

A LOVE EPISODE.

A REALISTIC NOVEL.

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A LOVE EPISODE.

A REALISTIC NOVEL.

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 2ND FRENCH EDITION.

Illustrated with Eight Page Engravings.

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PREFACE.

THE panoramic sketches which serve as finishing touches to the five books of "A Love Episode," and which have been designed to give some completeness to the work, have drawn from my critics severe strictures. Their recurrence is only due, they declare, to an artistic whim prompting the undertaking of wearisome repetition that the writer's skill might be vindicated in overcoming a difficulty without any loss of interest resulting. The possibility of self-delusion on my part is amply proved—that I have been led into a delusion admits of no doubt—as no one has grasped my idea; but the truth is that my every intention has been laudable, for I have been purposely bent on painting those five pictures of the same scene when witnessed at different hours and different seasons. My explanation is as follows.

In my poverty-stricken youth I lodged in an attic in the suburbs, from which I could gaze on the wide expanse of Paris. Paris, like a huge Titan, motionless and indifferent, lay ever beneath my window, and was to me as a grim confidant in my joys and sorrow. I

suffered the pangs of hunger, I wept in its presence; and in its presence I first knew love and my greatest happiness.

Well, since my twentieth year it had been one of my dreams to write a novel in which Paris, with its ocean of roofs, should enact a character, somewhat after the style of the Chorus of the ancients. I decided on depicting a homely drama played by three or four persons in a small room, while the mighty city, stretching to the horizon, was an ever-present witness gazing with stony eyes on their laughter and tears. And this thought of other days I have striven to realise in "A Love Episode."

I do not, therefore, seek to defend these five attempts at word-painting, but would only point out that, in what has been stigmatised as a mania for description, I have very rarely yielded to the mere desire of florid writing. In my mind they have had a consistent and human connection with the action; they have been wholly intentional on my part, and in striving to make these descriptions an integral part of the work, I have thought of the story as a bridge in which they served as key-stone.

One word more regarding these word-paintings of Paris. Some critics, in their fault-finding over minute details, after having "slated" my book, discovered that I had perpetrated the unpardonable anachronism of having described the structures of the new Opera House and the cupola of Saint-Augustin as towering above our immense city from the first years of the

Second Empire, when they certainly had not been called into existence.

When, in the April of 1877, I began to frequent the hill of Passy to take my notes, and when the hideous scaffolding that foretold the future magnificence of the Trocadéro was an eye-sore on the scene, I was rather annoyed to find that there was no landmark on the north which might aid me in giving some point to my descriptions.

The new Opera House and Saint-Augustin were the only objects springing above the confused sea of chimney-stacks. At first my respect for dates gave me some trouble. But the huge masses, glittering in the sun's rays, offered too great a temptation, rendering my task much easier, and, with their lofty tracery, allowing me to impart a personal interest to a whole quarter of Paris that was otherwise without buildings of any prominence. I gave way to the temptation, and my work is certainly worth nothing were my readers unable to make up their minds to accept an intentional error of some years in the age of two buildings.

ÉMILE ZOLA.

A LOVE EPISODE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE night lamp was burning on the chimney-piece, its fork of bluish flame glimmering behind a book, the shadow of which plunged more than half the chamber in darkness. The patch of light was steady, dividing the round table from the invalid chair, streaming across the heavy folds of the velvet curtains, and revealing depths of blue in the mirror of the rosewood wardrobe placed between the two windows. The quiet simplicity of the room, the blue tints on the hangings, furniture, and carpet, served at this hour of night to invest everything with the delightful vagueness of cloudland. Facing the windows, and within sweep of the shadow, gloomed the bed, with its velvet curtains, a black mass relieved only by the white of the sheets. With hands crossed on her bosom, and breathing lightly, lay Hélène, asleep—mother and widow alike speaking in the quiet unrestraint of her attitude.

In the midst of the silence one o'clock chimed from the time-piece. The noises of the neighbourhood had died away; the dull, distant roar of the city was the only sign of life that disturbed these Trocadéro heights. Hélène's breathing, so light and gentle, broke not at all the chaste repose of her bosom. She was in a beauteous sleep, peaceful yet sound, her profile perfect, the nut-brown hair twisted into a knot, and the head leaning forward somewhat, as though she had fallen asleep while eagerly listening. At the further end of the room the open door of an adjoining closet seemed but a square of blackness in the wall.

Still there was not a sound. The half-hour rang. The pendulum gave a feeble tick-tack through the general drowsiness that overwhelmed the whole chamber. Everything was

sleeping, night-lamp and furniture alike; on the table, near an extinguished lamp, some woman's handiwork was disposed in decorous slumber. Hélène in her sleep retained her air of gravity and goodness.

Two o'clock struck, and the stillness was broken. A deep sigh issued from amidst the darkness of the closet. There was a rustling of linen sheets, and silence reigned again. Anon laboured breathing broke through the gloom. Hélène had not moved. Suddenly she started up, for the moanings and cries of a child in pain jarred on her ear. Dazed with sleep, she pressed her hands against her temples, but consciousness swiftly returned with the child's stifled sobbing, and she leaped from her couch.

"Jeanne! my Jeanne!" was the mother's pained expression; "what ails you? tell me, love." The child was silent, and in her agitation the mother exclaimed, as she ran towards the night-light:

"Gracious Heaven! why did I fall asleep when she was so ill?"

Quickly she entered the closet, where the stillness seemed woeful. The feeble gleam of the lamp threw a circular patch of light on the ceiling. Bending over the iron cot, she could make out nothing for the time, but the dim light soon revealed amidst the bed-clothes, tossed about in disorder, Jeanne, with limbs quite stiff, her head flung back, the muscles of her neck swollen and rigid. The whilom sweet face was contorted, the eyes were open, and the gaze was fixed on the curtain rod above.

"My child!" rang out again the agonised cry. "My God! she is dying."

Setting down the lamp, she touched her daughter with trembling hands. The throbbing of the pulse and the heart's action seemed to have died away. The tiny arms and legs had been convulsively stretched out; and with the sight the mother grew frantic.

"My child! save my child!" came her panic-stricken prayer. "My child! Oh, my child!"

She wandered back to her room, brushing against the furniture and unconscious of her movements; then, distracted, she returned again to the little bed, throwing herself on her knees, and ever appealing for help. She clutched up the child, rained kisses on her hair, and stroked the little body, seeking one

word—only one word—from the reluctant lips. Where was the pain? Would she have some of the cooling drink she liked the other day? Perhaps the fresh air would revive her? So she rattled on, bent on making the child speak.

"Speak to me, darling Jeanne! speak to me, sweet! your mother asks."

Oh, God! and not to know what to do in this sudden terror born of the night! No sun to kindle everything into warmth. Still her supplications to the child continued—at one moment she was beseeching, at another answering in her own person. Thus, the pain gripped her in the stomach; no, no, it must be in the breast. It was nothing at all; only one must be a little patient. She tried to collect her scattered senses; but as she felt her daughter stark and stiff in her embrace, her heart sickened unto death. She tried to reason with herself, and to resist the yearning to scream. Nature prevailed, and a cry rang through the room:

"Rosalie, Rosalie, the child! the child! she is dying. Quick, hasten for the doctor!"

Screaming out these words, she ran through dining-room and kitchen to a room in the rear, where the maid started up from sleep, giving vent to her surprise. Hélène speeded back again. Clad only in her night-dress she moved about, seeming not to feel the icy cold of the February night. Pah! this maid would loiter, and her child would die! Back again she hurried through the kitchen to the bed-room before a minute had passed. Violently, and in the dark, she slipped on a petticoat, and threw a shawl over her shoulders. The furniture in her way was overturned, her rage and despair breaking in on the room's profound stillness. Then, leaving the doors open, she rushed down the three storeys in her slippers, consumed with the one thought of bringing back a doctor.

After the porter had opened the door Hélène found herself upon the pavement, with a singing in her ears and almost swooning. She ran quickly down the Rue Vineuse, pulled the door-bell of Doctor Bodin who had already tended Jeanne; but a servant—how the moments seemed an eternity!—informed her that the doctor was attending a woman in child-bed. Hélène remained stupefied on the pathway; she knew no other doctor in Passy. A moment or two she idled, gazing at the houses. A slight but keen wind was blowing, and she was walking in slippers through the light snow that had fallen dur-

ing the evening. Ever before her was her daughter swimming into her vision, and the thought of her was such anguish that she almost died in the disappointment of not finding a doctor at once. Then, as she retraced her steps along the Rue Vineuse, she rang the bell of another house. She would go on asking, she said to herself; some one would direct her; she gave a second tug at the bell; no one seemed to come. The wind played with the petticoat, making it cling to her legs, and tossed about her dishevelled hair.

At last a servant answered to her summons. "Doctor Deberle was in bed asleep." It was a doctor's house at which she had rung, and Heaven had not abandoned her! Straightway, intent upon crossing the threshold, she pushed the servant aside, still repeating her one prayer:

"My child, my darling child, is dying! Oh, tell him he must come!"

The house was small and seemed full of tapestry. She reached the first floor despite the servant's opposition, answering his protests with the constant "My child is dying!" In the apartment she entered she would have been content to wait; but the moment she heard the doctor stirring in the next room, she rushed across and appealed to him through the door-way:

"Oh, sir, come at once, I beseech you. My child is dying!"

When at last the doctor appeared in a short coat and without a neck-cloth, she dragged him away without allowing him to finish dressing. He recognised her at once as a resident in the next-door house, and therefore one of his own tenants; so when he induced her to cross through a garden, the way being shortened by using a side-door between the two houses, memory awoke suddenly within her.

"True, you are a doctor!" exclaimed she, "and I knew it. But I have become distracted. Oh, let us hasten!"

On the staircase she wished him to go first. She could not have admitted God Himself to her house in a devouter manner. Upstairs Rosalie had remained near the child, and had lit the lamp placed on the table. After the doctor had entered the room he took up the lamp and flooded with its light the body of the child, which retained its awful rigidity; the head, however, had slipped forward and nervous twitchings were ceaselessly drawing the face. For a minute his lips were compressed into silence. Hélène anxiously watched him, and on his

noticing the mother's looks bent on him, he whispered his reassurance.

"It will be nothing," he said. "But she is in danger lying here. She must have air."

Hélène grasped her in a strong embrace, and lifted her away on her shoulder. She could have kissed the doctor's hand for his good tidings, and a wave of happiness rippled through her. Scarcely, however, had Jeanne been placed in the larger bed than the little frame was again seized with violent convulsions. The doctor had removed the shade from the lamp, and the room was brightly lit up. Then, quickly opening the window half-way, he ordered Rosalie to drag the bed from beneath the curtains. Hélène's heart was again filled with anguish.

"Oh, sir, she is dying," she exclaimed, brokenly. "Look! look! Ah! I scarcely recognise her."

He did not reply, but watched the paroxysm with an attentive eye. Then at last:

"Walk into the alcove," he exclaimed. "Hold her hands to prevent her tearing herself. Now, there now, gently, quietly! Don't make yourself uneasy. The fit must just be allowed to have its way."

Both then bent over the bed, supporting Jeanne. The jerks and shocks were vibrating through her tiny limbs. The doctor had buttoned up his coat to hide his bare neck, and Hélène's shoulders had been enveloped till now in her shawl; but Jeanne in her struggles had dragged away a corner of the shawl, and unbuttoned the top of the coat. They did not notice it; they never even looked at one another.

However, the convulsion died away, and the little one appeared to be quite prostrate. Doctor Deberle was evidently ill at ease, though he had assured the mother that there was no danger. He kept his gaze fixed on the sufferer, and put some brief questions to Hélène as she stood by the bed-side.

"How old is the child?"

"Eleven years and six months, sir," was the reply.

Silence again fell between them. He shook his head, and, stooping down, raised Jeanne's closed eyelid and examined the mucus. He resumed his questions, but without raising his eyes to Hélène.

"Did she have convulsions when a baby?"

"Yes, sir; but they left her after she reached her sixth birthday. Ah! she is very delicate. For some days past

I have seen signs of something wrong. She was at times all limp and numb, and plunged in a stupor."

"Do you know if any member of your family suffered from a nervous affection?"

"I don't know. My mother was carried off by consumption."

Here shame made her pause. She could not confess to having a grandmother who had been an inmate of a lunatic asylum. There was something horrible connected with all her race.

"Take care! the convulsions are coming on again!"

It was the doctor who spoke, and he was all alive to the new attack. Jeanne slowly opened her eyes, and gazed around her with a vacant look, never speaking a word. The look slowly became fixed, the body was thrown violently backwards, and all the limbs became distended and rigid. Her skin was fiery-red, but all at once she turned livid. Her pallor was the pallor of death; the convulsions were renewed.

"Do not loose your hold of her," said the doctor. "Take her other hand!"

He ran to the table, where, on his entering, he had placed a small medicine-case. He came back with a bottle, the contents of which he made Jeanne inhale; but he might as well have laid a lash on the child's body, for she struggled so fiercely that she slipped from her mother's hands.

"No, no, don't give her ether," exclaimed Hélène, as the odour made her aware of its presence. "It drives her mad."

The two had scarcely strength to support the child. Her frame was racked and contorted, and she raised herself by her heels and the nape of the neck, as if she were bent in two. This over, she fell back again, tossing from one side of the bed to the other. Her fists were clenched, and the thumbs were bent against the palms. At times she would open her hands, and, with fingers wide apart, make vain grasps at phantom bodies in the air. She touched her mother's shawl and fiercely clung to it. But the mother's complaint and great grief was that she no longer recognised her daughter. The suffering angel, whose face was once so sweet, was transformed in every feature, while her eyes were sunken and their whites of a leaden-blue.

"Oh, do something, I implore you!" she murmured. "My strength is almost exhausted."

She recalled with horrible distinctness how the child of a neighbour at Marseilles had died of suffocation in a similar fit. Perhaps from feelings of pity the doctor was deceiving her. Every moment she believed she felt Jeanne's last breath against her face; all respiration seemed to have ceased. Heart-broken and overwhelmed with terror, she burst into weeping. The tears fell hot on the child's innocent body that lay altogether naked, she having thrown off the clothes.

The doctor, in the meantime, was gently kneading the base of the neck with his long and supple fingers. Gradually the fit died away, and Jeanne, after a slight twitch or two, lay without movement. She had fallen back in the middle of the bed with limbs stretched out, while her head inclined towards her bosom was supported by the pillow. One might have thought her an infant Jesus. Hélène stooped down and pressed a long kiss on her brow.

"Is it over?" asked she in a whisper. "Do you think she'll have another fit?"

He made an evasive gesture, and then replied:

"In any case, the others will be less violent."

He had asked Rosalie for a glass and water-bottle. Filling the glass half-full he took up two fresh medicine bottles and counted out a number of drops. Hélène assisted by lifting up the child's head, and the doctor succeeded in pouring a spoonful of the liquid between the clenched teeth. The flame of the lamp leaped up high and clear, revealing the disorder of the chamber's furnishings. Hélène's garments, that had been thrown on the back of an arm-chair before she slipped into bed, had now fallen down and were littering the carpet. The doctor had trodden on her stays, and had picked them up lest he might find them again in his way. An odour of vervain stole up from the disarranged bed and the linen scattered about. It was all the privacy of a woman's chamber roughly exposed. The doctor went himself for the basin, soaked a linen cloth in it, which he then pressed to Jeanne's temples.

"Oh, madame, you'll take cold!" expostulated Rosalie as she shivered all over. "Perhaps the window might be shut. The air is too raw."

"No, no!" cried Hélène; "leave the window open. Should it not be so?" she appealed to the doctor.

The wind entered in slight puffs, rustling the curtains to and fro; but she was quite unconscious of it. Yet the shawl had quite slipped off her shoulders, displaying her throat and bosom. Her back-hair had become undone, and some wanton tresses swept down to her hips. She had left her arms free and uncovered, that she might be the more ready; she had forgotten all; all was swallowed up in her love for her child. In her presence the doctor, occupied with his work, thought no longer of his unbuttoned coat, nor of the shirt-collar that Jeanne's clutch had torn away.

"Raise her up a little," said he. "No, no, not in that way! Give me your hand."

He took her hand and placed it under the child's head. He wished to give Jeanne another spoonful of the medicine. Then he called her close to him and made use of her as his assistant. She obeyed him religiously on seeing that her daughter was quieter.

"Now, come," he said. "You must let her head lean against your shoulder, while I listen."

Hélène did as she was bid, and he bent over her to place his ear against Jeanne's bosom. He touched with his cheek her naked shoulder, and as the pulsation of the child's heart struck against his ear, he could have heard the throbbing from the mother's breast. As he rose up his breath mingled with Hélène's.

"There is nothing wrong there," was the quiet remark that made her flush with joy. "Lay her down again. We need not distress her more."

But another paroxysm followed, though much less violent. From Jeanne's lips burst some broken words. At short intervals two fresh attacks seemed about to convulse her, and then a great prostration, somewhat alarming the doctor, fell on the child. He had placed her so that her head lay high, with the clothes carefully tucked under her chin. For nearly an hour he stood, watching his patient closely, as though awaiting the return of a healthy respiration. On the other side of the bed, Hélène waited too, never moving a limb.

Little by little a great calm was settling on Jeanne's face. It was even sunny with the light of the lamp, and it again regained its exquisite oval, though a little attenuated; beauty and refinement breathing in every feature. Her fine eyes, now closed, had large lids, transparent but for the blue veins, and



HÉLÈNE AND THE DOCTOR AT JEANNE'S BEDSIDE.



beneath them could almost be seen the sombre flash of her glance. Through the slender nose came her light breathing; and round the somewhat large mouth played a vague smile. She slept thus, pillowed amongst her own inky-black tresses.

"The attack has passed away now," said the doctor in a whisper, and he turned to arrange his medicine-bottles prior to leaving.

"Oh, sir!" Hélène exclaimed, approaching him, "don't leave me yet. Wait a few minutes only. Another fit might come on, and you, you alone, have saved her!"

He signed that there was nothing to fear; yet he remained with the idea of tranquillising her. Rosalie she had already sent to bed. Soon the dawn broke, still and grey, over the snow that whitened the house-tops. The doctor proceeded to close the window, and in the intense quiet the two exchanged some few whispered remarks.

"There is nothing seriously wrong with her, I assure you," said he. "Only with one so young great care must be taken." He paused and continued: "See especially that her days are spent quietly and happily, and without shocks of any kind."

"She is so delicate and nervous," replied Hélène after a moment's pause. "I cannot always control her. As regards her petty ailments, she allows her joys and sorrows so to overcome her that I become alarmed. Her love for me burns beyond expression, and makes her burst into tears, so jealous is she when I caress another child."

"So, so; delicate, nervous, and jealous," he repeated as he shook his head. "Doctor Bodin has attended her, has he not? I'll have a talk with him about her. We shall have to stop so pronounced a tendency; she has reached an age that is critical for the health of the other sex."

Hélène recognised the interest he was displaying and she awoke to instant gratitude.

"How I must thank you, sir, for the great trouble you have taken!"

The loudness of her tones frightened her; she might have woke Jeanne, and she bent down over the bed. But no. The child was sound asleep, with the colour of the rose on her face and the vague smile playing round her lips. The air of the quiet chamber was surcharged with languor. The old drowsiness, as if born again of relief, seized upon the curtains, furniture, and litter of raiment up and down. Everything was

bathed in the refreshing light of the early morning as it streamed through the two windows.

Hélène again stood up close to the bed; on the other side was the doctor, and between them lay Jeanne, lightly sleeping.

"Her father was frequently ill," remarked Hélène, softly, continuing her answer to his previous question. "I myself enjoy the best of health."

The doctor, who had not yet looked at her, raised his eyes, and could scarcely refrain from smiling, so hale and hearty was she in every way. She greeted his gaze with her own sweet and quiet smile. Her happiness lay in her good health.

His looks were still bent on her. Never had he seen beauty so perfect. Tall and commanding, she was a nut-brown Juno, of a nut-brown sunny with wandering lights. When she slowly turned her head, the profile assumed the severe purity of a statue. Her grey eyes and pearly teeth lit up the whole face. The chin was rounded and gave evident signs of strength; it proved her possessed of common-sense and firmness. But what astonished the doctor was the superbness of the charms so openly displayed. The shawl had again slipped off, and the arms and bosom were completely bare. A thick tress of hair waved over her shoulder, and was lost between her breasts. With everything on her person disarranged, she stood in the petticoat, that scarcely clung to her, a model of queenliness, chastity, and modesty, even beneath the gaze of this man, within whom were already awakening confused sensations.

In turn she scanned him for a moment. Doctor Deberle's years were thirty-five; his face was clean-shaven and a little long, the eyes were beautiful, but the lips thin. As she gazed on him she noticed for the first time that his neck was bare. Thus they remained face to face with Jeanne asleep between them. This distance, which but a short time before was immense, seemed now to be dwindling down. The child's breathing was growing unsteady, and Hélène slowly wrapped her shoulders in the shawl, while the doctor hastened to button his coat at the neck.

"Mamma! mamma!" Jeanne cried in her sleep. She awoke, and the moment she opened her eyes saw the doctor and became uneasy.

"Mamma, who's that?" was her instant question, but her mother kissed her, and said:

"Fall asleep, darling, you haven't been well. It's only a friend."

The child seemed surprised; she did not remember anything. She was drowsy and fell asleep again, murmuring tenderly:

"I'm going by-by. Good night, mamma, dear. If he is your friend he will be mine."

The doctor removed his medicine case, and, bowing, left the room without making any remark. . Hélène listened for a while to the child's breathing, and then, seated on the edge of the bed, she became oblivious to everything around her; her looks and thoughts were blank. The lamp, still alight, was paling before the rising sun.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT day Hélène thought it right and proper to pay a visit of thanks to Doctor Deberle. The abrupt fashion in which she had forced him to follow her, and the remembrance of the whole night he had spent with Jeanne, made her uneasy, as she recognised the fact that he had done more than is usually compassed within a doctor's visit. Still, she hesitated for two days, feeling strange repugnance towards taking such a step. For this she could give herself no reasons. It was the doctor himself who inspired her with this hesitancy; for one morning she met him and shrunk from his notice as though she were a child. For this excess of timidity she was much annoyed. Her quiet and honest nature was up in arms against the uneasiness which was taking possession of her. She decided, therefore, to go and thank the doctor that very day.

Jeanne's severe attack had taken place during the small hours of Wednesday morning, and it was now Saturday. Doctor Bodin, whose fears regarding the child had prompted him to make an early call, spoke of Doctor Deberle with the respect that an old doctor with a meagre income pays to another in the same district who is young, rich, and already possessed of a reputation. He did not forget to add, however, with an artful smile, that the fortune had been bequeathed by the elder Deberle, a man whom the whole of Passy held in veneration. The son had only the trouble of inheriting fifteen hundred thousand francs, together with a splendid practice. "He is, though, a very smart fellow," Doctor Bodin hastened to add, "and I shall be honoured by having a consultation with him on the subject of the precious health of my little friend Jeanne!"

About three o'clock Hélène made her way downstairs with her daughter. It was but a few steps along the Rue Vineuse before she could ring at the next-door house. Both still wore deep mourning. A servant, elegant in dress-coat and white tie, opened the door. Hélène was not slow in recognising the

large entrance-hall hung with Oriental tapestry; on each side were now arranged flower-stands, brilliant with a profusion of flowers. The footman having admitted them to a small drawing-room, the hangings and furniture of which were of a mignonette hue, stood awaiting their pleasure. H  l  ne gave her name—Madame Grandjean.

The footman pushed open the door of a drawing-room, furnished in yellow and black, of dazzling effect, and moving aside, announced:

“Madame Grandjean!”

H  l  ne, standing on the threshold, started back. She had just caught sight of a young lady at the other end of the room, seated close to the fire-place on a narrow couch which was completely filled by her ample skirts. Facing her sat an elderly person, who had retained her bonnet and shawl, and was evidently on a visit.

“I beg pardon,” exclaimed H  l  ne. “I wished to see Doctor Deberle.”

She had made the child enter the room before her, and now she took her hand in her grasp. She was equally astonished and embarrassed in meeting this young lady. Why had she not asked for the doctor? But then, she knew he was married.

Madame Deberle was just finishing some wonderful story, and was speaking quickly and rather shrilly.

“Oh! it’s marvellous, simply marvellous! Look, she clutches at her bosom like this, throws back her head, and her face turns green. I declare you ought to see her, Mademoiselle Aur  lie!”

At this moment she rose and smiled towards the door-way, rustling her skirts terribly.

“Be so kind as to walk in, madame,” she said sweetly and kindly. “Favour me so far. My husband is not at home, but I shall be delighted to receive you, I assure you. This must be the pretty little girl who was so ill a few nights ago. Sit down for a short time, I beg of you.”

H  l  ne was forced to accept the invitation, while Jeanne timidly perched herself on the edge of another chair. Madame Deberle again sank down on the little sofa, exclaiming with a giggle:

“Yes, this is my day. I receive every Saturday, and on that day Pierre announces all comers. A week or two ago he ushered in a colonel suffering from the gout.”

"How silly you are, Juliette!" expostulated Mademoiselle Aurélie, the elderly lady, an old friend, not very rich, who had seen her brought into the world.

There was a short silence, and Hélène gazed round on the richness of the apartment, with its curtains and chairs in black and gold, glittering like very constellations. Flowers decorated mantel-shelf, piano, and tables, and the full daylight streamed through the windows from the garden, in which could be seen the leafless trees and bare earth. The room had almost a hot-house temperature; in the fire-place one large log glowed with intense heat. After another glance Hélène recognised that the gaudy colours had a happy effect. Madame Deberle's hair was inky-black and her skin of a milky whiteness. She was little, plump, slow in her movements, and withal graceful. Amidst all the golden decorations, her white face flashed with a vermeil red under the shadow of her heavy and sombre head-dress. Within Hélène awoke feelings of real admiration for her hostess.

"Convulsions are so terrible," broke in Madame Deberle. "My Lucien had them when a mere baby. And, oh! how dreadfully uneasy you must have been, madame! It is a blessing that the dear little thing appears to be so well now."

As she drawled out these sentences she kept her looks on Hélène, whose superb beauty amazed and delighted her. Never had she seen a woman with so queenly an air in weeds such as draped the commanding and rather stern figure of the widow. Her admiration broke into an involuntary smile, while she exchanged glances with Mademoiselle Aurélie. Their admiration was so ingenuously and charmingly expressed, that a smile also rippled over Hélène's face.

Satisfied with her examination, Madame Deberle stretched herself on the sofa.

"You were not at the first night at the Vaudeville yesterday, madame?" asked she, as she played with the fan that hung from her waist.

"I never go to the theatre," was Hélène's reply.

"Oh! little Noëmi was simply marvellous! Her death scene is so realistic! She clutches her bosom like this, throws back her head, and her face turns green. Oh! the effect is awful."

For a short time she entered into a minute criticism of the actress's playing, which she upheld against the world; and then she passed in review other topics of the day—an exhibition, the

paintings in which were most remarkable; a stupid novel about which too much fuss was being made; a risky intrigue which she spoke of to Mademoiselle Aurélie with veiled meaning. And so she went on from one subject to another, without fatigue, her tongue ever ready, and breathing here an atmosphere which seemed peculiarly her own. Hélène, a stranger to such society, was content to listen, and at times interjected a remark or brief reply.

The door was again thrown open and the footman announced:

"Madame de Chermette! Madame Tissot!" Two ladies entered, magnificently dressed. Madame Deberle rose eagerly to meet them, and the train of her black silk dress, heavily decked with trimmings trailed so behind her that she had to kick it out of her way whenever she happened to turn round. A confused din of greetings arose.

"Oh! you darlings! I declare I never see you!"

"You know we come about that raffle?"

"Yes; I know, I know."

"Oh! we cannot sit down. We have to call at twenty houses yet."

"Come now, you are not going to run away at once!"

And then they finished by sitting down on the edge of a couch. The chatter commenced shriller than ever.

"Well! what do you think of yesterday at the Vaudeville?"

"Oh! it was splendid!"

"You know she disarranges her hair and lets down her hair. All the effect springs from that."

"People say that she swallows something to make her green."

"No, no, every action is premeditated; and she must have invented them in the first place."

"It's wonderful."

The two ladies rose and made their exit. The room regained its tranquil warmth. From some hyacinths on the mantle-shelf was wafted an all-pervading perfume. For a time one could hear the noisy twitter of some sparrows that were quarrelling on the lawn. Before sitting down again Madame Deberle proceeded to draw down the embroidered tulle blind of a window facing her, and then turned to her sofa again in the mellowed golden light of the room.

"I beg pardon," was the remark which ensued. "We have had quite an invasion."

Then, in an affectionate tone, she entered quietly into conversation with Hélène. She seemed to know some details of her history, doubtless from the gossip of her servants. With an effrontery that was yet full of tact, and appeared to exhibit much friendliness, she spoke to Hélène of her husband, and of his sad death at the Hôtel du Var, Rue de Richelieu.

"And you had just arrived, hadn't you? You had never been in Paris before. It must be awful to be plunged into mourning, in a strange place, the day after a long journey, and when one doesn't know a single place to go to."

Hélène assented with a slow nod. Yes, she had spent some very bitter hours. The disease which eventually carried off her husband had declared itself abruptly the day after their arrival, just as they were going out together. She knew none of the streets, and was wholly unaware what district she was in. For eight days she was confined to the bed-side of the dying man, hearing the rumble of Paris beneath her window, feeling she was alone, deserted, lost, as though plunged in the depths of an abyss. When she stepped out on the pavement for the first time she was a widow. The mere recalling of that bare room, with the rows of medicine bottles, and with the travelling trunks standing unpacked, made her shudder still.

"Was your husband, as I've been told, nearly twice your age?" asked Madame Deberle with an appearance of profound interest, while Mademoiselle Aurélie cocked her ears, so as not to lose a syllable of the conversation.

"Oh, no!" replied Hélène. "He was scarcely six years older."

She allowed herself to enter into the story of her marriage, telling in a few brief sentences how her husband had fallen deeply in love with her while she was living with her father, Monsieur Mouret, a hatter in the Rue des Petites-Marchés, at Marseilles; how the Grandjean family, who were rich sugar-refiners, were bitterly opposed to the match on account of her poverty. She spoke of the ill-omened and secret wedding after the usual legal formalities, and of their hand-to-mouth existence, till the day an uncle on his deathbed left them some ten thousand francs a-year. It was then that Grandjean, within whom an intense hatred of Marseilles was growing, decided on coming to Paris to live for good.

"And how old were you when you were married?" was Madame Deberle's next question.

"Seventeen."

"You must have been very beautiful."

The conversation suddenly ceased, for Hélène had not seemed to hear the remark.

"Madame Manguelin!" announced the footman.

A young lady was ushered in, retiring, and evidently ill at ease. Madame Deberle scarcely rose. It was one of her dependents, who had called to thank her for some service performed. She remained for a few minutes, and left the room with a courtesy.

Madame Deberle resumed the conversation, and spoke of the Abbé Jouve, with whom both were acquainted. The Abbé was a meek officiating priest at Notre-Dame de Grâce, the parish church of Passy; but his charity was such that he was more beloved and more respectfully hearkened to than any priest in the district.

"Oh, he has such pious eloquence!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, with a sanctimonious look.

"He has been very kind to us," said Hélène. "My husband had known him at one time when he was at Marseilles. The moment he knew of my misfortune he took charge of everything. To him we owe our settling in Passy."

"He has a brother, hasn't he?" questioned Juliet.

"Yes, his mother married again. Monsieur Rambaud was also acquainted with my husband. He has started a large business in the Rue de Rambuteau, devoted to the selling of oils and other Southern produce. I believe he enjoys a large income from it." She had not finished, for she added with a laugh: "The Abbé and his brother make up my court."

Jeanne, sitting on the edge of her chair, was wearied to death, and cast a look of impatience at her mother. Her delicate thin face wore a pained expression, as if she were sorry that this conversation was continued; and she appeared at times to sniff the heavy, oppressive odours floating in the room, while she cast side glances at the furniture, filled with distrust, as though her own exquisite sensibility warned her of some undefined dangers. Next she flung a look of tyrannical worship on her mother.

Madame Deberle was not slow to notice the child's uneasiness.

"Here's a little girl," explained she, "who is tired with being serious, like a grown-up person. There are picture-books on the table, dear, that will amuse you."

Jeanne took up an album, but her eyes were bent imploringly over the book on her mother. H  l  ne, charmed by her hostess's excessive kindness, did not move; there was nothing of the fidget in her, and she remained of her own accord seated for some hours. But as the servant announced in succession three ladies—Madame Berthier, Madame de Guiraud, and Madame Levasseur—she believed she ought to rise. Madame Deberle would not hear of it:

"You must stay now; I shall want to show you my son."

The circle round the fire-place was increasing. The ladies were all gossiping at the same time. One declared she was completely broken down, as for five days she could not get a wink of sleep till four o'clock in the morning. Another delivered a diatribe against nurses; she could no longer fall in with one who was honest. Next the conversation fell on dressmakers. Madame Deberle affirmed no woman tailor could fit properly; a man was requisite. Two of the ladies, however, mumbled something under their breath, and, a silence intervening, two or three words became audible. Every one broke into a laugh, while the fans were languidly waved to and fro.

"Monsieur Malignon!" announced the servant.

A tall young man, dressed in very good style, was ushered in. He was greeted with some admiring murmurs. Madame Deberle, not taking the trouble to rise, stretched out her hand with the question:

"Well! what of yesterday at the Vaudeville?"

"Vile!" was the reply.

"What! vile! She's marvellous when she clutches her bosom and throws back her head——"

"Stop, stop! The whole thing is loathsome in its realism."

And now a battle of words commenced. Realism was mentioned very frequently, but the young man would have none of your realism.

"I would have realism in nothing, you hear!" said he, almost in a shout. "No, in nothing! it degrades art."

People would soon be seeing some fine things on the stage, indeed! Why didn't No  mi follow out her actions to their logical conclusion? And he illustrated his remark with a gesture which quite scandalised all the ladies. Oh, horrible!

But Madame Deberle declared her mind that the actress produced a great effect; and Madame Levasseur having told how a lady had fainted in the balcony, everybody agreed that the affair was a great success; and with this the discussion stopped short.

The young man, at his ease in an arm-chair, stretched his legs among the ladies' flowing skirts. He seemed to be quite at home in the doctor's house. He had plucked mechanically a flower from a vase, and was tearing it to pieces with his teeth. Madame Deberle interrupted him:

"Have you read this novel that——"

He did not allow her to finish the sentence, but replied, with a superior air, that he only read two novels in the year.

As for the exhibition of paintings, it was not worth disturbing one's self about; and so, every topic being exhausted, he rose and leaned over Juliette's tiny sofa, conversing with her in a low voice, while the other ladies engaged themselves busily in an argument.

At length: "Dear me! he's gone," exclaimed Madame Berthier turning round. "I met him only an hour ago in Madame Robinot's drawing-room."

"Yes, and he is going to visit Madame Lecomte," said Madame Deberle. "He goes about more than any other man in Paris." She turned to H  l  ne, who had been following the scene: "A very genteel young fellow he is, and we like him very much. He has some interest in a stockbroking business; he's very rich besides, and in the run of everything."

The ladies now proceeded to make their adieux.

"Good-bye, my dear lady. I count upon you for Wednesday."

"Yes, to be sure; Wednesday."

"Oh, by the way. Will you be at that evening party? One doesn't know whom one may meet. If you go, I'll go."

"Ah, well! I'll go, I promise you. Give my best regards to Monsieur de Guiraud."

When Madame Deberle returned she found H  l  ne standing in the middle of the drawing-room. Jeanne had drawn close to her mother, whose hands she firmly grasped, and thus clinging to her caressingly and almost convulsively, she drew her little by little towards the door-way.

"Ah, I was forgetting!" exclaimed the lady of the house, and she immediately rang the bell.

"Pierre," she said, on the servant's appearing, "tell Miss Smithson to bring Lucien here."

During the few moments of waiting that ensued the door was again opened, but this time in a familiar fashion and without any formal announcement. A good-looking girl about sixteen years of age entered in company with an old man, short of stature but with a rubicund and chubby face.

"Good-day, sister," was the girl's greeting, as she kissed Madame Deberle.

"Good-day, Pauline! good-day, father!" said she, greeting them in turn.

Mademoiselle Aurélie had not stirred from her seat beside the fire, but now she rose to exchange greeting with Monsieur Letellier. He owned an extensive silk warehouse in the Boulevard des Capucines. Since his wife's death he took his younger daughter about everywhere in search of a rich husband.

"Were you at the Vaudeville last night?" asked Pauline.

"Oh, it was simply marvellous!" repeated Juliette, parrot-fashion, as she stood before a mirror, and put right a curl that had got loose.

"It is annoying to be so young; one can't go to anything!" said Pauline, pouting like a spoiled child. "I went with papa to the theatre-door at midnight, and learned how the piece had taken."

"Yes, and we stumbled on Malignon," said the father. "He was greatly pleased with it."

"Really!" exclaimed Juliette. "He was here a minute ago and declared it vile. One never knows how to take him."

"Have you had many visitors to-day?" asked Pauline, rushing off to another subject.

"Oh, several ladies; quite a crowd! The room was never once empty. I'm dead-beat——"

Here she abruptly broke off. She remembered she had to make a formal introduction:

"My father, my sister—Madame Grandjean."

The conversation turned on children and the ailments that plague so many mothers' lives, till Miss Smithson, an English governess, appeared with a little boy clinging to her hand. Madame Deberle scolded her violently in English for having kept them waiting.

"That's my own little Lucien!" exclaimed Pauline as she

dropped on her knees before the child, with a great rustling of her skirts.

"Now, now, leave him alone!" said Juliette. "Come here, Lucien; come and say good-day to this little lady."

The boy came forward very sheepishly. He was no more than seven years old, fat and dumpy, and dressed as gaudily as a doll. As he saw that they were all looking on smiling, he stopped short, and surveyed Jeanne, his blue eyes wide open with astonishment.

"Go on!" urged his mother. He turned his eyes questioningly on her and advanced a step. He betrayed all the sullenness peculiar to lads of his age, his head drooped, his thick lips gave him a sulky air, and his eyebrows were bent with a growing frown. Jeanne must have frightened him; and she wore a serious look standing there in her black dress. She had not let go her mother's hand, nervously pressing her fingers on the naked arm from sleeve to glove. With head lowered she awaited Lucien's approach uneasily, as though she were a young and timid savage, ready to fly from his caress. But a gentle push from her mother prompted her to step forward.

"Little lady, you will have to kiss him first," Madame Deberle said laughingly. "Ladies have always to begin with him. He is so bashful!"

"Kiss him, Jeanne," urged Hélène.

The child looked up at her mother; and then, as if conquered by the looks of the little noodle, she was seized with sudden pity as she gazed on his good-looking face, so dreadfully confused—she smiled, and smiled divinely. Every feature lit up as a wave of hidden tenderness seemed to engulf her soul, and she whispered: "Willingly, mamma!"

She took Lucien by the shoulders, almost lifting him from the ground, and gave him a hearty kiss on each cheek. He had no further hesitation in embracing her.

"Bravo! capital!" were the laughing comments of the on-lookers.

With a courteous farewell Hélène left, accompanied to the door by Madame Deberle.

"I beg of you, madame," said she, "to present my heartiest thanks to the doctor. He relieved me of such dreadful anxiety the other night."

"Is Henri not in the house?" broke in Monsieur Letellier.

"No, he will be away some time yet," was Juliette's reply.

"But you're not going away; you'll dine with us," she continued, addressing Mademoiselle Aurélie, who had risen as if to leave with Madame Grandjean.

The old lady, who waited each Saturday for a similar invitation, was persuaded to relieve herself of shawl and bonnet. The heat in the drawing-room was intense, and Monsieur Letellier hastened to open a window, before which he planted himself, inhaling the odours of a lilac bush in full blossom. Pauline played high jinks with Lucien behind chairs and couches, left in confusion by the visitors.

On the threshold Madame Deberle held out her hand to Hélène with a frank and friendly movement.

"I am privileged," said she. "My husband spoke about you to me, and I felt myself drawn to you. Your trouble, your lonely life—in short, I am very glad to have seen you, and you must not be long in coming back."

"I give you my promise, and I am obliged to you," said Hélène, moved by this affectionate outburst from a woman whom she had imagined rather silly. They clasped hands, and each looked into the other's face with a happy smile. Juliette's avowal of her sudden friendship was given with an endearing look:

"You are too lovely not to be loved!"

Hélène broke into a merry laugh, for her beauty never engaged her thoughts, and she called to her side Jeanne, whose eyes were busy in watching the pranks of Lucien and Pauline. But Madame Deberle would not allow the little one to go just yet.

"You are very good friends from this day; so you must just say good-bye for the present."

The two children blew one another a kiss from their finger-tips.

CHAPTER III.

IT was an institution in Hélène's life that, on the Tuesday, Monsieur Rambaud and the Abbé Jouve should dine with her. It was they who, during the early days of her bereavement, had broken in on her solitude, and had drawn up their chairs to her table with friendly freedom; their one object was to banish dull care from her life at least once a week. The Tuesday dinners became established facts, and the partakers in these little feasts appeared punctually at seven o'clock, serenely happy in pursuance of what they deemed a duty.

Tuesday had come round and Hélène was seated at the window, whiling away the interval that must elapse before the arrival of her guests over some needlework which the last rays of the dying sun allowed her to work at. There her days were spent quietly and pleasantly. The noises of the street died away before reaching so high up. She loved this large and peaceful chamber, with its substantial luxury, its rosewood furniture and blue velvet curtains. The world was dead to her when she first came to its seclusion, and she was rather bored during the first few weeks by its sombre magnificence, in preparing which Monsieur Rambaud had realised his ideal of comfort, much to the admiration of his brother who had declined the task. She was not long, however, in feeling herself happy in a home that partook, like her own heart, of soundness and simplicity. Her only enjoyment during her long hours of work was to gaze before her at the vast sea of Paris, stretching its roofs, like mighty billows, as far as the eye could reach. From her solitary work she had full command of its mighty sweep.

"Mamma, it's too dark to work," said Jeanne, seated near her on a stool. The child dropped her work, and stood up to gaze at Paris, which was darkening over with the shadows of night. She rarely romped about, and even before going out her mother had to tease her into acquiescence. In harmony with the doctor's strict injunction, Hélène made her stroll with her two hours each day in the Bois de Boulogne. There only

did they walk, and within the eighteen months they had not entered Paris thrice. Nowhere was the child so evidently happy as in their own large blue room. Her mother had had to renounce her intention of having her taught music; the strains of an organ pealing through the silent streets made her tremble and drew tears from her eyes. Her favourite amusement was assisting her mother to sew linen for the children of the Abbé's poor.

Night had now fallen and the lamp was brought in by Rosalie, who appeared with dress tucked up, fresh from the strong glare of the kitchen fire. Tuesday's dinner was the one event of the week breaking the monotony of the house, and she hastened to ask:

"Are the gentlemen not to be here to-night, madame?"

Hélène looked at the time-piece: "It is a quarter to seven; they will be here soon."

Rosalie was a gift from the Abbé Jouve, who had carefully met her at the station the day she arrived from Orleans, so that in truth she did not know a single street in Paris. The village priest, an old schoolmate of the Abbé Jouve, had sent her to him. Rosalie was dumpy and plump, and her face was as round as a ball under her narrow cap; her hair was black and bristly, her nose flat, and her lips thick. Her cooking powers were by no means despicable, as was to be expected from her being so long with her godmother, the servant at the vicarage.

"Here is Monsieur Rambaud at last!" exclaimed Rosalie, rushing to open the door before he could ring.

Full and broad-shouldered, Monsieur Rambaud entered, his expansive countenance giving him, somehow, the appearance of a country notary. His forty-five years had already silvered his hair, but his large blue eyes retained a look of wonder, artless and sweet as that of a child.

"And here's his reverence; everybody has come now!" ejaculated Rosalie, as she opened the door once more.

Monsieur Rambaud pressed Hélène's hand and sat down without speaking, smiling with the content of one who felt quite at home. Jeanne in the meantime had thrown her arms round the Abbé's neck, welcoming him with the remark that he was a dear, good soul.

"I've been so ill!" she hastened to tell him.

"So ill, my darling?"

The two at once showed their anxiety, the Abbé especially.

He was a little spare man, with a large head and unprepossessing demeanour; his dress, too, was ill-made; but his eyes, usually half shut, were at times opened to their full extent and lit up with a sparkle of exquisite tenderness. Jeanne abandoned one hand to him while she gave the other to Monsieur Rambaud. Both took hold of her and devoured her with troubled looks. Hélène was constrained to relate the story of Jeanne's illness, and the Abbé was on the point of quarrelling with her for not having taken sufficient pains to prevent it. "The attack was over now!" they congratulated themselves as they questioned her. "She had not had another, had she?" The mother could not refrain from smiling, as she said:

"You are even more wrapped up in her than I am, and I think you'll frighten me in the end. No! she hasn't been troubled again, saving that she has felt pains in her limbs and nasty headaches. But we shall try to get rid of these very soon."

The maid entered to announce that dinner was ready.

The table, side-board, and eight chairs in the dining-room were of mahogany. The damask curtains were drawn close by Rosalie. A lamp of white porcelain hung from the ceiling within a plain ring of copper, its light streaming over the table-cloth, on which stood ready the carefully-arranged plates and the tureen of steaming soup. Every Tuesday's dinner brought out the same remarks, but on this particular day Doctor Deberle served naturally as the subject of conversation. Abbé Jouve lauded him to the skies, though he knew well the doctor was no church-goer. He spoke of him as a man of upright character, charitable to a fault, a good father and a good husband; in fact, a paragon of excellence. As for Madame Deberle she was most estimable, in spite of her frivolousness, which was doubtless due to her Parisian education. In a word, he dubbed the couple charming. Hélène seemed happy in the Abbé's thus confirming her own opinion, and his remarks determined her to continue the acquaintance, which had at first startled her.

"You shut yourself up far too much!" dogmatised the priest.

"Far too much!" echoed his brother.

Hélène beamed on them with her quiet smile, as though to say that they themselves satisfied all her wants, and that she dreaded new acquaintances. Ten o'clock striking, the Abbé

and his brother took up their hats. Jeanne had just fallen asleep in an easy-chair, and they bent over her, raising their heads with satisfied looks as they observed her tranquil sleep. They stole from the room on tiptoe, and in the lobby both whispered their good-byes:

"Till next Tuesday!"

"Oh, by the way!" said the Abbé, returning a step or two, "I was forgetting to tell you mother Fétu is ill. You should go and see her."

"I will go to-morrow," answered Hélène.

The Abbé had a habit of commissioning her to visit his poor. They engaged together in all sorts of whispered talk about them: a mere word or two allowed each to understand the other; but on such a subject they never spoke in the presence of a third person. Next day Hélène went out alone; she had decided to leave Jeanne in the house, as during the past two days the child had been troubled with fits of shivering since her return from a visit of charity to an old man who had become paralysed. Once out of doors, she followed the Rue Vineuse, and gaining the Rue Raynouard soon found herself in the Passage des Eaux, a strange-looking steep lane like a stair-case, smothered between garden-walls, leading down from the heights of Passy to the quay. At the bottom of this descent was a dilapidated house where lived mother Fétu in an attic lighted by a round window, and furnished with a wretched bed, a deal table, and a chair without a bottom.

"Oh! my good lady, my good lady!" she moaned out when she saw Hélène entering.

Mother Fétu was in bed. In spite of her wretchedness, her body was round and bloated and her face puffed up, while her hands seemed like gourds, as she drew over her the tattered sheet. Her eyes were little and keen, she had a whimper in her voice, and her humility found an outlet in a rush of words.

"Dear, good lady, I thank you. Ah! ah! oh, how I suffer! It's just as if dogs were tearing at my side. I'm sure I have a beast in my inside—see, just there! The skin isn't broken; the disease is internal. Oh, the pain hasn't ceased for two days! Good Lord, how is it possible to suffer so much? Ah, my good lady, thank you! You do not forget the poor. It will be taken into account; yes, yes, it will be taken into account!"

Hélène had sat down. Noticing on the table a bowl of some

hot drink, she filled from it a glass ready to hand, and gave it to the sufferer. Near the bowl were placed a packet of sugar, two oranges, and some other comfits.

"Has any one been to see you?" Hélène asked.

"Yes, yes, a little lady. But she is of no use. That isn't the sort of stuff I need. Oh, if I could get a little meat! My next-door neighbour would cook it for me. Oh, oh, this pain is something dreadful! A dog is tearing—oh, if only I had some broth!"

In spite of the pains which were racking her limbs, she kept her sharp eyes fixed on Hélène, who was now busy fumbling in her pocket. As soon as she saw her visitor place on the table a ten-franc piece, she whimpered all the more, and struggled to a sitting position. When she had succeeded in this, she extended her arm, and the money vanished.

"Gracious Heaven!" she exclaimed, "this is another frightful attack. Oh! oh! I cannot stand such agony any longer! God will requite you, my good lady; I am positive He will requite you. Bless my soul, how these pains shoot through my whole body! His reverence promised me you would come. It's only you who know what I want. I am going to buy some meat. I must get up; I must get up. Help me; I have no strength left!"

The old woman wished to turn round, but Hélène, drawing off her gloves, took the gentlest possible hold of her, and put her back once more into bed. As she was still bending over her the door opened, and a flush of surprise mounted to her cheeks as she saw Doctor Deberle entering. Did he also make visits to which he never referred?

"It's the doctor!" blurted out the old woman. "Oh! Heaven must bless you both for being so good!"

The doctor bowed respectfully to Hélène. Mother Fétu ceased her whining on his entrance, but kept up a wheeze as if she were a child in pain. She had understood at once that the doctor and her benefactress were known to one another; her looks never left them, travelling from one to the other, while her wrinkled face showed the dull brain was working within. The doctor put some questions to her, while he sounded her right side. Hélène had just sat down when he turned towards her and said:

"She is suffering from inward pains proceeding from the liver. She will be on her feet again in a few days."

Next he tore from his memorandum-book a leaf on which he had written some lines, and he said to mother Fétu :

"Listen to me ! You must send this to the druggist in the Rue de Passy, and you must drink every two hours a spoonful of the draught he will give you."

The old woman burst out anew into blessings. Hélène remained seated. The doctor seemed to linger gazing at her. When their eyes met, he bowed, and obeying the behests of prudence, left the room first. He had not gone down a storey ere mother Fétu's lamentations were renewed.

"Ah, he's such a clever doctor ! At least, that is to say, if his medicine does me any good. Medicine, pah ! Dandelions and tallow make up a good simple for removing water from the body. Yes, yes, you can say you know in him a clever doctor ! Have you known him long ? Gracious goodness, how thirsty I am ! I am consumed with heat. He has a wife, hasn't he ? He deserves to have a good wife and beautiful children. Indeed, it's a pleasure to see kind-hearted people good acquaintances !"

She blurted this out in disjointed sentences. Hélène rose to give her a drink.

"I must go now, mother Fétu," said she. "Good-bye till to-morrow !"

"Ah, how good you are ! If I had only some linen ! Look at my chemise torn in two ; and this bed is so dirty ! But that doesn't matter. God will requite you, good lady !"

Next day on Hélène entering she found Doctor Deberle in mother Fétu's room. Seated on the chair, he was writing out a prescription, while the old woman was as voluble as ever over her sufferings.

"Oh, sir, it feels now like lead on my side ; yes, just like lead ! It's as heavy as a hundred-pound weight, and prevents me turning round."

She caught sight of Hélène, but never stopped for a moment.

"Ah ! here's the good lady ! I told the kind doctor you would come. Though the heavens fell, you would come all the same ; you're a very saint, an angel from paradise, and oh, so beautiful ! that people should fall on their knees in the streets to gaze on you as you pass ! Dear lady, I am no better ; just now I have a heavy feeling here ! Oh, I have told the doctor what you did for me ! The emperor could have

done no more. Yes, indeed, it would be a sin not to love you, a great sin!"

These broken sentences fell from her lips as her head rolled uneasily on the bolster. Her eyes were half shut, and the doctor smiled to Hélène, who felt very ill at ease.

"Mother Fétu," she said softly, "I have brought you your linen."

"Oh, thank you, thank you; God will requite you! You're just like this good, kind gentleman, who does more good to poor folks than a host of those who declare it their special task. You do not know what great care he has taken of me for four months, supplying me with medicine, broth, and wine. One rarely finds a rich person so kind to a poor soul! Oh, he's one of God's angels! Dear, dear, I seem to have quite a house in my stomach!"

Embarrassment now seized the doctor in turn. He rose and offered his chair to Hélène, but though she had come with the intention of remaining at least a quarter of an hour, she declined to sit down, on the plea that she was in a great hurry.

Mother Fétu still rolled her head to and fro, but did not forget to stretch out her hand to receive the parcel of linen, which straightway vanished to the bottom of the bed, while she kept on chattering:

"Oh, what a couple you would make! Now, now, I don't wish to offend you; I only say it because it is true. When you have seen one, you have seen the other. Oh, dear Lord! help me to turn round. Kind-hearted people understand one another. Yes, yes, they understand one another."

"Good-bye, mother Fétu," said Hélène, leaving the doctor in sole possession. "I don't think I shall be here to-morrow."

But next day found her in the attic again. The old lady was sound asleep, but scarcely had she opened her eyes and recognised her in her black dress sitting on the chair, than she exclaimed:

"He has been here. Oh, I don't know what has come over me, I feel as stiff as a stick. We were talking about you. He asked me all kinds of questions; whether you were generally sad, and whether your look was always the same. Oh, he's such a good man!"

Her words came slower, and she imagined Hélène's face would betray their effect on her. She waited with that wheedling, anxious expression which the poor know well how

to assume when they are desirous of pleasing some one. She thought she detected a flush of displeasure mounting to her benefactress's brow; and her huge, puffed-up face, eager and lit up, at once lost its excitement. But still she rattled on:

"I am always asleep. Perhaps I have been poisoned. A woman in the Rue de l'Annonciation was killed by a drug given her by the chemist in mistake."

To-day Hélène lingered for nearly half an hour in mother Fétu's room, hearing her talk of Normandy, where she was born, and where the milk was so good. During a silence she asked the old woman carelessly:

"Have you known the doctor a long time?"

Mother Fétu, lying on her back, half-opened her eyes and again closed them.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, almost in a whisper. "For instance, his father attended to me before '48, and he accompanied him then."

"I have been told the father was a very devout man."

"Yes, a little cracked. I'm sure the son is greatly his superior. His fingers, as they touch you, seem made of velvet." Silence again fell between them.

"I advise you to do everything he tells you," broke in Hélène, at last. "He is very clever; he saved my daughter."

"To be sure, to be sure!" at once exclaimed mother Fétu, all excitement. "People ought to have confidence in him. Why, he brought to life again a boy who was going to be buried! Oh, there aren't two persons like him; you won't stop me saying that! I am very lucky; I fall in with the pick of good-hearted people. I thank the gracious Lord for it every night. Well, I don't forget either of you. You are mingled together in my prayers. May God in His goodness shield you and grant your every wish! May He load you with His gifts! May He preserve you a place in paradise!"

She was sitting up in bed with hands clasped, seemingly entreating Heaven with devout fervour. Hélène allowed her to go on thus for a considerable time till she could not forbear smiling. The old lady, with her prating and pretended meekness, was in the end fast dropping into a gentle sleep; but Hélène before leaving consoled her with the promise that the day she was able to rise she would give her a bonnet and gown.

The whole week Hélène busied herself with mother Fétu. The visit every afternoon became an item in her daily life;

The Passage des Eaux, had, in especial, become dear to her. This steep lane, so cool and quiet, refreshed her; the pavement was so clean, flooded as it was on rainy days with the water rushing down from the high ground. A strange sensation thrilled her as she stood at the top and looked at the narrow alley with its steep declivity, usually deserted, and only known to the few inhabitants of the neighbouring streets. Next she ventured down through an archway beneath a house fronting the Rue Raynouard, and tripped down the seven flights of broad steps, down which the rush of water had cut a stony bed for itself that took up half of the narrow way. The walls of the gardens on each side bulged out, coated with a leprous white; umbrageous trees drooped over, and the chequered green that only left glimpses of the blue sky threw a grateful and deep shadow. Half way down Hélène would stop to take breath, gazing at the street-lamp that hung there, merry laughter striking on her ear from the gardens, the doors of which she had never seen open. At times an old woman panted up with the aid of the black and shining iron hand-rail fixed in the wall to the right; a lady came leaning on her parasol as on a walking stick; or an unruly company of lads ran down with a great stamping of feet. But almost always Hélène found herself alone; this steep descent, secluded and with leafy shadows, was to her a veritable delight—it seemed like a path in the depths of a forest. At the bottom she lifted her eyes upwards. To gaze at this narrow alley she had just descended thrilled her with some feelings of fear.

Into the old woman's attic she glided, her garments seemingly endowed with the quiet and coolness of the Passage des Eaux. This hole, so woefully wretched, no longer affected her painfully. She moved about as if in her own rooms, opening the round attic window to admit the fresh air, and pushing the table into a corner if it came in her way. This garret's emptiness, the white-washed walls and the rickety furniture, realised to her mind an existence, the simplicity of which she had sometimes dreamt of in her girlhood. Here, too, her being was flooded with a wondrous tenderness, and this was a delight; playing the part of sick nurse, and hearing the constant bewailing of the old woman, what she saw and felt within the four walls pervaded her with an all-consuming pity. In the end she awaited with evident impatience Doctor Deberle's

visit. She questioned him as to mother Fétu's condition; but from this they glided to another subject, as they stood near each other face to face. A closer acquaintance soon ensued, and they were surprised to find they possessed similar tastes. They understood one another without speaking a word, each heart engulfed in the same overflowing charity. Nothing to Hélène seemed sweeter than this mutual feeling, springing from such ordinary circumstances, to which she yielded without resistance, inspired with divine pity. At first she was somewhat afraid of the doctor; in her own drawing-room, she would have been cold and distrustful, in harmony with her nature. Here, in this garret where the world saw them not, sharing one chair, they were almost happy in the midst of wretchedness and poverty that filled their souls with emotion. A week passed, and they knew one another as though they had been intimate for years. Mother Fétu's miserable abode was filled with sunshine streaming from this fellowship of goodness.

The old woman grew better very slowly. The doctor, in his surprise, charged her with coddling herself, when the story was renewed that now she felt a dreadful weight on her legs. She kept up her monotonous moaning while lying on her back and rolling her head to and fro; but she took care to shut her eyes to give them an opportunity for unrestrained talk. One day she was to all appearance sound asleep, but beneath her eyelids the little black eyes were on the watch. At last, however, she had to rise from her bed, and next day Hélène presented her with the promised bonnet and gown. When the doctor made his appearance, the old woman's laggard memory was suddenly stirred:

"Gracious goodness! I've forgotten my neighbour's soup-pot; I promised to attend to it!"

She disappeared, slamming the door behind her, leaving the couple alone. They did not notice they were shut in, and they continued their conversation. The doctor urged Hélène to take advantage of his garden in the Rue Vineuse sometimes of an afternoon.

"My wife," said he, "must return your visit, and in her own person repeat my invitation. It would serve to strengthen your daughter's health."

"But I don't refuse," ejaculated she, laughing. "I do not require to be fetched with ceremony. Only—only—I am afraid of seeming forward. At any rate, we will see."

Their talk continued. At last the doctor exclaimed in a tone of surprise:

"Where on earth can she have gone to? It must be a quarter of an hour since she went to see after this neighbour's pot."

Hélène then saw that the door was shut, but it did not shock her at the moment. She continued to talk of Madame Deberle, of whom she spoke highly to her husband; but in the end she grew uneasy, the doctor glancing every now and then towards the door.

"It's very strange," remarked Hélène, in her turn, "that she does not come back!"

Their conversation dropped. Hélène, not knowing what to do, opened the window; and when she turned round they avoided looking at one another. The laughter of children sounded through the circular window, which, with its bit of blue sky, seemed like a full round moon. They could not be more alone—concealed from inquisitive looks, and with only this bit of heaven gazing in on them. The voices of the children died away in the distance; the silence was intense and chilling. No one would dream of finding them in this attic, out of the world. Their confusion grew apace, and in the end Hélène's discomfort prompted her to appeal to the doctor with a look of entreaty.

"I have a great many visits to pay yet," he exclaimed at once. "As she doesn't return, I must leave."

He quitted the room, and Hélène remained seated. Mother Fétu returned immediately with many protestations:

"Oh! oh! I can scarcely crawl; such a faintness has come over me! Has the dear good doctor gone? Well, to be sure, there's not much comfort here! Oh, you are both angels from heaven, coming to spend some time with one so unfortunate as myself! But God in His goodness will requite you. The pain went into my feet to-day, and I had to sit down on a step. You made no noise, and I forgot myself: Oh, I should like some chairs! If I only had an easy chair! My mattress is so vile that I am quite ashamed when you come. The whole place is at your disposal, and I would throw myself into the fire if you required it. Yes. Heaven knows it; I repeat it always in my prayers! Oh, kind Lord, grant their utmost desires to these good friends of mine—in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

As Hélène listened she experienced a revulsion of feeling;

mother Fétu's bloated face filled her with disgust. Never before in this stifling attic had she been affected in a like way: the penury and misery seemed to stare her in the face; the atmosphere choked her; the surrounding wretchedness sickened her. She darted down the stairs, her whole soul shocked with the blessings mother Fétu poured after her.

In the Passage des Eaux Hélène was filled with an additional sorrow. Half-way up on the right hand side of the path the wall was hollowed out, and here there was a well, no longer used, enclosed by a railing. During two days when passing she heard the wailings of a cat sounding from the bottom of the well. As she slowly climbed up now the wailings were renewed, but so pitiful were they that each seemed an agony. To picture this poor brute thrown into the disused well, and slowly dying there of hunger, paralysed Hélène's feelings in a moment. She hastened her steps and assured herself she would not venture down this lane again for a long time, lest the cat's death-agony should fall on her ear.

The day was a Tuesday. In the evening, on the stroke of seven, as Hélène was finishing a tiny bodice, the two wanted rings at the bell were heard, and Rosalie opened the door.

"His reverence is first to-night!" she exclaimed. "Oh, here comes Monsieur Rambaud too!"

They were very merry at dinner. Jeanne was nearly well again, and the two brothers, who spoiled her, were successful in procuring her liberty to eat some salad, of which she was excessively fond, notwithstanding Doctor Bodin's formal interdict. When she was going to bed, the child in high spirits hung round her mother's neck while she pleaded:

"Oh! mother, darling! let me go with you to-morrow to see the old woman!"

But the Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud were the first to scold her for thinking of such a thing. They would not hear of her going amongst the poor, as the sights were too harrowing. The last time she had been on such an expedition she had swooned twice, and for three days her eyes were swollen with tears, that flowed even in her sleep.

"Oh! I shall be good!" she pleaded. "I sha'n't cry, I promise."

"It is quite useless, my darling," said her mother, caressing her. "The old woman is well now. I shall not go out any more; I'll stay all day with you!"

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the following week Madame Deberle paid a return visit to Madame Grandjean, and displayed an affability that bordered on affection.

"You know what you promised me," she said, sweetly, as she was saying good-bye. "The first fine day we have you will come down to the garden, and bring Jeanne with you. It is the doctor's strict injunction."

"Very well," Hélène assured her, with a smile. "It is understood we will avail ourselves of your kindness."

Three days later, on a bright February afternoon, she accompanied her daughter down to the garden. The porter opened the door communicating between the two houses. At the bottom of the garden, in a greenhouse built somewhat in the style of a Japanese pavilion, they found Madame Deberle seated beside her sister. Both seemed idling away the time doing nothing, for some embroidery work had been thrown on the little table, and lay neglected.

"Oh, how good of you to come!" cried Juliette. "You must sit down here. Pauline, move that table away! It is so pleasant sitting here, and from this pavilion, too, we shall see the children running about very well. Now, children, run away and play; but take care not to fall!"

The large door of the pavilion stood wide open, and on each side had been arranged mirrors, which reflected the garden's expanse. It was as though they were seated underneath a tent. The garden looked homely, with the green sward in the centre, surrounded by beds of flowers. A plain railing divided it from the Rue Vineuse, but against this grew a thick green hedge, which prevented the curious from gazing in—on rather a double hedge, all lush with ivy, clematis, and woodbine, and behind these flourishing lilacs and laburnums. Even in the winter the ubiquitous ivy and the close network of branches proved a dense barrier. But the great charm of the garden lay in its having at the bottom a few lofty trees,

magnificent elms which hid from view the grimy wall of a five-storey house. Girt in on every side, as it was, by the neighbouring houses, this spot seemed like a nook in some park; the little Parisian garden, shaded by these trees, was invested by the imagination with grandeur, though it could have been swept like a drawing-room. Between two elms hung a swing, the seat of which was green with damp.

Hélène leaned forward to drink in the scene.

"Oh, this is a hole!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, carelessly. "Still, in Paris trees are so rare that one is to be congratulated on having half-a-dozen in the garden."

"Oh, how wrong to speak of it so!" said Hélène with fervour. "You are very lucky; it is charming."

The sun streamed from the dim sky in a cascade of golden light, falling slowly through the leafless branches like rain. The trees took a ruddier tint, and the delicate purple shoots softened the grey coldness of the bark. On the lawn and along the walks the grass and gravel glittered amidst the haze that seemed to ooze from the ground. No flower was in blossom; only the happy flush of the sunshine revealed the approach of spring.

"At this time of year it is rather dull," resumed Madame Deberle. "In June it is as cosy as a nest; the trees prevent any one looking in, and it is delightfully private——" She got so far, when she burst out angrily: "Lucien, you must come away from that fountain!"

The little lad was doing the honours of the garden, and had led Jeanne towards a fountain under the steps. Here he had turned on the water which he allowed to splash on the tips of his boots. It was a game that he delighted in. Jeanne, with grave face, was looking on while he wetted his feet.

"Just a moment!" said Pauline rising, "I'll go and stop his nonsense!"

But Juliette held her back.

"You'll do no such thing; you are as silly as he. The other day both of you looked as if you had taken a bath. How it is that a great girl like you cannot remain two minutes seated, I cannot understand! Lucien!" she continued directing prom eyes on her son, "Lucien! do you hear? Turn off the water at once!"

her. "The child, in his fright, made an effort to obey her. But as more; I'll stop of the attempt to stop the flow, the water burst out

with a rush and a noise that made him lose his head. He recoiled, splashed up to the shoulders

"Turn off the water at once!" again ordered his mother, whose cheeks were flushing with anger.

Jeanne, hitherto tongue-tied, slowly, and with the greatest caution, ventured near the fountain; while Lucien burst into loud sobbing as the stream, which terrified him, and which he was powerless to stop, rushed out violently. Carefully drawing in her skirt between her legs, she stretched out her bare hands so as not to wet her sleeves, and turned off the water without receiving a sprinkle. The flow ceased in a moment. Lucien, astonished and inspired with respect, dried his tears and gazed with swollen eyes at the girl.

"Oh, that child puts me beside myself!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, her complexion regaining its usual pallor, while she stretched herself as though wearied to death.

Hélène, deeming it best to intervene, called out—"Jeanne, take his hand, and amuse yourselves with walking up and down."

Jeanne took hold of Lucien's hand, and both with serious face paced up and down the paths with little steps. She was much taller than her companion, who had to stretch his arm up towards her; but this solemn amusement, which consisted in a ceremonious circuit of the lawn, appeared to delight them and lent great dignity to their figures. Jeanne, true lady as she was, gazed about, preoccupied with her own thoughts; Lucien every now and then would venture a glance at her; but not a word was said by either.

"How old-fashioned they are!" said Madame Deberle, smiling and again at her ease. "I must say your Jeanne is a dear, good child. She is so obedient, so well-behaved——"

"Yes, when she is in the company of others," broke in Hélène. "But she is a great trouble at times. She loves me though, and does her best to be good so as not to vex me."

Then they spoke of children: how girls were more precocious than boys; still it would be too bad to deduce too much from Lucien's unintelligent face. In another year he would, doubtless lose all his gawkiness and become quite a gallant. Almost without break their talk turned to the subject of a lady who lived in a house facing them, and concerning which of some scandal was floating about. Madame Deberle, horn of the checked herself to say to her sister:
city trees,

"Pauline, go into the garden for a minute."

With unruffled face the girl left them and stood under the trees. She was accustomed to these injunctions of her sister, given when some risky topic was started, of which she did not wish to speak before her.

"I was at the window yesterday," Juliette began, "and I saw her quite distinctly. She does not even draw the curtains. It is positively disgusting. Why, the children might see her!"

Her voice fell to a whisper, and she seemed shocked by her own narrative; still, her lips were wreathed with a slight smile. She now called out to Pauline that she could return.

Under the trees Pauline gazed upwards, quite unconcerned, awaiting her sister's pleasure. She came back to the greenhouse and resumed her seat. Juliette had not yet exhausted the topic, and addressing Hélène, said:

"Then, madame, you have seen nothing as yet?"

"No," was the quiet reply, "my windows do not look in that direction."

Although Pauline was thus afforded an opportunity of joining in the conversation she was content to listen, but the blanching of her face showed that the maiden understood.

"Dear me!" she remarked, as she gazed through the door into the garden, "there are a great many nests in these trees."

