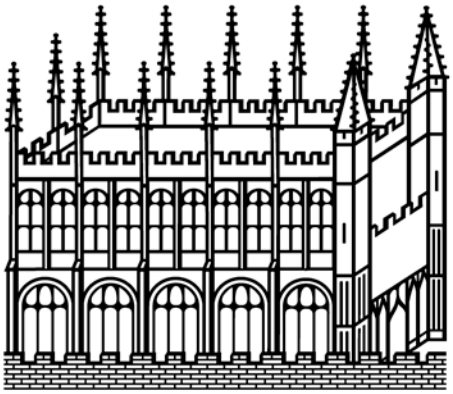
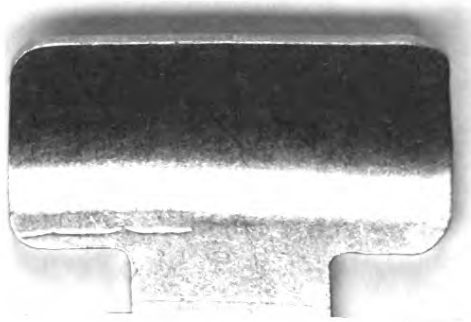


Sins of Desire

Paul Bourget



SINS OF DESIRE

This is the Story

THIS great romance *Sins of Desire* (André Conélis) is one of the world's great books. Paul Bourget was a member of the Academic Française, and one of the most distinguished of French writers. The story deals with a young man's vow to avenge the murder of his father, and in a climix of extraordinary power, shows how the hand of Fate intervenes in striking fashion between the avenger and the criminal. Blind love and bitter jealousy, mystery and revenge, combine to create an atmosphere that holds the interest on every page.

SINS OF DESIRE

by

PAUL BOURGET

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André Cornélis

CHAPTER I

WHEN I was a child, I used to go to confession. How often since then have I wished that I were still the little lad who came at five o'clock in the evening into the chapel belonging to our school, the cold and empty chapel, with its whitewashed walls, its benches on which our places were all numbered, its feeble harmonium, its crude Holy Family, its blue ceiling dotted with stars. We were taken to this chapel by a master, in batches of ten. When it came to my turn to kneel in one of the two narrow spaces on either side of the central seat of the priest, my heart would beat violently, and a strange oppression would come upon me, produced by the gloom and silence of the chapel, and the indistinct murmur of the confessor's voice as he questioned the boy on the opposite side, to whom I was to succeed. These sensations, and the shame inspired by the sins which I was about to confess, made me start with a nervous dread when the sound of the sliding panel announced that the moment had come, and I could distinguish the priest's marked profile, and note the keenness of his glance, although his face was full

and florid. What a moment of deadly pain to endure, and then what a blessed sense of relief! What a feeling of supreme liberty, alleviation, pardon—nay, effacement of my wrong-doing; what conviction that a fair spotless page was now offered to me, and it was mine to fill it with good deeds. I am too far removed now from the religious faith of my early years to imagine that there was a phenomenon of a supernatural order in all this. Whence then came the sense of deliverance that renewed the youth of my soul? Solely from the fact that I had told my sins, that I had thrown overboard the burden of conscience that oppresses us all. Confession was the lancet-stroke that empties the abscess. Alas! I have now no confessional at which to kneel, no prayer to murmur, no God in whom to hope! Nevertheless, I must get rid of these intolerable recollections. The tragedy of my life presses too heavily upon my memory, and I have not a friend to speak to, not an echo to take up my plaint. There are things which cannot be uttered, since they ought not to find a hearer—this I know; and so I have resolved, in order to cheat my pain, to make my confession here, to myself alone, on this fair white paper, as I might make it to a priest. I will write down all the details of my terrible history, bit by bit, as each comes to my remembrance, and when this confession is finished, I shall see whether I am to be rid of the anguish also. Ah! if it could even be diminished only! If it were but lessened, so that I might come and go, and have my share of

youth and life! I have suffered so much, and for so long, and yet I love life, in spite of my sufferings. A full glass of the black drug, the laudanum that I always keep at hand in a bottle for nights when I cannot sleep, and the slow torture of my remorse would cease at once. But I cannot, I will not. The instinctive animal desire *to live on* stirs me more strongly than all the moral reasons which urge me to make an end. Live then, poor wretch, since Nature bids you tremble at the thought of death. Nature? And besides, I do not want to go down there, below—no, not yet—into that dark world where it may be we should meet. No, no, not that terror, not that! See now, I had promised myself that I would be self-possessed, and I am already losing control over my thoughts; but I will resume it. The following is my project:—

On these sheets of paper I will draw a true picture of my destiny, for I can catch only troubled glimpses of it in the blurred mirror of my thoughts. And when the pages are covered with my scrawl I will burn them. But the thing will have taken form, and existed before my eyes, like a living being. I shall have thrown a steady light upon the chaos of horrible recollections which bewilder me. I shall know what my strength really is. Here, in this room where I came to the final resolution, it is only too easy for me to remember. To work, then! I pass my word to myself that I will set down the whole. Poor heart, let me number all thy wounds.

CHAPTER II

LET me remember? I have the sense of having trodden a Via Dolorosa during long years, but what was my first step in the blood-spotted pathway of pain? Where ought I to take up the tale of the slow martyrdom whose last stage of torture I have reached to-day? I know not, for my feelings are like those lagoon-worn shores on which one cannot tell where the sea begins or ends; vague places, all sand and water, whose uncertain outline is constantly changing and being formed anew; regions without bounds or features. Nevertheless these places are drawn upon the map, and we may depict our feelings also by reflection, and after the manner of analysis. The reality is ever shifting about. How intangible it is, always escaping our eager grasp! The enigma of enigmas is the exact moment at which a wound gapes in the heart, one of those wounds which have never closed in mine. In order to simplify everything, and to keep myself from sinking into that painful torpor of reverie which steals over me like the influence of opium, I will divide my task into events, marking first the precise fact which was the primal and determining cause of all the rest—the tragic and mysterious death of my father. Let me endeavour to recall the sort of emotion by which I was overwhelmed at that time, without mixing up with it anything of what I have since understood and felt.

