefit from his stay at Bonneville. She re-assumed her old gaiety of demeanour and they both recommenced their happy life of former days.

At first it seemed a renewal of the old comradeship of their early youth. "Don't bother about that tiresome play of yours. It will only get hissed. Come with me and help me to look whether Minouche has carried off my ball of string on to the top of the cupboard."

He held a chair for her, while she mounted upon it, and, craning herself up on the tips of her toes, she looked for the missing string. The rain had been falling for the last two days and they could not leave the big room. Their pleasant laughter rang out as they kept unearthing some relic of old days.

"Oh! see! here is the doll which you made out of two of my old collars. Ah! and this—don't you remember?—is the portrait of you that I drew the day that you made yourself so frightfully ugly by getting into a rage and crying, because I wouldn't lend you my razor."

Pauline wagered that she could jump at a single bound onto the table; then Lazare, too, jumped, quite glad at being drawn out of himself. His play was already lying neglected in a drawer. One morning when they came across the great symphony on "Sorrow," she played bits of it to him, accentuating the rhythm in a comical fashion. He made fun of his composition and sang the notes to support the piano, whose weak tones could scarcely be heard. But one little bit, the famous march of death, made them both serious; really, they said, it was not at all bad, and it must be preserved. Everything pleased them and struck a chord of tenderness in their hearts: a collection of flowers which Pauline had once mounted, and which they now discovered behind the books; a forgotten jar containing a sample of the bromide of potassium which they had extracted from the sea-weed; a small and broken model of a stockade, which looked as though it had been wrecked by a storm in a tea-cup. Then they romped over the house, chasing each other like a couple of school-boys at play. They were perpetually rushing up and down the stairs and scampering through the rooms, banging the doors noisily about. It seemed quite like the old days come back again. She was ten years old once more and he was nineteen; and she felt for him again all the devoted and enthusiastic friendship of a little girl. Nothing was changed. The sideboard of bright walnut still stood in the dining-room, the lacquered brass lamp still hung there, and the view of Vesuvius and the four lithographs of the Seasons still orna-

mented the walls. In its glass case the masterpiece of the grandfather still slumbered in its old place. There was only one room which they entered with silent emotion, that which Madame Chanteau had formerly occupied, and which had been left unused since her death. The secértaire was never opened now, but the hangings of yellow cretonne with their pattern of flower-work were fading from the sun-light which was occasionally allowed to penetrate into the room. The anniversary of Madame Chanteau's birth came round about this time, and they decked the room with great bunches of flowers.

Afterwards, when the wind rose and dissipated the rain-clouds, they betook themselves out of doors on to the terrace, into the kitchen-garden and along the cliffs, and their youth began again for them.

"Shall we go and catch shrimps?" Pauline cried to her cousin one morning, through the partition-wall, as she sprang out of bed. "The tide is going down."

They set off in bathing-costumes, and once more, after so many weeks and months, they found themselves again amongst the old familiar rocks, from which the sea was ebbing. They could have fancied that they had been poking about them only the night before.

"Take care!" cried Lazare; "there is a hole there, you know, and the bottom of it is covered with big stones."

"Oh! yes, I know; don't be frightened— Oh! do come and look at this huge crab I have just caught!"

The cool waves splashed round their legs and the fresh salt breezes from the sea thrilled them with glowing life. All their old rambling pleasures were resumed, the long walks, the pleasant rests on the sands, the hasty refuges sought in some hollow of the cliffs from the approach of suddenly rising waves, and the returns home at night-fall along the dusky paths. Nothing at all seemed changed, and the sea still stretched itself out into the boundless distance, with its ceaselessly varying expressions. Little forgotten incidents returned to their memory with all the reality of present facts. He seemed to be still six-and-twenty and she sixteen. When he casually happened to pull her about with his old playful familiarity, she seemed greatly embarrassed, and was thrilled with a delicious confusion. But she in no way tried to avoid him, for she had no thought of the possibility of evil. A fresh life began to animate them, with whispered words and causeless laughs and smiles, and long intervals of silence

which left them both quivering and trembling. The most trivial and ordinary incidents, a request for some bread, a remark about the weather, the good-nights they wished each other as they went to bed, seemed full of a new and strange meaning. All the recollection of their past life was waking up in them and thrilling them with the melting tenderness that comes of the remembrance of former joys and happiness. They caused each other no disquietude, and the sea seemed to lull them and fill them with a pleasant languor with its ceaseless monotone.

And so the days passed tranquilly by. The third week of Lazare's visit was already commencing. He still stayed on and had received severlaletters from Louise, who was feeling very much bored, but whom her sister-in-law was anxious to keep with her some time longer. In his replies he had strongly advised her to stay where she was, and told her that Doctor Cazenove also, whom he had consulted on the matter, recommended her to do so. Gradually he fell again into the quiet and regular routine of the house, the old times for meals and for getting up and going to bed, which he had changed in Paris. Véronique's grumpy humours, the incessant sufferings of his father, who remained immutable and racked by the same constant pain, while everything around him changed and altered. He found again the Saturday dinners, and the familiar faces of the doctor and the Abbé with their eternal talk of the last gale or the visitors at Arromanches. Minouche still jumped up on to the table at dessert as lightly as a feather and came and prodded him caressingly on his chin with her head, and her gently scratching teeth seemed to carry him back to years ago. There was nothing new amongst all these old and familiar things except Loulou, rolled up under the table, looking mournful and hideous, and growling at every one who came near him. It was all in vain that Lazare gave him sugar; the wretched beast, when he had swallowed it, only showed his teeth more surlily than before. They were obliged to leave him entirely to himself, and he lived quite alone and apart in the house, like an unsociable being who only asks of men and gods to be allowed to be bored in peace and quietness.

Pauline and Lazare sometimes had adventures when they were out on their long walks. One day, when they had quitted the path along the cliffs to avoid passing the works in Golden Bay, they came across Boutigny in the bend of a road. He was now a person of some importance and had grown rich by

the manufacture of commercial soda. He had married the woman who had shown herself so devoted to him as to be willing to follow him into this deserted region, and she had recently been confined of her third child. All the family, attended by a man-servant and a nurse, were driving in a handsome drag, drawn by a pair of big white horses. The two pedestrians were obliged to squeeze themselves against the bank to escape being caught by the wheels. Boutigny, who was driving, had checked the horses into a walking pace. There was a moment's embarrassment. They had not spoken for years, and the presence of the woman and children made the embarrassment still more painful. And, as their eyes met, they simply bowed to each other, without a word.

When the drag had passed on, Lazare, who was quite pale, said, with an apparent effort:

"He seems to be living like a prince, now!"

Pauline, whom the sight of the children had affected, answered gently:

"Yes, indeed. He has made some enormous profits lately. He has begun to try your old experiments again."

It was that which was the sore point with Lazare. The Bonneville fishermen, with the pertinacious necessity they seemed to be under to make themselves disagreeable to him, had informed him of what had taken place. Boutigny, assisted by a young chemist in his employment, was again applying the freezing treatment to the ashes of the sea-weed, and, by his prudent perseverance and practical abilities, had obtained marvellous results.

"Confound it all!" Lazare growled, in a low voice; "every time that science makes a stride in advance, it is some fool who helps her on through sheer accident."

Their walk was spoilt, and they went along in silence, their eyes gazing into the distance and watching the grey vapours rise up from the sea and spread themselves over the sky. When they returned home at night they were chilly and shivering, but the cheerful light of the hanging lamp streaming down upon the white cloth restored their warmth.

Another day, as they were following a path through a field of beet in the neighbourhood of Verchemont, they stopped in surprise at seeing smoke rising up from a thatched roof. The place was on fire, but the brilliance of the sun's rays prevented the blaze being seen, and the deserted house, with its doors

and windows closed, was burning away, while some peasants were at work at no great distance. Pauline and Lazare at once ran off and shouted out, but their shouts had no other effect than to disturb the magpies who were chattering in the apple-trees. At last, a woman with a handkerchief round her head appeared from a distant field of carrots, glanced about her for a moment, and then set off galloping over the ploughed lands as fast as her legs could carry her. She gesticulated wildly and shouted out something which they could not catch, so indistinctly did she speak. She tripped and fell down, got up, and then fell down again, and then picking herself up once more, she ran on again. The handkerchief had slipped off her head, and her hair was falling loosely down.

"What was it she said?" Pauline asked, feeling frightened.

The woman now rushed up to them, and they heard her hoarse scream, like the wail of an animal.

"The child! the child! the child!"

Her husband and son had been at work since the morning some couple of miles away in a corn-field which they had inherited. The woman had only just gone out to get an apronful of carrots, leaving the child asleep, and fastening up the house. The fire had probably been smouldering for some time, for the woman swore that she had entirely extinguished every ember. The thatched roof was now all aglow, and the flames shot up and threw their red forked blazes athwart the brilliant clearness of the golden sunlight.

"Is the door locked?" cried Lazare.

The woman did not hear him. She seemed quite distraught, and rushed without any apparent reason round the house, as though she were trying to discover some open place, some means of entrance which she must have known did not exist. Then she tottered and fell down again. Her legs had no longer the strength to support her, and her ashy face was racked with despair and terror, while she continued to scream out unceasingly:

"The child! the child!"

Great tears gushed from Pauline's eyes, but Lazare was even more painfully affected than his cousin by the woman's wailing cry, which thrilled through him and completely unnerved him. It was becoming more than he could bear, and he suddenly cried out:

"I will go and try to find your child."

His cousin looked at him in deep distress. She grasped his hands and tried to hold him back.

"You! you mustn't go! The roof is about to fall in!"

"We'll see about that," he replied, quietly.

Then he shouted out loudly to the woman:

"Your key! You've got your key with you, haven't you?"

The woman still appeared quite distracted and to have no comprehension of what he was saying to her. He felt about her and at last discovered the key. Then, while the woman remained screaming on the ground, he stepped calmly towards the house. Pauline followed him with her eyes, making no further attempt to detain him, rooted to the ground with fear and astonishment, while her cousin appeared as though he were about some very ordinary business. A shower of sparks fell; he was forced to squeeze himself closely against the door, for masses of burning straw were falling from the roof, and now he found himself hindered by an annoying obstacle. The rusty key could not be made to turn round in the lock. But he manifested no irritation, and, coolly taking his time, he at last succeeded in opening the door. He lingered for a moment longer on the threshold, in order to let the first rush of smoke, which burst out in his face, have time to escape. Never before had he known himself so calm and collected, and he moved as though he were in a dream, with a complete absence of all hesitation, and with a skilfulness and prudence which the danger he was encountering seemed to summon up in him. He bent down his head and disappeared within the cottage.

"Oh God! preserve him!" Pauline stammered.

She clasped her hands involuntarily together, almost crushing them with her pressure, and kept swaying them up and down, like one racked with a great agony. The roof was cracking, and was already collapsing in places. Lazare would never have time to make his escape. It seemed an eternity to her since he had entered. The woman on the ground had ceased her crying; the sight of a gentleman rushing into the fire seemed to have dazed her.

Then a piercing cry broke through the air. It was Pauline who had uttered it, quite involuntarily, from the very depths of her being as she saw the thatch collapse and fall between the smoking walls.

"Lazare!"

He appeared at the door, his hair scarcely singed, and his hands but slightly scorched; and, when he had laid the child, who was struggling and crying, in the woman's arms, he turned to his cousin with an expression of displeasure.

"What's the matter with you? What are you going on like this for?"

She threw her arms round his neck and burst out sobbing in such a state of nervous excitement, that, fearing she was going to faint, he made her sit down on an old moss-covered stone which was lying by the side of a spring. He himself was now beginning to feel faint. There was a trough filled with water, and he steeped his hands in it with a sensation of great pleasure. The coldness restored him to himself, and then he began to experience a feeling of great surprise at what he had done. Was it really possible that he had forced his way through the midst of those flames? He felt a sort of duplication of himself, and could distinctly see himself rushing through the smoke with an incredible agility and presence of mind, as though he were looking on at some wonderful feat that was being performed by a stranger. A remnant of his mental exaltation still lingered on within him, and filled him with a subtle joy which he had never known before.

Pauline had recovered a little, and she was examining his hands, as she said:

"No! there's no great harm done. The burns are only slight ones. But we must go home at once, and I will attend to them. Oh! how you did frighten me!"

She dipped her handkerchief in the water and bound it round his right hand, which was the more severely burnt of the two. They got up and tried to console the woman, who, after having showered wild kisses on the child, had laid it down near her, and was not now even looking at it. She had begun to grieve about the house, and wailed and moaned pitiably, as she cried out what were her men going to do when they came back and found their home in ruins. The walls were still standing, and a black smoke was pouring out of the red-hot interior, which hid everything and was accompanied by huge crackling showers of sparks.

"Come! my poor woman," Pauline said to her; "don't be so down-hearted. Come and see us to-morrow."

Some neighbours, who had been attracted by the smoke, now ran up, and Pauline led Lazare away. Their return home was



LAZARE RESCUING THE PEASANT'S CHILD.