Madame Deberle now resumed her embroidery, making perhaps two stitches in a minute. Hélène, who was only happy when busy, begged permission to bring her work next time she came. She found her companions somewhat dull, and whiled away the time in examining the Japanese pavilion. The walls and ceiling were hidden by tapestry worked in gold, with designs showing a flock of cranes in full flight, butterflies, and flowers in full blossom, alternating with blue ships tossing upon a yellow sea. Chairs, and iron-wood flower-stands were scattered about; on the floor were spread fine mats; the furnishings in Japan ware were littered with trinkets, small bronzes, Eastern vases, and a host of trumpery nick-nacks painted in all the hues of the rainbow. At the other end stood a grotesque figure in Dresden china, with bent legs and naked protruding stomach, the least movement making it shake its head with a terrible and amusing look.

"Isn't it horribly ugly?" asked Pauline, who had been

watching *Hélène* as she looked round. "Now, sister, won't you admit that all these purchases of yours are just rubbish? Even the favoured *Malignon* dubs your Japanese museum 'the sixpenny bazaar.' Oh, by the way, talking of him, I met *Malignon*. He was with a lady, and such a lady—*Florence*, one of the nymphs at the *Variétés*!"

"Where? where?" asked *Juliette* in a moment. "How I shall tease him!"

"On the boulevards. He's coming here to-day, is he not?"

She was not vouchsafed any reply. The ladies had all at once become uneasy owing to the disappearance of the children, and called out their names. Two shrill voices immediately answered:

"We are here!"

And they were there, almost concealed by a spindle tree, seated on the grass in the middle of the lawn.

"What are you about?"

"We have put up at an inn," answered *Lucien*. "We are resting ourselves in our room."

Greatly diverted, they watched them for a time. *Jeanne* seemed quite contented with the game. She was cutting the grass round about her, doubtless with the intention of preparing breakfast. A piece of wood, picked up in one of the flower-beds, served as travelling trunk. They were talking vehemently. *Jeannne*, with great conviction in her tone, was declaring that they were in Switzerland, and that they would set out to see the glaciers, which rather astonished *Lucien*.

"Ha, ha! here he is!" suddenly burst out *Pauline*.

Madame Deberle turned round, and caught sight of *Malignon* descending the steps. He had scarcely time to make his bow and sit down before she attacked him.

"Oh, it is gentlemanly of you to go about everywhere and say I have nothing but rubbishy ornaments about me!"

"You mean this saloon of yours? Oh, yes," said he, quite at his ease. "I think you have scarcely anything worth looking at."

"What! is my china baboon so bad?" she asked, her question betraying intense chagrin.

"Oh! that is somewhat vulgar. It shows bad taste. You wouldn't allow me to select the things——"

"Your taste, forsooth! just talk about your taste!" she

exclaimed, very flushed and angry. "You have been seen with a lady——"

"What lady?" interrogated he, surprised by the violence of the attack.

"A fine choice, indeed! I compliment you on it. A girl that the whole of Paris——"

She suddenly stopped, remembering Pauline's presence.

"Pauline," said she, "go into the garden for a minute."

"Oh, no!" retorted the girl with indignation. "It's so tiresome; I'm always being sent out of the way."

"Go into the garden," repeated Juliette, with severity in her tone.

The girl stalked off with sullen looks, but stopped all at once, to exclaim:

"Well, then, be quick over your talk!"

As soon as she was gone, Madame Deberle returned vigorously to the charge. "How can you, a gentleman, show yourself in public with that Florence? She is at least forty. She is ugly enough to frighten one, and all the gentlemen in the stalls chaff her on first nights."

"Have you finished?" called out Pauline, who was pacing sulkily up and down beneath the trees. "You are boring me dreadfully."

Malignon, however, defended himself. He had no knowledge of this girl Florence; he had never in his life spoken a word to her. They had possibly seen him with a lady: he was sometimes in the company of the wife of a friend of his. Besides, who had seen him? He wanted proofs, witnesses.

"Pauline," hastily asked Madame Deberle, raising her voice, "did you not meet him with Florence?"

"Yes, certainly," replied her sister. "I met them on the boulevards opposite Bignon's."

Glorying in her victory over Malignon, whose face wore an embarrassed smile, Madame Deberle called out:

"You can come back, Pauline; I am quite done."

Malignon had a box at the Folies-Dramatiques for the next night. He gallantly placed it at Madame Deberle's service, apparently not feeling the slightest ill-will; moreover, they were always quarrelling. Pauline wished to know if she could go to see the play that was running. As Malignon laughed and shook his head, she declared it was very silly; authors ought to write plays fit for girls. She was only allowed such

entertainment as "La Dame Blanche" and the classic drama could offer.

The ladies had lost sight of the children, but all at once Lucien betrayed his whereabouts by grievous sobbing.

"What have you done to him, Jeanne?" cried Hélène.

"I have done nothing, mamma," answered the little girl. "He has thrown himself on the ground."

The truth was, the children had just set out for the famous glaciers. As Jeanne affirmed, they were now scaling the mountains, and they lifted their feet far from the ground to escape stones and rocks. Lucien, however, quite out of breath with his exertions, made a false step and lay sprawling in the middle of an imaginary icefield. Disgusted, and furious with child-like rage, he no sooner found himself on the ground than he burst into tears.

"Lift him up," called Hélène.

"He won't let me, mamma. He is rolling about."

And so saying, Jeanne drew back, as though exasperated and annoyed at such an ill-bred display. He did not know how to play; he would certainly cover her with dirt. Her mouth curled, as if she were a duchess found compromising herself. At last, Madame Deberle, irritated by Lucien's continued wailing, requested her sister to pick him up and coax him into silence. Nothing loth, Pauline ran and cast herself down beside the child, rolling on the ground with him for a minute. He struggled with her, unwilling to be lifted up. She took him up, however, by the arms, and to appease him, whispered:

"Stop crying, like a dear, and we'll have a swing!"

Lucien at once closed his lips, while Jeanne's solemn looks vanished, and her face was irradiated with joyous eagerness. All three started in a race for the swing, but Pauline was the first to take possession of the seat.

"Push, push!" she urged the children. They pushed with all the force of their tiny hands, but Pauline was heavy, and they scarcely stirred the swing.

"Push quick!" she urged again. "Oh, the little block-heads, they can't!"

In the pavilion, Madame Deberle had just felt a slight chill. Despite the bright sunshine she thought it rather cold, and she requested Malignon to hand her a white cashmere shawl that was hanging up. Malignon rose to wrap the shawl round her

shoulders; they were indulging in familiar chat about matters possessing little interest for H  l  ne. Feeling fidgety, she rose and walked into the garden, fearing Pauline might unwittingly knock the children down, and so leaving Juliette and the young spark to wrangle over some new fashion in hats that engrossed them.

Jeanne no sooner saw her mother than she ran towards her with a wheedling smile, and entreaty written on every line of her face.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" implored she. "Oh, mamma!"

"No, no, you must not!" replied H  l  ne, who understood very well. "You know you have been forbidden."

Swinging was Jeanne's greatest delight. She would say that she believed herself a bird; the breeze blowing in her face, the lively rush through the air, the continued swaying to and fro in a motion as rhythmic as the beating of a bird's wing, thrilled her with an exquisite pleasure in her ascent towards cloudland; she imagined herself on her way to heaven. But it always ended in some mishap. On one occasion she had been found clinging to the ropes of the swing in a swoon, her large eyes wide open, fixed in a vacant stare; on another, she had fallen to the ground, stiff like a swallow that had been struck by a lead pellet.

"Oh, mamma!" implored she again. "Only a little, a very, very little!"

In the end her mother, willing to satisfy her, placed her on the seat. The child's face lit up with an angelic smile, and her wrists quivered with joyous expectancy. H  l  ne swayed her very gently.

"Higher, mamma, higher!" she murmured.

But H  l  ne paid no heed, and retained firm hold of the rope. She herself was glowing all over, her cheeks flushed, and she thrilled with excitement with every push she gave to the swing. Her wonted sedateness vanished as she lent herself more and more to her daughter's enjoyment.

"That will do now," she declared after a time, as she took Jeanne in her arms.

"Oh, mamma, you must swing now!" the child whispered as she clung to her neck.

She had a delight in seeing her mother flying through the air, to use her own words, and her pleasure was still more intense in gazing at her thus engaged than in having a swing

all to herself. Hélène asked her laughingly who would push her; when she went in for swinging, it was a serious matter; why, she would go higher than the tree-tops! As she was speaking Monsieur Rambaud made his appearance under the guidance of the porter-doorkeeper. He had been introduced to Madame Deberle by Hélène in her own rooms, and he judged he would not be presuming in presenting himself here when unable to find her. Madame Deberle was very gracious, pleased with the unaffected goodness of the worthy man, but soon returned to a very lively discussion with Malignon.

"Come, you darling, push mamma! Come and push!" Jeanne called out to him as she danced round her mother.

"Hold your tongue! We are not at home!" said her mother with mock gravity.

"Bless me! if that will please you, here I am to do it," exclaimed Monsieur Rambaud. "When people are in the country——"

Hélène was letting herself be persuaded. When a slip of a girl she was accustomed to swing for hours, and the recalling of these vanished pleasures created a secret craving to renew them. Pauline, who had sat down with Lucien on the edge of the lawn, intervened with the unreserved manner of the young lady freed from the trammels of girlhood.

"Of course he will push you, and he will swing me after you. You will push me, won't you, sir?"

This determined Hélène. The young blood that flowed so generously in her veins, hitherto checked by modesty springing from her surpassing loveliness, at once thrilled her with artless delight. She became a very school-girl, unaffected and bubbling over with good spirits. There was no prudishness about her. Laughingly, she declared she must not expose her legs, and asked for some cord to tie her skirts securely round her ankles. That done, she stood upright on the swing, her arms extended and clinging to the ropes.

"Now, push, Monsieur Rambaud," she exclaimed delightedly. "But gently at first!"

Monsieur Rambaud had hung his hat on the branch of a tree. His large and kindly face beamed with a fatherly smile. First he tested the strength of the ropes, and, giving a look to the trees, determined to give a slight push. To-day Hélène had abandoned for the first time widow's weeds; she was wearing a grey dress set off with mauve bows. Standing

upright she commenced to swing, almost touching the ground, and as if swaying herself to sleep.

"Quicker! quicker!" she ordered.

Monsieur Rambaud, with his hands ready, took hold of the seat as it passed him, and gave it a stronger push. Hélène went higher, every ascent taking her further. Still, with the motion, she did not lose her sedateness; she preserved almost an austere demeanour; her eyes shone very bright in her beautiful impassive face; her nostrils only were inflated, as though she were drinking in the air. Not a fold of her skirts was out of place, but a plait of hair slipped down.

"Quicker! quicker!"

An energetic push gave her increased impetus. Up in the sunshine she flew higher and higher. A breeze sprung up with her motion, and blew through the garden; her flight was so swift that they could scarcely distinguish her figure aright. Her face was now all smiles, and flushed with a rosy red, while her eyes shone like stars. The loosened plait of hair rustled against her neck. Despite the cord which bound them, her skirts waved about, revealing the whiteness of the ankles. Her unrestraint was perfect; her bosom heaved in its free enjoyment; she felt in the air as though it were her natural place.

"Quicker! quicker!"

Monsieur Rambaud, with face red and bedewed with perspiration, lent all his strength in pushing once more. There was a cry. Hélène went still higher.

"Oh, mamma! Oh, mamma!" That was all Jeanne could say in her ecstasy.

She was sitting on the lawn gazing at her mother, her little hands clasped on her bosom, looking as though she herself had drunk in the breeze that was stirring. Her breathing seemed to have stopped; her shoulders swayed instinctively from side to side, keeping time with the motions of the swing. Again came the cry—"Quicker! quicker!" Her mother still went higher. Far above, her feet grazed the branches of the trees.

"Higher, mamma! oh, higher, mamma!"

But the sweep of the swing was now at its greatest. The trees bent and cracked as with the force of a gale. Her skirts, which was all they could see, flapped in a miniature whirlwind. When she rushed back with arms stretched out and bosom

distended she lowered her head slightly and looked down for a moment; but anon, an impulse seized her, and she threw herself backwards, the head carelessly inclined, the eyes closed, making one think she had swooned with the rapid motion. Her fierce delight in the tearing upward and downwards through the air made her giddy. In her flight she swam into the sunshine—the pale yellow February sunshine that rained down like golden dust. Her chestnut hair gleamed with amber tints; and a flame seemed to have leapt up round her, the mauve bows on her sun-lit dress flashing like burning flowers. Everywhere the spring-tide was warming into birth, and the purple-tinted shoots of the trees displayed their tracery against the blue sky.

Jeanne clasped her hands. Her mother seemed to her a saint with a golden glory round her head winging her way to paradise. In her emotion she could only repeat in breathless tones—"Oh, mamma! oh, mamma!"

Madame Deberle and Malignon had now grown interested in the fun and came under the trees. Malignon pronounced the lady very bold.

"I should faint, I'm sure," said Madame Deberle, with a frightened air.

Hélène heard, and dropped some words from among the branches:

"Oh, my heart is all right! Give a stronger push, Monsieur Rambaud!"

Still her voice betrayed no emotion. She seemed to take no heed of the two men who were on-lookers. They were without doubt nothing to her. The tress of hair was flying in disorder, the cord that confined her skirts had given way somewhat, and they rustled in the wind like a flag. She was going still higher.

All at once the exclamation broke out:

"Enough, Monsieur Rambaud, enough!"

Doctor Deberle had just appeared on the steps. He came forward, embraced his wife tenderly, took Lucien up and kissed his brow. He then gazed at Hélène with a smile.

"I've had enough, I've had enough!" she still continued exclaiming.

"Why?" asked he. "Do I disturb you?"

She made no answer; a look of gravity had crept into her face. The swing, still continuing its rapid flights upward, lost

none of its impetus, but swayed to and fro with a regular motion that bore H  l  ne to a very great height. The doctor, surprised and charmed, beheld her with admiration; she was so magnificent, so tall and strong, so endowed with the purity of an antique statue, swinging thus gently amid the spring sunshine. But she seemed to grow annoyed, and abruptly leaped down.

"Stop a moment!" they all cried out.

From H  l  ne's lips came a dull moan; she had fallen upon the gravelled path, and her efforts to rise were fruitless.

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the doctor, his face turning very pale. "How imprudent!"

They all crowded round her. Jeanne broke into an agony of tears, and Monsieur Rambaud, with his heart in his mouth, was compelled to snatch her up in his arms. The doctor, meanwhile, was eagerly questioning H  l  ne.

"Is it the right leg you have fallen on? Can you not stand upright?"

No reply. She seemed stunned.

"Are you suffering?" he next asked.

"Yes, here, on the knee; a dull pain," she answered, with difficulty.

He sent off his wife at once for his medicine-case and some bandages, and then, bending over H  l  ne, said:

"I must see, I must see. No doubt it is a mere nothing."

He knelt down on the gravel. So far H  l  ne allowed him to go; but on his moving his hand towards her, she struggled up, and drew her skirts round her feet. She protested—"No, no!"

"But," said he, "I must examine the place."

A slight shiver stole over her, and she exclaimed, very feebly:

"I would rather not. It is nothing at all."

He looked at her, astounded at first. Her neck was flushing red; for a moment their eyes met, and seemed to read to the bottom of their souls; he was disconcerted, and rose slowly, remaining near, without pressing her further.

H  l  ne signed to Monsieur Rambaud to come to her side. She whispered in his ear:

"Fetch Doctor Bodin, and tell him what has happened to me."

Ten minutes later Doctor Bodin made his appearance on the scene. With superhuman courage she regained her feet, and

advanced towards her own house, leaning on the doctor and Monsieur Rambaud. Jeanne followed, sobbing like to break her heart.

"I shall wait on you," said Doctor Deberle to his brother physician. "Step down, and remove our fears."

In the garden a lively colloquy ensued. Malignon was of opinion that women had queer pates. Why on earth had this lady been so foolish as to jump down? Pauline, excessively provoked at the accident robbing her of a pleasure, declared it was silly to swing so high. Doctor Deberle uttered not a word, but seemed anxious.

"It is nothing serious," said Doctor Bodin, as he came down into the garden again—"only a sprain. Still, she will have to keep to an easy chair for at least a fortnight."

Thereupon Monsieur Deberle gave a friendly slap on Malignon's shoulder. He wished his wife to go in, as it was becoming too cold. Snatching up Lucien, he covered him with kisses, and bore him indoors himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE two windows of the room were wide open, and far below the house, which was perched on the very summit of the hill, lay Paris, rolling away to the horizon in a mighty flat expanse. Ten o'clock struck; the lovely February morning had all the sweetness and perfume of spring.

Hélène reclined in an invalid chair, reading in front of one of the windows, her knee still encased in bandages. She suffered no pain; but she had been confined to her room for a week past, unable even to take up her customary needlework. Not knowing what to do, she was turning over the leaves of a book she had picked off the table; she indulged in little or no reading at any time. It was the book she used every night as a shade for the lamp, the only one she had taken within eighteen months from the small but irreproachable library selected by Monsieur Rambaud. It was Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," which had at first wearied her to death, but a wonderful curiosity soon took possession of her. She read it through, at times affected to tears, sometimes rather bored; she would let it slip from her hand during some long-lagging minutes and gaze fixedly at the far-stretching horizon.

This morning Paris awoke from sleep with a happy indolence. A vapour that bathed the valley of the Seine shrouded the two banks from view. The mist was light and of a milky hue, and the sun gathering strength was slowly shining through it. Nothing of the city was distinguishable; to the eye the atmosphere seemed to be filled with floating muslin. In the hollows the haze deepened and assumed a bluish tint; while over open spaces the glinting sunshine descended in a delicate stream of golden dust through which the lines of streets glimmered. Far above, domes and steeples pierced the mist, their grey outlines towering up, though the trailing cloud still shrouded them. At times threads of yellow smoke floated upwards like giant birds on heavy wing, only to settle next moment and fade into the air. Over this all-enveloping

ing that hung above Paris was the mighty arch of a translucent sky, of an indistinguishable blue, almost white. The rays of the rising sun fell like exquisite powder; the golden atmosphere, golden with the vague beauty of an infant's smile, was dissolving in rain, while everything thrilled almost with a shiver. It was a festival wherein peace reigned supreme, tempered by a happiness of infinite tenderness; and during its continuance the city, pierced all over with golden arrows, slept idly, not yet judging it time to reveal herself by throwing off her veil of lace.

For eight days it had been Hélène's diversion to gaze on the mighty expanse of Paris, and she never wearied of doing so. It was as unfathomable and varying as the ocean; fair in the morning, ruddy with fire at night, borrowing all the joy and gloom of the heaven reflected in its depths. In the full sunshine Paris rolled before her in waves of gold, or a cloud would suddenly darken, and a tempest sweep over it. New beauties were always springing up; there were level stretches swimming in orange colour; gusts of wind whistled over it from time to time; there would be a shimmer of light on every house-top, or the horizon vanished behind sheets of rain that plunged heaven and earth in chaotic confusion. At her window Hélène experienced to the full a multitude of hopes and sorrows. As the keen wind blew in her face she imagined it wafted a bitter fragrance; and the ceaseless noise of the city rolling upwards was to her as a surging sea beating against a rocky cliff.

The book fell from her hands. She was dreaming, with a far-away look in her eyes. When she stopped reading thus, she was forced to discontinue by a desire to linger and revolve the matter in her mind. She took a delight in denying her curiosity immediate satisfaction. The tale filled her soul with a tempest of emotion. Paris this morning was displaying just the vague joy and sorrow which disturbed her heart. In this lay a great delight, at first to be ignorant of its presence, then to have it dimly revealed, while she abandoned herself to a lingering recognition, the course of which seemed to persuade her she was again beginning her youth.

How cramful of lies are novels! She was assuredly right in not reading them. They were mere fables, good for empty heads with no proper conception of life. Yet she remained entranced, dreaming unceasingly of the knight Ivanhoe, loved passionately by two women, Rebecca, the

lovely Jewess, and the noble Lady Rowena. She thought she could have loved with the intensity and quiet cheerfulness of the latter maiden. To love ! to love ! She did not utter the words, but they thrilled her through and through in the very thought, astonishing her and irradiating her face with a smile. In the distance some fleecy cloudlets, driven by the wind, floated over Paris like a flock of swans. Huge gaps were cleft in the fog ; a momentary glimpse was given of the left bank, indistinct and clouded, like a city of fairydom seen in a dream ; but a thick curtain of mist swept down, and the fairy city was engulfed and vanished in its folds. The fog, now shrouding every district alike, took the semblance of a beautiful lake with milky and placid waters ; while the course of the Seine, with its grey curve, was marked out by a denser current. Slowly over these milky, placid waters shadows crawled like vessels with sails tipped with red ; these the young woman followed with a dreamy gaze. To love ! to love ! She smiled as her dream sailed on.

Meanwhile, Hélène again took up her book. She had reached the chapter describing the attack on the castle, wherein Rebecca nurses the wounded Ivanhoe, and details to him the incidents of the fight which she gazes on from a window. A delightful delusion seized her ; she seemed to be walking in a heavenly garden, the trees laden with golden fruit, where she imbibed all sorts of fancies. Then, at the conclusion of the scene when Rebecca, wrapped in her veil, breathes tenderly over the sleeping knight, Hélène again allowed the book to slip from her hand—her heart was so brimful of emotion that she could not read on.

Heavens ! could all these things be true ? she asked herself as she reclined in her easy chair, still and silent as if from necessity, and contemplating Paris, shrouded and mysterious, beneath the rays of the glimmering sun. The events of her life then passed before her, conjured up by the reading of the novel. She saw herself a young girl in the house of her father, a hatter, named Mouret, at Marseilles. The Rue des Petites-Maries was dismal enough, and the house with its vat of steaming water, ready to the hand of the hatter, had a pervading rank smell that spoke of damp. She saw, too, her mother, ever an invalid, who kissed her with pale lips without speaking. No gleam of the sun ever penetrated into her nursery. Hard work went on around her that brought in a competency suffi-

cient for a working-man. This summed up her early life, and till her marriage, nothing intervened to break the monotony of these days. One morning, returning from market with her mother, a basket full of vegetables on her arm, she jostled against the lad Grandjean. Charles turned round and followed them. The love-romance of her life was in this incident. For three months she was always meeting him, while he, bashful and awkward, could not pluck up courage to speak to her. She was sixteen years of age, and a little proud of her lover, who she knew belonged to a wealthy family. But she thought him not very handsome, she laughed at him often, and in spite of him her sleep was unbroken in the large, gloomy, damp house. In the end they were married; even yet this marriage was to her a source of surprise. Charles worshipped her, and on their wedding night flung himself on the ground to kiss her bare feet. She beamed on him, her smile full of kindness, as she rebuked him for such childishness. The old dull life recommenced. During twelve years no sufficiently interesting event took place which she could bear in mind. Their life was very quiet and very happy; she was tormented with fever neither of the body nor of the heart; her whole attention was given to the daily cares of a poor household. Charles was wont to kiss her fair white feet, while she indulged and played the mother towards him. But other feeling she had none. There abruptly came into her sight the room in the Hôtel du Var, her husband in his coffin, and her widow's robe hanging over a chair. She had wept as on the winter's night when her mother died. Then once more the days glided on; for two months with her daughter she again enjoyed peace and happiness. Kind Heaven, did that sum up everything? What, then, meant this book when it spoke of transcendent loves which illuminate one's existence?

A prolonged quiver broke out on the horizon, above the expanse of motionless fog. Suddenly it was rent apart, the curtain was broken through more and more, and at last a huge gap betokened the complete break-up. The sun ascending higher and higher in the heavens, darting everywhere its rays in triumph, bent all its energy towards dispersing the mist. Slowly the stretch of vapour seemed to wear away, as though an invisible dam had diverted the stream towards another point. The fog, so dense but a moment before, was fading away, and as it slowly became transparent, there

flashed up all the brilliant hues of the rainbow. The whole of the left bank was of a heavenly blue, that deepened farther away to violet, beside the Jardin des Plantes. On the right bank the Tuileries district was swimming in red and white flesh tints, while away towards Montmartre the light was as of live coal, carmine flaming in gold; in the distance, the working-men's quarter deepened to a dusty brick colour, changing more and more till all became a slaty bluish-grey. To the eye the city no longer appeared in a tremor and indistinguishable, as though it were some abyss in the sea seen through the crystalline waves, with awful forests of plants preternatural in size, hidden horrible rumblings, and half-seen monsters. But the watery mist was quickly falling. It had been no more than a clustering of fine muslin drapery; the muslin curtain was withdrawn, and the real Paris smiled out again, wakened from its dream.

To love! to love! why did these words ring through her with such sweetness as the darkness of the fog gave way to light? Had she not loved her husband whom she had tended like a child? But a bitter memory stirred within her—the memory of her dead father, who had hung himself three months after his wife's decease, within a closet where her gowns still dangled from their hooks. There he gasped out his last agony, the body rigid and the face buried in a skirt, wrapped round by the clothes which breathed of her whom he had ever worshipped. Then, in her dreamings, she abruptly thought of other things; she mused on her own home-life, on the month's bills she had checked with Rosalie that very morning, and the fulfilment of duties such as these gave her a feeling of contented vanity. During the more than thirty years of her life she had retained her self-respect and strength of mind. Uprightness only inspired her. When she questioned her past, not one hour revealed a sin; in her mind's-eye she saw herself treading a straight and level path. Truly, the days might slip away, but she would walk on peacefully as before, with no impediment in her way. The very thought made her stern, and her spirit rose in angry contempt against the lives painted in fiction, the heroic attributes of which bring discord to the heart. The only true life was her own, girt in by a quiet content. Over Paris now hung a thin smoke like fine gauze, trembling and on the point of floating away; tender emotions suddenly took possession of her. To love! to love! every-

thing brought her back to this endearing phrase, even the pride born of her virtue. Her dreaming sunk into apathy, her heart was surcharged with tenderness, and her eyes filled with tears.

Hélène was about to resume her reading, when Paris slowly burst into view. Not a breath of wind stirred; it was as if a magician had waved his wand. The last gauzy film dispersed and floated out of sight, leaving the city without a shadow, while the rays of the conquering sun beat down. Hélène, with chin supported on her hand, gazed on this mighty awakening.

A far-stretching valley, with a myriad buildings huddled together. Over the distant range of hills were scattered the close-set roofs, and one knew intuitively that the sea of houses rolled afar, behind the undulating ground, into the fields hidden from sight. It was as the ocean, with all its infinite and unknown vagueness. Paris extended everywhere as far-reaching as the heaven which covered it. The city, burnished with the sunshine, seemed this lovely morning like a field of yellowing corn; and the vast picture was yet simple, two colours only predominating, the pale blue of the sky, and the golden glory reflected from the house-tops. The stream of light from the spring sun invested everything with the beauty of a new birth. So pure was the light that the minutest objects became visible, and Paris, with its innumerable stone buildings, shone as though under glass. From time to time, however, a breath of wind stirred amidst this wondrous and undisturbed quiet; and then the outlines of some districts grew faint, and quivered as if they were being viewed through an invisible flame.

Hélène's interest was first stirred in gazing on the mighty scene that lay unfolded before her, on the slope of the Trocadéro and the far-stretching quays. She had to lean out to distinguish the deserted square of the Champ-de-Mars, shut in at one end by the dull-looking Military School. Down below, on thoroughfare and pavement on each side of the Seine, she saw the passers-by—a busy cluster of black dots, moving like a swarm of ants; an omnibus painted yellow seemed like a spark of fire; drays and cabs crossed the bridge, mere child's toys in the distance, with miniature horses working like pieces of mechanism; and amongst others traversing the grassy slopes was a servant girl, with a white apron that made a shining spot against the surrounding green. After a while, Hélène looked down again; but the crowds were fading away

out of sight, and the vehicles appeared like grains of sand; the city was no longer like the enormous body of a dying Titan, alike untenanted and abandoned, giving feeble signs of life in the dull roar which rose from it. There, in the foreground to the left, some red roofs were shining, and the tall chimneys of the Army bake-house poured out their smoke slowly; while, on the other side of the river, between the Esplanade and the Champ-de-Mars, a grove of lofty elms clustered in a green nook, their tracery of bare branches quite clear to the eye, their tops rounded, and the young buds already bursting out. In the centre of the picture, the broad Seine rolled its waters, flowing between its steep grey banks towards the distant horizon; the confusion of barrels on the quays, of steam cranes and carts drawn up in line, realised a seaport scene. Hélène's eyes were always turning towards the shining river, on which boats passed to and fro like birds inky-black in colour. Her lingering looks involuntarily followed its stately course, which, like a strip of gold lace, cut Paris in two. This morning the stream seemed to flow out of the sun; a more dazzling sight could not be seen on the horizon. Hélène could see first the Pont des Invalides, next the Pont de la Concorde, and next the Pont Royal—bridge after bridge, they appeared to get closer, one above the other, viaducts forming a flight of steps and pierced with all kinds of arches; while the river, wending its way beneath these airy structures, showed here and there the tips of its blue dress, growing narrower as it faded more and more from view. Still Hélène gazed further into the background. Yonder, the water-way, now seen, now lost to sight, crawled amidst a confusion of houses; the bridges connecting the two portions of the city seemed thin films stretching from one bank to the other; while the towers of Notre-Dame bounded the horizon, beyond which river, buildings, and clumps of trees were as a haze in the distance amidst the gleaming sunshine. Dazzled, she withdrew her gaze from this central splendour, in which the whole glory of the city appeared to blaze.

On the right bank, amongst the clustering trees of the Champs-Élysées, glittered with a snowy sheen the crystal buildings of the Palace of Industry; further away, behind the dwarfed structure of the Madeleine, towered up like a tombstone the vast mass of the Opera House. There were other edifices, too; domes and towers, the Vendôme Column, Saint-Vincent de Paul, the Tour Saint-Jacques; and closer, the heavy cube-

like pavilions of the new Louvre and the Tuileries, half-buried in a wood of chestnut trees. On the left bank the dome of the Invalides shone like burnished gold; beyond it again, the two irregular towers of Saint-Sulpice were bathed in light; and in the rear, to the right of the newly-erected spires of Sainte-Clotilde, the Panthéon, on a hill, reared its blue rectangular mass above the city, its fine colonnade visible clear against the sky, and motionless in the air, with the gossamer appearance of a captive balloon.

Hélène's gaze now wandered idly all over Paris. There were hollows, as was evinced by the lines of roofs; the Buttes des Moulins mounted upwards, in jetty waves of old slate, while the wide boulevards stretched afar like a river, till the confused mass of houses was swallowed up in the distance, the tiles even becoming invisible. The morning was not sufficiently advanced to allow the sun to shine on the house-fronts looking towards the Trocadéro; not a window-pane reflected its beams. The glass coverings on some roofs alone sparkled with the glittering reflex of mica amidst the fiery red of the surrounding brick. The houses were mostly of a sombre grey, lit up by the reflected beams; but in front of Hélène the sun succeeded in piercing some places and lengthy streets cut through the shadow with their stream of light. It was only to the left that the wide-stretching line between earth and sky, almost perfect in its circular sweep, was broken by the slopes of Montmartre and the heights of Père-Lachaise. The scene, with the minute details of its background, with its numberless jagged rows of chimneys, and the tiny spots of black, formed by thousands of windows, became confused and speckled with yellow and blue; the city, seemingly endless, lost all its distinguishing features, and the distant suburbs looked like a shingly beach over which hung a violet-tinted mist, while the heavens swam with dazzling and quivering sunshine.

Hélène was watching the scene with grave interest when Jeanne burst gleefully into the room.

"Oh, mamma! look here!"

The child had in her hand a bunch of wall-flowers. She told with some laughter, how she had waylaid Rosalie on her coming in, and had looked over her basket of provisions. To rummage in this basket was a great delight to her.

"Look at it, mamma! It lay at the very bottom. Just smell it; what a lovely perfume!"

From the tawny flowers, speckled with purple, floated an odour that penetrated through and scented the whole room. Then H  l  ne, with a passionate movement, drew Jeanne to her breast, while the nosegay of flowers fell on her lap. To love! to love! truly, she loved her child. Was not this intense love which had pervaded her life till now sufficient for her wants? It ought to satisfy her; it was so gentle, so tranquil; no weariness could put an end to its continuance. Again she pressed her daughter to her, as though to conjure away thoughts which threatened to separate them. In the meantime Jeanne gave herself up to this shower of kisses. Her eyes moist with tears, she turned her delicate neck upwards with a coaxing gesture, and pressed her face against her mother's shoulder. Next she circled her mother with her arm, clinging there very contented, with cheek resting on the bosom. The wall-flowers' perfume ascended between them.

For a long time they remained thus without speaking. At length Jeanne, not moving from her place, asked in a whisper:

"Mamma, you see down there close to the river that rosy coloured dome; what is it?"

It was the dome of the Institute, and H  l  ne looked towards it for a moment as though trying to recall the name.

"I don't know, my love," she answered gently.

The child appeared content with this reply, and again there was a silence. Soon, however, she asked a second question.

"And there, quite near, what beautiful trees are those?" As she spoke she pointed with her finger towards a corner of the Tuileries garden.

"Those beautiful trees!" said her mother. "To the left do you mean? I don't know, my love."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jeanne. She mused for a little and then added with a grave pout:

"We know nothing!"

Indeed they knew nothing of Paris. During the eighteen months it had lain beneath their gaze every hour of the day they had not got to recognise a single stone of it. Three times only had they gone down into the city; but they had found their way back again suffering from a terrible headache, and had failed to become acquainted with anything, amidst the Babel and confusion of the streets.

Jeanne at times was not to be rebuffed.

"Ah! you can tell me now! What is that glass building

that glitters so much? The place is so large that you must know."

"It's a railway station. No, I'm wrong, I think it is a theatre."

She smiled and kissed Jeanne's hair, and at last confessed as before:

"I do not know, my love."

So they continued to gaze on Paris, troubling no more to identify any part of it. It was very delightful to have it there and yet to know nothing of it; it remained the vast and the unknown. It was as though they had halted on the threshold of a world which unrolled its panoramic effects ever before them, but into which they were unwilling to advance. Paris was sometimes an unpleasant neighbour, when there rose from it a close and stifling atmosphere; but this morning it was sunny and harmless as a child, and the air from its mysterious depths struck gently on their faces.

Hélène took up her book again while Jeanne, clinging close to her, bestowed rapt attention on the scene. In the dazzling and tranquil sky no breeze was stirring. The smoke from the Army bake-house curled up perpendicularly in light wreaths that dispersed high up in the air. On a level with the houses there seemed to surge a wave of life, a reflex of the life pent up below. The shrill noises of the streets softened amidst the sunshine into a happy murmur. All at once a flutter attracted Jeanne's notice. A flock of white pigeons had been freed from some adjacent dovecot, and flew through the air in front of the window; their spreading wings like falling snow, they swarmed across the line of view, and shut out the boundless vision of Paris.

With eyes again gazing upwards, and with dreamy look, Hélène remained plunged in happy fancies. She was the Lady Rowena; she loved discreetly and intensely, as is the nature of a noble mind. This spring morning, the wondrous vision of the beautiful city, the early wall-flowers breathing out their perfume on her lap, had filled her heart with a great feeling of tenderness.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

ONE morning Hélène was busily arranging her little library, the various books of which had got somewhat out of order with her past few days' reading, when Jeanne skipped into the room, merrily clapping her hands.

"A soldier, mamma! a soldier!" she screamed.

"What? a soldier?" exclaimed her mother. "What do you want, you and your soldier?"

But the child was in one of her paroxysms of extravagant delight; she only jumped about the more with her cry: "A soldier! a soldier!" without deigning to give further explanation. She had left the room door wide open, and so, as Hélène rose, she was astonished to see a soldier—a very little soldier—in the lobby. Rosalie had gone out, and Jeanne must have been playing out on the landing though such amusement was strictly forbidden by her mother.

"What do you want, my lad?" asked Hélène.

The little soldier was very much confused on seeing the lady, so lovely and fair, in her dressing-gown trimmed with lace; he shuffled one foot to and fro over the floor, bowed, and at last burst out with: "I beg pardon—excuse——"

He could get no further, and stumbled against the wall, still shuffling his feet. His retreat was thus cut off, and seeing the lady awaited his reply with an involuntary smile, he dived into his right-hand pocket, from which he dragged a blue handkerchief, a knife, and a hunk of bread. He gazed on each in turn, and thrust them back again. He next turned his attention to the left-hand pocket, from which were produced a twist of cord, two rusty nails, and some pictures wrapped in half of a newspaper. All these he pushed back to their resting-place, and then he strummed on his legs with an anxious air. At last he burst out again, as if dumbfounded:

"I beg pardon—excuse——"

But suddenly he put his finger to his nose, and exclaimed with a loud laugh:

"What a fool I am! I remember now!"

He undid two buttons of his coat, and rummaged in his breast, into which he plunged his arm up to the elbow. After a time he drew from its receptacle a letter, which he rustled violently before handing to H  l  ne, as though to shake the dust from it.

"A letter for me! Are you sure?" said she.

On the envelope were certainly inscribed her name and address in a heavy rustic scrawl, with the down-strokes tumbling over one another. When at last she made it all out, after long hesitation over the twists and turns of this marvellous handwriting, she could not but smile again. It was a letter from Rosalie's aunt, introducing to H  l  ne's notice Z  phyrin Lacour, who had fallen a victim to the conscription, "in spite of two masses having been said by his reverence." It went on to say that Z  phyrin was Rosalie's lover; and would madame be so good as to allow the young folks to see each other on Sundays? Over three pages this question was continually cropping up in the same words, the letter growing more and more confused, as the writer strove to continue without repeating herself. Just above the signature, however, the aunt seemed to have hit the right nail on the head, for she had written: "His reverence gives his permission;" and then the pen had spluttered over the paper, making a shower of blots.

H  l  ne folded the letter slowly. Two or three times, while deciphering its contents, she had lifted her head to glance at the soldier. He still remained close against the wall, and his lips stirred, each sentence in the letter being seemingly emphasized by a slight movement of the chin. No doubt he knew its contents by heart.

"Then you are Z  phyrin Lacour, are you not?" she asked.

His joy was quite hilarious as he inclined his head.

"Come in, my lad; don't stay out there."

He made up his mind to follow her, but he continued standing close to the door, while H  l  ne sat down. She had scarcely seen him in the darkness of the lobby. He must have been identical in figure with Rosalie; a third of an inch less and he would have been exempt from service. He had red hair, cut very short; there was not the least sign of a beard, and

the freckly face was quite round, and pierced with two small eyes like gimlet holes. His new great-coat, much too large for him, made him look still more like a barrel; his legs, wide apart, were incased in red trousers; while he swung before him his military cap, with its huge peak. It was comic, and yet pathetic, to look on this stupid little plump fellow, the rustic peeping through the uniform in every movement.

Hélène was wishful to obtain all his news.

"You left Beauce a week ago?"

"Yes, madame!"

"And here you are in Paris. Are you tired of it yet?"

"No, madame."

He was fast losing his bashfulness, and now gazed all over the room, evidently much impressed with its blue velvet hangings.

"Rosalie is out," Hélène began again, "but she will be here very soon. Her aunt tells me you are her sweetheart."

To this the soldier vouchsafed no reply, but hung his head with a shamefaced look, and set to work scraping the carpet with the tip of his boot.

"Then you will have to marry her when you leave the army?" Hélène continued questioning.

"Yes, to be sure!" exclaimed he, his face turning very red. "Yes, of course; we are engaged!" Then, won over by the kindly manner of the lady, he made up his mind to speak, his fingers still playing with his cap. "You know, it's an old story. When we were quite children, we were arrant little thieves together. We used to get switched; oh, yes, that's true! I must tell you the two families—Lacour and Pichon—lived in the same lane, and were next-door neighbours. And then, again, weren't Rosalie and myself taught at the same school? Then her parents died, and her aunt Marguerite took her in. But she, the minx, was already as strong as a demon."

He broke off, his face crimsoning all over, and then he asked hesitatingly:

"Perhaps she has told you all this?"

"Yes, yes; but go on with your story," said Hélène, greatly amused.

"In short," continued he, "she was awfully strong, though as light as a lark. It was a treat to see her at her work! How she got through it! One day she gave a slap to a

friend of mine—by Jove! such a slap! I had the livid mark of it on my arm for a week! Yes, that was the way it had all come about. All the gossips of the country side declared we must marry one another. Besides, we weren't ten years old before we had agreed on that! And, madame, we have stuck to it, we have stuck to it!"

He placed one hand upon his heart, with fingers wide apart. Hélène's amusement had now died away. The idea of bringing a soldier into familiar contact with her household was losing its charm. His reverence, no doubt, had given his sanction, but she imagined it was rather venturesome. In the country there is too much license, and lovers indulge in all sorts of pleasantries. Her face betrayed her apprehensions. When Zéphyrin at last gathered so much, his first inclination was to laugh, but his awe for Hélène restrained him.

"Oh, madame, madame! you don't know her, I can see! I have received slaps enough from her! By Jove! young men like to laugh! isn't that so? Sometimes I pinched her, and she would turn round and hit me right on the nose. Her aunt's advice always was, 'Look here, my girl, don't let yourself be tickled; it isn't lucky!' His reverence, too, took an interest in the match, and mayhap that has had a lot to do with our keeping up sweethearting. We were to have been married after my being drawn for a soldier. But here's the kettle of fish! Things turned out badly. Rosalie declared she would be a servant in Paris, and would earn a dowry while waiting for me. And so, and so——"

He swung himself about, dangling his cap, now from one hand now from the other. But still Hélène never said a word, and he jumped to the idea that she distrusted him. This was a dreadful wound to him.

"You think, perhaps, I shall deceive her?" he burst out angrily. "Even, too, when I tell you we are betrothed? I shall marry her, see you, as certainly as the heaven shines on us. I am quite ready to pledge my word in writing. Yes, if you like, I'll write it down for you."

He lifted up his head, moved to the heart. He walked into the centre of the room and gazed about him, intent on finding pen and ink. Hélène tried to appease his ruffled feelings, but he still went on:

"Yes, I would rather I signed a paper for you. What harm would it do you? Your mind will be all the easier with it!"

Just at that moment, however, Jeanne, who had again run away, returned, jumping and clapping her hands.

"Rosalie! Rosalie! Rosalie!" she chanted in tones now high, now low.

Through the open doors could be heard, only too well, the panting of the maid as she mounted the stair laden with her basket. Zéphyrin started back into a corner of the room, his mouth wide agape from ear to ear with a quiet laugh and the gimlet holes of his eyes gleaming with rustic roguery. Rosalie walked right into the room, as was her usual way, to display to her mistress her morning's purchase of provisions.

"Madame," said she, "I've brought some cauliflowers. Look at them! Only eighteen sous for two; it isn't dear, is it?"

She held out the basket half-open, but on lifting her head noticed Zéphyrin's grinning face. Surprise nailed her to the carpet. Two or three seconds slipped away; she had doubtless failed to recognise him in his uniform. Her round eyes opened wide, her fat little face blanched, and her coarse black hair waved about in agitation.

"Oh!"

This was all she said. Her astonishment was such that she dropped her basket. The provisions, cauliflowers, onions, apples, rolled on the carpet. Jeanne gave a delighted cry, and went on her knees in the middle of the room, hunting for the apples, even under the chairs and the wardrobe with the mirror. Rosalie, meanwhile, never moved, as though paralysed.

"What!" she found breath at last to say, "it's you! What are you doing here? what are you doing here? Say!"

She turned to Hélène with the question:

"You, then, have allowed him to come in?"

Zéphyrin never uttered a word, but contented himself with winking slyly. Then Rosalie gave vent to her emotion in tears; and, to show her delight at seeing him again, she could do nothing better than begin to quiz him.

"Oh! go away!" she began, marching up to him. "You are neat and pretty in that guise of yours! I might have passed you in the street, and not even have said: 'God bless you!' Oh! you are in a nice rig-out! You just look as if you had your sentry-box on your back; and they've cut your hair so short that you are more like the sexton's little dog than anything else. Good heavens! what a fright you are; what a fright!"

Zéphyrin, very indignant, made up his mind to say something.

"It's not my fault, I'm quite sure! Oh! if you joined a regiment we would see a few things."

They had quite forgotten where they were; everything vanished, the room, Hélène, and Jeanne, who was busy gathering the apples together. With hands folded over her apron, the maid stood upright in front of the soldier.

"Is everything all right down there?" asked she.

"Oh, yes, excepting Guignard's cow is ill. The veterinary surgeon came and told them she was full of water!"

"If she's full of water, she won't last long. Excepting that, is everything all right?"

"Yes, oh, yes! The village constable has broken his arm. Old Canivet is dead. And, by the way, his reverence lost his purse with thirty sous in it when he was returning from Grandval. But otherwise, everything is all right."

Then silence fell on them, and they looked at one another with sparkling eyes, the lips compressed and slowly expanding into an amorous grin. This must have been the manner in which they expressed their love for one another, for they had not even stretched out their hands in greeting. Rosalie's eyes, however, dropped all at once from their fond contemplation, and the sight of the vegetables on the floor brought on a storm of lamentation. Such a nice mess! and it was he who had caused it all! Madame should have let him wait on the stair! Scolding away as fast as she could, she dropped on her knees and restored to the basket the apples, onions, and cauliflowers, much to the disgust of Jeanne, who would fain have done it all herself. She was walking off to her kitchen, never deigning another look in Zéphyrin's direction, when Hélène, conciliated by the good understanding existing between the pair, stopped her.

"Listen to me a moment, my girl," she said. "Your aunt has asked me to allow this young man to come and see you of a Sunday. He will come in the afternoon, and you will try not to let your work fall behind too much."

Rosalie stood still, merely turning her head. Though she was well pleased, she kept up her doleful air.

"Oh, madame, he will be such a bother," declared she. But simultaneously she glanced over her shoulder at Zéphyrin, whose face again assumed its amorous grin. The little soldier

remained for a moment stock-still, the mouth agape from ear to ear with its silent laugh. Then he retired backwards, with his cap against his heart as he thanked *Hélène* profusely. The door shut upon him, but even on the landing he continued bowing.

"Is that *Rosalie's* brother, mamma?" asked *Jeanne*.

Hélène was embarrassed beyond measure by the question. She regretted the permission which she had just given with a sudden good-humour that surprised her now. She remained thinking for some seconds, and then replied:

"No, he is her cousin."

"Ah!" said the child, with a serious air.

Rosalie's kitchen looked out on the sunny expanse of Doctor *Deberle's* garden. In the summer the branches of the elms swayed in through the very large window. It was the cheeriest room of all, flooded always with light, sometimes so blinding that *Rosalie* had perforce put up a curtain of blue cotton, which she drew of an afternoon. The only complaint she made about the kitchen was that it was too small; it was a narrow strip of a place, the cooking range being on the right hand side, while on the left were the table and dresser. The various utensils and other furnishings, however, had been all so carefully arranged that she had contrived to keep a corner clear beside the window, where she worked in the evening. She took a pride in keeping everything wonderfully clean—stew-pans, kettles, and dishes. So, when the sun veered round to the window, the walls became resplendent with light; the copper vessels sparkled like gold, the tin pots shone refulgent like silver moons, while the white and blue tiles above the stove gleamed pale in this fiery burst of sunshine.

On the evening of the next Saturday *Hélène* heard so great a commotion that she determined to go and see what was the matter.

"How is it," asked she, "that you are tumbling about the things in this style?"

"I am scouring, madame," replied *Rosalie*, sweating and all in a flutter, while she squatted down and scrubbed the kitchen floor harder than ever.

But this process was soon brought to an end, and she commenced to rub it dry. Never had the kitchen displayed such perfection of cleanliness. So snowy white was it that it rivalled the purity of the sheets spread on a bridal bed. So

diligently had she used her fingers that it seemed as if the carpenter's plane had been once more on table and dresser. It was a sight to see; everything was in order, stew-pans and pots taking rank by their size, each on its own hook, even the frying-pan and gridiron, which shone without one grimy stain. Hélène looked on for a moment silently, and then with a smile disappeared.

Every Saturday there was a furbishing up on a similar scale, a tornado of dust and water lasting for four hours. It was Rosalie's wish on Sunday to display her neatness to Zéphyrin. It was her reception day. A cobweb would have cut her to the heart. When everything shone resplendent around her she became amiable, and burst out into song. At three o'clock she washed her hands once more, and donned a cap gay with ribbons. Then the curtain was drawn half-way, giving the dim light of a boudoir to her corner, and Zéphyrin's arrival was awaited, everything the pink of perfection, and odours of thyme and laurel floating in the air.

At half-past three exactly Zéphyrin made his appearance; he walked about the street until the clocks of the neighbourhood had struck the half-hour. Rosalie listened to the beat of his heavy shoes on the stairs, and she opened the door the moment he came to a halt on the landing. She had issued an edict against his ringing the bell. At each visit the same greeting passed between them.

"Is it you?"

"Yes, it's me!"

And they stood face to face, their eyes sparkling and their lips compressed. Then Zéphyrin submissively followed Rosalie; but there was no admission vouchsafed to him till he had relieved himself of shako and sabre. She would have none of these in her kitchen; and the sabre and shako were hidden away in the recesses of a cupboard. Next she made her lover sit down in the corner she had contrived at the window, and thence he was not allowed to budge.

"Sit still there! You can look on, if you like, while I get madame's dinner ready."

But he rarely appeared with empty hands. He would usually spend the morning in strolling with his comrades through the woods of Meudon, lounging lazily about, with no object save to drink in the fresh air that inspired him with regretful memories of the country. To give his fingers some-

thing to do he would cut switches, which he tapered and notched with marvellous figurings, still loitering as before, till some ditches barred his way, and there he came to a stand, the shako hanging on the back of his head, while his eyes were fixed on the knife with which he was carving the stick. He never could make up his mind to discard his switches, and so it happened that he carried them in the afternoon to Rosalie, who would throw up her hands somewhat indignantly, and exclaim that they would litter her kitchen. The truth of the matter was, she carefully preserved them; and under her bed was gathered a bundle of these switches, of all sorts and sizes.

One day he brought out on his appearance a nest full of eggs, which he had secreted in his shako under the folds of a handkerchief. Omelettes made from birds' eggs, he proceeded to declare, were very good—a statement received by Rosalie with exclamations of horror; the nest, however, was preserved and laid away in company with the switches. But his pockets were always full to overflowing. He would pull curiosities from them, transparent pebbles found on the banks of the Seine, pieces of old rusty iron, dried berries, and all sorts of strange rubbish a rag-picker would have none of. But his chief love was for pictures; as he sauntered along he seized on stray papers that had served as wrappers for chocolate or cakes of soap; he would gloat over the designs on these—black men, palm trees, dancing girls, or clusters of roses. The tops of old broken boxes, fantastic with figures of languid blonde women, glazed prints and silver paper once containing sugar balls, that had been cast into the gutters of the neighbourhood, were great wind-falls that filled his bosom with pride. This was booty that was speedily transferred to his pockets, and the choicer articles were secured in the fragment of a newspaper. Then came Sunday, when, if Rosalie had a moment of leisure between the preparation of a sauce or the tending of the joint, he would exhibit to her his pictures. They were her own had she so wished; and sometimes as the paper on which they were printed did not please his fancy, he would cut the pictures out, creating for himself infinite amusement. Rosalie fell into a pet as the shreds of paper were blown even on her plates; and only a sight of the pair would give an idea of the far-fetched rustic cunning with which he at last would gain possession of her scissors. At times she would get away from him by giving them up without any to-do.

Meanwhile on the fire simmered a pan of brown sauce. Rosalie watched it, wooden spoon in hand, while Zéphyrin his head bent forward and his back assuming gigantic proportions from his shoulder-straps, was busy cutting out pictures. His head was so closely shaven that the skin of the skull could be seen; and the yellow collar yawned wide, displaying the sun-burnt neck. For a quarter of an hour at a time neither would utter a syllable. When Zéphyrin lifted his head, he looked on while Rosalie took some flour, minced the parsley, salted and peppered the mixture, his eyes betraying all the while intense interest. Then at long intervals some words fell from him:

"By Jove! that has too good a smell!"

The culinary artist, with the heat of the fire beating on her, vouchsafed no immediate reply, but after a lengthy silence said in her turn:

"You see it must be made to simmer."

Their talk never went beyond that. They no longer spoke of their native place even. When a reminiscence was hinted at, a word was sufficient for them to grasp it, and they chuckled inwardly the whole afternoon. This was pleasure enough. When Rosalie turned Zéphyrin out of doors, both found food for great amusement.

"Come, you will have to go! I must wait on madame."

She restored shako and sabre to him and drove him out before her, afterwards running to wait on madame with cheeks flushed with happiness; while the hero walked back to barracks, dangling his arms, his brain intoxicated with the goodly fumes of thyme and laurel which still clung to him.

During his earlier visits Hélène judged it right to look after them. She popped in sometimes quite suddenly to give an order, and there always in his corner was Zéphyrin, between the table and the window, close to the stone filter, which forced him to draw in his legs. The moment the lady made her appearance he rose and stood upright, as though shouldering arms, and if she spoke to him, his reply never went beyond a salute and a respectful grunt. Hélène grew somewhat easier; she saw that her entrance did not disturb them, and that their faces only betrayed the quiet content of lovers awaiting their happiness.

But Rosalie on these occasions seemed much more on the alert than Zéphyrin. She had already been some months in

Paris, and under its influence was fast losing her country rust, though as yet she knew only three of the streets, Rue de Passy, Rue Franklin, and Rue Vineuse. Zéphyrin, soldier as he was, was, if could be, more rustic than before. As she confided to her mistress, "Oh, he gets more of a blockhead every day!" In the country, at least, he had been much sharper. But, as she went on to declare, it was the uniform's fault, and all lads who donned the uniform turned out sad dolts; in fact, his change of life had quite muddled Zéphyrin's brains, and with his staring round eyes and solemn swagger he reminded one of a goose. His shoulder-straps covered nothing but the old country dull-wittedness; the barracks had taught him nothing yet of the fine words and the all-subduing politeness of the ideal Parisian foot-soldier. "Yes, madame," she would wind up by saying, "you don't need to disturb yourself; it is not in him to play any tricks!"

In this style Rosalie played the mother towards him. While dressing her meat on the spit she would preach a sermon, in which abounded good counsel as to the pitfalls he should shun; and he rendered passive obedience by vigorously nodding approval of each injunction. Every Sunday he had to swear to her that he had attended mass, and that he had solemnly repeated his prayers morning and evening. She strongly inculcated the necessity of tidiness, gave him a brush down when he was leaving her, stitched on a button that hung from his coat by a thread, surveyed him from head to foot, and took care that nothing marred his appearance. She worried herself about his health and gave him cures for all sorts of ailments. In return for her kindly care Zéphyrin professed himself anxious to find a wife for her, but his proposal was long rejected through the fear that he might spill the water. One day, however, he brought up two buckets without a single drop falling on the stairs, and from that time he replenished the filter every Sunday. He would make himself useful in other ways, doing all the heavy work, and was extremely handy in running to the greengrocer's for butter, had she omitted purchasing any. The upshot of it even was his sharing in the duties of kitchen-maid. First he was permitted to shell the peas; later on the mincing was assigned to him. At the end of six weeks, though forbidden to touch the sauces, he watched over them with the wooden spoon in his hand. Rosalie had fairly made him her helpmate, and she would sometimes burst out laughing as she

saw him, with his red trousers and yellow collar; working busily before the fire with a dish-clout over his arm, like some scullery-wench.

One Sunday Hélène betook herself to the kitchen. Her slippers dulled the sound of her footsteps, and she gained the threshold unheard by either maid or soldier. In his corner Zéphyrin was seated over a basin of steaming soup. Rosalie's back was turned towards the door, and she was occupied in cutting some long sippets of bread for him.

"There, eat away, my dear!" said she. "You walk too much; it is that which makes you feel so empty! Bless me! have you enough? Do you want any more?"

She showered on him glances at once tender and uneasy. His figure, quite round, looked grand as he hung over the basin, devouring a hunk of bread with each mouthful. His face, covered with freckles, shone redder through the steam which circled round it.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "what grand juice! What do you put in it?"

"Wait a minute," said she, "if you like leeks——"

In the act of speaking she turned round and caught sight of her mistress. She cried out in her dismay, and both seemed turned to stone. But in a moment Rosalie poured forth a flood of excuses.

"It's my share, madame, oh, it's my share! I would not have taken any more soup, I swear it! I told him, 'If you wish my bowl of soup, you can have it.' Come, speak up, Zéphyrin; you know that was how it came about!"

The mistress remained silent, and the servant grew uneasy, thinking she was annoyed. She went on speaking in quavering tones:

"Oh, madame, he was dying of hunger; he stole a raw carrot from me! They feed him so badly! And then, you know, he had walked goodness knows where along the river-side! Oh, madame, you would have told me yourself to give him some soup!"

Hélène, as she gazed on the little soldier, who sat with his mouth full, not daring to swallow, could no longer remain stern. So she quietly said:

"Well, well, my girl, whenever the lad is hungry you must keep him to dinner; that's all. I give you permission."

Looking on them she had felt within her soul that flood of

tender feeling which had once already bathed her austerity in the waters of Lethe. This kitchen was their heaven! The cotton curtain, drawn half way, gave free entry to the beams of the dying sun. The burnished copper pans lit up the wall at the end, pervading with a rosy glow the twilight of the room. And there, in the golden shadow, shone both faces, small and round, peaceful and radiant like moons. Their love was so sure and thorough that their presence seemed wholly in harmony with the exquisite order of the kitchen's furnishings. It was as a flower opening its petals amidst the goodly odours steaming from the fire-place; their appetites received a stimulus, their hearts found nourishment.

"Mamma," asked Jeanne, one evening after considerable meditation, "why is it Rosalie's cousin never kisses her?"

"And why should they kiss one another?" asked H  l  ne in her turn. "They will kiss on their birth-day."

CHAPTER II.

THE soup had just been served the following Tuesday evening, when Hélène listened intently for a while, and then exclaimed:

"What torrents of rain! Don't you hear? My poor friends, you will get drenched to-night!"

"Oh, only a few drops!" said the Abbé quietly, though his old cassock was already wet about the shoulders.

"I've got a good stretch to go," said Monsieur Rambaud. "But I'll go home on foot, all the same; I like it. Besides, I have my umbrella."

Jeanne was thinking as she gazed gravely on her last spoonful of vermicelli. At last her thoughts took shape in words:

"Rosalie said you wouldn't come because of the wretched weather. Mamma said you would come. You are very kind; you always come."

A sunny smile lit up all their faces. Hélène had given a nod of affectionate approval to the two brothers. Out of doors the rain fell in torrents with a dull roar, and strong gusts of wind beat angrily against the outer window-shutters. Winter seemed to have returned. Rosalie had carefully drawn the red repp curtains, and the small dining-room, close and comfortable, lit by the unflickering light of a lamp hanging from the ceiling, was the very realisation, with its bright radiance, of the utmost and tenderest familiarity—the more pronounced from the violence of the hurricane outside. On the mahogany side-board, some china flashed back the clear effulgence. And so, in the oasis of this room, they sat and talked quietly, awaiting the good pleasure of the servant maid, around the table covered with a cloth exquisite in its snowiness and simplicity.

"Oh! you were waiting; so much the worse!" said Rosalie, familiarly, as she entered with a dish, "These are

filets of sole done brown for Monsieur Rambaud; they must be lifted just at the last moment."

Monsieur Rambaud assumed all the airs of the gourmand which immensely tickled Jeanne, and gave pleasure to Rosalie, who was excessively proud of her accomplishments as a cook. He turned towards her with the question:

"By the way, what have you got ready for us to-day? You are always bringing in some surprise or other when I am no longer hungry."

"Oh!" said she in reply, "there are the three usual dishes, and no more. After the sole you will have a leg of mutton and Brussels sprouts. Yes, that's the truth; there will be nothing else."

From the corner of his eye Monsieur Rambaud directed a glance towards Jeanne. The child was boiling over with glee, her hands over her mouth to restrain her laughter, while she shook her head to insinuate that the maid was deceiving them. He thereupon gave vent to some inarticulate expressions as though doubting her word, and Rosalie pretended great indignation.

"You don't believe me because Mademoiselle Jeanne laughs so," said she. "Ah, very well! believe what you like, you can eat no more, and see if you don't have a craving for food when you get home."

When the maid had left the room Jeanne burst into loud laughter, and was seized with a longing to confess the secret.

"You are really too greedy," she began. "I myself went into the kitchen——"

But she left her sentence unfinished.

"No, no, I won't tell; it isn't right! is it, mamma? There's nothing more, nothing at all. I only laughed to cheat you."

This interlude was re-enacted every Tuesday with the same unvarying success. Hélène was touched to the heart by the kindness with which Monsieur Rambaud gave himself up to the fun; she was well aware of the extreme simplicity of his tastes, and of the fact that his daily fare consisted of an anchovy and half-a-dozen olives. As for the Abbé Jouve, he never knew what he was eating, and his blunders and forgetfulness supplied an inexhaustible fund of amusement.

"How nice this whiting is!" Jeanne said to the priest, after they had all been served.

"Very nice, my darling!" answered he. "Bless me, so it is; it is whiting. I thought it was tarbot."

Every one laughed, and he guilelessly asked why. Rosalie, who had just come into the room, seemed very much hurt, and burst out:

"A fine thing, indeed! the priest in my native place knew much better what he was eating. He could tell the age of the fowl he was carving to a week, and he didn't require to go into the kitchen to find out what was for dinner. No, no, the smell was quite sufficient. Goodness gracious! had I been in the service of a priest like your reverence, I would not know yet even how to turn an omelette."

The priest hastened to excuse himself with an embarrassed air, as though his total want of appreciation of the delights of the table was a failing he could never hope to eradicate. Besides, as he said, he had too many things to think about.

"There! that is a leg of mutton," exclaimed Rosalie, as she placed on the table the joint referred to.

Everybody once more indulged in a merry peal of laughter, the Abbé Jouve being the first to break out. He bent forward to look, his little eyes twinkling with glee.

"Yes, certainly," said he, "it is a leg of mutton. I think I would have known it."

Still there was something about the Abbé to-day that betokened unusual absent-mindedness. He ate quickly, with the despatch of a man who is bored by his dinner at table, and who prefers to munch away standing on his legs. He would then wait the convenience of the others, plunged in deep thought, and simply smiling by way of reply to questions. A thousand times he cast on his brother a look in which encouragement and uneasiness were alike mingled. No more successful was Monsieur Rambaud in retaining his wonted tranquillity; his agitation found vent in a craving to talk and fidgeting on his chair, which seemed rather inconsistent with his imperturbable nature. A silence intervened when the Brussels sprouts had disappeared, and a delay occurred through Rosalie not bringing in the dessert. Out of doors the rain beat down with still greater force, rattling noisily against the house. The dining-room was rather stuffy, and it was borne in on Hélène that there was something strange in the air—that the two brothers were consumed by some secret to which they were unable to give utterance. She looked anxiously at them, and at last spoke:

"Dear! dear! What dreadful rain! isn't it? It seems to

be influencing both of you, for you are rather out of sorts!"

But they eagerly protested that such was not the case, doing their utmost to clear her mind of the notion. As Rosalie made her appearance with an immense dish, Monsieur Rambaud exclaimed, as though to veil his emotion:

"Just as I said! still another surprise!"

The surprise of the day was vanilla cream, one of the cook's triumphs. Her mouth expanded into a huge grin—it was good to see—as she deposited her burden on the table. Jeanne shouted and clapped her hands.

"I knew it, I knew it! I saw the eggs in the kitchen!"

"But I have no more appetite," declared Monsieur Rambaud, with a look of despair. "I could not eat any of it!"

Thereupon Rosalie's face sobered into seriousness, eloquent with suppressed wrath. Her dignity only allowed her to say:

"Oh, indeed! a cream which I made specially for you! Well, well! just try not to eat any of it. Yes, try!"

He had to give in and take a considerable portion of the cream. The Abbé remained plunged in thought. He rolled up his napkin and rose before the dessert had come to an end, as was frequently his custom. For a little while he strode about, his head hanging down; then, when Hélène in her turn quitted the table, he cast at Monsieur Rambaud a look of intelligence, and led the young lady into the bedroom. Through the door left open behind them could be heard almost directly their voices in quiet conversation, the words falling indistinguishable on the ear.

"Oh, do make haste!" implored Jeanne of Monsieur Rambaud, who seemed incapable of finishing a biscuit. "I want to show you my work."

But he was in no hurry. He was compelled, though, to leave his chair when Rosalie prepared to remove the table-cloth.

"Wait a little! wait a little!" murmured he, as the child was striving to drag him towards the bedroom.

He started back from the doorway, overcome with embarrassment and timidity. Then, as the Abbé raised his voice, his limbs were seized with sudden weakness, and he had to sit down again before the bare table. From his pocket he drew a newspaper.

"Now," said he, "I'm going to make you a little coach."

In an instant Jeanne abandoned her intention of entering

the adjoining room. Monsieur Rambaud excited in her intense wonder by his skill in turning a sheet of paper into all sorts of playthings. Chickens, boats, bishops' hats, carts, and cages, were all evolved under his fingers. To-day, so tremulous were his hands that he failed to produce anything in detail. His head was lowered on the least sound issuing from the adjacent room. But Jeanne was absorbed in contemplation of his handiwork, as she leaned on the table at his side.

"Now," said she, "you must make a chicken to attach to the carriage."

Meantime, within the other room, the Abbé Jouve remained standing in the well-defined shadow thrown by the lamp-shade across the floor. Hélène had sat down in her usual place in front of the round table; and, as on Tuesdays she did not stand on ceremony with her friends, she was busy over some work, only her white hands, engaged in sewing a child's cap, being visible under the circular glare of light.

"Jeanne gives you no further uneasiness, does she?" asked the Abbé.

She shook her head before making a reply.

"Doctor Deberle seems quite satisfied," said she. "But the poor darling is still very nervous. Yesterday I found her in her chair in a fainting fit."

"She needs exercise," was the priest's dictum. "You stay in-doors far too much; you should follow everybody's example and go about more."

He ceased speaking, and there followed a silence. Now he had, without doubt, what he had been craving—a suitable inlet for his discourse; but the moment for speaking came and he was still communing with himself. Taking a chair, he sat down at Hélène's side.

"Hearken to me, my dear child," he began. "For some time I have wished to talk with you seriously. The life you are leading here can entail no good results. A convent existence such as yours is not consistent with your years; and this abandonment of worldly pleasures is as injurious to your child as it is to yourself. You are risking many dangers—dangers to health, ay, and other dangers too."

Hélène raised her head, while every feature displayed astonishment.

"What is it you wish to say, my friend?" she asked.

"Dear me! I know the world but little," continued the priest,

his tones showing some slight embarrassment, "yet I know well a woman incurs great risk when she remains without a protecting arm. To speak frankly, you keep to your own company too much, and this seclusion in which you hide yourself is not healthful, believe me. A day must come when you will feel its pernicious consequences."

"But I make no complaint; I am very happy as I am," interjected she with some spirit.

The old priest gently shook his large head.

"Yes, yes, that is all very well. You feel completely happy. I know all that. Only, on the down-hill path of a lonely and dreaming life, you never know where you are going. Oh! I understand you perfectly; you are incapable of doing any wrong. But sooner or later you would thereby lose your peace of mind. Some morning not long hence you will wake up to discover this blank in your life, and your thoughts filled up by some feeling alike regrettable and secret."

As she sat in the shadow, a blush crimsoned Hélène's face. Had the Abbé, then, read her heart? Was he aware of this restlessness which was fast possessing her—this heart-trouble which thrilled her every-day life, and the existence of which till now she had been unwilling to question? Her needle-work fell on her lap. A sensation of weakness pervaded her, and she awaited the priest's pleasure as being a saintly participant in her secret, who would allow her to confess aloud and reveal openly the mystic feelings which she crushed within her innermost being. As all was known to him, it was in his power to question her, and she would strive to answer.

"I leave myself in your hands, my friend," she murmured. "You are well aware I have always listened to you."

The priest remained for a time silent. At last he said slowly and solemnly:

"My child, you must marry again."

His words struck her dumb; she sat limp, and in a state of stupor. She was awaiting his next words, what he said had no meaning for her. The Abbé went on, however, putting before her arguments which should incline her towards marriage.

"Remember, you are still young. You must not remain longer in this out-of-the-way corner of Paris, scarcely daring to go out, and wholly ignorant of the world. You must return to the every-day life of us all, lest in the future you regret bitterly your loneliness. You yourself have no idea of how

the effects of your isolation are beginning to tell on you, but your friends remark your loss of colour, and are in consequence uneasy."

With each sentence he paused in the hope that she might break in and controvert his statements. But no; she sat as if lifeless, seemingly benumbed with astonishment.

"No doubt you have a child," he began again. "That seems always a delicate matter to surmount. Still, you must admit that even in Jeanne's interest a husband's arm would be of the greatest advantage. Of course, we must find some one good and honourable who would be a true father——"

She broke in before he completed the sentence. She spoke abruptly, and in tones of intense disgust and repugnance.

"No, no, I will not! Oh! my friend, how can you advise me thus? Never, do you hear, never!"

Her whole soul was up in arms; the passion she betrayed in her refusal terrified even herself. The priest's proposal had pierced this heart-secret which she had hidden carefully away; and the pain with which it had thrilled her proved to her at length the intensity of the evil—she experienced all the revulsion and shame that possess a woman when stripping off her last remaining garment.

Then, with the open and smiling look of the priest still bent on her, she burst out in opposition:

"No, no; I do not wish it! I love nobody!"

He still gazed into her face, and she imagined he read the lie thereon. She blushed and stammered:

"Remember, too, I only left off my mourning a fortnight ago. No, it could not be!"

"My child!" quietly said the priest, "I thought much over this before speaking. I am sure your happiness is wrapped up in it. Calm yourself; you need never act against your own wishes."