I was nine years old. It was in 1864, in the month of June, at the close of a warm, bright afternoon. I was at my studies in my room as usual, having come in from the Lycée Bonaparte, and the outer shutters were closed. We lived in the Rue Tronchet, near the Madeleine, in the seventh house on the left, coming from the church. Three highly-polished steps (how often have I slipped on them!) led to the little room, so prettily furnished, all in blue, within whose walls I passed the last completely happy days of my life. Everything comes back to me. I was seated at my table, dressed in a large black overall, and engaged in writing out the tenses of a Latin verb on a ruled sheet divided into several compartments. All of a sudden I heard a loud cry, followed by a clamour of voices; then rapid steps trod the corridor outside my room. Instinctively I rushed to the door and came up against a man-servant, who was deadly pale, and had a roll of linen in his hand. I understood the use of this afterwards. I had not to question this man, for at sight of me he exclaimed, as though involuntarily :—

'Ah! M. André, what an awful misfortune!'

Then, regaining his presence of mind, he said :—

'Go back into your room—go back at once!'

Before I could answer, he caught me up in his arms, rather threw than placed me on the upper step of my staircase, locked the door of the corridor, and walked rapidly away.

'No, no,' I cried, flinging myself against the door, 'tell me all; I will, I must know.' No

answer. I shook the lock, I struck the panel with my clenched fists, I dashed my shoulder against the door. Vain was my frenzy! Then sitting upon the lowest step, I listened, in an agony of fear, to the coming and going of people outside, who knew of 'the awful misfortune,' but what was it they knew? Child as I was, I understood the terrible signification which the servant's exclamation bore under the actual circumstances. Two days previously, my father had gone out after breakfast, according to custom, to the place of business which he had occupied for over four years, in the Rue de la Victoire. He had been thoughtful during breakfast, indeed for some months past he had lost his accustomed cheerfulness. When he rose to go out, my mother, myself, and one of the habitual frequenters of our house, M. Jacques Termonde, a fellow-student of my father's at the Ecole de Droit, were at table. My father left his seat before breakfast was over, having looked at the clock, and inquired whether it was quite right.

'Are you in such a hurry, Cornélis?' asked Termonde.

'Yes,' answered my father, 'I have an appointment with a client who is ill—a foreigner—I have to call on him at his hotel to procure some important papers. He is an odd sort of man, and I shall not be sorry to see something of him at closer quarters. I have taken certain steps on his behalf, and I am almost tempted to regret them.'

And since then, no news! In the evening of that day, when dinner, which had been put

off for one quarter of an hour after another, was over, and my father, who was always so methodical, so punctual, had not come in, my mother began to betray increasing uneasiness, and could not conceal from me that his last words dwelt upon her mind. It was a rare occurrence for him to speak with misgiving of his undertakings! The night passed, then the next morning and afternoon, and once more it was evening. My mother and I were once more seated at the square table, where the cover laid for my father in front of his empty chair, gave, as it were, a form to our nameless dread. My mother had written to M. Jacques Termonde, and he came after dinner. I was sent away immediately, but not without my having had time to remark the extraordinary brightness of M. Termonde's eyes, which were blue, and usually shone coldly in his thin sharp face. He had fair hair and a beard best described as pale. Thus do children take note of small details, which are speedily effaced from their minds, but afterwards reappear, at the contact of life, just as certain invisible marks come out upon paper when it is held to the fire. While begging to be allowed to remain, I was mechanically observing the hurried and agitated turning and re-turning of a light cane—I had long coveted it—held behind his back in his remarkably beautiful hands. If I had not admired the cane so much, and the fighting centaurs on its handle—a fine piece of Renaissance work—this symptom of extreme disturbance might have escaped me. But, how

could M. Termonde fail to be disturbed by the disappearance of his best friend? Nevertheless, his voice, a soft voice which made all his phrases melodious, was quite calm.

'To-morrow,' he said, 'I will have every inquiry made if Cornélis has not returned; but he will come back, and all will be explained. Depend on it, he went away somewhere on the business he told you of, and left a letter for you to be sent by a commissionaire who has not delivered it.'

'Ah!' said my mother, 'you think that is possible?'

How often, in my dark hours, have I recalled this dialogue, and the room in which it took place—a little salon, much liked by my mother, with hangings and furniture of some foreign stuff all striped in red and white, black and yellow, that my father had brought from Morocco; and how plainly have I seen my mother in my mind's eye, with her black hair, her brown eyes, her quivering lips. She was as white as the summer gown she wore that evening. M. Termonde was dressed with his usual correctness, and I remember well his slender and elegant figure. It makes me smile when people talk of presentiments. I went off perfectly satisfied with what he had said. I had a childish admiration for this man, and hitherto he had represented nothing to me but treats and indulgence. I attended the two classes at the Lycée, if not with a light, at least with a relieved heart. But, while I was sitting upon the lower step of my little staircase, all my uneasiness revived. I hammered

at the door again, I called as loudly as I could; but no one answered me, until the good woman who had been my nurse came into my room.

'My father!' I cried, 'where is my father?'

'Poor child, poor child,' said nurse, and took me in her arms.

She had been sent to tell me the awful truth, but her strength failed her. I escaped from her, ran out into the corridor, and reached my father's bedroom before any one could stop me. Ah! upon the bed lay a rigid form covered by a white sheet, upon the pillow a bloodless, motionless face, with fixed, wide-open eyes, for the lids had not been closed; the chin was supported by a bandage, a napkin was bound around the forehead; at the bed's foot knelt a woman, still dressed in her white summer gown, crushed and helpless with grief. These were my father and my mother. I flung myself madly upon her, and she clasped me passionately, with the piercing cry, 'My André, my André!' In that cry there was such intense grief, in that embrace there was such frenzied tenderness, her heart was then so big with tears, that it warms my own even now to think of it. The next moment she rose and carried me out of the room, that I might see the dreadful sight no more. She did this easily, her terrible excitement had doubled her strength. 'God punishes me! God punishes me!' she said over and over again, taking no heed of her words. She had always been given, by fits and starts, to mystical piety. Then she covered my face, my

neck, and my hair with kisses and tears. May all that we suffered, the dead and I, be forgiven you, poor mother, for the sincerity of those tears at that moment. In my darkest hours, and when the phantom was there, beckoning to me, your grief pleaded with me more strongly than his plaint. Because of the kisses of that moment I have always been able to believe in you, for those kisses and tears were not meant to conceal anything. Your whole heart revolted against the horrid deed that bereaved me of my father. I swear by the anguish which we shared in that moment, that you had no part in the hideous plot. Ah, forgive me, that I have felt the need even now of affirming this, of redoubling the evidence of it. If you only knew how one sometimes hungers and thirsts for certainty —ay, even to the point of agony.