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a very pleasant one, and though Lazare was suffering but little pain, his cousin insisted upon giving him her arm to support him. They were still feeling too much emotion to speak much, and they looked at each other smilingly. Pauline felt a kind of happy pride. He must really be brave, then, in spite of his paling at the thought of death! As they made their way along she was absorbed in an astonished contemplation of the inconsistencies of the only man that she knew well. She had seen him spend whole nights at his work, and then give himself up to idleness for months. She had known him exhibit the most uncompromising truthfulness after having lied unblushingly. She had received a brotherly kiss from him on her brow, and she had felt his hands, hot and feverish with desire, burn her wrists in their excited grasp; and now to-day he had proved himself a hero. She was right not to have despaired of life, and not to have judged that everyone must be altogether good or altogether bad. When they arrived at Bonneville their emotional silence found relief in a torrent of rapid talk. They went over every little detail again, and they related the story of what had happened a score times, remembering at each fresh repetition of it some little incidents that had been previously forgotten, and which came back to their recollection one by one. They talked about it for a long time afterwards, and help was sent to the burnt-out peasants.

Lazare had been nearly a month at Bonneville when a letter arrived from Louise, complaining that she was utterly overwhelmed with ennui. In his reply to it, he told her that he would come and take her home again at the beginning of the following week. There had been some more tremendous down-pours of rain, those violent deluges which so frequently swept down upon the neighbourhood, and shrouded earth, sea, and sky, beneath a pall of grey vapour. Lazare had spoken seriously of finishing his play, and Pauline, who wanted to be near him that she might encourage him, took her knitting, the little stockings which she distributed amongst the children of the village, into her cousin's room. But it was very little work he did after she had taken her place by the table. They were constantly talking to each other in low and almost whispered tones, repeating the same things over and over again, without ever seeming to grow weary of them, while the eyes of each never strayed from those of the other. They no longer sported together and they avoided touching each other's hands,

with an instinctive knowledge of the danger that lurks in the contact of shoulders and the warm impact of the breath. And, besides, nothing could have seemed to them more delightful than this languid quiet, this feeling of drowsiness which glided over them, while the rain pattered ceaselessly down upon the slates on the roof. An interval of silence made them blush, and they unconsciously put a caress in every word they addressed to each other, impelled thereto by that influence which had caused their old days together, which they had thought had passed away for ever, to spring up again and bloom afresh for them.

One evening Pauline had sat up knitting in Lazare's room till nearly midnight, while her cousin, whose pen had dropped idly from his fingers, was telling her in slowly uttered words about what he intended to write in the future, dramas peopled by colossal figures. All the house was asleep. Véronique had gone to bed long ago, and the deep stillness of the night, through which there only broke the familiar wail of the high tide, had gradually permeated them with a sort of sensual tenderness. Lazare, unbosoming himself, confessed that his life hitherto had been a failure; and he said that if literature, too, failed him, he had made up his mind to retire to some secluded spot and live the life of a recluse.

"Do you know," he added, with a smile, "I often think that we ought to have emigrated after my mother's death?"

"Emigrated! Why?"

"Yes, taken ourselves very far away, to Oceania, for instance, to one of those islands where life is so sweet and pleasant."

"But your father? Should we have taken him with us?"

"Oh! it's only a fancy, a dream, that I'm talking of. One may indulge in pleasant dreams, you know, when the actual truth is not very cheerful."

He had got up from the table and had sat down upon one of the arms of Pauline's chair. She let her knitting drop that she might amuse herself by listening to the ceaseless flow of the imagination of this strangely strung young man, and she lay back in her chair and lifted her head towards him, while he found himself so near her that he could feel the glowing warmth of her shoulders against his hip.

"Are you mad, my poor dear? What should we have done out there?"

"We should have lived! Do you remember that book of

travels that we used to read together a dozen years ago? It is a perfect paradise out there. There is no winter, the sky is always blue, and life is passed beneath the sun and the stars. We should have had a cabin and have lived upon delicious fruits, and we should have had nothing to do and never a trouble to vex us!"

"Ah! then, we should soon have become a couple of savages, with rings through our noses and feathers on our heads!"

"Well, why not? We should have loved each other from one end of the year to the other, taking no count of the days. Ah! it would have been delightful!"

She looked at him. His eyelids were quivering and his face turned pale as a slight tremor thrilled through him. This thought of love had filled him with a delicious languor. He had taken hold of her hand from the mere desire of drawing closer to her and holding in his grasp some part of her, and he played with this warm hand, bending its taper fingers, and smiling all the while with an embarrassed smile. At first, Pauline felt no disquietude. It was nothing more than a revival of their old intimacy together. But she quickly felt her strength ebbing from her, and her increasing trouble made her already his. Her very voice faltered as she said:

"But to eat nothing but fruit would make rather a spare diet. We should have to hunt and fish and cultivate a piece of land. If it is true, as they say, that the women do the work out there, would you have set me to dig the ground?"

"You! With those tiny hands of yours! Oh! we could have made capital servants out of the monkeys, you know!"

She smiled languidly at this pleasantry of his, while he added:

"Besides, they would have been no longer in existence, those little hands of yours! I should have quite eaten them up—like this!"

He kissed her hands and then began to mumble them with his mouth, while the blood surged to his face in a sudden thrill of blind passion. They neither of them spoke. They were affected by a common madness; a giddy vertigo which overwhelmed them both with the same dizzy faintness. She slipped unresistingly down to the edge of the arm-chair, her face crimson and inflamed and her eyes closed tightly. With a rough hand he had already unbuttoned her bodice, and he was tearing open the fastenings of her skirts when his lips touched hers. He

gave her a kiss, which she passionately returned, clasping him round the neck with all the strength of her two arms. But, in this thrill of her virgin body, she had opened her eyes, and she saw herself slipping on to the floor, and recognised the lamp and the cupboard and the ceiling, whose slightest stain was familiar to her; and then she seemed to awake with all the surprise of one who finds herself in her own room after some terrible dream. She began to struggle violently and succeeded in getting on to her feet. Her skirts were slipping down and her bare breasts were bursting forth from her opened bodice. A cry broke from her lips through the panting silence of the room:

"Leave me alone! It is abominable!"

But, mad with desire, he did not seem to hear her. He seized her once more and began to drag off her clothes. His lips sought her naked flesh and burned it with hot kisses, at whose touch her whole body shivered and trembled. Twice she had nearly fallen again, yielding to an almost invincible impulse to surrender herself, and suffering frightfully from this inward contest. They had struggled all the way round the table with panting breath and interlaced limbs, when he succeeded in pushing her down upon an old couch, whose springs creaked beneath the shock. Then with her stiffly outstretched arms she kept him at a distance, while she gasped out in a voice that was growing hoarse:

"Oh! I beseech you, leave me alone! It is disgraceful, abominable, what you want of me!"

Lazare, with his teeth closely clenched, did not say a word. He thought that he was at last going to possess her when she again freed herself from his clutch with such a violent effort that he fell back reeling against the table. Then, taking advantage of her momentary freedom, she rushed out of the room, crossed the landing at a stride, and burst into her own room. She had not time to close her door before he had reached it in pursuit of her. He tried to force it open, while she leaned against it with all the weight of her body, struggling to close it sufficiently to be able to slip the bolt and turn the key in the lock. She felt that she was quite lost if he succeeded in even getting the tip of his slipper through the narrow opening. At last the key turned hardly with a grating sound; and then there was a deep silence, through which they could again hear the noise of the sea.

Pauline continued leaning heavily against the door, with her eyes widely opened in the darkness. On the other side of it she knew that Lazare had moved no more than she had herself. She could hear his panting breath, and she could still feel its hot touch on her neck. If she moved away she thought he might possibly break in one of the panels with his shoulder. It made her feel easier remaining there; and she continued to press mechanically against the door with all her strength, as though Lazare were still pushing against it on the other side. Two minutes, that seemed interminable, passed away in the mutual conviction of their persistence in the struggle on each side of the slight door that alone separated them, fevered and thrilled with an impulse of desire which they could not suppress. Then Lazare's voice, choking with emotion, whispered very softly:

"Let me in, Pauline. I know you are there."

All her body quivered; that voice had sent a feverish thrill through her from her head to her feet. But she made no reply. Her head was bent down, and with one hand she held up her falling petticoats, while the other, clutched over her loosened bodice, grasped her breast to hide its nakedness.

"You are suffering as much as I am, Pauline. Open the door, I beseech you. Why should we deny ourselves this happiness?"

He began to be afraid now of awakening Véronique, whose room was close at hand. He couched his supplications in low whispered tones, like the plaints of a sick man.

"Open the door; do open it, and we will die together afterwards, if you like. Have we not loved each other ever since we were children? You ought to have been my wife. It is fated that you shall belong to me some day— I love you, I love you, Pauline!"

She trembled more violently than ever; every word seemed to pierce her heart. The kisses which he had rained upon her shoulders burned hotly again upon her flesh, like drops of fire. And, stricken with a fear of opening the door and abandoning herself to Lazare in an irresistible impulse of her half-naked body, she stiffened herself more rigidly than before. He was right! Why should they, indeed, deny themselves this bliss, which they could keep a secret to themselves from all the world? The house was wrapped in sleep, the night was dense and black. Oh! to lie sleeping in the darkness clinging round each other's necks!

To hold him closely to her, were it only for a single hour! Oh! to really live, to really live!

"Oh! how cruel you are, Pauline! You will not even speak to me; and I am so wretched and unhappy here. Do open the door. I will take you away with me and protect you, and we will forget all else! Oh! do open the door and let me in, I beseech you!"

He was sobbing, and she began to shed tears, too. But she still kept silence, in spite of the passionate promptings of her blood. For a whole hour Lazare remained at the door, begging her to let him come in, growing angry with her and reviling her, and then breaking out again into expressions of impassioned endearment. Twice she believed he had gone away, and twice he came back again from his room wrought up to a higher pitch than before of amorous frenzy. When at last she heard him bang his door furiously behind him, she felt overcome with a deep sadness. It was all over this time, and she had conquered, but her victory affected her with such a profound despondency and shame that she undressed herself and got into bed without lighting her candle. The thought of seeing her nakedness exposing itself through her disordered and gaping clothes filled her with painful confusion. The coolness of the sheets soothed a little the burning of the kisses which scorched her shoulders, and she lay for a long time perfectly motionless, feeling crushed down beneath the weight of her disgust and grief.

She could not get to sleep, but lay awake till morning. The abomination of what had happened took complete possession of her thoughts. The whole of the evening had been a sin at which she now shuddered with horror. She felt that she could no longer find any excuse for herself, and that she must now confess the duplicity of her affections. Her motherly love for Lazare and her condemnations of Louise were but the hypocritical and disguised re-awakening of her old passion for her cousin. She had allowed herself to believe the lies which it had suggested to her, and as she analysed more closely than before the secret sentiments of her heart, she was conscious that the rupture between Lazare and his wife had really pleased her rather than otherwise, and that she had hoped in some way to profit by it. Was it not she who had been the cause of her cousin and herself slipping back into the relationships and habits of former days? Ought she not to have seen that the result could not fail to be disastrous? Now matters had reached a

terrible pass, and the lives of all of them were threatened with ruin. She had given him to another, while she herself loved him passionately, and he, too, desired her. This thought filled her throbbing brain and racked her temples as though a peal of bells were clanging within them. At first she made up her mind that she would run away from the house in the morning. Then she thought that such a flight would be cowardly. Since Lazare was going very shortly, why should she not remain? Her pride, too, awoke within her and forbade her to take flight with a heart full of shame for what she had done, and she tried to calm herself, for she felt that she could never again carry her head as high as she had been used to do while she continued to harbour a bitter remorse for the events of that night.

The next morning she came downstairs at her accustomed hour. There was nothing to tell of the night of torture she had spent except the redness and heaviness of her eyes. She was pale and quite calm. When Lazare appeared in his turn, he explained his air of weary lassitude by telling his father that he had sat up very late working. The day passed away in the usual occupations. Neither Pauline nor Lazare made any reference to what had occurred between them, even when they found themselves quite alone and free from all observation. They made no attempt to avoid each other and appeared quite confident of themselves. But, in the evening, when they wished each other good-night on the landing by the doors of their rooms, they fell passionately into each other's arms, while their lips met in a kiss. Then Pauline, full of alarm, hastily escaped and locked herself up in her room, while Lazare, too, rushed away and threw himself into his bed and burst into tears.

It was thus that they continued to bear themselves towards each other. The days slowly glided past, and the two cousins lived on together in constant anxiety of some possible lapse. Though they never spoke of such a thing and had never referred to that terrible night, they thought of it continually and were filled with a constant fear that some time or other they would roll to the ground in each other's arms as suddenly as though they were stricken down by lightning. Would it be in the morning as they came out of their rooms, they wondered, or in the evening as they were exchanging a lingering good-night? Would it be in his room or in hers or in some lonely corner of the house? Their sense of what was right and honourable was

quite undimmed, and every sudden lapse and momentary madness, the passionate embraces behind a door and the burning kisses stolen in the dark, left them immediately afterwards affected with a despondent anger with themselves. But neither the one nor the other had the courage to take the only safe step, that of immediate separation. Pauline, affecting to believe that it would be cowardly to take flight, persisted in remaining in the presence of danger, while Lazare, yielding to the first transport of a fresh intrigue, did not even reply to the pressing letters he received from his wife. He had been six weeks now at Bonneville, and he and Pauline had begun to believe that this existence of alternating pain and sweetness would go on for ever.

One Sunday, at dinner, Chanteau was quite gay, having permitted himself to drink a glass of Burgundy, a luxury for which he had to pay very dearly every time that he indulged in it. Pauline and Lazare had spent some delightful hours together by the sea under the bright blue sky, and now they were exchanging looks that were full of tenderness, though marked with that haunting fear of themselves which thrilled their present intimacy with such a glow of passion.