The conversation came to a sudden stop. Hélène strove to keep pent within her bosom the angry protests that were rushing to her lips. She resumed her work, and, with head lowered, contrived to put in some stitches. When the silence was at its deepest, Jeanne's shrill voice could be heard ringing from the dining-room:

"You don't put a chicken to a carriage; it should be a horse! You don't know how to make a horse, do you?"

"No, my dear; horses are too difficult," said Monsieur

Rimbaud. "But if you like I'll show you how to make carriages."

This was always the fashion in which their game came to an end. Jeanne, all ears and eyes, watched her kindly play-fellow folding the paper into a multitude of little squares; next she followed his example; but she never succeeded, and she would stamp her feet in vexation. However, she knew already how to manufacture boats and bishops' hats.

"You see," went on Monsieur Rambaud, patiently, "you make four corners like that; then you turn them back——"

For a minute he had been eagerly listening, and a few words uttered in the next room had fallen on his ear. The poor hands were seized with a mighty trembling, and his tongue faltered, so that he could only half articulate.

Hélène was unable to restrain herself, and began the conversation anew.

"Marry again, and with whom, pray?" she suddenly asked the priest, as she laid her work down on the table. "You have some one in view, have you not?"

The Abbé Jouve rose from his chair and stalked slowly up and down. Without halting, he nodded assent.

"Well! tell me who he is," she requested.

For a short space he stood before her upright, then shrugging his shoulders, said:

"What's the good, since you decline?"

"No matter, I want to know," she replied. "How can I make up my mind when I don't know?"

He did not answer her immediately, but remained standing and gazing into her face. A somewhat sad smile wreathed his lips. At last he exclaimed, almost in a whisper:

"What! have you not guessed?"

No, she did not understand. She looked at him in astonishment, whereupon he merely made a sign—he nodded his head in the direction of the dining-room.

"He!" she exclaimed, in hushed tones, and a great seriousness fell upon her. She indulged in no more violent declamation, and her face displayed only sorrow and surprise. She sat a long time plunged in thought, her gaze riveted to the floor. Truly, she had never dreamed of such a thing; and yet, she found nothing in it to object to. Monsieur Rambaud was the only man into whose hand, honestly and without fear, she could put her own. She knew his innate goodness; she did



ABBÉ JOUVE ADVISING HÉLÈNE TO MARRY MONSIEUR
RAMBAUD.

not find it in her heart to smile at his awkwardness and simplicity. But despite all her regard for him, the idea that he loved her chilled her to the soul.

Meanwhile the Abbé strode from one end of the room to the other, but stopped on passing the dining-room door and called Hélène gently to him:

"Come here and look!"

She rose and saw what he wished.

Monsieur Rambaud had brought the play to an end by lifting Jeanne into her own chair. But a moment before, leaning against the table, he had allowed himself to slip down at the little girl's feet. He was on his knees before her, and encircled her with one of his arms. On the table were laid the carriage drawn by the chicken, boats, boxes, and bishops' hats.

"Now, do you love me well?" he asked her "Tell me that you love me well!"

"Of course, I love you well; you know it."

He stammered and trembled, as though he were staking his happiness on some love declaration.

"And what would you say if I asked you to let me stay always beside you?"

"Oh, I should be quite pleased. We would play together, wouldn't we? That would be good fun."

"Ah, but do you hear? I should be always here."

Jeanne had taken up a boat which she was twisting into a gendarme's hat.

"You would need to get mamma's leave," she murmured; and with this reply all his fears were again stirred into life. His fate was being decided.

"Quite right," said he. "But if mamma gave me leave, would you say yes, too?"

Jeanne, busy finishing her gendarme's hat, sang out in her usual rapturous strain:

"I would say yes! yes! yes! I would say yes! yes! yes! Come, look how pretty my hat is!"

Monsieur Rambaud, with tears in his eyes, rose on his knees and caressed her, while she threw her arms round his neck. He had entrusted to his brother the asking of Hélène's consent; he reserved for himself the pleading for Jeanne's favour.

"You see," said the priest with a smile, "the child has set her heart on it."

Hélène still retained her grave air; she made no further inquiry. The Abbé again eloquently took up his plea, and emphasized his brother's good qualities. Was he not a treasure-trove of a father for Jeanne? She was well acquainted with him; in trusting him she gave no hostages to fortune. Hélène spoke not in comment, and the Abbé with great feeling and dignity asserted in conclusion that in charging himself with such a task, he thought not of his brother, but of her and her happiness.

"I believe you; I know how you love me," said Hélène with animation. "Wait; I want to give your brother his answer in your presence."

The clock struck ten. Monsieur Rambaud made his entry into the bedroom. With hand stretched out she went to meet him.

"I thank you for your proposal, my friend," said she. "I am very grateful, and you have done well in speaking——"

She was gazing calmly into his face, holding his huge hand in her grasp. Trembling all over, he dared not lift his eyes.

"Yet I must have time to consider," she went on. "You will perhaps have to give me a long time."

"Oh! as long as you like—six months, a year, longer if you please," exclaimed he with a light heart, delighted that she had not forthwith sent him about his business. His excitement brought a faint smile to her face.

"But I intend that we shall still continue friends. You will come just as before, and you will simply give me your promise to remain content till I first speak to you about the matter. Is that understood?"

He had withdrawn his hand and was now hunting feverishly for his hat, signifying his agreement with her wishes by a continuous bobbing of the head. Just at the moment of leaving he found his voice once more.

"Listen to me," said he. "You now know I am quite ready—don't you? Well, whatever happens I shall be always willing. That's all the Abbé should have told you. In ten years, if you like, you will only have to make a sign. I shall obey you!"

It was Monsieur Rambaud who a last time took Hélène's hand and gripped it as though he would crush it. On the staircase the two brothers turned round with the usual good-bye:

"Till next Tuesday!"

"Yes, Tuesday," answered H  l  ne.

On returning to her room a fresh downfall of rain beating against the outer shutters filled her with grave concern.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "what torrents! How wet my poor friends will get!"

She opened the window and looked down into the road. The gaslights flickered with the intermittent gusts. Through the dimly-seen puddles and falling rain that shimmered in the light she could see stalking the round figure of Monsieur Rambaud, dancing exultant in the darkness of the night, and seemingly caring nothing for the drenching torrent.

Jeanne in the meantime was plunged in thought; she had caught the last words of her kind playfellow. Her tiny boots were but now thrown aside, and she was sitting on the edge of the bed in her night-gown in deep cogitation. On entering the room, her mother discovered her thus.

"Good-night, Jeanne; kiss me."

No answer; the child apparently heard not. H  l  ne sank down in front of her, and clasped her round the waist, asking her in a whisper:

"So you would be very glad if he lived with us?"

The question seemed to bring no surprise to Jeanne. She was doubtless pondering this very matter. Slowly she nodded assent with her head.

"But you know," said her mother, "he would be always beside us—night and day, at table—everywhere!"

A great trouble dawned in the clear depths of the child's eyes. She nestled her cheek against her mother's shoulder, kissed her neck, and finally, with a shivering horror, whispered a question in her ear:

"Mamma, would he kiss you?"

A crimson flush swept across H  l  ne's brow. With the first surprise she was at a loss to answer, but in the end she murmured:

"He would be the same as your father, my darling!"

Then Jeanne's little arms tightened their hold, and she burst into loud and grievous sobbing.

"Oh! no, no!" she cried, chokingly. "I don't want it any more! Oh! mamma, do please tell him I don't want it any more! Go and tell him I won't have it!"

She gasped, and threw herself on her mother's bosom, covering her with tears and kisses. H  l  ne did her utmost to

appease her, assuring her she would make it all right; but Jeanne was bent on having, without delay, a definite answer.

"Oh! say no! say no! darling mother! You know it would kill me. It will be never, never, won't it?"

"Well, I'll promise it will be never. Now, be good and lie down."

For some minutes longer the child, speechless with emotion, clasped her in her arms, as though powerless to tear herself away, and guarding her against all who would deprive her of her mother. After some time Hélène lulled her to sleep; but for a portion of the night she had to watch beside her. She would start violently in her sleep, and every half-hour her eyes would open to gain assurance of her mother's presence, and she fell asleep again with lips glued to her hand.

CHAPTER III.

It was a month fraught with divine sweetness. The April sun had draped the garden in tender green, light and delicate as a garment of lace. Twining around the railing were the slender shoots of the lush clematis, while the budding honey-suckle filled the air with its sweet-smelling, almost sugared perfume. On both sides of the trim and close-shaven lawn, red geraniums and pale gilly flowers gave the flower-beds a glow of colour; and at the bottom the cluster of elms, breaking the monotonous line of the adjacent houses, veiled with a green drapery every branch, the young tender leaves on which trembled with the least breath of air.

For more than three weeks the sky had remained blue and cloudless. The spring-tide was enacting a miracle in delicious harmony with the second spring and blossoming that had burst into life in Hélène's heart. Every afternoon saw her go down into the garden with Jeanne. A place was assigned her close against the first of the elms to the right. There a chair was ready for her; and next day she would still find on the gravel of the walk, scattered about, the clippings of thread that had fallen from her work on the previous afternoon.

"You are quite at home," impressed on her every evening Madame Deberle. For Hélène she had been inspired with a devoted affection, which lasted with her six months. "Come to-morrow, of course, and try to come sooner, won't you?"

Hélène, in truth, felt there thoroughly at her ease. By degrees she became accustomed to this nook of greenery, and looked forward to the time of going down to the garden with the longing of a child. What charmed her most in this plot of city ground was the exquisite trimness of the lawn and bushes. She breathed in it an air altogether quieting, that bereft her of the exciting feelings of her nature. The neatly laid-out flower-beds, and the network of ivy, the withered leaves of which were removed every now and then by the gardener, seemed wholly in harmony with her spirit. Seated

beneath the deep shadow of the elm-trees, in this quiet garden where Madame Deberle's presence impregnated the air with the odour of musk, she could have imagined herself in a drawing-room. The sight of the blue sky alone, when she raised her head, thrilled her with a sense of being out-of-doors, and her bosom heaved as she breathed with greater freedom.

Often, without seeing a soul, they would both thus pass the afternoon. Jeanne and Lucien played at their feet. There would be long intervals of silence, to be broken by Madame Deberle, who got bored by such brown studies, and would chatter for hours, quite satisfied with the silent sanction of H  l  ne, who answered for the most part by gently moving her head. She would tell endless stories concerning the ladies of her acquaintance, would get up schemes for parties during the coming winter, iterate parrot-like opinions on the day's news and society gossip, all commingling in this pretty woman's brain, while she would spice her remarks with affectionate outbursts over the children or enthusiastic encomia on the delights of friendship. H  l  ne allowed her to squeeze her hands. She did not always lend an attentive ear; but, surcharged with the unfading blissful tenderness which possessed her, she showed she was affected by Juliette's caresses, and thought her a perfect angel of kindness.

Sometimes, to Madame Deberle's intense delight, a visitor would drop in. After Easter she had no more Saturday receptions; with that season they came to an end. But she dreaded being without company, and a casual unceremonious visit spent in her garden gave her the greatest pleasure. She was now busily engaged in settling on the watering-place where she was to enjoy a holiday during the month of August. To every visitor was retailed the same talk; she discoursed on the fact that her husband would not accompany her to the sea-side; and then poured forth a flood of questions, as she could not make up her mind where to go. She did not ask for herself; no, it was all on Lucien's account. When the foppish youth Malignon came he sat astride on a rustic chair. He, indeed, loathed the country; one must be mad, he would declare, to go into exile from Paris with the idea of catching influenza beside the sea. However, he took part in the discussions on the merits of the various watering-places; but all fell under his ban, saving Trouville, which, according to him, offered the very best chances of enjoyment. Day after day,

Hélène listened to the same talk, yet without feeling wearied, deriving even pleasure from the hours that were spent thus monotonously and that served to lull her into dreaming of one thing only. The last day of the month came; yet Madame Deberle had not decided where she should go.

As Hélène was leaving one evening, Madame Deberle said to her: "I must go out to-morrow; but that needn't prevent you coming down here. Wait for me; I sha'n't be long in returning."

Hélène consented; alone in the garden she spent a delicious afternoon. Nothing stirred, save the sparrows fluttering in the trees overhead. This little sunny nook entranced her, and, dating from this day, her happiest afternoons were those on which her friend left her alone.

A closer intimacy sprang up between the Deberles and herself. She dined with them as a friend who is pressed to stay when the family sits down to table; when she was lingering under the elm-tree and Pierre came down to announce dinner, Juliette implored her to remain, and she sometimes yielded. They were family dinners, enlivened by the noisy pranks of the children. Doctor Deberle and Hélène seemed good friends, their sensible and somewhat reserved natures sympathising well. Thus it was Juliette frequently declared: "Oh, you two would get on capitally! Your composure only exasperates me!"

About six o'clock every evening the doctor returned from his round of visits. He found the ladies in the garden, and sat down beside them. At first Hélène started up with the idea of leaving the family to themselves, but this sudden departure displeased Juliette greatly, and she had now perforce to remain. She became almost inseparable from the home-circle of this family, the members of which appeared closely attached to one another. On the doctor's entrance, his wife held up her cheek to him, always with the same loving gesture, and he kissed her; next he helped Lucien to clamber up his legs, and kept him on his knees while he was chatting away. The child would clap its tiny hands on the father's mouth, would pull the father's hair, and play such pranks that the upshot was his being put down, and told to go and play with Jeanne. The fun would bring a smile to Hélène's face, and she neglected her work for the moment, to gaze at father, mother, and child. The husband's kiss gave her no pain, and Lucien's tricks

suffused her heart with tenderness. It might have been said that she found a haven of refuge amidst this family's quiet content.

Meanwhile the sun was sinking into the west, gilding the tree-tops with his rays. The heavens, grey with the twilight, seemed to rain down peaceful thoughts. Juliette, whose curiosity was insatiable, even in company with strangers, plagued her husband with ceaseless questions, and often had not the patience to await the replies.

"Where have you been? What have you been about?"

Thereupon he would describe to them his round of visits, would repeat any news of what was going on, or would speak of some cloth or piece of furniture he had had a glimpse of in a shop window. Often while he was speaking, his eyes met those of Hélène, but neither turned away the head. They gazed each into the other's face, for the time, with grave looks, as though heart was being revealed to heart; but after a little they smiled and the eyes drooped. Juliette, fidgety and sprightly, though she was always careful to assume a studied languor, allowed them no opportunity for lengthy conversation; she burst with her interruptions into any talk whatsoever. Still they exchanged words, scraps of conversation calmly uttered, quite commonplace, which seemed to assume a deep meaning, and to linger in the air after having been spoken. The items of their conversation were approved by each with a slight gesture that seemed to show they held their thoughts in common. Their understanding was perfect in its sympathy; it sprang from the depths of their being, and grew closer even when they were silent. Sometimes Juliette, rather ashamed of monopolising all the talk, would cease her magpie chatter.

"Dear me!" she would exclaim, "you are getting bored, aren't you? We are talking of matters which can have no possible interest for you."

"Oh, never heed me," Hélène answered, blithely. "I never tire. It is a pleasure to me to listen and say nothing."

She was uttering no untruth. During the lengthy periods of silence, however, she experienced most delight in being present. With head bent over her work, lifting her eyes at long intervals to exchange with the doctor interminable looks that riveted their hearts the closer, she willingly surrendered self to the luxury of her feelings. Between herself and him, she now whispered to her heart, there existed a secret passion, a

something very sweet—all the sweeter because no one in the world shared it with them. But she kept her secret with a tranquil mind, unpricked by the dictates of honour, for thoughts of evil never disturbed her. How good he was to his wife and child! She loved him the more when he made Lucien jump or kissed Juliette on the cheek. Since she had first seen him in his own home their friendship had greatly increased. Now she was as one of their family; she never dreamt that they could break off the intimacy. And within her own breast she called him Henri—naturally, too, from hearing Juliette address him so. When her lips said "Sir," through all her being was echoed "Henri."

One day the doctor found Hélène alone under the elms. Juliette went out nearly every afternoon.

"Hallo! is my wife not with you?" he exclaimed.

"No, she has left me to myself," she answered, laughingly. "Of course, you have come home earlier than usual."

The children were playing at the other end of the garden. He sat down beside her. Their quiet chat produced no agitation in either of them. For nearly an hour they spoke of a thousand matters, without for a moment feeling any desire to allude to the tenderness which filled their hearts. What was the good of referring to that? Did they not know well what might have been said? They had no confession to make. Theirs was the joy of being together, of talking on many things, of giving themselves up to the pleasure of their isolation without a shadow of regret, in the self-same spot where every evening he embraced his wife in her presence.

To-day he cracked some jokes over her devotion to work. "Do you know," said he, "I do not even know the colour of your eyes? They are always bent on your needle."

She raised her head and looked straight into his face, as was her custom.

"Do you wish to tease me?" she asked, gently.

But he went on. "Ah! they are grey—grey tinted with blue, are they not?"

This was the limit to which they dared go; but these words, the first that had sprung to his lips, comprised a wealth of tenderness. Frequently, from that day onwards, he found her alone in the twilight. In spite of them, and without their having any knowledge of it, their intimacy grew apace. They spoke in an altered voice, every word a caress, which was not

the case when others were present. And yet, when Juliette came in, full of gossip about her day in town, they could keep up the talk already begun without even troubling themselves to draw away their chairs. It appeared as though this lovely spring-tide and this garden, with its blossoming lilac, were prolonging within their hearts the first rapture of their love.

Towards the end of the month, Madame Deberle was inspired with a great idea. The thought had suddenly struck her of giving a children's ball. The season was already far advanced, but the scheme took such hold on her foolish brain that she hurried on the preparations with reckless haste. One thing her heart was set upon; it was to be a fancy-dress ball. Now, in her own home, in other people's houses, everywhere, in short, she spoke of nothing but her ball. The conversations that took place in the garden were endless. The foppish Malignon thought it rather a bore; still he condescended to take some interest in it, and promised to bring a comic singer whom he knew well.

One afternoon, while they were all sitting under the trees, Juliette introduced the grave question of costumes for Lucien and Jeanne.

"It is so difficult to make up one's mind," said she. "I have been thinking of a clown dressed in white satin."

"Oh, that's vulgar!" declared Malignon. "At your ball there will be a round dozen of clowns. Wait, you must have something novel."

He gravely proceeded to ponder the question, sucking all the while the head of his cane. Pauline came up at the moment, and loudly proclaimed her desire to appear in the guise of a soubrette.

"You!" screamed Madame Deberle, in astonishment. "You won't appear in costume at all! Do you think yourself a child, you great stupid? You will oblige me by coming in a white dress."

"Oh, but it would have pleased me so!" exclaimed Pauline, who, despite her being eighteen years old, and the fact that she was just developing into a lovely woman, liked nothing better than to romp with a band of little ones.

Meanwhile, Hélène sat at the foot of her tree working away, and raising her head at times to smile to the doctor and Monsieur Rambaud, who stood in front of her conversing.

Monsieur Rambaud had now become quite intimate with the Deberle family.

"Well," said the doctor, "and how are you going to dress Jeanne?"

He got no further, for Malignon burst out: "I've got it! I've got it! A marquis of the time of Louis XV."

He waved his cane with a triumphant air; but, as no one of the company hailed his idea with enthusiasm, he appeared astonished.

"What! don't you see it? Won't it be Lucien who receives his little guests? Then, you place him, dressed as a marquis, at the drawing-room door, with a large bouquet of roses, and he bows to the ladies."

"But," came Juliette's objection, "there will be dozens of marquises at the ball!"

"What does that matter," replied Malignon coolly. "The more marquises the greater the fun. I tell you it is the best thing you can hit upon. The master of the house must be dressed as a marquis, or the ball will be a complete failure."

Such was his conviction of his scheme's success that the result was its adoption by Juliette with great enthusiasm. To her mind, she asserted, a dress in the Pompadour style, decorated with posies of flowers, was altogether charming.

"What about Jeanne?" again asked the doctor.

The little girl had just buried her head against her mamma's shoulder in the caressing manner so characteristic of her. As an answer was about to cross Hélène's lips, she murmured:

"Oh! mamma, you know what you promised me, don't you?"

"What was it?" burst from every one.

As her daughter bent on her an imploring look, Hélène laughingly replied:

"Jeanne does not wish her dress to be known."

"Yes, that's so," said the child; "the whole thing is spoil when you tell your dress."

Every one was tickled with this coquettish display. Monsieur Rambaud thought he might tease her over it; for some time past Jeanne was ill-tempered with him, and the poor man, at his wits' end to hit upon a mode of again gaining his little friend's favour, deemed teasing her the best method of conciliation. Keeping his eyes on her face, he chanted several times:

"I am going to tell! I am going to tell!"

The child became quite livid. The gentle, sickly face assumed an expression of ferocious anger; the brow was furrowed with two deep wrinkles and her chin drooped with nervous agitation.

"You!" she screamed excitedly, "you will say nothing!"

She rushed at him madly, and shouted out, as he still pretended he would say something:

"Hold your tongue! I will have you hold your tongue! I will have it!"

Hélène had been unable to prevent this fit of blind fury, such as sometimes took fierce possession of the little girl, and said with some harshness:

"Jeanne, take care; I shall whip you!"

But Jeanne paid no heed, never once heard her. Trembling from head to foot, stamping on the ground, and choking with rage, she said over and over again, "I will have it," in a voice that grew more and more hoarse and broken; and her hands convulsively gripped Monsieur Rambaud's arm which she twisted with extraordinary strength. Hélène threatened her in vain, and perceiving her inability to quell her by severity, and grieved to the heart at such a display before them all, she contented herself by saying gently:

"Jeanne, you are vexing me very much."

The child immediately quitted her hold and turned her head. The moment she caught sight of her mother, with disconsolate face and eyes swimming with repressed tears, she burst into loud sobs and threw herself on Hélène's neck, exclaiming in her grief:

"No, mamma! no, mamma!"

She put her hands to her mother's face to prevent her weeping. Hélène put her from her by degrees, and then the little one, broken-hearted and distracted, threw herself on a seat a short distance away, where her sobs broke out louder than ever. Lucien, to whom she was always held up as a model to follow closely, gazed at her surprised and rather pleased. Hélène returned to her sewing with renewed zeal, and tendered an apology for so regrettable an incident.

"Goodness gracious!" said Juliette to her; "you must pardon children everything. Besides, the little one has the best of hearts, and is grieved so much, poor darling, that she has been already punished too much."

So saying, Madame Deberle called Jeanne to come and kiss

her, but she remained on her seat, rejecting the offer of pardon, and choking with tears.

Monsieur Rambaud and the doctor, however, walked over to her side. The former hung over her and asked, in tones thick with emotion: "Tell me, my pet, what has vexed you? What have I done to you?"

"Oh!" replied she, plucking away her hands and displaying a face full of anguish, "you wanted to take my mamma from me!"

The doctor, listening meanwhile, burst into laughter. Monsieur Rambaud failed to grasp her meaning at the moment.

"What is this you're talking of?"

"Yes, indeed, the other Tuesday. Oh! you know it well; you were on your knees, and wished me to say you could stay with us!"

The smile vanished from the doctor's face. His lips became ashy pale, and quivered. A flush, on the other hand, mounted to Monsieur Rambaud's cheek, and he whispered to her:

"But you said yourself that we should always play together?"

"No, no, I did not know at the time!" the child exclaimed excitedly. "I tell you I don't want it. Never, never speak of it again and we shall be friends!"

Hélène was on her feet now, with her needlework in its basket, and the last words fell on her ear.

"Come, let us go up, Jeanne," she said. "Your tears are not pleasant company."

She bowed, and pushed the child away before her. The doctor, with livid face, fixed his eyes on her. Monsieur Rambaud's dismay knew no bounds. Madame Deberle and Pauline were busily engaged twisting Lucien round into all sorts of positions, with Malignon's willing assistance, and over the boy's shoulders debated in lively style the question of his Pompadour dress.

On the morrow Hélène was left alone under the elms. Madame Deberle's whole soul was now given up to running about in the interests of her ball, and she had taken Lucien and Jeanne with her. On the doctor's return home at an earlier hour than usual, he hurried down the garden steps. He did not sit down, but wandered aimlessly round our heroine, tearing at times strips of bark from the trees with his finger-nails. She lifted her eyes for a moment, his agitation rousing in her feel-

ings of alarm ; but she soon again plied her needle with a hand trembling somewhat with excitement.

"The weather is going to break up," said she, uncomfortable as the silence continued. "The afternoon seems quite cold."

"We are only in April, remember," he replied, with a brave effort to control his voice.

He appeared to be on the point of leaving her, but he turned towards her and suddenly asked :

"So you are going to get married ? "

The churlish question took her wholly by surprise, and her work fell from her hands. Her face blanched, but by a supreme effort of will it remained unimpassioned, as though she were a marble statue ; she opened her eyes wide and gazed at him. She made no reply, and he continued in imploring tones :

"Oh ! I pray you, answer me. One word, one only ! Are you going to get married ? "

"Yes, perhaps ; what business is it of yours ? " she retorted, her words betraying icy indifference.

He made a passionate gesture and exclaimed :

"It is impossible ! "

"Why should it be ? " she asked, still keeping her eyes fixed on his face.

He was forced to silence ; under her gaze he found he could not utter the words burning on his tongue. One moment longer he remained near her, pressing his hands to his brow, then he fled away with a feeling in his throat of suffocation dreading lest he might give expression to his despair while with assumed tranquillity she once more turned to her work.

But the spell of these delicious afternoons was gone. Next day shone fair and sunny, and Hélène seemed ill at ease from the moment she found herself alone with him. There existed no longer the pleasant intimacy, the happy trustfulness which sanctioned their sitting side by side in blissful security, and revelling in the joy unalloyed of being together. Despite his intense carefulness to give her no cause for alarm he would sometimes gaze at her and tremble with sudden excitement, while his face crimsoned with a rush of blood. From her own heart had fled its wonted happy calm ; shudders ran through her frame, she was on tenter-hooks, her hands were weary and had forsaken their work.

Hélène no longer allowed Jeanne to wander from her side,

Between himself and her the doctor found this constant onlooker, who watched him with great, clear eyes. But what pained Hélène most was the knowledge that she now felt ill at ease in Madame Deberle's company. When the latter returned of an afternoon, with her hair swept about by the wind, and called her "my dear" while relating the incidents in her shopping expedition, she no longer listened with her quiet smile. A storm arose within the depths of her soul, stirring up feelings to which she dared not give a name. Shame and hatred seemed to awake; but her honourable nature crushed them in their birth, and she gave her hand to Juliette. Still she could not repress the shudder which ran through her as she pressed her friend's warm fingers.

The weather was now becoming broken. The rain forced the ladies to take refuge in the Japanese pavilion. The garden, with its whilom exquisite order, was now converted into a lake, and no one dared venture on the walks lest the mud should cling to the boots. When, from between two clouds, the sun smiled again, the dripping greenery soon dried; the lilac trees had every tiny blossom tipped with pearls, and the great rain-drops fell from the elm branches.

"At last I've arranged it; it will be on Saturday," Madame Deberle said one day. "My dear, I'm quite tired out with the whole affair. Now, you'll be here at two o'clock, won't you? Jeanne will open the ball with Lucien."

Succumbing to a flow of tenderness, and in ecstasy over the preparations for her ball, she took the two children in her arms; then, laughingly catching hold of Hélène, she pressed two fervent kisses on her cheeks.

"That is my reward," she exclaimed, merrily. "You know I deserve it; I have run about enough! You'll see what a success it will be."

The caress chilled Hélène to the heart; while the doctor, with Lucien clinging to his neck, gazed at them over the child's fair head.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the lobby of the doctor's unpretentious house, Pierre, in livery and white cravat, was standing, throwing open the door as each carriage rolled up. The dank air rushed in; the afternoon was rainy, and the dusky yellow of the sky lit up faintly the narrow lobby, with its curtained doorways and array of green plants. It was two o'clock, and the heavens lowered as though it were a dismal winter's day.

But immediately on the servant's pushing open the door of the outer drawing-room, a stream of light dazzled the guests. The Venetian shutters had been closed, and the curtains carefully drawn, and no gleam from the dull sky glimmered through. Lamps were arranged at intervals on the furniture, and the candles, burning brightly amidst the glass pendants of the chandelier, gave to the room somewhat of the appearance of a death-chamber, lighted up to honour the dead. At the end of this smaller drawing-room, the green of the hangings in which rather softened the glare of the light, was the large drawing-room, furnished in black and gold, and decorated as magnificently as for the ball which Madame Deberle gave every year in the month of January.

The children were now beginning to arrive. Pauline's whole attention was given up to the ranging of chairs in the drawing-room, in front of the dining-room door, which had been removed from its hinges and replaced by a red curtain.

"Papa!" she cried, "just lend me a hand! We shall never have things in order."

Monsieur Letellier, his arms behind his back, was gazing at the chandelier, but hastened to give the required assistance. Pauline carried the chairs about with her own hands. She had paid due deference to her sister's request and was robed in white; only the dress was cut square at the neck and displayed her bosom.

"At last we are ready," she exclaimed; "they can come

when they like. But what is Juliette dreaming about? Surely she has finished dressing Lucien!"

At the same moment Madame Deberle entered leading the little marquis. From the company already present came admiring remarks—"Oh! what a love! What a darling he is!" His coat was of white satin decked with flowers, his immense waistcoat was embroidered in gold, and his knee-breeches were of cherry-coloured silk. Lace clustered round his chin and delicate wrists. A sword, a mere toy with a great rose-red knot, rattled against his hip.

"Now you must do the honours," said his mother to him, as she led him into the outer room.

For eight days now he had been repeating his lesson. With all the grace of a cavalier he stood on his little legs, his powdered head slightly thrown back, and his cocked hat tucked under his left arm; and as each of his lady-guests was ushered into the room, he bowed low, offered his arm, exchanged courteous greeting, and began again. Those in his immediate vicinity laughed over his intense seriousness, that had in it something of effrontery. This was the style in which he led to a seat Marguerite Tissot, a little lady five years old, dressed in a charming milk-maid costume, with a milk-can hanging at her side; so too with the Berthier children, Blanche and Sophie, the one masquerading as Folly, the other dressed in approved soubrette style; he had even the hardihood to make up to Valentine de Chermette, a tall young lady of some fourteen years, whom her mother always dressed in Spanish costume, and at her side his figure appeared so slight that she seemed to be carrying him along. But he was profoundly embarrassed in the presence of the Levasseur family, which numbered five girls, who appeared before him in order according to height, the youngest being scarcely two years old, while the oldest was ten. All five were arrayed in Red Riding-Hood costume, the head-dress and gown in poppy-coloured satin with stripes of black velvet, which showed with handsome effect through the great lace apron. Recognising his duty gallantly he led the two elder, one hanging on each arm, into the drawing-room, closely followed by the three others. Notwithstanding the laughter that circled around, the little man never lost his self-command for a moment.

In the meantime Madame Deberle was taking her sister to task in a corner.

"Good gracious! what a fearfully low-necked dress!"

"Dear, dear! what have I done now? Papa hasn't said a word," answered Pauline coolly. "If you're anxious, I'll put some flowers at my breast."

She plucked a handful of blossoms from a flower-stand where they were growing and allowed them to nestle in her bosom. Madame Deberle was forthwith surrounded by some ladies of the *materfamilias* type, splendidly dressed in walking costume, who were already profuse in their compliments about her ball. As Lucien was passing them, his mother arranged a loose curl of his powdered hair, while he stood on tip-toe to whisper in her ear:

"Where's Jeanne?"

"She will be here immediately, my darling. Take good care not to fall. Run away, there comes little Mademoiselle Guiraud. Ah! she is in an Alsatian costume."

The drawing-room was now filling rapidly; the rows of chairs, fronting the red curtain, were almost all occupied, and a hubbub of children's voices was rising. The boys were flocking into the room in groups. There had already entered three Harlequins, four Punches, a Figaro, some Tyrolese peasants, and a few Highlanders. Young Master Berthier was dressed as a page. Little Guiraud, a mere bantling two-and-a-half years old, wore his clown's costume in so comic a style that every one as he passed lifted him up and gave him a kiss.

"Here comes Jeanne," exclaimed Madame Deberle, all at once. "Oh, she is lovely!"

A murmur ran round the room; heads were bent forward, and every one gave vent to exclamations of admiration. Jeanne was standing on the threshold of the outer room, awaiting her mother, who was taking off her cloak in the lobby. The child was robed in a Japanese dress of unusual splendour. The gown, embroidered with flowers and strange-looking birds, swept to her feet, which were hidden from view; while beneath her broad waist-ribbon the flaps, tucked aside, gave a glimpse of a green petticoat, watered with yellow. Nothing could seem more curiously bewitching than her delicate features seen under the shadow of her hair, twisted up with long pins thrust through it, while the chin and oblique eyes, small and sparkling, realised to the life a young lady of Yeddo, walking in an atmosphere laden with the perfumes of tea and benzoin.

And she lingered there hesitatingly, with all the sickly languor of a tropical flower pining for the land of its birth.

Behind her, however, followed Hélène. Both, in their hasty entry from the dulness of the outer day into the brilliant glare of the wax candles, blinked their eyes as though blinded, while their faces were irradiated with smiles. The rush of warm air and perfumes, the scent of violets rising above all, almost stifled them, and sent a flush of red to their fresh-coloured cheeks. Each guest, on passing the doorway, was inspired with similar wonder and hesitancy.

"Why, Lucien! where are you?" exclaimed Madame Deberle.

The boy had not caught sight of Jeanne. He rushed forward and seized her arm, forgetting to make his bow. They were so dainty, so loving, the little marquis in his flowered coat, and the Japanese maiden in her elaborately-worked purple gown, that they might have been taken for two statuettes of Saxon ware, exquisitely gilded and painted, into which life had been suddenly breathed.

"You know, I was waiting for you," whispered Lucien. "Oh, it is so nasty to give everybody my arm! What do you say? Of course, we'll keep beside each other."

And he sat himself down with her in the first row of chairs. He was wholly oblivious to his duties as host.

"Oh, I was so uneasy!" purred Juliette into Hélène's ear. "I was beginning to dread Jeanne had been taken ill."

Hélène proffered an apology, to the effect that children's dressing was endless labour. She was still standing in a corner of the drawing-room, one of a cluster of ladies, when her heart told her the doctor was approaching behind her. The truth was, he was making his way from behind the red curtain, beneath which he had dived to give some final instructions. But suddenly he came to a standstill. He, too, had divined her presence, though she had not yet turned her head. Attired in a dress of black grenadine, she had never appeared more queenly in her beauty; and a thrill ran through him as he breathed the cool air which she had brought from the outer day, and which seemed wafted from her shoulders and arms, gleaming white under their transparent covering.

"Henri has no eyes for anybody," exclaimed Pauline, with a laugh. "Ah, good day, Henri!"

It was then he advanced towards the group of ladies, with a courteous greeting. Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was amongst

them, engaged his attention for the moment by pointing out to him some distance away a nephew whom she had brought with her. He was all complacence. Hélène, without speaking, gave him her hand, encased in its black glove, but he dared not clasp it with marked force.

"Oh! here you are!" said Madame Deberle, as she appeared beside them. "I have been seeking you everywhere. It is nearly three o'clock; they had better begin."

"Certainly; at once," was his reply.

The drawing-room was now crowded. All round the room, in the brilliant glare thrown from the chandelier, sat the fathers and mothers, their walking costumes serving to fringe the circle with less vivid colours; some ladies, drawing their chairs together, formed groups; men standing motionless along the walls filled up the gaps; while in the doorway leading to the next room a cluster of frock-coated guests could be seen crowding together and peering each over the other's shoulders. The light fell wholly on the little folks, noisy in their glee, as they rustled about in their seats in the centre of the large room. There were almost a hundred children packed together, in an endless variety of the gayest costumes, blue and red intermingling with gorgeous effect. It was a veritable sea of fair heads, displaying every possible hue from pale yellow to ruddy gold, with here and there bursts of bows and flowers—or like a field of ripe grain were the sunny tresses, waving to and fro as though blown on by the wind. At times, amidst this confusion of ribbons and lace, of silk and velvet, a face was turned round—a rosy nose, a pair of blue eyes, a mouth smiling or pouting, seemingly strangely out of keeping with the surroundings. There were some no higher than one's boots, buried out of sight between strapping lads and lasses of ten years of age, and whom their mothers sought from the distance, but in vain. A few of the boys were bored and disgusted, sitting next to girls who were busy spreading out their skirts. Some, however, were already very venturesome, jogging the elbows of their fair neighbours with whom they were unacquainted, and laughing in their faces. But the young ladies were queenly in their dignity, though some knots of three or four friends stirred about in such a way as if intending to inflict damage on their chairs, and chattered so loudly that nobody could hear the sound of his or her own voice. They were all intently gazing at the red curtain.

Slowly the curtain was withdrawn, and in the recess of the doorway was displayed a puppet-show. There was a hushed silence. Then in a moment from a side-scene sprang Punch, with so ferocious a yell that baby Guiraud could not restrain a responsive cry of terror and delight. It was a most blood-thirsty drama, in which Punch, having administered a sound beating to the magistrate, murders the policeman and tramples with ferocious glee on every law, human and divine. At every cudgelling bestowed on the wooden heads the pitiless audience went into shrieks of laughter; and the sharp thrusts delivered by the puppets at each other's breasts, the duels in which the antagonists beat a tattoo on their skulls as though they were empty pumpkins, the awful havoc of legs and arms reducing the characters to a jelly, served to redouble the roars of laughter arising from all sides, that were endless in their merriment. But the climax of enjoyment was reached when Punch sawed off the policeman's head on the edge of the stage; the incident was provocative of such hysterical mirth that the rows of the child-audience were broken up in confusion through their falling one against the other. One tiny girl judged it so fine that she pressed her little hands devoutly to her heart. Others burst out into loud applause, while the boys laughed, with mouths agape, the deeper tones of their voices mingling with the shrill peals coming from the girls.

"How amused they are!" whispered the doctor. He had returned to his place close to Hélène. She was in equal spirits with the children. Behind her he sat drinking in the intoxicating perfume that exhaled from her hair. The cudgelling on the stage reaching an extraordinary length, she turned to him and exclaimed:

"Do you know, it is awfully funny!"

The youngsters, crazy with excitement, were now interfering with the action of the drama. They were giving answers to the various characters. A mite of a young lady, who must have been well up in the plot, was busy explaining what had to happen.

"He'll beat his wife to death in a minute! Now, they are going to hang him!"

The youngest of the Levasseur girls, who was two years old, shrieked out all at once:

"Mamma, mamma, will they put him on dry bread?"

Exclamations and delighted remarks were fast causing a

shrill turmoil. Meanwhile Hélène was gazing into the crowd of children.

"I cannot see Jeanne," she said. "Is she enjoying herself?"

He bent forward, with head perilously near her own, and whispered:

"There she is, between that harlequin and the Norman maiden! You can see the pins gleaming in her hair. Her whole heart is in her laughter."

He still leaned towards her, her cool breath playing on his cheek. Till now no confession had escaped them; with their silence they still retained the intimacy which had been marred only for some brief days past by a vague sorrow. But with these bursts of happy laughter striking on their ears and gazing on the little folks, she became once more, in sooth, a very child, and gave herself up to a child's enjoyment. While Henri's breath beat warm on her neck, the whacks from the cudgel, now louder than ever, came startlingly to her ear, and her bosom rose and fell with excitement. She turned her head round with eyes sparkling:

"Good heavens! what nonsense it all is!" She made this remark each time. "See, how they hit one another!"

"Oh! their heads are hard enough!" he replied in trembling tones.

This was all he found in his heart to say. Their minds were being fast ushered into childhood once more. The doings of Punch's loose life were creating a languor within their breasts. When the drama drew to its close with the appearance of the devil, and the final fight and general massacre ensued, Hélène in the act of throwing herself back crushed against Henri's hand placed on the back of her arm-chair; while the child-audience, shouting and clapping their hands, made the very chairs creak with their enthusiasm.

The red curtain dropped once more. The cheering was at its height when Malignon's presence was announced by Pauline, with the customary remark:

"Ah! here's our dandy, Malignon!"

He made his way into the room, shoving the chairs aside, quite out of breath.

"Dear me! what a funny idea to shut out the light!" exclaimed he, falteringly, in his astonishment. "People might imagine they had entered a dead-house." Then, turning to-

wards Madame Deberle, who was approaching him, he continued: "Well, you can boast of having made me run about! Since this morning I have been on the hunt for Perdiguët; you know whom I mean, my singer fellow. But I haven't been able to lay my hands on him, and I have brought you in his place the great Morizot."

The great Morizot was an amateur who entertained drawing-rooms with his feats in thimble-rigging. A table was assigned to him, and on this he accomplished the most wonderful of his tricks; but it all passed without his awakening the very least interest in the onlookers. The poor little darlings were all wearing serious faces; some of the tinier mites, with fingers in mouth, fell fast asleep. The older children turned their heads and smiled towards their parents, who were themselves yawning behind their hands. There was thus a general feeling of relief when the great Morizot declared his intention of disappearing with his table.

"Oh! he's awfully clever," whispered Malignon into Madame Deberle's neck.

But the red curtain was drawn aside once again, and a performance of magic riveted the attention of all the little folks.

Along the whole extent of the dining-room stretched the table, laid out and bedecked as though for a grand dinner, and on the scene fell the bright radiance of the central lamp and the two sconces, each having its ten brackets. There were fifty covers ready; in the middle and at the two ends were shallow baskets, all lush with blossoms; between these towered tall *épergnes*, filled to overflowing with "surprise" packets, covered with shimmering paper and gaudy pictures. Then there were mountains of cake, pyramids of iced fruits, piles of sandwiches, and, less prominent, a whole host of tastefully arranged plates bearing sweetmeats and pastry; buns, cream puffs, and cakes alternated with dry biscuits, cracknels, and fancy almond cakes. Jellies were quivering in their glass dishes, while custards were contained in porcelain bowls. Round the table glimmered the silver foil of the champagne bottles, not higher than one's hand, made specially to suit the little guests. One might have declared it was some gigantic feast, which children are wont to conjure up in dreamland—a feast served up with all the importance necessary to the dining of lords and ladies—a fairy transformation of the table to which their own parents sat down, and on which a very

cascade of plenty in the shape of pastry and whole shopfuls of toys had been poured.

"Come, come, give the ladies your arms!" said Madame Deberle, her face covered with smiles as she watched the delight of the children.

But the filing off into couples was a failure. Lucien had triumphantly taken Jeanne's arm and advanced first. The others following behind fell somewhat into confusion, and the mothers were forced to come and assign them places, remaining close at hand, especially behind the babies, whom they watched over lest any mischance might befall them. Sooth to say, the guests seemed at first rather uncomfortable; they looked at one another, were afraid to lay hands on the good things, and were vaguely disquieted by this new world in which everything appeared upside down, the children seated at table while their parents remained standing. At length the older ones won confidence and commenced the attack. The entry of the mothers into the fray, as they cut up the heaps of cake and distributed it to those in their vicinity, gave new life to the feast which soon became very noisy. The exquisite arrangement of the table immediately disappeared, as though a tempest had burst over it. The two Berthier girls, Blanche and Sophie, laughed at the sight of their plates which had been filled with something of everything—jam, custard, cake, and fruit. The five young ladies of the Levasseur family took sole possession of a corner laden with dainties, while Valentine, proud in her knowledge of being fourteen years of age, sensibly acted the lady's part, and looked after the comfort of her neighbours. Lucien, however, impatient to display his politeness, uncorked a bottle of champagne, but bungled in such a way that the whole contents spurted over his breeches of cherry-coloured silk. There was a to-do.

"Kindly leave the bottles alone! I am to uncork the champagne," shouted Pauline.

She bustled about in an extraordinary fashion, purely for her own amusement. On the entry of a servant with the chocolate pot, she seized it and filled the cups with the greatest glee, as active in the performance as any restaurant waiter. Next she took round ices and glasses of syrup and water, ran away for a moment to fill with good things a baby-girl who had been passed over, and was off again busy asking every one questions,

"What is it you wish, my chieftain? Eh? A cake? Yes, my darling, wait a moment; I am going to pass you the oranges. Now eat, every one of you little stupid, you shall play afterwards."

Madame Deberle, calm and dignified, declared that they should be left alone, and that they would acquit themselves very well. At one end of the room sat Hélène and other ladies laughing at the scene which the table presented; all the rosy mouths were working up and down displaying beautiful white teeth. And nothing eclipsed in drollery the lapse that took place at intervals from the polished behaviour of well-trained children to the outrageous freaks of young savages. With their two hands gripping the glasses, they drank to the very dregs, smeared their faces, and spoilt their dresses. The clamour grew worse. The last of the dishes were plundered. Jeanne herself was dancing on her chair as she heard the strains of a quadrille coming from the drawing-room; and on her mother approaching to upbraid her with having eaten too much, she murmured in her ear:

"Oh! mamma, I feel so happy to-day!"

But now the other children were rising as they heard the music. Slowly the table thinned, until there only remained a fat, chubby infant right at the middle. His majesty seemingly cared little for the attractions of the piano; with a napkin round his neck, and his chin resting on the table-cloth, for he was a mere chit, he opened his great eyes, and pressed forward his mouth whenever his mamma offered him a spoonful of chocolate. The contents of the cup vanished, and he licked his lips as the last mouthful went down his throat, with eyes more agape than ever.

"By Jove! my lad, you eat hearty!" exclaimed Malignon, who was watching him with a thoughtful air.

Now came the division of the "surprise" packets. Each child, on leaving the table, bore away one of the large gilt paper bundles, the coverings of which were hastily torn off, and from them poured out a host of toys, funnily-shaped hats made of tissue paper, birds and butterflies. But the joy of joys was the possession of a cracker. Every "surprise" packet had its cracker; and these the lads pulled at gallantly, delighted with the explosion, while the girls shut their eyes with every flash. For a time the sharp crackling from this volley alone could be heard; and, while this uproar was lasting, the children

commenced to troop back into the drawing-room, where the piano was still rattling away at lively quadrille music.

"I could enjoy a cake," murmured Mademoiselle Aurélie, as she sat down.

The table was now deserted, and displayed the litter of the huge feast. A few ladies ensconced themselves in seats—some dozen or so, who had preferred to wait till the children had retired. As no servant could be laid hands on, Malignon bustled hither and thither in attendance. He extracted its last contents from the chocolate pot, shook up the dregs of the bottles, and even was successful in discovering some ices. But through all these cavalier doings of his, he could not quit one idea, and that was—why had they decided on closing the blinds?

"You know," he asserted, "the place looks like a cellar."

Hélène was still standing engaged in conversation with Madame Deberle, who now made haste to return to the drawing-room, and her companion was preparing to follow, when she felt herself touched gently. Behind her was the doctor smiling; he evidently did not intend to leave her.

"Are you not going to take anything?" he asked.

The trivial question cloaked so earnest an entreaty that her heart was filled with profound disquietude. She knew well that every word was eloquent of another thing. The excitement springing from the gaiety which pulsed around her was slowly gaining on her. The feverish joy of the little folks dancing and shouting was distilled into her veins. With flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, she at first declined—

"No, thank you, nothing at all."

But he grew importunate, and in the end, harassed and anxious to free herself from his attentions, she yielded.

"Well, kindly bring me a cup of tea."

He hurried off and returned with the cup, his hands trembling as he handed it to her. While she was sipping the tea he drew nearer her, and his lips quivering nervously protruded as though the confession, springing from his heart, was about to find utterance. She in her turn drew back from him, and returning him the empty cup, made her escape while he was placing it on a sideboard, leaving him alone in the dining-room with Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was slowly gorging herself, every dish in succession being subjected to a close scrutiny.

Within the drawing-room the piano was sending out



DOCTOR DEBERLE DECLARING HIS LOVE TO

its merriest strains, and the fun of the ball raged fast and furious the whole length of the floor. A circle of onlookers had been formed round the quadrille party with whom Lucien and Jeanne were dancing. The little marquis became rather mixed over the figures; he got on well only when he had occasion to take hold of Jeanne; and then he gripped her by the waist and whirled round. Jeanne preserved her equilibrium, somewhat vexed by his rumpling her dress, but the delights of the dance taking full possession of her, she seized him in her turn and lifted him off his feet. The white satin coat embroidered with nosegays mingled with the folds of the gown enwoven with flowers and strange birds, and the two little figures seemed made of Saxon ware and endowed with all the beauty and novelty of some ornament taken from the shelves of a what-not. The quadrille over, Hélène summoned Jeanne to her side to re-arrange her dress.

"It is his fault, mamma," was the little one's excuse. "He rubs against me—he's a dreadful nuisance."

Round the drawing-room the faces of the parents were wreathed with smiles. The piano began again, and all the babies now determined on having a dance. Seeing, however, they were observed, they could not free themselves from their backwardness; they remained grave and held back, giving but a tentative skip or two, in order to keep up appearances. Others again knew how to dance; but the majority were ignorant of the steps and stirred little beyond one place, their limbs being evidently a source of embarrassment. But Pauline interposed: "I must see to them! Oh, you little stupids!"

She threw herself into the midst of the quadrille, seized hold of two of them, one grasping her right hand the other her left, and managed to infuse such life into the dance that the stretch of wooden flooring creaked beneath them. The only sounds now audible rose from the hurrying hither and thither of tiny feet beating wholly out of time, the piano alone keeping to the dance measure. Some more of the older people joined in the fun. Hélène and Madame Deberle, noticing some little maids who were too bashful to venture forth, dragged them into the crowd. It was they who led off the figures, pushed the lads forward, and arranged their dancing in rings; and to their care were consigned by the mothers the very youngest of the babies, who were induced to dance their feet about for a time while they were gripped fast by the two

hands. The ball was now at its height. The dancers were inspired with a rapturous joy, laughing and pushing each other about, as though it were some boarding-school gone out of its wits with glee over the absence of the teacher. Nothing, truly, could outshine in unalloyed happiness this carnival of youngsters, into which these miniature men and women threw themselves—a veritable microcosm wherein were displayed the fashions of every people, and the fantastic creations of romance and drama. The ruddy lips and blue eyes, the faces breathing love, invested the dresses with the fresh purity of childhood. It realised in one's mind the merry-making of a fairy tale to which trooped Cupids in disguise to honour the betrothal of a Prince Charming.

"How stuffy it is!" exclaimed Malignon. "I'm off to inhale some fresh air."

As he left the drawing-room he threw the door wide open. The daylight from the street peered in gloomily, and gave a dingy effect to the glare of lamps and wax-candles. Every quarter of an hour Malignon opened the door to let in some fresh air.

Still there was no cessation of the piano-playing. Little Guiraud, in her Alsatian costume, with a black butterfly pinned to her golden hair, swung round in the dance with a harlequin twice her height. A Highlander whirled Marguerite Tissot round so madly that she dropped her milk-pail. The two Berthier girls, Blanche and Sophie, who were inseparables, were dancing together; the soubrette in the arms of Folly, whose bells were ringing merrily. A glance could not be thrown over the assemblage without one of the Levasseur girls coming into view; the Red Riding-Hoods seemed to be adding to their number; everywhere leapt into sight caps and gowns of gleaming red satin slashed with black velvet. Meanwhile some of the older boys and girls had found refuge within the adjacent saloon where they could dance with comfort. Valentine de Chermette, cloaked in the mantilla of a Spanish maiden, was executing some marvellous steps facing a young gentleman who had donned evening dress. Suddenly there was a burst of laughter which drew every one to the sight; behind a door in a corner, baby Guiraud, the two-year old clown, and a mite of a girl of his own age, were together, locked in a close embrace to prevent their tumbling, and the couple of sly-boots were gyrating round with cheek pressed against cheek.

"I'm quite done up," remarked H  l  ne, as she leaned against the dining-room door.

She fanned her face, flushed with her exertions in the dance. Her bosom rose and fell beneath the transparent grenadine of her bodice. Still she was conscious of Henri's breath beating on her shoulders; still he was close to her—ever behind her. Now it flashed on her he would speak, but she had no strength to flee from his avowal. He came nearer and whispered, breathing on her hair: "I love you! oh, how I love you!"

She tingled from head to foot, as though a gust of flame had beaten on her. Angels above! he had spoken; she could no longer counterfeit the pleasurable quietude of ignorance. She hid behind the shelter of her fan her face purple with blushes. The children, whirling about madly in the last of the quadrilles, made the floor ring with the beating of their feet. There were silvery peals of laughter, and bird-like voices gave vent to exclamations of pleasure. A freshness exhaled from this band of innocents rushing round madly like little demons.

"I love you! oh, how I love you!"

She shuddered the more; she would listen no further. With dizzy brain she fled into the dining room, but it was deserted, saving that Monsieur Letellier slept in a chair in solitary state. Henri followed her, and had the hardihood to seize her wrists; a scandal seemed imminent—his face was convulsed with such passion that she trembled before him. His tongue still repeated the phrase:

"I love you! I love you!"

"Leave me," she murmured, faintly. "You are mad——"

How the dancing went on with the trampling of tiny feet! Blanche Berthier's bells could be heard ringing in unison with the hushed notes of the piano; Madame Deberle and Pauline beat time by the clapping of their hands. It was a polka, and H  l  ne caught a glimpse of Jeanne and Lucien, a smiling pair with arms clasped round each other.

But with a sudden jerk she freed herself and fled to an adjacent room—a pantry into which streamed the daylight. The sudden brightness blinded her. She was terror-stricken—she dared not re-enter the drawing-room with the tale of passion written legibly on her face; she walked hastily across the garden and climbed to the haven of her own home, the noises of the ball-room still ringing in her ears.

CHAPTER V.

IN her own room near the sky, amidst its dull seclusion into which she plunged, Hélène felt stifled. So tranquil was it, so fenced in from the outer world, so drowsy did it appear with its blue velvet hangings, that the place startled her, while her bosom panted, and she was consumed with the passion which thrilled her. Was this her own room, this dreary, lifeless nook that was devoid of air? Hastily she threw open a window, and leaned out to gaze on Paris.

The rain had ceased, and the clouds were trooping away like some herd of monsters burying their disorderly array in the gloom of the horizon. A blue gap that grew larger by degrees opened up above the town. Hélène's elbows trembled on the bar which supported them; she was still out of breath with her too hasty ascent, she saw nothing, but only heard her heart beating loudly against her swelling breast. She inhaled deep draughts of air; she imagined the spreading valley with its river, its two millions of people, its immense city, its distant hills, could not hold air enough to restore once more her quiet and regular breathing.

For some minutes she remained there in a state of bewilderment, still burnt up by the fever of passion from which she had fled. It seemed as though there were pouring down on her an avalanche of sensations and confused ideas, the roar of which prevented her hearing her own voice or thinking rationally. There was a buzz in her ears; and great spots swam slowly before her eyes. She astonished herself by examining her gloved hands, and by remembering that she had omitted sewing on a button that had come off the left-hand glove. Next she spoke out loud, repeating several times, in tones that grew fainter and fainter:

"I love you! I love you! oh, how I love you!"

Instinctively she buried her face in her hands, and with her fingers pressed on the eyelids strove to intensify the darkness in which she revelled. A craving for death fell on her—a

longing to see no more, to be alone, girt in by the gloom of night. Her breathing grew quieter. Paris blew on her face from its mighty lungs; she knew it lay before her, she had no wish to look on it, and yet she was inspired with terror by the thought of leaving the window, and of seeing no longer beneath her this city, the vastness of which lulled her to rest.

Ere long she grew unmindful of Paris. The love-scene and the confession, despite her every effort, woke again to life. In the inky darkness Henri stood out, every feature so distinct and vivid that she could realise the nervous twitching of his lips. He came nearer and hung over her. Then with a wild gesture she pushed him away. But, notwithstanding this, she felt the heated breath on her shoulders and the voice exclaiming, "I love you! I love you!" With a mighty effort she put the phantom to flight, but again it took shape in the distance, and slowly swelled to its whilom proportions; it was Henri once more following her hastily into the dining-room, still murmuring, "I love you! I love you!" These words rang within her breast with the sonorous clang of a bell, and these words only did she hear pealing their loudest throughout her frame, and wildly dashing against her bosom. Meantime, she craved time for thought, and again she plucked Henri's image from her sight. He had spoken; never would she dare to look on his face again. The brutal passion of the man had tainted the tenderness of their love. She conjured up past hours, in which he had worshipped her without giving expression to it in words; hours spent at the bottom of the garden amidst the tranquillity of the budding spring-time. God in Heaven! he had spoken—the thought intoxicated her, lowered on her in such immensity that the instant destruction of Paris by a thunderbolt, while she was gazing on it, would have seemed a trivial matter. Her heart was torn with feelings of indignant protest and haughty anger, commingled with a secret and unconquerable pleasure, which ascended from her inner being and bereft her of her senses. He had spoken, he did not cease speaking, he sprang up unceasingly, pleading with passionate words, "I love you! I love you!"—words that swept into oblivion her past life as wife and mother.

In spite of her brooding over this vision, she retained full consciousness of the vast expanse which stretched beneath her, though unseen through the darkness that curtained her sight. Noisy rumblings broke on her ear, and waves of life seemed to

surge up and circle around her. Echoes, scents, and even the light streamed against her face, though her hands were still pressed to it. At times sudden gleams appeared to pierce her closed eyelids, and amidst the resulting radiance she imagined she saw monuments, steeples, and domes diffuse themselves over the horizon of her dream. She tore away her hands, opened her eyes, and sat dazzled. The arch of heaven was above her, and Henri had vanished.

Only a ridge of clouds trailed across the sky, like a heaped-up mass of crumbling chalk hills. At the moment, through the clear heaven of the deepest blue, like a flotilla of vessels urged on by the wind, some light snowy flecks only were in motion, drifting slowly. To the north, above Montmartre, there hung in an angle of the sky a net of exquisitely delicate tracery, as if fashioned of a wan-coloured silk, and ready to the hand of some fisherman plying his trade in the depths of so tranquil a sea. But in the west, away towards the hills of Meudon, which Hélène could not see, the tail-end of the rain-cloud must still have been dimming the sun, as Paris, notwithstanding the clear rift of blue above, looked gloomy and murky, and was partly hidden from sight by vapours rising from the roofs that were yielding up their moisture. The city was all of one hue, bluish grey-like slate, against which the trees stood out black. Still everything was very vivid; the sharp outlines could be traced and the thousands of windows were quite visible. The Seine gleamed with the tarnished splendour of an olden silver ingot. The monuments on its two banks seemed as if they had been dipped in a sooty liquid; the Tour Saint-Jacques reared its curious antiquated structure, and seemed to all appearance eaten away by rust, while the Pantheon, towering over the gloomy district in which it stands, had some grim resemblance to a gigantic catafalque. The gilding on the dome of the Invalides emitted the only glitter, and one might have imagined lamps had been lit there in the daylight, so dreamy and melancholy was the shimmer amidst the twilight gloom that was creeping over the city. Everything was blurred; Paris veiled in a cloud, as though it were an artist armed with some Titanic black crayon, was outlining itself against the horizon, delicately and yet with intense reality, beneath the exquisite blue of the heavens.

Gazing on the gloomy town Hélène lost all cognisance of her acquaintance with Henri. She was brave for the moment;

his image no longer dogged her thoughts. A rebellious impulse stirred her soul to reject the mastery which this man had gained over her within a few weeks. No, she did not know him. She knew nothing of him, of his actions or his thoughts; she could not even have determined whether he possessed talent. Perhaps her affections were still baser in quality than his mental faculties. And thus she gave way to every imagining, her heart feeding on this Dead Sea fruit, yet ever battling against her ignorance concerning Henri that rose up as a barrier to separate her from him and check her in her efforts to know him. She knew nothing, she would never know anything. She pictured him in his brutish passion only, hissing out those burning words, creating within her the one trouble which had, till now, broken in on the quiet happiness of her life. Whence, then, had he sprung to lay her life desolate in this fashion? It came swiftly to her that but six weeks before she had had no existence for him, and the thought was insufferable. Angels in Heaven! to live no more for one another, to pass without recognition, perhaps never to meet again! In her despair she clasped her hands together and her eyes filled with tears.

Now Hélène gazed fixedly on the towers of Notre-Dame in the far distance. A ray of light beamed sunnily on them from between two clouds. Her brain was dazed, as though teeming with a multitude of tumultuous thoughts hurtling about within its confines. Her sorrow was keen; she would fain have concerned herself with the sight of Paris, and to regain her life-peace by directing on the ocean of roofs once more the tranquil glances of days past. To think that at other times, at the same hour, the infinitude of the city—in the stillness of a lovely twilight—had plunged her in tenderest musing! Meantime Paris lay before her, flushing in the dying light of the sun. After the first ray had fallen on Notre-Dame, others had followed streaming across the city. The luminary, dipping in the west, created huge rifts in the clouds, and the various districts were bathed in ever-changing lights and shadows. For a time the whole of the left bank was of a leaden hue, while the right was speckled over with spots of light that gave the verge of the river the appearance of some immense brute's skin. Then these resemblances varied and vanished at the mercy of the wind, which drove the clouds before it. It seemed as though over the burnished gold of the house-tops sheets of darkness were floating, all in the same direction and

with the same gentle and untroubled motion. Some of them were of immense extent, sailing along with all the majestic grace of an admiral's ship; these were surrounded by lesser ones, preserving the regularity of a squadron in line of battle. One vast shadow trailed along, with a gap that yawned like a serpent's mouth, and for a while hid Paris, which it seemed ready to devour. And when it faded in the far-off horizon, curtailed to the limits of an earth-worm, a gush of light streamed from a rift in a cloud, and fell into the void which it had left. The golden cascade began thin as a thread of fine sand, that swelled out into conical shape and rained down in a continuous shower on the Champs Elysées district, where it poured in dancing radiance. Long time the shooting rays lasted, brilliant with all the flaming glories of a rocket.

Yes, it was true; this love was her fate, and Hélène no longer shut it out from her heart. She could battle no more against her feelings. Henri had it in his power to possess her; she yielded herself into his hands. It was now she tasted the immeasurable delight of withstanding her love no further. Why should she grudge herself happiness any longer? Had she not had enough of waiting? The memory of her past life inspired her with disgust and aversion. How had she been able to drag on this passionless life, of which she was formerly so proud? A vision rose before her of herself as a young girl living in the Marseilles street, the Rue des Petites-Maries, where she existed in a perpetual tremor; she saw herself a wife, her heart's blood frozen in the companionship of a great baby who slobbered over her naked feet, while she found little interest, saving in the cares of her household; she saw herself pursuing through every hour of her life the same path with the same tread, without a trouble to mar her peace; and now this monotony, this trance into which her passions had been lulled, enraged her beyond expression. How could she imagine for a moment that she would have been happy in the thought of another thirty years spent thus, her heart dead, and the proud consciousness of her own honour alone filling the blank in her existence? How she had cheated herself with her integrity and nice honour, which had girt her round with the empty joys of piety! No, no; she had had enough of it; she wished to live! An awful spirit of ridicule woke within her as she reflected on what her reason urged. Her reason, forsooth! she pitied her reason; it had brought her, during her

already long life, no cup of pleasure that could be compared with that she had tasted during the past hour. She had dreamt of no such stumble; she had been vain and idiotic enough to think that she would go on to the end without her foot tripping once on a stone. Ah, well! to-day she panted thus to fall, longed for it to plunge her into some abyss; the whole revulsion of her being tended towards this invincible craving. Oh! that she might disappear in a close embrace, after tasting for one moment the bliss she had never enjoyed!

Within her own soul, meanwhile, she mourned with a great sorrow. It was a heart-burning that sprang from a consciousness of a gloomy blank within her. Then argument rose to her lips. Was she not free? In her love for Henri she deceived nobody; she could deal as she pleased with her love. Then, did not everything exculpate her? What had been her life for nearly two years? Her widowhood, her unrestricted liberty, her loneliness—everything, she judged, had infected her with tenderness, and smoothed the way for love. Love must slowly have been smouldering within her in the long evenings spent between her two old friends, the Abbé and his brother, simple hearts whose serenity had lulled it to rest; love was smouldering when she shut herself within these narrow walls, far away from the world, and gazed on Paris rumbling noisily on the horizon; love was smouldering whenever she leaned from this window in the dreamy fashion, once so foreign to her, which had tended to rob her of her heart's sufficiency. It came back to her, that radiant morning of spring, when the town was sunny and clear as though seen through glass; when Paris seemed fair with the purity of childhood, as she surveyed it lazily, stretched in her easy-chair with a book on her knees. That morning it was love first awoke—a scarcely perceptible feeling that she was unable to define; against it she believed herself strongly armoured. To-day she sat in the same place, but devoured with an overpowering passion, and before her eyes the dying sun lit up the city with flame. It seemed to her that one day had sufficed for all, and that this was the ruddy evening following the radiance of the morning; she imagined she felt these fiery beams scorching her heart.

But a change had come over the sky. The sun in its descent towards the Meudon hills had but a moment before burst through the clouds in all its splendour. The whole vault of heaven was illuminated; on the verge of the horizon a

crumbling ridge of chalk-coloured clouds, that hid Charenton and Choisy-le-Roi in the distance, had their peaks tinged with carmine, edged with brilliant lace; the flotilla of smaller clouds floated slowly into the blue above Paris, and at once veiled themselves in purple; while the delicate net work that seemed made of white silk thread, stretching over Montmartre, instantaneously assumed the appearance of a golden tracery, the meshes of which were designed to snare the stars on their rising. Beneath the flaming vault of heaven Paris lay in a yellow haze, striped with immense shadows.

Far below, athwart its vast extent, cabs and omnibuses crawled in every direction through an orange-coloured mist, and the crowds of pedestrians, like some black swarm, glittered amidst the mass as the rays of light fell on them. The lads of a seminary passed along the Quai de Billy, a straggling line of cassocks, that were yellow in colour in the diffused light. Next the vehicles and pedestrians vanished from view, and in the distance, crossing some bridge, only a thread of carriages could be seen with gleaming lamps. To the left, the lofty chimneys of the Army bake-house towered on high, emitting great clouds of wreathing smoke of a delicate flesh-hue; while on the other side of the river the magnificent elms of the Quai d'Orsay loomed up, a sombre mass pierced with sunny arrows. Between its banks, over which the slanting beams streamed, the Seine circled in dancing eddies where the blue, yellow, and green were transfused into a speckled flood of light; but as it glowed towards the background, its gorgeous hues that seemed born of an eastern sea rapidly changed to one burst of dazzling gold; and it might have been imagined that a molten ingot was welling out of the horizon from an invisible crucible, and was broadening out with a coruscating display of colour, growing more brilliant in proportion to its cooling. The bridges, to the eye like stepping-stones, spanned the glittering stream with curves that became always more delicate, throwing strips of grey shadow and vanishing in the end amid a glowing mass of houses, over which waved the two towers of Notre-Dame, red and fiery like torches. To the right, to the left, the monuments were all bathed in flames. The glass structure of the Palais de l'Industrie glowed like a furnace amongst the trees of the Champs Elysées; away beyond, at the rear of the hidden roof of the Madeleine, the huge pile of the Opera-House appeared a mass of burnished

copper; and other buildings, cupolas and towers, the Vendôme column, Saint-Vincent de Paul, the Tour Saint-Jacques, and, hard by, the pavilions of the new Louvre and the Tuileries, were surmounted by a blaze, every patch of open to all appearance containing a pile of flaming wood. The dome of the Invalides was on fire, and flashed with such brilliancy that at every moment fear might have prophesied its being wrapped in flames and scattering over the neighbourhood burning flakes of wood. Beyond the irregular towers of Saint-Sulpice, the Pantheon spread itself over the sky in dull splendour, like some royal palace which a conflagration was reducing to charred embers. Then the whole of Paris, more and more as the sun declined, lay flushed in the light reflected from the flaming monuments. Flashes gleamed across the house-tops, while the black smoke lingered in the valleys. Every frontage turned towards the Trocadéro seemed red-hot, the glass of the windows glittering and emitting a shower of sparks that shot from the town as if the bellows of a Cyclopean forge were being unceasingly plied. Bursts of flame, always springing up, broke from the adjacent districts, where the streets crossed, now dark and again all ablaze, even far over the plain; the ruddy glow which veiled the outskirts, darkening but still retaining a warm haze, gave out flashes of dying flame from some fire struggling again into life. Ere long a furnace seemed raging, Paris was in the embrace of a conflagration; the heavens were empurpled, and the clouds oozed with blood over the vast city bathed in red and gold.

Hélène, with the ruddy tints falling upon her, abandoned her heart to the passion which was devouring her, and gazed upon Paris all ablaze. A little hand was placed on her shoulder, and she gave a start. It was Jeanne, exclaiming in her ear: "Mamma! mamma!"

She turned her head, and the child went on:

"How happy you must be! Did you not hear me? I have called to you ten times at least."

The little girl was still in her Japanese costume, and her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were flushed with pleasure. She gave her mother no time for answer.

"You ran away from me nicely! Do you know, at the last, they were hunting for you everywhere! Had it not been for Pauline, who came with me to the bottom of the staircase, I wouldn't have dared to cross the road."

With a pretty gesture she moved her face close to her mother's lips, and, without pausing, whispered the question :

"Do you love me?"

Hélène kissed her somewhat absently. She was amazed and impatient at her early return. Was it indeed the case that she had fled from the ball-room an hour before? To satisfy the child, who seemed uneasy, she answered in a few words that she had been feeling rather unwell. The fresh air was doing her good; she only needed a little quietness.

"Oh! don't fear; I'm too tired," murmured Jeanne. "I am going to keep here, and be very, very good. But, darling mamma, I can speak, can I not?"