CHAPTER III

WHEN I asked my mother, on the instant, to tell me all about the awful event, she said that my father had been seized with a fit in a hackney carriage, and that as no papers were found upon him, he had not been recognised for two days. Grown-up people are much too ready to think it is equally easy to tell lies to all children. Now, I was a child who pondered long in my thoughts over things that were said to me, and by dint of putting a number of small facts together, I came to

the conviction that I did not know the whole truth. If my father's death had occurred in the manner stated to me, why should the man-servant have asked me, one day when he took me out to walk, what had been said to me about it? And when I answered him, why did he say no more, and being a very talkative person, why had he kept silence ever since? Why, too, did I feel the same silence all around me, in the air, sitting on every lip, hidden in every look? Why was the subject of conversation constantly changed whenever I drew near? I guessed this by many trifling signs. Why was not a single newspaper left lying about, whereas, during my father's lifetime, the three journals to which we subscribed were always to be found on a table in the salon? Above all, why did both the masters and my schoolfellows look at me so curiously, when I went back to school early in October, four months after our great misfortune? Alas! it was their curiosity which revealed the full extent of the catastrophe to me. It was only a fortnight after the reopening of the school, when I happened to be playing one morning with two new boys; I remember their names, Rastonaix and Servoin, now, and I can see the big fat cheeks of Rastonaix and the ferret-like face of Servoin. Although we were outdoor pupils, we were allowed a quarter of an hour's recreation indoors, between the Latin and English lessons. The two boys had engaged me on the previous day for a game of ninepins, and when it was over, they came close to me, and looking at each other to keep

up their courage, they put to me the following questions, point-blank :—

'Is it true that the murderer of your father has been arrested?'

'And that he is to be guillotined?'

This occurred sixteen years ago, but I cannot now recall the beating of my heart at those words without horror. I must have turned frightfully pale, for the two boys, who had struck me this blow with the carelessness of their age—of our age—stood there disconcerted. A blind fury seized upon me, urging me to command them to be silent, and to hit them with my fists if they spoke again; but at the same time I felt a wild impulse of curiosity—what if this were the explanation of the silence by which I felt myself surrounded?—and also a pang of fear, the fear of the unknown. The blood rushed into my face, and I stammered out :—

'I do not know.'

The drum-tap, summoning us back to the schoolroom, separated us. What a day I passed, bewildered by my trouble, turning the two terrible sentences over and over again.

It would have been natural for me to question my mother; but the truth is, I felt quite unable to repeat to her what my unconscious tormentors had said. It was strange but true, that thenceforth my mother, whom nevertheless I loved with all my heart, exercised a paralysing influence over me. She was so beautiful in her pallor, so royally beautiful and proud. No, I should never have ventured to reveal to her that an irresistible doubt

of the story she had told me was implanted in my mind merely by the two questions of my schoolfellows; but, as I could not keep silence entirely and live, I resolved to have recourse to Julie, my former nurse. She was a little woman, fifty years of age, an old maid too, with a flat wrinkled face, like an over-ripe apple; but her eyes were full of kindness, and indeed so was her whole face, although her lips were drawn in by the loss of her front teeth, and this gave her a witch-like mouth. She had deeply mourned my father in my company, for she had been in his service before his marriage. Julie was retained specially on my account, and in addition to her the household consisted of the cook, the man-servant, and the *femme de chambre*. Julie put me to bed and tucked me in, heard me say my prayers, and listened to my little troubles. 'Oh! the wretches!' she exclaimed, when I opened my heart to her and repeated the words that had agitated me so terribly. 'And yet it could not have been hidden from you for ever.' Then it was that she told me all the truth, there in my little room, speaking very low and bending over me, while I lay sobbing in my narrow bed. She suffered in the telling of that truth as much as I in the hearing of it, and the touch of her dry old hand, with fingers scarred by the needle, fell softly on my curly head as she stroked it.

That ghastly story, which bore down my youth with the weight of an impenetrable mystery, I have found written in the newspapers of the day, but not more clearly than

it was narrated by my dear old Julie. Here it is, plainly set forth, as I have turned and re-turned it over and over again in my thoughts, day after day, with the vain hope of penetrating it.

My father, who was a distinguished advocate, had resigned his practice in court some years previously, and set up as a financial agent, hoping by that means to make a fortune more rapidly than by the law. His good official connection, his scrupulous probity, his extensive knowledge of the most important questions, and his great capacity for work, had speedily secured him an exceptional position. He employed ten secretaries, and the million and a half francs which my mother and I inherited formed only the beginnings of the wealth to which he aspired, partly for his own sake, much more for his son's, but, above all, for his wife's—he was passionately attached to her. Notes and letters found among his papers proved that at the time of his death, he had been for a month previously in correspondence with a certain person named, or calling himself, William Henry Rochdale, who was commissioned by the firm of Crawford, in San Francisco, to obtain a railway concession in Cochin China, then recently conquered, from the French Government. It was with Rochdale that my father had the appointment of which he spoke before he left my mother, M. Termonde, and myself, after breakfast, on the last fatal morning. The *Instruction* had no difficulty in establishing this fact. The appointed place of meeting was

the Imperial Hotel, a large building, with a long façade, in the Rue de Rivoli, not far from the Ministère de la Marine. The entire block of houses was destroyed by fire in the Commune; but during my childhood I frequently begged Julie to take me to the spot, that I might gaze, with an aching heart, upon the handsome courtyard adorned with green shrubs, the wide, carpeted staircase, and the slab of black marble, encrusted with gold, that marked the entrance to the place whither my father wended his way, while my mother was talking with M. Termonde, and I was playing in the room with them. My father had left us at a quarter-past twelve, and he must have taken a quarter of an hour to walk to the Imperial Hotel, for the concierge, having seen the corpse, recognised it, and remembered that it was just about half-past twelve when my father inquired of him what was the number of Mr Rochdale's rooms. This gentleman, a foreigner, had arrived on the previous day, and had fixed, after some hesitation, upon an apartment situated on the second floor, and composed of a salon and a bedroom, with a small ante-room, which separated the apartment from the landing outside. From that moment he had not gone out, and he dined the same evening and breakfasted the next morning in his salon. The concierge also remembered that Rochdale came down alone, at about two o'clock on the second day; but he was too much accustomed to the continual coming and going to notice whether the visitor who

arrived at half-past twelve had or had not gone away again. Rochdale handed the key of his apartment to the concierge, with directions that anybody who came, wanting to see him, should be asked to wait in his salon. After this he walked away in a leisurely manner, with a business-like portfolio under his arm, smoking a cigar, and he did not reappear.