They were all three smiling, when Véronique, who was just going to bring in the dessert, called out from the door of the kitchen:

"Here comes madame!"

"Madame who?" cried Pauline, with a feeling of stupefaction.

"Madame Louise!"

They all broke out into stifled exclamations. Chanteau gazed in speechless concern at Pauline and Lazare, who had turned very pale. The latter rose excitedly from his seat and his voice quavered with anger.

"What! Louise? She never told me that she was coming, and I had forbidden her to do so. She must be mad!"

The twilight was falling, soft and clear. Lazare threw down his napkin and rushed out of the room. Pauline followed him, struggling to regain her cheerful serenity. It was indeed Louise who was alighting with difficulty from old Malivoire's coach.

"Are you mad?" her husband cried to her across the yard. "Why do you go on in this absurd way without writing to me?"

Then Louise burst into tears. She had been so poorly at Clermont, she said, and had felt so depressed and weary. And as her two last letters had remained unanswered, she had felt an irresistible impulse to set off, mingled with a yearning desire to

see Bonneville again. Her only reason for not having sent him word of her intention was her fear that he might have prevented her doing what she wanted.

"And I was looking forward with so much pleasure to taking you all by surprise!" she concluded.

"It is idiotic! You will go back again to-morrow morning!" her husband cried.

Louise, quite crushed by this reception, fell into Pauline's arms. The latter, on seeing her so awkward in her movements, and noticing her swelling form underneath her dress, had again turned pale. And now, when she felt the breast of this woman, who was soon to be a mother, pressing against her own, she was filled with shuddering and yet with pity. She tried to suppress her own jealous thrills and to silence Lazare.

"Why do you speak to her so unkindly? Kiss her! You were quite right to come, my dear, if you thought you would be better at Bonneville. You know very well that we all love you, don't you?"

Loulou was barking furiously at all these voices which were disturbing the usual quiet of the yard. Minouche, after having poked her head out of the door, had retired again, shaking her feet as though she had just escaped mixing herself up in some compromising incident. All the party went into the house again, and Véronique laid another place at the table and began to serve the dinner over again.

"Hallo! is it really you, my little Louise?" Chanteau exclaimed, with an uneasy smile. "You wanted to take us all by surprise? You have almost made my wine go the wrong way!"

However, the evening passed away fairly pleasantly. They had all regained their tranquillity, and avoided making any reference to the immediate future. There was a momentary return of embarrassment at bed-time, when Véronique inquired if Monsieur Lazare was going to sleep in his wife's room.

"Oh no! Louise will sleep better alone," Lazare replied, looking up instinctively and catching Pauline's glance.

"Yes, that will be better," the young wife said; "sleep at the top of the house, for I am dreadfully tired, and I shall have the whole bed to myself."

Three days passed away. Then Pauline at last came to a determination. She would leave the house on the following Monday. Lazare and Louise had already begun to talk of re-

maining till after the latter's confinement, which was expected in little more than a month, and Pauline thought she could see that her cousin had had enough of Paris, and would settle down altogether at Bonneville, weary and sick of his perpetual failures. The best thing she could do, she thought, was to give up the place entirely to them at once, for she had not been able to gain the conquest over herself, and she felt, even more than before, lacking in the courage to go on living in the same house with them, and perpetually seeing them in all the intimacy of man and wife. And this course seemed to her, too, to be the best means of escaping from all the perils which were threatened by the reviving passion from which she and Lazare had just suffered so much. Louise alone expressed any astonishment at learning Pauline's decision, but she was supplied with undeniable reasons for it. Doctor Cazenove told her that his relation at Saint-Lô had made Pauline most unusually favourable offers, and that the latter could not really refuse them any longer, and that her relations insisted upon her accepting a position which would make her future safe. Chanteau, too, with tears in his eyes, expressed his consent.

On the Saturday she had her farewell dinner with the Abbé and the doctor. Louise, who was in great pain, could scarcely drag herself to the table, and this threw an additional gloom over the meal, in spite of the efforts of Pauline, who had cheerful smiles for everyone, while she was grieving bitterly at the thought of leaving this house, which she had animated and brightened for so many years with her ringing laughter, in a state of anxious and sad disquietude. Her heart was aching with pain, and Véronique served the dinner with a tragic air. Chanteau refused to touch a single drop of Burgundy, having become all at once almost superfluously prudent, trembling at the thought of being so soon deprived of a nurse whose mere voice seemed to be able to lull his pains. Lazare was feverishly wrangling with the doctor about a new scientific discovery.

By eleven o'clock the house had once more subsided into silence. Louise and Chanteau were already asleep, while Véronique was tidying up her kitchen. At the top of the house, by the door of his old room, which he still occupied, Lazare detained Pauline for a moment, according to their usual evening custom.

"Good-bye!" he murmured.

"No! not good-bye," she said, forcing herself to smile. "*Au revoir*, for I am not going away till Monday."

They gazed at each other, and their eyes grew troubled, and then they fell into each other's arms, while their lips were sealed passionately in a last kiss.

CHAPTER X.

The next morning, as they sat down to their coffee at the early breakfast, they were surprised at Louise not making her appearance. The servant went upstairs to knock at her door, and when she at last appeared, she was very pale, and seemed to walk with pain and difficulty.

"What is the matter with you?" Lazare asked with concern.

"I have been in pain since the early morning," she replied. "I have scarcely had a wink of sleep all night, and I think I have heard every hour strike."

"But you ought to have called to us," Pauline said; "we could have come and sat with you, at any rate."

When Louise reached the table, she sat down on her chair with a sigh of relief.

"Oh, no!" she said, "you couldn't have done anything for me. I know quite well what is the matter with me. I've scarcely been free from these pains for the last eight months."

Her pregnancy, which had been a very distressing one, had subjected her to constant nausea and violent griping pains, which sometimes kept her almost bent double for a couple of days together. This morning her nausea had disappeared, but she was feeling as though a band of steel were circling her stomach so tightly as to wound her flesh.

"Ah! one grows quite accustomed to pain!" Chanteau ejaculated sententiously.

"I am obliged to walk about when I feel like this," the young wife resumed. "That's why I came down. I couldn't keep still upstairs any longer."

She took nothing but a few sips of her coffee. All the morning she was dragging herself about the house, getting up from one chair to go and sit down upon another. They did not venture to speak to her, for she grew irritable and seemed to suffer additional pain when any notice was taken of her. She had no

cessation of suffering until a little before noon, when she became easier and was able to sit down at the table again and take some soup. But, between two and three o'clock, she was attacked with violent griping pains again, and she could not keep still for a moment, but dragged herself about between the dining-room and the kitchen, and then, with great difficulty, went upstairs to her room only to come down again immediately.

Up at the top of the house, Pauline was packing her trunk. She was going to leave Bonneville the next morning, and she had only just time to empty her drawers and get everything ready for her departure; but every minute she went out on to the landing and looked over the balustrade, distressed by those dragging steps which suffering made so heavy that they shook the floors. About four o'clock, as she heard Louise becoming still more agitated, she resolved to go and speak to Lazare, who had locked himself up in his room, full of nervous exasperation at the troubles with which he accused fate of overwhelming him.

"We cannot leave her alone like this," she insisted. "We must go and talk to her. Come with me."

They found her half-way up the first flight of stairs, bent over the balustrade, without the strength to go either up or down.

"My dear girl," said Pauline, tenderly, "we are quite distressed about you. We are going to send for the midwife."

Then Louise got angry.

"How can you go on tormenting me like this," she cried, "when all that I want is to be left alone? At eight months, what good do you suppose a midwife can do me?"

"At any rate, it would be more satisfactory to see her."

"No, I won't! I know quite well what is the matter with me. For pity's sake, don't talk to me any more! Leave me alone and don't torture me like this!"

Louise showed herself so obstinate and exhibited so much temper that Lazare, in his turn, grew quite angry; but Pauline was compelled to promise that she would not send for the midwife. This midwife was a Madame Bouland, of Verchemont, who possessed an extraordinary reputation throughout the neighbourhood for skilfulness and energy. She was considered to have no equal at Bayeux or even at Caen. It was on account of this great reputation of hers that Louise, who was very timid and had a presentiment that she would die in child-bed, had

determined upon putting herself in her hands. But, none the less, she experienced a great fear of Madame Bouland, the same irrational fear with which his patients contemplate a dentist, whom it is necessary they should visit, but defer visiting as long as possible.

At six o'clock Louise had another cessation of pain, and showed herself very triumphant in consequence; telling the others that she had known quite well that it was only her customary sufferings which had been troubling her, though to-day they had been more severe than usual, and scoffingly remarking that they would have done a lot of good, indeed, if they had gone disturbing folks for nothing! But, though she was feeling so much better, she was quite worn out with fatigue, and, when she had eaten a cutlet, she went to bed. She would be all right again, she said, if she could only get to sleep. She obstinately refused to let anyone sit upstairs with her while the family were at dinner, and insisted upon being left alone, and even forbade anyone to come up and see how she was getting on, for fear of them startling her in her sleep.

For dinner that evening there was a stew and a piece of roast veal. The meal commenced in silence, for Louise's illness increased the feeling of gloom which was caused by Pauline's approaching departure. They made as little noise as possible with their spoons and forks for fear it might reach the ears of the invalid on the next floor and still further distress her. Chanteau, however, by degrees grew very loquacious, and was relating some stories of wonderful pregnancies, when Véronique, as she was handing round the veal, suddenly said:

"I'm not quite sure, but I fancy I can hear Madame Lazare groaning upstairs."

Lazare sprang from his seat and went to open the door. They all gave over eating and strained their ears to listen. At first they could hear nothing, but soon the sound of prolonged suppressed groans reached them.

"She's had another attack!" Pauline exclaimed. "I will go up to her."

She threw down her napkin, and left the plate of veal, which Véronique had just laid before her, quite untouched. Fortunately she found the key on the outside of Louise's door, and so she had no difficulty in entering the room. The young woman was sitting on the edge of her bed, wrapped in a dressing-jacket, while her feet were bare. She was swaying herself backwards

forwards like a pendulum, racked with an unremitting agony which extorted a succession of deep groans from her.

"Are you getting any worse?" Pauline asked.

Louise made no reply.

"Would you like us to send for Madame Bouland now?"

Then, with an air of martyred resignation, the young woman broke out:

"Oh, very well! if you like. I don't care. I shall perhaps be allowed to be at peace if you do— Oh! I can't bear this much longer!"

Lazare, who had followed Pauline upstairs and had been listening outside the door, now ventured to come into the room, and said that they had better send to Arromanches as well and fetch Doctor Cazenove, on the chance of complications occurring. Then Louise burst into tears. Hadn't they the least pity for her condition, she cried? Why did they go on torturing her in this way? They knew very well that the thought of being delivered by a man had always been intolerable to her. She was possessed by a feeling of morbid shame, and it distressed her that even her husband and cousin should see her in this state of self-abandonment to which her suffering had driven her, and she dragged the loose jacket closely round her poor bent body.

"If you send for the doctor," she said, "I will get into bed and turn my face to the wall and refuse to say another word to any one."

"At any rate, bring the midwife," Pauline said to Lazare. "I don't think that her time has arrived yet, and it may only be necessary to do something to relieve her."

They both went downstairs again. The Abbé Horteur had just come to pay a short evening visit, and he was standing in silence before the alarmed Chanteau. They tried to persuade Lazare to eat a little veal before setting off, but he declared, in utter despondency, that a single mouthful would choke him, and he started off to run to Verchemont.

"I think I hear her calling me," Pauline exclaimed, hastening towards the staircase. "If I want Véronique I will knock on the floor. You can finish your dinner without me, can't you, uncle?"

The priest, feeling much embarrassed at suddenly finding himself in the midst of a confinement, could not summon up his customary consolatory phrases, and he soon retired, pre-

mising to return after he had been to the Gonins' house, where the crippled old man was very ill; and Chanteau was left alone before the disordered table. The glasses were half full, the veal was growing cold on the plates, and the greasy forks and half-eaten pieces of bread still lay where they had been dropped in the sudden alarm which had come upon the diners. As Véronique put a kettle of water on the fire, by way of precaution, in case it should be wanted, she began to grumble at not knowing whether she was to clear the table or to leave everything in its present state of confusion.

When Pauline got upstairs, she found Louise standing up and leaning against the back of a chair.

"It hurts me too much to sit down," she said. "Come and help me to walk about."

Ever since the morning she had been complaining of a pricking sensation as though flies were biting her flesh sharply, but now she was suffering from internal spasms and contractions. Whenever she sat or lay down she felt as though a mass of lead were pounding her vitals, and she felt constrained to walk about. She took her cousin's arm, and, with her support, she walked from the bed to the window.

"You are a little feverish," the young girl said. "Would you like something to drink?"

Louise could not reply. A violent spasm had bent her double, and she clung to Pauline's shoulders, while such a tremor passed over her, that they both shook from it. Cries of mingled impatience and terror broke from her.

"I am dying of thirst!" she murmured, when she was able to speak again. "My tongue is quite dry, and you see how red I am. But no! don't leave me! I should fall if you did. Let us go on walking, and I will have something to drink presently."