She nestled close to Hélène, full of joy at the prospect of not being undressed all at once. She was in ecstasies over her embroidered purple gown and her petticoat of green silk; and she shook her head to hear the rattle against her hair of the pendants hanging from the long pins thrust through it. Soon there burst from her lips a rush of hasty words. She had seen everything, heard everything, and remembered everything, preserving ever a stolid look, as though she understood nothing. Now she made ample amends for her former assumed dignity, her silence, and her indifference.

"Do you know, mamma, it was an old fellow with a grey beard who made Punch walk about? I had a good look at him when the curtain was drawn aside. Yes, and the little boy Guiraud was sobbing. How stupid of him, wasn't it? They told him the policeman would come and put water in his soup; they had to carry him off, he wept in such a way. And at lunch, too, Marguerite stained all her milk-maid's dress with preserve. Her mamma wiped it off, and said to her—'Oh, you dirty slut!' Marguerite even had it all over her hair. I never opened my mouth, but I had lots of fun in seeing them rush at the cakes. Were they not bad-mannered, darling mother?"

She paused for a few seconds, absorbed in some reminiscence, and then asked with a thoughtful air :

"Tell me, mamma, did you eat any of the yellow cakes with white cream inside? Oh! they were good! they were good! I kept the dish beside me the whole time."

Hélène was not listening to the child's chatter. But Jeanne babbled on to relieve her excited brain. She launched out again, giving the minutest details regarding the ball, and investing each little incident with the greatest importance.

"You did not see, after it had begun, that my waist-band came undone. A lady, whose name I don't know, pinned it for me. Then I said to her: 'Madame, I thank you very much!' But when I was dancing with Lucien the pin ran into him. He asked me, 'What is that in front of you pricking me?' Of course I knew nothing about it, and told him I had nothing there to prick him. However, Pauline came and put the pin in its proper place. By the way, you've no idea how they were pushing each other about, and one great stupid of a boy gave Sophie a blow on the back which made her fall. The Levasseur girls were jumping about with their feet close together. I am pretty certain that isn't the way to dance. But the best of it all, you must understand, came at the end. You weren't there, so you can't know. One person took another by the arms, and then everybody whirled round; we were like to die with laughing. Besides, some of the big gentlemen were whirling round. It's true; I am not telling fibs. Why, don't you want to believe me, darling mother?"

Jeanne was growing vexed at Hélène's continued silence. She nestled closer and gave a shake to her hand. But perceiving that she drew from her only a few words, she herself, by degrees, lapsed into silence, falling also into a brown study, and pondering over the incidents of the ball with which her heart was full. Both mother and daughter now sat mutely gazing on Paris all aflame. Its cloak of mystery was round it still, as it lay thus flushed by the blood-red clouds, like some city of an old-world tale expiating its lusts in a rain of fire.

"Had you any round dances?" asked Hélène of a sudden, as if wakening with a start.

"Yes, yes!" murmured Jeanne, engrossed in her turn.

"And the doctor, did he dance?"

"I should think so; he had a turn with me. He lifted me up and asked me, 'Where is your mamma? Where is your mamma?' and then he kissed me."

Hélène unconsciously smiled; his goodness moved her to laughter. What need had she of knowing Henri well? It appeared sweeter to her not to know him, ay, never to know him well, and to greet him as the one whose coming she had awaited so long. What need was there of amazement or disquiet? At the fated hour he was hastening to meet her on her life journey. The thought was heaven; her frank nature welcomed what was in store; and a calm, sprung from the

knowledge that she loved and was beloved, fell on her mind. She told her heart that she would venture enough to prevent her happiness being marred.

But night was coming on and the breeze blew chilly. Jeanne, still plunged in reverie, shivered. She reclined her head on her mother's bosom, and as though the question was inseparably connected with her deep meditation, she murmured a second time: "Do you love me?"

Then Hélène, her face glad with smiles, took her head within her hands and seemed to examine her face closely for a moment. Next she pressed a long kiss close to her mouth, over a ruddy speck on the skin. There, there she could see Henri had kissed the child!

The gloomy ridge of the Meudon hills was already sharply dividing the thin crescent reflected from the sun. Over Paris the slanting beams of light still fell with lengthening streamers. The shadow cast by the dome of the Invalides, swollen to inordinate proportions, traversed the whole of the Saint Germain district; while the Opera-House, the Tour Saint-Jacques, the columns and the steeples, threw sheets of darkness on the right bank. The lines of house-fronts, the yawning gulfs of the streets, the raised-up islands of roof-tops, glared with a more sullen glow. The reflected glitter died from the windows, as though the houses had been reduced to charred embers. The chimes from different clocks rang out; a rumbling noise fell on the ears, anon to die away. With the approach of night the sky developed distance, rearing its violet-tinted cupola, streaked with gold and purple, above the flaming city. Of a sudden there was a fierce outbreak of the fiery glow; a last burst of light streamed across Paris as far as the wilderness of its suburbs; then a grey ash seemed to fall, and the several districts stood out against the sky, shadowy and black like burnt-out coals.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

ONE morning in May Rosalie ran out of the kitchen, dish-clout in hand, screaming out in the familiar fashion of a favourite servant :

"Oh, madame, come quick! His reverence the Abbé is down below in the doctor's garden busy digging."

Hélène made no responsive movement, but Jeanne had already rushed to have a look. On her return, she exclaimed :

"How stupid Rosalie is! he is not digging at all. He is with the gardener, who is putting plants into a barrow. Madame Deberle is plucking all her roses."

"They must be for the church," said Hélène quietly. She was engaged on some tapestry-work.

A few minutes later the bell rang and Abbé Jouve made his appearance. He came with the intimation that on the following Tuesday his presence must not be counted on. His evenings would be wholly taken up with the ceremonies incident to the month of the Holy Virgin. The vicar had assigned him the task of procuring decorations for the church. It would be a great success. All the ladies were giving flowers. He was expecting two palm-trees about fourteen feet high which might be placed to the right and the left of the altar.

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" murmured Jeanne, listening wonderstruck.

"Well, well," said Hélène with a smile, "since you cannot come to us, old friend, we will go to see you. Why, you've quite turned Jeanne's head with your talk about flowers."

She had no religious tendencies; she never even went to mass, on the plea that her daughter's health suffered from the shivering fits which seized her when she came out of a church. The old priest eschewed in her presence any reference to religion. It was his wont to say, with good-natured indulgence, that good hearts carve out their own salvation by deeds of

loving-kindness and charity. Her heart God would know when to touch.

Till the evening of the following day Jeanne thought of nothing but the month of the Virgin. She plagued her mother with questions; she dreamt of the church with its wondrous profusion of white roses, filled with thousands of wax tapers, with the sound of angels' voices, and with sweet perfumes. And she was very anxious to be near the altar that she might have a better view of the Holy Virgin's lace-gown, a gown worth a fortune, according to the Abbé. But Hélène bridled her excitement with a threat not to take her should she behave badly beforehand.

But the evening came at last and they set out. The nights were still cold, and when they reached the Rue de l'Annonciation, where the church of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce stands, the child was shivering all over.

"The church is heated up," said her mother. "We must secure a place near a hot-air pipe."

She pushed open the thick door, and as it swung back softly to its place they found themselves breathing a warm atmosphere, while the brilliant light streamed on them and the chants came to their ears. The ceremony had commenced, and Hélène, perceiving that the central nave was crowded, signified her intention of going down one of the side aisles. But there seemed insuperable obstacles in her way; she could not get near the altar. She gripped Jeanne's hand and patiently pressed forward; but, despairing of advancing further, she took the first two unoccupied chairs she could see. A pillar hid half of the choir from view.

"I can see nothing," said the child, grievously discontented. "This is a very nasty place."

Hélène signed to her to keep silent, and the child at once lapsed into a fit of sulks. In front of her the whole scene was eclipsed by the huge bulk of an old lady. When her mother turned towards her she was standing upright on her chair.

"Will you come down!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "You are a nuisance."

But Jeanne was stubborn.

"Hist! mamma, there's Madame Deberle. See, she is down there in the centre. She is beckoning to us."

Annoyed beyond endurance, our heroine trembled with impatience. She shook the little one, but she was sturdy in

her refusals to sit down. During the three days that had intervened since the ball H  l  ne had shunned a visit to the doctor's house on the plea of having a great deal to do.

"Mamma," went on Jeanne with a child's wonted stubbornness, "she is looking at you; she is nodding good-day to you."

With this intimation H  l  ne was forced to turn round and exchange greetings; each bowed to the other. Madame Deberle, in a wondrously-striped silk gown trimmed with white lace, sat in the centre of the nave but a short distance from the choir, looking very young and dressy. She had brought her sister Pauline, who was now busy waving her hand. The chants still went on, the crowd of worshippers adding to the volume of sound with an accompaniment of voices of every kind and degree, while the shrill tones of the children lent a piquancy to the monotonous rhythm of the music.

"They are wishing us to go over, you see," exclaimed Jeanne, with some triumph in her remark.

"That is useless; we shall do very well here."

"Oh, mamma, do let us go over to them! There are two chairs empty."

"No, no, come and sit down."

But the ladies smilingly persisted in their request, heedless to the last degree of the offence which they were giving their neighbours; nay, delighted at being the observed of all observers. H  l  ne had thus to yield. She pushed the gratified Jeanne before her, and strove to make her way through the crowd, her hands all the while trembling with repressed anger. It was no easy business. The worshippers, unwilling to disturb themselves, glared at her with furious looks, while with gaping mouths they kept on singing. She pressed on in this style for five long minutes, the tempest of voices pealing around her with ever-increasing violence. At last she came to a standstill, and Jeanne, squeezing close against her mother, gazed at those dismal caverns of gaping mouths. The disengaged places in front of the choir, however, were close at hand; they had but a few steps towards them.

"Come, be quick," whispered Madame Deberle. "The Abb   told me you would be coming, and I kept the two chairs for you."

H  l  ne thanked her, and, to cut the conversation short, began at once turning over the leaves of her service book. But Juliette was as worldly as ever; she sat here, perfectly at

her ease, agreeable and chatty, as in her drawing-room. She bent her head over her and went on :

" You have become quite invisible of late. I was intending to pay you a visit to-morrow. Surely you haven't been ill, have you ? "

" No, thank you. I've been so very busy. "

" Well, listen to me. You must come and dine with us to-morrow. Quite a family dinner, you know. "

" You are too good. We shall see. "

She seemed to retire within herself, intent on following the service, and saying no more. Pauline had lifted Jeanne to her side that she might be nearer the hot-air pipe, over which she toasted herself luxuriously, as happy as any chilled mortal should be under such circumstances. The two girls, enjoying the warmth of the heated air, sat up and gazed around on everything with a curious stare, examining the low ceiling, with its wood-work panels, the maze of pillars, each girt round with a semi-circular support from which hung a chandelier, the pulpit of carved oak ; and over the ocean of heads that waved to and fro with the rise and fall of the chant, their eyes wandered towards the dark corners of the side aisles, towards the chapels, the gilding of which alone displayed their presence by its gleaming, and the baptistery enclosed by a railing near the chief entrance. But their gaze always returned and rested on the gorgeous sight of the choir, gay with brilliant colours and dazzling gilding ; a crystal chandelier, flaming with light, swung from the vaulted ceiling ; immense candelabra, filled with rows of wax tapers, that glittered amidst the gloom of the church like a profusion of stars in orderly array, brought out prominently the chief altar, which seemed one huge cluster of foliage and flowers. Over all, standing amidst the heaped-up roses, was a Virgin, dressed in satin and lace, crowned by a wreath of pearls, supporting a Jesus in long clothes on her arm.

" Say, are you warm ? " asked Pauline. " It is awfully jolly. "

But Jeanne was in an ecstasy, and gazed on the Virgin amongst the flowers. The scene thrilled her with emotion. A fear crept over her that she would cry out, and she lowered her eyes in the endeavour to restrain her tears by fixing her interest on the black and white pavement. From the choir, whence she could hear the children's chanting rising up softly, were wafted to her gentle breaths of air that circled round her head.

Meanwhile Hélène, with face bent over her prayer-book,

drew herself away whenever Juliette's lace rustled against her. She was in no wise prepared for this meeting. Despite the vow she had sworn within herself, to be ever pure in her love for Henri, and never to yield herself to him, she was consumed with the burning thought that she was a traitoress to the confiding and happy woman who sat by her side. She was possessed with one idea—she would not venture to this dinner. She cast about for reasons which would allow her to break off these relations so hateful to her honour. But the swelling voices of the choristers, so near to her, drove all reflection from her mind; there was no sequence in her thoughts, and she resigned herself to the soothing influences of the chant, thereby tasting a holy joy she had never before found within the walls of a church.

"Have you been told about Madame de Chermette?" asked Juliette, unable any longer to restrain her craving for a gossip.

"No, I know nothing."

"Well, well; just imagine. You have seen her daughter, so womanish and tall, though she is fifteen years old only, haven't you? There is some talk about her getting married next year, to that black-looking lad that's always hanging to her mother's skirts. People are talking about it with a vengeance."

"Oh!" muttered H  l  ne, who was not paying the least attention.

Madame Deberle went into further detail, but of a sudden the chant ceased and the organ-music died away in a moan. Astounded at the loudness of her own voice breaking upon the intense stillness which ensued, she lapsed into silence. A priest made his appearance at this moment in the pulpit. There was a rustling noise, and then he spoke. No, certainly not, H  l  ne would not join this dinner-party. With eyes fixed on the priest she pictured to herself the next meeting with Henri, which for three days she had contemplated with terror; she saw him white with anger at her enforced stay within doors, and she dreaded lest she might not display sufficient indifference. The priest had disappeared from her dream; the thrilling tones were borne to her in casual sentences, as though falling from heaven:

"No tongue could paint that hour when the Virgin, with head reverently bent, answered: 'I am the handmaiden of the Lord!'"

Yes, she would be brave; her whole understanding was restored to her. She would taste the joys of being beloved; she would never avow her love, for her heart told her such an avowal would cost her peace. How intensely would she love, without confessing it, gratified by a word, a look from Henri, exchanged at lengthy intervals on the occasion of a chance meeting. It was a dream that brought her some sense of the infinite. The church within which she sat became a friend and comforter. The priest went on:

"The angel vanished. Mary plunged deep in contemplation of the divine mystery working within her, her heart bathed in sunshine and love."

"He speaks very well," whispered Madame Deberle, leaning towards her. "And quite young too, scarcely thirty, don't you think?"

Madame Deberle was affected. Religion inspired her with the pleasurable sensations derived from eating some dainty. To present gifts of flowers for the decoration of churches, to have petty dealings with priests, gentlemanly, prudent, and irreproachable, to come attired in her best to church, where she assumed all the airs of worldly patronage to the God of the poor—all this had for her special delights; the more so as her husband did not interest himself in religion, and her devotions had thus all the sweetness of forbidden fruit. Hélène looked at her and answered with a nod; her face was ashy white with faintness, while the other's was lit up by smiles. There was a movement of chairs, a rustle of handkerchiefs, as the priest quitted the pulpit with the final adjuration:

"Oh! give wings unto your love, souls imbued with Christian piety. God has made a sacrifice of Himself for your sake, your heart is full of His presence, your soul overflows with His grace!"

Of a sudden the organ music burst forth again. The litanies of the Virgin poured forth their appeals of passionate tenderness. Faint and distant the music rolled forth from the side-aisles and from the dark recesses of the chapels, as though the earth were giving answer to the angel voices of the child choristers. A rush of air swept over the throng, making the flames of the wax-tapers leap up, while amongst the flowers that lay dying and emitting their last perfumed breaths, the Divine Mother had, it could almost be thought, inclined her head to smile on her Jesus,

Seized with an instinctive dread, Hélène turned her head of a sudden.

"You're not ill, Jeanne, are you?" she asked.

The child, with face ashy white and glistening eyes, her whole soul entranced by the emotions created by the litanies, concentrated her gaze on the altar, and her imagination painted to her a sea of roses waving around it.

"No, no, mamma," she whispered; "I am pleased, I am very well pleased."

Then followed the question:

"But where is our dear old friend?"

It was the Abbé of whom she spoke. Pauline caught sight of him; he was seated in the choir, but Jeanne had to be lifted up.

"Oh! I see him. He is looking at us; he is closing his eyes."

According to Jeanne, the Abbé "closed his eyes" when he laughed silently. Hélène hastened to exchange a friendly nod with him. The sight of him seemed to emphasize the tranquillity reigning within her, and to assure still further the quiet which endeared this church to her and lulled her into a blissful condition of patient endurance. Censers swung before the altar, and thin threads of smoke floated up; the benediction followed, and the holy monstrance was slowly raised and waved above the heads lowered to the earth. Hélène remained on her knees in happy unconsciousness, but she heard Madame Deberle exclaiming:

"It's over now; let us go away."

There ensued a movement of chairs and a stamping of feet that reverberated along the arched aisles. Pauline had taken Jeanne's hand, and walking away in front with the child, began to question her.

"Have you never been to the theatre?"

"No. Is it finer than this?"

As she spoke, the little one, giving vent to great gasps of wonder, tossed her head as though ready to affirm that nothing could be finer. To her question, however, Pauline deigned no reply, for she had just come to a standstill in front of a priest who was passing in his surplice. When he had gone a little distance, she exclaimed aloud, with such conviction in her tones that two of the congregation turned their heads:

"Oh! what a fine head!"

Hélène, meanwhile, had risen from her knees. She advanced

slowly at Juliette's side with the crowd, which was making its way out with difficulty. Her heart was filled with tenderness, she felt weary and enervated, and her soul no longer rebelled against Juliette being so near. At one moment their bare hands came into contact and they smiled. They were almost fainting in the throng, and Hélène would fain have had Juliette go first to give her some protection. All their old friendship blossomed forth once more.

"Is it understood that we can count on you for to-morrow evening?" asked Madame Deberle.

Hélène had no longer the will to decline. She would see whether it were possible when she reached the street. It finished by their being the last to leave. Pauline and Jeanne stood on the opposite pavement awaiting them. But a tearful voice brought them to a halt.

"Ah, my good lady, what a time it is since I had the happiness of seeing you!"

It was mother Fétu, who was soliciting alms at the door of the church. Barring Hélène's way, as though she had lain in wait for her, she went on:

"Oh, I have been so very ill, always here, in the stomach, you know. Just now I feel as if a hammer were pounding away at me; and I had nothing at all, my good lady. I didn't dare to send you word about it. May the gracious God repay you!"

Hélène slipped a piece of money into her hand at the moment, and promised to think about her.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, who had remained standing within the porch, "there's some one talking with Pauline and Jeanne. Oh! it is Henri."

"Yes, yes," mother Fétu hastened to add, as she turned her little eyes on the two ladies, "it is the good doctor. I have seen him during all the service; he has never budged from the pavement; he has been waiting for you, no doubt. Ah! he's a saint of a man! I swear that to be the truth in the face of God who hears us. Yes, I know you, madame; he is a husband who deserves to be happy. May Heaven hearken to your prayers, may every blessing be on you! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

Amidst the myriad furrows on her face, that was wrinkled like a withered apple, her little eyes kept gleaming in malicious unrest, darting a glance now on Juliette, now on Hélène, so that

it was impossible to say with any exactitude whom she was addressing when she spoke of "the good doctor." She followed them, muttering without stop mingling whimpering entreaty with devout outbursts.

Henri's reserve alike astonished and moved H  l  ne. He had scarcely the courage to raise his eyes towards her. His wife quizzing him on the opinions which restrained him from entering a church door, he merely explained that to smoke a cigar was his object in coming to meet them; and thus H  l  ne understood he wished to see her again, to prove to her how wrong she was in fearing some fresh outrage. Doubtless, like herself, he had sworn to keep himself within the limits of reason. She never questioned whether his sincerity could be real; no, it was an unhappiness to her to see him unhappy. Thus it came about, on her leaving them in the Rue Vineuse, she said cheerfully:

"Well, it is settled then; to-morrow at seven."

In this way the old friendship grew closer than ever, and life took a fresh lease of charm. To H  l  ne's mind it seemed as if Henri had never yielded to that moment of folly; it was but a dream; each loved the other, but they would never breathe a word of their love, they were content with knowing its existence. Delicious hours, in which, without their tongues giving evidence of their passion, they displayed it constantly; a gesture, an inflexion of the voice sufficed, ay, even a silence. Everything tended insensibly towards their love, everything plunged them deeper in a passion which they bore away with them, which was ever with them, the only atmosphere they could breathe. And their excuse was their honesty; with their eyes wide open they played this drama of the heart; not even a hand-clasp did they allow each other, and this restraint infused unalloyed delight into the simple greeting with which they met.

Every evening the ladies arranged to go to the church. Madame Deberle was enchanted with this novel pleasure she was enjoying. It was so different from evening dances, concerts, and first nights; she worshipped fresh sensations, and nuns and priests were now constantly in her company. The store of religion she had acquired in her school-days now found new life in her giddy brain and took shape in trivial observances which amused her, as though she were busy reviving the games of her childhood. H  l  ne's soul expanded, indepen-

dent of all her religious training, and she resigned herself to the bliss of these services of the month of Mary, happy also in the joy with which they appeared to inspire Jeanne. They dined earlier; they gave Rosalie no peace lest she might cause delay, and prevent their having good seats. Then they called for Juliette on the way. One day Lucien was taken, but he had behaved so ill that he was now left at home. In entering the heated church, with its glare of wax-candles, there flowed in on her a feeling of tenderness and calm, which by degrees became necessary to Hélène. When doubts sprang up within her during the day, and the thought of Henri filled her with an indefinable anxiety, with the evening the church once more brought her peace. The chants poured forth their flood of divine passion; the flowers, newly culled, made still heavier the close atmosphere of the building. It was here she breathed all the first rapture of springtide, in worshipping the woman deified, and all her senses swam as she contemplated the mystery of love and purity—Mary, virgin and mother—with her wreath of white roses. With every day she remained longer on her knees. She surprised herself at times with hands joined in entreaty. When the ceremony came to an end, there followed the happiness of the return home. Henri awaited their appearance at the door; the evenings grew warmer, and their way lay through the dark, still streets of Passy, while scarce a word passed between them.

"How devout you are getting!" said Madame Deberle one night with a laugh.

Yes, it was true: Hélène was opening wide the portals of her heart to pious thoughts. Never could she have fancied that such happiness would attend her love. She returned to the church as to a place of endearment, for under its roof she could give free vent to her tears, her soul unclouded by a single thought, everything swallowed up in speechless worship. For an hour in the evening she put no restraint on herself. The bursting love within her,—prisoned for a whole day, at length escaped from her bosom on the wings of prayer, where the world was a witness and a trembling worshipper. The muttered prayers, the bending of the knee, the reverences—words and vague gestures seemingly interminable—all lulled her to rest; they were to her as the only modes of expression; it was always the same passion speaking by means of the same phrase, by means of the same movement. She had need of

faith; the Divine goodness opened before her a world of enchantment.

Hélène was not the only victim of Juliette's joking; she feigned a belief that Henri himself was becoming religious. What, had he not now entered the church to wait for them—he, an atheist, a scoffer, who was wont to assert that with the keen edge of his scalpel he had sought for the soul and had not yet discovered its existence! She had perceived him standing behind a pillar in the shadow of the pulpit, and instantly jogged Hélène's arm.

"Look, look, he is there already! Do you know, he wouldn't confess when we got married! Why, his face is the very essence of comicality; quick, look!"

Hélène did not at the moment raise her head. The service was coming to an end, clouds of incense were rising, and the organ-music pealed forth joyfully. But her neighbour was not the one to leave her alone, and she was forced to speak in answer.

"Yes, yes, I see him," she whispered, but she never turned her eyes towards him.

The song of praise that mounted from the worshipping throng revealed to her his presence. It seemed to her that Henri's breath was wafted on the wings of the music and beat against her neck, and she imagined she could see behind her his glances shedding their light along the nave and haloing her as she knelt, with a golden glory. It urged her to pray with such fervour that words failed her. The expression on his face was sober, and as unruffled as a husband should wear when looking for ladies in a church, the same as if he were waiting for them in the lobby of a theatre. But when they came together, in the midst of the slowly-moving crowd of worshippers, they felt the bonds of their love drawn closer with the flowers and the chanting; and they shunned all conversation, for their hearts were on their lips.

A fortnight slipped away, and Madame Deberle grew wearied. She jumped from one thing to the other, consumed with the thirst of doing what every one else was doing. At the moment her craze was over sales for charitable purposes; she would toil up sixty flights of stairs of an afternoon to beg of well-known artists their paintings, and her evenings were spent in presiding over meetings of lady patronesses, with a bell handy to call for order. Thus it happened that one Thursday

evening Hélène and her daughter went without their companion to church. On the conclusion of the sermon, while the choristers were commencing the *Magnificat*, our heroine, forewarned by some sudden impulse of her heart, turned her head. Henri was there, in his usual place. She remained with looks riveted to the ground till the service was brought to an end, ardently longing for the return home.

"Oh, how good of you to come!" said Jeanne, as they left the church, with all a child's frankness. "I would have been afraid to go through these dark streets."

But Henri pretended astonishment, and asserted that he imagined he would meet his wife. Hélène allowed the child to answer him; she followed them without uttering a word. As the trio passed under the porch a pitiful voice besought them:

"Charity, charity! May God repay you!"

Every night Jeanne dropped a ten-sou piece in mother Fétu's hand. When the latter saw the doctor alone with Hélène, she nodded her head knowingly, instead of breaking out into a storm of thanks, as was her custom. The church had now emptied, and she drew herself after them, mumbling away in inaudible sentences. Sometimes, instead of returning by the Rue de Passy, the ladies went homewards by the Rue Raynouard when the night was fine, the way being thus lengthened by five or six minutes. That night Hélène turned into the Rue Raynouard, craving for its gloom and stillness, and entranced by the loneliness of its far-reaching extent, lit only by a flicker of gas, without the shadow of a single passer-by being thrown across its pavement.

At this hour Passy seemed out of the world; sleep already had fallen over it, and it had all the quietude of a provincial town. On each side of the street loomed mansions, girls' schools, black and silent, and dining places, from the kitchens of which there still streamed lights. The shadow was not traversed by the glare thrown from the window of a single shop. To Henri and Hélène the loneliness was pregnant with intense delight. He had not ventured to offer her his arm. Jeanne walked between them in the middle of the road, which was gravelled like a side-walk in some park. The houses came to an end, and on each side extended walls, over which spread mantling clematis and clusters of lilac blossoms. Immense gardens divided the mansions, and here and there through a railing they could catch glimpses of a gloomy background of

verdure, against which, amidst the trees the turf assumed a more delicate hue. The air was filled with the perfumes of iris growing in vases that they could scarce distinguish. All three paced on slowly through the warm spring night that bathed them in its odours, and Jeanne, with childish artlessness, turned her face upwards to the heavens, and exclaimed :

"Oh, mamma, look there at the stars !"

But behind them, like an echo of their own, came the foot-fall of mother Fétu. Nearer and nearer she approached to them, till they could hear her muttering the words of the Latin prayer, "*Ave Maria, gratia plena*," repeated over and over again with the same breathless persistency. Mother Fétu was telling her beads on her homeward way.

"I have still something left—can I give it to her ?" Jeanne asked her mother.

Without waiting a reply she left them, running towards the old woman, who was on the point of entering the Passage des Eaux. Mother Fétu clutched at the coin, calling down all the angels of Heaven to bless her. As she spoke, however, she grasped the child's hand and detained her at her side, asking in changed tones :

"The other lady is ill, is she not ?"

"No," answered Jeanne surprised.

"May Heaven shield her ! May it shower down on her and her husband its favours ! Don't run away yet, my dear little lady. Let me say an *Ave Maria* for your mother's sake, and you will join in 'Amen' with me. Oh ! your mother will allow you ; you can catch her up."

Meanwhile Henri and Hélène trembled as they found themselves suddenly left alone in the shadow-cast by a line of huge chestnut trees that bordered the road. They walked quietly on a few steps. The chestnut trees had strewn the ground with their bloom, and they were pacing over this rosy-tinted carpet. On a sudden they came to a stop, their hearts filled with such emotion that they could go no further.

"Pardon me," merely said Henri.

"Yes, yes," ejaculated Hélène. "But oh ! be silent, I pray you."

She felt his hand touch her own, and she started back. Fortunately Jeanne ran towards them at the moment.

"Mamma, mamma !" she cried : "she has made me say an *Ave* ; she says it will bring you good luck."

The three then turned into the Rue Vineuse, while mother Fétu crept down the steps of the Passage des Eaux, busy with the final recounting of her rosary.

The month slipped away. Two or three more services were attended by Madame Deberle. When the last Sunday came Henri ventured once more to wait for Hélène and Jeanne. The walk home thrilled them with joy. The month had been one long spell of wondrous bliss. The little church seemed to have entered into their lives to soothe their love and render its way pleasant. At first a great peace had settled on Hélène's soul; she found happiness in this sanctuary where she imagined she could dwell without shame on her love; but the undermining had continued, and when her holy rapture passed away she was in the grip of her passion, held in bonds that would have plucked at her heartstrings had she sought to break them asunder. Henri still preserved his respectful attitude, but she could not but see the passion burning in his face. She dreaded some outburst of wanton lust. She was afraid of herself; she was torn by her feverish desires.

One afternoon, going homewards after a walk with Jeanne, she passed along the Rue de l'Annonciation and entered the church. The child was complaining pitifully of weariness. She would not allow till the last day that the evening service was fatiguing her, so intense was the pleasure it afforded her; but her cheeks grew waxy-pale, and the doctor advised that she should go long strolls.

"Sit down here," said her mother. "It will rest you; we'll only stay ten minutes."

She herself walked over to some chairs some way off, and knelt down. She had placed Jeanne close to a pillar. Workmen were busy at the other end of the nave taking down the hangings and removing the flowers, for the ceremonials attending the month of Mary had come to an end the evening before. With face buried in her hands Hélène said nothing, heard nothing; she was eagerly catechising her heart whether she should confess to the Abbé Jouve the awful life that had come upon her. He would advise her, perhaps restore her lost peace. Still, within her there arose, out of her very anguish, a fierce flood of joy. She hugged her sorrow, dreading lest the priest might succeed in finding a cure. Ten minutes slipped away, then an hour. She was overwhelmed with the strife raging within her heart.

At last she raised her head, her eyes glistening with tears, and saw the Abbé Jouve at her side gazing on her sorrowfully. It was he who was directing the efforts of the workmen. He had recognised Jeanne and had just come forward.

"Why, what is the matter, my child?" he asked of Héléne, who hastened to rise to her feet and wipe away her tears.

She was at a loss what answer to give; she was afraid lest she should fall once more on her knees and burst into sobs. He approached still nearer, and went on gently:

"I do not wish to cross-question you, but why do you not confide in me? Confide in the priest and forget the friend."

"Some other day," she said brokenly, "some other day, I promise you."

In the meantime Jeanne had at first sat very good and patient, finding amusement in looking at the windows, the statues over the great doorway, the scenes taken from the last journey to the Cross which were depicted in miniature bas-reliefs all along the side-aisles. By degrees the cold air of the church enveloped her as with a shroud; and as she remained plunged in a weariness that even banished thought, an uneasy feeling woke within her with the holy quiet, with the far-reaching echoes stirred by the least sound, and with this sanctuary where she imagined she was going to die. But a grievous sorrow rankled in her heart—the flowers were being borne away. The great clusters of roses were vanishing, and the altar seemed more and more bare and chill. The marble looked icy-cold when no wax-candle shone on it, when there was no smoking incense. Now the Virgin in her robes of lace was being pushed from her pedestal, and the next moment came tumbling into the arms of two workmen. At the sight, Jeanne uttered a faint cry, she stretched out her arms, and she fell back rigid; the illness that had been threatening her for some days had at last laid its heavy hand upon her.

Héléne, wrung with mental anguish, carried her, with the assistance of the sorrowing Abbé, into a cab, and at the doorway she turned round with hands extended and trembling.

"It's all this church! it's all this church!" she exclaimed vehemently, regret and reproach mingling with her tones as she realised the month of pious joy she had spent within its walls.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN evening came Jeanne was somewhat better. Her efforts to rise were successful, and to remove her mother's fears she persisted in dragging herself into the dining-room, where she took her seat before her empty plate.

"I shall be all right," she said, trying to smile. "You know very well I'm a nuisance. Get on with your dinner; I want you to eat."

But in the end she pretended a hunger she did not feel as she observed that her mother sat watching her paling and trembling, without being able to swallow a morsel. She promised she would take some jam, and Hélène hurried through her dinner, while the child, with a never-fading smile and her head nodding tremblingly, watched her with worshipping looks. On the appearance of the dessert she made an effort to carry out her promise, but tears welled into her eyes.

"You see I can't get it down my throat," she murmured. "You mustn't be angry with me."

The weariness that overwhelmed her was terrible. Her legs seemed dead, her shoulders pained her as though gripped by a hand of iron. But she was very brave through it all, and choked at their source the moans that the agony in her neck awakened. Her head grew heavy, and for a time she lost consciousness; she was bent double with pain. Her mother, as she gazed on her angel, so faint and feeble, was wholly unable to swallow the pear she was trying to force down her throat. Her sobs choked her, and throwing down her napkin, she ran to clasp Jeanne in her arms.

"My child, my child!" wailed she, her heart bursting with sorrow as her eyes travelled over the dining-room where her darling, overflowing with spirits and good health, had made merry so often over her powers of digestion.

Jeanne woke to life again, and strove to smile as of old.

"Don't trouble yourself; I will be all right soon. Now you have done you must put me to bed. I only wanted

to see you have your dinner. Oh! I know you; you wouldn't have eaten as much as a morsel of bread."

Hélène bore her away in her arms. She had pushed the little couch close to her own in the bedroom. When Jeanne had stretched out her limbs, and the bed-clothes were tucked-up under her chin, she declared she was much better. There were no more complaints about dull pains at the back of her head. Then with her suffering she melted into tenderness, and her passionate love seemed to grow more pronounced. Hélène was forced to caress her, to avow intense affection for her, and to promise that she would again caress and hang over her when she came to bed.

"Never mind if I'm sleeping," affirmed Jeanne. "I shall know you're there all the same."

She closed her eyes and fell into a doze. Hélène remained near her, watching over her slumbers. When Rosalie entered on tip-toe to ask permission to go to bed, she answered "yes" with a nod of the head. Eleven o'clock struck, and Hélène still watched there, when she imagined she heard a gentle tapping at the outer door. Bewildered with astonishment, she took up the lamp and left the room to make sure.

"Who is there?"

"'Tis I; open the door," said a voice in stifled tones.

It was Henri's voice. She quickly opened the door, thinking his coming only natural. No doubt the doctor had only now been informed of Jeanne's illness and had hastened to her, although she had not summoned him to her assistance. She was somewhat ashamed, as she reflected she was allowing him to share in attending on her sick daughter.

But Henri gave her no opportunity to speak. He followed her into the dining-room, trembling, with inflamed visage.

"I beseech you, pardon me," faltered he, as he seized her hand. "I haven't seen you for three days, and I cannot resist the craving to see you."

Hélène withdrew her hand. He drew back, but with his gaze still fixed on her, continued:

"Don't be afraid; I love you. I would have waited at the door had you not opened it to me. Oh! I know well it is but madness, but I love you, I love you!"

Her face was grave as she listened to him, and displayed a dumb reproach which tortured him. The reception which his avowal met with stirred him to pour forth his passionate love.

"Why, why are we acting this terrible farce? I cannot endure it any longer; my heart would burst; I should do something mad; I would take you up in my arms in the presence of everybody and carry you away."

A gust of passion incited him to stretch out his arms. He came nearer, he kissed her dress, his feverish hands tremblingly touched her. But she remained standing, wholly unmoved.

Then she spoke. "You know nothing?" asked she.

He had taken her bare hand as it fell below the sleeve of her dressing-gown, and was covering it with passionate kisses. She started away with a gesture of impatience.

"Oh! do leave off. You see that I am not even listening to you. I have something far different to think about!"

She became more composed, and put her question to him a second time.

"You know nothing? Well, my daughter is ill. I am pleased to see you; you will dispel my fears."

She took up the lamp and walked on before him, but as they were going through the doorway, she turned, and looking fixedly at him, said firmly:

"I forbid you beginning again here. Oh! you must not!"

He entered behind her, still quivering in every limb, and scarcely understanding what had been enjoined on him. At this midnight hour, with its linen sheets and raiment littering the floor, the bedroom was again laden with the perfume of vervain that had woke within him such agitation the first evening he had gazed on Hélène in her disordered attire, when the shawl had slipped off and revealed her shoulders. Oh, it was bliss beyond compare to find himself there once more on his knees, to inhale the atmosphere of love, to await thus the coming of light in silent worship, and to forget all in the realisation of his dream! His temples throbbed convulsively, as he leaned over the child's little iron bed.

"She is asleep; look at her," said Hélène in a whisper.

He did not hear her; his passion was forcing him to break the silence. She was hanging over the bed in front of him, and he could see her rosy neck, with its delicate tracery of hair. He shut his eyes, that he might escape the temptation of kissing the spot.

"Doctor, look at her, she is so feverish Oh, tell me whether it is serious!"

The mad desire was still darting through his brain, but

yielding to professional habit he mechanically felt Jeanne's pulse. The struggle in his breast, though, was raging too fiercely; he remained for a time motionless, seemingly unaware that he held this wasted little hand in his own.

"Say, is it a violent fever?"

"A violent fever! Do you think so?" he repeated.

The little hand was scorching his own. There was another silence; the physician was awaking within him. The passion was dying from his eyes; his face slowly grew paler; he bent down uneasily, and examined Jeanne attentively.

"You are right; this is a very severe attack," he exclaimed. "My God! the poor child!"

His passion all died within him; he burnt only with the desire to be of service to her. His coolness returned at once. He had sat down and was questioning the mother upon the child's state previous to this access of illness, when Jeanne woke, moaning loudly. She complained of a terrible pain in the head. The pangs that were darting through neck and shoulders had reached such intensity that her every movement wrung a sob from her. Hélène was on her knees on the other side of the bed, encouraging her, and smiling on her, though her heart was bursting with the sight of such agony.

"There's some one there, isn't there, mamma?" she asked, as she turned round and caught sight of the doctor.

"It is a friend, whom you know."

The child looked at him for a time with thoughtful eyes, as if in doubt, but soon a wave of tenderness passed over her face.

"Yes, yes, I know him; I love him very much." Then she added, with her coaxing air: "You will have to cure me, won't you, sir, to make mamma happy? Oh, I'll be good; I'll drink everything you give me."

The doctor again felt her pulse, while Hélène grasped her other hand; and, as she lay there between them, her looks travelled attentively from one face to the other, as though no such advantageous opportunity of seeing them had occurred before, and her head shook with a nervous trembling. Then she grew agitated; the tiny hands seized them in a convulsive grip.

"Do not go away; I'm so afraid. Take care of me; don't let all them folks come near me. I only want you, only you two, near me. Come close up to me, together!"

She drew them towards her, and with a violent effort brought them close to her, still uttering the same entreaty:

"Come close, together, together!"

Several times did she behave in the same delirious fashion. In the intervals of quiet a heavy sleep fell on her, but it left her breathless and almost dead. When she started out of these short dozes she heard nothing, she saw nothing—a white vapour shrouded her eyes. The doctor kept watch over her for a part of the night when the fever was at its height, leaving the house only to procure a medicine with his own hands. When morning broke, and he prepared to leave, Hélène, with a terrible anxiety in her face, accompanied him into the lobby.

"Well?" asked she.

"Her condition is very serious," he answered; "but you must not fear; rely on me; I will give you every assistance. I shall be here in the forenoon at ten o'clock."

When Hélène returned to the bedroom she found Jeanne sitting up in bed, gazing round her with bewildered looks.

"You left me! you left me!" she wailed. "Oh! I'm afraid; I don't want to be left all alone."

To console her, her mother kissed her, but she still gazed round the room.

"Where is he? Oh! tell him not to go away, I wish him to be here, I wish him——"

"He is going to come back, my darling," broke in Hélène, whose tears were mingling with Jeanne's own. "He will not leave us, I promise to you. He loves us too well. Now, be good and lie down. I'll stay here till he comes back."

"Are you sure? are you sure?" murmured the child, as she slowly fell back into deep slumber.

Terrible days were now in store; three weeks full of awful agony. The fever did not quit its victim for an hour. Jeanne only seemed tranquil when the doctor was present; she put one of her little hands in his, while her mother held the other. She found safety in their presence; she gave to each an equal share of her tyrannical worship, as though she knew well beneath what passionate kindness she was sheltering herself. Her nervous temperament so exquisite in its sensibility, and more exquisite since the first day of her illness, inspired her, no doubt, with the thought that only a miraculous effort of their love could save her. As the hours slipped away she gazed on them with grave and searching looks as they sat on each side

of her couch. The wondrous depths of human passion that could be conceived or vainly imagined were mirrored in the gaze of the dying girl. She spoke not at all, but she let them know words by a warm pressure, beseeching them thus not to leave her, giving them to understand what peace was hers when they were present. When the doctor entered after having been away her joy was supreme, and her eyes that never quitted the door were flushed with light; so she would fall quietly asleep, all her fears put to flight as she heard her mother and him moving round her and speaking in whispers.

The day after this severe attack Doctor Bodin called. But Jeanne suddenly turned away her head and refused to allow any examination.

"I don't want him, mamma," she murmured, "I don't want him! I beg of you."

As he made his appearance on the following day Hélène was forced to inform him of the child's dislike, and thus it came about the venerable doctor made no further effort to enter the sick-room. But he mounted the stairs every other day to hear of Jeanne's progress, and sometimes chatted with his brother professional, Doctor Deberle, who paid him every deference as being his elder.

After all, there was no need of striving to deceive Jeanne. Her senses had become wondrously acute. The Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud paid a visit every night; they sat down and spent an hour in sad silence. One evening, as the doctor was going away, Hélène signed to Monsieur Rambaud to take his place and clasp the little one's hand, to prevent her observing the departure of her beloved friend. But scarcely two or three minutes had passed ere the sleeping Jeanne opened her eyes and quickly drew away her hand. She burst into sobbing, and declared they were behaving ill to her.

"Don't you love me any longer? won't you have me beside you?" asked poor Monsieur Rambaud with tears in his eyes.

She looked at him, deigning no reply; it would seem as if her heart was set on knowing him no more. The worthy man, with swelling heart, returned to his corner. He ended by always gliding silently into a window-recess, where, half hidden behind a curtain, he remained during the evening, sunk in a stupor of grief, while his looks never quitted the sufferer. The Abbé was there too, with his large head and pallid face showing above his thin shoulders. He concealed his tears by blowing his nose loudly from time to time. The danger in

which his little friend lay wrought such havoc within him that his poor were wholly forgotten.

But it was useless for the two brothers to retire to the other end of the room; Jeanne was still conscious of their presence. They were a source of vexation to her, and she turned round with a harassed look, even though drowsy with the fever. Her mother bent over her to catch the words trembling on her lips.

"Oh! mamma, I feel so ill. All this is choking me, send everybody away—quick, quick!"

Hélène with the utmost gentleness explained to the two brothers the child's wish to fall asleep; they understood her meaning and quitted the room with drooping heads. The moment they had gone Jeanne breathed with greater freedom, cast a glance round the chamber and once more fixed a look of infinite tenderness on her mother and the doctor.

"Good night," whispered she, "I feel well again; stay beside me."

For three weeks she kept them thus at her side. At first Henri had paid two visits in the day, but soon he spent the whole night with them, giving up to the child every hour he could spare. At the outset he had feared it was typhoid fever; but so contradictory were the symptoms that he soon felt himself involved in perplexity. There was no doubt he was face to face with a disease of the chlorosis type, presenting the greatest difficulty in treatment and fearfully complicated, as could be only anticipated from the fact that the child was fast developing into womanhood. He dreaded in succession a lesion of the heart or the setting in of consumption. Jeanne's nervous excitement, wholly beyond his control, was a special source of uneasiness; to such heights of delirium did the fever rise, that the strongest medicines were of no avail. He brought all his fortitude and knowledge to bear on the case, inspired with the one thought that her welfare and life itself were in his hands. On his mind there had fallen a great stillness with which mingled solemn hope; not once during these three anxious weeks did his passion break its bonds. Hélène's breath no longer woke tremors within him, and when their eyes met they were only eloquent of the sympathetic sadness of two souls threatened by a common misfortune.

But every moment brought their hearts nearer. They now lived only with the one idea. No sooner had he entered the bed-chamber than by a glance he gathered how Jeanne had

spent the night; and there was no need for him to speak for her to learn what he thought of the sufferer's condition. Besides, with all the innate bravery of a mother, she had forced from him a declaration that he would not deceive her, but allow her to know his fears. Always on her feet, without having had a three hours' sleep for three weeks, she displayed superhuman endurance and composure, and quelled her despair without a tear that she might concentrate her whole soul in the struggle with the dread enemy. Within and without her heart there was nothing but emptiness; the world around her, the thoughts of each hour, the consciousness of life itself, had all faded into darkness. Existence held nothing for her. She clung only to life with the presence of her suffering darling and the man who promised a miracle. It was he, and he only, to whom she looked, to whom she listened, whose most trivial words were to her of the first importance, and into whose breast she would fain transfuse her own soul with all its indomitable energy. Insensibly, and without break, this idea wrought out its own accomplishment. Almost every evening, when the fever was raging at its worst and Jeanne lay in imminent peril, they remained in the misty room alone and silent; and in their own despite, as though they were eager to remind themselves that they stood shoulder to shoulder in the struggle with death, their hands met on the edge of the bed in a caressing clasp, while they trembled with solicitude and pity till a faint smile breaking on the child's face, and quiet and regular breathing, warned them that the danger was past. Each encouraged the other with an inclination of the head. Thus again had their love triumphed; as every time the mute caress grew more demonstrative their hearts drew closer together.

One night Hélène divined that Henri was concealing something from her. For ten minutes, without a word crossing his lips, he examined Jeanne. The little one complained of intolerable thirst; she seemed choking, and there was an incessant wheezing in her parched throat. There was a purple flush on her face, and she lapsed into a stupor which prevented her even raising her eyelids. She lay motionless; it might have been imagined she was dead—the heaving of her bosom had died away.

"Do you think she is very ill?" gasped Hélène.

He answered in the negative; there was no change. But his face was ashy-white and he dropped into a seat, over-

whelmed by his helplessness. Thereupon, wrung as her whole being was with agony, she sank into a chair on the other side of the bed.

"Tell me everything. You vowed to tell me all. Is she beyond all hope?"

He still sat silent, and she spoke again more vehemently:

"You know how brave I am. Have I wept? have I despaired? Speak: I want to know the truth."

Henri fixed his eyes on her. The words came slowly from his lips.

"Well," said he, "if an hour hence she hasn't awakened from this stupor, it will be all over."

Not a sob broke from Hélène; an icy horror possessed her and stiffened her hair. Her eyes turned on Jeanne; she fell on her knees and clasped Jeanne in her arms with a superb gesture eloquent of ownership, as though she could preserve her from ill nestling thus against her shoulder. A minute dragged on while she kept her face close to the child's, drinking in her every feature with greedy looks and eager to give her breath from her own nostrils, ay, and her very life too. The laboured breathing of the little sufferer grew shorter and shorter.

"Can nothing be done?" she exclaimed as she lifted her head. "Why do you remain there? Do something."

He made a disheartened gesture.

"Do something! What can I say? I know not what. There must be something to be done. You are not going to let her die—oh, surely not!"

"I will do everything possible," the doctor said simply.

He rose up, and now commenced a supreme struggle. All the coolness and nerve belonging to the physician returned. Till now he had not ventured to try violent cures, as he dreaded to enfeeble the little frame already almost destitute of life. But he remained no longer undecided, and straightway despatched Rosalie for a dozen leeches. He made no effort to conceal from the mother that this was a desperate remedy which might save or kill her child. When the leeches were brought in her heart failed her for a moment.

"Gracious God! gracious God!" she murmured. "Oh! if you kill her!"

He was forced to wring her consent from her.

"Well, put them on; but may Heaven guide your hand!"

She had not quitted her clasp of Jeanne; she refused to rise from her position, as she still desired to keep the little head nestling against her shoulder. With motionless features he busied himself with the last resource, not allowing a word to fall from his lips. The first application of the leeches was unsuccessful. The minutes slipped away. The only sound breaking the stillness of the shadowy chamber was the merciless and unceasing tick-tack from the time-piece. Hope departed with every second. In the bright disc of light cast by the shade of the lamp Jeanne lay stretched among the disordered bed-clothes, beautiful in her suffering, and with limbs white as if modelled in wax. Hélène, with tearless eyes, but choked with emotion, gazed on the little body already in the clutches of death, and to look on a drop of her daughter's blood would willingly have yielded up all her own. But at last a ruddy drop has trickled down—the leeches had made fast their hold; one by one they commenced sucking. The child's life was in the balance. These were terrible moments, pregnant with anguish. Was that sigh the exhalation of Jeanne's last breath, or did it mark her return to life? For a time Hélène's heart was frozen within her; she believed she was dead; and there came a violent impulse to pluck away the beasts that were sucking so greedily; but some supernatural power restrained her, and she sat there with open mouth and her blood chilled within her. The pendulum still swung to and fro, the room seemed to wait the issue in anxious expectation.

The child stirred. The heavy eyelids were raised, but dropped again, as though wonder and weariness had overcome her. A slight quiver passed over her face; it appeared as if she were breathing. There was a trembling of the lips. Hélène, in an agony of suspense, bent over her, fiercely waiting the result.

"Mamma! mamma!" murmured Jeanne. Henri heard, and walking to the head of the bed, whispered in her ear: "She is saved."

"She is saved! she is saved!" echoed Hélène in bewildered tones, her bosom filled with such joy that she fell on the floor close to the bed, gazing now at her daughter and now at the doctor with distracted looks. But she rose, and giving way to a mighty impulse, threw herself on Henri's neck.

"I love you! oh, I love you!" she exclaimed.

She kissed him; she clasped him closer. This was the avowal of her love—the avowal imprisoned so long, but at last poured forth when death and life had ended their struggle. At this time of supreme delight the mother and lover were merged in one; she proffered him her love in a fiery rush of gratitude.

"I weep; you see I can weep," faltered she. "God in Heaven! how I love you, and how happy we shall be!"

Through her sobs she spoke to him with endearing words. Her tears, dried at their source for three weeks, welled down her cheeks. So she lay on his breast, child-like, showering on him caresses, and borne away on the full flood of her affection. Then she fell on her knees, and took Jeanne in her arms to lull her to deeper slumber against her shoulder; and in the intervals of the child's sleep she raised to Henri eyes glistening with passionate tears.

It was a night of wondrous joy. The doctor lingered very late. Stretched in her cot, the bed-clothes tucked under her chin and her head, with its nut-brown tresses, resting in the centre of the pillow, Jeanne lay, relieved but prostrate; her eyelids were closed, but she did not sleep. The lamp, placed on the table, which had been rolled close to the fireplace, lit only one end of the room; Hélène and Henri sat in the dim shadow in their customary places on each side of the bed. But the child's presence was no bar; on the contrary, she served as a closer bond between them, and her innocence was intermingled with their love on this first night of its avowal. After their long and grievous pilgrimage, the two enjoyed a blissful repose. In short, sitting thus together, they were again themselves, with heart laid bare to heart; the sorrows and pleasures which they had shared together, and from which they had just issued with agonised souls, were stronger links in the chain of their love. This room, with its warmth and seclusion, pervaded by the holy quiet that circles round a sufferer's bed, was an accessory to their passion. At times Hélène rose to hunt on tip-toe for a cooling draught, to wind up the lamp, or give some order to Rosalie; while the doctor, whose eyes never quitted her, would sign to her to walk gently. And when she had sat down again they smiled to each other. Not a word was spoken; all their interest was concentrated in Jeanne, who was to them as their love itself. Sometimes when the coverlet was being pulled up, or the child's head was being raised, their hands met and rested together in sweet forgetfulness. Unde-

signed and stealthy, it was the only caress in which they indulged.

"I am not sleeping," murmured Jeanne. "I know very well you are there."

With hearing her speak they were overjoyed. Their hands separated; beyond this they had no desires. The child's presence was to them satisfaction and peace.

"Are you feeling well, my darling?" asked Hélène, when she saw her stirring.

Jeanne made no immediate reply. She spoke dreamingly.

"Oh, yes! I don't feel anything now. But I can hear you, and that pleases me."

After the lapse of a moment, she opened her eyes with an effort and looked at them. An angelic smile crossed her face, and her eyelids dropped once more.

On the morrow, when the Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud made their appearance, Helen gave way to a shrug of impatience. They were a disturbing element in her happy nest. As they went on questioning her, shaking with fear lest they might receive bad tidings, she had the cruelty to reply that Jeanne was no better. She spoke without consideration, driven to this strait by the selfish desire of treasuring for herself and Henri the bliss of having rescued her from death, and of being the sole guardians of the truth. What was their reason for striving to share in her happiness? To Henri and herself did it belong, and had it been told to another it would have seemed to her impaired in value. To her imagination, it would be as though a stranger were participating in her love.

The priest crept up to the bed.

"Jeanne, 'tis we, your old friends. Ah, you don't know us!"

She nodded gravely to them in recognition, but she was unwilling to speak to them; she was in a thoughtful mood, and she cast on her mother a look full of meaning. The two loving souls went away more heart-broken than ever.

Three days after this Henri allowed his patient her first boiled egg. It was a matter of the first importance. Jeanne's mind was made up to eat it with none present but her mother and the doctor, and the door must be closed. As it happened, Monsieur Rambaud was present at the moment. She whispered some words in the ear of her mother, who was busy spreading on the bed a napkin to serve as a table-cloth.

"Wait a little till he has gone away." And when he had left them alone, she burst out: "Now, quick! quick! It's far nicer when there's nobody but ourselves."

Hélène lifted her to a sitting posture, while Henri shook up two pillows against which she might lean; and with the napkin spread before her, and a plate on her knees, Jeanne waited smilingly.

"Shall I break the shell for you?" asked her mother.

"Yes, do, mamma."

"And I will cut you three little bits of bread," added the doctor.

"Oh! four; you'll see if I don't manage four."

It was now the doctor's turn to be addressed endearingly. When he gave her the first slice, she gripped his hand, and as she still clasped her mother's, she rained kisses on both hands with the same passionate tenderness.

"Come, come, you will have to be good," entreated Hélène, who observed she was ready to burst into tears; "you must please us by eating up your egg."

With this Jeanne ventured to begin; but her frame was so enfeebled, that with the second sippet of bread she declared herself wearied. As she swallowed each mouthful, she would say with a smile that her teeth were tender. Henri encouraged her, while Hélène's eyes were brimful of tears. Angels in Heaven! she saw her child eating! She watched the bread disappear, and the gradual consumption of the first egg thrilled her to the heart. To realise Jeanne stretched dead beneath her winding-sheet was a vision of mortal terror; but now she was eating, and eating so heartily, with an invalid's characteristic dawdling and hesitancy!

"You won't be angry, mamma? I'm doing my best; why, I'm at my third slice! Are you pleased?"

"Yes, my darling, quite pleased. Oh, you don't know all the joy the sight of you gives me!"

A sea of happiness was welling in her heart, and in blissful forgetfulness she leaned against Henri's shoulder. Both laughed gleefully to the child, but slowly over her face crept a sullen flush; she gazed at them stealthily and drooped her head, refusing to eat more, while her features gloomed with distrust and anger. They had to lay her back in bed again.

CHAPTER III.

MONTHS slipped away and still Jeanne was convalescent. August came, and she had not quitted her bed. As evening fell she rose for an hour or two ; but even the crossing of the room to the window, where she reclined on an invalid chair and gazed on Paris, flaming with the ruddy light of the dying sun, seemed too great a strain for her wearied frame. The attenuated limbs could scarce bear their burden, and she would declare with a wan smile that the blood in her veins would not suffice for a little bird, and that she must have plenty of soup. Strips of raw flesh were dipped in her broth. She had grown to like this mixture, as she was keen in her desire to be able to go down to play in the garden.

Weeks passed into months, the months went on their course with the same delightful monotony, and Hélène forgot to count the days. She never left the house ; at Jeanne's side the whole world was lost to her. No tittle-tattle from gossiping tongues reached her ears. Her retreat, though it looked down on Paris, which with its smoke and noise stretched across the horizon, was as secret and secluded as any cave of holy hermit amongst the hills. Her child's life was assured, and the knowledge satisfied all her desires—she spent her days in watching over her restoration to health, joying in the colour fleeting back to her cheeks, in a bright look, or in a gesture of gladness. Every hour brought back her daughter as she was of old, with lovely eyes and hair again becoming wavy. It seemed as if she had given birth to her once more. The more lengthy the period of recovery, the greater joy was yielded to her ; as she recalled the olden days when she suckled her, her heart, while she gazed on the child gathering strength, was flooded with greater bliss than when in the past with the two little feet in her hand she attempted to prophesy when her baby would walk.

Meanwhile the calm of Jeanne's mind seemed disquieted. At varying times Hélène saw a shadow glooming on her face—

a shadow of sudden distrust and sourness. Why, without warning, was her laughter turned to sulkiness? Was she suffering? was she hiding some quickening of the old pain?

"Tell me, darling, what is the matter? You were laughing just a moment ago, and now you are nearly crying! Speak to me; do you feel pain anywhere?"

But Jeanne abruptly turned away her head and buried her face in the pillow.

"There's nothing wrong with me," she answered shortly. "I want you to leave me alone." And she would lie brooding the whole afternoon with her eyes fixed on the wall, showing no sign of affectionate repentance, but plunged in sadness which baffled her forlorn mother. The doctor knew not what to say; the fits of gloom would always break out when he was there, and he attributed them to the sufferer's nervousness. He impressed the necessity of crossing her in nothing.

One afternoon Jeanne had fallen asleep. Henri, who was pleased with her progress in convalescence, had lingered in the room and was carrying on a whispered conversation with Hélène, who was busy once more in her seat at the window with her everlasting needlework. Since the terrible night when in the tempest of her passion she had confessed she loved him, both lived on peacefully in the delicious consciousness of their love, careless of the morrow, and without a thought for the world. Round Jeanne's bed, in this room that still reverberated with her agony, there floated an atmosphere of purity which shielded them from any outburst of their passion. The breathing of the innocent child fell on their ears with a quieting influence. But as the little invalid slowly grew well again, their love in very sympathy took new strength; the blood freshened in her veins, and they sat side by side with beating hearts, finding a wondrous joy in the present, and craving to know nothing of what was to be done when Jeanne should be on her feet again, and when their love would blossom forth in all its strength and luxuriance.

For hours they sat in a heaven of delight, speaking little and in whispers, lest the little one might be awakened. Their words were without significance, but they struck re-echoing chords within each. This day their love revealed itself in a thousand ways.

"I assure you she is much better," said the doctor. "In a fortnight she will be able to go down to the garden."

Hélène gave a sudden stitch with her needle.

"Yesterday she was again very miserable," she murmured. "But this morning she was laughing and happy; she has given me her promise to be good."

Then intervened a long silence. The child was still plunged in sleep, and their souls were enveloped in a profound peace. When she slumbered thus, their relief was intense; they seemed to share each other's hearts the more.

"Have you not seen the garden yet?" asked Henri. "Just now it's full of flowers."

"The asters are out, aren't they?" questioned she.

"Yes, the flower-bed looks magnificent. The clematises have wound their way up into the elms. It is quite a nest of foliage."

There was another silence. Hélène's busy needle stopped and she gazed at him with a smile. To their imagination it seemed as though they were strolling together along high-banked paths, such as fancy only might paint, overcast by shadows and with rose trees showering down their blossoms. As he hung over her, he drank in the floating perfume of vervain that exhaled from her dressing-gown. There was, however, a rustling of the sheets which broke in on their dreams.

"She is wakening," exclaimed Hélène as she started up.

Henri drew himself away, and simultaneously threw a glance at the side of the bed. Jeanne had but a moment before gripped the pillow with her arms, and with her chin buried in its soft down, had turned her face directly towards them. But her eyelids were still shut, and she had seemingly again fallen asleep, to judge from the slow and regular breathing.

"Are you always sewing like this?" he asked as he came nearer to Hélène.

"I cannot rest with idle hands," answered she. "It is mechanical enough, but it regulates my thoughts. For hours I can think of the same thing without wearying."

He said no more, but his eye dwelt on the needle as the stitching went on almost in a melodious cadence; and his heart seemed to read in the fate of the thread the story of their own lives. For hours she could have sewn on and for hours he could have sat there, listening to the music of the needle which rang out for them the music of one word without their being weary. It was their wish to live their days ever thus in this quiet nook, to sit beside one another while the child was

asleep, to stir not from their place lest they might awake her. Oh, sweet tranquillity! how in the silence they could listen to the pulsing of their hearts, and drink of the unmeasured delight that wrapped them in a dream of everlasting love!

"How good you are!" came several times from his lips; the joy which welled within him could only find expression in the one phrase.

Again she raised her head towards him, never deeming it strange for a moment that she should be so passionately worshipped. Henri's face was near her own, and for a second they gazed at one another.

"Let me get on with my work," she said in a whisper. "I shall never have it finished."

But now an instinctive feeling of dread prompted her to turn round, and there lay Jeanne, lowering upon them with deadly pale face and her great inky black eyes. The child had not made the least movement; her chin was still buried in the downy pillow, which she clasped with her little arms. She had only opened her eyes a moment before and was contemplating the scene before her.

"Jeanne, what's the matter?" asked H  l  ne. "Are you ill? do you want anything?"

She made no reply, never stirred, did not even lower her eyelids, but the great flashing eyes glared on them. The sullen gloom was on her brow, and in the pallid cheeks were deep hollows. She was about to throw back her hands as though a convulsion fit was imminent. H  l  ne started up, praying her to speak; but she remained as if frozen, and darted on her mother such black looks that her face became purple with blushes, and she murmured:

"Doctor, see; what is the matter with her?"

Henri had drawn away his chair from H  l  ne's. He ventured near the bed, and was desirous of taking hold of one of the little hands which so fiercely gripped the pillow. But as he touched her she trembled in every limb. With a start she turned towards the wall and exclaimed:

"Leave me alone; you, I mean! You are hurting me!"

She pulled the coverlet over her face, and for a quarter of an hour they attempted, without success, to soothe her with gentle words. Nevertheless they persevered, and at last she rose up with her hands clasped in supplication:

"Oh, please, leave me alone; you are tormenting me! Leave me alone!"

Hélène, in her bewilderment, sat down once more at the window, but Henri did not resume his place beside her. Now they understood; Jeanne was devoured by jealousy. They were unable to utter another word. The doctor paced up and down for a minute or two in silence, and then slowly quitted the room, understanding the meaning of the anxious glances that the mother was darting towards the bed. As soon as he had gone she ran to her daughter's side and pressed her passionately to her breast, with a wild outburst of words.

"Hear me, my pet, I am alone now; look at me, speak to me. Are you in pain? Oh! have I vexed you? Tell me, oh, *do* tell me! Is it I whom you are angry with? What is it you are troubled about?"

But it was useless to pray for an answer, useless to plead with all sorts of questions; Jeanne declared she was quite well. Then she started up with a frenzied cry:

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

She burst into grievous sobbing, and wound her arms convulsively round her mother's neck, raining greedy kisses on her face. Hélène's heart was torn within her, and she was overwhelmed with unspeakable sadness; she kept her strained to her bosom, mingling her tears with her own and vowing to her she would never love any one save herself.

From that day onward Jeanne's jealousy was awakened with a word, with a glance. While she was in the perilous grip of death some instinct had led her to put trust in the loving tenderness with which they shielded her and saved her. But now strength was returning to her, and she would allow none to participate in her mother's love. It was then she conceived an ill-will towards the doctor, an ill-will nursed stealthily into hate in proportion to her growing health. It was hidden deep within her self-willed brain, in the innermost recess of her suspicious and silent nature. She would never essay to describe her distrust; she herself knew not its extent. She was thrown into a convulsion when the doctor drew too near to her mother; her hands were pressed violently to her bosom. Therein lay all her torments; it seemed to sear her very heart, and she flew into a furious passion that choked her and robbed her cheeks of every vestige of colour. Nor could she

place any restraint on herself ; she imagined every one unjust, and she grew stiff and haughty, and deigned no reply when she was charged with being very ill-natured. H  l  ne, trembling with dismay, dared not press her to explain the source of her trouble, and her eyes turned away as this eleven-year old child darted at her a glance in which was concentrated the premature passion of a woman.

"Oh, Jeanne, you are making me very miserable," she would say to her, the tears standing in her eyes as she observed a sudden bubbling up of mad anger that was chokingly repressed.

But the words, once so potent for good, which drew the child weeping to H  l  ne's arms, were now wholly without influence. There was a change taking place in her character. Her humours varied ten times within a day. Generally she spoke abruptly and imperiously, addressing her mother as though she were Rosalie, and constantly fretting her with the pettiest demands, ever impatient and loud in complaint.

"Give me a drink. What a time you take ! I am left here dying of thirst !"

When H  l  ne handed the glass to her she exclaimed : "There's no sugar in it ; I won't have it !"

She would throw herself violently back on her pillow, and the second time she would push away the glass, with the complaint that the drink was too sweet. They no longer cared to attend to her, she would say ; they were doing it purposely. H  l  ne, dreading lest she might infuriate her to a greater extent, made no reply, but gazed on her with the tears trembling on her cheeks.

But Jeanne's anger knew no bounds when the doctor made his appearance. The moment he entered the sick-room she laid herself flat in the bed, and sullenly hung down her head in the manner of savage brutes who will not suffer a stranger to come near. Some days she refused to say a word, allowing him to feel her pulse or examine her while she lay motionless with her eyes fixed on the ceiling. On other days she would not even look at him, and clasped her two hands over her eyes with such a gust of passion that to remove them would have necessitated the violent twisting of her arms. One night, as her mother was about to dose her with a spoonful of medicine, she burst out with the cruel remark :

"I won't have it ; it will poison me."

Hélène's heart, pierced to the quick, sank within her, and she dreaded to elicit what she would imply.

"What are you saying, my child?" she asked. "Do you understand what you are talking about? Medicine is never nice to take. You must drink this."

But Jeanne lay in obstinate silence and turned her head away to get rid of the draught. From this day onward she was full of caprices, swallowing or rejecting the medicines according to the humour of the moment. She sniffed at the phials and examined them suspiciously as they stood on the night-table. Should she have refused to drink the contents of one of these she never forgot its identity, and she would have died rather than allow a drop from it to pass her lips. Honest Monsieur Rambaud alone could persuade her at times. She overwhelmed him now with the most lavish caresses, especially if the doctor were looking on; and her gleaming eyes were turned towards her mother to note if she took amiss this display of affection towards another.

"Oh, it's you, you dear old soul!" she exclaimed the moment he entered. "Come and sit down here close to me. Have you brought me any oranges?"

She sat up and laughingly fumbled in his pockets, where goodies were always secreted. Next she embraced him, playing quite a love comedy, while her revenge found satisfaction in the anguish which she imagined she read in her mother's pallid face. Monsieur Rambaud beamed with joy over his triumphant restoration to his little sweetheart's good graces. But Hélène, on meeting him in the lobby, had the desired opportunity of hurriedly apprising him of the state of affairs. All at once seemingly, his eye fell on the draught standing on the table.

"What! are you having syrup?"

Jeanne's face grew clouded, and she said, in a low voice:

"No, no, it's nasty, it stinks; I can't take it."

"What! you can't drink this?" questioned Monsieur Rambaud gaily. "I can wager it's very good. May I take a little of it?"

Without awaiting her expressed permission he poured from it a large spoonful, and swallowed it with a grimace that seemed to betoken immeasurable satisfaction.

"How delightful!" he murmured. "You are quite wrong; see, just take a little to try."

Jeanne, amused, made no further resistance. She would drink whatever Monsieur Rambaud happened to taste. She watched his every motion greedily, and appeared to study his features with a view to observe the effects of the medicine. The good man in a month gorged himself in this way with doctor's stuff, and, on Hélène thanking him gratefully, shrugged his shoulders.

"Stop, stop! it's very good stuff!" he declared, in the end, with perfect conviction, and henceforth it was his pleasure to share in the little one's medicines.

He passed his evenings at her bedside. The Abbé, on the other hand, came regularly every second day. She retained them with her as long as possible, and displayed her vexation when she saw them take up their hats. Her immediate dread lay in being left alone with her mother and the doctor, and she would fain have had company always in the room to keep them apart. Frequently, without reason, she called Rosalie to her. When they were alone with her, her eyes never quitted them, maintaining a ceaseless espial into every corner of the bedroom. Whenever their hands came together, her face grew ashy-white. If a whispered word was exchanged between them she started up in anger, demanding to know what had been said. It was a grievance to her that her mother's gown should, on the carpet, sweep against the doctor's foot. They dared not approach, or look at one another, without her falling immediately into violent trembling. The extreme sensitiveness, resulting from the racking pains to which her innocent little body had been subjected, induced in her an exasperation which would prompt her to turn round, were she to guess that they were smiling to one another behind her. The times when their love was at its height she divined by the atmosphere wafted around her. It was then her gloom became deeper, and her agonies were those of nervous women who await the bursting of a terrible storm.