The day passed on, and towards night two housemaids entered the apartment of the foreign gentleman to prepare his bed. They passed through the salon without observing anything unusual. The traveller's luggage, composed of a large and much-used trunk and a quite new dressing-bag, were there. His dressing-things were arranged on the top of a cabinet. The next day, towards noon, the same housemaids entered the apartment, and finding that the traveller had slept out, they merely replaced the day-covering upon the bed, and paid no attention to the salon. Precisely the same thing occurred in the evening; but on the following day, one of the women having come into the apartment early, and again finding everything intact, began to wonder what this meant. She searched about, and speedily discovered a body, lying at full length underneath the sofa, with the head wrapped in towels. She uttered a scream which brought other servants to the spot, and the corpse of my father—alas! it was he—was removed from the hiding-place in which the assassin had cunningly concealed it. It was not difficult to reconstruct the scene

of the murder. A wound in the back of the neck indicated that the unfortunate man had been shot from behind, while seated at the table examining papers, by a person standing close beside him. The report had not been heard, on account of the proximity of the weapon, and also because of the constant noise in the street, and the position of the salon at the back of the ante-room. Besides, the precautions taken by the murderer rendered it reasonable to believe that he had carefully chosen a weapon which would produce but little sound. The ball had penetrated the spinal marrow and death had been instantaneous. The assassin had placed new unmarked towels in readiness, and in these he wrapped up the head and neck of his victim, so that there were no traces of blood. He had dried his hands on a similar towel, after rinsing them with water taken from the carafe; this water he had poured back into the same bottle, which was found concealed behind the drapery of the mantelpiece. Was the robbery real or pretended? My father's watch was gone, and neither his letter-case nor any paper by which his identity could be proved was found upon his body. An accidental indication led, however, to his immediate recognition. Inside the pocket of his waistcoat was a little band of tape, bearing the address of the tailor's establishment. Inquiry was made there, in the afternoon the sad discovery ensued, and after the necessary legal formalities, the body was brought home.

And the murderer? The only data on which the police could proceed were soon exhausted. The trunk left by the mysterious stranger, whose name was certainly not Rochdale, was opened. It was full of things bought haphazard, like the trunk itself, from a bric-à-brac seller who was found, but who gave a totally different description of the purchaser from that which had been obtained from the concierge of the Imperial Hotel. The latter declared that Rochdale was a dark, sunburnt man with a long thick beard; the former described him as of fair complexion and beardless. The cab on which the trunk had been placed immediately after the purchase, was traced, and the deposition of the driver coincided exactly with that of the bric-à-brac seller. The assassin had been taken in the cab, first to a shop, where he bought a dressing-bag, next to a linen draper's, where he bought the towels, thence to the Lyons railway station, and there he had deposited the trunk and the dressing-bag at the parcels office. Then the other cab which had taken him, three weeks afterwards, to the Imperial Hotel, was traced, and the description given by the second driver agreed with the deposition of the concierge. From this it was concluded that in the interval formed by these three weeks, the assassin had dyed his skin and his hair, for all the depositions were in agreement with respect to the stature, figure, bearing, and tone of voice of the individual. This hypothesis was confirmed by one Jullien, a hairdresser, who came forward

of his own accord to make the following statement :—

On a day in the preceding month, a man who answered to the description of Rochdale given by the first driver and the bric-à-brac seller, being fair-haired, pale, tall, and broad-shouldered, came to his shop to order a wig and a beard; these were to be so well constructed that no one could recognise him, and were intended, he said, to be worn at a fancy ball. The unknown person was accordingly furnished with a black wig and a black beard, and he provided himself with all the necessary ingredients for disguising himself as a native of South America, purchasing kohl for blackening his eyebrows, and a composition of Sienna earth and amber for colouring his complexion. He applied these so skilfully, that when he returned to the hairdresser's shop, Jullien did not recognise him. The unusualness of a fancy ball given in the middle of summer, and the perfection to which his customer carried the art of disguise, astonished the hairdresser so much that his attention was immediately attracted by the newspaper articles upon 'The Mystery of the Imperial Hotel,' as the affair was called. At my father's house two letters were found; both bore the signature of Rochdale, and were dated from London, but without envelopes, and were written in a reversed hand, pronounced by experts to be disguised. He would have had to forward a certain document on receipt of these letters; probably that document was in the letter-case which the assassin carried

off after his crime. The firm of Crawford had a real existence at San Francisco, but had never formed the project of making a railroad in Cochin China. The authorities were confronted by one of those criminal problems which set imagination at defiance. It was probably not for the purpose of theft that the assassin had resorted to such numerous and clever devices; he would hardly have led a man of business into so skilfully laid a trap merely to rob him of a few thousand francs and a watch. Was the murder committed for revenge? A search into the life of my father revealed nothing whatever that could render such a theory tenable. Every suspicion, every supposition, was routed by the indisputable and inexplicable fact that Rochdale was a reality whose existence could not be contested, that he had been at the Imperial Hotel from seven o'clock in the evening of one day until two o'clock in the afternoon of the next, and that he had then vanished, like a phantom, leaving one only trace behind—*one only*. This man had come there, other men had spoken to him; the manner in which he had passed the night and the morning before the crime was known. He had done his deed of murder, and then—nothing. 'All Paris' was full of this affair, and when I made a collection, long afterwards, of newspapers which referred to it, I found that for six whole weeks it occupied a place in the chronicle of every day. At length the fatal heading 'The Mystery of the Imperial Hotel,' disappeared from the columns of the newspapers, as the

remembrance of that ghastly enigma faded from the minds of their readers, and solicitude about it ceased to occupy the police. The tide of life, rolling that poor waif amid its waters, had swept on. Yes; but I, the son? How should I ever forget the old woman's story that had filled my childhood with tragic horror? How should I ever cease to see the pale face of the murdered man, with its fixed, open eyes? How should I not say: 'I will avenge thee, thou poor ghost'? Poor ghost! When I read *Hamlet* for the first time, with that passionate avidity which comes from an analogy between the moral situation depicted in a work of art and some crisis of our own life, I remember that I regarded the Prince of Denmark with horror. Ah! if the ghost of my father had come to relate the drama of his death to me, with his unbreathing lips, would I have hesitated one instant? No! I protested to myself; and then? I learned all, and yet I hesitated, like him, though less than he, to dare the terrible deed. Silence! silence! Let me go back to the facts.