She continued to walk, dragging her legs after her, and swaying about and pressing more heavily upon the arm that supported her. For two hours she never stopped walking to and fro. It was now nine o'clock. Why didn't the midwife arrive? Louise was now anxiously longing for her to come, and complained that they must want to see her die, to leave her so long without assistance. It only took twenty-five minutes to get to Verchemont, and an hour would have been quite sufficient to fetch the midwife. Lazare must be amusing himself somewhere, or, perhaps, an accident had happened, and no one would ever come

at all. Then she was attacked again by nausea and sickness.

"Go away!" she cried, "I don't want you to stay any longer. To think that it's possible to be reduced to such a condition as this and be an object of disgust to everyone!"

Through all the agony she was suffering, her sense of shame and hatred of any departure from feminine gracefulness never ceased to occupy her mind. Notwithstanding her fragility, she had great powers of resistance and endurance, and she struggled hard to retain what little strength she had, while it distressed her very much that she had not been able to draw on her stockings and to see the little patches of nakedness which were exposed to view.

Eleven o'clock struck, and the delay became intolerable. Véronique set off for Verchemont. She took a lantern with her, and was instructed to examine all the ditches. Louise had twice attempted to lie down on the bed, her legs being quite weary with fatigue, but she had been obliged to get up again directly, and she was once more standing with her elbows leaning on the chest of drawers. Pauline, who was standing behind her, could do nothing to assist her.

It was nearly midnight when the sound of wheels made Pauline rush hastily down the stairs.

"But where is Véronique?" she cried out from the steps, as she recognised Lazare and the midwife. "Haven't you met her?"

Lazare told her that they had come by the Porte-en-Bessin road, after having met with all sorts of hindrances. When he arrived at Verchemont he found that Madame Bouland was eight miles away attending to a woman in her confinement. He could get no horse or vehicle to take him to hunt her up, and he had been obliged to go the whole distance on foot, running all the way, and then there had been endless other troubles. Fortunately, however, Madame Bouland had a gig.

"But the woman!" Pauline exclaimed. "She has been delivered all right, I suppose, since Madame Bouland has been able to come with you."

Lazare's voice trembled as he replied hoarsely:

"The woman is dead."

They went into the hall which was dimly lighted by a candle placed on one of the stairs. There was an interval of silence

during which Madame Bouland hung up her cloak. She was a short, dark woman, very thin, and as yellow as a lemon, with a large, prominent nose. She spoke loudly, and had an extremely authoritative manner, which caused her to be much respected by the peasantry.

"Will you be good enough to follow me?" Pauline said to her. "I have been quite at a loss to know what to do, and she has never ceased complaining since the beginning of the evening."

Louise was still standing before the chest of drawers, pawing the ground with her feet. She began to cry again as soon as she saw the midwife. The latter asked her a few short questions about the dates and situation and character of her pains.

Then she said that she could offer no opinion until she had made a further examination of Louise's condition; and she proceeded to lay the pillows one on the top of the other in the middle of the bed. Lazare, who had now come upstairs, went up to his wife and kissed her perspiring brow, but she did not appear to be conscious of his encouraging caress.

"Come! come!" said the midwife, and then Louise turned a glance of mute supplication towards Pauline, which she well understood. She led Lazare out of the room, and they both remained on the landing, without being able to take themselves further away. The candle, which was still burning down below, cast a dim light, broken by weird shadows, up the stairs, and the two cousins stood, one leaning his back against the wall and the other supporting herself against the balustrade, gazing at each other in motionless silence. They strained their ears to catch the sounds that came from Louise's room. They heard a constant moaning and two piercing cries. Then it seemed to them as though an eternity had passed away before Madame Bouland came and opened the door. They were going to enter, when the midwife pushed them back, and, coming out of the room herself, she shut the door behind her.

"Well?" Pauline murmured.

She signed to them to go downstairs, and it was not till they had reached the ground-floor that she opened her mouth.

"It seems likely to be a serious case. It is my duty to warn the family."

Lazare turned pale. An icy breath seemed to have passed over his brow and frozen it.

"I cannot undertake the whole responsibility," Madame Bou-

land continued. "The presence of a doctor is absolutely necessary."

Then there was a short interval of silence. Lazare was overcome with a feeling of hopeless despair. Where were they to find a doctor at that time of night? His wife might die twenty times over before they would be able to get the surgeon from from Arromanches.

"I don't think that there is any immediate danger," Madame Bouland added; "but you had better lose no time. I myself can do nothing further."

And when Pauline besought her, in the name of humanity, at any rate to do something to alleviate the sufferings of Louise, whose groans continued to echo through the house, she replied in her clear, sharp tones:

No! indeed; I am not authorised to do anything of that kind. That other poor woman over yonder is dead, and I had rather not be responsible for this one."

At this moment a tearful call was heard from Chanteau in the dining-room.

"Are you there? Come in! No one has been to tell me anything. I have been waiting to hear something for an eternity."

They entered the room. They had forgotten all about Chanteau since the interrupted dinner. He had remained sitting before the still laid table, twisting his thumbs and patiently waiting with all the drowsy resignation which he had acquired from his long periods of lonely quiescence. This new catastrophe, which was throwing the house into alarm and confusion, had quite prostrated him; he had not even had the heart to go on eating, and his plate still remained untouched before him.

"Is she no better?" he asked.

Lazare shrugged his shoulders wildly. Madame Bouland, who retained all her accustomed calmness, pressed him to lose no further time.

"Take the gig!" she said. "The horse is tired out, but you will be able to be back in two hours or two hours and a half. I will stay here, and look after her."

Then Lazare suddenly rushed out of the room, feeling certain that he would find his wife dead upon his return. They could hear him shouting and lashing with his whip, as the gig clattered noisily away.

The midwife went upstairs again and Pauline followed her, after having just told her uncle that she was afraid that there was much pain in store for poor Louise. When she had offered to put him to bed, he had refused to go, and insisted upon staying up that he might know how things went on. If he felt drowsy, he said, he could sleep very well in his easy-chair, where he had often slept for whole afternoons. He had only just been left alone again, when Véronique came back, with her lantern extinguished. She was bursting with rage. For two years she had never spoken so many words at once.

"Of course they have come by the other road! And there have I been looking into all the ditches and nearly killing myself to get to Verchemont! And I waited, too, for a whole half-hour again down there, in the middle of the road!"

Chanteau looked at her with his heavy eyes.

"Well, my girl, it was scarcely probable that you would meet each other."

"And, then, as I was coming back," she continued, "I met Monsieur Lazare galloping like a madman in a crazy gig. I shouted out to him that they were anxiously waiting for him, but he only whipped the horse on more violently than ever and nearly ran over me. I've had quite enough of these errands of which I can make neither head nor tail. And to make matters worse, too, my lantern went out."

She hustled her master about and tried to make him finish eating his food, that she might at any rate get the table cleared. He was not at all hungry, but he ate a little of the cold veal for the sake of something to occupy himself with. He was feeling troubled and put out now by the Abbé's failure to keep his word. What was the good of promising to come and keep one company if he had made up his mind to stay at home? Priests, certainly, cut a comical figure in the midst of a confinement; and this idea served to amuse him, and he set himself cheerfully to take his supper in solitude.

"Come, sir, make haste!" Véronique cried. "It is nearly one o'clock, and it won't do to have the plates and dishes and things lying about like this till to-morrow. There's always something going wrong in this awful house!"

She was just beginning to clear the table, when Pauline called to her in an urgent voice from the staircase. Chanteau once more was left alone and forgotten in front of the table, and no one came to give him any news.

Madame Bouland had just assumed authoritative control over Louise's room, giving her orders and searching the drawers for what she wanted. She had begun by ordering a fire to be lighted, for the room felt damp. Then she said that the bed was an inconvenient one, and that it was too low and yielding, and, when Pauline told her that there was an old folding-bed in the coach-house, she sent Véronique to get it, and she had it set up in front of the fire, laying a plank down upon it, on which she merely placed a mattress. Then she wanted a large supply of linen; a sheet, which she folded in four, to protect the mattress, other sheets and napkins and cloths, which she hung over chairs in front of the fire to get warmed. The room, littered over with all this linen and blocked up by the bed, looked like an ambulance hastily improvised in expectation of a battle.

She went on talking perpetually now, and addressed Louise with a sort of military air, as though she were giving the word of command to the poor young woman's sufferings. Pauline begged her in a whisper to make no reference to the doctor.

It was not till half-past three o'clock in the morning, after a long, weary period of waiting, during which Louise had been racked with the keenest agony, that Lazare came back with Doctor Cazenove.

Louise was now in a most dangerous condition, and for a long time the old doctor feared that it would be impossible to bring her child alive into the world, and yet save the mother. His examination of the young woman had filled him with the gravest alarm. However, after a long and agonizing period of suspense, a baby boy was born, and it was alive.

When it was all over, Lazare turned his head to the wall and burst out into tears. He had been a prey to the keenest mental torture during the progress of the painful but necessary operations which had just come to a close, and he was despondently thinking, after witnessing such suffering, that it would be preferable for them all to die rather than to still go on living.

Pauline bent down over Louise and kissed her on the forehead.

"Come and kiss her!" she said to her cousin.

He came up and stooped down over his wife; but he shuddered as his lips touched her brow that was damp with an icy perspiration. Louise was lying with her eyes closed, and she

seemed to be no longer breathing. Lazare leaned against the wall at the foot of the bed and tried to stifle his sobs.

"I am afraid it is dead," said the doctor.

The baby had given utterance to none of the usual shrill squallings which accompany the gurgling sound that signals the respiration of air into the lungs. It was of a bluish-black colour, livid in places, and of small bulk, though its head was extremely oversized.

"We might try what friction and inflation would do," the doctor continued; "but I'm afraid it would only be time wasted. And the mother stands in need of all my attention."

Pauline heard what Cazenove said.

"Give it to me!" she exclaimed. "I will try what I can do. If I don't end by making him breathe, it will be because I have no more breath left myself."

Then she carried it off into the next room, the room which had once been Madame Chanteau's, taking with her the bottle of brandy and some flannel. She laid the poor little creature in an arm-chair before a blazing fire; and then, having steeped a piece of flannel in a saucer of brandy, she knelt down and rubbed it without stopping for a moment, quite regardless of the cramp that was gradually stiffening her arm. There was so little of it, and it looked so miserably fragile, that her great fear was lest she might kill it by rubbing it too hard. And so she passed the flannel backwards and forwards with a gentle and almost caressing movement, like the constant brushing of a bird's wing. She turned the child over and tried to excite each of its tiny limbs into animation. But it still continued quite motionless. Though the friction seemed to impart a little warmth to it, its chest still remained shrunk and uninflated, and it seemed to be growing still darker in colour.

Then, without feeling any repugnance for that flabby little face, which had scarcely yet been washed, she glued her mouth to its tiny, rigid lips. Then she made a long, slow respiration, adapting the force of her breath to the capacity of the compressed lungs into which the air had not been able to make its way. She was obliged to stop every now and then when her breath was exhausted; but, when she had inhaled a fresh supply, she recommenced again. The blood was mounting to her head, and her ears began to buzz, and she was becoming a little giddy. But she still persevered, and she continued in this way trying to inflate the baby's lungs for more than half-an-hour,

without being encouraged by the least result. She vainly tried to make its sides work in and out by pressing them very gently with her fingers. But nothing seemed to do the least good, and anyone else would have abandoned in despair this apparently impossible resurrection. But Pauline brought to her task a quite maternal perseverance, the obstinate insistence of a mother who is determined that her child shall live, and at last she felt life entering into the poor little body, and its tiny lips moved slightly beneath her own.

For nearly an hour she had remained quite alone in this room, absorbed in the painful excitement of her struggle with death, and quite forgetful of all else. This flickering signal of life and the transitory tremor of the little lips filled her with fresh courage. She had recourse to friction again, while every minute she resumed her attempts at inflation, alternating the two processes without any regard to her own exhaustion. She felt a growing necessity of conquering and of producing life in this seeming deadness. For a moment she feared she had been mistaken, for her lips again seemed only to press against lifeless ones. Then she felt another rapid contraction. Little by little the air was forcing its way into the lungs, and she could feel it being sucked from her and then returned, and she fancied she could feel the little heart beginning to beat. Her mouth never left the tiny lips; she shared her life with the little creature, and they had only one breath between them in this wonderful resurrection, a slow, prolonged breath which went from the one to the other like a common soul. Her lips were soiled and defiled, but her joy at having saved the child prevented her feeling any disgust; and she was now inhaling a warm pungency of life, which seemed to intoxicate her; and when, at last, the baby broke out into a feeble, plaintive wail, she fell back from the chair on to the floor.

The big fire was blazing brightly and filled the room with a cheerful light. Pauline remained on the floor in front of the baby, whom she had not yet examined. What a poor, frail mite it was! All her own robust vigour rose up in rebellious protest against this miserable son which Louise had given to Lazare. She cast a glance that was full of hopelessness at her own hips and virgin breast. Within those spreading sides of hers, she thought, there would have been room for a big and strong son. She felt a keen regret for the apparent waste of her life, for her womanhood that was slumbering in sterility. The sight of this

newly-born child re-awakened in her all the wild emotion she had felt on the night of the wedding. She would never be a mother! What was the good of her vigorous puberty, of her organs and muscles all teeming with rich sap, of the penetrating scent which streamed up from her youthful flesh in all the vigour of its dusky blossomings? She would remain for ever like an uncultivated field, deserted and left to solitary aridity. Instead of that miserable abortion which was lying like a naked insect on the chair, she saw in her mind's eye the healthy, vigorous son that would have been born of her marriage, and she wept for the child she would never have.