Every one about Hélène now looked on Jeanne as saved, and she herself had slowly come to recognise this as a certainty. Thus it happened that these fits were regarded by her in the end as the bad humours of a spoilt child of little or no consequence. A craving to live sprang up within her after the six weeks of anguish she had just spent. Her daughter was now well able to dispense for hours with her care; and these hours opened up for her, who had so long become unconscious

of life, a vista of delight, of peace, and pleasure. She rummaged in her drawers, and made joyous discoveries of forgotten things; she plunged into all sorts of petty tasks, in the endeavour to resume the happy course of her daily life. And in this upwelling of life her love expanded, and Henri was the reward she allowed herself for the intensity of her past sufferings. Beneath the shelter of this room they deemed themselves beyond the world's ken, and every hindrance in their path was forgotten. The child, to whom their love had proved a terror, alone remained a bar between them.

Jeanne was a veritable scourge to their affections. An ever-present barrier, with her eyes constantly on them, she compelled them to maintain a continued restraint and to go on acting unconcernedly, with the result that their hearts were stirred with greater emotion than before. For days they could not exchange a word; they knew intuitively she was listening, even when she was seemingly wrapped in slumber. One night when H  l  ne had quitted the room with Henri, and in the lobby, overcome with repressed anguish, was about to fall into his arms, Jeanne, from behind the closed door, burst out with the cry—"Mamma! mamma!" Her voice was shrill with rage as though she had heard the echo of the burning kiss which the doctor had imprinted on her mother's hair. Hastily H  l  ne was forced to return, for she had just heard the child leap from her bed. She met her running towards her, shivering with cold and rage. Jeanne would have her no longer away from her. From this day they were fain to console themselves with a clasp of the hand on his coming and going. Madame Deberle was enjoying a month at a watering-place on the coast with her little Lucien, and the doctor, who had all his time at his own command, dared not spend more than ten minutes in H  l  ne's company. Their long and delightful chats at the window had come to an end. When their eyes met a gleam of passion lit up within them.

What in especial proved exquisite torture to their hearts was the fickleness of Jeanne's humour. One night, as the doctor hung over her, she gave way to tears. For a whole day her hate changed to feverish tenderness. She prayed him to stay at her bedside; she summoned her mother twenty times that she might gaze on them standing side by side happy and smiling. H  l  ne was already picturing up a long and joyous vista of days spent thus; but when next day the doctor entered the room

the child received him with such a display of sourness that the mother besought him with a look to leave them. Jeanne had fretted herself the whole night in angry regret over her good humour. Not a moment passed but what a like scene was re-enacted. After the blissful hours the child had brought them in her moods of impassioned tenderness these hours of misery fell on them with the torture of the lash, and emphasised still more the necessity of their being all in all to one another.

Insensibly there awoke within Hélène a feeling of revulsion. To all seeming her daughter would be her death. Why, when her illness had been put to flight, did the ill-natured child work her utmost to torture her? Did one of these intoxicating dreams take possession of her imagination—a mystic dream in which she found herself traversing a country alike unknown and entrancing with Henri by her side—Jeanne's face, harsh and sullen, would suddenly start up before her, and thus her heart was ever being rent in twain. The struggle between her maternal affection and her love was provocative of too intense suffering.

One night, despite Hélène's formal edict of banishment, the doctor came. For eight days they had been unable to exchange a word. She would fain that he had not entered; but he gently pushed her into the room with a gesture of encouragement. Here both imagined themselves secure. Jeanne was in a deep sleep. They sat down as of old, near the window, and far from the glare of the lamp, and the peaceful shadows played around them. For two hours their conversation went on, their faces almost touching that their whispers might be the lower; so low indeed were they that scarcely a sound disturbed the silence of the large room. At times they turned their heads and glanced at the delicate profile of Jeanne whose little hands were clasped together and reposing on the coverlet. But in the end they grew forgetful of their surroundings, and their talk became incautiously louder. Hélène had a rude awakening, and tore away her hands on which Henri was imprinting burning kisses. Her blood froze within her as she realised the length to which their indiscretion had led them.

"Mamma! mamma!" loudly cried Jeanne, seized with sudden agitation, as though she were suffering from nightmare.

She writhed about in bed, her eyelids still heavy with sleep, and struggled hard to reach a sitting posture.

"Hide, hide yourself, I beseech you!" whispered Hélène in anguished tones. "You will be her death if you stay here."

In an instant Henri vanished into the window recess, concealed by the blue velvet curtain; but it was in vain, the child still kept up her pitiful cry.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! I suffer so much!"

"I am here, at your side, my darling; where do you feel the pain?"

"I do not know. Oh! see, it is here! Oh, it is scorching me!"

With eyes wide open and distorted features, she pressed her two little hands to her bosom.

"It came on me in a moment. Wasn't I asleep? Then I felt something like a burning coal."

"But it's all gone now. You're not pained any longer, are you?"

"Yes, yes, I feel it still."

She glanced uneasily round the room. She was now wholly awake; the sullen gloom crept over her face, and her cheeks became livid.

"Are you by yourself, mamma?" she asked.

"Of course I am, my darling!"

She shook her head and gazed about, sniffing the air, while her agitation visibly increased.

"No, you're not; I know you're not. There's some one— Oh, mamma! I'm afraid, I'm afraid! You are telling me a story; you are not by yourself."

She fell back in bed in an hysterical fit, sobbing loudly and huddling herself beneath the coverlet, as though to ward off some danger. Hélène, crazy with dismay, dismissed Henri from the room without delay, notwithstanding his wish to remain and look after the child. But she drove him out forcibly. She returned and clasped Jeanne in her arms, while the little one gave vent to the one pitiful cry, with every utterance of which her sobbing was renewed louder than ever:

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

"Hush, hush, my angel! don't say that," exclaimed the agonised mother. "You're all the world to me. You'll see yet whether I love you or not."

She nursed her till morning broke, intent on yielding

the kisses were not for another; she grew uneasy with her least movement, besought imperiously her hand before she fell asleep, and would fain have retained it in her own during her sleep. Now, with the knowledge that nobody came near, and that her mother was shared with no stranger, she had regained confidence, and was enraptured at the prospect of the opening up once more of the old happy life wherein they were wont to work alone at the window. Every day brought new roses to her cheeks: Rosalie declared her eye could detect their glowing brighter and brighter with every hour.

There were times, however, as night fell over the earth, when H  l  ne broke down. While her daughter lay ill her face had become grave and somewhat pale, and a deep wrinkle, never before visible, furrowed her brow. When Jeanne caught sight of her in these hours of weariness, wherein despair left its dreary void within her heart, a double sorrow would chill the child, and her little bosom swelled with vague remorse. Gently and silently she would twine her arms round her neck.

"Are you happy, mother darling?" came the whisper.

A thrill ran through H  l  ne's frame, and she hastened to answer:

"Yes, of course, my pet."

Still the child pressed her question:

"Are you, oh! are you happy? Quite sure?"

"Quite sure. Why do you want to think I am unhappy?"

With this Jeanne would clasp her closer in her little arms, as though to requite her. She would love her so well, she would say—so well that nowhere in Paris could one meet with a happier mother.

CHAPTER IV.

DURING August Doctor Deberle's garden appeared a deep and sequestered nook amidst the surrounding foliage. The railing was hidden by the twining branches of the lilac and laburnum trees, and climbing plants, ivy, honeysuckle, and clematis sprouted everywhere in the utmost luxuriance, stealing here and there in inextricable confusion, drooping down in a leafy canopy, and climbing along the walls till they had reached the elms at the bottom, where the verdure spread about in such lush profusion that the imagination would have declared the walls of a tent were stretched between the trees, the elms serving as giant props. The garden was so small that the tiniest fleck of shadow covered it. The noontide sun threw a disc of yellow light on the centre, encircling the lawn and its two flower-beds. Against the garden steps was trained a rose-bush that was laden with hundreds of large tea-roses. In the cool of the evening their odours were wafted into every corner, and the air under the elms grew heavy with the warm breath of roses. Nothing could transcend the charm of this hidden nook, with its perfume-laden atmosphere, into which no neighbourly inquisition could peep, and which brought pleasant dreams of the forest primeval, while barrel-organs were droning out polkas in the Rue Vineuse.

"Why, madame, doesn't mademoiselle go down to the garden?" Rosalie asked daily. "I'm sure it would do her a world of good to romp about under the trees."

One of the elms had invaded Rosalie's kitchen with its branches. With her hand she tore away the leaves, and it was the greatest of joys to her to gaze on the clustering foliage, through which she could see nothing.

"She isn't strong enough yet," was Hélène's reply. "The cold, shady garden might be harmful to her."

Rosalie was in no way convinced. A happy thought with her was not so easily abandoned. Madame must surely be mistaken in imagining that it would be cold or harmful. Perhaps madame's objection sprang rather from the fear that she would

be in some one's way; but it was nonsense. Mademoiselle would be, of a truth, in nobody's way; not a living soul made any appearance there. The doctor shunned it, and, as for madame, she would be away at the watering-place till the middle of September. This was so certain that the door-keeper had asked Zéphyrin to give the garden a rake over, and Zéphyrin and she herself had spent there two Sunday afternoons already. Oh! it was lovely, lovelier than one could imagine.

Hélène remained fixed in her resolve. Jeanne displayed symptoms of having a great longing to enjoy a walk in the garden, which had been the ceaseless topic of her discourse during her illness; but a vague feeling of embarrassment, with the inrush of which her eyes would drop to the floor, was sufficient to close her mouth on the subject in her mother's presence. When Sunday came round, the maid hurried into the room, exclaiming breathlessly:

"Oh! madame, there's nobody there, I give you my word! Only myself and Zéphyrin, who is raking! Do let her come. You can't imagine how fine it is outside. Come for a little, only a little, just to see!"

Her conviction was such that Hélène gave way. She cloaked Jeanne in a shawl, and told Rosalie to take with her a heavy wrap. The child was in an ecstasy that spoke silently from the depths of her great sparkling eyes; she even wished to descend the staircase without help, that her strength might be made plain. Her mother's arms were stretched out behind her, ready to lend support. When they had reached the foot of the stairs and entered the garden, they both gave vent to an exclamation. So little did this umbrageous and leafy spot resemble the trim and homely corner that they had seen in the spring-time that they failed to recognise it.

"It's just as I told you!" declared Rosalie, in triumphant tones.

The clumps had grown to great proportions, transforming the old alleys into banked paths, and, in walking, their skirts became entangled with the interwoven branches. To the fancy it seemed some far-away recess in a wood, arched over with foliage, through which darted rays green in hue, and encompassed by a delightful charm and mystery. Hélène directed her steps towards the elms, at the foot of which she had sat in April,

"But I don't wish her to stay here," said she. "It is shady and coldish."

"Well, well, you will see in a minute," answered the maid.

Three steps further on they emerged from the clustering foliage, and there, in the midst of the leafy profusion, they caught sight of the sun's golden rays streaming on the lawn, warm and still as in a woodland glade. As they looked up they saw the branches standing out against the blue of the sky with the delicacy of guipure. The tea-roses on the great bush, fainting somewhat in the heat, drooped slumberously from their stems. In the flower-beds were asters, tinged red and white, looking with their old-world air like blossoms woven in ancient tapestry.

"Now you'll see what I want to do," said Rosalie. "I'm going to put her all right myself."

She was busy folding and spreading the wrap on the edge of a walk, where the shadow came to an end. Here she ensconced Jeanne, covering her shoulders with a shawl, and bidding her stretch out her little legs. On the child's face, as she sat thus, the shadow fell, while her feet lay in the sunshine.

"Are you all right, my darling?" H  l  ne asked.

"Oh, yes," was her answer. "I don't feel cold a bit, you know. I almost think I am sweltering before a big fire. What lots of fresh air I'm breathing! How pleasant it is!"

Thereupon H  l  ne, whose glances were turning uneasily towards the closed window-shutters of the house, announced her intention of returning upstairs for a little while, and loaded Rosalie with a variety of injunctions. She would have to watch the sun; she was to leave Jeanne there not more than half-an-hour; and she must not quit sight of her for a moment.

"Don't be alarmed, mamma," exclaimed the child with a laugh. "There are no carriages to pass along here."

Left to amuse herself, she gathered from the path at her side handfuls of gravel, which it gave her pleasure to drop from her clasped hands like a shower of rain. Z  phyrin was busy all the while raking. On catching sight of madame and her daughter he had hustled on his great-coat, which he had hung from the branch of a tree; and in token of respect he stood stock-still, with his rake idle in his hand. Throughout the length of Jeanne's illness he had come every Sunday as usual; but so great was the caution with which he stepped into the

kitchen, that Hélène would scarcely have dreamt of his presence had not Rosalie on every occasion been deputed as his messenger to receive news of the invalid's progress, and to convey his condolences. Yes, so ran her comments, he was laying claim now to good manners; Paris was giving him some polish! So here he was, leaning on his rake, and mutely addressing Jeanne with a sympathetic nod. As soon as she saw him, her face broke into smiles.

"I have been very ill," she said.

"Yes, I know, mademoiselle," he replied as he placed his hand on his heart. Then inspired with the wish to say something pretty, something comical, which might serve to enliven the meeting, he added:

"You see, your health has been taking a rest. Now it will indulge in a good rousing snore."

Jeanne had gathered up once more a handful of pebbles, while he, perfectly satisfied, and opening his mouth wide from ear to ear in a burst of silent laughter, renewed his raking with greater vehemence than ever. The drawing of the rake over the gravel was accompanied by a harshly recurring sound. When a few minutes had elapsed Rosalie, seeing her little charge absorbed in her amusement, seemingly happy and at her ease, drew gradually farther away from her, as though lured by the creaking of the rake. Zéphyrin was working away in the full glare of the sun, on the other side of the lawn.

"You are sweating like an ox," she whispered to him. "Take off your great-coat. Be quick; mademoiselle won't be offended."

He relieved himself of his great-coat and suspended it once more from a branch. His red trousers, supported by a belt round the waist, seemed far too high on his body, while his shirt of thick brown linen, held at the neck by a narrow band was so stiff that it stuck out and made him look even rounder than he was. He tucked up his sleeves after a great fuss, to show Rosalie a couple of hearts aflame, which he gave out in the regiment he was going to tattoo, with the accompanying legend—"For Ever."

"Did you go to mass this morning?" said Rosalie. She usually attacked him with this question every Sunday.

"To mass! to mass!" he repeated with a chuckle.

The two red ears projected from his head shorn to the very

skin, and the whole of the diminutive barrel-like body had a world of banter in its contortions.

At last the confession came. "Of course I went to mass."

"You are lying," Rosalie burst out violently. "I know you are lying; your nose is twitching. Oh, Zéphyrin, you are going to the dogs—you have left off going to church! Beware! beware!"

His answer was, lover-like, to essay to put his arm round her waist, but to all appearance she was shocked, and exclaimed loudly:

"I'll make you put on your great-coat again if you don't behave. Indeed, you're not ashamed! Why, there's mademoiselle looking at you!"

Thereupon Zéphyrin turned to his raking once more. In truth, Jeanne had but a moment before lifted her eyes towards them. Her amusement was palling on her somewhat; her pebbles thrown aside, she had been gathering leaves and plucking grass; but a feeling of indolence crept over her, and she lay in all the luxuriousness of *dolce far niente*, gazing at the sunshine as it fell more and more on her. A few moments previously only her legs, as far as the knees, were bathed in this warm cascade of light, but now it leaped on to her body, gradually spreading the range of its influence, till it fell like an impassioned kiss, plunging her in sensations of delight. What afforded her amusement in especial were tiny discs of light, of an exquisite golden hue, that danced over her shawl, for all the world like living creatures. She tossed back her head to see if perchance they were creeping towards her face, and as she awaited their coming she clasped her two little hands together in the glare of the sunshine. How thin and transparent they seemed! The sun's rays passed through them, and all the same they appeared to her pretty, rosy-red with all the tints of a shell, delicate and attenuated, like the tiny hands of an infant Christ. The fresh air, too, the gigantic trees around her, and the warmth, had lulled her somewhat into forgetfulness. Sleep, she imagined, had come upon her, and still she could see, she could hear. It seemed to her a heaven of delight.

"Mademoiselle, please draw back a bit," said Rosalie, who had approached close to her. "The sun's heat is too warm for you."

But Jeanne, with a wave of her hand, declined to budge. For the time her attention was devoted only to the contempla-



JEANNE WATCHING ZÉPHYRIN AND ROSALIE IN THE
GARDEN.

tion of the maid and the little soldier, her childish curiosity being awakened over matters forbidden in a child's sight. Sullenly she directed her glances towards the ground, with the intention of making them believe her eyes had not been turned towards them; but from beneath her long eyelashes she kept watching them, though to all appearance overcome with drowsiness.

Rosalie stood near her for a minute or two longer, but she was powerless against the charm of the creaking rake. Once more she dragged herself slowly towards Zéphyrin, as if in spite of her will. She resented the change in his manner he was now displaying, and yet her heart was bursting with intoxicating delight and mute admiration. The little soldier had used to good purpose his long strolls with his comrades in the Jardin des Plantes and round the Place du Château-d'Eau where the barracks stood, and the result was the acquisition of the charming and engaging demeanour of the Parisian foot-soldier. From them he learned his flowery talk, the arch looks of the gallant, those ambiguities of language which are so dear to the hearts of ladies. At times she was thrilled with intense pleasure as she listened to phrases repeated to her with a swagger of the shoulders, but which contained incomprehensible words that inflamed her cheeks with a flush of pride. The uniform sat no longer awkwardly on him; he swung his arms to and fro with the free grace of the gallant; and especially noticeable was the style of wearing his shako on the back of his head, with the result that the round face became prominent with its tip of a nose, while the shako swayed gently with the rolling of his body. He was then in the full enjoyment of his liberty, quaffed his dram, and clasped the ladies round the waist. Now conviction entered her soul, with his chuckling silence, that he would not confide his secrets to her. Paris was making him too fine a gentleman, and she stood before him, delighted yet angry, undecided whether to scratch his face or let him give vent to his love in silly nothings.

Zéphyrin, meanwhile, was raking away and turned the corner of the path. He was now hidden by a great spindle-tree, and was darting side-glances at Rosalie, luring her on against her will with the taps of his rake. When she had got near him, he pinched her roughly on the hip.

"Don't cry out; that's to show you how I love you!" he said in a thick whisper. "And take that over and above."

He screwed up his courage and kissed her on the ear. Then, as Rosalie gave him a fierce nip in reply, he imprinted another kiss on her face, this time on her nose. Though she was pleased, her face turned fiery-red: she was furious at her inability, through Jeanne's proximity, to give him a box on the ear.

"I have pricked my finger," she declared to Jeanne as she once more returned to her side, in apology for the exclamation that had escaped her lips.

Through the slender tracery of the spindle-tree branches the child had seen the incident. In the surrounding greenery the soldier's red trousers and shirt were clearly discernible. She slowly raised her eyes towards Rosalie, and looked at her for a moment, while the maid, with moist lips and dishevelled hair, blushed the more. But again her looks fell to the ground and she gathered another handful of pebbles, but was without the will to play with them. She sat thus in a dreamy state with her two hands resting on the warm ground, while the sun's rays streamed down on her more and more. Within her a wave of health was swelling and bereaving her of breath. The trees seemed to take Titanic shape, and the air was swimming with the perfume of roses. She was steeped in wonder and delight, and she dreamt of all sorts of vague things.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Rosalie uneasily.

"I don't know—of nothing," was Jeanne's reply. "Yes, I do know. You see, I would like to live to be very old."

She could not explain her meaning beyond this. She said it was an idea that had come into her head. But in the evening, when her dreamy fit had fallen on her, and her mother asked the cause, she suddenly put the question:

"Mamma, do cousins ever marry?"

"Yes, of course," said Hélène. "Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, nothing; only I wanted to know."

Hélène had become accustomed to these extraordinary questions. The hour spent in the garden had so beneficial an effect on the child that every sunny day found her there. Hélène's reluctance was dispelled by degrees; the house was still shut up. Henri never ventured to show himself, and ere long she sat down on the edge of the rug beside Jeanne. But on the following Sunday morning the windows had been thrown open, and she was troubled at heart.

"Goodness gracious! the rooms must be aired," exclaimed

Rosalie, as an inducement for them to go down. "I declare to you nobody's there!"

On this day the air was even balmy. Through the leafy screen the sun's rays darted like golden arrows. Jeanne's strength was at first able to meet the demands made on it, and she strolled about for ten minutes, leaning on her mother's arm. But she wearied, and turned towards her rug, a corner of which she assigned to Hélène. Both faces lit up with amused smiles as each gazed at the other sitting on the ground. Zéphyrin had given up his raking, and was now assisting Rosalie in gathering parsley, clumps of which were growing against the whole length of the wall.

Suddenly from within the house floated the sounds of an uproar and bustle, and as Hélène was thinking of flight, Madame Deberle made her appearance on the garden-steps. She had just come, was still in her travelling dress, was speaking very loudly, and seemed very busy. But immediately she caught sight of Madame Grandjean and her daughter, sitting on the ground in the front of the lawn, she ran down, overwhelmed them with embraces, and poured a deafening flood of words into their ears.

"What! is it you? How glad I am to see you! Kiss me, my little pet! Poor puss, you've been very ill, have you not? But you're getting better; see what roses are coming to your cheeks! And you, my dear, how often I've thought of you! I wrote to you: did my letters reach you? You must have spent a terrible time: but it's all over now! Are you going to let me kiss you?"

Hélène was now on her feet, and was forced to submit to a kiss on each cheek and return them. The display of affection chilled her to the heart.

"You'll excuse us for having invaded your garden," she hastened to explain.

"You're joking with me," retorted Juliette with vehemence. "Are you not the same as at home here?"

She ran away for a little, hastened up the stairs, and called across the open rooms:

"Pierre, don't forget anything; there are seventeen packages!"

But she was back in an instant and commenced chattering about her holiday adventures.

"Oh! such a splendid season! We went to Trouville, you

know. The beach always thronged with people! Everything tip-top and magnificent! I had visitors too. Papa came for a fortnight with Pauline. Well, never mind, I'm glad to get home again. But I haven't given you all my news. Oh! I'll tell you later on!"

She stooped down and kissed Jeanne again; then, serious of a sudden, she asked:

"Am I browned by the sun?"

"No; I don't see any signs of it," replied Hélène as she gazed at her.

Juliette's eyes were clear and expressionless, her hands plump, and her pretty face full of amiability. Age did not tell on her; the sea air itself was powerless to affect the even tenor of her way. So far as appearances went, she might have just returned from a shopping expedition in Paris with the purchased finery decking her person. However, she was bubbling over with affection, and the more loving her outbursts, the more weary, constrained, and ill grew Hélène. From the centre of her rug Jeanne never stirred, only raising at times her delicate, sickly face, while her hands were clasped with a chilly air in the sunshine.

"Wait, you haven't seen Lucien yet," exclaimed Juliette. "You must see him; he is awfully stout."

When the little lad was brought on the scene, after the dust of the journey had been washed from his face by a servant-girl, she pushed and turned him about to exhibit his proportions. Lucien, fat and chubby-cheeked, his skin tanned with playing on the beach and with exposure to the salt breeze, was radiant with health; his face was still rather clammy, and wore an angry frown after his enforced wash. He had not been properly dried, and one cheek was still wet and fiery-red with the rubbing of the towel. When he caught sight of Jeanne he stood stock-still with astonishment. She looked at him, her face sickly and emaciated, colourless as linen against the background of streaming black hair that fell in clusters to her shoulders. The great, brilliant, but sorrowful eyes seemed to fill up her whole face; and, despite the excessive heat, she shivered somewhat, and her hands were stretched out as though she were chilled and seeking warmth from a blazing fire.

"Well! aren't you going to kiss her?" asked Juliette.

But Lucien looked rather afraid. At length he made up his

mind, and with cautious air advanced his lips that he might preserve as great a distance from the invalid as possible. This done, he started back expeditiously. Hélène's eyes were brimming over with tears. What health this child enjoyed! And her Jeanne was breathless after a walk round the lawn! Some mothers were very fortunate! Juliette in an instant understood how cruel his conduct was, and she rated Lucien soundly.

"Good gracious! what a fool you are! Is that the way to kiss young ladies? You've no idea, my dear, how outrageous he became at Trouville."

Her vexation and confusion were intense. Happily for her the doctor made his appearance, and she quickly recovered.

"Oh! here's Henri!" she exclaimed.

He had been expecting their return in the evening, but she had travelled by another train. She plunged into a discursive explanation, without in the least making her reasons clear. The doctor listened with a smiling face.

"Well, here you are at last," he said. "That's all that's necessary."

He had a minute before bowed to Hélène without speaking. His glance for a moment fell on Jeanne, but in his embarrassment he turned away his head. Jeanne had borne his look with a serious face, and unclasping her hands she instinctively grasped her mother's gown and drew her closer to her side.

"Well, how is Master Impudence?" said the doctor as he raised Lucien up and kissed him on each cheek. "Why, he's growing like magic!"

"Yes; and am I to be forgotten?" asked Juliette, as she held up her head. But he did not put Lucien down; he held him over one arm and leaned down to kiss his wife also. The three faces were lit up with smiles.

Hélène grew pale and declared she must now go up. Jeanne, however, was unwilling; she had a wish to see the end of the scene, and her lingering looks dwelt on the family group and then travelled backwards to her mother. As soon as Juliette had bent her face upwards to receive her husband's kiss, the child's eyes had flashed wrathfully.

"He's too heavy," went on the doctor as he restored Lucien to his feet. "Well, has the season been successful? I saw Malignon yesterday, and he was telling me about his stay there. So you let him leave before you, eh?"

"Oh! he's a nuisance!" exclaimed Juliette, over whose face had crept a serious and embarrassed expression. "He tormented us to death the whole time!"

"Your father was hoping for Pauline's sake—He hasn't declared his intentions then?"

"What! Malignon!" said she, as though astonished and offended. Soon she assumed a wearied look.

"Leave him alone; he's cracked! How happy I am to be home again!"

Apparently without transition, she broke into an amazing outburst of tenderness, characteristic of her loving, bird-like nature. She threw herself on her husband's breast and raised her face towards him. To all seeming they had forgotten they were not alone.

Jeanne's eyes never quitted them. Her lips were livid and trembled with anger; her face was that of a jealous and revengeful woman. The agony to which she was subjected was so great that she was forced to turn away her head, and it was then she caught sight of Rosalie and Zéphyrin at the bottom of the garden, still gathering parsley. Doubtless with the intent of being in no one's way, they had crept in among the thickest of the bushes, where both were squatting. Zéphyrin, with a sly movement, had seized hold of one of Rosalie's feet, while she, without uttering a syllable, was slapping him heartily. Jeanne could see between two branches the little soldier's face, chubby and round as a moon, deeply flushed, while the mouth gaped with an amorous grin. One gave the other a push, and soldier and maid rolled behind the leafy screen. The sun's rays were beating down vertically, and the warm air surged round the sleeping trees without stirring a leaf. From beneath the elms floated the heavy odour of soil untouched by spade. The last of the tea-roses were casting one by one their petals on the garden-stair. Then Jeanne, with swelling heart, turned her gaze on her mother, and seeing her motionless and dumb as the scene was being enacted before her, cast on her a look of intense anguish—a child's look of infinite meaning that baffles all questioning.

Meanwhile, Madame Deberle stepped closer to them, and said:

"I hope we shall see each other frequently. Now that Jeanne is feeling better, she must come down every afternoon."

Hélène was already casting about for an excuse, and pleaded

that she was unwilling to weary her too much. But Jeanne abruptly broke in:

"No, no; the sun does me a great deal of good. We shall come down, madame. You will keep my place for me, won't you?"

As the doctor still remained in the background, she smiled towards him.

"Doctor, please say to mamma that the fresh air won't do me any harm."

He came forward, and this man, inured to human suffering, had on his cheeks a slight flush springing from this child's gentle address.

"Certainly not," he exclaimed; "the fresh air will only bring you nearer good health."

"So you see, mother darling, we must come down," said she, with a look of ineffable tenderness, while the sobs were choking in her throat.

But Pierre had re-appeared on the steps and announced the safe arrival of madame's seventeen packages. Juliette retired, declaring that she was frightfully dirty, and that she intended to take a bath, her husband and Lucien following in her train. When they were alone, Hélène knelt down on the rug, as though about to tie the shawl round Jeanne's neck, and whispered in the child's ear:

"You're not angry any longer with the doctor, then?"

With a long continued shake of the head the child answered:

"No, mamma."

There was a silence. Hélène's hands were seized with an awkward trembling, and she was seemingly unable to tie the shawl. Then Jeanne murmured:

"But why does he love other people so? I won't have him——"

Her look became harsh and gloomy, while her little hands were stretched out caressingly on her mother's shoulders. She would fain have given vent to her feelings, but the words springing to her lips frightened her. The sun slowly dipped in the west, and the two retraced their steps homewards. Zéphyrin meanwhile wandered into sight, with a bunch of parsley in his hand, which he sorted while darting murderous glances at Rosalie. The maid followed at some distance, inspired with distrust now that there was no one present. Just as she stooped to roll up the rug he gave her a pinch, which she

returned with a blow from her fist in his back, that re-echoed like an empty cask. This restored him to his equanimity, and he was still laughing silently as he re-entered the kitchen busily sorting his parsley.

Henceforth Jeanne was stubbornly bent on going down to the garden as soon as she heard Madame Deberle's voice within its precincts. All Rosalie's tittle-tattle regarding the little next-door house she drank in greedily, restless and curious over their every-day doings, and she would escape from the room and maintain a vigilant watch from the kitchen window. In the garden, ensconced in a small arm-chair which had been brought for her use from the drawing room at Juliette's direction, her eyes seemingly never quitted the family; she rebuffed Lucien, provoked with his questioning and antics, especially when the doctor was present. Then she would stretch herself out as if wearied, gazing before her with her great eyes. For Hélène these afternoons were pregnant with anguish. She always returned however, returned in spite of the revulsion which wrung her whole being. Every day on Henri's arrival home, when he imprinted a kiss on Juliette's hair, her heart leaped in its agony. At these times, if to hide the agitation of her face she pretended to busy herself with Jeanne, she would perceive that the child was paler than herself, with her black eyes glaring, and the chin twitching with repressed fury. Jeanne shared in her suffering. When her mother turned away her head, heart-broken, the child sat with so sad and weary a face that she had to be carried upstairs and put to bed. She was no longer able to see the doctor approaching his wife without changing countenance; she would tremble and dart towards him a glance inflamed with the jealous fire of a deserted mistress.

"I cough in the morning," she said to him one day. "You must come and see for yourself."

Some rainy days intervened, and Jeanne was anxious that the doctor should commence his visits once more. A great improvement in her health had set in. To give her some pleasure her mother had been constrained to accept two or three invitations to dinner with the Deberles. The child's heart, that had been torn so long with a hidden sorrow, was seemingly lulled to rest with the complete re-establishment of her health. She asked Hélène the old question—

"Are you happy, mother darling?"

"Yes, very happy, my pet."

With the answer she became radiant. She must be pardoned, she said, her ill-nature in the past. She referred to it as a fact that no effort of her own will could gainsay—as the result of a headache that came on her suddenly. Something sprang up within her—she wholly failed to know what it was. She was tempest-tossed with a multitude of vague imaginings—nightmares that she could not even have recalled to memory. But it was all past now; she was well again, and the old horror would never return.

CHAPTER V.

THE shadows of night were falling. From the grey heaven where the first of the stars were gleaming, a fine ash seemed to be raining down on the great city, raining down without cease and slowly burying it. The hollows were already hidden deep in gloom, and a line of cloud, like a wave of ink, swelled up in the horizon, engulfing the last streaks of daylight that glimmered hesitatingly as they died in the west. Below Passy there were but a few stretches of roofs visible; the wave rolled on, and darkness covered all.

"What a warm evening!" ejaculated H  l  ne, as she sat at the window, overcome by the heated breeze which was wafted upwards from Paris.

"A grateful night for the poor," exclaimed the Abb   who stood behind her. "The autumn will be mild."

This Tuesday Jeanne had fallen into a doze at dessert and her mother perceiving she was rather tired helped her to bed. She was already fast asleep in her cot, while Monsieur Rambaud was seated at the table busily mending a toy—a mechanical doll which both spoke and walked and which, a present from him, Jeanne had broken; he excelled in these kinds of contrivances. H  l  ne was breathless for lack of air, the lingering heats of September were oppressive, and she had thrown the window wide open, gazing with sensations of relief on the vast gloomy ocean of shadows that rolled its waves before her. She had pushed forward an easy-chair to be alone, and the priest's words astonished her. He went on gently:

"Have you covered up the little one snugly? The air on this hill is always keen."

She made no reply; her heart had a craving for silence. She drank in the magic spell of eventide that conjured the outside world with all its noises into nothingness. The steeples and towers were tipped with flame, like distant lamps; Saint-Augustin died out first, the Pantheon was haloed for a moment with a bluish light, and the glittering dome of the Invalides gradually faded from sight, like a moon setting in the sea of

clouds rolling onwards. Night was as the ocean, with its extent and mighty depths shrouded in gloom, a dark abyss wherein the inner sense divined a world lay hid. From the lungs of the unseen city blew a wind, mighty yet gentle. There was still a hum of its undying roar, the sounds ascending faint and clear, the sharp rattle of an omnibus over the quay, the whistle of a train crossing the bridge of the Point-du-Jour; and the Seine, swollen by recent storms, rolled on in greater force, pulsing with the life of a breathing soul, winding away far below in a maze of shadows. A warm odour was wreathing upwards from roofs that still glimmered, while the river, amidst the slow-continuing exhalation of the day's heat, emitted a cooling breeze. Paris had vanished, sunk in the dreamy repose of a colossus that allows night to envelop its limbs, and lies there motionless for a time, with eyes wide open.

There was naught that spoke to Hélène with greater feeling than the time when the city's life died away. For the three months during which she had been a close prisoner, chained to Jeanne's couch, she had no other companion in her vigil at the invalid's bed-side save Paris spreading its mighty limbs towards the horizon. During the summer heats of July and August the windows had almost always been open; she could not cross the room, could not stir or turn her head, without gaining a glimpse of the ever-present panorama. It was there, never fading, sharing in her griefs and in her hopes, like some friend who would not leave her side. But she was wholly unconscious of its presence; never before had it been so lost to her senses; its streets and its people were sunk in oblivion—still it was her all-in-all during these lonely days. The few square feet that made up the sick room, the door of which was kept sealed to the outside world, Paris gazed on freely, through the two windows. Very often, with her eyes fixed on its expanse, she had wept, leaning on the window-sill to hide her tears from the ailing child; one day—the very day she imagined her daughter dying—she had remained thus for a long time, overcome and choked with grief, while she watched the smoke curling up from the Army bakehouse. Frequently, in her hours of hopefulness, she had here breathed forth the gladsome confidences of her heart to the lines of distant suburbs. There towered up not a single monument which did not recall to her some sensation of joy or sorrow. Paris took bodily life from her own being; but she loved it best as evening floated down,

when with the death of day it yielded a quarter of an hour of peace, of forgetfulness and dreaming, as she awaited the lighting of the gas.

"What a multitude of stars!" murmured the Abbé Jouve. "There are thousands of them gleaming."

He had just taken a chair and sat down at her side. With the exclamation, she gazed upwards into the summer night. The heaven was studded with twinkling golden lights. On the very verge of the horizon a constellation was sparkling like a carbuncle, and a shower of almost invisible stars was falling across the arch of the sky—a sandy rain of flashing lights. Charles's-Wain slowly turned its shaft in the night.

"Look," said she, in her turn, "look at that tiny blue star—see, far away up there—I recognise it night after night. But it dies and fades as the night rolls on."

The Abbé's presence no longer annoyed her. With him at her side, she imagined the quiet was deepening around her. A few words passed between them after intervals of silence. Twice she questioned him on the names of the stars; the expanse of heaven was ever an enigma to her. But he was doubtful, and pleaded ignorance.

"Do you see," she asked, "that lovely star, exquisitely clear in its lustre?"

"To the left, do you mean?" he replied; "near one of lesser size, greenish in its light? There are so many of them that my memory fails me."

They lapsed again into silence; their eyes were still turned upwards, and as they gazed on the infinite number of stars they were dazzled, and a shudder crept over them. In the vast depths of the heaven, behind the thousands of stars, twinkled thousands of others in an ever-increasing multitude. Theirs was a light of undying lustre; they seemed like the red-hot cinders of worlds shining with the clear brilliance of gems. The Milky Way was already gleaming, a slant of light trailing its myriad component parts through space in the infinite distance.

"It fills me with fear," said Hélène, in a whisper.

To forget the scene, she stooped her head, and glanced down on the gaping abyss in which Paris seemed to be engulfed. In its depths not a light could yet be seen; night had rolled over it and plunged it in impenetrable darkness. The shrill, undying noises faded into softness.

"Are you weeping?" asked the Abbé, who heard the sounds of sobbing.

"Yes," simply answered Hélène.

They saw nothing of each other. Her whole being was speaking in the tears that rolled down for a long time. Behind them Jeanne lay at rest in innocent slumber, and Monsieur Rambaud, his whole attention engrossed, bent his grizzled head over the doll which he was busily dismembering. At times he could not prevent the loosened springs giving out a creaking noise, and his huge fingers drew from the disordered mechanism with the utmost gentleness a childish squeaking. If the doll squeaked too loudly he stopped its working at once, distressed and vexed with himself, while he turned towards Jeanne to see if he had roused her. Once more he would set himself to his work of repairing, with greater precautions, his only tools being a pair of scissors and a bodkin.

"Why do you weep, my daughter?" again asked the Abbé. "Can I not afford you some relief?"

"Excuse me now," said Hélène: "these tears do me good. By-and-by, by-and-by——"

Her choking sobs forbade further words. Once before, in this very place, she had been convulsed with a storm of tears; but she was then alone and at peace to sob in the darkness, waiting with weary heart till the grief that wrung her was dried up at its source. However, it sprang from no sorrow; her laughter was well once more, and she had resumed the old monotonous delightful life. But it was as though abruptly a keen sense of awful grief had come upon her; she grew conscious of a bottomless abyss which she could not fathom, a limitless sea of despair in which she was sinking with all who were dear to her. She knew not what misfortune hung over her head; she was without hope, and she could only weep.

Similar waves of feeling had swept over her during the month of the Virgin in the church, laden with the perfumes of flowers. As twilight fell, the vastness of Paris filled her with deep religious sense. The stretch of plain took greater proportions, and a sadness rose up from the two millions of living beings who were being engulfed in darkness. And when night fell and the city with its subdued rumbling had vanished from sight, her oppressed heart poured forth its sorrow, and her tears fell amid the intense quiet. She had an impulse to asp her hands and pray. She was thrilled with an intense

craving for faith, love, and a lapse into heavenly forgetfulness, and it was now that the first glinting of the stars pierced her soul with a holy joy and fear.

A lengthy interval of silence ensued, and the Abbé Jouve broke in with his urgent request.

"My daughter, you must confide in me; why do you hesitate?"

Her tears still fell, but gently, as though she were a child wearied and powerless.

"The Church has its terrors for you," he continued. "For a time I thought you had yielded your heart to God. But it has been willed otherwise. Heaven has its own purposes. Well, since you dare not trust the priest, why should you refuse any longer to confide in the friend?"

"You are right," she faltered; "yes, I am sad at heart, and need your consolation. I must tell you my mind. When I was a child I never entered a church; now I cannot be present at service without being influenced to the very depths of my being. Yes; and what at the moment has drawn tears from me is Paris speaking to me with the voice of a mighty organ, pealing up through the immeasurable night towards the beauteous heavens. Oh! I would fain believe. Help me; teach me."

The Abbé Jouve abated her excitement by lightly placing his hand on her own.

"Tell me everything," he merely said.

She struggled for a time, her heart wrung with anguish.

"There's nothing to tell, I assure you. I'm hiding nothing from you. I weep without cause—because I feel stifled—because my tears gush out of their own accord. You know what my life has been. No sorrow, no sin, no remorse could I find in it to this hour. I do not know—I do not know——"

Her voice died away, and from the priest's lips slowly came the sentence:

"You love, my daughter!"

She started; she dared not make a disavowal. Silence fell once more on them. In the sea of shadows that lay at rest before them, a light had glimmered forth. It seemed at their feet, somewhere in the abyss, but where they would have been unable to specify. One by one others broke through the darkness, shooting into instant life and remaining stationary, gleaming like stars, of which there would seem to be a new

uprising on the surface of a gloomy lake. Betimes there burst into view a double line of lights, leaping from the Trocadéro towards Paris; again, other lines of lights traversed this; streets were outlined, and a wondrous and magnificent illumination streamed in every direction. Hélène never breathed a word, gazing only on these gleams of light that prolonged the sky below the horizon to an infinite distance, as though the earth had vanished and the vault of heaven was laid bare to the view on every side. Her heart was flooded with the emotion of a few minutes before, when Charles's-Wain slowly began to turn round the Polar axis, its shaft in the air. Paris, studded with lights, unrolled its saddening expanse in the abyss, giving birth to fearful thoughts of a firmament where worlds cluster in myriads.

Meanwhile the priest, in tones monotonous and gentle, speaking, as was his wont at confession, whispered for long in her ear. One evening in the past he had warned her; solitude, he had strongly advised her, would be harmful to her welfare. No one with impunity could become a hermit, lost to the outside world. She had imprisoned herself too closely, and the door had lain open to perilous thoughts.

"I am very old now, my daughter," he murmured, "and I have frequently seen women coming to us weeping and praying, with a craving to find faith and religion. Thus it is I cannot deceive myself to-day. These women, striving after God in so zealous a fashion, are but souls rendered miserable by passion. It is a man whom they worship in our churches."

She had grown unheeding of his words; a strife was raging in her bosom, and she strove to lay bare to herself at length her innermost thoughts. The broken confession burst from her in a whisper:

"Oh! yes, I love, and that is all! Beyond that I know nothing—nothing!"

Now he forbore to interrupt her; she spoke in a feverish torrent of short sentences. She took a grievous pleasure in confessing her love, in sharing with the venerable priest the secret which had so long burdened her.

"I swear I can read none of my thoughts. It has come to me without my knowing its presence. Perhaps it came in a moment. Only in time did its sweetness overpower me. Besides, why should I deem myself stronger than I am? I have made no effort to fly from it; I was only too happy.

Look you, my daughter was ill; I had made up my mind to lose her. Well! and yet my love has been as intense as my sorrow; it came back with sovereign power after those days of terror—it possesses me, I feel transported——”

She shivered and drew a breath.

“In short, my strength has failed me. You are very right, friend of mine, in thinking that it is a relief to confide in you. But, I beseech you, tell me what goes on within the depths of my heart. My life was once so peaceful; I was so happy. A thunderbolt has fallen on my being. Why on me? Why not on another? I had done nothing to bring it on; I imagined myself well protected. Ah, if you only knew—I know myself no longer! Help me, save me!”

Perceiving she was silent, the priest, with the wonted freedom of the confessor, mechanically asked the question:

“The name? tell me his name?”

She was hesitating, when a peculiar noise prompted her to turn her head. It came from the doll which, in Monsieur Rambaud's hands, was by degrees renewing its mechanical life, and had just been enabled to make three steps on the table, the creaking of wheels and springs proving that it was still working badly; next, it had fallen on its back, and, unaided by the worthy man, rebounded on the ground. He followed all its movements with outstretched hands, ready to lend his support and inspired with paternal anxiety. The moment he perceived *Hélène* turn round, he smiled confidently towards her, as if with the assurance that the doll was recovering its walking powers. Once more he dived with scissors and bodkin into the toy. *Jeanne* still slept on.

Then *Hélène*, her resolution yielding under the influence of the universal quiet, whispered a name in the priest's ear. He stirred not; in the darkness his face could not be seen. A silence ensued, and he said:

“I knew it, but I wanted to hear it from your own lips. My daughter, yours must be a great sorrow”

He gave utterance to no truism regarding duty. *Hélène*, astounded and cut to the heart by the unemotional pity displayed by the Abbé, gazed once more on the lights that speckled with gold the gloomy veil shrouding Paris. They were flashing everywhere in myriads. They were like the sparks that circle over the blackened refuse of burnt paper. At first these twinkling jets had started into sight, running from the

Trocadéro towards the heart of the city. Soon there was another coruscation on the left in the direction of Montmartre ; another burst into view on the right behind the Invalides, and still another, more distant beside the Panthéon. From these rays of lights were darting at the moment offshoots of lesser brilliance.

"You remember our conversation," began the Abbé slowly. "My opinion has not changed. My daughter, you must marry."

"I!" exclaimed she, overwhelmed with amazement. "But I have just confessed to you—Oh, you know well I cannot——"

"You must marry," he broke in with greater decision. "You will wed an honest man."

He seemed within the folds of his old cassock to have grown more commanding. His large comical-looking head which, with eyes half-closed, was usually hanging towards one shoulder, was now raised, and his eyes beamed with such intensity that she saw them sparkling in the darkness.

"You will marry an honest man who will be a father to Jeanne, and will lead you back to the path of goodness."

"But I do not love him—Gracious Heaven! I do not love him!"

"You will love him, my daughter. He loves you, and he is good in heart."

Hélène writhed, and her voice dropped to a whisper as she heard the slight noise that Monsieur Rambaud made behind them. He was so patient, so strong in his hope, that for six months he had not once intruded his love on her. Disposed by nature to the most heroic self-sacrifice, he waited in serene confidence. The Abbé stirred, as though about to turn round.

"Would you like me to tell him everything? He would stretch out his hand and save you. You would fill him with joy beyond compare."

She checked him with distracted looks. Her heart was torn within her. Both of these men was a source of terror to her—their judgment retained perfect equilibrium in presence of her feverish passion. What world could they breathe in to be enabled to set at naught what caused her such agony? The priest waved his hand with an all-comprehensive gesture.

"My daughter, look on this lovely night, supremely still in presence of your troubled spirit. Why do you refuse to find happiness?"

Paris was lit up in every direction. The tiny shoots of

dancing flame had speckled the sea of shadows from one end of the horizon to the other, and now serenely, as in a summer night, millions of stars seemed gleaming there with undimmed splendour. The lights, to all appearance suspended in space, were undisturbed; there was not even a breath or rustle of wind. Paris, now invisible, had fallen into the depths of an abyss as profound as a new firmament. At times, at the base of the Trocadéro, a light—the lamp of a passing cab or omnibus—would dart across the gloom with the flare of a shooting star; and where the gas jets streamed forth their light in a yellow-coloured haze, a confused jumble of house-fronts, and nooks full of clustering trees, that tinted the shadowy scene with a raw green, could be vaguely made out. Over the Pont des Invalides the gleaming lights flashed without ceasing; far below trailed a band of denser gloom from which shot a marvellous train of comet-like coruscations with tails of light showering down in a rain of gold—this was the reflection in the Seine's black waters of the lamps on the bridge. The long curve of the river was shown by the double line of lights which ever and anon were coupled by other lines; it seemed to the imagination like some glittering ladder, thrown across Paris, with its ends on the verge of the heaven among the stars. To the left gloomed another gulf; an unbroken chain of stars twinkled from the Arc-de-Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde, where a new cluster of Pleiades was flashing; next came the gloomy stretches of the Tuileries, the Louvre, inky blots where houses stood on the brink of the water, and the Hôtel-de-Ville away at the extreme end, some large square breaking in on its monotony with a burst of light; and more in the background, amidst the endless confusion of roofs, appeared scattered gleams, allowing nothing to be seen but the hollow of a street below, the corner of some boulevard, or the brilliantly-illuminated meeting-place of several thoroughfares. On the opposite bank, on the right, the Esplanade alone could be made out with any distinctness, its rectangle marked out in flame, like an Orion in the winter night bereft of his baldrick; the long streets of the Saint-Germain district seemed gloomy with their fringe of lamps; and beyond, the thickly-populated quarters were speckled over with a multitude of tiny shoots of flame, clustering together like heavenly nebulae. Away towards the outskirts, girdling the whole of the horizon, gleamed numberless street-lamps and windows

lit-up; through the city seemed to roll in the distance the myriads of stars and wanderers through space that no human eye can reach. The structures themselves had vanished into the depths of the darkness; not even a lamp betrayed their presence. At times the on-looker could have imagined he was present at some gala of giants, and gazing on a brilliantly-illuminated tower reared by the efforts of Titans, with staircases, balusters, windows, pediments, and terraces—a veritable cosmos of stone, which with its wondrous and awful architecture was traced in outline by the gleaming lights of a myriad of lamps. But there was always a speedy return of the one feeling that new constellations were springing into being, and that the heavens were spreading above and below.

Hélène, in obedience to the all-embracing wave of the priest's hand, cast a lingering look over Paris with its myriad lights. Here too she knew not what these seeming stars indicated. She yearned to ask what the blaze far below on the left betokened, for she saw it night after night. There were others which roused her curiosity, and some of them she loved, some inspired her with uneasiness and vexation.

"Father," she said, using for the first time the title of affection and respect, "let me live as I am. The loveliness of the night has agitated me. You are wrong; you would never know how to console me, for you cannot understand my feelings."

The priest stretched out his arms, then slowly dropped them to his side resignedly. A silence followed, which he broke after a time with a whispered reply:

"Doubtless, that must be the case. You call for succour and reject salvation. How many despairing confessions I have received! What tears I have been unable to prevent! Listen, my daughter, promise me one thing only; if ever life becomes too heavy a burden for you, think that one honest man loves you and that he waits for you. To regain content you will only have to place your hand in his."

"I promise you," answered Hélène, with deep meaning in her tones.

As she made the avowal a ripple of laughter burst through the room. Jeanne had just awoke, and her eyes were riveted on her doll pacing up and down the table. Monsieur Rambaud, enthusiastic over the success of his tinkering, kept his hands stretched out lest any accident should befall his work. But

the doll preserved its stability, and strutted about on its tiny feet, every roll of its head producing the same words, screamed out in parrot fashion.

"Oh! it's some trick or other!" murmured Jeanne, who was still half-asleep. "What have you done to it—say? It was all smashed, and now it's walking. Give it me a moment; let me see. Oh, you are a darling!"

Meanwhile over the gleaming expanse of Paris there floated higher and higher a rosy cloud. It might have been said to be the fiery breath from the lungs of a furnace. At first, it was shadowy-pale in the darkness—a reflected glow scarcely seen. Then slowly, as the evening grew older, it assumed a ruddier hue; and thus, hanging in the air motionless above the city, deriving its being from the myriad lights and all the noisy life which breathed from below, it seemed to the imagination like one of those clouds, charged with lightning and flame, that circle round the mouth of a volcano.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

THE finger-glasses had been handed round the table, and the ladies were daintily wiping their fingers. A momentary silence reigned, while Madame Deberle gazed on each side to see if every one had finished; then, without speaking, she rose, and amidst a noisy pushing back of chairs, her guests made haste to follow her example. An old gentleman who had been seated at her right hand pressed forward and offered his arm.

"No, no," she murmured, and led him towards a doorway. "We will have coffee now in the parlour."

The guests, in couples, followed her. Two ladies and two gentlemen lagged behind the others, busily engaged in conversation, and evidently without thought of joining the train defiling out. But when the parlour was reached, all constraint vanished, and the jovialness that had marked the dessert made its re-appearance. On a table the coffee was already served in an enormous lacquer tray. Madame Deberle's eyes wandered round her, in the kindly endeavour of a hostess to satisfy the various tastes of her guests. But it was Pauline who ran about and waited on the gentlemen. There were a dozen persons present, about the regulation number of people invited to the house every Wednesday, from December onwards. Later in the evening, at ten o'clock, a great many others would make their appearance.

"Monsieur de Guiraud, a cup of coffee," exclaimed Pauline, as she halted in front of a diminutive, bald-headed man. "Ah! no, I remember, you don't take any. Well, then, a glass of Chartreuse?"

But in her running about she became confused, and brought him a glass of cognac. Beaming with smiles, she made the round of the guests, perfectly self-possessed, and looking people straight in the face, while her long train dragged with easy grace behind her. She wore a magnificent white dress of

Indian cashmere, trimmed with swan's-down, and cut square at the bosom. When the gentlemen were all standing up, sipping their coffee, each with cup in hand and chin high in the air, she took possession of a tall lad, the younger Tissot, whom she imagined rather handsome.

Hélène had not taken any coffee. She had seated herself apart, with a somewhat wearied expression on her face. She was dressed in black velvet, without trimming, which gave her an air of austerity. In this small drawing-room smoking was going on, and several boxes of cigars were placed beside her on a pier-table. The doctor advanced towards her, and, as he selected a cigar, asked the question :

"Is Jeanne improving?"

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "We walked to the Bois to-day, and she romped like a madcap. Oh! she must be sound asleep by now."

They were both chatting in friendly tones, with the smiling intimacy of people who see each other day after day, when Madame Deberle's voice rose high and shrill :

"Stop! stop! Madame Grandjean can tell you all about it. Didn't I come back from Trouville on the 10th of September? It was raining, and the beach was simply disgusting!"

Three or four of the ladies gathered round her while she rattled on about her holiday at the sea-side. Hélène deemed it necessary to rise and join the group.

"We spent a month at Dinard," said Madame de Chermette. "Such a delightful country-side and such charming society."

"Behind the Swiss cottage was a garden, and then a terrace against the sea," went on Madame Deberle. "As you know, I decided on taking my landau and coachman with me. It was very much handier when I wanted an airing. Then Madame Levasseur came to see us."

"Yes, one Sunday," interrupted that lady. "We were at Cabourg. Your establishment there was perfect, but a little too dear, I think."

"By the way," broke in Madame Berthier, addressing Juliette, "hasn't Monsieur Malignon been giving you lessons in swimming?"

On Madame Deberle's face Hélène was quick to observe a shadow of vexation, of sudden annoyance. Several times already she had imagined that, on Malignon's name being brought unexpectedly into the conversation, Madame Deberle

had seemed troubled. But their young hostess immediately regained her equanimity.

"A fine swimmer!" exclaimed she. "The idea of him ever giving lessons to any one! Why, I have a mortal fear of cold water—the very sight of people bathing curdles my blood."

She gave an eloquent shiver, with a shrug of her plump shoulders as though she were a bird shaking water from her back.

"Then it must be a story?" questioned Madame de Guiraud.

"Of course; I will vouch it is all his own invention. He detests me since he spent a month with us down there."

People were now beginning to pour in. The ladies, with clusters of flowers in their hair and round, plump arms, entered smiling and nodding, while the men, each in evening dress and hat in hand, made their bows and ventured on some common-place. Madame Deberle, never ceasing her talking for a moment, extended the tips of her fingers to the friends of the house, and many said nothing, passing on with a bow. Meantime Mademoiselle Aurélie had just appeared on the scene, and at once went into raptures over Juliette's dress, which was of sea-blue trimmed with grosgrain silk. With this all the ladies standing round her seemed to catch their first glimpse of the dress, and declared it was exquisite, truly exquisite. It was a production of Worms's establishment, and they discussed it for five minutes. The coffee drinking was over, and the guests had left their empty cups nearly everywhere, on the tray and on the pier tables; the old gentleman, however, had not yet finished, as between every mouthful he carried on a conversation with a lady. A warm perfume, the odours from the coffee and the ladies' dresses intermingling, permeated the apartment.

"You know I have had nothing," remonstrated young Monsieur Tissot with Pauline, who had been chatting with him about an artist to whose studio her father had escorted her with a view to examining the pictures.

"What! have you had nothing? Surely I brought you a cup of coffee?"

"No, mademoiselle, I assure you."

"But I insist on your having something. See here is some Chartreuse."

With a wisely-timed nod Madame Deberle drew her

husband's attention. The doctor, grasping her intention, threw open the door of the large drawing-room, into which they all filed, while a servant removed the coffee-tray. There was almost a chill atmosphere pervading the immense apartment, through which streamed the sunny light thrown by six lamps and a chandelier with ten wax candles. There were already several ladies there, sitting in a circle round the fireplace, but only two or three men were present, standing amidst the sea of outspread skirts. Through the open doorway of the smaller drawing-room rang the shrill voice of Pauline, who had lingered behind in company with young Tissot.

"Now that I have poured it out, I'm determined you shall drink it. What do you want me to do with it? Pierre has carried off the tray."

Then she entered the room, a vision in white, in her dress trimmed with swan's-down. Her ruddy lips parted, displaying her teeth, as she smilingly announced:

"Here comes Malignon, the exquisite!"

Hand-shaking and bowing were now the order of the day. Monsieur Deberle had ensconced himself near the door. Madame Deberle, seated with other ladies on an extremely low couch, was forced to rise every other second. When Malignon made his appearance, she affected to turn away her head. He was dressed to perfection; his hair had been manipulated by the curling-irons, and the parting continued down to his very neck. On the threshold he had stuck an eye-glass in his right eye with a slight grimace, which, according to Pauline, was "jolly knowing," and glanced round the room. Carelessly and without uttering a word, he shook hands with the doctor, and made his way towards Madame Deberle, in front of whom he respectfully bent his tall figure imprisoned within its black coat.

"Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed as though she had just become aware of his presence. "It seems you go in for swimming now."

He could not guess her meaning, but he nevertheless made haste to answer with an attempt at a joke:

"Certainly; I once saved a Newfoundland dog from drowning."

The ladies thought this excessively funny, and even Madame Deberle seemed disarmed.

"Well, I'll allow you to save Newfoundlands," she answered. "But you know very well I did not bathe once at Trouville."

"Oh! you're speaking of the lesson I gave you!" he exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you one night in your dining-room to move your feet and hands about?"

All the ladies were convulsed with mirth—he was delightful! Juliette shrugged her shoulders; it was impossible to engage him in a serious talk. She rose to meet a lady whose first visit this was to her house, and who was a superb performer on the piano. Hélène, seated near the fire, her lovely face unruffled by any emotion, looked on and listened. Malignon, in especial, seemed to interest her. She had watched him skilfully piloting his way through the group to reach Madame Deberle's side, and she could hear the conversation that ensued behind her chair. Of a sudden there was a change in the tones, and she leaned back to gather the drift of what was being said.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" asked Malignon. "I waited for you till six o'clock."

"Nonsense; you are mad," murmured Juliette.

Thereupon Malignon lisped out loudly:

"Oh! you don't believe the story about my Newfoundland! Yet I received a medal for it, and I'll show it to you."

Then he added, in a whisper:

"You gave me your promise—remember."

A family group now entered the drawing-room, and Juliette was profuse in her complimentary greeting, while Malignon re-appeared amongst the ladies with eye-glass in his eye. The colour fled from Hélène's face as the hasty words fell on her ear. She recoiled as if from a thunderbolt, or from something equally unforeseen and horrible. How could thoughts of treachery enter into the mind of this woman whose life was so happy, whose face betrayed no signs of sorrow, whose cheeks had the freshness of a white rose? She had always known her to be devoid of brains, though possessing a trait of lovable egotism which barred her from the annoying consequences of a foolish action. And over such a fellow as Malignon, too! The scene in the garden of an afternoon flashed back on her memory—she recalled Juliette's smiling lovingly as the doctor kissed her hair. Their love for one another, notwithstanding, was a reality. An inexplicable feeling of indignation with Juliette pervaded her as though the wrong had been practised on herself. For Henri's sake she suffered humiliation; she was consumed with jealous rage; and her perturbed feelings

were so plainly mirrored in her face that Mademoiselle Aurélie asked her :

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

The old lady had sunk into a seat at her side immediately she observed she was alone. She had conceived a lively friendship for Hélène; she was charmed with the kindly manner in which so sedate and lovely a woman listened for hours to her tittle-tattle.

But Hélène made no reply. A wild desire sprang up within her to gaze on Henri, to know what he was doing, to gather the expression of his face. She rose, and looking for him throughout the drawing-room, found him at last. He was engaged in conversation, standing in front of a stout, ghastly-looking man; he was completely at his ease, and on his face, with its agreeable smile, beamed an air of satisfaction. She scanned him for a moment. She felt for him a pity which belittled him somewhat, though all the while she loved him the more with an affection into which entered some vague sense of protection. Her feelings, still in a whirl of confusion, inspired her with the thought that she ought now to repair for him his lost happiness.

"Well, well!" muttered Mademoiselle Aurélie, "it will be pleasant if Madame de Guiraud's sister is going to favour us with a song. It will be the tenth time I have heard her sing the 'Turtle-Doves.' That is her stock song this winter. You know she is separated from her husband. Look at that dark gentleman down there, near the door. They are most intimate together, I believe. Juliette is compelled to have him here—otherwise she wouldn't come!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hélène.

Madame Deberle was bustling about from one group to another, requesting silence for a song from Madame de Guiraud's sister. The drawing-room was now crowded, some thirty ladies being seated in the middle of the floor, whispering and giggling; two, however remained on their feet, speaking very loudly and indulging in eloquent shrugs of their shoulders; while five or six men, completely at their ease, seemed quite at home amongst them, almost buried in the folds of the ladies' trains. A whispered "hush!" ran round the room, the tumult of voices died away, and a lackadaisical stolid look crept into every face. Only the fans were rustled through the heated atmosphere.

Madame de Guiraud's sister sang, but Hélène never listened. Her eyes were now riveted on Malignon, who pretended to be intensely fond of music, and appeared to be ravished by the "Turtle-Doves." Could it be with this puppy of a lad? It was at Trouville, without doubt, that some dangerous prank had been played. The words that Hélène had overheard evidently went to show that Juliette had not yet succumbed, but her fall seemed imminent. Malignon sat in front of her, marking the time by swaying to and fro in the intensity of his delight; Madame Deberle's face beamed in admiring complacency, while the doctor, good-natured and patient, was silently awaiting the last notes of the song before renewing his talk with the stout, ghastly-looking man.

There was a murmur of applause as the singer's voice died away, and two or three exclaimed in tones of transport: "Delightful! magnificent!"

But the dainty Malignon, stretching his arms over the ladies' head-dresses, noiselessly beat his gloved hands together, and warbled out "Brava! brava!" in a voice that rose high above the others.

Very quickly the rapturous plaudits faded; every face relaxed and once more lit up with smiles; a few of the ladies rose, and with the feeling of general relief the buzz of conversation began again. The atmosphere was growing warmer, and as the fans were kept waving, an odour of musk was wafted from the ladies' dresses. At times, amidst the universal chatter, would break out a peal of pearly laughter, or some word spoken in loud tones caused many to turn round. Thrice already had Juliette swept into the smaller drawing-room to pray gentlemen who had escaped thither not to desert the ladies in so rude a fashion. They acceded to her request, but ten minutes afterwards they had again vanished.

"It's intolerable," she muttered with an air of vexation; "not one of them will stay here."

While this interlude was going on, Mademoiselle Aurélie was running over the ladies' names for Hélène's benefit, as this was but her second evening visit to the doctor's house. There were present the most substantial people of Passy, some of them rolling in riches. She leaned towards Hélène and whispered in her ear:

"Yes, it seems all arranged. Madame de Chermette is going to marry her daughter to that tall fair fellow to whom

she has clung for eighteen months. Well, never mind, that will be one mother-in-law who'll love her son-in-law."

She stopped and then burst out in tones of intense surprise :

"Good gracious! there's Madame Levasseur's husband speaking to his wife's lover. I thought Juliette had sworn never to have them here together."

Hélène's looks slowly travelled round the drawing-room. Even amongst such estimable and seemingly honest people as these could there be women who played the wanton? In her provincial austerity she was astounded by the way in which these connections were winked at in Paris. She laughed bitterly within herself over her own painful repugnance when Juliette had shaken hands with her. She was an idiot to be so nicely scrupulous. The wanton played the respectable woman here in a sanctimonious style that was relieved by a dainty coquettishness. Madame Deberle had now seemingly resigned herself into Malignon's hands; she had curled up her little figure, enveloped in its exquisite brown dress, into an easy chair, where she sat listening gleefully to his jokes. Monsieur Deberle passed them at the moment.

"You're surely not quarrelling to-night?" said he questioningly.

"No," replied Juliette with a burst of merriment. "He's talking too much silly nonsense. If you had heard all the nonsense he's been saying!"

There now came more singing, but silence was obtained with greater difficulty. It was a duet from *La Favorita*, trilled forth by young Monsieur Tissot and a lady of ripened charms, whose hair was dressed in childish style. Pauline stood at one of the doors, amidst a crowd of black coats, gazing at the male singer with a look of undisguised admiration, as though she were engaged in examining a work of art.

"What a handsome fellow!" escaped from her lips during a softly played portion of the accompaniment, and so loud were her tones that the whole drawing-room heard the remark.

As the evening progressed, the faces betrayed signs of weariness. Ladies who had occupied the same seat for three hours, looked bored though they knew it not—they were even delighted by the chance that allowed them to be bored here. In the intervals succeeding two songs, which were only half listened to, the murmur of busy tongues rose higher than ever; it seemed as though the deep notes of the piano were still

echoing. Monsieur Letellier told how he had gone to Lyons for the purpose of inspecting some silk ordered, and how he had been greatly impressed by the fact that the Saône did not mingle its waters with those of the Rhône. Monsieur de Guiraud, who was a magistrate, gave vent to some sententious observations on the need of stemming the vice of Paris. There was a circle round a gentleman who was acquainted with a Chinaman, and was relating particulars regarding his friend. In a corner two ladies were exchanging confidences about the failings of their servants. The group of ladies, amongst whom Malignon sat enthroned had been in the meantime busily discussing literature, Madame Tissot declaring Balzac unreadable, with which he agreed so far, remarking only that here and there some very fine passages occurred in Balzac.

"Silence, silence for a little!" exclaimed Pauline. "She's just going to play!"

The lady whose talent as a musician had already been heralded had sat down to the piano. Obeying the injunctions of politeness, every head turned towards her. But with the general stillness the deep voices of men conversing in the small drawing-room could be heard. Madame Deberle was evidently in despair—her vexation mounted higher and higher.

"They are a nuisance," she muttered. "Let them stay there, if they don't want to come in; but, at least, they should keep their tongues quiet!"

She gave the requisite order to Pauline who, intensely delighted, ran to carry out her wishes in the adjacent apartment.

"You must know, gentlemen, that a lady is going to play," she said with the unruffled fearlessness of a maiden, attired in her queenly garb. "You are requested to keep silence."

She spoke very loud, her voice being naturally shrill. She lingered with the men, laughing and quizzing, and the noise grew more pronounced than ever. There was a discussion going on, and she supplied additional matter for argument. In the drawing-room Madame Deberle was in an agony. The guests, moreover, had been sated with music, and no enthusiasm was engendered. The musician resumed her seat, biting her lips, notwithstanding the burst of laudatory compliments which the lady of the house deemed it her duty to lavish on her.

Hélène was pained; Henri did not seem to see her. He had made no attempt to come to her side. At times he smiled

to her from afar. At the beginning of the evening she was relieved by his maintaining a prudent reserve. But on learning the particulars in the lives of the two others, she would fain have wished for something, she knew not what, some display of affection, short of compromising her reputation. Her breast was stirred with confused yearnings and every imaginable evil thought. Did he love her no longer that he remained so indifferent to her presence? Surely he was choosing his own time. Oh! if she could have told him everything! If she could apprise him of the unworthiness of this woman who bore his name! From the piano short merry catches came to her ear, and she sank into a dreamy state. She imagined Henri had driven Juliette from his home, and she lived with him as his wife in some foreign land, the language of which they knew not.

Some one speaking startled her of a sudden.

"Won't you have anything?" asked Pauline.

The drawing-room had emptied, and the crowd of guests were passing into the dining-room to have tea. H  l  ne rose with difficulty. She was dazed; she thought she had dreamt it all—the words she had heard, Juliette's impending disgrace, the honest-looking libertine with face unruffled and aglow with smiles. If it had all been true, Henri would have been at her side and both ere this would have quitted the house.

"Will you take a cup of tea?"

She smiled and thanked Madame Deberle, who had retained a place for her at the table. Plates loaded with pastry and sweetmeats covered the cloth, and towering up gracefully above their meaner surroundings were a huge cake and two of less majestic dimensions. In the confined space the cups of tea were crowded together, separated two and two by narrow grey napkins with long fringes. The ladies only were seated. They were eating little cakes held by the tips of their ungloved fingers, passing to each other the cream-jug and pouring out the cream with dainty gestures. Three or four, however, had sacrificed themselves to attending on the men, who were standing along the sides of the room, and while drinking, were taking every conceivable precaution to ward off any push which might be dealt them unwittingly. A few others lingered in the two drawing-rooms, and waited till the cakes should come to them. This was the hour of Pauline's supreme delight; there was a shrill clamour of noisy tongues, peals of laughter mingled with the ringing clatter of silver-plate, and

the perfume of musk grew more powerful as it blended with the all-pervading fragrance of the tea.

"Kindly pass me some cake," said Mademoiselle Aurélie to Hélène, close to whom she happened to find herself. "These sweetmeats are a fraud!"

She had already emptied two plates. She continued with her mouth full:

"Well, people are beginning to go now. We shall be a little more comfortable."

In truth, several ladies were now leaving, after affectionate clasps of the hands with Madame Deberle. Many of the gentlemen had already wisely vanished, and the room was growing less crowded. Now came the opportunity of the gentlemen to sit down in their turn at the table. Mademoiselle Aurélie, however, did not quit her place, but expressed an inordinate wish for a glass of punch.

"I will get you one," said Hélène, starting to her feet.

"No, no, thank you. You must not inconvenience yourself so much."

For a while Hélène watched Malignon. He had just shaken hands with the doctor, and was now respectfully bidding farewell to Juliette at the doorway. With lustrous face, sparkling eyes, and the old agreeable smile, it might have been imagined by an on-looker that she was receiving some laudatory commonplaces on the evening's success. While Pierre was pouring out the punch at a side-board, near the door, Hélène stepped forward and contrived to slip into concealment behind the curtain that had been drawn aside. She listened.

"I beseech you," said Malignon, "come the day after to-morrow. I shall wait for you till three o'clock."