CHAPTER IV

I REMEMBER little of the succeeding events. All was so trivial, so insignificant, between that first vision of horror and the vision of woe which came to me two years later, that, with one exception, I hardly recall the intervening time. In 1864, my father died; in

1866, my mother married M. Jacques Termonde. The exceptional period of the interval was the only one during which my mother bestowed constant attention upon me. Before the fatal date my father was the only person who had cared for me; at a later period there was no one at all to do so. Our apartment in the Rue Tronchet became unbearable to us; there we could not escape from the remembrance of the terrible event, and we removed to a small hotel in the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg. The house had belonged to a painter, and stood in a small garden which seemed larger than it was because other gardens adjoined it, and overshadowed its boundary wall with greenery. The centre of the house was a kind of hall, in the English style, which the former occupant had used as a studio; my mother made this her ordinary sitting-room. Now, at this distance of time, I can understand my mother's character, and recognise that there was something unreal and slightly theatrical about her, which, although it was very harmless, led her to exaggerate the outward expression of all her feelings. While she occupied herself in studying the attitudes by which her emotions were to be fittingly expressed, the sentiments themselves were fading away. For instance, she chose to condemn herself to voluntary exile and seclusion after her bereavement, receiving only a very few friends, of whom M. Jacques Termonde was one; but she very soon began to adorn herself and everything around her, with the fine and subtle tastefulness that was innate

in her. My mother was a very lovely woman; her beauty was of a refined and pensive order, her figure was tall and slender, her dark hair was very luxuriant and of remarkable length. No doubt it was to the Greek blood in her veins that she owed the classical lines of her profile, her full-lidded soft eyes, and the willowy grace of her form. Her maternal grandfather was a Greek merchant, of the name of Votronto, who had come from the Levant to Marseilles when the Ionian Islands were annexed to France. Many times in after years I have recalled the strange contrast between her rare and refined beauty and my father's stolid sturdy form, and my own, and wondered whether the origin of many irreparable mistakes might not be traced to that contrast. But I did not reason in those days; I was under the spell of the fair being who called me, 'My son.' I used to look at her with a kind of idolatry when she was seated at her piano in that elegant sanctum of hers, which she had hung with draped foreign stuffs, and decorated with tall green plants and various curious things, after a fashion entirely her own. For her sake, and in spite of my natural awkwardness and untidiness, I strove to keep myself very clean and neat in the more and more elaborate costumes which she made me wear, and also more and more did the terrible image of the murdered man fade away from that home, which, nevertheless, was provided and adorned by the fortune which he had earned for us and bequeathed to us. All the ways of modern life are so

opposed to the tragic in events, so far removed from the savage realities of passion and bloodshed, that when such things intrude upon the decorous life of a family, they are put out of sight with all speed, and soon come to be looked upon as a bad dream, impossible to doubt, but difficult to realise.

Yes, our life had almost resumed its normal course when my mother's second marriage was announced to me. This time I accurately remember not only the period, but also the day and the hour. I was spending my holidays with my spinster aunt, my father's sister, who lived at Compiègne, in a house situated at the far end of the town. She had three servants, one of whom was my dear old Julie, who had left us because my mother could not get on with her. My aunt Louise was a little woman of fifty, with countrified looks and manners: she had hardly ever consented to stay two whole days in Paris during my father's lifetime. Her almost invariable attire was a black silk gown made at home, with just a line of white at the neck and wrists, and she always wore a very long gold chain of ancient date, which was passed under the bodice of her gown and came out at the belt. To this chain her watch and a bunch of seals and charms were attached. Her cap, plainly trimmed with ribbon, was black like her dress, and the smooth bands of her hair, which was turning gray, framed a thoughtful brow and eyes so kind that she was pleasant to behold, although her nose was large and her mouth and chin were heavy. She had brought up

my father in this same little town of Compiègne, and had given him, out of her fortune, all that she could spare from the simple needs of her frugal life, when he wished to marry Mdlle. de Slane, in order to induce my mother's family to listen to his suit. The contrast between the portrait in my little album of my aunt and her face as I saw it now, told plainly enough how much she had suffered during the past two years. Her hair had become more white, the lines which run from the nostrils to the corners of the mouth were deepened, her eyelids had a withered look. And yet she had never been demonstrative in her grief. I was an observant little boy, and the difference between my mother's character and that of my aunt was precisely indicated to my mind by the difference in their respective sorrow. At that time it was hard for me to understand my aunt's reserve, while I could not suspect her of want of feeling. Now it is to the other sort of nature that I am unjust. My mother also had a tender heart, so tender that she did not feel able to reveal her purpose to me, and it was my aunt Louise who undertook to do so. She had not consented to be present at the marriage, and M. Termonde, as I afterwards learned, preferred that I should not attend on the occasion, in order, no doubt, to spare the feelings of her who was to become his wife. In spite of all her self-control, Aunt Louise had tears in her brown eyes when she led me to the far end of the garden, where my father had played when he was a child like myself.

The golden tints of September had begun to touch the foliage of the trees. A vine spread its tendrils over the arbour in which we seated ourselves, and wasps were busy among the ripening grapes. My aunt took both my hands in hers, and began :—

'André, I have to tell you a great piece of news.'

I looked at her apprehensively. The shock of the dreadful event in our lives had left its mark upon my nervous system, and at the slightest surprise my heart would beat until I nearly fainted. She saw my agitation and said simply:—

'Your mother is about to marry.'

It was strange this sentence did not immediately produce the impression which my look at her had led my aunt to expect. I had thought from the tone of her voice, that she was going to tell me of my mother's illness or death. My sensitive imagination readily conjured up such fears. I asked calmly :—

'Whom?'