The poor, frail little creature was still continuing to cry. It was writhing about on the chair, and Pauline began to be afraid that it would fall on to the floor. Then her pity was aroused at the sight of so much uncomeliness and weakness. She would do what she could for it, she thought, and she would help it to go on living, as she had the happiness of helping it into life. Then she took it upon her knees and did all that was necessary for it, while she still continued to shed tears, in which were mingled sorrow for her own unfruitfulness and pity for the misery of all living creatures.

Madame Bouland, whom she had summoned, came to help her to wash the baby. They wrapped it up in warm flannels and then laid it in the bed, till the cradle was prepared for it. The mid-wife, much astonished to find it alive, carefully examined it. She said that it seemed to be well formed, but that its frailty would make it very difficult to rear. Then she hurried off again to Louise, who still remained in a very critical condition.

As Pauline was taking up her position again at the baby's side, Lazare, who had been informed of the miracle that had taken place, came into the room.

"Come and look at him!" his cousin said, with much emotion. As she drew near he began to tremble, and he cried:

"What! you have laid him in that bed!"

He had shuddered as he entered the door. This room, so long unused, so full of mouruful associations and so rarely entered, he now saw warm and bright, and made cheerful by the crackling of the fire. The furniture was still in its accustomed position, and the clock still marked twenty-three minutes to eight. No one had occupied the room since his mother had died there. And it was in this very bed where she had

breathed her last, in this sacred and awful bed, that he saw his own son restored to life, looking even tinier than he was as he lay within the large-sized coverings.

"Does it displease you?" Pauline asked in surprise.

He shook his head. He could not speak for emotion. At last he stammered out:

"I was thinking of my mother. She has gone away, and now there is another one there who will go away as she has done."

His words were cut short by a burst of sobbing. His terror and his disgust of life broke out in spite of all the efforts he had made to restrain himself since Louise's terrible delivery. When he had touched his baby's wrinkled brow with his mouth, he stepped hastily back, for he had fancied that he could feel the skull giving way beneath his lips. He was filled with remorseful despondency at the sight of this poor, frail little thing which he had brought into existence.

"Don't distress yourself about him!" Pauline said, to cheer him. "We'll make a fine young fellow of him. It doesn't matter anything at all his being so small now."

He looked at her, and, in his troubled emotion, he cried out from the depths of his heart:

"We owe his life to you now a second time! Am I destined, then, to be ever under obligations to you?"

"To me!" she exclaimed. "I have done nothing more than the midwife would have done herself, if I hadn't happened to be here."

He silenced her with a wave of his hand.

"Do you think that I am base enough," he cried, "not to recognise that I owe everything to you? Ever since you first came into this house, you have never ceased to sacrifice yourself. I will say nothing now about your money, but you still continued to love me yourself when you gave me up to Louise. I know it now quite well. Ah! if you only knew the shame I feel of myself when I look at you and recollect! You would have given your very life-blood, and you were always kind and cheerful, even at the very time when I was crushing down your heart. Ah! yes! you were quite right; cheerfulness and kindliness are everything; all else is a mere delusion!"

She tried to interrupt him, but he continued in louder tones:

"What a fool I made of myself with all my disbelief and braggart scepticism, and all the pessimism which I paraded out of vanity and fear! It is I who have brought ruin upon our

lives, upon yours and upon my own, and upon those of the whole family. Yes! you were the only sensible one amongst us! Life becomes so easy, when everyone in a family is cheerful and affectionate, and each lives for the others. If the world is to die of misery, at any rate let it die cheerfully and merrily, and in sympathy with itself!"

Pauline smiled at the violence of his language, and, taking hold of his hands, she said:

"Come! come! Don't excite yourself so! Now that you see that I was right, you will act differently and all will go well."

"Ah! I don't know that! I am talking like this just now, because there are times when the truth will force itself out, even in spite of one's self. But, to-morrow, I shall slip back into all my old torment. One can't change one's nature! No! no! All will not go well now. On the contrary, things will gradually get worse and worse. You know that as well as I do. It is my own folly that I am angry at now."

She drew him gently towards her, and said to him in her grave manner:

"You are neither foolish nor base; you are unfortunate. Kiss me, Lazare."

They exchanged a kiss in the presence of the poor little baby, who seemed to be asleep. It was a purely fraternal kiss, untainted by the slightest breath of that desire which had been so hot in them only the day before.

The dawn was breaking, a soft, grey dawn. Cazenove came into the room to look at the baby, and was astonished to find it doing so well. He determined to take it back into the other room, for he felt that he could now answer to Louise for its life. When the little creature was brought to its mother, she looked at it with a feeble smile, and then she closed her eyes and fell into one of those deep restorative slumbers which do so much for the recuperation of those in her condition. The window had been slightly opened, and a delicious air, like a very breath of life, streamed in from the sea. They all stood for a moment or too, quite worn out, but very happy, by the bed in which the young mother was sleeping; and then, with silent tread, they all left the room, except Madame Bouland.

The doctor, however, did not leave the house till nearly eight o'clock. He was very hungry, and Lazare and Pauline themselves were almost fainting for want of food, and so Véronique made them some coffee and an omelet. Downstairs they found

Chanteau, whom they had all forgotten, sleeping soundly in his chair. Nothing had been touched since the previous evening, and the room was reeking with an irritating smoke from the lamp, which was still burning. Pauline jokingly remarked that the table, on which the plates and dishes were still remaining, was already laid for them. She swept up the crumbs and made the table a little tidier. Then, as the coffee was not yet ready, they attacked the cold veal, with joking references to the dinner that had been so painfully interrupted. Now that all danger was over, they were as merry and cheerful as children.

"You will hardly believe it," Chanteau exclaimed, beaming with happiness, "but I have slept without being asleep. I was very angry that no one came down to give me any news, but yet I felt no uneasiness, for I was dreaming that all was going on well."

His delight increased as he saw the Abbé Horteur enter the room. He had come across after saying mass. Chanteau joked him merrily.

"Ah! here you are at last, then! You deserted me in a nice way last night! Do you find babies such very terrible creatures?"

The priest defended himself from this charge by telling them how he had one night delivered a woman on the high-road and baptized the baby. Then he accepted a small glass of curaçoa.

Bright sunshine was gilding the yard when Doctor Cazenove at last took his departure. As Lazare and Pauline walked with him to the gate, he whispered to the latter:

"You are not going away to-day?"

She remained silent for a moment. She raised her great dreamy eyes, and seemed to be looking far away into the future.

"No!" she replied; "I must wait."

CHAPTER XI.

After an abominable May, June set in with very warm weather. Westerly gales had been blowing for the last three weeks, and storms had devastated the coast, swept away great masses of the cliffs, swallowed up boats, and killed many people; but now the arching blue sky and the soft slumbering sea, and the hot, brilliant days made everything assume an aspect of infinite tenderness.

One glorious afternoon Pauline had wheeled Chanteau's chair out on to the terrace, and she had laid near him, on a red woollen rug, the little Paul, who was now eighteen months old. She was his godmother, and she spoilt the child as much as she did his grandfather.

"Are you sure the sun won't be too much for you, uncle?" she asked.

"Oh, dear no! I should think not, indeed! It is so long since I have seen it. Are you going to leave little Paul asleep there?"

"Yes. The fresh air will do him good."

She knelt down on the edge of the rug and gazed at him, dressed in a white frock, with his bare legs and arms peeping out beyond it. His eyes were fast closed, and his quiet little rosy face was turned up towards the sky.

"He has dropped off to sleep at once," she said, softly. "He has tired himself out with rolling about. Don't let the animals bother him."

She shook her finger at Minouche, who was sitting in the dining-room window making an elaborate toilet. Some distance off Loulou was lying stretched out on the gravel, opening his eyes every now and then with a glance of suspicion, and ever ready to snarl and bite.

As Pauline rose to her feet again, a low groan broke from Chanteau.

"Ah! has your pain come back?"

"Come back! Ah! it never leaves me now. Did I groan? I do it without even being aware of it."

He had become a most pitiable object. By degrees his chronic gout had accumulated cretaceous matter at all his joints, and great chalk-stones had formed and pushed their white buds through his skin. His feet, which were hidden out of sight in his slippers, were contracted inwards like the claws of a sickly bird. But his hands openly displayed all their horrible deformity, swollen at every joint with gleaming red knots, with the fingers warped by swellings which forced them apart, the left one being rendered especially hideous by a concretion as big as a small egg. On his left elbow a more voluminous deposit had brought on an ulcer. He was now in such a state of complete stiffness that he could no longer make use of his hands or feet, and the few joints which could still be slightly bent cracked with as much noise as though a bag of marbles were being shaken. His whole body seemed to have become petrified in the position which he had adopted as the least painful, bent forward with a strong inclination to the right; and he had so completely shaped himself to his easy-chair, that even when he was put to bed he remained thus twisted and bent. His pain never left him now, and the least change in the weather, or a drop of wine, or a mouthful of meat in excess of his severe regimen, brought on inflammation.

"Would you like a glass of milk?" Pauline asked him. "It would refresh you."

"Ah! milk, indeed!" he gasped out between two groans. "That's another pretty invention of theirs, that milk-cure! I believe they've done for me with that! No! no! I won't take anything; that's the treatment that does me the most good."

He asked her to change the position of his left leg, for he could not move it himself.

"The villain is all on fire to-day. Put it further away; push it. There, that will do, thank you. What a lovely day! Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

As his eyes gazed out on to the far-spreading distance, he continued to groan quite unconsciously. His moan of pain had now become quite as natural to him as his breathing itself. He was wrapped in a heavy blue woollen rug, and he sat with his poor deformed hands, that looked so pitiable in the bright sunshine, lying helplessly on his knees. It pleased him to sit

and look at the sea, with its infinite blue flecked over with white sails, and stretching out its limitless surface before him, who was no longer able to put one foot before another.

Pauline, whom Paul's little naked legs were beginning to disturb, knelt down again and covered them up with a corner of the rug. For three months she had always been going to take her departure on the following Monday. But the child's feeble grasp held her back with a force she could not resist. For the first month of its life they had feared every morning that it would not live to see the evening. It was Pauline who had kept it alive from day to day, for its mother was still confined to her bed, and the nurse, whom they had been obliged to get, simply gave it suck, and was capable of nothing more than the gentle stupidity of a cow. It required the most devoted and constant care and attention, and Pauline had to keep perpetual watch over it with all the ceaseless assiduity of a sitting hen to make up for the month's gestation it had lost. By the end of this first month it had happily acquired the strength of a child born in due season, and it was gradually developing, though it was still but a puny creature, and Pauline never left it for a minute, more especially since its weaning, which had been attended with much distress to it.

"There!" she said, "he can't take cold now. See, uncle, how pretty he looks in this crimson rug. It makes him all quite rosy."

Chanteau painfully turned his head, which was now the only part of his body which he was able to move.

"If you kiss him," he murmured, "you will wake him. Don't disturb him, the little cherub. Do you see that steamer over there? It is coming from Havre. How it is cutting along!"

Pauline watched the steamer to please him. It was like a black point in the boundless waters, and a slight streak of smoke stained the horizon. For a short time she stood perfectly still, gazing at the sea that slumbered so peacefully beneath the clear sky, and enjoying the beauty of the day.

"But, while I am stopping here, the stew is getting burned!" she exclaimed at last, hurrying off towards the kitchen.

Just as she was going to enter the house, a voice called from the first-floor:

"Pauline!"

It was Louise who was leaning out of the window of what had once been Madame Chanteau's room, but which was now occupied by herself and Lazare. She was wearing a loose jacket, and her hair was hanging down. In querulous tones she went on to say:

"If Lazare is down there, tell him to come upstairs."

"No, he isn't here. He hasn't come back yet," Pauline replied.

Then Louse broke out quite angrily:

"I knew quite well we shouldn't see him again till this evening, even if he condescends to come back then. He has stayed away all night in spite of his express promise. Ah! he's a nice fellow. When he once gets to Caen, there's no getting him away from it!"

"He has so few amusements," Pauline urged gently. "And then this business about the manure would keep him some time. No doubt he will take advantage of the doctor's gig, and come back in it."

Since they had settled down at Bonneville, Lazare and Louise had lived a life of perpetual misunderstandings and disagreements. There were not open quarrels between them, but constant bickerings and ill-tempered contentions, and the lives of both of them were rendered unhappy by their want of harmony. Louise, after a long and painful convalescence, was now leading an empty, aimless existence, manifesting the greatest distaste for domestic matters, and spending her time in novel-reading and protracted toilets. Lazare had again fallen a prey to an overwhelming ennui; he never opened a book, and spent his time in gazing abstractedly upon the sea, escaping to Caen at long intervals, only to return home more weary than ever. Pauline, who had been obliged to retain the management of the house, had become quite indispensable to them, for she patched up their quarrels several times a day.

"Be quick and finish dressing!" Pauline added. "The Abbé will be here directly, and you must come and sit with him and my uncle. I have too much to do myself."

But Louise showed no signs of being soothed.

"How can he do it? Keeping away from home for all this time! My father wrote to me yesterday and told me that all the remainder of our money would go in the same way as the rest."

Lazare had, indeed, allowed himself to be swindled in a couple of unfortunate speculations, and Pauline had become so anxious on the child's account that she had, as his godmother, made him a present of two-thirds of what she still possessed, taking out in his name a policy which would assure him a hundred thousand francs on the day he attained his majority. She had now only an income of five hundred francs, but her sole regret was the necessity she was under of curtailing her customary charities.