"You cannot surely be speaking seriously?" questioned Madame Deberle with a laugh. "You must be joking!"

But he spoke with greater determination, and repeated: "I shall wait for you—the day after to-morrow—you know where."

Then she gave hurriedly a whispered reply:

"Very well, the day after to-morrow."

Malignon bowed and made his exit. Madame de Chermette left in company with Madame Tissot. Juliette, in the best of spirits, walked with them into the lobby, and said to the former of these ladies with her most endearing look:

"I shall call on you the day after to-morrow. That day I intend to devote to a round of visits."

Hélène stood riveted to the floor, her face bereft of every vestige of colour. Pierre, in the meanwhile, had poured out the punch, and now handed the glass to her. She grasped it mechanically and carried it to Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was busy making an inroad on the preserved fruits.

"Oh, you are far too good!" exclaimed the old maid. "I should have nodded to Pierre. I'm sure it's a shame not offering punch to ladies. Why, when people are my age——"

She got no further, for she observed the ghastliness of Hélène's face. "You surely are in pain. You must take a drop of punch!"

"Thank you, it's nothing. The room is so oppressive——"

She reeled, and turned aside into the deserted drawing-room, where she dropped into an easy chair. The lamps were shedding a reddish glare; and the wax candles in the chandelier, burnt to their sockets, threatened immediate destruction to the crystal sconces. From the dining-room were wafted to her ears the farewells of the last of the guests. Hélène had lost all thoughts of going; she longed to linger where she was, plunged in thought. So it seemed it was no dream; Juliette would go to this man's rooms the day after to-morrow; she knew the day. Still, again the determination flashed through her—she would have nothing more to do with the matter. Then the thought struck her that she should speak to Juliette and warn her of the consequences of her sin. But the kindly thought chilled her to the heart, and she drove it from her mind as though it were unwarranted. There was a smouldering log crackling in the fireplace, on which her eyes were fixed. The air was still heavy and oppressive with the perfumes from the ladies' dresses.

"What! you are here!" exclaimed Juliette as she entered. "Well, you are good not to run away all at once. Now one can breathe at last!" Hélène was surprised, and made a movement as though about to rise, but Juliette went on: "Wait, wait, you are in no hurry. Henri, give me my scent-bottle."

Three or four persons, intimate friends, lingered behind the others. They sat before the dead fire and chatted with delightful freedom, while the vast room seemed to be drowsy with very weariness. The doors were open, and they saw the smaller drawing-room empty, the dining-room deserted; the rooms were still lit up and plunged in unbroken silence. Henri displayed the tenderest devotion to his wife; he had

just run up to their bed-room and brought down her scent-bottle from which she inhaled while slowly closing her eyes. He asked her if she had not fatigued herself too much. Yes, she felt somewhat tired; but she was delighted—everything had gone off so well. Next she told them that on her reception nights she could not sleep, but tossed about in her bed till six o'clock in the morning. Henri's face broke into a smile, and some quizzing followed. Hélène looked at them, and, as the whole house seemed slowly to be predated with a benumbing drowsiness a shiver ran through her frame.

However, only two guests now remained. Pierre had been sent out in search of a cab. Hélène was the last to go. One o'clock struck. Henri, standing no longer on ceremony, stood on tip-toe and blew out two wax candles in the chandelier that were dangerously heating their crystal sconces. As the lights died one by one, it seemed the hour for sleep, great shadows creeping through the room.

"I prevent your going to bed!" exclaimed Hélène, as she rose suddenly to her feet. "You must turn me out."

A flush of red dyed her face; the blood, racing through her veins, seemed to paralyse her. They walked with her into the hall, but the air there was chilly, and the doctor was somewhat alarmed for his wife's sake, her bosom being exposed.

"Go back; you will do yourself harm. You are too warm."

"Very well, good-bye," said Juliette, embracing Hélène as was her wont in her most endearing moments. "Come and see me oftener."

Henri had taken Hélène's fur cloak in his hand, and held it outstretched to assist her in putting it on. After she had slipped her arms into the sleeves, he drew it up to her neck and arranged it smilingly, while they stood in front of an immense mirror which covered one side of the hall. They were alone, and they gazed at one another in the mirror's depths. Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, wrapped round in her fur cloak, she threw herself backwards into his arms. For three months they had but shaken hands in friendly greeting; they would fain that their love had died. The smile vanished from his face; it underwent a transformation, growing turgid and impassioned. He clasped her madly to his breast, and kissed her on the neck. Her head fell backwards, and she returned his kiss.

CHAPTER II.

DURING the night Hélène had no sleep. She turned from side to side in feverish unrest, and, when a drowsy stupor fell on her senses, the old sorrows would start into new life within her breast. As she dozed and the nightmare increased, one fixed thought tortured her—she was eager to know the place of meeting. The knowledge, she imagined, would be a source of relief. It could not possibly be Malignon's rooms, in the Rue Taitbout, that were often spoken of in the doctor's house. Where, where could it be? Despite herself, her brain throbbed with the thought, and she became oblivious to everything save the craving to unravel the mystery, which made her grow giddy and thrilled her with secret longings.

As day dawned, she flung on her clothes, and astonished herself by saying loudly:

"It is to-morrow!"

With one stocking on, and hands falling helpless to her side, she lapsed into a dreaming fit: they would meet in some furnished lodging in some out-of-the-way room, let by the month. But the idea seemed loathsome to her. Next she conjured up a set of delightful rooms, hung with thick curtains, filled with flowers, while in every grate huge fires emitted a brilliant glare. It was no longer Juliette and Malignon whom she pictured there, but Henri and herself who had sought the joys of a retreat where no noise from the outside world penetrated. She shivered within the folds of her loosely-hanging dressing-gown. Where, where had they agreed to meet?

"Good day, mother darling," exclaimed Jeanne who had awakened in her turn.

As her strength was now returning to her, she had gone back to sleep in her cot in the closet. With bare feet and in her night-dress she ran to throw herself on Hélène's neck, as was her every-day custom, then back again she rushed to curl herself up for a little in her warm bed. This gave her pleasure and a ripple of laughter stole from under the clothes. Once more she uttered her greeting:

"Good day, mother darling!"

Off she ran again, screaming with laughter; she had thrown the sheet over her head, and her cry came, hoarse and muffled, from beneath:

"I've hidden myself—I've hidden myself!"

• But *Hélène* was in no mood for play as on other mornings, and *Jeanne*, dispirited, fell asleep again. The day was still young. About eight o'clock *Rosalie* made her appearance to recount the morning's chapter of accidents. Oh! the roads were awful outside; in going for the milk her shoes had come off in the muddy slush. It was a proper thaw; the air was pleasant, and almost oppressive with the change. Oh, by the way, she had almost forgotten! an old lady had come to see madame the night before.

"Why!" she said, as there came a pull at the bell, "I wager that's she!"

It was mother *Fétu*, but mother *Fétu* transformed, magnificently dressed in a new gown and tartan shawl wrapped round her shoulders. Her voice still retained its plaintive entreaty.

"Dear lady, it's only I, who have taken the liberty of calling to ask you about something!"

Hélène gazed at her, somewhat surprised at the display of finery.

"Are you better, mother *Fétu*?"

"Oh, yes, yes; I feel better, if I may venture to say so. You see I have always something queer in my inside; it knocks me about dreadfully, but still I'm keeping better. Another thing, I've had a stroke of luck; it was a surprise, because it came about, you see—A gentleman has made me his housekeeper—and oh! it's such a story!"

Her words came slowly, and the little piercing eyes glittered in her face, furrowed by a thousand wrinkles. She seemed to be awaiting cross-examination by *Hélène*, who, however, sat close to the fire which *Rosalie* had just lit, and paid her but scant attention, engrossed in her own thoughts and with a look of pain on her features.

"What do you want to ask me?" she said to mother *Fétu*.

The old lady made no immediate reply. She bent her scrutiny on the room, on its rosewood furniture and blue velvet hangings. Then, with the humble and fawning accents of the beggar, she muttered:

"Pardon me, madame, you have everything so nice here,

My gentleman has a room like this, but it's all in red. Oh! such a story I've to tell you! Just picture to yourself a young man of good position who has taken rooms in our house. Of course, that isn't much of itself, but still our first and second floors are very nice. Then, it's so quiet, too! There's no traffic; you could imagine yourself in the country. The workmen have been in the house a whole fortnight; they have made such a jewel of his room!"

She paused here, observing that H  l  ne's attention was being aroused.

"It's for his work," she began again still more drawlingly; "he says it's for his work. We have no door-keeper, you know, and that pleases him. Oh! my gentleman doesn't like door-keepers, and he is quite right, too!"

Once more she came to a halt, as though suddenly inspired with an idea.

"Why, wait a minute, you must know him—of course you must. He frequents one of your lady friends!"

"Ah!" exclaimed H  l  ne, with colourless face.

"Yes, to be sure, the lady who lives close by—she who used to go with you to church. She came the other day."

Mother F  tu's eyes contracted, and from under the lids she took note of her benefactress's emotion. But H  l  ne strove to ask one question in tones that would not betray her agitation:

"Did she go up to his rooms?"

"No, she altered her mind; perhaps she had forgotten something. I was at the door. She asked for Monsieur Vincent, and then sank back in her cab again, calling to the driver to return home as it was too late. Oh! she's such a lively, nice, and respectable lady. The gracious God doesn't send many such into the world. Why, with the exception of yourself she's the best—well, well, may Heaven bless you all!"

So she went on, droning away at a host of empty phrases with the pious glibness of one perpetually telling her beads. But the twitching of the myriad wrinkles of her face showed that her mind was still working dully, and soon she flushed with intense satisfaction.

"Ah!" she began again inconsequently, "how I should like to have a pair of good shoes! My gentleman has been so very good, I can't ask him for any more. You see I'm dressed; still, I must get a pair of good shoes. Look at those I have; they are all holes, and when the weather is very nasty, they

just give rise to illness afterwards. Yes, I was down with stomach-ache yesterday; I was writhing all the afternoon, and if I had a pair of good shoes——”

“I’ll bring you a pair, mother Fétu,” said Hélène, waving her towards the door.

The old lady retired backwards, with profuse curtsying and thanks, but Hélène intervened with a question:

“At what hour are you alone?”

“My gentleman is never there after six o’clock,” she answered. “But don’t give yourself the trouble; I’ll come myself, and get them from your door-keeper. But you can do as you please. You are an angel from heaven. The gracious God will requite you for all your goodness!”

On the stair-head she could be heard giving vent to her feelings. Hélène sat a long time plunged in a stupor that the information, brought by this woman with such fortuitous seasonableness, served to create in her mind. Now she knew the place of assignation. It was a room, with rose-red decorations, in the old tumble-down house! She pictured once more to herself the staircase oozing with damp, the brown doors on each flat, grimy with the touch of greasy hands, and all the wretchedness which stirred her heart to pity when she had gone the winter before to visit mother Fétu; she strove to conjure up this rose-red chamber in the midst of such repulsive, poverty-stricken surroundings. She was sitting absorbed in her reverie when two tiny warm hands were placed over her eyes, inflamed with the want of sleep, and a laughing voice asked:

“Who is it? who is it?”

It was Jeanne who had slipped into her clothes without assistance. Mother Fétu’s voice had wakened her up; and perceiving that the closet-door had been shut, she had finished dressing with the utmost speed to give her mother a surprise.

“Who is it? who is it?” she demanded again, convulsed more and more with laughter.

She turned to Rosalie, who entered at the moment with the breakfast.

“You know, don’t you speak. Nobody is asking you any questions.”

“Be quiet, you little madcap!” exclaimed Hélène. “I suppose it’s you!”

The child slipped on to her mother’s lap, where she threw herself backwards and swung to and fro, delighted that she

had been found out. She went on chattering with an air of conviction:

"My word! it might have been any other little girl! Eh? perhaps some little girl who had brought you a letter of invitation to dine with her mamma. And she would have covered your eyes, too!"

"Don't be silly," exclaimed *Hélène*, as she lifted her on to her feet. "What are you talking about? *Rosalie*, let us have breakfast."

The maid's eyes, however, were riveted on the child, and she commented upon her little mistress being so oddly dressed. To tell the truth, so great was *Jeanne's* haste that she had not put on her shoes. She had drawn on a short flannel petticoat which allowed a glimpse of her chemise. Her swan's-down morning-jacket was flying loose, and she stood as scantily clad as some street urchin, the undeveloped bosom of exquisite delicacy displayed to the eye, with its maze of eloquent lines circling round her breasts that were yet scarcely tipped with red. With her hair streaming behind her, stamping about in her stockings awry on her feet, she looked charming, clad all in white like some child of fairyland.

She cast down her eyes to see herself, and immediately burst into laughter.

"Look, look, mamma, I'm delightful! Say, won't you let me be as I am? It is so nice!"

Hélène, repressing a gesture of impatience, asked as was her wont every morning:

"Are you washed?"

"Oh, mamma!" pleaded the child, her joy suddenly dashed.

"Oh, mamma! it's raining; it's too nasty!"

"Then, you'll have no breakfast. Wash her, *Rosalie*."

She usually took this office upon herself, but this morning her heart was in a tumult, and she drew nearer to the fire, shivering though the weather was balmy. *Rosalie* had lifted close to the fireplace the small table, over which she had stretched a napkin; next two white china bowls had been placed on it. The coffee and milk simmered away before the fire in a silver pot, which had been a gift from *Monsieur Rambaud*. At this early hour the room, in its disorder, with a drowsy air lingering about it and still littered with dress, seemed delightfully homely.

"Mamma, mamma!" screamed *Jeanne* from the depths of

the closet, "she's rubbing me too hard; I'm burning. Oh, dear! how awfully cold!"

Hélène, with eyes fixed on the coffee-pot, remained engrossed in thought. She desired to know everything, so she would go. To think of this mysterious place of assignation in so squalid a nook of Paris was an ever-present pain and vexation. She judged such taste hateful, but in it she identified Malignon's playful genius with its leaning towards romance, prompting him to imitate after a less costly fashion the notorious houses of the Regency. Still, despite her disgust, she was burnt up with a fearful craving; she was fascinated by her thoughts, and her senses mirrored the stillness and twilight that must hold sway in the rose-red room.

"Mademoiselle," declared Rosalie, "if you don't let me finish with you, I shall call madame."

"Stop, stop: you are putting soap in my eyes," answered Jeanne, whose voice was hoarse with sobs. "Leave me alone; I've had enough of it. The ears can wait till to-morrow."

But the splashing of water went on, and the squeezing of the sponge into the basin could be heard. There was a clamour and a struggle; the child was sobbing, but almost immediately she made her appearance, shouting gaily:

"It's over now; it's over now!"

Her hair was still glistening with wet, and she shook herself, her face glowing with the rubbing it had received and exhaling a fresh and grateful smell. In her struggle to get free, her jacket had slipped from her shoulders, her petticoat had become loosened, and her stockings had tumbled down, displaying her bare legs. At the moment, according to Rosalie, mademoiselle was like an infant Jesus. Jeanne, however, was very proud over her cleaning; she had no wish to be dressed.

"Look at me a little, mamma; look at my hands, and my neck, and my ears. Oh! you must let me warm myself; I am so comfortable. You don't say anything; surely I've deserved my breakfast to-day."

She had curled herself before the fire in her own little easy-chair. The next proceeding was the pouring out of the coffee by Rosalie. Jeanne took her bowl on her lap, and gravely soaked her toast in its contents with all the airs of a grown-up person. Hélène had always forbidden her eating in this way, but she remained plunged in thought. She did not touch her bread, and was satisfied with drinking her coffee. As the last

of the coffee vanished, Jeanne was stung with remorse. Her heart filled, she put aside her bowl, and gazing on her mother's pale face, threw herself on her neck.

"Mamma, are you ill now? I haven't vexed you, have I? —say."

"No, no, my darling, quite the contrary; you're very good," murmured Hélène as she embraced her. "I'm only a little wearied; I haven't slept very well. Go on playing; don't be uneasy."

The thought occurred to her that the day would drag terribly. What would she do ere night came? For some time past she had abandoned her needlework; sewing had become a terrible weariness. For hours she lingered in her seat, her hands idle, almost suffocating in her room, and craving to go out into the open-air for breath, yet never stirring. It was this room which made her ill; she hated it, in angry exasperation over the two years she had spent within its walls; its blue velvet and the vast panorama of the mighty city disgusted her, and her thoughts dwelt on a lodging in some busy street, the uproar of which would have deafened her. Good heavens! how leaden-winged were the hours! She snatched up a book, but the ineradicable idea that engrossed her mind continually conjured up the same visions between her eyes and the page of print.

In the meantime Rosalie had been busily setting the room in order; Jeanne's hair had been brushed and she was dressed. While her mother sat at the window, striving to read, the child, who was in one of her moods of obstreperous gaiety, commenced a grand game in the midst of all the newly arranged furniture. She was all alone; but this gave her no discomfort; she herself represented three or four persons with excruciatingly funny earnestness and gravity. At first she played the lady going on a visit. She vanished into the dining-room, and returned bowing and smiling, her head nodding this way and that in the most coquettish style.

"Good day, madame! How are you, madame? How long it is since I've seen you! A marvellously long time, to be sure! Dear me, I've been so ill, madame! Yes; I've had the cholera: it's very nasty. Oh! it doesn't show; no, no, it makes you look younger, on my word of honour. And your children, madame? Oh! I've had three since last summer!"

So she rattled on, never ceasing her curtseying to the round

table, which doubtless represented the lady she was visiting. Next she ventured close to the chairs, and maintained with them a general conversation which lasted for about an hour, her talk abounding with a host of the most extraordinary phrases.

"Don't be silly," said her mother at intervals, when the chatter put her out of patience.

"But, mamma, I'm paying my friend a visit. She's speaking to me, and I must answer her. At tea nobody should put the cakes in their pockets, should they?"

She turned and began again:

"Good-bye, madame; your tea was delicious. Remember me most kindly to your husband."

Then in a moment it was something else. She was going out shopping in her carriage, and got astride of a chair like a boy.

"Jean, not so quick; I'm afraid. Stop! stop! here is the milliner's! Mademoiselle, how much is this bonnet? Three hundred francs; that isn't dear. But it isn't pretty. I should like it with a bird on it—a big bird like that! Come, Jean, drive me to the grocer's. Have you no honey? Yes, madame, here is some. Oh, how nice it is! I don't want any of it; give me a penn'orth of sugar. Oh! Jean, see, take care! There's a carriage got a spill! Mr. Policeman, it was the cart which drove against us. You're not hurt, madame, are you? No, sir, not in the least. Jean, Jean! home now. Gee-up! gee-up! Wait a minute; I must order some chemises. Three dozen chemises for madame. I want boots, too, and stays. Gee-up! gee-up! Good gracious, you can never reach the end of what you want!"

She fanned herself, enacting the lady who has returned home and is finding fault with her servants. She never remained quiet for a moment; she was in a feverish ecstasy, all sorts of whimsical ideas were continually bubbling up, all the life she knew surged up in her little brain and was reproduced piecemeal. Morning and afternoon she moved about, dancing and chattering; when she grew tired, a foot-stool or parasol discovered in a corner, some trumpery lying on the ground, sufficed to launch her into some new game in which her effervescing imagination found fresh outlet. Persons, places, and incidents were all of her own creation, and she had as much amusement as though twelve children of her own age had been beside her.

But evening came at last. It was on the stroke of six. Hélène, rousing herself from the troubled stupor in which she had spent the afternoon, hurriedly threw a shawl over her shoulders.

"Are you going out, mamma?" asked Jeanne in her surprise.

"Yes, my darling, just for a walk close by. I won't be long; be good."

Outside it was still thawing. The causeway was deep in mud. In the Rue de Passy, Hélène entered a boot shop, to which she had taken mother Féty on a previous occasion. Then she returned along the Rue Raynouard. The sky was grey, and from the pavement a mist was rising. The road lay dimly before her, deserted and uninviting, though the hour was yet early, the few gas-lamps looking in the damp haze like yellow spots. She quickened her steps, keeping close to the houses and shrinking from sight as though she were on the way to keep an assignation. But as she turned hastily into the Passage des Eaux, she halted beneath the archway, her heart giving way to genuine terror. The passage opened beneath her feet like some black gulf. The bottom was invisible; the only thing she could see in the black tunnel was the uncertain glimmer of the one lamp which lighted it. In the end her mind was made up; she grasped the iron railing to prevent her slipping. Feeling her way with the tip of her boot, she landed successively on the broad steps. The walls, right and left, grew closer, seemingly endless in the night, while the naked branches of the trees overhead cast vague shadows of gigantic arms with shrivelled outstretched hands. She trembled as she thought how one of the garden doors might open and a man spring upon her. There were no passers-by, and she stepped down as quickly as possible. Suddenly from out the darkness issued a shadow; the shadow coughed and she was frozen with fear; but it was only an old woman creeping up with difficulty. Once more reassured, she lifted up with greater care her dress which had been trailing in the mud. So thick was the coating of mud on the steps that her boots were constantly sticking fast. At the bottom she turned aside instinctively. From the branches the rain-drops dripped fast into the passage, and the lamp glimmered like that of some miner, hooked to the side of a pit down the walls of which the water was oozing dangerously.

Hélène mounted straight to the attic, at the top of the huge house abutting on the Passage, whither so often she had gone. But nothing stirred, though she rapped loudly. In considerable perplexity she descended the stairs again. Mother Fétu was doubtless in the rooms on the first floor, where, however, Hélène dared not show herself. She remained five minutes in the entry, which was lighted by a petroleum lamp. Again she ascended the stairs, hesitatingly gazing at each doorway, and was on the point of going away, when the old woman bent down over the balusters.

"What! it's you on the stairs, my good lady!" she exclaimed. "Come in, and don't catch cold out there. Oh! it is a vile place—enough to give one their death!"

"No, thank you," said Hélène; "I've brought you your pair of shoes, mother Fétu."

She looked at the door which mother Fétu had left open behind her. She caught a glimpse of a warm fire.

"I'm all alone, I assure you," declared mother Fétu. "Come in. This is the kitchen here. Ah, yes! you're not proud with us poor folks—that's a fact!"

Despite the repugnance which shame at the purpose of her coming created within her, Hélène followed her.

"God in Heaven! how can I thank you! Oh, what lovely shoes! Wait and I'll put them on. There's my whole foot in; it fits me like a glove. Bless the day! I can walk with that at least, and not be afraid of the rain. Oh! my good lady, you are my preserver; you've given me ten more years of life. No, no, it's no flattery; it's what I think, as true as there's a lamp shining on us. No, no, I don't flatter!"

She melted into tears as she spoke, and grasping Hélène's hands kissed them. In a stew-pan some wine was being heated, and on the table, near the lamp, stood a half-empty bottle of Bordeaux with its tapering neck. The only other things placed there were four dishes, a glass, two saucepans, and a pot. It could be seen that mother Fétu had taken up her quarters in the bachelor's kitchen, and that the fires had been lit for her sake only. Seeing Hélène's glance turning towards the stew-pan, she coughed, her face assuming a dolorous expression.

"It grips me in the stomach," she groaned. "Oh! it's useless for the doctor to speak; I must have a worm in my inside. And then, a drop of wine relieves me so. I'm greatly afflicted, my good lady. I wouldn't have a soul suffer from my

trouble; it's too dreadful. In fact I'm nursing myself a little now; and when one is past their prime, isn't it fair that they should do so? I have been so lucky in falling in with so agreeable a gentleman. May Heaven bless him!"

With this outburst she dropped two great lumps of sugar into her wine. She seemed more corpulent than ever, and the little eyes almost vanished from her fat face. There was a devout thankfulness in her slow and dignified movements. Her life's ambition was now evidently satisfied. For this she had been born. While she was crushing the sugar in her glass Hélène caught a glimpse of some tit-bits secreted at the bottom of a cupboard—a jar of preserves, a bag of biscuits, and even some cigars, all doubtless pilfered from the gentleman lodger.

"Well, good-bye, mother Fétu, I'm going away," she exclaimed.

The old lady, however, pushed the saucepan to one side of the fire, and hastened to say:

"Wait a minute; this is far too warm, and I'll drink it by-and-by. No, no; don't go out that way. I must apologise for having received you in the kitchen. Let us go round the rooms."

She caught up a lamp, and darted into a narrow lobby. Hélène, with beating heart, followed close behind. The lobby, with walls dilapidated and smoky, was reeking with damp. A door was thrown open, and she emerged on a thick carpet. Mother Fétu had already advanced into a room that was plunged in darkness and silence.

"Well?" she asked, as she lifted up the lamp; "it's very nice, isn't it?"

There were two rooms, each of them square, communicating with one another by folding-doors which had been removed, and in their place a curtain had been substituted. Both were hung with cretonne with rose-tinted designs in relief after the Louis XV style, picturing chubby-cheeked cupids disporting amongst garlands of flowers. In the first apartment there was a round table, two lounges, and some easy chairs; and in the second, which was somewhat smaller, an immense bed took up the whole space. Mother Fétu drew attention to a lamp which swung from the ceiling by gilt chains. To her this lamp was the veritable acme of luxury, and she proceeded to go into discursive explanations.

"You can't imagine what a funny fellow he is. He lights

it in mid-day, and stays here, smoking a cigar and gazing into vacancy. But it amuses my gentleman, it seems. Well, it doesn't matter; he must spend his money somehow!"

Hélène went through the rooms in silence. They seemed to her in bad taste. There was too much pink everywhere, the bed was too large, the furniture too new. Seduction was here foreshadowed with offensive ostentatiousness. A milliner girl would speedily have yielded; but still confused sensations began gradually to tingle through Hélène's frame while the old woman rambled on with many winks:

"He calls himself Monsieur Vincent. Of course, it's all the same to me. As long as he pays, my gentleman——"

"Well, good-bye, mother Fétu," said Hélène in whose throat was gathering a feeling of suffocation.

She was burning to go away. She opened a door, and found herself threading three small rooms, the bareness and dirt of which were repulsive. The paper hung in tatters from the walls, the ceilings were grimy, and the old plaster littered the broken floors. The whole place was pervaded by a smell originating from squalor of ancient standing.

"Not that way! not that way!" screamed mother Fétu. "That door is generally shut. These are other rooms which they haven't attempted to clean. My word! it's cost him quite enough already! Yes indeed, these aren't nearly so nice! Come this way, my good lady, come this way!"

On Hélène's return to the room with the rose hangings, she stopped to kiss her hand once more.

"You see I'm not ungrateful! I shall never forget the shoes. How they suit me and how cosy they are! Why, I could walk half a dozen miles with them. For what can I pray to Heaven that you might be requited? Gracious God, grant that she may be the happiest of women! You who read my heart, you know what I wish for her! May it come to pass in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!" A holy enthusiasm had suddenly welled up within her; she repeated the sign of the cross over and over again; and bowed the knee in the direction of the great bed and the crystal lamp. This done, she opened the door leading on to the stair-head and whispered in a changed voice into Hélène's ear:

"Whenever you like, just knock at the kitchen door; I'm always there!"

Hélène was dazed; she cast glances behind her as though

she were leaving a place of dubious repute. She walked down the staircase, re-ascended the Passage des Eaux, and regained the Rue Vineuse, without consciousness of the ground she was covering. The old woman's last words to her still rang startlingly in her ears. In truth, no; never again would she set foot in that house, never again would she bear her charity there! What reason could she have for rapping at the kitchen door? At the moment she was satisfied; she had seen what was to be seen. She was filled with scorn against herself—against everybody. How disgraceful to have gone there! The two rooms, hung with cretonne, recurred ceaselessly to her vision; in one glance she had compassed the minutest details, even to the position of the chairs and the folds of the bed-curtains. But simultaneously sprang up before her eyes the three other small rooms, filthy, bare, and deserted—a very plague-spot; and the pictures—the conjuring up of the mouldy walls hidden by the chubby-cheeked cupids—thrilled her with no less anger than disgust.

"Well, madame," exclaimed Rosalie, who was awaiting her return on the staircase, "the dinner will be nice. Dear, oh dear! it's been burning for half an hour!"

At table Jeanne plagued her mother with questions. Where had she been? what had she been about? But as the answers she received were somewhat curt, she started gaily to amuse herself in giving a little dinner. Near her, her doll was perched on a chair. On hospitable thoughts intent, she placed before it half of her dessert.

"Now, mademoiselle, you must eat like a lady. See, wipe your mouth. Oh, the dirty little thing! She doesn't even know how to use her napkin! There, you're all nice. See, here is a biscuit. What do you say? You want some preserve on it. Well, I should think it is better as it is! Let me pare you a quarter of this apple!"

She placed the doll's portion on her chair. But when she had emptied her own plate she took up the dainties one after the other and devoured them, speaking all the time in the person of the doll.

"Well, that's delightful! I've never eaten such tasty preserve! Where did you get this preserve, madame? I shall tell my husband to purchase a jar of it. Did you pluck these juicy apples in your garden, madame?"

She fell asleep as she played, and stumbled into the bedroom

with the doll in her arms. She had given herself no rest since morning. Her little legs could no longer sustain her—she was helpless and wearied to death. A ripple of laughter burst over her face even in sleep; in her dreams she must have been continuing her play. All limp and motionless she was put to bed by her mother, to join with the angels in some all-engrossing game in the Land of Nod.

At last Hélène was alone in her room. With closed doors she spent a miserable evening beside the dead fire. She lapsed into a state of torpor; thoughts that found no tongue were stirring within the innermost recesses of her heart. She was transformed to a guilty and pleasure-loving woman whom she recognised not, but who spoke in tyrannical tones that could not be gainsaid. With the advent of midnight she wearily sought her couch; but in bed her torture passed endurance. She dozed, she tossed from side to side as though a fire were beneath her. She was haunted by visions that her sleeplessness evolved in increasing numbers. Next, an idea took root in her brain. In vain she strove to banish it; the idea clung to her, surged up within her bosom, and assumed complete sway over her. About two o'clock she rose with fixed intent, her face rigid and pallid as though she were walking in her sleep. Having lit the lamp she wrote a letter in a disguised hand; it was a vague denunciation, a note of three lines praying Doctor Deberle to visit on the same day such a place at such an hour; there was no explanation, no signature. She sealed the envelope and dropped the letter into the pocket of her dress which had been thrown over an arm-chair. Then returning to bed, she fell in a moment into a sleep that knew no break—so breathless and leaden was it.

CHAPTER III.

IT was nearly nine o'clock the next morning before Rosalie was allowed to prepare the coffee. Hélène had risen late; she was weary and pale with the nightmare that had broken her rest. She rummaged in the pocket of her dress, she touched the letter, and returning it to its place sat down at the table without opening her lips. Jeanne, too, was suffering from headache, as her pale and troubled face proved. To-day she quitted her bed with regret, without any heart to indulge in play. There was a sooty colour in the sky and a dim light threw the room into darkness, while from time to time sudden downpours of rain beat against the windows.

"Mademoiselle isn't very cheerful," said Rosalie, who monopolised the conversation. "She can't keep merry for two days running. That's the worst of dancing about too much yesterday!"

"Do you feel ill, Jeanne?" asked Hélène.

"No, mamma," answered the child. "It's only the nasty weather."

Hélène lapsed once more into silence. She finished her coffee and sat in her chair, plunged in thought, with her eyes riveted on the glowing coals. She rose hurriedly, inspired with the idea that it was her duty to speak to Juliette and bid her abandon the afternoon assignation. But how? She could not say; still the necessity of the step occurred to her, and from her brain everything was banished save the determination to make the attempt—a determination that would not be gainsaid and that possessed her. Ten o'clock struck; she began to dress. Jeanne gazed at her when she took up her bonnet; she clasped her little hands, as though she were stricken with cold, while over her face crept a pained look. It was her wont to take umbrage should her mother go out; she was unwilling to quit her side and craved to go with her everywhere.

"Rosalie," said Hélène, "be quick and finish the room. Don't go out. I'll be back shortly."

She stooped down and gave Jeanne a hasty kiss, not noticing her vexation. The moment she had gone, a sob broke from the child, who had hitherto summoned all her dignity to her aid to restrain her emotion.

"Oh, mademoiselle, how naughty!" exclaimed the maid by way of consolation. "Gracious powers! no one will rob you of your mamma. You must allow her to see after her affairs. You can't always be hanging on to her skirts!"

Meanwhile Hélène had turned the corner of the Rue Vineuse, keeping close to the wall as a protection against the rain. Pierre opened the door; but at sight of her he seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Is Madame Deberle at home?"

"Yes, madame; but I don't know whether——"

Hélène, in the character of a family friend, pushed past him towards the drawing-room, but the servant took the liberty of stopping her.

"Wait, madame, I'll go and see."

He slipped into the room, opening the door as little as he could, and soon Juliette's voice could be heard speaking with irritation.

"What! you've allowed some one in! Why, I forbade it peremptorily; it's something incredible—I can't be left quiet for an instant."

Hélène pushed open the door, strong in her resolve to do that which she imagined her duty pointed to.

"Oh, it's you!" said Juliette, as she caught sight of her. "I didn't catch who it was!"

The look of annoyance, however, did not fade from her face, and it was evident the visit was ill-timed.

"Do I disturb you?" asked Hélène.

"Not at all, not at all," she answered. "You'll understand in a moment. We have been getting up a surprise. We are rehearsing 'Caprice' to play it on one of my Wednesdays. We had hit upon this forenoon on the certain chance that nobody could have any inkling of it. But you'll stay now; you will have to keep silence about it, that's all."

Then clapping her hands and addressing herself to Madame Berthier who was standing in the middle of the drawing-room, she began once more, without devoting any further attention to Hélène:

"Come, come; we must get on. You don't give sufficient

point to the sentence—'To make a purse unknown to one's husband would seem in the eyes of most people a little more than romantic!' Say that once more."

Hélène, who was intensely surprised at finding her engaged in this way, had sat down in the background. The chairs and tables had been pushed against the wall, the carpet being thus left clear. Madame Berthier, whose complexion was delicately fair, dragged through her soliloquy, her eyes fixed on the ceiling in the effort to recall the words to mind; while the robust Madame de Guiraud, a beautiful brunette, who had assumed the character of Madame de Léry, reclined in an arm-chair awaiting the cue for her entry. The ladies, in their unpretentious morning dresses, had doffed neither bonnets nor gloves. Seated in front of them, with a volume of Musset in her hand, was Juliette with excited looks, muffled up in a huge dressing-gown of white cashmere, and assuming the determined airs of the stage manager busily tutoring his actors in the use of their vocal organs and the introduction of by-play. The day being dull, the small curtains of embroidered tulle were tucked up and swung across the knobs of the window-fastenings, and the depths of the garden could be seen dripping with rain.

"You don't display sufficient emotion," criticised Juliette. "Put a little more meaning into it; every word ought to tell. Begin again—I'm going, my dear little purse, to finish your toilette!"

"I shall be an awful failure," said Madame Berthier, languidly. "Why don't you play the part instead of me? You would make a delicious Mathilde!"

"I! Oh, no! In the first place, one must be fair. Besides, I'm a very good teacher, but a bad pupil. So let us get on, let us get on!"

Hélène sat still in her corner, Madame Berthier, engrossed in her part, had not even turned round. Madame de Guiraud had honoured her with a slight nod. She recognised that she was in the way, and that she ought to have declined sitting down. Her staying was due not so much to the sense of a duty to be fulfilled, as to a strange feeling, which stirred vaguely within her heart's depths, and which had thrilled her in times past here. The unkindly greeting Juliette had bestowed on her pained her. Her friendships were usually capricious; she worshipped people for three months, threw herself on their

necks, and seemed to live for them alone; then, one morning, without affording any explanation, she appeared to lose all consciousness of their acquaintance. Without doubt she was yielding obedience, in this as in everything, to the fashionable craze of loving people who were beloved by her own circle. These sudden outbursts of affection were so many wounds to H  l  ne, for her generous and undemonstrative heart had its ideal in infinity. She often left the Deberles plunged in sadness, and borne down by despair when she thought of the instability of the structure which could be reared on the basis of human affections. But on this occasion, as this crisis in her life was being enacted, the thought brought her still keener pain.

"We'll skip the scene with Chavigny," said Juliette. "He won't be here this morning. Let us see Madame de L  ry's entrance. Now, now, Madame de Guiraud, watch your cue." Then she read from her book:

"Just imagine my showing him this purse."

"Oh, it's exceedingly pretty. Let me look at it," Madame de Guiraud began, as she rose with a silly expression on her face.

When the servant opened the door to her, H  l  ne had pictured a scene entirely different from this. She had imagined she would find Juliette displaying excessive nervousness, with pallid cheeks, shivering at the very thought of the assignation, hesitating and yet allured. She saw herself imploring her to reflect, till the young woman, choked with her sobs, threw herself into her arms. Then they would have mingled their tears together, and H  l  ne would have quitted her with the thought that Henri was henceforward lost to her, but that she had secured his happiness. But she had broken in on this rehearsal, which was wholly unintelligible to her; she could see Juliette with unruffled features, doubtless after having spent a good night's rest, with her thoughts sufficiently unoccupied to allow of the animated discussion on Madame Berthier's by-play, and troubling herself not the least in the world about what she would do in the afternoon. This indifference and frivolity chilled H  l  ne, who had come hither burnt up with her passion.

A longing to speak fell on her. At a venture she asked:

"Who will play the part of Chavigny?"

"Malignon," answered Juliette, turning round with an air of

astonishment. "He played Chavigny all last winter. It's a nuisance he can't come to the rehearsals. Listen, ladies, I'm going to read Chavigny's part. Unless that's done, we'll never get through."

Forthwith she proceeded with her assumption of the man's part, her voice deepening unconsciously, and her manner aping the hero in harmony with the situation. Madame Berthier renewed her warbling tones, and Madame de Guiraud gave herself infinite pains in the attempt to be lively and intelligent. Pierre came in to throw more wood on the fire; and gazed slyly around him at the ladies, who amused him immensely.

Hélène, still fixed in her resolve, despite some heart-shrinking, attempted to take Juliette aside.

"Only a minute. I've something to say to you."

"Oh, impossible, my dear! You see how much I'm engaged. To-morrow, if you have the time,"

Hélène said no more. The young woman's unconcerned tone displeased her. She was aflame with anger as she observed her undisturbed looks, when she herself had endured such intense agony since the night before. At one moment she was on the point of rising and letting things take their course. She was exceedingly foolish in wishing to save this woman; the nightmare that had been on her began once more; her hand had slid into her pocket, and the letter was clasped in her feverish grasp. Why should she have any care for the happiness of others, when they had no care for her and were undisturbed with her sorrows?

"Oh! capital, capital," exclaimed Juliette of a sudden.

Madame Berthier's head was reclining on Madame de Guiraud's shoulder, and she was declaring through her sobs:

"I am sure that he loves her; I am sure of it!"

"Your success will be immense," said Juliette. "Say it once more—'I am sure that he loves her; I am sure of it.' Leave your head as it is. You're divine. Now, Madame de Guiraud."

"No, no, my child, it cannot be; it is a caprice, a fancy," recited the stout lady.

"Perfect! but oh, the scene is lengthy, isn't it? Let us take a rest for a little. We must have that incident in proper working order."

Then all three plunged into a discussion regarding the arrangement of the drawing-room. The dining-room door, to

the left, would serve for entrances and exits: to the right an easy-chair could be placed, a couch at the other end, and the table could be pushed close to the fire-place. Hélène had risen and followed them about, as though she had developed an interest in the scenic arrangement. She had abandoned her idea of eliciting an explanation; she merely wished to make a last effort towards preventing Juliette's going to the place of meeting.

"I intended asking you," she said to her, "if this isn't the day you are going to pay Madame de Chermette a visit?"

"Yes, this afternoon."

"Then, if you'll allow me, I'll come for you; it's such a long time since I promised to go and see her."

Juliette betrayed signs of embarrassment for a moment. But she regained her self-possession immediately.

"Of course, I should be very happy. Only, I have so many things to see after; I must do some shopping first, and I have no idea when I shall be able to get to Madame de Chermette's."

"That doesn't matter," said Hélène; "it will enable me to have a walk."

"Listen, I can speak to you candidly. Well, you must not press me. You would be in my way. Let it be some other Monday."

This was said without a trace of emotion, so flatly and with so quiet a smile that Hélène was dumbfounded and uttered not another syllable. She was constrained to lend some assistance to Juliette, who suddenly decided to bring the table close to the fire-place. Then she drew back and the rehearsal began once more. When the scene was over, Madame de Guiraud had a soliloquy and repeated with considerable intensity the two sentences:

"But what a treacherous gulf is the heart of man! In truth, we are worth more than they!"

What ought she to do now? Within Hélène's breast the question raised a storm that stirred her only to vague thoughts of silence. She experienced an irresistible desire to be revenged on Juliette with her tranquil beauty, as if her self-possession were an insult directed against her own fevered heart. She pictured her fall, to gain some idea whether she could always retain this unruffled exterior and unconcern. She overwhelmed herself with scorn as she recalled her delicacy and scruples. Twenty times she should have said to Henri: "I love you, take

me; let us go away together." Could she have done so without the most intense emotion? Could she have displayed the unperplexed callousness of this woman, who, three hours before her first assignation, was rehearsing a comedy in her own home? Even at this moment she trembled more than Juliette; what maddened her was the consciousness of her passion amidst the quiet cheerfulness of this drawing-room; she was terrified lest she should burst out into some angry speech. Was this her cowardliness?

At the moment a door opened, and Henri's voice reached her ear:

"Do not disturb yourselves. I'm only passing."

The rehearsal was drawing to a close. Juliette, who was still reading Chavigny's part, had just caught hold of Madame de Guiraud's hand.

"'Ernestine, I adore you!'" she exclaimed in an outburst of passionate earnestness.

"'Then Madame de Blainville is no longer beloved by you?'" demanded Madame de Guiraud.

But so long as her husband was present Juliette declined to proceed. There was no need of the men knowing anything about it. The doctor showed himself most polite to the ladies; he complimented them and predicted an immense success. With black gloves on and his face clean-shaven he was about to begin his round of visits. On his entry he had merely greeted Hélène with a slight bow. At the Comédie Française he had seen some very great actress in the character of Madame de Léry, and he acquainted Madame de Guiraud with some of the action in the scene.

"At the moment when Chavigny is going to throw himself at your feet, you fling the purse into the fire. Dispassionately, you know, without anger, as might be expected from a woman who plays with love."

"All right, leave us alone," said Juliette. "We know all about that."

At last, when they heard the slamming of his study-door, she began once more with the incident.

"'Ernestine, I adore you!'"

Henri, previous to his leaving the room, had saluted Hélène with the same slight bow. She had sat dumb, awaiting some catastrophe. The sudden appearance of the husband seemed to her ominous; but when he had gone, his courtesy and evident

blindness proved to her the absurdity of the situation. This idiotic comedy took up his attention too, forsooth! And there was no loving fire within his eye as he looked at her sitting there! The whole house had become hateful and repellent to her. Here was a downfall; there was nothing to detain her, for she abhorred Henri as much as Juliette. Within her pocket she had crumpled up the letter in her grasp. She murmured "Good-bye for the present," and quitted the house, with swimming brain, the furniture seeming to be dancing around her. Some words uttered by Madame de Guiraud remained ringing long in her ears:

"Adieu. You will perhaps think badly of me to-day, but you will have some kindly feeling for me to-morrow, and believe me that is much better than a caprice."

When Hélène had shut the door and reached the pavement, she drew the letter violently from her pocket, as if by mechanical agency, and dropped it into the box. Next, she stood still for a few seconds dazed, with her eyes glaring at the narrow brass covering which had fallen back again in its place.

"It is done," she exclaimed in a whisper.

Once more she conjured up the two rooms hung with pink cretonne, the easy chairs, the huge bed. Malignon and Juliette were there together; all of a sudden the wall was riven open, and the husband entered. She was conscious of no more, and a great calm fell on her heart. Instinctively she looked around to see if any one had observed her dropping in the letter. The street was empty. She turned the corner and returned to her own house.

"Have you been good, my darling?" she asked as she kissed Jeanne.

The child, seated on the same chair, raised her gloomy face towards her. Without answering she threw her two arms round her mother's neck, and kissed her with a great gasp. Her grief had been intense.

At lunch Rosalie was greatly surprised.

"Madame has surely been for a long walk!"

"Why do you think so?" asked Hélène.

"Because madame is eating with such an appetite. It is long since madame ate so heartily."

It was true; she was very hungry, and with her sudden relief she found the bottom of her stomach. She was conscious

of unutterable peace and content. After the crisis she had undergone these last two days, a stillness fell upon her spirit; her limbs were relaxed and supple as though she had but a moment before issued from a bath. The only sensation that remained was one of heaviness somewhere, of an indefinable load that was weighing her down.

When she returned to the room, her eyes were at once directed towards the clock, the hands of which stood at twenty-five minutes past twelve. Juliette's assignation was for three o'clock. There were still two hours and a half. She made the reckoning mechanically. Moreover, there was no undue hurry; the hands of the clock moved on, and no one in the world could stop them now. She left facts to bring about their own accomplishment. For a long time a child's cap that she had begun had lain about on the table. She took it up and began to sew at the window. The room was plunged in an unbroken silence. Jeanne had seated herself in her usual place, but her arms hung idly at her side.

"Mamma," she said, "I cannot work; it's no fun at all."

"Well, my darling, don't do anything. Oh! wait a minute, you can thread my needles!"

Then the child silently busied herself with effortless movements. She carefully cut pieces of cotton equal in length, and spent a great deal of time in finding the eye of the needle; but it happened that she was always just ready with a needle when her mother had finished with the last.

"You see," said the latter gently, "we'll have it over quickly. To-night will see the last of my six little caps."

She turned round to glance at the clock—ten minutes past one. Still nearly two hours. Now Juliette must be beginning to dress. Henri had received the letter. Oh! yes, he would go. The instructions were definite; he would find it without delay. But it seemed all so far off still; the thought chilled her. She went on sewing with regular stitches, industriously like a work-girl. The minutes slipped away one by one. Two o'clock struck.

A ring at the bell came as a surprise.

"Who can it be, mother darling?" asked Jeanne who had jumped on her chair. "Oh! it's you!" she continued, as Monsieur Rambaud entered the room. "Why did you ring so loud? You gave me quite a fright."

The worthy man was overwhelmed—to tell the truth, the tug at the bell was a little too strong.

"I am not myself to-day, I'm ill," the child went on. "You must not frighten me."

• Monsieur Rambaud displayed the greatest solicitude. What was the matter with his poor darling? His fears were only removed and he sat down when Hélène by a slight nod conveyed to him that the child was in her dismals, as Rosalie would say. Usually a call from him in the day-time was very rare, so he set about explaining immediately the object of his visit. It concerned some fellow-townsmen of his, an old workman who was past all work owing to his advanced years, and who lived with his paralytic wife in a little room as large as one's hand. Their wretchedness could not be pictured. He himself had gone up that morning to see them and make a personal investigation. They were lodged in a hole under the tiles, with a window like a snuff-box in size, through the broken panes of which the wind beat in; within, stretched on a mattress, lay a woman covered by an old curtain, while the feeble-minded man squatted on the floor, and had no longer sufficient courage to sweep up the place.

"Oh! poor things, poor things!" exclaimed Hélène, moved to tears.

The old workman gave Monsieur Rambaud no uneasiness. He would remove him to his own house and easily find him something to do. He thought only of the wife with palsied frame, whom the husband dared not leave for a moment alone and who had to be rolled up like a bundle; where could she be put? what was to be done with her?

"I thought of you," he went on. "You must obtain her instant admission to an asylum. I would have gone straight to Monsieur Deberle, but I imagined you knew him better and would have greater influence with him. If he were good enough to take any interest in the matter, it could be all arranged to-morrow."

With pale cheeks, and trembling with pity, Jeanne listened to the tale.

"Oh, mamma!" she murmured with clasped hands, "be kind—get the admission for the poor woman!"

"Yes, yes, indeed!" said Hélène, whose feelings were obtaining the mastery of her. "I will speak to the doctor as soon as I can; he will himself take every requisite

step. Give me their names and the address, Monsieur Rambaud."

He scribbled a line on the table, and said as he rose :

"It is thirty-five minutes past two. You would perhaps find the doctor at home now."

She had risen at the same time, and looked at the clock with a fierce thrill through all her frame. In truth it was thirty-five minutes past two, and the hands of the clock were creeping on. She stammered out some words to the effect that the doctor must have set out on his round of visits. Her eyes were riveted on the dial-plate. In the meantime Monsieur Rambaud was standing hat in hand, and began to give the outline of his story once more. These poor people had sold everything, their stove even included, and since the setting in of winter had spent days and nights without a fire. At the close of December they had been four days without food. Hélène gave vent to a cry of pain. The hands of the clock stood at twenty minutes to three. Monsieur Rambaud remained two minutes longer before leaving.

"Well, I depend on you," he said.

Then he stooped down to kiss Jeanne—

"Good day, my darling."

"Good day; don't put yourself about; mamma won't forget. I'll make her remember."

When Hélène came back from the lobby, whither she had gone in company with Monsieur Rambaud, the hands pointed to the three quarters. In a quarter of an hour, all would be over. As she stood motionless before the fire-place, the scene which was about to be enacted flashed before her eyes; Juliette was already there; Henri entered and surprised her. She knew the room; she could see the minutest details with terrible vividness. The convulsion of feeling produced by Monsieur Rambaud's awful story had not yet died away, and through her frame a mighty shudder crept from feet to face. A voice cried out within her. What she had done—the writing of this letter, of this cowardly denunciation—was a crime. The truth came to her with dazzling clearness. Yes, it was a crime she had committed! She recalled to her memory the gesture with which she had flung the letter into the box; she recalled it with a sense of stupor such as might dull one who looks on while another commits an evil action, and has no thought of intervening. She was as if awaking from a dream. What

was it that had happened? Why was she here, with eyes glued to the hands on this dial-plate? Two additional minutes had slipped away.

"Mamma," said Jeanne, "if you like, we'll go together to see the doctor to-night. It will be a walk for me. I am almost choking to-day."

Hélène did not hear; thirteen minutes longer. But she was unable to allow so horrible a thing to take place. In this stormy awakening she felt naught but a furious craving to prevent it. It would have to be done; she would live no longer. In a state of frenzy she ran into her bedroom.

"Ah, you're going to take me!" exclaimed Jeanne joyously. "We're going to see the doctor at once, aren't we, mother darling?"

"No, no," she answered, while she hunted about for her boots, stooping down to look under the bed.

They were not to be found; she shrugged her shoulders in supreme indifference when it occurred to her that she could very well run out with the flimsy house-slippers she had on her feet. She set about turning upside down the wardrobe with glass doors in the search for her shawl. Jeanne crept up to her with a world of persuasion in her face.

"Then, you're not going to the doctor's, mother darling?"

"No."

"Say that you'll take me all the same. Oh! do take me; it will be such a pleasure!"

She had at last gained possession of her shawl; she threw it over her shoulders. Good heavens! no more than twelve minutes—just time to run. She would go—she would do something, no matter what. She would decide on the way.

"Darling mother, pray take me with you," said Jeanne in tones that grew lower and lower and more imploring.

"I cannot take you," said Hélène; "I'm going to a place where children don't go. Give me my bonnet."

Jeanne's face blanched. Her eyes clouded; her words came with a gasp.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

The mother made no reply—she was busily tying the strings of her bonnet. The child went on:

"You always go out without me now. You went out yesterday, you went out to-day, and you are going out again. Oh! I'm dreadfully troubled, I'm afraid to be here all alone."

I'll die if you leave me. Do you hear, mother darling? I'll die."

She burst out into loud sobs, and overwhelmed with a fit of grief and rage, she clung fast to Hélène's skirts.

"Come, come, leave me; be good, I'm coming back," the latter continued to assure her.

"No, no! I won't have it!" the child exclaimed through her sobs. "Oh! you don't love me any longer, or you would take me with you. Yes, yes, I'm sure you love other people better! Take me with you, take me with you, or I'll stay here on the floor; you will come back and find me on the floor."

She wound her little arms round her mother's legs; she wept on with face buried in the folds of her dress; she clung to her and weighed her down to prevent her making a step forward. The hands of the clock moved steadily on; it was ten minutes to three. This fact drove Hélène to think that she would never reach the house in time, and, nearly distracted, she wrenched Jeanne from her grasp and exclaimed:

"What an unbearable child! This is veritable tyranny! If you sob any more, I'll have something to say to you!"

She left the room and slammed the door behind her. Jeanne had staggered back as far as the window; her tears dried up with such brutal conduct; she grew stiff, and her face was without colour. She stretched her hands towards the door, and twice wailed out the words—"Mamma, mamma!" She remained where she had fallen on a chair, with staring eyes and features distorted by the jealous thought that her mother was deceiving her.

When she reached the street, Hélène hastened her steps. The rain had ceased, but great drops fell from the house-tops and drenched her shoulders. Within her own mind she had said that she would reflect outside and fix on some plan. But now she was only inflamed with the desire to reach the house. When she darted into the Passage des Eaux, she lingered for a moment. The staircase was the bed of a torrent, the water in the gutters of the Rue Raynouard overflowing and rushing down. Down the steps, in the narrow space between the walls, it broke in foam; and the corners of the paving-stones, washed by the rain, shone like glass. A gleam of gloomy light, falling from the grey sky, darted through the Passage, between the dusky branches of the trees. She scarcely tucked up her skirts before running down. The water came up to her ankles; the

flimsy slippers were dipped in every puddle ; around her, down the whole way, she heard a clear gurgling noise, like the murmuring of brooklets through the grass in the depths of a wood.

• Suddenly she found herself on the stairs in front of the door. She stood there, panting and on the rack. Then her memory came back and she decided to knock at the kitchen.

“ Oh ! it's you ! ” exclaimed mother Fétu.

There was none of the old whimper in her voice. Her little eyes were sparkling, and a complacent grin spread over the myriad wrinkles of her face. All the old deference vanished, and she patted her hands as she listened to the broken words. Hélène gave her twenty francs.

“ May God requite you ! ” prayed mother Fétu in her wonted style. “ Everything you like, my dear ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

MALIGNON, lounging in an easy chair, with legs stretched out before the huge, blazing fire, sat in quiet expectation. In his excessive fastidiousness he had drawn the window-curtains, and had lit the wax-candles. The outer room, in which he had seated himself, was brilliantly illuminated by a small chandelier and two sconces. On the contrary, the bed-room was plunged in shadow, the swinging crystal lamp shedding a dying twilight glare around. Malignon drew out his watch.

"The deuce!" he muttered. "Is she going to keep me waiting to-day again?"

He gave vent to a slight yawn. He had been waiting for an hour, and it was little amusement to him. However, he rose and cast a glance over his preparations. The arrangement of the chairs did not please him, and he rolled a small sofa in front of the fire-place. The cretonne hangings had a ruddy glow, reflecting the light of the candles; the room was warm, silent, and close; outside the wind came and went in sudden gusts. Next he paid a last visit to the inner room, where his vanity experienced some satisfaction; it seemed to him magnificent, quite "up to the mark," padded like an alcove, with the bed hidden in a voluptuous shadow. Just as he was arranging effectively the lace-work of the pillows, there were three hurried knocks at the door. It was the signal.

"At last!" he exclaimed aloud, his face beaming with triumph.

He ran to open the door, and Juliette entered, with veil lowered, wrapped up in a fur mantle. While Malignon was gently closing the door, she stood still for a moment, with the emotion that checked the words on her lips undetected. However, before the young man had had time to take her hand, she disclosed her smiling face, rather pale but quite unruffled.

"What! you have lighted up the place!" she exclaimed. "Why? I thought you hated candles in broad daylight!"

Malignon, who had been making ready to clasp her in his

arms with a passionate gesture that he had been rehearsing, was put somewhat out of countenance, and hastened to explain that the day was too miserable, and that the windows looked on to waste patches of ground. Besides, night was his special delight.

"Well, one never knows how to take you," she said jestingly. "Last spring, at my children's ball, you made such a fuss; you said it was like a cavern, like some dead-house. In fact, we must admit your taste has changed."

She seemed to be paying a visit, and she assumed a courage which slightly deepened her voice. It was the only indication of uneasiness. At times her chin twitched somewhat, as though she felt some compunction within her bosom. But her eyes were flushing, and she tasted to the full the keen pleasure that resulted from her imprudence. This worked a transformation within her; she thought of Madame de Chermette who had a lover. Gracious heavens! it seemed funny all the same.

"Let us have a look round your rooms," she began.

She walked round the apartment. He followed in her footsteps, thinking that he ought to have seized her in his arms at once; but now it was out of his power, he must wait. In the meantime she gazed at the furniture, examined the walls, looked upwards, started back, chattering all the time.

"I don't like your cretonne—so frightfully common! And how did you fall in with that abominable pink? See, there's a chair that would be nice if the wood weren't covered with gilding. Not a picture—not a trinket—only your chandelier and your candelabra that are by no means in good style! Ah, well! my dear, I advise you to continue laughing at my Japanese pavilion!"

She burst into a laugh, revenging herself thus on him for old affronts which still rankled in her breast.

"Your taste is very pretty—let us talk about it! You don't know that my baboon is worth the whole lot of your movables and more! A draper's shopman wouldn't even have accepted that pink. Have you had the notion of seducing your laundress?"

Malignon was much hurt, and did not answer. He made an attempt to lead her into the bedroom. She stood on the threshold, declaring that she never entered such gloomy places. Besides, she could see quite enough; the one room was worthy of the other. The whole of it had come from the Saint-Antoine quarter. But the swing lamp was her special

butt. She was merciless; she spoke again and again of this trashy lamp, which every little work-girl with no furniture of her own might have dreamt of. Swing-lamps in the same style could be had in all the bazaars at seven francs fifty centimes each.

"I paid ninety francs for it," ejaculated Malignon at last, in his impatience.

Thereupon she seemed delighted at having angered him. His self-possession returned, and he asked slyly:

"Won't you take off your cloak?"

"Oh, yes, I will," she answered; "it is dreadfully warm here."

She took off her bonnet too, and this with her fur cloak he hastened to place on the bed. When he returned, he found her seated in front of the fire, still gazing round her. She had regained her gravity, and was disposed to display a more conciliatory demeanour.

"It's very ugly, but you aren't amiss though. The two rooms might have been made very pretty."

"Oh! they're good enough for my purpose!" he allowed himself to say with a careless shrug.

In a moment he regretted his silly words. He could not possibly have been duller-witted nor clumsier. She hung down her head, a sharp pang darting through her bosom. An instant before she had forgotten the object of her coming. He sought at least to turn to advantage the embarrassment into which he had plunged her.

"Juliette!" he said pleadingly, as he leaned towards her.

With a gesture she forced him to resume his seat. It was at the watering-place of Trouville that Malignon, wearied to death by constantly looking on the sea, hit upon the happy idea of falling in love. One evening he took her hand; she was not offended and bantered him over it at first. Soon, with unoccupied mind and heart-whole, she imagined that she loved him. Till this day, she had done nearly everything her friends did around her; a lover only was lacking, and she was driven to secure one by eagerness and a craving to be like others. At the first, had the young man displayed any violence, she would have inevitably yielded. His idiocy was such that he wanted to conquer by force of wit, and he allowed her time to accustom herself to playing the part of coquette. So, after the first outburst, which took place one night when they were

together gazing at the sea like a pair of lovers in a comic opera, she had repelled him, in her astonishment and disgust that he was spoiling the romance that served as amusement to her. Back in Paris Malignon had sworn to himself to be more skilful in his attack. He had just resumed his sway over her, during a fit of weariness, brought on with the close of the winter, when the well-known dissipations, dinners, balls, and first nights, were beginning to overwhelm her with their dreary monotony. The thought of having rooms specially furnished for her in some secluded spot, the cloak of mystery surrounding such a place of meeting, the piquant odour which the adventure brought to her senses, allured her. There was originality in it, she thought, and besides she must have a good look at everything. So wholly unruffled were her feelings that she was as little disturbed in being beside Malignon, as when she paid visits to artists to beg pictures for her charity bazaars.

"Juliette! Juliette!" murmured the young man, striving to speak in caressing tones.

"Come, be sensible," she replied merely.

She took a Chinese screen from the chimney-piece and went on, quite at her ease, as though she had been sitting in her own drawing-room.

"You know we had a rehearsal this morning. I'm afraid I have not made a very happy choice in Madame Berthier. As Mathilde she snivels and is insufferable. You remember the effective soliloquy when she addresses the purse—'Poor little thing, I kissed you a moment ago'? Well! she declaims it like some school-girl who has got up a complimentary greeting. It's so vexatious!"

"And what about Madame de Guiraud?" he asked, as he drew his chair closer and took her hand.

"Oh! she is perfection. I've turned out in her a Madame de Léry with some sarcasm and animation."

She abandoned her hand to him, and he kissed it between her two sentences without her seeming to notice it.

"But the worst of it all, you know," she said, "is your absence. In the first place, you might say something to Madame Berthier; next, we can never reach a good *ensemble* if you never come."

He had succeeded in passing his arm round her waist.

"But as I know my part," he murmured.

"Yes, that's all very well; but there's the arrangement of

the scenes to look after. You're very cruel in not devoting to us three or four mornings."

She was unable to continue; he rained a shower of kisses on her neck. Then she could not but know that he held her in his arms; she pushed him away, tapping him gently with the Chinese screen which she still retained in her hand. Doubtless, she had registered a vow that she would not allow any further advances. Her white face was flushed with the heat reflected from the fire, and her lips shrank inward with the very expression of a spectator whom such sensations astound. Really, it was only that! To make certain would entail going on to the end, and she grew terrified.

"Leave me alone," she ejaculated with a constrained smile. "I shall get angry."

But he imagined he had moved her. He thought with great coolness—"If I allow her to go as she came, she is lost to me." His speaking was to no purpose; he took her hands, and made as though he would ascend to the shoulders. For a moment she seemed to give way. She knew that she had only to close her eyes. The wish came to her, and she canvassed it within her own bosom with dispassionate zeal. But it seemed to her that a voice was crying out, "No!" It was she herself crying out before she had even answered her own heart.

"No, no," she said again. "Let me go; you are hurting me. I won't—no, no—I won't!"

But he made no answer to her appeal, and was forcing her towards the bedroom when she twisted herself violently from his grasp. She was acting in obedience to some strange emotion foreign to her desires; she was angry with herself and with him. In her vexation some disjointed phrases escaped from her lips. Yes, indeed, he rewarded her badly for her trust. What did he hope to attain in displaying such brutishness? She even called him a coward. Never in her life would she see him again. But he allowed her to talk on that she might forget herself; he ran after her with a wicked and brutal laugh. At last she could do no more than gasp in her refuge behind a chair, suddenly subdued, knowing full well that she belonged to him, though he had not yet put out his hands again to seize on her. The moment was one of the most unpleasant in her life.

And they were there, gazing at one another, their faces transformed by shame and lust, when a noise broke through

the stillness. At first they did not grasp its significance. A door was opened, some steps crossed the room, and a voice exclaimed in their ears :

"Fly! fly! You will be caught!"

It was Hélène. Both, astounded, gazed at her. So great was their stupefaction that they lost consciousness of their embarrassing situation. Juliette displayed no sign of confusion.

"Fly! fly!" said Hélène again. "Your husband will be here in two minutes."

"My husband!" stammered the young woman, "my husband!—why—for what reason?"

She was losing her presence of mind. Her brain was in a turmoil. It seemed to her monstrous that Hélène should be standing there, talking of her husband. But Hélène gave way to an angry gesture.

"Oh! if you think I've time to explain—he is on the way here. I give you warning. Disappear at once, both of you."

With this Juliette's agitation exceeded all description. She ran about the rooms like a maniac, screaming out disconnected sentences.

"My God! My God!—I thank you. Where is my cloak? How sickening it is, this room's being so dark! Give me my cloak. Bring me a candle for me to find my cloak. My dear, don't mind my not thanking you. I can't get into my sleeves—no, I can't get in—no, I can't!"

She was paralysed with fear, and Hélène was forced to assist her in putting on her cloak. She crushed her bonnet on crossways, and did not even tie the ribbons. The worst of it, however, was their losing an all-important minute in hunting for her veil which had fallen under the bed. Her words came with a gasp; her trembling hands moved about in bewilderment, fumbling about her person to see that she had left nothing behind which might compromise her.

"Oh, what a lesson! what a lesson! Thank goodness, it is well over!"

Malignon was very pale, and made a sorry appearance. His feet beat a tattoo on the ground, as he convinced himself he was scorned and ridiculous. The only lucid thought that occurred to him was the certainty that his chances were destroyed. His lips could only give utterance to the wretched question :

"Then you think I ought to go away too?"

As she gave him no reply he took up his cane, and went on talking with an assumption of the utmost composure. They would just be in time. It happened there was another staircase, small and never used, which would yet allow of their descent. Madame Deberle's cab had remained at the door; it would convey both of them away along the quays. He said again:

"Now calm yourself. It will be all right. See, this way."

He threw open a door through which a glimpse could be had of three small rooms opening into one another, dingy and dilapidated, abandoned in all their wretchedness. There entered a breath of humid air. Juliette, ere she stepped into the vile place, gave final expression to her disgust.

"How could I have come here?" she exclaimed in loud tones. "What a hole! I shall never forgive myself."

"Be quick, be quick," urged H  l  ne, whose anxiety was as great as her own.

H  l  ne pushed her forward, and then the young woman threw herself sobbing on her neck. She was in the throes of a nervous reaction. She was overwhelmed with shame; she would have fain defended herself, fain have given a reason for her being in this man's company. Then instinctively she gathered up her skirts as though she were about to cross a gutter. Malignon, who had gone on first, cleared away with the end of his boot the plaster littering the back staircase. The doors were shut once more.

In the meantime, H  l  ne remained standing in the middle of the parlour. The silence that reigned was intense; the room was warm and close, and the only sound came from the crackling dying embers. There was a singing in her ears; she heard nothing. But after a time, which seemed to her interminable, there suddenly broke out the rattle of a cab. It was the sign of Juliette's departure. Then she sighed, and her body moved in a gesture of dumb gratitude. The thought that she would not be tortured by everlasting remorse for having acted despicably filled her with pleasant and thankful feelings. With her relief came an access of tenderness; an overwhelming weakness fell on her with the ending of the crisis through which she had gone, and she felt no incentive to depart in her turn. In her own heart she thought that Henri was coming, and that he must meet with some one in this place. There was a knock at the door, and she opened it at once,

The first sensation was one of bewilderment. Henri entered, his mind busy with the thought of the letter that he had received, and his face pale and uneasy. But when he caught sight of her a cry escaped from his lips.

"You! My God! It was you!"

• The cry betokened more astonishment than joy. He had not reckoned on an assignation given with such boldness, and soon there was a furious awakening of all his desires—the opportunity was so unexpected, the retreat so voluptuous and mysterious!

"You love me, you love me!" he stammered. "Ah! it is you, and I did not understand!"

He stretched out his arms; he wished to embrace her. Hélène had greeted his entrance with a smile; now she started back with wan cheeks. Truly she had waited for him; she had promised herself they would be together for a moment, and she would invent some fiction. Like a flash the situation burst on her; Henri believed it to be an assignation. She had never wished such a thing, and there was a revulsion in her heart.

"Henri, I pray you release me."

But he had grasped her by the wrists and was drawing her slowly towards him, as though he intended to subdue her in a moment by a kiss. The love that had been surging within him for months, but which had grown less violent owing to the break in their intimacy, now burst out with the more fierceness that he had begun to forget Hélène. All his heart's-blood mounted to his cheeks; and she struggled as she looked on his burning face and recognised its import with a sensation of terror. Twice already he had gazed on her thus madly.

"Release me. You are frightening me. I assure you, you are deceiving yourself."

His surprise found voice once more.

"Was it indeed you who wrote to me?" he asked.

She hesitated for a second. What could she say in answer?

"Yes," at last she whispered.

She could not betray Juliette after having saved her. A chasm lay before her into which she was herself slipping. Henri was now glancing round the two rooms, feeling wonderment at their being lit up and the style of their decoration. He ventured to question her.

"Are these your rooms?"

She remained silent.

"Your letter put me so much about. *Hélène*, you are hiding something from me. For mercy's sake relieve my anxiety!"

She was not listening to him; her thoughts were intent on the fact that he had good reason for believing it to be an assignation. What could she have been doing here? What purpose had she in waiting for him? She had no story to tell. She did not know but what she had given him this assignation. Round her was tightening his embrace, which was plunging her into oblivion.

He clasped her closer. He questioned her as she lay in his arms, lips upon lips, that he might gain the truth from her.

"You were waiting for me—you were waiting for me?"

She yielded herself up without a struggle, succumbing to the weariness which overwhelmed her; she was fain to say what he would say, to wish what he would wish.

"I was waiting for you, *Henri*."

Their lips met once more.

"But why this letter? And I find you here? Where are we?"

"Do not ask me; never seek to know. It is I who am with you, as you see. What more would you have?"

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, I love you."

"You are mine, *Hélène*, absolutely mine?"

"Yes, absolutely."

With lips upon lips they had kissed. She had forgotten everything, and was yielding to a superior force. It seemed to her now natural and necessary. An intense calm was reigning within her; the sensations and memories of her youth alone, filled her mind. One day during such a winter as this, when she was a young girl in the *Rue des Petites-Maries*, death had nearly claimed her when she was sitting in a close room before a huge charcoal fire that had been lit for the dressing of the hats. On another day, in summer, a chaffinch that had lost itself in the dingy street flew round her room. Why did she think of death, and why did she see that bird winging its flight before her? In all the joyous oblivion of her being there sprang up a sense of melancholy and childish exuberance.