'You do not guess?'

'M. Termonde?' I cried.

Even now I cannot define the reasons which sent this name to my lips so suddenly, without a moment's thought. No doubt M. Termonde had been a good deal at our house since my father's death; but had he not visited us as often, if not more frequently, before my mother's widowhood? Had he not managed every detail of our affairs for us with care and fidelity, which even then I could recognise as very rare? Why should the news of his

marriage with my mother seem to me on the instant to be much worse news than if she had married no matter whom? Exactly the opposite effect ought to have been produced, surely? I had known this man for a long time; he had been very kind to me formerly —they said he spoiled me—and he was very kind to me still. My best toys were presents from him, and my prettiest books; a wonderful wooden horse which moved by clockwork, given to me when I was seven—how much my poor father was amused when I told him this horse was 'a double thoroughbred'—*Don Quixote*, with Doré's illustrations, this very year; in fact some new gift constantly, and yet I was never easy and light-hearted in his presence as I had formerly been. When had this restraint begun? I could not have told that, but I thought he came too often between my mother and me. I was jealous of him, I may as well confess it, with that unconscious jealousy which children feel, and which made me lavish kisses on my mother when he was by, in order to show him that she was my mother, and nothing at all to him. Had he discovered my feelings? Had they been his own also? However that might be, I now never failed to discern antipathy similar to my own in his looks, notwithstanding his flattering voice and his over-polite ways. At my then age, instinct is never deceived about such impressions. This was quite enough to account for the shiver that went over me when I uttered his name. But I saw my aunt start at that shiver and my cry.

'M. Termonde,' said she; 'yes, it is he; but why did you think of him immediately?' Then, looking me full in the face with a searching gaze, she said in a low tone, as though she were ashamed of putting such a question to a child :—

'What do you know?'

At these words, and without any other cause than the weakness of nerves to which I had been subject ever since my father's death, I burst into tears. The same thing happened to me sometimes when I was shut up in my room alone, with the door bolted, suffering from a dread which I could not conquer, like that of a coming danger. I would forecast the worst accidents that could happen; for example, that my mother would be murdered, like my father, and then myself, and I peered under all the articles of furniture in the room. It had occurred to me, when out walking with a servant, to imagine that the harmless man might be an accomplice of the mysterious criminal, and have it in charge to take me to him, or at all events to lose me in some unknown place. My too highly-wrought imagination overmastered me. I fancied myself, however, escaping from the deadly device, and in order to hide myself more effectually, making for Compiègne. Should I have enough money? Then I reflected that it might be possible to sell my watch to an old watchmaker whom I used to see, when on my way to the Lycée, at work behind the window of his little shop, with a glass fixed in his right eye. That was a sad

faculty of foresight which poisoned so many of the harmless hours of my childhood! It was the same faculty that now made me break out into choking sobs when my aunt asked me what I had in my mind against M. Termonde. I related the worst of my grievances to her then, leaning my head on her shoulder, and in this one all the others were summed up. It dated from two months before. I had come back from school in a merry mood, contrary to my habit. My teacher had dismissed me with praise of my compositions and congratulations on my prizes. What good news this was to take home, and how tenderly my mother would kiss me when she heard it! I put away my books, washed my hands carefully, and flew to the salon where my mother was. I entered the room without knocking at the door, and in such haste that as I sprang towards her to throw myself into her arms, she gave a little cry. She was standing beside the mantelpiece, her face was very pale, and near her stood M. Termonde. He seized me by the arm and held me back from her.

'Oh, how you frightened me!' said my mother.

'Is that the way to come into a salon?' said M. Termonde.

His voice had turned rough like his gesture. He had grasped my arm so tightly that where his fingers had fastened on it I found black marks that night when I undressed myself. But it was neither his insolent words nor the pain of his grasp which made me stand there

stupidly, with a swelling heart. No, it was hearing my mother say to him :—

'Don't scold André too much; he is so young. He will improve.'

Then she drew me towards her, and rolled my curls round her fingers; but in her words, in their tone, in her glance, in her faint smile, I detected a singular timidity, almost a supplication, directed to the man before her, who frowned as he pulled his moustache with his restless fingers, as if in impatience of my presence. By what right did he, a stranger, speak in the tone of a master in our house? Why had he laid his hand on me ever so lightly? Yes, by what right? Was I his son or his ward? Why did not my mother defend me against him? Even if I were in fault it was towards her only. A fit of rage seized upon me; I burned with longing to spring upon M. Termonde like a beast, to tear his face and bite him. I darted a look of fury at him and at my mother, and left the room without speak ing. I was of a sullen temper, and I think this defect was due to my excessive and almost morbid sensitiveness. All my feelings were exaggerated, so that the least thing angered me, and it was misery to me to recover myself. Even my father had found it very difficult to get the better of those fits of wounded feeling, during which I strove against my own relentings with a cold and concentrated anger which both relieved and tortured me. I was well aware of this moral infirmity, and as I was not a bad child in reality, I was ashamed of it. Therefore, my

humiliation was complete when, as I went out of the room, M. Termonde said :—

'Now for a week's sulk! His temper is really insufferable.'

His remark had one advantage, for I made it a point of honour to give the lie to it, and did not sulk; but the scene had hurt me too deeply for me to forget it, and now my resentment was fully revived, and grew stronger and stronger while I was telling the story to my aunt. Alas! my almost unconscious second-sight, that of a too sensitive child, was not in error. That puerile but painful scene symbolised the whole history of my youth, my invincible antipathy to the man who was about to take my father's place, and the blind partiality in his favour of her who ought to have defended me from the first and always.

'He detests me!' I said through my tears; 'what have I done to him?'

'Calm yourself,' said the kind woman. 'You are just like your poor father, making the worst of all your little troubles. And now you must try to be nice to him on account of your mother, and not to give way to this violent feeling, which frightens me. Do not make an enemy of him,' she added.

It was quite natural that she should speak to me in this way, and yet her earnestness appeared strange to me from that moment out. I do not know why she also seemed surprised at my answer to her question, 'What do you know?' She wanted to quiet me, and she increased the apprehension with which

I regarded the usurper—so I called him ever afterwards—by the slight faltering of her voice when she spoke of him.