"A fine speculation this manure of his is!" Louise railed on. "I am sure my father will have made him give it up, and he's only stopping away to amuse himself. Oh, well! I don't care! He may be as dissolute as he likes!"

"Then, what are you getting so angry for?" Pauline retorted. "But you know that's all nonsense, and the poor fellow never thinks of anything wrong. Do hurry down, won't you? What can have come to Véronique, I wonder, that she should disappear in this way on a Saturday, and leave me all her work to do?"

A most extraordinary thing had happened, which had been puzzling the whole house since two o'clock. Véronique had prepared the vegetables for the stew, and plucked and trussed a duck, and had then disappeared as suddenly and completely as though the earth had swallowed her up, and had been seen no more. Pauline, quite astounded at this sudden disappearance, had at last resolved to undertake the cooking of the stew herself.

"She hasn't come back, then?" Louise asked, recovering from her anger.

"No, indeed!" Pauline replied. "Do you know what I am beginning to think? She bought the duck of a woman who happened to be passing for forty sous, and I remember telling her that I had seen much finer ones for thirty sous at Verchemont. She tossed up her head directly, and gave me one of her surly looks. Well, now, I'll be bound that she has gone to Verchemont to see if I wasn't telling a lie."

She smiled, but there was a touch of sadness in her smile, for the surliness which Véronique was again manifesting towards her pained her. The servant's gradual increase of ill will against Pauline since Madame Chanteau's death had now brought it back to its earliest virulence.

"We've none of us been able to get a word out of her for

this last week or more," Louise said. "Any sort of folly may be expected from such a person."

"Well," said Pauline, tolerantly, "we must excuse her whims. She is sure to come back again, and we shall not die of hunger this time."

The baby now began to move about on the rug, and she ran up to it and bent over it.

"Well! what is it, my dear?"

Its mother, who was still at the window, glanced out for a moment and then disappeared within the room. Chanteau, quite absorbed in his own reflections, just turned his head as Loulou began to bark, and then called out to his niece:

"Here are your visitors, Pauline!"

Two ragged young urchins, the advanced guard of the troop which she received every Saturday, now came up. Little Paul had quickly dropped off to sleep once more, and she got up again and said:

"It's a nice time for them to come! I haven't a minute to spare. Well, never mind! stay, since you're here. Sit down on the bench. And, uncle, if any more of them come, please make them sit down by the side of these. I must just go and give a glance at my stew."

When she returned, at the end of a quarter of an hour, two boys and two girls were already sitting on the bench, her little friends of former days, but now grown bigger, though still retaining all their old mendicant habits.

Never before had there been so much distress in Bonneville. During the storms in May the three remaining houses had been crushed against the cliffs. The destruction was now complete, and the waves had made a clean sweep of the village after centuries of attack, during each year of which the neighbourhood had been gradually falling a prey to the sea. The fishermen, at last expelled from the nook where for generation after generation they had obstinately persisted in struggling against the ceaseless attack, had been compelled to migrate further up the ravine, where they were camping out in companies. The richer ones had built shelters for themselves, while the poorer ones were taking refuge behind the rocks, and they were all joining to found a new Bonneville, from which their descendants would in turn be ejected after fresh centuries of contest. Before it could complete its work of destruction, the sea had had to sweep away the piles and stockades. On the day of their overthrow the wind

was blowing from the north, and such huge mountains of water were dashed up that the church itself was shaken by the violence with which they broke against the shore. Lazare, though he was told of what was going on, would not come down. He stood on the terrace watching the waves sweep up, while the fishermen all rushed off to view the desperate onslaught. They were thrilled with a pride that was largely mingled with terror. Ah! now she was going to do it! Now she was going to make a clean sweep of it all, "the slut!" And in less than twenty minutes, indeed, everything had disappeared, the stockades were broken down, and the timbers were smashed into matchwood. The fishermen roared with the waves, and gesticulated and danced like so many savages, intoxicated by the wind and the sea, and glutting themselves with the sight of all this destruction. Then, while Lazare was angrily shaking his fist at them, they had fled for their lives, closely pursued by the wild rush of the waves, which there was no longer anything to hold in check. Now they were perishing of hunger and groaning as of old in this fresh Bonneville, accusing the sea of their ruin and commending themselves to the charity of the kind young lady.

"What are you doing there?" Pauline cried, as she saw Houtelard's son. "I forbade you ever to come here again!"

He was a great strapping fellow, now nearly twenty years old. His former sad and timid expression, that told of his ill treatment at home, had turned into a sly, crafty look. He lowered his eyes as he replied:

"Please take pity upon us, Mademoiselle Pauline. We are so miserable and wretched now that father is dead."

Houtelard had gone off to sea one stormy night and had not returned. His body had never been found afterwards, nor that of his mate, nor even a single plank of their boat. Pauline, however, who was now obliged to exercise a strict supervision over her charities, had sworn that she would never give a single sou to either son or widow as long as they lived together in concubinage. On his father's death, the young man's stepmother, the former servant who had so liberally whacked him when he was a little lad, had turned him into a husband, now that he was too old to be beaten. All Bonneville was much amused at this new arrangement.

"You know quite well why I won't have you coming here," Pauline replied. "When you conduct yourself differently, I will see what I can do for you."

Then the young fellow began to plead his cause in a whining voice:

"It is all her fault; she has made me do it. She would have gone on beating me if I hadn't. And, besides, she isn't my mother. It matters no more with me than if it was with someone else. Please give us a trifle, kind young lady. We have lost everything. I could get on well enough myself, but it is for her that I am asking you, and she is very ill, indeed she is, I swear it."

Pauline ended by taking pity on him and sending him away with a loaf of bread and some stew, and she even promised to go and see the sick woman and bring her some medicine.

"Medicine, indeed!" muttered Chanteau. "Just you try to get her to swallow it! It's meat that she wants."

Pauline had already turned her attention to the little Prouane girl, one of whose cheeks was completely torn open.

"How have you managed to do that?"

"I fell against a tree, Mademoiselle Pauline."

"Against a tree? It looks more like a cut from the corner of a table."

She was a big girl now, with prominent cheek bones, but she still had the great haggard eyes of a weak witted one, and she made vain efforts to remain standing in a respectful attitude. Her legs shook under her and her thick tongue could scarcely articulate her words.

"You have been drinking, you wicked girl!" cried Pauline, scrutinizing her keenly.

"Oh, Mademoiselle Pauline! how can you say so?"

"You were drunk and you fell down? Isn't it so! I know well what you are all given to. Sit down, and I will go and get some arnica and a bandage."

She attended to the girl's cheek, and tried to make her feel ashamed of herself. It was a disgraceful thing, she told her, for a girl of her age to intoxicate herself with her father and mother, a couple of drunkards who would be found dead some morning, poisoned by calvados. The girl listened drowsily, and when her cheek was bandaged, she stammered out:

"Father is always complaining of pains, and I would rub him if you would give me a little camphorated brandy."

Neither Pauline nor Chanteau could keep from laughing.

"No! no! I know very well what would become of the brandy. I will give you a loaf, though I am afraid you will

go and sell it and spend the money in drink. Stay where you are and Cuche shall take you home."

Cuche's son got up from the bench in his turn. His feet were bare, and all the clothes he had consisted of an old pair of breeches and a ragged shirt, through which his flesh, browned by the sun and scratched with brambles, appeared. Now that the men would have nothing more to do with his mother, who had fallen into a state of hideous decrepitude, he scoured the country himself to try and find her fresh customers. He was to be met running along the high-roads, leaping over hedges with the agility of a wolf, and living like a savage to whom hunger makes every sort of prey acceptable. He had reached the lowest depths of misery and destitution, and seemed sunk in such an abyss of wretchedness that Pauline looked at him with remorse, as though she felt herself guilty for having allowed a human being to go on living in such a sewer. But whenever she had attempted to rescue him from it, he had always fled away from her, hating all thought of work or service.

"Since you have come here again," she said to him gently, "I suppose you have thought over what I said to you last Saturday. I hope your still coming to see me is a sign that you are not lost to all sense of what is right. You cannot go on leading your present miserable life, and I am no longer as rich as I was, and I cannot support you in idleness. Have you made up your mind to accept my offer?"

Since the loss of her fortune, Pauline had tried to make up for her want of money by interesting other charitable people in her pensioners. Doctor Cazenove had at last succeeded in obtaining the admission of Cuche's mother into the hospital for incurables at Bayeux, and Pauline herself had in reserve a sum of a hundred francs to provide an outfit for the son, for whom she had found a berth among the workmen employed on the line to Cherbourg. He bent his head down as she spoke, and listened to her with an air of suspicion.

"It's quite settled, isn't it?" she continued. "You will accompany your mother and then you will return to your post."

But as she stepped up towards him, he sprang backwards. His down-cast eyes never left her, and he seemed to think that she was going to seize him by his wrists.

"What is the matter?" she asked in surprise.

Then the lad murmured with a wild animal's uneasy glance:

"You are going to take me and shut me up. I don't want to go."

All further attempts at persuasion were useless. He let her go on talking, and appeared to admit the force of her reasoning; but, as soon as ever she moved, he sprang towards the gate, and with an obstinate shake of the head he refused her offers for his mother and for himself, and preferred freedom and starvation.

"Take yourself off, you impostor!" Chanteau at last cried in indignation. "It is kindness thrown away troubling one's self about such a vagabond."

Pauline's hands trembled at her wasted charity and the failure of her love for others to effect anything for this lad, who insisted on remaining in his existence of voluntary misery.

"No! no! uncle," she said, with an expression of despondent tolerance, "they are starving, and they must have some food in spite of everything."

She called Cuche back to her to give him, as on other Saturdays, a loaf of bread and forty sous. But he backed away from her, saying:

"Put it down on the ground and then go away, and I will come and pick it up."

She did as he told her. Then he cautiously stepped forward, casting suspicious glances around him. When he had picked up the forty sous and the loaf, he ran off as fast as his bare feet could carry him.

"The wild beast!" cried Chanteau. "He will come and murder us all one of these nights. It is that little gaol-bird's daughter there, I would swear, who stole my silk handkerchief the other day."

It was the little Tourmal girl of whom he was speaking, whose grandfather had joined her father in gaol. She was now the only one who was left on the bench with the little Prouane, who was stupefied with drink. She got up, without having appeared to hear this charge of theft that had been made against her, and she began to whine.

"Have pity upon us, kind young lady. There is nobody but mother and me at home now. The gendarmes come and beat us every night. My body is all one big bruise and mother is dying. Oh! kind young lady, do give us some money and some good meat and wine—"

Chanteau, quite exasperated by the girl's string of lies, moved

restlessly in his chair, but Pauline would have given the chemise off her back.

"There! there! That will do," she said. "You would get more if you talked less. Stay where you are, and I will go and make up a basket for you."

When she came back, bringing with her an old fish-hamper, in which she had put a loaf, two litre-bottles of wine and some meat, she found another of her pensioners on the terrace, the young Gonin girl, who had brought her child with her, a girl of some twenty months old now. The mother, who was sixteen years of age, was so fragile and badly developed, that she seemed more like the child's elder sister. She was scarcely able to carry it, but she contrived to drag it along with her, as she knew that Mademoiselle Pauline was very fond of children and could refuse them nothing.

"Good gracious! How heavy she is!" cried Pauline, as she took the child into her arms. "And to think that she is not six months older than our Paul!"

Her eyes involuntarily turned themselves sadly to the baby boy, who was still lying asleep upon the rug. This child-mother, who had been confined at so early an age, was very fortunate to have had such a fine baby.

"If you only knew how much she eats, Mademoiselle Pauline! And I've no bed-linen and nothing to dress her with. And then father is dead too, and mother and her man are always ill-using me. They treat me like the lowest of the low, and say that if I have a baby I ought to bring in what it costs to keep it."

The crippled old man had been found dead in his coal-chest one morning, and he was so blackened with bruises that the police had nearly taken the matter up; and now the woman and her paramour were threatening to strangle the useless brat who consumed a portion of the supplies.

"Poor little thing!" Pauline murmured. "I am knitting her some socks. You must bring her to see me oftener; there is always milk here, and she might take a few spoonfuls of gruel. I will come and see your mother, and I will be angry with her, as she is still behaving unkindly to you."

The girl took her daughter again, while Pauline proceeded to make up a parcel for her. She sat down and held the baby on her knees as awkwardly as a child playing with a doll. Her clear eyes still manifested a continual surprise at her having

brought the child into the world, and, although she suckled it, she often nearly let it fall as she soothed it against her flat bosom. Pauline had severely scolded her one day for having put it down on the edge of the road on a heap of pebbles, while she herself engaged in a stone-throwing encounter with the young Prouane girl.

The Abbé Horteur now appeared upon the terrace.

"Here are Monsieur Lazare and the doctor coming," he announced.

They heard the wheels of the gig, and while Martin, the ex-sailor with the wooden leg, was leading the horse to the stable, Cazenove came out from the yard, crying:

"I am bringing you back the rake who has been away from home all night. You won't be very hard on him, I hope!"

Lazare now appeared with a feeble smile. He was ageing quickly; his shoulders were bent and his face was cadaverous-looking, devastated by the mental anguish which was destroying him. He was just going to explain the reason of his delay, when the window of the first floor, which had remained open, was violently closed.

"Louise hasn't quite finished dressing yet," Pauline explained. "She will be down in a minute or two."