"But you are drenched," said *Henri*. "Did you come here on foot?"

He lowered his voice to speak caressingly to her; he

whispered in her ear as if they could be heard. Now that she was yielding herself to him, his heart was fluttering with his desires, and he clasped her in an embrace, passionate yet timid, venturing no further, and delaying the hour. He was seized with a fraternal care for her health; he had a craving to busy himself about her, to give her some trivial and familiar attention.

"Your feet are wet—you will be ill," he exclaimed. "As if there could be any sense in running through the streets with such shoes!"

He had made her sit down in front of the fire. She made no resistance, but smiled, abandoning her feet to him to allow of his taking off her shoes. Her flimsy slippers had burst while she was walking through the puddles of the Passage des Eaux, and were heavy like sponges. He drew them off and placed one on each side of the fireplace. The stockings also were dripping, and were stained to the ankles with mud. She never dreamt of blushing when, with a gesture of pain and with the greatest tenderness, he pulled them from her feet.

"That's how people catch cold," he said. "Warm yourself."

He drew forward a footstool. The two icy-cold feet flushed in the heat of the fire with a ruddy glow. The room was somewhat close. A drowsy air exhaled from the inner apartment with its enormous bed, the lamp was burning dimly, and half of the doorway was hidden by one of the curtains that had escaped from its fastening. In the parlour a long flame leaped up from each of the candles, emitting that warm odour that characterises the last evening hour. At times could be heard the rush of rain outside, rattling dully through the intense silence.

"Yes, indeed, I feel cold," she murmured, shivering in spite of the great heat.

Her feet were icy-cold. Peremptorily he wished to take them in his hands. His hands were burning, and their heat thrilled through her limbs.

"Do you feel them?" he asked. "Your feet are so small that I can cover them all over."

He clasped them in his feverish fingers. The rosy toes alone could be seen. She lifted up her heels, and her ankle-bones grazed against his hands. He opened his hands and looked at the feet, so exquisitely delicate, for some seconds. The temptation was too strong, he kissed them.

"No, no, warm yourself," he exclaimed, as she started up. "Warm yourself just now."

Both had lost consciousness of time and place. Each had an indefinite feeling that it was the middle of a long winter night. The candles, burning in their sockets in the steaming and drowsy room, made them imagine they had been awake for hours. But they were ignorant where they were. Around them lay a desert; there was no sound, no human voice; it seemed like a gloomy ocean over which a tempest was sighing. They were outside the world—a thousand leagues away. And this forgetfulness of the ties which bound them to earth and living things was so absolute that it seemed to them they had been born there at one and the same moment, and that they ought to die presently when they clasped one another in an embrace.

They even spoke no more. Words could not render their feelings. Perhaps they had known one another in another world, but this past intimacy was of little consequence. The present moment only existed for them; they lived not beyond it; they spoke not of love, as though already they had become accustomed to each other after ten years of marriage.

"Are you warm?"

"Oh! yes, thank you."

She grew uneasy and stooped down.

"My shoes will never get dry," she murmured.

He assured her to the contrary, and taking up her small shoes placed them against the andirons. Then he whispered to her:

"They will dry there, I assure you."

He turned towards her once more, kissed her feet again, and laid his hands on her waist. The glowing embers that filled the hearth scorched them both. There was no revulsion within her as these hands, eager with desire, wandered over her bosom. In the blotting out of everything surrounding her, and even of her own reality, she still retained the one memory of her youth, of a room pervaded by as great a heat, of a huge fire with irons in it, over which she had been leaning; and she remembered that a similar oblivion had reigned within her, that it was no more blissful, that the kisses with which Henri covered her gave no slower or more voluptuous death. When of a sudden he seized her in his arms to bear her into the bedroom, a final anxiety surged up within her. She imagined some one had cried out; it seemed to her she was forgetting some one sobbing in the shadow. But the thought came and went in

a shiver; she looked round the room, but could see no one. This room was strange to her; nothing in it appealed to her. There was a downfall of rain that beat with a more lengthened rush. Then, as though giving way to sleep, she threw herself on his shoulder and allowed him to carry her away. As they entered, the remaining curtain escaped from its fastening and shrouded the doorway.

When Hélène returned with bare feet to seek for her shoes lying in front of the dying fire, she thought that they had never loved each other less than on that day.

CHAPTER V.

JEANNE, with eyes fixed on the door, remained plunged in grief over her mother's sudden departure. She gazed round on the empty and silent room; but she could still hear the fading sounds of hurrying footsteps, of rustling skirts, and lastly the slamming of the outer door. She heard nothing more, and she was alone.

All alone, all alone. Over the bed her mother's dressing-gown had been flung at random, the skirt bulging out and a sleeve lying across the bolster, strangely presenting the appearance of a person who had fallen down overwhelmed with grief and sobbing in misery. There was some linen scattered about, and a black neckerchief was on the floor like a gloomy blot. The chairs were in disorder, the table had been pushed in front of the wardrobe, and amidst it all she was quite alone. She felt her tears choking her, as she looked at the dressing-gown that no longer encased her mother, and that lay stretched there in the ghastly semblance of death. She clasped her hands and wailed out for the last time, "Mamma! mamma!" The blue velvet hangings muffled the room. It was over, and she was alone.

Then the time slipped away. The clock struck three. Through the windows a dismal and dingy light was streaming. Over the sky were sailing dark clouds, which made it still gloomier. Through the panes of glass, which were covered with moisture, Paris could be dimly seen swimming in vapour; with its outskirts hidden in thick smoke. For the child the city offered no such companionable presence as was the case on bright afternoons, when, on leaning out a little, it seemed to her as though she could touch each district with her hand.

What was she to do? Her little arms tightened in despair against her bosom. This desertion was to her mournful, passing all bounds, and characterised by an injustice and wickedness that enraged her. She had never seen anything like it for

hatefulness; it struck her everything was going to vanish, nothing would come back of the old life. Then she caught sight of her doll seated near her in a chair, with its back against a cushion, its legs stretched out, its eyes staring at her as though it were a human being. It was not her mechanical doll, but a large doll with a pasteboard head, curly hair, and eyes of enamel, the fixed look of which frightened her sometimes; with two years of constant dressing and undressing, the paint had got rubbed off the chin and cheeks, and the limbs, stuffed with bran and in a pink covering, had assumed a look of feebleness, and were wrinkled like old linen. The doll at the moment was in its night attire, arrayed only in a bed-gown, with its arms twisted, one in the air the other hanging downwards. When Jeanne realised that there was some one with her, she felt for an instant less unhappy. She took it in her arms and embraced it ardently, while the head swung back, its neck being broken. She chattered away to it, told the doll she was Jeanne's best-behaved friend, that she was good-natured, that she would never go out and leave Jeanne alone. The doll, she said, was her treasure, her kitten, her dear little pet. Trembling with agitation, she strove to check her tears, and covered it with kisses.

The access of tenderness gave her some revengeful consolation, and the doll fell over her arm like a bundle of rags. She rose and looked out, with brow pressed against a pane of glass. The downpour had come to an end, and the last of the rain-clouds, driven before the wind, were nearing the horizon and the heights of Père-Lachaise, which were wrapped in gloom; and Paris, thus girdled round by the storm, was lit by a uniform clearness and assumed a lonely and melancholy sublimity. It seemed without inhabitants, like one of those cities seen in a nightmare—the reflex of a world of death. There was no question but that it offered her little entertainment. Idly she dreamt of those she had loved since her birth. Her oldest sweetheart had been at Marseilles, a huge red cat that weighed very heavy; she clasped it round the belly with her little arms and carried it in that fashion from one chair to another without provoking its anger in the least; then it had vanished, and this was the first misfortune she remembered. She had next a sparrow, but it was dead; she had picked it up one morning from the bottom of its cage. That made two. She never reckoned the toys which got broken just to give her pain, all kinds of

wrongs which had gone to her heart and caused her much suffering, because she was too stupid. One doll in especial, not higher than one's hand, had been a cause of agony to her when its head had been smashed; she had even cherished it to such a degree that she had buried it by stealth in a corner of the yard; and some time after, overcome with a craving to look on it once more, she had disinterred it and made herself sick with terror as she gazed on its blackened and repulsive features. It was always other people who were first to fail in their love. Why was it? She never changed. When she loved any one, her love lasted all her life. Her ideas could not grasp neglect; such a thing was to her monstrously wicked, which could not possibly occur to her little heart without giving it a deadly pang. She shivered as a host of vague ideas awoke within her slowly. So people parted one day; each one went his own way, never to meet or love each other again. With her eyes fixed on the limitless and dreary expanse of Paris, she sat chilled in presence of what her childish passion divined as one of life's hardest blows.

In the meantime her breath was fast dimming the glass. With her hands she rubbed away the vapour that prevented her seeing through. Several monuments in the distance, wet with the rain, glittered like dark-brown ice. There were lines of houses, regular and distinct, with their fronts standing out pale amidst the surrounding roof, looking like floating masses of linen—a portion of some tremendous washing stretched out to dry on fields of red grass. The sky was clearing, and through the tail of the cloud which still cloaked the city in gloom, the milky rays of the sun were beginning to stream; and over some of the districts, in certain places where the sky would soon begin to smile, the cloud hung with gleeful hesitancy. Jeanne gazed below, over the quay and the heights of the Trocadéro; the street traffic was about to begin after the violent storm, which still pelted away at intervals. The cabs resumed their jolting crawl, and the omnibuses rattled along the still lonely streets with a louder rumble. Umbrellas were shut up, and wayfarers who had taken shelter beneath the trees ventured from one pavement to another through the muddy streams rushing into the gutters. She noticed with special interest a lady and a little girl, magnificently dressed, whom she saw standing beneath the awning of a toy-shop near the bridge. Doubtless they had been caught in the shower and

had taken refuge there. The child would fain have carried away the whole shop, and was busily pestering her mother into the buying of a hoop. Both were now leaving; the child was running, laughing and full of glee, driving the hoop along the pavement. With this Jeanne's melancholy returned with intensified force; her doll became hideous. She longed to have a hoop and to be down there, while her mother would have walked slowly behind her and cautioned her not to go so far. Everything combined to torture her. Every minute she rubbed the glass clear. She had been enjoined never to open the window; but she was full of rebellious thoughts; she could at least gaze out of the window, if she were not to be taken a walk. She threw it open, and leaned out like a grown-up person—in imitation of her mother when she ensconced herself there, and allowed herself the luxury of silence.

The air was fresh, and moist in its freshness, which seemed to her delightful. A darkness spread slowly over the horizon, and induced her to lift her head. It appeared to her imagination like some gigantic bird with outstretched wings. At first she saw nothing; the sky was clear; but at the angle of the roof a gloomy cloud made its appearance, rushing on and speedily enveloping the whole heaven. Another squall was rising before a roaring west wind. The daylight was quickly vanishing, and the city was plunged in a gloom that had a livid shimmer, giving the house-fronts the appearance of being coated in long-standing rust. Almost immediately the rain fell. The streets were cleared, umbrellas were again opened, and the passers-by, flying in every direction, vanished like chaff. An old lady gripped her skirts with both hands, while the torrent beat down on her bonnet as though it were falling through a spout. But the rain swept on; the flying cloud kept pace with the maddening rush of water beating in the direction of Paris; there was a downpour speeding along the line of quays with the fleetness of an infuriated horse; a dust seemed to rise from it, a slight white steam that rolled close to the ground with incredible quickness; it descended the Champs Elysées, rushed into the long narrow districts of the Saint-Germain district, and overwhelmed in its rush great portions of the city, open spaces and deserted squares. In a few seconds, behind this veil that grew thicker and thicker, the city faded away and seemed to disappear. There was a vapour rising on every side, and the awful splashing that continued

was like the deafening rattle produced by the clashing of old iron.

Jeanne, giddy with the noise, started back. A leaden-hued wall seemed to have been built up before her. But she was fond of rain: she returned, leaned out again, and stretched out her arms to feel the great, cold rain-drops splashing on her hands. It gave her some amusement, and she got wet to the sleeves. Her doll must, of course, like herself, have a headache, and she therefore hastened to put it astride the window-rail, with its back against the wall. She thought, as she saw the drops pelting down, that it was doing her some good. The doll stood up very stiffly, its little teeth displayed in a never-fading smile, while one of its shoulders was streaming with water and every gust of wind lifted up its night-dress.

What was the reason that prevented her mother taking her with her? In the rain that beat down on her hands there seemed a new inducement to be out. It must be very nice, she argued, to be in the street. Once more there flashed on her mental vision, as it were, the little girl behind the watery curtain driving her hoop along the pavement. Nobody could deny that she had gone out with her mamma. Both even seemed to her to be exceedingly well-pleased. That was sufficient proof that little girls were taken out when it rained. But, too, willingness on her mother's part was requisite. Why had she been unwilling? Then she thought again of her red cat that had gone away with its tail in the air over the houses opposite, and of the poor little sparrow which she had tempted to eat something when it was dead, and which pretended that it did not understand. The old tales kept coming back; nobody's love for her was enduring enough. Oh! she would have been ready in two minutes; on days when she so wished she dressed quickly; there were only the boots which Rosalie buttoned, her jacket, her hat, and it was done. Her mother could easily have waited two minutes for her. When she left home to see her friends, she made no such fuss about it; when she walked in the Bois de Boulogne, she led her gently by the hand, and stopped with her at every shop in the Rue de Passy. Jeanne could not get to the bottom of it; her black eyebrows frowned and her exquisitely delicate features grew forbidding, her livid face resembling that of some wicked old woman. She felt in a vague way that her mother was in some place where children never go. She had not been

taken out that something might be hidden from her. These thoughts filled her with an unutterable sadness, and her heart throbbed with pain.

The rain was fast slowing into a drizzle, and through the curtain which veiled Paris, glimpses were at times revealed. The dome of the Invalides, delicately outlined and quivering amidst the mist, was the first to reappear through the rain that shimmered as it fell tremblingly. Next, some of the districts emerged into sight as the downpour slackened; the city seemed to issue from a deluge that had overwhelmed it, the roofs all streaming and every street filled with a tide of water from which a vapour still rose. But suddenly there was a burst of light; a gush of sunshine fell on the torrents of rain. For a moment, it was a smile breaking through tears. The rain had ceased to fall over the Champs Elysées district; there was an indistinct gloom over the left bank, the Cité, and the far-away suburbs; while the drops were flashing down like shafts of steel, in countless myriads and delicately slender, through the sunshine. On the right a rainbow sprang up with its exquisite colouring. As the gush of light streamed across the sky, smudges of rose-red and blue bedaubed the horizon in a medley mass that spoke somewhat of a child's box of water-colours. Then there was a sudden blaze; it seemed a fall of golden snow over a town of crystal. The light died away, a cloud rolled up, and the smile faded amidst tears; the water vanished from the streets of Paris with a prolonged sobbing noise, beneath the leaden-hued sky.

Jeanne, with her sleeves dripping, was seized with a fit of coughing. But she was unconscious of the chill that was penetrating her frame; she was now absorbed in the thought that her mother had gone into Paris. She had grown at last to know three buildings—the Invalides, the Panthéon, and the Tour Saint-Jacques. She went over their names, and pointed them out with her finger without picturing to herself what they were like were she nearer them. Without doubt her mother was down there, and she settled in her mind that she was in the Panthéon, because it astonished her the most—it was so huge and towered up through the air, the very crowning-point of the city. Then she began to question herself. Paris was still to her the place where children never go; she was never taken there. She would have liked to know, that she might say quietly to herself: "Mamma is there; she is doing such and such a

thing." But it seemed to her too immense; it was impossible to find any one there. Her glance travelled towards the other end of the plain. Would her mother not rather be in one out of that cluster of houses on the hill to the left? or would she not be quite near, beneath those enormous trees, the bare branches of which seemed as dead as firewood? Oh! if she could only lift up the roofs! What could that gloomy monument be? What was that street along which something of enormous bulk was running? What could all that district be at sight of which she was frightened, as she was well convinced people fought with one another down there? She could not see it distinctly, but to tell the truth, it seemed to stir before her; it was very ugly and must not be looked at by little girls. A host of indefinite ideas, which brought her to the verge of weeping, awoke trouble within her ignorant, childish mind. The unknown world of Paris, with its smoke, its never-ceasing noises, its surging life, exhaled in her face in the warm and humid atmosphere of the thaw an odour of wretchedness, filth, and crime, which forced her to turn away her youthful head, as though she had leaned over one of those pestilential pits which breathe forth suffocation from their unseen horrors. The Invalides, the Panthéon, the Tour Saint-Jacques—she went over their names, and counted them; she knew none beyond these, and she sat terrified and ashamed with the all-absorbing thought that her mother was among these wretched surroundings, in some place she did not know, away down in the very heart of the city.

Suddenly Jeanne turned round. She could have sworn some one had walked into the bedroom; a light breath of wind even fluttered against her shoulder. But the room was empty, and still littered with the disorder that Hélène had left. The dressing-gown, flung across the pillow, lay stretched out in the same mournful attitude. Then Jeanne, with pallid cheeks, cast a glance round the room, and her heart nearly burst within her. She was alone! she was alone! Gracious heavens! her mother in abandoning her had pushed her, and with such force that she had fallen to the ground. The thought came back to her in her anguish; she seemed to feel again on her wrists and her shoulders the agony of the outrage. Why had she been struck? She had been good, and she had nothing to reproach herself with. She was usually spoken to with such gentleness that the punishment awoke indignation within her. She was

thrilled with a feeling of childish fear as when she was threatened with the approach of the wolf, and when it was declared to her she was looking at it though it was invisible; it stayed in the shadow with many other things that were going to overwhelm her. But she was alive with suspicion; her face paled and slowly grew turgid with jealous fury. Of a sudden, the thought that her mother must have a greater love for those whom she had gone to see came upon her with such crushing force that her two hands clutched at her bosom. She knew now, her mother was false to her.

Over Paris a great sorrow seemed to be lowering; another storm was about to beat upon it. A murmur ran through the darkened air, and heavy clouds were hovering overhead. Jeanne, still at the window, was convulsed with another fit of coughing; but in being thus chilled she felt herself revenged; she would willingly have had her illness return. With hands pressed against her bosom, she grew conscious of some pain growing more intense within her. It was an agony to which her body abandoned itself. She trembled with fear, and did not again venture to turn round; her heart sank with the idea of looking once more into the room. To be little means to be without strength. What could this new evil be which filled her with shame and with a pleasure that was yet a pain? When she was teased, when she was tickled and roared with laughter, this shiver of exasperation sometimes darted through her. With stiffened body, she sat there awaiting something with every one of her pure and innocent limbs in an agony of revulsion. From the innermost recesses of her being, with all her woman's feelings aroused, there darted through her a pang, as though she had received a blow from a distance. Then with failing heart she cried out chokingly, "Mamma! mamma!" No one could have known whether she called to her mother for aid, or whether she accused her of having inflicted on her the pain which was killing her.

At this moment the tempest broke out in all its fury. Through the deep and ominous stillness the wind howled over the city, which was shrouded in darkness; and from Paris there came a long continued clatter—window-shutters beating to and fro, flying slates, chimney tops, and gutter pipes rattling on to the street pavements. For a few seconds there was a calm; then there blew another gust which swept over the horizon with such mighty strength that the ocean of roofs seemed to

be convulsed, and, tossing about in waves, to disappear in a whirlpool. For a moment chaos reigned. Some enormous clouds, like supernatural blots of ink, crashed into a host of smaller ones that were scattered and floating about like rags which the wind was bearing and driving away in fragments. A second later two clouds rushed against one another, every crash resulting in a loud report, which seemed to sprinkle with wreckage the copper-hued air; and every time the hurricane rose to its height, blowing from every point of the heavens, the thunder of opposing armies broke out—a combating of gods which threatened the city below with impending destruction. The rain had ere this ceased. Suddenly there was a rift in a cloud in the centre of the sky, and the appearance of rushing water indicated the course of the Seine. The river, that flowed before like a green ribbon, was now swollen and muddy with the torrents of rain, which had transformed it to a clay-coloured stream. Slowly the bridges came into view, slender and delicately outlined in the mist; while, right and left, on the deserted quays along the grey line of their pavements, the trees were bending violently to the wind. Away in the background, the cloud broke up over Notre-Dame, and so awful was the downpour that the city seemed deluged. Far above where the torrents were falling, the towers alone showed up in a bit of clear sky, seeming to the imagination like floating wreckage. On every side the water poured down from the heavens, the right bank being to all appearance engulfed three times. The first rush inundated the distant suburbs, gradually extending its area and beating on the turrets of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul and the Tour Saint-Jacques, which glistened in the rain. There were two additional downfalls, one following in hot haste on the other, streaming over Montmartre and the Champs Elysées. At times a glimpse could be had of the glass structure of the Palace of Industry, a mist hanging over it with the gushing of the rain; Saint-Augustin, with its cupola looming through the fog, appeared like a clouded moon; the flat roof of the Madeleine stretched away like the court of a church in ruins, with the flags washed white with the streaming rain; and, in the rear, the huge and gloomy mass of the Opera House made one think of a dismasted vessel, with its keel fixed between two rocks, resisting the assaults of the tempest. On the left bank, which was hidden by a watery veil, burst into view the dome of the Invalides, the

steeples of Sainte-Clotilde, the towers of Saint-Sulpice, glinting softly in the wet atmosphere. Another cloud began to spread over the sky; from the colonnade of the Panthéon the water streamed down in sheets, threatening to inundate what lay below. Immediately the rain beat down on the city in every direction; one would have imagined that the heavens were precipitated on the earth; the streets were engulfed in the overwhelming torrents which fell with such violence as almost to foretell the end of the city. A prolonged roar was sounding upwards, produced by the rushing of the water along the gutters and its fall into the drains. Far above the dirty streets of Paris, which had assumed with the showers a dingy brown colour, the clouds, livid in hue, spread themselves uniformly without stain or rift. The rain was becoming finer and fell sharply and vertically; and when the wind rose high once more, the grey masses were wrinkled into mighty waves—the rain-drops pattered down obliquely and almost horizontally, beating against the walls with a hissing sound, till with the fall of the wind they rushed down vertically again, scourging the earth with a quiet obstinacy from the hill of Passy away to the level plain of Charenton. In this eclipse of the heavens, the vast city, as though overwhelmed and lifeless after some awful convulsion, seemed but a stony expanse of ruins.

Jeanne's heart was brimming over with sorrow and she wailed out once more—"Mamma! mamma!" A terrible weariness deprived her limbs of their strength as she looked on at the engulfing of Paris. Whilst outside chaos was reigning her tresses were at the mercy of the wind and her face was wet with the rain; through her still tingled the sweet sorrow which had just made her shiver; within her heart there was a consciousness of some irretrievable woe. Everything seemed to her to have come to an end; she knew age was creeping on her. The hours might pass away, but she did not even cast a glance into the room. It was all the same to her to be forgotten and alone. Such was the despair possessing the child's heart, that it invested with gloom everything around her. If she were scolded, as of old, when she was ill, it would be very wrong. There was a thought consuming her, weighing on her like a sick headache. Surely, but a moment ago, in some place or other, something she cherished had been destroyed. She could not prevent the catastrophe; she must inevitably submit to whatever was desired of her. In the end her weariness

prostrated her. She had joined her hands over the bar on which she was leaning, and she grew drowsy; her head reclined forward and at times she opened wide her eyes to gaze at the rain.

And still the rain kept beating down; the livid sky seemed dissolving in water. There was a final blast of wind, which passed on with a monotonous roar. The rain was left to tyrannise still, and it poured down ceaselessly in the midst of a solemn stillness, while the city over which it had temporary sway was silent and deserted. The rain was like a streaked sheet of glass through which Paris could be seen like some phantom place, outlined with uncertain touch and about to fade away. To Jeanne the scene brought nothing beyond a longing to sleep, to be disturbed by hideous dreams, as though all her future, with this evil which she but dimly recognised, was rising up in a vapour to pierce through her frame and make her cough. Every time she opened her eyes she was seized with fits of coughing, and she sat there for a few seconds looking at the scene; then, as her head fell back once more, it was retained in her mind—it seemed as if it were spreading over her head to crush her.

The rain was still falling. What hour could it be now? Jeanne could not have told. Probably the clock had ceased going. It seemed to her too great a fatigue to turn round. It was surely at least a week since her mother had quitted her. She had abandoned all thought of waiting for her; she was resigned to the prospect of never seeing her again. Then she grew oblivious to everything, to the wrongs which had been done her, to the marvellous pain from which she had just been suffering; she lost all sense even of her own loneliness. A heaviness fell on her with the chillness of a stone. This only was certain—she was very unhappy; ah! as unhappy as the poor little waifs to whom she gave alms as they huddled together in gateways. Angels in heaven! how the cough racked one and how penetrating was the cold, when there was no one to proffer love! She closed her heavy eyelids, succumbing to a feverish stupor, and the last of her thoughts was a vague memory of childhood, of a visit to a mill, stored with yellow wheat, and of the tiny grains slipping beneath mill-stones as huge as houses.

Hours and hours passed away; each minute was a century. The rain beat down without ceasing, with the same tranquil

rush as though all time and eternity were allowed it to deluge the plain. Jeanne had fallen asleep. Near her the doll was astride on the iron bar of the window, with its legs in the room and its head outside, rather resembling a drowned person, with night dress clinging to its rosy skin, with glaring eyes and hair streaming with water. Its wretchedness was enough to make one weep, so comical was its position, so real was its death-like aspect. Jeanne coughed in her sleep; but she never once opened her eyes, her head swayed to and fro on the crossed arms, and the cough spent itself in a wheeze, without awakening her. That was all—she slept in the darkness; she did not even withdraw her hand, from the cold red fingers of which bright rain-drops were trickling one by one into the vast profound which lay beneath the window. This went on for hours and hours. Paris was slowly waning on the horizon like some phantom city, heaven and earth mingled together in an indistinguishable mass, and the grey rain still beat down with unflagging persistency.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER 1.

NIGHT had long fallen when H       returned. Clinging to the balusters she ascended the staircase wearily, while her umbrella dripped unceasingly on the stairs. She stood for a few seconds outside her doorway to regain her breath ; in her ears still sounded the deafening rush of the rain ; she seemed to feel the rough jostling of hurrying foot-passengers, and her eyes were dazzled with the glare of the street-lamps reflected from the puddles. She was walking in a dream, filled with the surprise of the kisses that had just been showered on her to be greedily returned ; and as she fumbled for her key she believed her bosom felt neither remorse nor joy. Events had compassed it ; she could have done naught to prevent it. But the key was not to be found ; it had been doubtless left behind in the pocket of her other gown. With the discovery her vexation was intense ; it seemed as though she were brought to a rough stop at the door of her own home, and the only thing that remained was to ring the bell.

"Oh ! it's madame !" exclaimed Rosalie as she opened the door. "I was beginning to be uneasy."

She took the umbrella from her, that she might place it in the kitchen sink, and she rattled on :

"Good gracious ! what torrents ! Z         has only just come, and he was drenched to the skin. I took the liberty, madame, of keeping him to dinner. He can stay out till ten o'clock."

H       followed her mechanically. She imagined she must look once more on everything in her home ere removing her bonnet.

"You have done quite right, my girl," she answered.

For a moment she lingered in the kitchen door-way, gazing at the ruddy brightness of the fire. Impulsively she darted forward, and opened the door of a cupboard, shutting it again,



HÉLÈNE FINDING JEANNE ASLEEP AT THE OPEN WINDOW.
p. 259.

Everything was in its place, chairs and tables alike; she greeted them with looks of recognition; and their presence gave her pleasure. Zéphyrin had, in the meantime, struggled respectfully to his feet. She nodded smilingly to him.

"I didn't know whether to put the roast on the table or not," began the maid.

"Why, what time is it?" she asked.

"Oh, it's close on seven o'clock, madame."

"What! seven o'clock!"

Astonishment riveted her to the floor; she had lost all consciousness of time. She was awakened from her dream.

"And where's Jeanne?" she asked.

"Oh! she has been very good, madame. I even think she must have fallen asleep, for I haven't heard her for some time."

"Haven't you given her a light?"

Embarrassment closed Rosalie's lips; she was unwilling to tell that Zéphyrin had brought her some pictures. Made-moiselle had never made the least stir, so she could scarcely have wanted anything. Hélène paid no further heed to her, but ran into the room where a dreadful chill fell on her.

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" she screamed out.

No answer broke the stillness. She stumbled against an arm-chair. From the dining-room, the door of which she had left ajar, there streamed some light across a corner of the carpet. She felt a shiver creeping over her, and she could have declared that rain was falling in the room; a damp air blew in her face and there was a sound of water. She turned her head and straightway saw the dim square made by the open window against the gloomy grey of the sky.

"Who can have opened this window?" she cried. "Jeanne! Jeanne!"

Still no answering word. A mortal terror smote on her heart. She must look out at this window; but as she felt her way towards it, her hands lighted on a head of hair—it was Jeanne. Rosalie entered with a lamp, and there lay the child, with face blanched to a deadly pallor, sleeping with cheek resting on her crossed arms, while the drops of rain splashing from the roof were drenching her. Her breathing was scarcely perceptible, so overcome was she with despair and fatigue. Beneath the cover of the great blue-tinted eyelids there still clung two heavy tears,

"Unhappy child!" moaned Hélène. "Oh, heavens! she's icy cold! To fall asleep there, at such a time, when she had been expressly forbidden to touch the window! Jeanne, Jeanne, speak to me; wake up, Jeanne!"

Rosalie had wisely vanished. The child was raised in the mother's passionate embrace, but her head dropped as though she were unable to shake off the leaden slumber that had seized upon her. At last, however, the eyes were unclosed, but the glare of the lamp dazzled her, and she was still benumbed and stupid.

"Jeanne, it's I! What's wrong with you? See, I've just come back."

But she displayed no sign of intelligence; in her stupefaction she could only exclaim—"Oh!"

She gazed inquiringly on her mother, seemingly failing to recognise her. Then suddenly she shivered, as she grew conscious of the cold air of the room. Her memory awoke, and the tears rolled from her eyelids over her cheeks. She commenced to struggle, in the evident desire of being left alone.

"It's you, it's you! Oh, leave me, you hold me too tight! I was so comfortable."

She slipped from her arms with affright in her face. Her uneasy looks wandered from her mother's hands to her shoulders; one of the hands was without its glove, and she started back from the touch of the moist palm and warm fingers with fierce resentment, as if she were flying from a stranger's caress. The old perfume of vervain had died away; the fingers had surely become greatly attenuated; and the hand was unusually soft. This skin was no longer her mother's, and to touch it filled her with rage.

"Come, I'm not angry with you," pleaded Hélène. "But, indeed, were you behaving well? Come and kiss me."

Jeanne still recoiled from her. She had no remembrance of having seen her mother dressed in this gown or cloak. The waist-band hung loose, and the plaits of the skirt were awry in a style which incensed her. Why had she come home with her dress in such disorder, everything about her seeming to tell some sad and sorry story? There were mud stains on her petticoat, her slippers had burst, nothing appeared to cling to her person, as the child herself was wont to declare when she was venting her wrath on other little girls who did not know how to dress themselves.

"Kiss me, Jeanne."

The voice, too, seemed strange; in her ears it sounded louder. Her looks had now travelled to her mother's face; she was astounded with the smallness and wearied expression of the eyes, with the feverish scarlet of the lips, with the unnatural gloom that dyed every feature. It was all loathsome to her. The old heartache began once more, as when an injury had been done her; and, unnerved by the presence of what was unknown and horrible to her, grasping the fact that she was breathing an atmosphere of falsehood, she burst into sobbing.

"No, no, I entreat you! You left me all alone, and oh! I've been so miserable!"

"But, my darling, I'm back again. Don't weep any more, I've come home!"

"Oh, no, no! it's all over now! I don't wish any more! Oh, I've waited and waited, and been so wretched!"

Hélène laid her hand on the child again, and was drawing her gently to her bosom, but she resisted stubbornly, exclaiming plaintively:

"No, no, it will never be the same! You are not the same!"

"What! What are you talking of, child?"

"I don't know; you are not the same."

"Do you want to say that I don't love you any more?"

"I don't know; you are no longer the same! Don't say no. You don't feel the same! It's all over, over, over! I wish to die!"

With blanched face Hélène clasped her again in her embrace. Did her face reveal her secret? She kissed her, but a shudder ran through the little one's frame, and an expression of such misery crept into her face that Hélène forbore to imprint a second kiss on her brow. She still kept hold of her, but neither of them uttered a word. Jeanne's sobbing fell to a whisper: her nervous revulsion paralysed her. Hélène's first thought was that a child's whims must pass without notice, but within her heart there stole into life a feeling of secret shame, and the weight of her daughter's body on her shoulder drove a blush into her cheeks. She hastened to put Jeanne down, and each felt relieved.

"Now, be good, and wipe your eyes," said Hélène. "We'll make everything all right."

The child gently acquiesced in her behest, but she still seemed

somewhat afraid and her looks were cast on the ground. Suddenly her frame was racked with a fit of coughing.

"Good heavens! why, you've made yourself ill now! I cannot indeed stay away a moment from you. Did you feel cold?"

"Yes, mamma; in the back."

"See here, put on this shawl. The dining-room stove is lighted, and you'll soon feel warm. Are you hungry?"

Jeanne hesitated over her answer. It was on the tip of her tongue to speak the truth and say no; but she darted a side-glance at her mother, and recoiling from her side, replied in a whisper:

"Yes, mamma."

"Ah, well, it will be all right," exclaimed H  l  ne, whose beating heart had need of re-assurance. "Only, I entreat you, you bad child, not to startle me so again."

On Rosalie's re-entering the room to announce that dinner was ready, H  l  ne's wrath broke out on her. The little maid's head drooped; she stammered out that it was all very true, and she ought to have looked better after mademoiselle. Then, thinking to mollify her mistress, she busied herself in helping her to undress. Goodness gracious! madame was in a fine state! Jeanne glared at each garment as it was thrown aside, seemingly intent on cross-examining it, as though she anticipated, with the throwing-off of the mud-stained raiment, the revelation of some secret. The band of a petticoat, in especial, would not give way; Rosalie was forced to work away for a time at the untying of the knot; and the child, fascinated, crept closer, displaying over the knot as much impatience and vexation as the maid, and craving to know how it had become fast. But she was unable to linger near; she fled away behind a chair, keeping at a distance the garments, the warm exhalations from which brought torments to her. She turned away her head; never had her mother's undressing seemed so repulsive to her.

"Madame should feel comfortable now," exclaimed Rosalie. "It's awfully nice to get into dry clothes after a drenching."

When H  l  ne felt herself once more in her blue swan's-down dressing-gown, she gave vent to a slight sigh, as though a new happiness had welled up within her. She again regained her old cheerfulness; she had got quit of a burden with the absence from her shoulders of the weight of her dragged garments. It was in vain that the maid repeated the announcement that

the soup was on the table; she had made up her mind to wash her face and hands. Her ablutions accomplished to her satisfaction, with face and hands glistening still with moisture, and her dressing-gown buttoned up to her chin, she was slowly approached by Jeanne, who took one of her hands and kissed it.

At table, however, not a word passed between mother and daughter. The fire in the stove was flaring up with a merry murmur, and there was a look of happiness about the little dining-room, with its bright mahogany and gleaming china. But the old stupor which drove away all thought seemed to have fallen again on Hélène; her eating was mechanical and had only the appearance of appetite. Jeanne sat facing her, and quietly watched her over her glass, noting every one of her movements. A cough broke from her, and her mother who had become unconscious of her presence, at once displayed lively concern.

"Why, you're coughing again! Aren't you getting warm?"

"Oh, yes, mamma; I'm very warm!"

She leaned towards her to feel her hand and learn whether she was speaking the truth. Only then did she perceive that her plate remained untouched.

"You said you were hungry. Don't you like what you have there?"

"Oh, yes, mamma; I'm eating away!"

With an effort Jeanne swallowed a mouthful. Hélène looked at her for a time, but she soon again sank into dreaming about the fatal room with its gloomy shadows. It did not escape the child that she was of little interest to her mother now. As the dinner came to an end, her poor wearied limbs had well-nigh lost all feeling on the chair; and she sat like some bent, aged woman, with the dim eyes of a withered old maid for whom love is past and gone.

"Won't mademoiselle have any sweets?" asked Rosalie. "If not, can I remove the cloth?"

Hélène still sat with far-away looks.

"Mamma, I'm sleepy," exclaimed Jeanne in changed tones. "Will you let me go to bed? I'll feel better in my bed."

Once more her mother seemed to awake with a start to the consciousness of her surroundings.

"You are suffering, my darling! where do you feel the pain? Tell me."

"No, no; I told you I was all right! I'm sleepy, and it's already time for me to go to bed."

She left her chair and threw back her shoulders, as though to prove that there was no illness threatening her; she tottered over the floor on her little feet that were benumbed. When she reached the bedroom, she leaned her body against the furniture, and her hardihood was such that not a tear came, though feverish fires were darting through her whole frame. Her mother followed to assist her to bed; but the child had displayed such haste in undressing herself that she only came in time to tie up her hair for the night. With no helping hand she slipped between the sheets, and her eyelids were quickly closed.

"Are you comfortable?" asked H  l  ne, as she drew up the bed-clothes and tucked her carefully in.

"Yes, quite comfortable. Leave me alone and don't disturb me. Take away the lamp."

Her only yearning was to be alone, to be girt in by the darkness, that she might reopen her eyes and chew the cud of her sorrows, with no one near to watch her. When the light had been carried away, her eyes opened to their widest extent.

Not far away, in the meantime, H  l  ne was pacing up and down her room. She was seized with a wondrous longing to be up and moving about; the idea of going to bed seemed to her insufferable. She glanced at the clock—twenty minutes to nine; what was she to do? She rummaged about in a drawer, but forgot what she was seeking for. Then she wandered up to her bookshelves, glancing aimlessly over the books; but the very reading of the titles wearied her. A buzzing sprang up in her ears with the room's stillness; the loneliness, the heavy atmosphere, were as an agony to her. She would fain have had some bustle going on around her, or people to speak to—something, in short, to draw her from herself. Twice she listened at the door of Jeanne's little room, from which there issued no sound of breathing. Everything was quiet; she turned back once more, and amused herself by taking up and replacing whatever came to her hand. Suddenly the thought flashed across her mind that Z  phyrin must be still beside Rosalie. It was a relief to her; she was delighted at the idea of not being alone, and she stepped along in her slippers towards the kitchen.

She was already in the lobby and was pushing open the glass door of the inner passage, when there came to her ear the re-echoing sound of a box on the ears given with the greatest heartiness, and Rosalie could be heard exclaiming:

• "Ha, ha! you think you'll nip me again, do you? Take your paws off!"

"Oh! that's nothing, my charmer!" exclaimed Zéphyrin in his thick, guttural tones. "That's to show how I love you—in this style you know——"

Here the door gave a loud creak. On her entering, Héléne discovered the diminutive soldier and the servant maid, seated very quietly at table, with noses bent over their plates. They assumed complete indifference; their innocence was certain. Yet their faces were dyed with blushes, their eyes were aflame, and they wriggled about restlessly on their straw-bottomed chairs. Rosalie started up and hurried forward.

"Madame wants something?"

Héléne had no pretext ready to her tongue. She had come to see them, to chat with them, and have their company. But she felt sudden shame; she dared not say that she wanted nothing.

"Have you any hot water?" she asked, after a silence.

"No, madame, and my fire is nearly out. Oh, but that doesn't matter; I'll give you some in five minutes. It boils in no time."

She threw on some charcoal and then placed the kettle above; but seeing that her mistress still lingered in the doorway, she said:

"I'll bring the water to you in five minutes, madame."

In answer Héléne gave an unmeaning wave of her hand.

"I'm not in a hurry for it; I'll wait. Don't disturb yourself, my girl; eat away, eat away. Here's a lad who'll have to go back to his barracks."

Rosalie sat down again with a good grace. Zéphyrin was still standing upright, and having given a military salute returned to the cutting of his meat, squaring out his elbows to show that he could conduct himself aright. Eating thus together, after madame had finished dinner, they did not even draw the table into the middle of the kitchen floor, but were content rather to sit side by side, with their noses turned towards the wall. In this position they were enabled to jostle their knees together, pinch and slap one another, without a morsel of food being wasted; and, did they lift their eyes, the

glorious prospect of stew-pans was before them. A bunch of laurel and thyme hung near them, and a spice-box gave out a piquant perfume. Around them—the kitchen was not yet rescued from disorder—spread the ruins of the dessert; but still its presence was most attractive to sweethearts endowed with a good appetite, which they were satisfying with provender never seen within the walls of the barracks. Especially noticeable was the smell of the roast, rendered pungent with a dash of vinegar—the vinegar of the salad. In the copper pans and iron pots the reflected light from the gas was dancing. As the heat of the fire had grown beyond endurance, they had opened the windows half-way, and a cool breeze blew in from the garden, puffing up the blue cotton curtain.

"Must you be in by ten o'clock exactly?" asked H  l  ne.

"I must, madame, with all deference to you," answered Z  phyrin.

"Oh, it's a long walk! Do you take the 'bus'?"

"Oh, yes, madame, sometimes! But you see a good swinging walk is much the best."

She had advanced a step into the kitchen and was leaning against the dresser; her arms had fallen down and her hands were clasped over her dressing-gown. She gossiped away about the wretched weather they had had that day, about the food supplied to the regiment, and the high price of eggs. But every time she asked a question and their answer came, the conversation died away. They experienced some discomfort with her standing thus behind their backs; they did not turn round again but spoke into their dishes, their shoulders bent beneath her gaze, while, to conform to propriety, every mouthful they took was as small as possible. H  l  ne had now regained her tranquillity and felt quite happy here.

"Don't worry yourself, madame," said Rosalie; "the kettle is singing already. If this fire would only burn up a little better!"

H  l  ne would not allow her to disturb herself. It would be all right by-and-by. There was now an intense weariness pervading her limbs. Almost without volition she crossed the kitchen, and approached the window, where she observed the third chair, which was of wood, very high, and when turned upside down became a stool. However, she did not sit down all at once; she had caught sight of a number of pictures, heaped up at a corner of the table.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, as she took them in her hand, inspired with the wish of gratifying Zéphyrin.

The little soldier gaped with a silent chuckle. His face beamed with smiles, and his eyes followed each picture, while his head wagged when something specially lovely was being examined by madame.

"That one there," he suddenly burst out, "I found it in the Rue du Temple. She's a beautiful woman with flowers in her basket."

Hélène sat down and inspected the beautiful woman who was exhibited on what had served as the lid of a box of lozenges, all gilt and varnished, with every stain carefully wiped off by Zéphyrin. On the chair a dish-clout was hanging, and she could not well lean back. She flung it aside, and once more lapsed into her dreaming. As the two sweethearts remarked Hélène's good-nature, their restraint vanished, and in the end her very presence was forgotten. From Hélène's hands the pictures dropped, one by one, on her knees; and with a vague smile playing on her face, she regarded them and listened to their talk.

"Say, my dear" whispered the girl, "why don't you have some of the mutton?"

He answered neither yes nor no, but swung backwards and forwards on his chair as though he had been tickled, then stretched himself contentedly while she placed a thick slice on his plate. His red shoulder-straps moved up and down, and his bullet-head, with enormous ears jutting out, swayed to and fro within the yellow collar as though it were the head of some baboon. His laughter ran all over him and he almost burst inside his tunic, which he never unbuttoned out of respect for madame.

"This is far better than old Rouvet's radishes," he exclaimed at last with his mouth full.

This was a reminiscence of their country home. The laughter of both was immoderate, and Rosalie held on to the table to prevent herself falling. It happened one day before their first communion, Zéphyrin had filched three radishes from old Rouvet. They were very tough, these radishes, tough enough to break their teeth; but Rosalie, all the same, crunched through her share of the spoil at the back of the school-house. Hence it was that every time they chanced to be taking a meal together, Zéphyrin never omitted to ejaculate:

"Yes! this is better than old Rouvet's radishes!"

Rosalie's laughter grew beyond measure, and the result was that the band of her petticoat gave way with an audible crack.

"Hullo! has it parted?" asked the little soldier with triumph in his tones.

He put out his hand with the intention of finding out for himself, but his reward at her hands was a good slap.

"Be quiet; you won't be allowed to put it right! Why, it's disgusting to make me burst the band! I put a fresh one on every week!"

But he did not give up his attempt, and she took a little bit of the flesh on his hand between her thick fingers and twisted it. This trick of hers served only to lead him further, when suddenly with a furious glance she reminded him that her mistress was looking on. He showed little compunction, and stuffed his cheek with a huge mouthful, winking towards her in the rakish soldier's style, while his looks declared that no woman, not even a lady, disliked what he had been doing. To be sure, when folks are sweethearting other people always like to be looking on.

"You have still five years to serve, haven't you?" asked Hélène, sinking into her high wooden chair, and yielding herself up to a feeling of tenderness.

"Yes, madame; perhaps only four, if there isn't need for me."

It struck Rosalie that her mistress was thinking of her marriage, and she broke in with a burst of assumed anger:

"Oh! madame, he can stick in the army for ten years yet! I won't trouble myself to demand him from government! He is becoming too much of the rake; yes, I believe he is being ruined! Oh, yes, it's useless for you to laugh! That won't take with me. When we go before the mayor to get married we'll see on whose side the laugh is!"

With this he chuckled all the more, that he might prove himself the lady-killer before madame, and the maid's annoyance seemed to get the mastery over her.

"You had better go away, I advise you! You know, madame, he's just a booby at heart! You've no idea what brutes this uniform makes of men. That's the way he goes on with his comrades. If I sent him to the door, you would hear him sobbing on the stairs. Oh, I don't care a fig for you, my

lad! Why, when such is my wish, won't you be always beside me to know how my stockings are made?"

She bent forward to observe him closely, but on seeing his comely freckled face beginning to cloud over, she grew instantly fond, and prattled on without seeming transition:

"Ah! I haven't told you I've received a letter from auntie. The Guignard lot want to sell their house. Ay! and almost for nothing too! We might perhaps be able to take it later on!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Zéphyrin, his face brightening up, "we would be quite at home there. There's room enough for two cows."

With the idea they lapsed into silence. They were now having some dessert. The little soldier spread preserves over his bread with a child's greedy satisfaction, while the servant girl pared an apple with a careful and maternal air. His disengaged hand, however, he thrust under the table, and with a cat-like movement stroked her knees, but with such gentleness that she pretended to be unconscious of it. When his conduct was at all seemly, she was by no means offended. It must even have been agreeable to her, though she did not confess to it, for thrills of happiness pervaded her as she sat on her chair. The day, in a word, had been a round of pleasure.

"Madame," exclaimed Rosalie after an interval of silence, "there's the water boiling now."

Hélène never stirred. She felt herself breathing their atmosphere of happiness; she gave a continuance to their dreams and thought of them living in the country in the Guignards' house and possessed of two cows. It brought a smile to her face as she saw him so serious with his hand held under the table, while the little maid sat very stiff with innocent demeanour. Then everything became blurred; she lost all definite sense of her surroundings, of the place where she was and of what had brought her there. The copper pans were flashing on the walls; feelings of tenderness riveted her there, and her eyes had a far-away look. She was not affected in any way by the disorderly state of the kitchen. This subsidence of all activity within her inspired her with the intense joy resulting from a satisfied longing. She was conscious only of the great heat, and the fire was bedewing her pale brow with beads of perspiration; behind her the wind blew deliciously on her neck through the half-open window.

"Madame, your water is boiling," again said Rosalie. "There will be soon nothing left in the kettle."

She held the kettle before her, and Hélène, for the moment astonished, was forced to rise.

"Oh, yes! thank you!"

She had no longer an excuse, and she went away slowly and regretfully. When she reached her room she was at a loss what to do with the kettle. Suddenly within her there was a burst of passionate love. The torpor which had reduced her to a state of stupidity vanished before a wave of glowing feeling, the rush of which thrilled her as with fire. She shivered with a pleasure she had not yet known. Memories returned to her; her senses awoke too late to the consciousness of an awful and unsatisfied desire. Standing upright in the middle of the room, she stretched her whole body, her nerveless limbs cracking and her hands upraised and bent round. Oh! she loved him; she longed for him; she would yield herself to him the next time at once.

While she was taking off her dressing-gown and gazing at her naked arms, a noise broke on her anxious ear. She thought she had heard Jeanne coughing. Taking up the lamp, she found the child with eyelids closed, seemingly fast asleep. But the moment the mother, satisfied with her examination, turned her back, the child's eyes were opened wide—those black eyes which followed her movements as she returned to her room. There was no sleep for Jeanne, nor had she any desire to be sent to sleep. A second fit of coughing racked her bosom, but she buried her head beneath the coverlet and stifled every sound. She might go away for ever now; her mother would never remark her absence. Her eyes were still wide open in the darkness; she knew everything as though knowledge had come with thought, but she would die without a murmur.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT day all sorts of practical ideas took possession of Hélène's mind. She awoke, impressed by the overpowering necessity of keeping personal watch over her own happiness, and shuddering with fear lest by some imprudent step she might lose Henri. At this chilly morning hour, when there seemed a numbing and sleepy atmosphere in her room, she felt she idolised him, she longed for him with a sudden transport that pervaded her whole being. Never had she experienced such an anxiety to be diplomatic. Her first thought was that she must go and see Juliette that very morning, and thus obviate the need of any tedious explanations or inquiries which might result in ruining everything.

On her calling on Madame Deberle about nine o'clock, she found her already up, with pallid cheeks and red eyes like the heroine in a play. As soon as she caught sight of her, the poor woman threw herself with a burst of sobbing into her arms, exclaiming that she was her good angel. She didn't love Malignon, not in the least, she swore it! Gracious heavens! what a stupid adventure! It would kill her—there was no doubt of that! Now she did not feel herself qualified in the least for the ruses, lies, and agonies, and the tyranny of a sentiment that never varied. Oh, how delightful did the sensation seem of finding herself again free! She laughed contentedly; but immediately there was another outburst of tears as she besought her friend not to despise her. Beneath her feverish unrest there lingered a fear; she imagined her husband knew everything. He had come home the night before trembling with agitation. She overwhelmed Hélène with questions, who now with a hardihood and facility which amazed herself, poured into her ears a story, every detail of which she invented off-hand one by one. She vowed to her that her husband doubted her in nothing. It was she who had become acquainted with everything, and, wishing to save her, had devised the plan of breaking in upon their meeting. Juliette listened to her, put

instant credit in the fiction, and her face grew sunny with joy, her smiles beaming through her tears: She threw herself once more on her neck. Her caresses brought no embarrassment to Hélène; she experienced none of the honourable scruples that had at one time affected her. When she left her, after extracting a promise from her that she would try to be calm, she laughed in her sleeve at her own cunning; she quitted the house in a transport of delight.

Some days slipped away. Hélène's whole existence had undergone a change; and in the thoughts of every hour she lived no longer in her own home, but with Henri. The only thing that existed for her was the little next-door house in which her heart beat. Whenever an excuse seemed sufficient to her she ran thither, and forgot everything in the content of breathing the same air. In the first raptures of possession the sight of Juliette flooded her with tenderness as being one of Henri's belongings. He had not again, however, been able to meet her for a moment alone. She appeared affectedly loth to give him a second assignation. One evening, when he was leading her into the hall, she had merely made him swear never to visit again the house in the Passage des Eaux, as such an act might compromise her. Both trembled in eager expectation of the passionate embrace in which they would clasp one another, they knew not where, some place, some night; and Hélène, haunted with this longing, only existed henceforth for that blissful moment, indifferent to every one, passing her days in hoping for it, and experiencing a great happiness that was marred only by the troubling consciousness that Jeanne's cough was always breaking on her ear.

Jeanne was shaken with a short, dry cough, that never ceased and became severer towards evening. She was then slightly feverish, and she grew weak with the sweats that bathed her in her sleep. When her mother cross-questioned her, she answered that she wasn't ill, that she felt no pain. Doubtless it was the cold coming to an end. Hélène, appeased by the explanation, and having no adequate idea of what was going on around her, retained, however, in her bosom, amidst the excess of joy that made up her life, a vague and rankling grief, as though it were some burden, the fretting of which drew blood from her in some spot that she could not designate. At times, when she was plunged in the blissful tenderness of one of her meaningless transports, an anxious thought came to her



DOCTOR DEBERLE WITH HÉLÈNE IN MALIGNON'S
APARTMENT.

—she imagined there was some gloomy care behind her. She turned round, and her face shone with a smile. People are ever in a tremble when they are too happy. There was nothing there. Jeanne had coughed a moment before, but she sipped some comforting drink; there would be no ill effects.

But one afternoon, old Doctor Bodin, who visited them in the character of the family-friend, prolonged his stay and carefully examined Jeanne from the corners of his little blue eyes. He generally questioned her as though he were having some fun with her. On this occasion not a word escaped his lips. But two days after he made his appearance again; and this time, not troubling to examine Jeanne, he talked away merrily in the characteristic fashion of the man who has seen many years and many things, and the conversation turned on travelling. Once he had served as a military surgeon; he knew every corner of Italy. It was a magnificent country, which to be admired must be seen in spring. Why didn't Madame Grandjean take her daughter there? From this he led by easy transitions to advising a visit to the land of the sun, as he styled it. Hélène's eyes were bent on him fixedly. "No, no," he exclaimed "neither of you is ill! Oh, no, certainly not! Still a change of air would mean new strength!" Her face had paled to a death-like white; she was seized with a mortal chill at the thought of leaving Paris. Gracious Heavens! to go away so far, so far! to lose Henri in a moment, their love to droop without a to-morrow! Such was the agony the thought produced that she bent her head towards Jeanne to hide her emotion. Did Jeanne wish to go away? The child, with a chilly gesture, had intertwined her little fingers. Oh! yes, she would so like! She would so like to go away into the sunny land, quite alone, she and her mother, quite alone! Over the poor attenuated face, while her cheeks were burning with fever, there swept the bright hope of a new life. But Hélène would listen to no more; indignation and distrust alike led her to believe that they were all—the Abbé, Doctor Bodin, Jeanne herself—plotting to separate her from Henri. When he observed the pallor of her cheeks, the old doctor imagined that he had not been so prudent as he might have been, and hastened to declare that there was no hurry, though he determined to return to the subject at another time.

That day it happened that Madame Deberle was to be at home. As soon as the doctor had gone Hélène hastened to

put on her bonnet. Jeanne refused to quit the house; she felt better beside the fire; she would be very good and would not open the window. For some time she had not teased her mother to be allowed to go with her; but she followed her as she went out with a longing look. When she was left alone she shrunk into her chair and sat for hours motionless.

"Mamma, is Italy far away?" she asked as Hélène glided towards her to kiss her.

"Oh! very far away, my pet!"

Jeanne clung round her neck, and not allowing her to rise again at the moment, whispered:

"Well? Rosalie could take care of everything here. We would have no need of her. A small travelling-trunk would do for us, you know! Oh! it would be delightful, darling mother! Nobody but us two! I would come back quite fat—like this!"

She inflated her cheeks and pictured how stout her arms would be. Hélène's answer was that she would see; and then she ran away with a final injunction to Rosalie to take good care of mademoiselle. Thereupon the child coiled herself up in the chimney corner, gazing at the ruddy fire and buried in a brown study. From time to time she moved her hands forward mechanically to warm them. The glinting of the flames dazzled her large eyes. So absorbed was she in her dreaming that she did not hear Monsieur Rambaud entering the room. His visits were very frequent; he came, he would say, in the interests of the paralytic woman for whom Doctor Deberle had not yet been able to secure admission into the Hospital for Incurables. Finding Jeanne alone, he took a seat on the other side of the fire-place, and chatted with her as though she were a grown-up person. It was most regrettable; this poor woman had waited a week; but he would go down presently and see the doctor, who might perhaps give him an answer. Meanwhile he did not stir.

"Why hasn't your mother taken you with her?" he asked.

Jeanne's shoulders moved with a gesture full of weariness. To go about in the company of others entailed too much trouble. Nothing gave her any pleasure now.

"I am getting old," she added, "and I can't be always amusing myself. Mamma finds entertainment out of doors and I within; so we are not together."

There ensued a silence. The child shivered and held out

her two hands towards the fire which burnt steadily with a ruddy glare; and, in a word, she seemed like some old dame, muffled up in a huge shawl, with a silk handkerchief round her neck and another encircling her head. Shrouded in all these wraps, it struck one that she was no larger than an ailing bird, sore distressed and panting amidst its plumage. Monsieur Rambaud, with hands clasped over his knees, was gazing at the fire. He turned towards Jeanne and asked if her mother had gone out the evening before. She answered with a nod, yes. And did she go out the evening before that and the previous day? The answer was always yes, given with a nod of the head; her mother quitted her every day.

With this the child and Monsieur Rambaud gazed at one another for a long time, their faces pale and serious, as though they shared some great sorrow. They made no reference to it—a chit like her and an old man could not talk of such a thing together; but they were well aware why they were so sad, and why it was a pleasure to them to sit thus at each side of the fire-place when they were alone in the house. It was a comfort beyond telling. They loved to be near one another that their forlornness might pain them less. A wave of tenderness poured into their hearts: they would fain have embraced and wept together.

“You are cold, you dear old friend, I’m certain of it. Come nearer the fire.”

“No, no, my darling, I’m not cold.”

“Oh! you’re telling a fib; your hands are like ice! Come nearer or I’ll get vexed.”

It was now his turn to display his anxious care.

“I could lay a wager they haven’t left you any drink. I’ll run and make some for you; would you like it? Oh! I’m a good hand at making it. You would see, if I were your nurse, you wouldn’t be without anything you wanted.”

He did not allow himself any more explicit hint. Jeanne somewhat sharply declared she was disgusted with cooling drinks; she was compelled to sip too many of them. But now and then she accepted attentions from Monsieur Rambaud as he fluttered round her like a mother; he slipped a pillow under her shoulders, gave her the medicine that she had almost forgotten, or carried her into the bedroom clasped in his arms. These little acts of devotion thrilled both with tenderness. As Jeanne eloquently declared with her sombre eyes, the flashing

of which filled the old man with a wondrous emotion, they were playing the parts of the father and the little girl while her mother was absent. Suddenly a sadness fell on them; their talk died away, and they glanced at one another stealthily with pitying looks.

After a lengthy silence the child again asked the question which she had already put to her mother :

"Is Italy far away?"

"Oh! I should think so," replied Monsieur Rambaud. "It's away over there, on the other side of Marseilles, a deuce of a distance! Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Oh! because—" she began gravely. But she burst into loud complaints at her ignorance. She was always ill, and she had never been sent to school. Then they were both silent again, lulled into forgetfulness with the intense heat of the fire.

In the meantime Hélène had found Madame Deberle and her sister Pauline in the Japanese pavilion where they frequently whiled away the afternoon. Inside it was very warm, and from the mouth of the stove was wafted an oppressive heat.

The large windows were shut, and a full view could be had of the narrow garden in its winter guise, like some immense painting in sepia finished with exquisite delicacy, with a tracery of little black branches showing clear against the brown earth. The two sisters were carrying on a sharp controversy.

"Now, be quiet!" exclaimed Juliette, "it is our palpable interest to support Turkey."

"Oh! I've had a talk about it with a Russian," replied Pauline, who was equally excited. "We are in high favour at St Petersburg, and there only can we find our true allies."

Juliette's face assumed a serious look, and, crossing her arms, she exclaimed :

"Well, and what will you do with the balance of power in Europe?"

The Eastern crisis was the absorbing topic in Paris at the moment; society ran riot over it; and every woman who pretended to any position could not speak with propriety of any other thing. Thus, for two days past, Madame Deberle had devoted herself with passionate fervour to foreign politics. Her ideas were very pronounced on the various results which threatened to ensue. Pauline provoked her to madness by assuming the somewhat original rôle of advocating Russia's cause in opposition to the clear interests of France. Her first

intention was to convince her of her folly, but she soon lost her temper.

"Pooh! hold your tongue; you speak like an idiot! Now, if you had only studied the matter carefully with me——"

• She broke off to greet Hélène who entered at the moment.

"Good day, my dear! It is very good of you to call. I don't suppose you have any news. This morning's paper talked of an ultimatum. There was great excitement during the sitting of the House of Commons!"

"No, I don't know anything," answered Hélène who was astounded by the question. "I go out so little!"

However, Juliette had not waited for her reply. She hastened to explain to Pauline the object to be attained in neutralising the Black Sea, and her talk bristled with references to English and Russian generals, whose names were mentioned familiarly and with faultless pronunciation. But Henri now made his appearance with several newspapers in his hand. Hélène was quick to know that he came there for her sake.

Their eyes were eagerly bent on one another with a look that partook of fascination, and when their hands met it was in a long-continued and silent clasp that told how the personality of each was lost in the other.

"Is there anything in the papers?" asked Juliette feverishly.

"In the papers, my dear?" repeated the doctor; "no, there's never anything!"

For a time the Eastern Question dropped into the background. There were allusions made several times to some one whom they were expecting, but who did not make his appearance. Pauline remarked that it would soon be three o'clock. Oh! he would come, declared Madame Deberle; he had given such a definite promise; but she never hinted at any name. Hélène heard without understanding; what had no connection with Henri had not the least interest for her. She no longer brought her work with her; her visits would last for two hours, and she would take no part in the conversation, her mind filled with the same girlish dream wherein all others miraculously vanished, and she was left alone with him. However, she replied to all Juliette's questions, while Henri's eyes, riveted ever on her own, thrilled her with a delicious languor. He moved behind her with the intention of pulling up one of the blinds, and she knew well that he had come to ask another meeting, as she noticed the tremor that seized him when he

brushed against her hair. She was ready to yield, for she had no longer the strength to wait.

"There's a ring at the bell; that must be him!" suddenly exclaimed Pauline.

The faces of the two sisters assumed an air of indifference. It was Malignon who made his appearance, dressed with greater care than ever, his looks somewhat sombre in their seriousness. He shook hands with those who deigned to honour him so far; but he eschewed his customary jocularities, and re-entered with dignified aspect a house where he had not shown his face for some time past. While the doctor and Pauline were expostulating with him on the rarity of his visits, Juliette bent down and whispered to H  l  ne, who, despite her supreme indifference, was overcome with astonishment.

"Ah! you are surprised? Dear me! I don't want him at all! but at heart he's such a good fellow that nobody could be long angry with him! Just fancy! he has unearthed a husband for Pauline. It's splendid, isn't it?"

"Oh! no doubt," answered H  l  ne complacently.

"Yes, one of his friends, immensely rich, who never thought of getting married, but whom he has sworn to bring here! We were waiting for him to-day to have some definite reply. So, you know, I had to pass over a lot of things. Oh! there's no danger now; we know one another thoroughly."

Her face beamed with a pretty smile, and she blushed somewhat at the memories conjured up; but soon she turned and took instant possession of Malignon. H  l  ne likewise smiled. These accommodating circumstances in life were sufficient excuse for her own delinquencies. It was highly criminal to think of tragic melodramas; no, everything wound up with universal happiness. But while she was thus indulging in the faint-hearted but pleasing thought that there was nothing absolutely indefensible, Juliette and Pauline had just opened the door of the pavilion and were dragging Malignon in their train into the garden. Suddenly she heard words from Henri that fell low and passionately on her neck.

"I beseech you, H  l  ne! Oh! I beseech you——"

She started to her feet, and gazed around her with sudden anxiety. They were quite alone; she could see the three others walking slowly up and down one of the walks. Henri was bold enough to lay his hands on her shoulder, and she trembled with a dismay that was mingled with rapturous joy.

"Whenever you wish," she stammered, knowing full well that he was seeking an assignation. Hurriedly they exchanged a few words.

"Wait for me to-night in the house in the Passage des Eaux."

"No, no, I cannot—I have explained to you, and you swore to me——"

"Well, somewhere else, wherever you like, so that I can see you! In your own house—to-night?"

She experienced a feeling of revulsion. But she could only refuse with a sign, to which she was impelled by fear, as she observed the two ladies and Malignon returning. Madame Deberle's pretext for taking the young man away was to show him a miracle in operation—several clumps of violets in full blossom notwithstanding the cold weather. She was walking quickly and entered before the others, her face lit up with smiles.

"It's all arranged," she exclaimed.

"What's all arranged?" asked Hélène, who was still trembling with excitement and had forgotten everything.

"Oh, this marriage! It was such a fuss! Pauline was at first not to be won over! The young man has seen her and thinks her charming! To-morrow we're all going to dine with papa. I could have embraced Malignon for his good news!"

With the utmost self-possession Henri had so contrived as to put some distance between Hélène and himself. He also expressed his sense of Malignon's favour, and seemed to share his wife's delight at the prospect of seeing their little sister settled at last. He turned then to Hélène, and informed her that she had dropped one of her gloves. She thanked him. They could hear Pauline laughing and joking in the garden. She was leaning towards Malignon, murmuring broken sentences into his ear, and bursting into loud laughter as he gave her whispered answers. Without doubt he was chatting confidentially to her about her future husband. Hélène inhaled the cold air with delight as it was wafted through the open door of the pavilion.

It was at this moment that a silence had fallen on Jeanne and Monsieur Rambaud through the languor produced by the intense heat of the fire. The child woke up from the long-continued pause with a sudden question, as if the question had been led up to by her dreaming fit:

"Would you like to go into the kitchen? We'll see if we can get a glimpse of mamma!"

"I'll be very glad," replied Monsieur Rambaud.

She was stronger to-day, reaching the kitchen without any assistance, and she leaned her face against a pane of glass. Monsieur Rambaud also gazed into the garden. The trees were bare of foliage, and through the large transparent windows they could make out every detail inside the Japanese pavilion. Rosalie, who was busy attending to the soup, regarded mademoiselle as an intruder on her domain. But the child had caught sight of her mother's dress; and she pointed her out, while she flattened her face against the glass to obtain a better view. Pauline meanwhile had been looking up, and nodded vigorously. Hélène also made her appearance, and signed to her to come down to the garden.

"They have seen you, mademoiselle," said the servant girl. "They want you to go down."

Monsieur Rambaud was forced to open the window, and every one shouted to him to carry Jeanne downstairs. Jeanne vanished into her room and vehemently refused, accusing her worthy friend of having purposely tapped on the window. It was a great pleasure to her to look at her mother, but she declared stubbornly she would not go near that house; and to all Monsieur Rambaud's questions and entreaties she would only answer with a stern "Because!" which was meant to explain everything.

"It is not you who ought to force me," she said at last with a gloomy look.

But he told her that she would grieve her mother very much, and that it would be a pity to insult other people. He would muffle her up well, she would not catch cold; and, so saying, he wound the shawl round her body, and taking off the silk handkerchief she had round her head, put on in its place a knitted hood. Even when she was ready she protested her unwillingness. In the end she allowed him to carry her down, with the express proviso that he would take her up again the moment she should feel poorly. The porter opened the door communicating between the two houses, and when they entered the garden they were hailed with exclamations of joy. Madame Deberle, in especial, displayed over Jeanne an excess of tenderness; she ensconced her in a chair near the stove, and desired that the windows should be forthwith closed, as she

declared the air was rather sharp for the darling child. Malignon had now left. As Hélène pushed back with her hand the child's dishevelled hair, feeling some shame in seeing her in company muffled up in a shawl and with a hood for head-dress, Juliette burst out in protest:

"Leave her alone! Aren't we all at home here? Poor Jeanne! we are glad to have her!"

She rang the bell and asked if Miss Smithson and Lucien had not yet returned from their daily walk. They had not yet returned. It was as well, she declared; Lucien was getting beyond all control, and the night before had made the five Levasseur girls sob fit to break their hearts.

"Would you like to play at something?" asked Pauline, who seemed to have lost her head with the thought of her impending marriage. "Some game that doesn't tire one."

But Jeanne shook her head in refusal. Beneath their drooping lids her eyes wandered over the faces that surrounded her. The doctor had just informed Monsieur Rambaud that admission to the Hospital for Incurables had been secured for his protégée, and in a burst of emotion the worthy man clasped his hands as though a great personal favour had been conferred on him. They were all lounging in their chairs, and the conversation became delightfully friendly. There was less effort in the following up of remarks, and there were at times intervals of silence. While Madame Deberle and her sister were busily engaged in discussion, Hélène said to the two men:

"Doctor Bodin has advised us to go to Italy."

"Ah! that is why Jeanne was questioning me!" exclaimed Monsieur Rambaud. "Would it give you any pleasure to go away there?"

Without vouchsafing any answer, the child clasped her two little hands over her bosom while her pale face flushed with joy. She stealthily, and with some fear, looked towards the doctor; it was he, she knew well, whom her mother was consulting. He started slightly, and then sat chilled to the heart. Suddenly, however, Juliette joined in the conversation, wishing, as usual, to have her finger in every pie.

"What's this? are you talking about Italy? Didn't you say you had some idea of going to Italy? Well, it's a droll coincidence! Why, this very morning, I was teasing Henri to take me to Naples! Just fancy, for ten years now I have

been dreaming of seeing Naples! He promises me every spring, but he doesn't keep to his word!"

"I didn't tell you that I would not go," murmured the doctor.

"What! you didn't tell me? Why, you refused flatly, with the excuse that you could not leave your patients!"

Jeanne was listening eagerly. Her marble brow was disfigured with a deep wrinkle, and she was pulling her fingers mechanically, one after the other.

"Oh! I could entrust my patients for a few weeks to the care of a brother-physician," explained the doctor. "That's to say if I thought it would give you so much pleasure——"

"Doctor," interrupted Hélène, "are you also of opinion that such a journey would benefit Jeanne?"

"It would be the very thing; it would restore her thoroughly to health. Children are always the better for a change."