'You will have to write to them this evening,' said she at length.

Write to them! The words sickened me. They were united; never, nevermore should I be able to think of the one without thinking of the other.

'And you?'

'I have already written.'

'When are they to be married?'

'They were married yesterday,' she answered, in so low a tone that I hardly heard the words.

'And where?' I asked, after a pause.

'In the country, at the house of some friends.' Then she added quickly: 'They preferred that you should not be there on account of the interruption of your holidays. They have gone away for three weeks; then they will go to see you in Paris before they start for Italy. You know I am not well enough to travel. I will keep you here until then. Be a good boy, and go now and write.'

I had many other questions to put to her, and many tears more to weep, but I restrained myself, and a quarter of an hour later, I was seated at my dear good aunt's writing-table in her salon.

How I loved that room on the ground floor, with its glass door opening on the garden. It was filled with remembrance for me. On the wall at the side of the old-fashioned 'secretary' hung the portraits, in frames of

all shapes and sizes, of those whom the good and pious soul had loved and lost. This funereal little corner spoke strongly to my fancy. One of the portraits was a coloured miniature, representing my great-grandmother in the costume of the Directory, with a short waist, and her hair dressed *à la* Proudhon. There was also a miniature of my great-uncle, her son. What an amiable, self-important visage was that of the staunch admirer of Louis Philippe and M. Thiers! Then came my paternal grandfather, with his strong parvenu physiognomy, and my father at all ages. Underneath these works of art was a bookcase, in which I found all my father's school prizes, piously preserved. What a feeling of protection I derived from the *portières* in green velvet, with long bands of needlework, my aunt's masterpieces, which hung in wide folds over the doors! With what admiration I regarded the faded carpet, with its impossible flowers, which I had so often tried to gather in my babyhood! This was one of the legends of my earliest years, one of those anecdotes which are told of a beloved son, and which make him feel that the smallest details of his existence have been observed, understood, and loved. In later days I have been frozen by the ice of indifference. And my aunt, she whose life had been lived among these old-fashioned things, how I loved her, with that face in which I read nothing but supreme tenderness for me, those eyes whose gaze did me good in some mysterious part of my soul! I felt her so near to me, only

through her likeness to my father, that I rose from my task four or five times to kiss her, during the time it took me to write my letter of congratulation to the worst enemy I had, to my knowledge, in the world.

And this was the second indelible date in my life.

CHAPTER V

INDELIBLE! Yes, those two dates and only those have remained so, and when I retrace the past in fancy, I am always pulled up by them. The two images—my father assassinated, my mother married again—weighed long upon my heart. Other children have restless and supple minds which yield easily to successive impressions; they surrender themselves entirely to the actual moment, pass from a pleasure to a childish trouble, and forget in the evening what they have felt during the day. But I? ah, no! From my two recollections I was never released. An ever present hallucination kept before my mind's eye the dead face on the pillow, and my mother kneeling at the bed's foot, or the sound in my ears of my aunt's voice announcing the other news. I could always see her sad face, her brown eyes, and the black bows on her cap shaking in the wind of the September afternoon. And still, even to-day, when I am endeavouring to reproduce the history of my mind's life, or the real and solitary André Cornélis, all other remembrances vanish before those two; not a phase of my youth

but is pervaded by them and contained in them, as the cloud contains the lightning, and the fire it kindles, and the ruins of the homesteads which it strikes. Of all the images that crowd upon my memory, recalling what I was during my long years of childhood and youth, those two disastrous days are always the chief; they form the lurid background of the picture of my life, the dark horizon of a more melancholy landscape.

What are the other images? A large space, with old trees in it, some children playing late on an autumn day; while others, who are not playing, but only look on, lean against the old brown tree-stems, or wander about like forsaken creatures. This is the playground of the Lycée at Versailles. The scholars who are playing are the 'old' boys, the others, the shy exiles, are the 'new,' and I am one of the latter. It is just four short weeks since my aunt told me of my mother's marriage, and already my life is entirely changed. On my return from the holidays it was decided that I should enter the school as a boarder. My mother and my stepfather were about to travel in Italy until the summer, and the question of their taking me with them was not even mooted. My mother proposed to allow me to remain as a day-pupil, under the care of my aunt, who would come up to Paris; but my stepfather negatived the proposition at once by quite reasonable arguments. Why should so great a sacrifice of all her habits be imposed upon the old lady, and what was there to dread

in the rough life of a boarding-school, which is the best means of forming a boy's character?

'And he needs that schooling,' added my stepfather, directing the same cold glance towards me as on the day when he grasped my arm so roughly. In short, it was settled that I was to go to school, but not in Paris.

'The air is bad,' said my stepfather.

Why am I not in the least obliged to him for his seeming solicitude for my health? It was not because I foresaw what he had foreseen already—he, the man who wanted to separate me from my mother for ever—that it would be easier for them to leave me at a school outside the city than at one nearer home, when they returned? What need has he of these calculations? Is it not enough that he should give utterance to a wish for Madame Termonde to obey him? How I suffer when I hear her say 'thou' to him, just as she used to say it to my own father. And then I think of the days when I came home from my classes at the Lycée Bonaparte, and that dear father helped me with my lessons. My stepfather brought me to this school yesterday in the afternoon, and it was he who presented me to the head master, a tall thin personage with a bald head, who tapped me on the cheek and said :—

'Ah, he comes from Bonaparte, the school of the "Muscadins." '

That same evening I had the curiosity to refer to the dictionary for this word 'Muscadin,' and I found the following definition: 'A

young man who studies personal adornment.' It is true that I do not resemble the fellows in tunics among whom I am to live, for I am handsomely dressed, according to my mother's taste, and my costume includes a large white collar and smart English boots. The other boys have shapeless képis, coarse blue stockings which fall over their broken shoes, and their buttons are mostly torn off. They wear out the last year's outdoor costume in the house. During the first play-time on my first day, several of the boys eyed me curiously, and one of them asked me: 'What does your father do?' I made no answer. What I dread, with unbearable misery, is that they may speak to me of *it*. Yesterday, while my stepfather and I were coming down to Versailles in the railway carriage, without exchanging a word, what would I have given to be able to tell him of this dread, to entreat him not to throw me among a number of boys and leave me to their heedless rudeness and cruelty, to promise him that I would work harder and better than before, if I might but remain at home! But the look in his blue eyes is so sharp when they rest on me, it is so hard for me to say the word 'Papa' to him—that word which I am always saying in my thoughts to the other; to him who lies, in the sleep that knows no waking, in the cemetery at Compiègne! And so I addressed no supplication to M. Termonde, and I allowed myself to be shut up in the Versailles Lycée without a word of protest. I preferred to wander about as I do among strangers, to

uttering one complaint to him. Mamma is to come to-morrow; she is going away the next day, and the nearness of this interview prevents me from feeling the inevitable separation too keenly. If she will only come without my stepfather!