They all looked at one another, and there was a feeling of embarrassment. This angry banging of the window portended a quarrel. After having taken a step or two towards the stairs, Lazare checked himself and determined to wait where he was. He kissed his father and little Paul; and then, to conceal the reason of his disquietude, he tried to lay the blame of it on his cousin, saying to her in a querulous voice:

"Rid us of all this vermin! You know I can't bear to see them anywhere near me."

He was referring to the three girls who were still on the bench. Pauline hastened to fasten up the parcel she had made for the young Gonin girl.

"There! you can go now," she said. "You two just take your comrade home, and take care that she doesn't fall any more. And you, look well after your baby, and try not to forget it or leave it anywhere on the road."

As they were at last setting off, Lazare insisted upon examining the little Tourmal's hamper. She had already contrived to stow away in it an old coffee-pot, which had been thrown aside into a corner and which she had managed to steal. They drove

them all three away, and the young drunkard tottered along between the two others.

"What a dreadful lot they are!" exclaimed the priest, sitting down by Chanteau's side. "God has certainly abandoned them. These young hussies begin having children directly after their first communion and take to drinking and thieving like their parents. Ah, well! I've warned them of what will happen to them some day!"

"Well! my young friend," the doctor said ironically to Lazare, "are you thinking of constructing those famous stockades of yours over again?"

Lazare broke out into an angry gesture. Any allusion to his defeat in his struggle with the sea exasperated him.

"No indeed!" he cried. "I would let the sea sweep into our own house, without even putting a broom-handle across the road to stay its course. No! no! indeed. I've been very foolish as it is, but one doesn't commit that kind of folly twice. I actually saw those scoundrels dancing with delight on the day of the catastrophe! Do you know what I am beginning to think? I feel quite sure that they had sawn through the beams on the day before the spring-tide, for they would never have given way as they did if they had not been tampered with."

He was now trying in this way to salve his wounded pride as an engineer. Then, stretching his hand towards Bonneville, he added:

"Let them all go to smash themselves! I will take my turn at dancing then!"

"Don't say such wicked things!" Pauline observed in her tranquil manner. "It is only the poor who may be excused for being wicked. You ought to build up the stockade again in spite of everything."

Lazare had already calmed down, as though his last burst of passion had exhausted him.

"No! no!" he said, "that would bore me too much. But you are right; there is nothing worth while making one's self angry for. Whether they're drowned or not, what does it matter to me?"

There was a fresh interval of silence. Chanteau had fallen back into his condition of dolorous motionlessness after having raised his head to receive his son's kiss. The priest was twirling his thumbs, and the doctor was pacing about, with his

hands behind his back. They all began to look at little Paul, whom Pauline was defending from his father's caresses, and trying to prevent from being awakened. Since the others had come she had begged them to lower their voices and not to tread so heavily about the rug, and she was now shaking the whip at Loulou, who still continued to growl, which he had commenced doing on hearing the noise of the horse being led to the stable.

"You don't suppose that that will quiet him, do you?" said Lazare. "He's been making that row for the last hour. He's the most trying and disagreeable brute I ever came across. He begins to snarl directly one moves, and one might as well be without a dog at all, he is so completely absorbed in himself. The only good the sulky beast does is to make us regret our poor old Matthew."

"How old is Minouche now?" Cazenove asked. "I have seen her about here as long as I can remember."

"She is turned sixteen," Pauline answered him, "and she keeps very well yet."

Minouche, who was still at her toilet in the dining-room window, raised her head as the doctor pronounced her name. Just for a moment she held her foot suspended in the air, then she again began to delicately lick her fur.

"She isn't deaf yet, you see," Pauline said; "but I fancy her sight is not so good as it was; though that doesn't keep her from going on in a very shameless way. It is scarcely a week ago since seven kittens of hers were drowned. She is always having them. It is really quite terrible to think of the number she has. If all that she has had during the last sixteen years had been allowed to live, they would have eaten the whole neighbourhood up. She disappeared again last Tuesday, and now you see she is washing herself, for she only came home again this morning after three nights and three days of abominations."

The girl spoke without the least embarrassment or blush of the cat's amours. An animal who was so neat and fastidious that she wouldn't even go out of doors on a damp day, and yet who went wallowing four times a year in every gutter in the neighbourhood! Yesterday she had seen her on a wall with a great tom-cat, bristling their tails up stiffly in the air, and then, after an exchange of angry clawings, they had fallen into the middle of a puddle, screeching and shrieking in the most ex-

cruciating way. This time Minouche had returned home from her periodical debauch with one ear slit and her back badly torn. She still remained as unsatisfactory a mother as it was possible to imagine. As each fresh litter was taken away from her, she merely licked herself, as she had done in her youth; and, seeming to entertain no doubts as to her inexhaustible fecundity, she quickly set out again to take in a fresh load.

"At any rate she keeps herself neat and clean," the Abbé Horteur said, looking at Minouche washing herself with her tongue. "So many of your hussies never even wash their faces."

Chanteau, who was, like the others, looking towards the cat, was now moaning more loudly, in his continual and involuntary expression of pain. It had become so habitual with him that he was quite unconscious of it.

"Are you feeling worse?" the doctor asked him.

"Eh! What? Why do you ask?" he said, suddenly seeming to wake up. "Ah! it's because I am breathing heavily. Yes, I am in great pain this evening. I thought that the sun would do me good, but I feel as though I were being suffocated, and I haven't a joint that isn't burning."

Cazenove examined his hands. They all shuddered at the sight of the poor deformed stumps. The priest made another of his deep observations.

"Such fingers as those are not adapted for playing draughts. That's an amusement which you can't have now."

"Be very careful about what you eat and drink," the doctor urged. "Your elbow is highly inflamed, and the ulceration is increasing."

"How can I be more careful than I am?" Chanteau wailed hopelessly. "My wine is all measured out and my meat is weighed! Must I give up taking anything at all? Indeed, it isn't living to go on like this, and one might as well die at once. I can't eat without assistance—how is it likely with such things as these at the end of my arms?—and you may be quite sure that Pauline, who feeds me, takes care that I don't get anything that I oughtn't to have."

The young girl smiled.

"Yes, indeed," she said, "you ate too much yesterday. It was my fault, but I couldn't refuse, when I saw how your appetite was distressing you."

Then they all affected to grow merry, and they began to tease

him about the junketings in which they pretended he still indulged. But their voices trembled with pity at the sight of this remnant of a man, this inert mass of flesh, which now only lived to suffer. He had fallen back into his usual position, his body leaning to the right and his hands lying on his knees.

"This evening, now, for instance," Pauline continued, "we are going to have a duck—"

Then she suddenly checked herself and added:

"By the way, did you happen to see anything of Véronique as you came through Verchemont?"

Then she told Lazare and the doctor the story of Véronique's disappearance, but neither of them had seen anything of her. They expressed some astonishment at the woman's strange whims, and ended by growing merry over the subject. It would be a fine sight, they said, to see her face when she came back and found them already round the table with the dinner all cooked and served.

"I must leave you now," Pauline said gaily, "for I must go back to the kitchen. If I let the stew get burnt or serve the duck underdone my uncle will give me notice!"

The Abbé Horteur broke out into a loud laugh, and even Doctor Cazenove himself seemed tickled at the idea, when the window on the first floor was suddenly thrown open with a tremendous clatter. Louise did not show herself, but merely cried out in a sharp voice through the opening:

"Come upstairs, Lazare!"

At first Lazare seemed inclined to rebel and to refuse obedience to a command uttered in such a tone. But Pauline, anxious to avoid a scene before visitors, glanced at him with a look of supplication, and he went off to the house, while his cousin remained for a moment or two longer on the terrace to do what she could to dissipate the awkwardness of the situation. No one spoke, and they all continued to look at the sea in embarrassment. The westering sun was now lighting it up into a sheet of gold, and crowning the slight blue ripples with quivering fires. Far away in the distance the horizon was glowing with a tender lilac. The lovely day was drawing towards its close in perfect serenity, and not a cloud or a sail flecked the infinite reach of sky and sea.

"Well, as he never came home last night," Pauline at last ventured to say with a smile, "I suppose it is necessary to lecture him a little."

The doctor looked at her, and he, too, smiled a smile in which Pauline could read again his prediction of former days, when he told her that she wasn't making them a very desirable present in giving them to each other. Then she began to walk away towards the kitchen.

"Well, I must really leave you now," she said. "Try to amuse yourselves. Call for me, uncle, if Paul wakes up again,"

In the kitchen, when she had stirred the stew and got the spit ready, she knocked the pots and pans about impatiently. The voices of Louise and Lazare reached her with increasing loudness through the ceiling, and she grew distressed as she thought that they would certainly be heard out on the terrace. It was very absurd of them, she said to herself, to go on shouting out in that way as though they were both deaf, and letting everyone know of their disagreements. But she did not care to go up to them, partly because she had to get the dinner ready, and partly because she felt ill at ease at the thought of going and interfering with them in their own room. It was generally downstairs, in the common life of the family, that she played her part of reconciler. She went into the dining-room for a few moments, where she busied herself with laying the table. But the voices still continued, and she could no longer bear the thought that they were making themselves unhappy, and so, impelled by that spirit of active charity which made the happiness of others the chief thought of her life, she went upstairs.

"My dear children," she exclaimed, entering the room suddenly, "I daresay you will tell me it is no business of mine, but you are really making too much noise. It is very foolish of you to excite yourselves in this way and disturb the whole house."

She had hastily stepped across the room, and at once closed the window which Louise had left open. Fortunately, neither the priest nor the doctor had remained on the terrace. With one quick glance she had seen that there was no one there except the drowsing Chanteau and little Paul, who was still sleeping.

"We could hear you out there as plainly as if you had been in the dining-room," she resumed. "Come, now, what is the matter, this time?"

But their tempers were aroused, and they continued their quarrelling without taking any notice of Pauline's entrance.

She was now standing quite still and silent, feeling ill at ease again in this room where the husband and wife slept. The yellow cretonne with its green pattern, the old mahogany furniture and the red carpet, had been replaced by heavy woollen hangings and furniture more in harmony with Louise's fastidious delicacy. There was nothing left to remind one of the dead mother. The scent of heliotrope breathed from the toilet-table, on which were lying some damp towels, and the perfume made Pauline feel a little stifled. She involuntarily glanced round the room, in which every object spoke of the familiarity of husband and wife. Though she had at last, as her rebellious thoughts calmed themselves down, prevailed upon herself to continue living with them, and though she could now sleep at nights, even while she knew that they were together, perhaps clasped in each other's arms, she had never yet entered their room in the midst of their conjugal privacy, amongst this litter of garments lying scattered about and the bed already prepared for the night. She was trembling again, trembling with the tremor of her old jealousy.

"How can you make each other so unhappy?" she murmured, after a short interval of silence. "Are you determined to go on in this foolish way?"

"I'm tired enough of it!" Louise cried. "But he never will allow that he is at all in the wrong. I merely told him how uneasy he had made us all by not coming home last night, and then he flew at me like a wild beast, and accused me of having ruined his life, and threatened that he would go off to America!"

Lazare interrupted her in furious tones:

"You are lying! If you had chided me for my absence in that gentle fashion, I should have kissed you, and there would have been an end of the matter. But it was you who accused me, accused me of causing you to spend your life in tears. Yes, you threatened to go and throw yourself into the sea, if I continued to make it impossible for you to go on living."

Then they flew at each other again, and gave vent to all the bitterness which the continued jarrings of their temperaments excited in them. The slightest little matters set them bickering, and then quickly wrought them up to a state of exasperated antipathy, which made all the rest of the day wretched and miserable. Louise, with her pretty, soft looks, was, when her enjoyment was interfered with, as malicious as a fawning cat,

that loves to be caressed, but strikes out with its claws at the slightest irritation; while Lazare found in these quarrels a relief from his besetting ennui, and frequently persisted in them for the sake of the excitement they caused him.

Pauline continued to listen to them. She was suffering greater unhappiness than they themselves were. This fashion of loving each other was quite beyond her comprehension. Why couldn't they make mutual allowances and accommodate themselves to each other, since they had got to live together? She was bitterly disappointed and pained, for she still continued to consider the marriage as her own work, and she longed to see it a happy and harmonious one, and to feel compensated for the sacrifice she had made by knowing that at any rate she had not acted foolishly.

"I never reproach you for squandering my fortune," Louise continued.

"There was only that accusation wanting!" Lazare cried. "It wasn't my fault that I was robbed of it."

"Oh! it is only stupid folks who allow their pockets to be emptied who are robbed. But, any way, we are now reduced to a miserable income of four or five thousand francs, barely sufficient to enable us to live in this hole of a place. If it were not for Pauline, our child would have to go naked one of these days, for I quite expect that you will throw away all that we have left with your extraordinary fads and speculations that come to grief one after the other."

"There! there! Prate away! Your father has already paid me some pretty compliments. I guessed you had been writing to him. I've given up this speculation in manure in consequence; though I know it was a perfectly safe thing, with cent per cent to be gained. But now I'm like you, and I've had enough of it, and the deuce take me if I bother myself any more. We will go on living here."

"A pretty existence, isn't it, for a woman of my age? It's nothing but a gaol, with never an opportunity of going out or seeing anybody, and this stupid sea for ever in front of one, which only seems to increase your ennui— Oh, if I had only known! If I had only known!"