"Oh! then," exclaimed Juliette, "we can take Lucien, and we can all go together? That will be pleasant, won't it?"

"Yes, indeed; I'll do whatsoever you wish," he answered smilingly.

Jeanne lowered her face, and wiped from her eyes two heavy tears of passionate anger and grief. She fell back in her chair as though she would fain hear and see no more, while Madame Deberle, filled with ecstasy by the suggestion of such unexpected pleasuring, began chattering noisily. Oh! how good her husband was! She kissed him for his self-sacrifice. Then, without the loss of a moment, she busied herself sketching the necessary preparations. Next week they would start. Goodness gracious! she would never have time to get everything ready! Next they wanted to draw out a plan of their journeying; they would need to pass through this and the other place certainly; they could stay a week at Rome; then they would have to stay in a little country place that Madame de Guiraud had mentioned to her; and she wound up with a lively discussion with Pauline, who was eager that they should postpone their departure till such time as she could accompany them with her husband.

"Not a bit of it!" she exclaimed. "The wedding can take place when we come back."

Jeanne's presence had been wholly forgotten. Her eyes

were riveted on the faces of her mother and the doctor. The proposed journey, indeed, now offered inducements to Hélène, for it must necessarily keep her near Henri. Within her heart welled up a great joy, as she thought of their journeying together to the land of the sun, of their living through the days each at the other's side, and extracting honeyed bliss from these hours of freedom. Round her lips wreathed a smile of happy relief; she had imagined with fear and trembling that he would be lost to her; and she deemed herself blessed in the thought that she would carry her love with her. While Juliette was unrolling maps showing places they would travel through, each was indulging in the dream that they were already walking together through a fairy-land of perennial spring: each told the other with a look that their passion would reign there, ay, and wheresoever they breathed the same air.

In the meantime, Monsieur Rambaud, whom an unconscious sadness had slowly awed into silence, was quick to observe Jeanne's anguish.

"Aren't you well, my darling?" he asked in a whisper.

"Oh! I'm frightfully ill! Carry me up again, I implore you."

"But we must tell your mamma."

"Oh! no, no; mamma is busy, she hasn't any time to give to us. Carry me up, oh! carry me up."

He clasped her in his arms and said to Hélène that weariness had told somewhat on the child. In answer, she requested him to wait for her when he had reached her rooms; she would hasten after them. The little one, though light as a feather, seemed to slip from his grasp, and he was forced to come to a standstill on the second storey. She had leaned her head against his shoulder: each gazed into the other's face with a look of grievous pain. Not a sound broke the chill silence of the staircase. In a low voice he asked her:

"You're pleased, aren't you, to go to Italy?"

She straightway burst into sobs, declaring in broken phrases that she had no longer any craving to go, and that she would rather die in her own room. Oh! she would not go, she would fall ill, she knew it well. She would go nowhere—nowhere. They could give her little shoes to the poor. Through her tears she whispered to him:

"Do you remember what you asked of me one night?"

"What was it, my pet?"

"To stay with mamma always—always—always! Well if you wish so still, I wish so too!"

The tears welled into Monsieur Rambaud's eyes. He kissed her tenderly, while she added in a still lower key:

"You are perhaps vexed by my getting so angry over it. I didn't understand, you know. But it's you whom I want! Oh! say that it will be soon. Won't you say that it will be soon? I love you more than the other one!"

Below in the pavilion, Hélène began to dream once more. The proposed journey was still the topic of conversation. Within her sprang up an unconquerable yearning to relieve her overflowing heart and to paint to Henri the sea of happiness which was drowning her senses; and while Juliette and Pauline were wrangling over the number of dresses that ought to be taken, she leaned towards him and gave him the assignation she had refused but an hour before:

"Come to-night; I shall expect you."

She ascended to her own rooms at last, but on the staircase she met Rosalie flying down, terror-stricken. The moment she saw her mistress, the girl shrieked out:

"Madame! madame! Oh! be quick! Mademoiselle is ill! She's spitting blood!"

CHAPTER III.

ON rising from the dinner-table the doctor spoke to his wife of a woman who was approaching her confinement, and in close attendance on whom he would doubtless have to pass the night. He quitted the house at nine o'clock, walked down to the riverside, and paced along the deserted quays through the blackness of the night; a slight but damp wind was blowing, and the swollen Seine rolled on in inky waves. As soon as eleven o'clock chimed, he walked up the Trocadéro hill and began to prow! round the house, the huge square pile of which seemed but a deepening of the gloom. Lights could still be seen streaming through the dining-room windows. Walking round he noted that the kitchen was also brilliantly lighted up. He stood still in astonishment that slowly developed into uneasiness. Shadows traversed the blinds; there seemed to be considerable movement in the room. Had Monsieur Rambaud perhaps stayed to dine? But the worthy man never omitted leaving at ten o'clock. He dared not go up, for what would he say, should Rosalie open the door to him? At last, as it was nearing midnight, mad with impatience and throwing prudence to the winds, he rang the bell, and walked swiftly past Madame Bergeret's room without giving any answer. At the top of the stairs Rosalie received him.

"It's you, sir! Come in. I will go and announce you. Madame must be expecting you."

She gave no sign of surprise on seeing him at this hour. As he entered the dining-room without uttering a word, she wailed out distractedly: "Oh! mademoiselle is very ill, sir. What a night! My legs seem to be running into my body!" She left the room, and the doctor mechanically took a seat. He was oblivious to the fact that he was a physician. Pacing along the quay he had conjured up the room into which Hélène would take him; she would put a finger on his lips lest Jeanne, sleeping in the adjoining closet, should be awakened; the lamp would be lit, the room would be bathed in shadow, and their kisses would make no noise. And now he was there, as

though he were paying a visit, waiting with his hat on his knees. The intense silence that reigned outside the door was only broken by a grievous coughing.

Rosalie made her appearance once more, and quickly crossing the dining-room with a basin in her hand, merely announced to him: "Madame says you are not to go in."

He sat on, powerless to depart. Then, was their meeting to be postponed till another day? He was dazed, as though such a thing had seemed to him impossible. Then some thoughts crowded in his brain: poor Jeanne was surely failing greatly in health; children contrived to bring only sorrow and vexation. The door, however, opened once more, and Doctor Bodin entered, with a thousand excuses falling from his lips. For some time he chattered away: he had been sent for, but he would be always exceedingly pleased to enter into consultation with his renowned brother physician.

"Oh! no doubt, no doubt," stammered Doctor Deberle, whose ears were filled with a loud singing.

The elder physician, with mind set at rest, affected a puzzled manner, and declared his doubtfulness regarding the symptoms. He spoke in a whisper and described them in technical phraseology, each sentence being broken in upon, and wound up with a wink. There was coughing without expectation, very pronounced weakness, and intense feverishness. Perhaps it might develop into typhoid fever. But in the meantime he gave no opinion on the case, as the anæmic nervous affection for which the patient had been treated so long made him fear unforeseen complications.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, after delivering himself of each remark.

Doctor Deberle made answer with an evasive nodding and waving of his hand. While the other was speaking, he was slowly filled with shame at finding himself in this room. Why had he come up?

"I have applied two blisters," continued the old doctor. "I'm waiting the result. But, of course, you'll see her. You will give me your opinion then."

He led him into the bedroom. Henri entered with a shudder creeping through his frame. The chamber was very faintly lit up by a lamp. There thronged into his mind the memories of other such nights; there was the same heated perfume, the same close and calm atmosphere, the same deepening

shadows that shrouded the furniture and hangings. But there was no one to come to him with outstretched hands as in the olden days. Monsieur Rambaud lay back in an arm-chair and seemed asleep. Hélène was standing in front of the bed, robed in her white dressing-gown, but did not turn her head; her face, in its death-like pallor, appeared to him sublime. Next, for a moment's space, he gazed on Jeanne. Her weakness was so great that she could not open her eyes without fatigue. Bathed in sweat, she lay in a stupor, with ghastly face, save that a burning flush coloured each cheek.

"It's galloping consumption," he exclaimed at last, speaking aloud in spite of himself, and giving no sign of astonishment as though he had long foreseen what would happen.

Hélène heard and looked towards him. Her body seemed of ice, her eyes were dry, and she was terribly calm.

"You think so, do you?" said Doctor Bodin, simply, giving an approving nod in the style of the man who would rather not express his opinion first.

He sounded the child once more. Jeanne, her limbs quite lifeless, yielded to the examination without seemingly knowing why she was being disturbed. A few rapid sentences were exchanged between the two physicians. The old doctor murmured some words about the breathing being hollow, as though it were issuing from a cracked jar; but he assumed still further hesitancy, and suggested it might be capillary bronchitis. Doctor Deberle hastened to explain that an accidental cause had brought on the illness; doubtless it was due to a cold, he had already noticed several times that an anæmic tendency produced chest diseases. Hélène stood waiting behind them.

"Listen yourself to her breathing," said Doctor Bodin, giving way to Henri.

He leaned over her, and made as though he would take hold of Jeanne. She had not raised her eyelids; she lay in self-abandonment, consumed with fever. The open night-dress displayed the child's breast, where the budding outlines of the woman were scarcely foreshadowed; and nothing could be more chaste or yet more harrowing than the sight of this dawning maturity on which the angel of death had already laid his hand. She had displayed no aversion when the old doctor had touched her. But the moment Henri's fingers glanced against her body, she started as if she had received a shock. In a transport of shame she awoke from the coma in

which she was plunged. Her instant action was that of a girl astounded by an attempted outrage; she clasped her two poor thin little arms over her bosom, and exclaimed in quavering tones: "Mamma! mamma!"

Now she opened her eyes. When she recognised the man who was bending over her, it was with terror. She saw that her bosom was bare; her violated modesty prompted her to burst into sobs, and hastily she drew the bed-cover over herself. It seemed as though she had grown older in a flash by ten years in her agony, and that, on the brink of death, notwithstanding her ten years, she had attained a point of development to understand that this man must not lay hands on her, must not recognise her mother in her. She wailed out again in piteous entreaty: "Mamma! mamma! I beseech you!"

Hélène, who had hitherto not opened her lips, approached close to Henri. Her eyes were bent on him fixedly; her face was of marble. She touched him, and merely said in a choked voice: "Go away!"

Doctor Bodin strove to appease Jeanne, who shook the bed with her renewed coughing. He assured her that nobody would annoy her again, that every one would go away, to prevent her being disturbed.

"Go away," repeated Hélène in a deep whisper into her lover's ear. "You see very well we have killed her."

Then, without another word, Henri went away. He remained for a moment longer in the dining-room, awaiting he knew not what, something that might possibly take place. But seeing that Doctor Bodin did not come out, he groped his way down the stairs, bereft even of Rosalie's attention in lighting him on his way. His mind recurred to the awful speed with which its victims were claimed by galloping consumption, a disease to which he had devoted earnest study; the miliary tubercles would multiply with fearful speed, the choking sensation would increase; Jeanne would certainly not live three weeks.

A week passed by. In the mighty expanse of heaven that lay before the window, the sun rose and set above Paris; but Hélène was only vaguely conscious of the pitiless and steady advance of time. She grasped the fact that her daughter was doomed; she lived plunged in a stupor, alive only to the terrible anguish that filled her heart. It was but waiting on in hopelessness, springing from the certainty that death would

be merciless. She could not weep, but paced quietly up and down the room, never sitting down, tending the sufferer with slow and calculated movements. At times she would yield to fatigue and fall into a chair, whence she gazed at her for hours. Jeanne grew weaker and weaker; her body was grievously convulsed with vomiting; the fever never quitted her. When Doctor Bodin appeared, he examined her for a little while and gave some order; but his drooping shoulders, as he left the room, were eloquent of such powerlessness that the mother forbore to accompany him to ask even a question.

The morning after the illness had declared itself, Abbé Jouve had made haste to call. He and his brother came every evening, exchanging a mute clasp of the hand with Héléne, never venturing to ask any news. They had offered to watch by the bed-side in succession, but she sent them away when ten o'clock struck; she would have no one in the bedroom during the night. One night, the Abbé, who had seemed absorbed with some idea since the evening before, took her aside.

"There is one thing I've thought of," he whispered. "Her health has put obstacles in the darling child's way; she could receive the sacrament here for the first time."

His meaning at first did not seem to dawn on Héléne. This thought wherein, in spite of his characteristic charity, the priest with his absorbing interest in spiritual matters was alone revealed, came on her with surprise, and even wounded her somewhat. With a careless gesture she exclaimed:

"No, no; I would rather she wasn't worried. If there be a Heaven she will have no difficulty in entering its gates."

In the evening, however, Jeanne had one of those happy delusions which beguile the dying. Her hearing, rendered more exquisite by illness, had allowed her to catch what the Abbé had said.

"It's you, dear old friend!" said she. "You spoke about the sacrament. It will be soon, won't it?"

"No doubt, my darling," he answered.

Then she wanted him to come near to speak to her. Her mother had lifted her against the pillow, and her meagre body was crouching in a sitting posture; round her burnt-up lips there wreathed a smile, while the shadow of death was already seen in the depths of her brilliant eyes.

"Oh! I'm getting on very well," she began. "I could lift myself up if I wanted. Tell me: Would I have a white

"I don't wish him to come in."

"He is asking after mademoiselle."

"Tell him she is dying."

The door had been left open, and Henri had heard everything. Without awaiting the return of the servant-girl he walked down the stairs. He came every day, received the same answer, and went away.

What gave H  l  ne profound pain were the consolatory visits. The few ladies whose acquaintance she had made at the Deberle's house deemed it their duty to tender her their sympathy. Madame de Chermette, Madame Levasseur, Madame de Guiraud, and even other ladies, presented themselves. They made no request to be allowed to enter, but catechised Rosalie in such loud tones that the sound of their voices pierced through the thin partitions of the small lodging. Giving way to her impatience, H  l  ne thereupon summoned them into the dining-room where, standing, she spoke with them very briefly. All day she went about in her dressing-gown, careless of her attire, with her lovely hair merely gathered up and twisted into a knot. Her eyes closed spontaneously with weariness; her face was flushed; she had a bitterness in her mouth; her lips were glued together and she could scarcely articulate. When Juliette called, she could not exclude her from the bedroom, and allowed her to stay a little beside the bed.

"My dear," the latter advised her one day in friendly tones, "you give way too much. Keep up your spirits."

H  l  ne, of necessity, was about to reply when Juliette began, in the attempt to entertain her, to chat about things which were engaging the gossips of Paris.

"We are certainly going to have war. I am in a nice state about it, as I have two cousins who will have to serve."

She dropped in upon them in this style after a walk into Paris, her brain bursting with the tittle-tattle gathered in the course of the afternoon. She raised quite a storm as she rustled her long skirts through the stillness of the sick-room; but it was altogether futile for her to lower her voice and assume a pitiful air—her happy indifference peeped through all disguise; she was content and joyous in the possession of perfect health. H  l  ne was miserable in her company, and her heart was torn with jealous anguish.

"Madame," said Jeanne to her one evening, "why does Lucien not come to play with me?"

Juliette was embarrassed for the moment, and answered only with a smile.

"Is he ill, too?" continued the child.

"No, my darling, he isn't ill. He has gone to school."

As Hélène accompanied her along the lobby she showed an inclination to apologise for her prevarication.

"Oh! I should gladly bring him; I know there's no infection. But children get frightened with the least thing, and Lucien is such a stupid! He would just burst out sobbing when he saw your poor angel——"

"Yes, indeed, you are quite right," broke in Hélène, her heart ready to break with the thought of this woman's frivolity, and of her possessing a child who enjoyed robust health.

A second week passed away. The disease was developing, robbing Jeanne every hour of some of her vitality; but in its lightning rapidity, striving to destroy so delicate and lovely a body, it was unmarked by any simultaneous display of all the usual symptoms; no, she was distressed at a time by one torment only. Thus, the spitting of blood had ceased, and at intervals the cough disappeared. The child's little bosom seemed laden with so heavy and stifling a burden, that one could trace the ravages of the disease in the difficulty she experienced in breathing. Such weakness could not withstand so violent an attack; the eyes of the Abbé and Monsieur Rambaud were constantly wet with tears as they heard her. Day and night, from beneath the shelter of the curtain, issued the sound of oppressed breathing; the poor darling, whom it might have been thought the slightest shock must have slain, lived on through the agony that bathed her in sweat. Her mother, still standing with an effort, was no longer able to listen to the rattle in Jeanne's throat, and walked into the adjoining room, where she leaned her head against the wall.

Jeanne was slowly becoming oblivious to her surroundings. The world was lost to her, and her face bore an unconscious and forlorn expression, as though she had lived already all alone in some unknown sphere. When they who hovered round her wished to engage her attention, they named themselves that she might recognise them; but she would gaze at them fixedly and without a smile, then turn herself round towards the wall with a weary look. A gloominess was settling down on her; she was fading from life with the same vexation and sulkeness as she displayed in past days of jealous outbursts. Still,

at times, the whims characteristic of the invalid would awake her to consciousness. One morning she asked her mother :

"To-day is Sunday, isn't it?"

"No, my child," answered H  l  ne. "This is only Friday. Why do you wish to know?"

She seemed already to have forgotten the question she had asked. But two days after, while Rosalie was in the room, she said to her in a whisper: "This is Sunday. Z  phyrin is here. Ask him to come and see me."

The maid hesitated, but H  l  ne, who had heard, nodded to her in token of consent. The child spoke again :

"Bring him; come both of you; I shall be so pleased."

As Rosalie entered the sick-room with Z  phyrin, she raised herself on her pillow. The little soldier, with bare head and hands spread out, twisted his body about to veil his intense emotion. He had a great love for mademoiselle, and it grieved him unutterably to see her "shouldering arms on the left," as he expressed it in soldierly fashion in the kitchen. So, in spite of the previous injunctions of Rosalie, who had instructed him to be jolly, he stood speechless, with downcast face, as he saw her so pale and reduced to a skeleton. He was still as tender-hearted as ever, though so seductive in his talk; but at the moment he was wholly at a loss for any of the fine phrases that he knew so well to invent. The maid, behind him, gave him a pinch to evoke a laugh. But he could only stammer out :

"I beg pardon—mademoiselle and every one here——"

Jeanne raised herself again with the support of her tiny arms. She opened wide her large, vacant eyes; she seemed to be looking for something. Her head shook with nervous trembling; doubtless the stream of light was blinding her as the shadows of death were gathering around.

"Come closer, my friend," said H  l  ne to the soldier. "It is mademoiselle who has asked to see you."

The sunshine entered through the window, in a slanting bar of golden light, in which the dust rising from the carpet could be seen giddily circling. March had come, and the springtide was already budding outside. Z  phyrin took one step forward, and appeared in the sunshine; his little, round, freckled face flushed with the yellow light of ripe corn, while the buttons on his tunic glittered, and his red trousers were stained with the blood-hue of a field of poppies. At last Jeanne became aware of his standing there; but her looks again betrayed

uneasiness, and she glanced restlessly from one corner to another.

"What do you want, my child?" asked her mother. "We are all here." She understood, however, in a moment. "Rosalie, come nearer. Mademoiselle wishes to see you."

Rosalie, in her turn, stepped forward into the sunshine. She wore a cap, the strings of which, carelessly tossed over her shoulders, flapped round her head like the wings of a butterfly. A stream of golden light fell on her bristly black hair, and on her kindly face with its flat nose and thick lips. The little soldier and the servant-girl, standing elbow to elbow in the sunshine, seemed to be the only persons in the room. Jeanne's eyes were bent on them.

"Well, my darling," began Hélène again, "you do not say anything to them! Here they are together."

Jeanne's eyes were still fixed on them, and her head shook with the tremor of a woman in extreme old age. They stood there like man and wife, ready to take each other's arm and return to their own country-side. The spring sun threw its warmth on them, and eager to amuse mademoiselle they ended by smiling into one another's face with a look of embarrassment and tenderness. The very odour of health was exhaled from their round figures. Had they been alone, without doubt Zéphyrin would have caught hold of Rosalie, and would have received for his pains a hearty slap. Their eyes showed it.

"Well, my darling, have you nothing to say to them?"

Jeanne gazed at them, her breathing growing still more oppressed. She said not a word, but suddenly burst into tears. Zéphyrin and Rosalie had to make haste to quit the room.

"I beg pardon—mademoiselle and every one here—" stammered the little soldier, as he went away distracted.

This was one of Jeanne's last whims. She lapsed into a dull stupor, from which nothing could rouse her. She lay there in utter loneliness, unconscious even of her mother's presence. When she hung over the bed to gain one glance, the child preserved a stolid expression, as though the shadow of the curtain only had passed over her eyes. Her lips were dumb; she seemed filled with the gloomy resignation of the outcast who knows death is hovering near. Sometimes she would remain for long with her eyelids half-closed, and the on-looker was baffled in attempting to guess from her hidden gaze what absorbing thought she was intent on. Nothing had now exis-

tence for her save her large doll, reclining at her side. They had given it to her one night to divert her during her insufferable anguish, and she refused to give it back, defending it with fierce gestures the moment they essayed to take it from her. The doll, its pasteboard head placed on the bolster, was stretched out like an invalid, and the coverlet was tucked up to its shoulders. There was little doubt the child was nursing it; from time to time she touched with her hands its disjointed limbs, covered with flesh-tinted cloth, but empty of saw-dust. For hours her eyes were never once removed from the eyes of enamel that were always fixed, or from the white teeth round which wreathed an everlasting smile. She would grow suddenly affectionate, clasp its hands against her bosom and lean her cheek against the little head of hair, the caressing contact of which seemed to give her some relief. She found comfort in her affection for the big doll, and made certain of its presence when she awoke from a doze; she saw only it, and chatted to it, while her face sometimes wore the shadow of a smile, as though it had whispered something into her ear.

The third week was dragging to an end. One morning the old doctor came and remained. Hélène understood: her child would not live through the day. Since the previous evening she had been in a stupor that deprived her of the consciousness even of her own actions. There was no longer a struggle with death; it was but a question of hours. As the dying child was devoured by an awful thirst, the doctor had merely enjoined that she should be given a sleeping draught to ease her sufferings; and the relinquishing of all attempts at cure reduced Hélène to a state of imbecility. So long as the medicines littered the night-table she still had hopes of a miraculous recovery. But now bottles and boxes had vanished, and her last trust was gone. One instinct only inspired her now—to be near Jeanne, never to leave her. The doctor, wishful to distract her attention from the terrible sight, strove, by assigning her little duties, to keep her at a distance. But she returned, drawn thither by the physical craving to see. She waited, standing erect, with arms fallen at her sides and face swollen with despair. About one o'clock Abbé Jouve and Monsieur Rambaud made their appearance. The doctor went to meet them, and muttered only one word. Both grew pale. With the shock they stood stock-still, while their hands were seized with trembling. Hélène had not turned round.

The day was lovely, the afternoon typical of early April, warm and sunny. Jeanne was tossing about in her bed. Her lips moved painfully at times with the intolerable thirst. She had brought her poor transparent hands from under the coverlet, and waved them gently to and fro in the air. The secret working of the disease had ceased, she coughed no more, and the dying voice came like a breath. For a moment she turned her head, and her eyes sought the light. Doctor Bodin threw the window wide open, and Jeanne was at once tranquil, with cheek resting against the pillow and her looks roving over Paris, while the heavy breathing grew fainter and fainter.

During the three weeks of her illness, she had thus turned many times towards the city that stretched away to the horizon. Her face grew grave, and she fell to musing. At this last hour Paris was smiling under the glittering April sunshine. Warm breezes entered from without; there were bursts of children's laughter, the chirpings of sparrows. On the brink of the grave the child exerted her last strength to gaze again on the scene, and follow the trailing smoke as it floated upwards from the distant suburbs. She recognised her three old friends, the Invalides, the Panthéon, and the Tour Saint-Jacques; then she lapsed once more into unconsciousness, her weary eyelids half-closed, with this vast ocean of roofs stretching before her. Perhaps she was dreaming that she was growing much lighter and lighter, and that she was fleeting away like a bird. Now, at last, she would know; she would perch herself on the domes and steeples; with seven or eight flaps of her wings she would gaze on the forbidden mysteries that were hidden from children. She became uneasy once more, and her hands groped about; she was at rest only when she held the large doll in her little arms against her bosom. It was evidently her wish to take it with her. Her looks wandered far away amongst the chimneys glinting with the sun's ruddy light.

Four o'clock struck, and the leaden shadows of evening were already gathering. The end was at hand; there was a sound of choking, a slow and passive agony. The darling angel was without the vitality to withstand it. Monsieur Rambaud, overcome, threw himself on his knees, convulsed with silent sobbing, while he dragged himself behind a curtain to hide his grief. The Abbé was kneeling at the bed-side, with clasped hands, repeating the prayers for the dying.

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" murmured Hélène, chilled to the heart with a horror that impinged on her head with a bitter cold.

She had repulsed the doctor and thrown herself on the ground, leaning against the bed to gaze into her daughter's face. Jeanne opened her eyes, but did not look at her mother. She drew her doll still closer—her last love. Her bosom heaved with a mighty sigh, followed by two fainter ones. The light faded from her eyes, and her face for a moment gave signs of a fearful anguish. But speedily there was relief; her mouth was open, and she breathed no more.

"It is over," said the doctor, as he took her hand.

Jeanne's great vacant eyes were fixed on Paris. The long thin face was still further attenuated, the look grew sombre, and from the wrinkled brows there swept down over the features a grey shadow. Thus it was even in death that she retained the livid expression of a jealous woman. The doll's head was flung back, the hair was dishevelled, and it too seemed dead.

"It is over," again said the doctor, as he allowed the little cold hand to drop.

Hélène, with face strained forward, pressed her hands to her brow as if she felt her head splitting open. No tears came to her eyes; she gazed stupidly in front of her. Then a rattling noise mounted in her throat; she had just seen at the foot of the bed a pair of shoes that lay forgotten there. It was all over. Jeanne would never put them on again; the little shoes could be given to the poor. And with the sight the tears gushed forth; she knelt still on the ground, with face pressing against the dead child's hand, which had slipped down. Monsieur Rambaud was sobbing. The Abbé had raised his voice, and Rosalie, standing at the door of the dining-room, was biting her sleeves to check the noise of her grief.

At this very moment Doctor Deberle rang the bell. He was unable to prevent himself going up to glean information.

"How is she now?" he asked.

"Oh! sir," wailed Rosalie, "she is dead."

He stood motionless, stupefied by the announcement of the end which he had been expecting daily. At last he spoke: "O God! the poor child! what a calamity!"

He could only give utterance to these commonplace but heart-rending words. The door shut once more, and he disappeared down the stairs.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Madame Deberle was apprised of Jeanne's death she wept, and gave way to one of those outbursts of emotion that kept her in a flutter for some two days. Hers was a grief that was immoderately loud. She ran and threw herself into Hélène's arms. Then, inspired by a phrase dropped in her hearing, she was seized by the idea of imparting some affecting surroundings to the child's funeral, and she was soon absorbed in the maturing of her plan. She offered her services, declared her willingness to undertake every detail. The mother, worn out with weeping, sat overwhelmed in her chair; Monsieur Rambaud, who was acting in her name, was quickly losing his head. He consented with profuse expressions of gratitude. Hélène roused herself for a moment to declare her wish that there should be flowers—abundance of flowers.

Without losing a minute, Madame Deberle set about giving herself a world of pains. She spent the whole of the next day in running about from one lady-friend to another, bearing the woeful tidings. She had conceived the notion of having a following of little girls dressed in white. She would require at least thirty, and she did not return till she had secured the full number. She had gone in person to the undertaker's establishment, criticised the various styles, and chosen the necessary drapery. She would have the garden-railing hung with a curtain, and the body might be laid out under the lilac-trees, the twigs of which were already tipped with green. It would be delightful.

"If only it's a fine day to-morrow!" escaped from her lips in the evening when her scurrying to and fro had come to an end.

The morning was lovely; there was a blue sky and a flood of sunshine, while the air was pure and invigorating as only the air of spring can be. The funeral was to take place at ten o'clock. By nine the drapery had been arranged and hung up. Juliette ran down to give the workmen her ideas

regarding what should be done. She did not wish the trees to be altogether covered. The white cloth, fringed with gold, surrounded and formed a door-way between the two portions of the garden gate, which were thrust aside against the lilac-trees. She was not long, however, in speeding back to her drawing-room in time to receive her lady guests. Here they were to assemble to prevent Madame Grandjean's two rooms being filled to overflowing. Still, she was greatly annoyed at her husband having had to go that morning to Versailles—for some consultation or other, he explained, that he could not well neglect. She was left alone, and she would never be able to get through with it all. Madame Berthier was the first arrival, bringing her two daughters with her.

"What do you think!" exclaimed Madame Deberle; "Henri has deserted me! Well, well! Lucien, why don't you say good-day?"

Lucien was all ready dressed for the funeral, with black gloves. He seemed astonished on seeing Sophie and Blanche dressed as though they were about to take part in some gala-show. A silk sash encircled the muslin gown of each, and their veils, which swept down to the floor, hid the little caps of transparent tulle. While the two mothers were busy chatting, the three children gazed at one another, bearing themselves somewhat stiffly in their new attire. At last Lucien broke the silence by saying: "Jeanne is dead."

His heart was full, and yet his face wore a smile—a smile born of amazement. He had been very quiet since the evening before, dwelling on the thought that Jeanne was dead. As his mother was up to her ears in business, and took no notice of him, he had plied the servants with questions. Was it the case, he wanted to know, that it was impossible to move when one was dead?

"She is dead, she is dead!" echoed the two sisters, who were like rose-buds under the cover of their white veils. "Are we going to see her?"

He pondered for a time, and then, with dreamy eyes and open mouth, seemingly striving to divine the nature of the problem that lay beyond his ken, he answered in low tones:

"We shall never see her again!"

In the meantime several other little girls entered the room. On a sign from his mother Lucien advanced to meet them. Marguerite Tissot, her muslin dress enveloping her like a cloud,

seemed a child-virgin; her fair hair escaped from underneath the little cap looked through the snowy veil like a tippet figured with gold. A quiet smile crept into every face when the five Levasseurs made their appearance; they were all alike, trooping together in boarding-school fashion; the eldest first, the youngest last; and their skirts were of such enormous extent that they filled up a corner of the room. But on little Mademoiselle Guiraud's entry the whispers became audible; they laughed and crowded round to see her and kiss her. She was like some white turtle-dove with its downy feathers ruffled; wrapped up in rustling gauze, she appeared of enormous size, and round as a barrel, but still no heavier than a bird. Her mother even had lost sight of her hands. By degrees the drawing-room seemed to be filling up with a cloud of snow-flakes. Several boys, in their black coats, were like dark spots amidst the universal white. Lucien, now that his little wife was dead, made haste to choose another. He displayed the greatest hesitation; he would have preferred a wife like Jeanne, taller than himself. At last, however, he settled on having Marguerite, whose hair fascinated him, and to whom he attached himself for the day.

"The corpse hasn't been brought down yet," Pauline muttered at the moment in Juliette's ear.

Pauline was as flurried as though the preliminaries of a ball were in hand. It was with the greatest difficulty that her sister had prevented her donning a white dress for the ceremony.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Juliette, "what are they dreaming about? I must run up. Stay with these ladies."

She hastily left the room, where the mothers sat in their mourning attire chatting in whispers, while the children dared not make the least movement lest they should rumple their dresses. When she had reached the top of the staircase and entered the chamber where the body lay, Juliette's blood was chilled by the intense cold. Jeanne still seemed asleep, with clasped hands; and, like Marguerite and the Levasseur girls, she was arrayed in a white dress and white cap, with white shoes on her feet. A wreath of white roses crowned the cap, and declared her the queen of her little friends, to be honoured by the crowd of guests who were waiting below. At the window, on two chairs, was placed the oak coffin lined with satin, and open, like some casket for holding trinkets. The furniture was all in order; a wax taper was burning; the

room was close and gloomy, with the damp smell and stillness of a vault that had been walled up for many years. Juliette, fresh from the sunshine and smiling life of the outer world, came to a sudden halt, stricken dumb, without the courage to explain that they must needs hurry.

"A great many people have come," she stammered at last. There was no answer forthcoming, and she added, just for the sake of saying something: "Henri has been forced to attend a consultation at Versailles; you will excuse him."

Hélène sat in front of the bed and gazed at her with vacant looks. They were wholly unable to drag her from this room. For thirty-six hours she had lingered there, despite the prayers of Monsieur Rambaud and the Abbé Jouve, who kept watch with her. During these two nights, especially, she had been weighed to the earth with an immeasurable agony. In addition, she had experienced the unutterable grief of dressing her daughter for the last time, of putting on the white silk shoes—she would allow no other to touch the feet of the little angel who lay dead. Then she sat motionless, as though her strength were spent, and the intensity of her grief had lulled her into forgetfulness.

"Have you got some flowers?" she exclaimed after an effort, her eyes still fixed on Madame Deberle.

"Yes, yes, my dear," answered the latter. "Don't trouble yourself about that."

Since her daughter had breathed her last, Hélène had been consumed with one idea—flowers, flowers, an overwhelming profusion of flowers. With every new face upon which her eyes alighted, she grew uneasy, seemingly afraid that sufficient flowers would never be obtained.

"Are there any roses?" she began again after a silence.

"Yes. I assure you that you will be well pleased."

She shook her head and fell back once more into her stupor. In the meantime the undertaker's men were waiting on the landing. It must be got over now without delay. Monsieur Rambaud, who was himself affected to such a degree that he staggered like a drunken man, beckoned to Juliette entreatingly to assist him in leading the poor woman from the room. Both slipped their arm gently beneath hers; they raised her up and led her towards the dining-room. But the moment she divined their intention, she shook them from her in a last despairing outburst. The scene was heart-rending. She threw herself

on her knees at the bedside and clung passionately to the sheets, while the room re-echoed with her piteous shrieks; but still Jeanne lay with her face of stone, stiff and icy-cold, wrapped round by the silence of eternity. She seemed to be frowning; there was a sour pursing of the lips, eloquent of a revengeful nature; and it was this gloomy and pitiless look, springing from jealousy and transforming the face, which drove H  l  ne frantic. During the preceding thirty-six hours she had not failed to notice how gradually the old spiteful expression had taken frozen shape on her daughter's face; how more sullen she looked the nearer she approached her grave. Oh, the comfort of it if Jeanne could only have smiled on her for the last time!

"No, no!" she shrieked. "I pray you, leave her for a moment. You cannot take her from me. I want to embrace her. Oh, only a moment—only a moment!"

With trembling arms she clutched her child to her bosom, eager to dispute possession with the men who stood without in the lobby, with their backs turned towards her and an impatient frown on their faces. But her lips were powerless to breathe any warmth into the cold countenance; she became conscious that Jeanne's obstinacy was not overcome, that she refused pardon. She allowed herself to be dragged away and fell into a chair in the dining-room, with the one mournful cry, repeated twenty times: "My God! My God!"

Monsieur Rambaud and Madame Deberle were overcome with emotion. There was an interval of silence, and when the latter opened the door half-way it was all over. There was no noise—scarcely a stir. The screws, oiled beforehand, closed the lid for ever. The chamber was left empty, and a white sheet thrown over the coffin.

The door was now open, and H  l  ne was left without restraint. On her re-entering the room she cast a dazed look on the furniture and round the walls. The men were busy bearing away the corpse. Rosalie had drawn up the coverlet over the bed to efface the slight hollow made by the weight of her whom they had lost. Opening her arms with a distracted gesture and stretching out her hands, H  l  ne rushed towards the staircase. She wanted to go down, but Monsieur Rambaud held her back, while Madame Deberle explained to her that it was not quite the thing. But she vowed she would behave rationally, that she would not follow the funeral procession. Surely they could allow her to look on; she would remain quiet

in the pavilion. Both wept as they heard her pleading. She had, however, to be dressed. Juliette threw a black shawl round her to conceal her morning dress. There was no bonnet to be found; at last they came across one from which they tore a bunch of red vervain flowers. Monsieur Rambaud, who was chief mourner, took hold of Hélène's arm.

"Do not leave her," whispered Madame Deberle as they reached the garden. "I have so many things to look after!"

She hastened away. Hélène walked with difficulty, her eyes seeming ever to seek for something. As soon as she had issued into the daylight, she drew a long sigh. Angels in Heaven! what a lovely morning! She looked directly towards the iron gate, and just caught sight of the little coffin under the white drapery. Monsieur Rambaud allowed her to advance only two or three steps.

"Now, be brave," he said to her, while a shudder ran through his own frame.

They looked on the scene. The narrow coffin was bathed in sunshine. At the foot, on a lace cushion, lay a silver crucifix. To the left the holy-water sprinkler was plunged in its font. The tall wax tapers were burning with an invisible flame, little specks that seemed endowed with life dancing away from them at intervals. Beneath the hangings, the branches of the tree with their purple-tinted shoots formed a bower. It was a nook flushed with the beauty of spring and over it streamed the golden sunshine that lent new charm to the blossoms with which the coffin was covered. It seemed as if it had been raining flowers; there were heaped-up clusters of white roses, white camellias, white lilac, white carnations, buried together in a snowy mass of white petals; what lay beneath was hidden from sight, and from the pall the white blossoms were falling, strewing the ground with white periwinkle flowers and white hyacinths. The few passers-by in the Rue Vineuse stopped and gazed with a smile of tender emotion into the sunny garden where the little body lay at peace amongst the flowers. There seemed to be a music stealing up from these snowy surroundings; such purity in the glare of light grew dazzling, and the sun, falling across the hangings and the clusters and wreaths of flowers, flushed everything with life. A bee flew humming over the roses.

"Oh, the flowers! the flowers!" murmured Hélène, powerless to say another word.

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips, and her eyes filled with tears. Jeanne must be warm, she thought, and with the idea a wave of emotion welled within her bosom; she became conscious of gratitude to those who had aided in enveloping her child in flowers. She wished to go forward, and Monsieur Rambaud made no effort to hold her back. How sweet was the scene presented beneath the cloud of drapery! Perfumes were wafted upwards; the air was warm and without a breath. She stooped down and chose one rose only—a rose she had come to obtain that she might place it within her bosom. Suddenly she commenced to tremble, and Monsieur Rambaud became uneasy.

“Don’t stay here,” he said as he drew her away. “You promised not to make yourself unwell.”

He was attempting to lead her into the pavilion when the door of the drawing-room was thrown wide open. Pauline was the first to appear. She had undertaken the duty of arranging the funeral procession. One by one, the little girls stepped into the garden. Their coming seemed like some sudden outburst of bloom, as if a miracle had been accomplished and the hawthorns had flowered. In the open air there was greater freedom for the expanse of white skirts, which in the sunshine were streaked with transparent bars, while shades of white of the utmost delicacy floated across them as though over the wings of a swan. An apple-tree above was raining down its blossoms; gossamer-threads were floating to and fro; the dresses were instinct with all the purity of spring. The procession still went on, it already surrounded the lawn; they descended with light steps, sailing on like downy shapes growing suddenly larger beneath the open sky.

The garden was now a snowy mass, and as Hélène gazed on the surging crowd of little girls, a memory awoke within her. Another joyous time flashed on her, with its ball and the joyous twinkling of tiny feet. She saw once more Marguerite in her milk-girl costume, with her milk-can hanging from her waist; while Sophie, dressed as a waiting-maid, danced round in the arms of her sister Blanche, whose trappings as Folly gave out a merry tinkle of bells. She thought of the five Levasseur girls, and of the Red Riding Hoods, the number of whom seemed endless, with their ever-recurring cloaks of poppy-coloured satin striped with black velvet; while little Mademoiselle Guiraud, in her Alsatian garb, with

a butterfly in her hair, danced as if demented opposite a Harlequin twice as tall as herself. To-day they were all arrayed in white. Jeanne, too, was in white, her head laid amongst the flowers on the white satin pillow. The delicate-faced Japanese maiden, with hair transfixed by long pins, and purple tunic embroidered with birds, was leaving them for ever in her dress of snowy white.

"How tall they have all grown," exclaimed Hélène, as she burst into tears..

They were all there; her daughter alone was missing. Monsieur Rambaud led her into the pavilion; but she stood at the threshold, anxious to see the funeral train start. Several of the ladies bowed to her quietly. The children looked at her, with some astonishment in their blue eyes. Meanwhile Pauline was hovering round, giving orders. She spoke in whispers to suit the occasion, but at times she forgot herself.

"Now, be good children! Look, you little stupid, you are all dirty already! I'll come for you in a minute; don't budge!"

The arrival of the hearse was the signal to start, but Madame Deberle rushed up, exclaiming: "The bouquets have been forgotten! Quick, Pauline, the bouquets!"

This gave rise to some confusion. A bouquet of white roses had been prepared for each little girl. The distribution of them had to be completed; the children, in an ecstasy of delight, held the great clusters in front of them as though they had been wax tapers; Lucien, still at Marguerite's side, daintily inhaled the perfume of the flowers as she held them to his face. The band of little ladies, their hands filled with blossoms, looked radiant with happiness in the golden light; then suddenly their faces grew grave as their eyes lighted on the coffin which the men were placing on the hearse.

"Is she inside that thing?" asked Sophie in a whisper.

Her sister Blanche nodded her head in assent. Then, continuing the talk, she said: "For men it's as big as this!"

She was referring to the coffin, and stretched out her arms to their widest extent. Little Marguerite, with her nose buried amongst her roses, was seized with a fit of laughter, owing, as she declared, to her feeling rather tickled by the flowers. The others quickly followed suit, and buried their noses to find out the truth for themselves; but they were remonstrated with, and they all became grave once more.

The funeral procession was now filing into the street. At

the corner of the Rue Vineuse a woman without a cap, and with tattered shoes on her feet, wept and wiped her cheeks with the corner of her apron. Several windows were crowded with people, and their exclamations of pity broke the stillness of the road. Hung with white silver-fringed drapery, the hearse rolled on without a sound; nothing came to the ear save the measured tread of the two white horses, dulled by the solid earthen causeway. The flowers, in clusters and wreaths, borne on the funeral car, were in lush profusion; the coffin was hidden by them; every jolt tossed about the heaped-up mass, and the street behind the hearse was strewn with lilac blossom. From each of the four corners streamed a long ribbon of white watered silk, held by four little girls—Sophie and Marguerite, one of the Levasseur family, and the tiny Mademoiselle Guiraud, who was so very small and so uncertain on her legs that her mother kept by her side. The others, in a close body, surrounded the hearse, each bearing in her hand her bouquet of roses. They walked gently with waving veils; the wheels rolled on amidst all this muslin, as though borne along on a cloud, from which smiled the tender faces of angels. Then behind, following Monsieur Rambaud, with pallid countenance and bowed head, came several ladies and little boys; Rosalie, Zéphyrin, and the servants of Madame Deberle. To these succeeded five empty mourning carriages. As the hearse bore away along the sunny street the promise of springtide blasted for ever, a number of white pigeons wheeled over the mourners' heads.

"Good heavens! how annoying!" exclaimed Madame Deberle when she saw the procession start off. "If only Henri had postponed that consultation! I told him how it would be!"

She did not know what to do with Hélène, who remained prostrate on a seat in the pavilion. Henri might have stayed beside her and afforded her some consolation. His absence was a horrible nuisance. Luckily, Mademoiselle Aurélie was glad to offer her services; she had no liking for such solemn scenes, and she would be enabled at the same time to attend to the luncheon which had to be prepared ere the children's return. Juliette hastened after the funeral, which was proceeding towards the church by way of the Rue de Passy.

The garden was now deserted; a few workmen only were busy folding up the curtains. All that remained on the gravelled path over which Jeanne had been carried were the

scattered petals of a camellia. Hélène, giving way suddenly to the sense of loneliness and profound stillness, was thrilled once more with the anguish wrung from her by this eternal separation. Once again—only once again!—to be at her darling's side! The never-fading thought that Jeanne was leaving her in anger, with a face that spoke of nothing but gloomy hatred, seared her heart as if with a red-hot iron. She saw well that Mademoiselle Aurélie was there to watch her, and she cast about for some opportunity to escape from her and hasten to the cemetery.

"Yes, it's a dreadful loss," began the old maid, comfortably seated in a chair. "I myself would have worshipped children, and little girls in particular. Ah, well! when I think of it I am pleased that I never married. It saves a lot of trouble!"

It was thus she thought to divert her. She chatted away about one of her friends who had had six children; they were now all dead. Another lady had been left a widow with a big lad of a son who struck her; he might die, and it would not be difficult to comfort her. Hélène appeared to be listening to her; she did not stir, but her whole frame quivered with impatience.

"You are calmer now," said Mademoiselle Aurélie, after an interval of silence. "Yes, indeed, it's always best when we get the better of our feelings."

The dining-room opened into the Japanese pavilion. She rose, and thrusting back the door peered into the room. The table was groaning with plates of cake. In an instant Hélène speeded through the garden; the gate was open, the undertaker's men having just carried away their ladder.

On the left the Rue Vineuse turns into the Rue des Réservoirs, from which the cemetery of Passy can be entered. Upwards from the Boulevard de la Muette a huge retaining wall has been reared, and the cemetery stretches like an immense terrace commanding the hill, the Trocadéro, the avenues, and the whole expanse of Paris. In twenty steps Hélène had gained the yawning gateway, and saw before her the lonely mass of white gravestones and black crosses. She entered. At the corners of the first walk two great lilac trees were budding. Interments had been rare, the grass was very long, and several cypress trees threw solemn shadows across the coverlet of green. Hélène hurried straight on; a troop of sparrows frightened her, and a grave-digger raised his head towards her after having flung aside a shovelful of earth. She

turned to the right, and advanced almost to the edge of the parapet; but, on looking round, she saw behind a cluster of acacias the little girls dressed in white on their knees before the vault into which Jeanne's body had a moment before been lowered. The Abbé Jouve, with outstretched hand, was giving the farewell benediction. She heard nothing but the dull thud with which the stone covering of the vault was rolled back into its place. It was all over.

Meanwhile Pauline had observed her and pointed her out to Madame Deberle, whose vexation was such that she almost gave way to anger. "What!" she exclaimed; "she has come! It isn't at all proper; it's very bad taste!" She approached Hélène, showing by the expression of her face that she disapproved of her presence. A few of the ladies also went forward with curious looks. Monsieur Rambaud had rejoined her, and stood silent at her side. She was leaning against one of the acacias, feeling faint and weary with the sight of the crowd of mourners. She nodded her head in recognition of their sympathetic greetings, but all the while a lump grew in her throat as she saw she had come too late; she had heard only the noise of the stone falling back into its place. Her eyes turned ever towards the vault, the step of which a cemetery official was busy sweeping.

"Pauline, look after the children," said Madame Deberle.

The little girls were rising from their knees like a flock of white sparrows. A few of the tinier ones, whose knees had become entangled among their petticoats, were sitting on the ground, and they had perforce to be picked up. While Jeanne was being lowered down, the older girls had leaned forward to see to the bottom of the hole. It was very dark; they shuddered and grew pale. Sophie assured her companions in a whisper that one remained down there for years and years. "At night-time too?" asked one of the little Levasseur girls. "Of course—at night too—always!" Oh, the night! Blanche was nearly dead with the idea. They all looked at one another with eyes wide open, as if they had just heard some story about thieves. When they had regained their feet, however, and were grouped round the vault, released from their mourning duties, the bloom returned to their cheeks; it was all untrue, they declared, they were only told so for fun. It was so pleasant; this garden was pretty with its long grass; what capital games they could have at hide-and-seek

behind all the tombstones! The little feet were itching to dance away already, and the white dresses fluttered to and fro like wings. Amidst the graveyard stillness the warm sunshine streamed lazily down, flushing the faces of the children. After some time Lucien had thrust his hand beneath Marguerite's veil; he touched her hair and asked if she put anything on it, as it was so yellow. The little one bridled up, and thereupon he told her that they would marry each other some day. Marguerite had no objection, but she was afraid that he might pull her hair. His hands were still wandering over it; it seemed as smooth as letter-paper.

"Don't go so far away," cried out Pauline.

"Well, we'll leave now," said Madame Deberle. "There's nothing more to be done, and the children must be hungry."

The little girls, who were scattered about like some boarding-school during play-time, had to be marshalled together. They were counted and baby Guiraud was missing; but she was at last seen in the distance, walking up and down a path with her mother's parasol. The ladies then turned their steps towards the gateway, driving before them the surging mass of white dresses. Madame Berthier congratulated Pauline on her marriage, which had been fixed to take place during the following month. Madame Deberle informed them that she was setting out in three days for Naples, with her husband and Lucien. The crowd was now disappearing quickly; Zéphyrin and Rosalie were the last to remain. They were linked together, arm-in-arm, delighted with their outing, though their hearts were heavy with grief. They slackened their pace, and the figures of the lovers could be seen for a moment longer, with the sunshine dancing over them at the end of the path.

"Come," murmured Monsieur Rambaud.

With a gesture she entreated him to wait. She was alone, and to her it seemed as though a page of her life had been torn out. As soon as the last of the mourners disappeared, she knelt before the tomb with a painful effort. The Abbé Jouve, robed in his surplice, had not yet risen to his feet. Both prayed for a long time. Then, without speaking, while his face beamed with loving-kindness and pardon, the priest aided her to rise.

"Give her your arm," he merely said to Monsieur Rambaud.

Paris stretched towards the horizon, bathed in the golden light of the smiling spring morning. In the cemetery a chaffinch was singing.

CHAPTER V.

TWO years were past and gone. One morning in December the little cemetery looked frozen and desolate with the intense cold. Since the evening before there had been falling a fine snow, which a north wind was blowing about. From the grey sky the flakes trembled down at rarer intervals, light and fleeting like feathers. The snow was already hardening, and a heaped-up mass of swan's-down edged the parapet of the terrace. Beyond this line of white lay Paris, amidst the gloomy grey on the horizon.

Madame Rambaud was praying here once more, kneeling on the snow before the grave of Jeanne. Her husband had but a moment before risen silently to his feet. They had been married in November at Marseilles. Monsieur Rambaud had disposed of his business, and had been in Paris for three days to conclude the transaction. The carriage awaiting them in the Rue des Réservoirs, it had been arranged, was to take them back to their hotel, and thence with their travelling-trunks to the railway station. Hélène had been induced to make the journey in the one hope of kneeling here. She remained motionless, with drooping head, as if dreaming and unconscious of the cold ground that chilled her knees.

Meanwhile the wind had sighed to rest. Monsieur Rambaud had stepped along the terrace, leaving her to the mute anguish evoked by memory. A haze was stealing over the outlying districts of Paris, the infinite extent of which faded away into the dim and cloudy distance. Round the Trocadéro the city was of a leaden hue, seemingly untenanted, while the last of the snow-flakes fluttered slowly down, forming in the still atmosphere pale spots against the gloomy depths and continuing their fall with imperceptible motion. Beyond the chimneys of the army bake-house, the brick towers of which assumed the colour of well-worn copper, the snow was showering down thickly; it was like gauze floating in the air and borne to earth thread by thread. There was not a breath stirring as the dream-like

shower went on; it came from a world of enchantment in sleepy and contented blissfulness. As they neared the roofs the flakes seemed to falter in their flight; in myriads they pillowed themselves on each other, falling ceaselessly and in such intense silence that blossoms shedding their petals make more noise; and from this moving mass, the progress of which through space was inaudible, there sprang a sense of forgetfulness of earth and breathing things, a peace beyond expression. There was a milky whiteness spreading more and more over the whole heaven—a whiteness still blackened by the wreaths of smoke. Little by little clusters of houses, like islets, grew distinct; there, in the immediate foreground, the city started into sight, black gullies and pits outlining to the eye the immense extent of the several districts.

Slowly Hélène rose from her kneeling position. On the snow there remained the imprint of her knees. Wrapped in a large dark-coloured mantle trimmed with fur, she seemed amidst the surrounding white very tall and broad-shouldered. The border of her bonnet, a band of black velvet, was like a diadem throwing a shadow on her forehead. She had regained her beautiful and placid expression; her grey eyes still contrasted with the pearly teeth; the chin was rounded as in the olden days, giving signs of strength, and proving she was endowed with sturdy sense and determination. As she turned her head, her profile assumed once more statuesque severity and purity. Beneath the untroubled paleness of her cheeks the blood lay at rest; everything went to show that honour was again ruling her life. Two tears had rolled from under her eyelids; her present tranquillity was derived from her past sorrow. She stood before the grave on which was reared a simple pillar, giving Jeanne's name, with two dates that comprised the brief life of twelve years of the dead child.

Around her was the cemetery, enveloped in its snowy sheet, through which pointed rusty monuments and iron crosses, like arms thrown upwards in agony. There was only one path visible in this lonely corner, and that had been made by the footmarks of Hélène and Monsieur Rambaud. The solitary expanse was without a stain, and underneath slept the dead. The walks burst through the shadowy outlines of the trees. Ever and anon some snow fell noiselessly from a branch that had been too heavily burdened. Nothing stirred beyond this. At the other end black stains showed where a

funeral had passed; a burial was taking place beneath this snowy winding-sheet. Another funeral train appeared on the left. Hearses and mourners went their way in silence, like shadows thrown on a spotless linen sheet.

Hélène was awaking from her dream when she observed, near her a beggar woman crawling along. It was mother Fétu, the snow deadening the sound of her huge man's boots, which were all burst and cobbled with bits of string. Never had Hélène seen her weighed down with such intense misery, nor covered with filthier rags, though she was still as fat and her expression was as stupid as ever. The old hag, in the foulest weather, despite hard frosts or drenching rain, now followed funerals to speculate on the pity of the charitable. She knew well that amongst gravestones the fear of death makes generous; she lurked here and there, venturing close to people on their knees while their grief had overwhelmed them, for she understood that they were then powerless to refuse. She had entered with the last funeral train, and a moment before had espied Hélène. But she had not recognised her benefactress; she told with gasps and sobs how she had two children at home who were dying of hunger. Hélène listened to her—she was struck dumb with the sight. The children were without fire to warm them; the elder was going off in a decline. Suddenly mother Fétu's words came to a stop. Her brain was evidently working beneath the myriad wrinkles of her face, and the little eyes began to blink. Good gracious! it was her benefactress! Heaven, then, had hearkened to her prayers! Without seeking to explain further the stories about her children, she plunged into a whining tale, which found vent in a ceaseless rush of words. Several of her teeth were missing, and she could be understood with difficulty. The gracious God had sent every affliction on her head, she declared. The gentleman lodger had gone away, and she had just been enabled to rise after a three month's confinement to bed; yes, the old pain still remained, it now gripped her everywhere; a neighbour had told her that a spider must surely have got in through her mouth while she was sleeping. If she had only had a little fire, she could have warmed her belly; that was the only thing that could relieve her now. But there was nothing to be had for nothing—not even the end of a match. Perhaps she was right in thinking madame had been away travelling? That was her own concern, of course. But still she looked very well, and fresh, and beautiful. God

would requite her for all her kindness. While *Hélène* was drawing out her purse, mother *Fétu* leaned panting against the railing that encircled *Jeanne's* grave.

The funeral processions had vanished from sight. Somewhere, in a grave close at hand, a grave-digger whom they could not see was heard wielding his pick-axe with regular strokes. Meanwhile the old woman had regained her breath, and her eyes were riveted on the purse. Then, purposing to extort as large a sum as possible, she exhibited considerable cunning, and spoke of the other lady. Nobody could say she was a charitable lady; ah well! she did not know what to do with her money, it did not do her much good. Warily she glanced at *Hélène* as she spoke thus. Next she ventured to mention the doctor's name. Oh! he was good; he was like good bread in the mouth! Last summer he had gone another jaunt with his wife. Their little one was thriving, and was a fine child. *Hélène's* fingers, however, as she opened the purse, had been seized with trembling, and mother *Fétu* in an instant changed her tone. In her stupidity and bewilderment she had only now grasped the fact that her good lady was standing beside her daughter's grave. She stammered, gasped, and tried to bring the tears into her eyes. She was so dainty a darling, with such loves of little hands; she could see her again giving her silver in charity. What long hair she had, and how she gazed on the poor with her large eyes full of tears! Ah! there was no replacing such an angel; there were no more like her, though they searched through the whole of *Passy*. And when the fine days came she would bring in her hand a bunch of daisies, gathered in the moat of the fortifications. She lapsed into silence, frightened by the gesture with which *Hélène* cut her short. Was it possible, she thought, she was at fault now in finding the right thing to say? Her good lady did not weep, and she only gave her a twenty-sou piece.

Monsieur Rambaud, meanwhile, had walked towards them from the parapet of the terrace. *Hélène* hastened to rejoin him. With the sight of the gentleman mother *Fétu's* eyes began to sparkle. He was unknown to her; he must be a new-comer. Dragging her feet along she followed *Hélène*, invoking on her head every blessing of heaven; and when she had crept close to *Monsieur Rambaud*, she spoke again of the doctor. Ah! his would be a magnificent funeral when he died, were the poor people whom he had attended for nothing to follow

his corpse! He was rather fickle in his loves, nobody could deny that. There were ladies in Passy who knew him well. But all that didn't prevent him worshipping his wife—a pretty lady who might, had she wished, have gone wrong, but had given up such ideas long ago. Their home was quite a turtle-doves' nest. Had madame paid them a visit yet? They were certain to be at home; she had a few minutes before observed that the shutters were open in the Rue Vineuse. They had formerly such a regard for madame that surely they would be delighted to receive her with open arms! The old hag leered at Monsieur Rambaud as she mumbled away. He listened to her with all the coolness of a brave man. The memories that were being called up before him brought no shadow to his unruffled face. Only it occurred to him that the pertinacity of the old beggar was annoying Hélène, and he hastened to fumble in his pocket, giving her alms in his turn, and at the same time waving her away. The moment her eyes rested on another silver coin, mother Fétu burst into loud thanks. She would buy some wood; she would be able to warm her afflicted body; that was the only thing now to give her stomach relief. Yes, it was quite a nest of turtle-doves, and the proof was that the lady was brought to bed last winter with a second child, a beautiful little daughter, rosy-cheeked and fat, who must now be nearly fourteen months old. On the day of the baptism the doctor had put a hundred sous into her hand at the door of the church. Good hearts had come together; madame brought her good luck. Pray God that madame may never have a sorrow; may she have every good fortune! May it come to pass in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!

Hélène stood upright gazing on Paris, while mother Fétu vanished amongst the tombs, muttering three *Paters* and three *Aves*. The snow had ceased; the last of the flakes had fluttered down slowly and wearily on the roofs; and beyond the mists trailing close to the ground the sun could be seen, through the pearly-grey expanse of heaven, striking its beams of red and gold. Over Montmartre a belt of blue fringed the horizon, but it was so faint and delicate that it seemed but a shadow thrown by white satin. Gradually the smoke was clearing away from Paris, which with its snowy canopy took vaster proportions, though under the downfall it remained motionless and dead. There were now no longer fleeting specks

of white beneath which the city seemed to shudder, and which streamed in foamy waves over the dull-brown house-fronts. Amidst the masses of snow that girt them round the houses stood out black and gloomy, as though mouldy with centuries of damp. Entire streets appeared to be in ruins, as if undermined by some gunpowder explosion; the roofs were ready to give way and the windows were already sunken. But gradually as the belt of blue broadened in the direction of Montmartre, there welled up a stream of light, pure and cool as the waters of a spring, and Paris shone under a glass, under which even the outlying districts assumed the distinctness of a Japanese picture.

Cloaked in her fur mantle, with her hands clinging idly to the sleeves, Hélène began to muse. With the persistency of an echo one thought only pursued her. A child, a daughter fat and rosy, had been born to them; in her imagination she could see her at the love-compelling age when Jeanne commenced to prattle. Baby girls are such darlings when fourteen months old! She counted the months; fourteen—that made it two years when she took into consideration the remaining period—exactly the time within a fortnight. Then her brain conjured up a sunny picture of Italy, a realm of dreamland, with its golden fruits, where the lovers wandered through the perfumed nights with arms twined round each other. Henri and Juliette were pacing before her eyes beneath the light of the moon. They loved as husband and wife within whom the passion of love is once more awakened. To think of it—a tiny girl, rosy and fat, its naked body flushed by the warm sunshine, while it strives to chatter away in words that the mother arrests with kisses! She felt no anger as she thought of it; her heart gave no sign, but drew still greater quietude from the sadness of her spirit. The land of the sun had vanished; her eyes wandered slowly over Paris, on the mighty bulk of which winter had laid his freezing hand. Wrapped in the awful silence of their chill garment lay at rest what to the imagination were huge fragments of marble—the wearied limbs of some long-suffering Titan that pain could no longer touch. Above the Panthéon a patch of blue was spreading in the heavens.

Meanwhile memory was recalling the past to life. At Marseilles she had existed in a state of coma. One morning as she had gone along the Rue des Petites-Maries, she burst out sob-

bing in front of the house of her childhood. This was the last occasion on which she had wept. Monsieur Rambaud was her frequent visitor; she felt his presence near her a protection. It was almost autumn when she saw him enter one evening, with eyes red and in the agony of a great sorrow: his brother, the Abbé Jouve, was dead. In her turn she comforted him. What followed she could not recall with any exactitude of detail. The Abbé seemed ever to stand behind them, and the influence of the thought persuaded her to succumb. When he hinted once more at his wish, she had nothing to say in refusal. It seemed to her that she was but obeying a wise command. Of her own accord, when the period of mourning had come to an end, she had calmly arranged the details with Monsieur Rambaud. The hands of her old friend trembled in a transport of tenderness. It should be as she pleased, he had waited months; a sign was sufficient for him. They were married in mourning garb. On the wedding-night he, too, had kissed her naked feet—feet fair as though fashioned out of marble. Thus her life began once more.

While the belt of blue was broadening on the horizon, the rush of memories came with an astounding effect on Hélène. Had she lived through a year of madness? To-day, as she pictured the woman who had lived nearly three years in that room in the Rue Vineuse, she imagined she was passing judgment on some stranger, whose line of conduct revolted and surprised her. How fearfully foolish had been her act, how abominably wicked! She had been blind to every sense of duty in its doing! Yet she had not sought it. She was living peacefully, hidden in her corner, and absorbed in the love of her daughter. The road of life lay before her, untroubled by any curious thoughts, by any desire. A breath of air had circled past her, and she had fallen to the ground. Even at this moment she was unable to explain it to herself. The old being had parted from her; and another mind and heart were controlling her actions. Was it possible? She had done these things! Then an icy chill ran through her; Jeanne was vanishing beneath the roses. In the torpor begotten of her grief she grew very calm again, without a longing or curiosity, proceeding along the path of duty that lay so straight before her. Life was again beginning for her, fraught with the peace that the austerity and pride of honesty only can bestow.

Monsieur Rambaud moved near her to lead her from this place of sadness. But Hélène silently signed to him her wish to linger longer. She approached close to the parapet and gazed below, on the Avenue de la Muette, at a stand of cabs, the long line of which along the edge of the pavement showed nothing but old vehicles in the last stage of decay. The hoods and wheels with all the colour blanched out of them, the rusty horses, seemed to have been rotting there since the dark ages. The cabmen sat motionless, freezing within their icy-cold cloaks. Over the snow there were other vehicles crawling along, one after the other, with the utmost difficulty. The beasts were losing their foot-hold, and were stretching out their necks, while the drivers, with many oaths had descended from their seats and were holding them by the bridle; and through the windows could be seen the faces of the patient fares, reclining against the cushions, and resigned to the stern necessity of accomplishing in three quarters of an hour a distance that might well have been done in ten minutes. The rumbling noises were deadened by the snow; the sound of voices only vibrated upward, strangely shrill and distinct amidst the awful silence of the streets; there could be heard loud shouts, the laughing exclamations of people slipping on the icy paths, the angry cracking of whips by drivers, and the snorting of terrified horses. In the distance, to the right, the lofty trees on the quay were sights to marvel at. They seemed spun out of glass, like immense pieces of Venetian ware, with arms twisted at the whim of the artist, who had relieved their bareness with flowers. The icy north wind had transformed their trunks into the semblance of column shafts. Over them waved boughs clustering with down and feathery tufts, mingled with an exquisite tracery of black branches trimmed with white threads. It was freezing still, and not a breath stirred in the pure air.

Hélène told her heart that she knew nothing of Henri. For a year she had seen him almost every day; he had lingered for hours and hours to be near her, to speak to her, to gaze into her eyes. She knew nothing of him. One night she had yielded to him, and he had taken her. She knew nothing of him; she made a mighty effort, but she could understand nothing beyond this. Whence had he come? how had he crept into her intimacy? what manner of man was this that she had yielded to him—she who would rather have

perished than have yielded to another? She knew nothing of him; it had all sprung from some sudden tottering of her reason. He was a stranger to her on the last as on the first day. To no purpose she patched together little things done from time to time—his words, his acts, everything that her memory recalled concerning him. He loved his wife and his child; he smiled with such delicate grace; he conformed rigidly in outward behaviour to the ideal of the well-bred man. Then she saw him again with inflamed visage, and hands trembling with lust. In a week or two he vanished, he was removed from her sight. At this hour she could not have said where she had spoken to him for the last time. He passed away, and his shadow went with him. Their story had no other ending. She knew nothing of him.

Over the city the sky was growing blue, and every cloud had vanished. Wearied with her memories, and rejoicing in this universal loveliness, Hélène raised her head. The blue of the heavens was exquisitely clear, but still very pale, verging scarcely on blue in the light of the sun, which was low on the horizon, and glittered like a silver lamp. It gave out no heat with its rays through the chill atmosphere, while reflecting itself in the snow. Below, like sheets of white cloth fringed with black, stretched the expanse of roofs; the tiles of the Army bakehouse, and the slates of the houses on the quay, were all shrouded. On the other bank of the river, the square stretch of the Champ-de-Mars seemed a Russian steppe, while black dots that marked the presence of straggling vehicles, realised sledges skimming along with the tinkling of bells. The elms on the Quai d'Orsay, dwarfed by distance, looked like flowers reproduced in delicate crystal, and bristling with sharp excrescences. Through the midst of the snow-white sea the Seine rolled its muddy waters between banks that edged the black current with ermine; since the evening before the ice had been floating down, and the eye could see with perfect clearness the masses crushing against the piers of the Pont des Invalides, and vanishing swiftly beneath the arches. The bridges, growing more and more delicate with distance, seemed but steps in a ladder formed of white lace, and reaching as far as the sparkling walls of the Cité, above which the towers of Notre-Dame reared their snow-white peaks. On the left, the level plain was broken up by other points. Saint-Augustin, the Opera House, the Tour Saint-Jacques seemed like mountains clad

with eternal snow. Nearer at hand the pavilions of the Tuileries and the Louvre, joined together by the new buildings, bore a wondrous resemblance to a ridge of hills with spotless peaks. On the right, too, the white tops of the Invalides, of Saint-Sulpice, and the Panthéon—the last in the dim distance—outlined against the sky a palace of fairy-land with a front of blue-tinted marble. Not a sound broke the stillness. Grey-looking ditches revealed the presence of streets, and the public squares were hollowed out like crevasses. Whole lines of houses had vanished. The fronts of neighbouring habitations only became distinguishable with the thousand streams of light reflected from their windows. The expanse of snow grew hazy and faded away dazzlingly into a seeming lake, the blue tints of which mingled with the blue of the sky. The vast stretch of Paris lay visible in the clear, cold air, glittering in the light of the silver sun.

Then Hélène for the last time gazed round on the un pitying city which also remained unknown to her. She saw it once more, tranquil and with immortal beauty amidst the snow, the same as when she had left it, the same as it had been every day for three years. Paris to her was pregnant with her past life. In its presence she had loved, in its presence Jeanne had died. But this companion of her every-day existence retained in its mighty face a wondrous serenity, unruffled by any emotion, a dumb witness of the laughter and tears which the Seine seemed to roll on in its flood. She had endowed it at times with monstrous cruelty, with almighty goodness. To-day she felt that she would be ever ignorant of it, in its indifference and immensity. It lay before her; it was life.

Monsieur Rambaud now laid a light hand on her arm to lead her away. His kindly face was troubled, and he whispered:

“Do not give yourself pain.”

He divined her every thought, and this was all he could say. Madame Rambaud looked at him, and her sorrow was appeased. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkled with the cold. Already she was far away from her memories, and existence began once more.

“I’m not very sure whether I shut the big trunk properly,” she exclaimed.

Monsieur Rambaud promised that he would make sure,

The train started at mid-day, and there was plenty of time. Gravel was being scattered on the streets; their cab would not take an hour. But, suddenly, he raised his voice:

"I'm sure you've forgotten the fishing-rods!"

"Oh, yes; quite!" she answered, surprised and vexed at her forgetfulness. "We should have obtained them yesterday."

They were very handy rods, the like of which could not be purchased at Marseilles. They owned near the sea a small country house, where they purposed to spend the summer. Monsieur Rambaud looked at his watch. On their way to the railway station they would still be able to buy the fishing-rods. They could be tied up with the umbrellas. Then he led her from the place, stumbling along amongst the graves. The cemetery was empty; the imprint of their feet alone remained on the snow. Jeanne, dead, lay in everlasting solitude facing Paris.

THE END.



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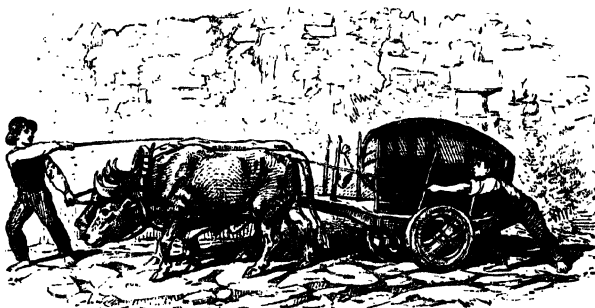
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