"And do you suppose that I am enjoying myself here? If I were not married, I should be able to go off to some distant place and try my fortune. I have longed to do so a score times. But that's all at an end now, and I'm nailed down to this wilder-

ness of a place, where there is nothing to do but to go to sleep. You have done for me, I feel that very clearly."

"I done for you ! I !—I didn't force you to marry me, did I ? It was you who ought to have seen that we were not suited to each other. It is your fault, if our lives are ruined."

"Ah ! yes, indeed, our lives are certainly ruined, and you do all you can to make them more intolerable every day."

Pauline, though she had resolved not to interfere between them, could no longer restrain herself.

"Oh ! do give over, you unhappy creatures ! You seem to take a pleasure in marring a life that might have been such a happy one. Why will you goad each other into saying things which you cannot recall and which make you so wretched ? Hold your tongues, both of you ! I won't let this go on any longer."

Louise had fallen into a chair in a fit of tears, while Lazare, who was in a state of wild excitement, was pacing with wide strides about the room.

"Crying won't do any good, my dear," Pauline continued. "You are not far from right in what you said. You have had to bear many wrongs. And you, my poor boy, how can you treat her in this unkind fashion ? It is abominable of you. I thought that at any rate you had a kind heart. You are, both of you, a couple of overgrown children, and are equally in fault, making yourselves wretched without knowing why. But I won't have it any longer, do you hear ? I won't have unhappy people about me. Come and kiss each other at once !"

She tried to laugh, and she now no longer felt that tremor which had at first so disquieted her. She was only thrilled now with the burning desire of kindliness, the desire of seeing these two wrapt in each other's arms, that she might be sure their quarrel was at an end.

"Kiss him, indeed ! I should just think so !" Louise cried. "He has insulted me too much !"

"Never !" exclaimed Lazare.

Then Pauline broke out into a merry laugh.

"Come ! come !" she said ; "don't sulk with each other. You know I am very determined about having my own way. The dinner is getting burnt and our guests are waiting. If you don't do as I tell you, Lazare, I shall come and make you. Go down on your knees before her, and clasp her affectionately to your heart. No ! no ! you must do it better than that !"

Then she made them twine their arms closely and lovingly

round each other, and watched them kiss each other with an air of joyful triumph, without the least sign of trouble in her clear, calm eyes. There was within her a warm, thrilling joy, like some subtle fire, which elevated her above them. Lazare strained his wife to him in a flood of remorse; and Louise, still wearing her dressing-jacket, and with her neck and arms bare, returned his caresses, while her tears streamed more freely than before.

"There! that's much nicer, isn't it, than quarrelling?" said Pauline. "I will be off, now that you don't want me any longer to make peace between you."

She sprang to the door as she spoke, and closed it quickly behind her upon that chamber of love, with its turned-down bed and litter of clothes, and its perfume of heliotrope, which still thrilled her with a kind of soft emotion, as though it were an accomplice perfume which would complete her task of reconciliation.

When she got downstairs again to the kitchen, Pauline began to sing as she stirred her stew. Then she threw a bundle of wood into the fire, hung up the turnspit, and began to watch the duck roast with a critical eye. It amused her to have to play the servant's part. She tied a great white apron round her, and she was quite pleased at the thought of waiting upon them all and undertaking the most humble duties, that she might be able to tell them that it was to her that they were to-day indebted for their gaiety and their nourishment. Now that, thanks to her, they were smiling and happy, she wanted to serve them with a festive repast of very good things, of which they would eat largely as they grew mirthful and bright round the table.

She thought of her uncle and the child again, and she hastily ran out on to the terrace, where she was greatly astonished to find her cousin sitting by the side of his little son.

"What!" she exclaimed, "have you come down already?"

He merely nodded his head in answer. He seemed to have fallen back into his old state of weary indifference; his shoulders were bent and his hands were lying listlessly in front of him. Then Pauline said to him with an expression of uneasy anxiety:

"I hope you didn't begin again as soon as my back was turned."

"No! no!" he at last prevailed upon himself to reply.

"She will be down as soon as she has put on her dress. We have quite forgiven each other and made it up. But how long will it all last? To-morrow there will be something else; every day, every hour! You can't change people, and you can't prevent these things happening."

Pauline became very grave, and her saddened eyes sought the ground. Lazare was right. She could see clearly a long series of days like this in store for them, the same ceaseless quarrels between them, which she would have to smooth away. And she was no longer quite sure that she was altogether cured herself, and might not again give way to her old violent outbursts of jealousy. Ah! were these daily troubles never to have an end? But she had already raised her eyes again, as she had remembered how many times she had won the victory over herself; and as for those other two, she was quite sure that they would grow tired of quarrelling with each other before she did of reconciling them. This thought served to cheer her, and she laughingly repeated it to Lazare. What would be left for her to do, if the house were perfectly happy and untroubled? She would fall a victim to ennui if she hadn't some little roughness to smooth away.

"Where are the Abbé and the doctor?" she asked, surprised to see them no longer there.

"They must have gone into the kitchen-garden," Chanteau said. "The Abbé wanted to show our pears to the doctor."

Pauline was going to look from the corner of the terrace, when she stopped short before little Paul.

"Ah! He's woke up again!" she cried. "Just look at him! He's already trying to be off on the loose!"

Paul had just pulled himself up on to his little knees in the midst of the rug, and then he began to creep slyly off on all fours. But before he had reached the gravel he had tripped on a fold of the rug, and he rolled over on to his back with his frock thrown back, and his little legs and arms in the air. He was kicking about and wriggling his rosy nudity in the midst of the poppy-like brilliance of the rug.

"Well! he's showing us all he's got!" Pauline cried merrily. "Look and you shall see how he's improved in his walking since yesterday."

She knelt down by his side and tried to put him on his feet. He had developed so slowly that he was very backward for his age, and they had feared for a time that he would always be

weak on his legs. So it was a great joy to the family to see him making his first essays at walking, clutching at the air with his hands, and tumbling down over the smallest bit of gravel.

"Come now! give over playing," Pauline cried to him. "Come and show them that you are a man. There now, keep yourself steady, and go and kiss your father, and then you shall go and kiss your grandfather."

Chanteau, whose face was racked with sharp shooting pains, turned his head to watch the scene. Notwithstanding his despondency, Lazare, too, willingly lent himself to the fun.

"Come along!" he cried to the child.

"Oh! you must stretch out your arms towards him," Pauline explained. "He won't venture if you don't. He likes to see something that he can fall against. Come, my treasure, pluck up a little courage!"

There were three steps for him to take. There were loving exclamations and unbounded enthusiasm when Paul made up his mind to make the short passage with all the balancings of a tight-rope-walker who is a little uncertain of his legs. He fell into the arms of his father, who kissed him on his still scanty hair, and he smiled with an infant's vague and delighted smile, opening very widely his damp and rosy little mouth. Then his godmother wanted to make him talk, but his tongue was still more backward than his legs, and he only uttered some guttural sounds in which his relatives alone could distinguish the words "father" and "mother."

"Oh! but there's something else yet to be done," Pauline said. "He has promised to go and kiss his grandfather. Go along with you! It's a fine walk you've got before you this time!"

There were at least eight steps between Lazare's chair and Chanteau's. Paul had never ventured so far out into the world before, and so there was considerable excitement about the matter. Pauline had taken up her position half-way to prevent accidents, and it took two long minutes to get the child persuaded to make a start. At last he set off, swaying about, and his hands clutching the air. For an instant Pauline thought that she would have to catch him in her arms, but he bravely pushed forward and fell upon Chanteau's knees. Bursts of applause greeted him.

Then they made him make the journey half a score times

more. He no longer showed any signs of fear; he started off at the first call, went from his grandfather to his father and then back again to his grandfather, laughing loudly all the time, and quite enjoying the fun, though he always seemed just on the point of tumbling down, as though the ground were shaking beneath him.

"Just once again to father!" Pauline cried.

Lazare was beginning to get a little tired. Children, even his own, quickly bored him. As he looked at his child, so merry and now apparently quite strong, the thought flashed through his mind that this little creature would out-live him and would doubtless close his eyes for the last time, and the idea racked him with a keen agony. Since he had come to the determination to go on vegetating at Bonneville, he was constantly preoccupied with the thought that he would die in the room where his mother had died; and he never went up the stairs without telling himself that one day his coffin would pass that way. The entrance to the passage was very narrow, and there was an awkward turning which was a perpetual source of disquietude to him, and he tormented himself by wondering how the bearers would be able to carry him out without jolting him. As increasing age day by day shortened his remaining span of life, this constant dwelling upon the thought of death hastened the breaking up of his being, and ate away his last remnants of manliness. He was quite done for, he often told himself, and was of no further use; and he would ask himself what was the good of bestirring himself, as he fell over deeper and deeper into the slough of his ennui.

"Just once more to grandfather!" cried Pauline.

Chanteau was not able to stretch out his arms to receive and support his grandson, and when he put his knees apart, the frail fingers of the child clutching hold of his trousers extorted long groans of pain from him. The little lad was already quite used to the old man's ceaseless moaning, and probably imagined, in his scarcely awakened intelligence, that all grandfathers suffered in the same way. But to-day, in the bright sunshine, as he came and fell against him, he turned up his little face, and checked his laugh as he gazed into his vacillating eyes. His two deformed hands were like hideous blocks of flesh and chalk; his face, hollowed with red wrinkles and disfigured with suffering, looked as though it had been violently warped over towards his right shoulder; while his whole body was covered

with humps and cracks, like the badly pieced fragments of some old stone saint. Paul appeared quite surprised to see him looking so ill and so old in the sunshine.

"Just once more! Just once more!" cried Pauline again.

She, who was rampant with health and gay cheerfulness, kept sending the little lad to and fro between the two men, from the grandfather, sunk hopelessly in pain and suffering, to the father, already undermined and decayed by his terror of the morrow.

"Perhaps his generation will be a less foolish one than this," she suddenly exclaimed. "He will not accuse chemistry of spoiling his life, and he will believe that it is possible to live, even with the certainty of having some day to die."

Lazare broke out into an embarrassed smile.

"Bah!" he said. "He will have the gout like my father, and his nerves will be worse strung than mine. Just see how weak he is! It is the law of degeneration."

"Don't talk such stuff!" cried Pauline. "I will bring him up, and see if I don't make a man of him!"

There was a moment's silence, during which she clasped the child to her in a motherly embrace.

"Why don't you get married, as you're so fond of children?" Lazare asked.

She looked at him in amazement.

"But I have a child! Haven't you given me one?—I get married! Never!

She dandled little Paul in her arms, and laughed pleasantly as she said that Lazare had quite converted her to the doctrines of the great Saint Schopenhauer, and that she would remain unmarried in order to be able to work for the universal deliverance. She was herself, indeed, the incarnation of renunciation, of love for others and kindly charity for erring humanity.

The sun was seeking his rest in the boundless waters, and the paling sky breathed out a perfect tranquillity, while the infinite expanses of air and sea lay wrapped in all the mellow softness of the close of a lovely day. One single little white sail gleamed far away on the waters, but it vanished as the sun sank beneath the long line of the horizon. Then there was nothing to be seen save the gradual deepening of the twilight over the sleeping sea.

Pauline was still dandling the child, and keeping up her

brave gaiety, as she stood in the middle of the terrace, that was now growing grey in the increasing dusk, between her despairing cousin and her moaning uncle. She had stripped herself of everything, and her clear laugh rang with happiness.

"Aren't we going to dine this evening?" asked Louise, who now made her appearance in a coquettish dress of grey silk.

"I'm quite ready," Pauline replied. "I can't think what they can be doing in the garden."

Just at this moment Abbé Horteur appeared, looking very much disturbed and distressed. In reply to their anxious questions, after having sought about for some phrase which would soften the shock, he ended by bluntly saying to them:

"We have just discovered poor Véronique hanging from one of your pear-trees."

They all cried out with surprise and horror, and their faces paled beneath the presence of death in the air.

"But what could make her do such a thing?" Pauline cried. "She could have had no reason, and she had even commenced to prepare the dinner. It can scarcely be because I told her that they had made her pay ten sous too much for her duck!"

Doctor Cazenove now came up. For the last quarter of an hour he had been vainly trying to restore animation to the poor woman's body in the coach-house, where Martin had helped them to carry it. They could never tell, he said, what these whimsical old servants would do. She had never got over her mistress's death.

"She had just strung herself up by the strings of one of her kitchen-aprons," he added.

Lazare and Louise, frozen with terror, said not a word. Chanteau, after having listened in silence, felt a sudden pang of disgust as he thought of the compromised dinner. And this miserable creature without hands or feet, who had to be put to bed and fed like a child, this pitiable remnant of a man, whose almost vanished life was nothing more than one scream of pain, cried out in furious indignation:

"She must have been cracked to go and kill herself!"

THE END.



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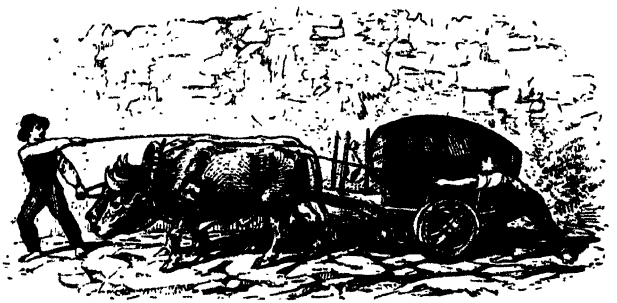
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