She came—and with him. She took her seat in the parlour, which is decorated with vile portraits of scholars who have taken prizes at the general examinations. My schoolfellows were also talking to their mothers, but none could boast a mother so worthy to be loved as mine! Never had she seemed to me so beautiful, with her slender and elegant figure, her graceful neck, her deep eyes, her fine smile. But I could not say a word to her, because my stepfather, 'Jack' as she called him, with her pretty affectation of an English accent, was there between us. Ah! that antipathy which paralyses all the loving impulses of the heart, how intensely have I felt it, then and since! I thought I could perceive that my mother was surprised, almost saddened by my coldness when she bade me farewell; but ought she not to have known that I would never show my love for her in *his* presence? She is gone; she is on her travels, and I remain here.

Other images arise which recall our schoolroom in the evenings of that first winter of my imprisonment. The metal stove burns red in the middle of the gas-lit room. A bowl of water is placed upon the top lest the heat should affect our heads. All along the walls stretches the line of our desks, and behind

each of us is a little cupboard in which we keep our books and papers. Silence reigns, and is rendered more perceptible by the scratching of pens, the turning over of leaves, and an occasional suppressed cough. The master is in his place, behind a desk which is raised above the others. His name is Rodolphe Sorbelle, and he is a poet. The other day he let fall out of his pocket a sheet of paper covered with writing and erasures, from which we managed to make out the following lines :—

Je voudrais être oiseau des champs,
Avoir un bec,
Chanter avec :
Je voudrais être oiseau des champs,
Avoir des ailes,
Voler sur elles.
Mais je ne puis en faire autant,
Car j'ai le bec
Beaucoup trop sec,
Et je suis pion,
'Cré nom de nom !

This prodigious poem gave us, cruel little wretches that we were, the greatest delight. We sang the verses perpetually, in the dormitory, out walking, in the playground, setting the last words to the classic music of 'Les Lampions.' But the old watchdog has sharp teeth, and defends himself by 'detentions,' so none of us cared to brave him to his face. The lamp hung over his head shows up his greenish-gray hair, his red forehead, and his threadbare coat, which once was blue. No doubt he is rhyming, for he is writing, and every now and then he raises that swollen

brow, and his large blue eyes—which express such real kindness when we do not torment him with our tricks—search the room and observe in turn each of the thirty-five desks. I, too, take a prolonged survey of the companions of my slavery; I already know their faces. There is Rocquain, a little fellow, with a big red nose in a long white face; and Parizelle, a tall, stout boy, with an underhung jaw. He is fair-skinned, has green eyes and freckles, and for a wager ate a cockroach the other day. There is Gervais, a brown, curly-haired lad, who makes his will every week. He has communicated to me the latest of these documents, in which there is the following clause :—'I leave to Leyreloup some good advice, contained in my letter to Cornélis.' Leyreloup is his former friend, who played him the trick of rolling him in a heap of dead leaves last autumn, having been egged on to the deed by big Parizelle, whom the vengeful Gervais ever since regards as a rascal, and the advice contained in the posthumous letter is a warning to distrust the giant. All this small school-world is absorbed in countless interests which even at that time I held to be puerile, when compared with the thoughts that are in me. And my schoolfellows themselves seem to understand that there is something in my life which does not exist in theirs; they spare me the torments that are generally inflicted upon a new boy, but I am not the friend of any of them, except this same Gervais, who is my walking companion when we go out. Gervais is an imaginative lad, and when he is at home he

devours a collection of the *Journal pour Tous.* He has found in it a series of romances called, 'L'Homme aux Figures de Cire,' 'Le Roi des Gabiers,' 'Le Chat du Bord,' and Thursday after Thursday, when we go out walking, he relates these stories to me. The tragic strain of my own fate is the cause of my taking a grim pleasure in these narratives, in which crime plays the chief part. Unfortunately I have confided the secret of this questionable amusement to my good aunt, and the head master has separated the improvised 'feuilletoniste' from his public. Gervais and I are forbidden to walk together. My aunt believed that the excess of sensitiveness in me, which alarmed her, would be corrected by this prohibition. Poor woman! Neither her solicitous tenderness, nor her pious care and foresight—she comes to Versailles from Compiègne every Sunday to take me out—nor my studies—for I redouble my efforts so that my stepfather should not triumph in my bad marks—nor my religious enthusiasm—for I have become the most fervent of us all at the chapel—no, nothing, nothing appeases the hidden demon which possesses and devours me. While the evening studies are going on, and in the interval between two tasks, I read a letter whose envelope bears the effigy of King Victor Emmanuel. This is my food for the week, conveyed in the pages written by my mother. They give me details of her travels, which I do not understand very clearly; but I do understand that she is happy without me, outside of me—that the

thought of my father and his mysterious death no longer haunts her; above all, that she loves her new husband, and I am jealous—miserably, basely jealous. My imagination, which has its strange lapses, has also a singular minuteness. I see my mother in a room in a foreign inn, and spread out upon the table are the various fittings of her travelling-bag, silver-mounted, with her cipher in relief, the Christian name in full, and encircling it the letter T. Marie T——. Well, had she not the right to make a new life for herself, honourably? Why should this mixture of her past with her present hurt me so much? So much, that just now, when stretched upon my narrow iron bed in the dormitory, I could not close my eyes.

How long those nights seemed to me, when I lay down oppressed by this thought, and strove in vain to lose it in the sweet oblivion of sleep! I prayed to God for sleep, with all the strength of my childlike piety. I said mentally twelve times twelve *Paters* and *Aves*—and I did not sleep. I then tried to 'form a chimera'; for thus I called a strange faculty with which I knew myself to be endowed. When I was quite a little boy, on an occasion when I was suffering from toothache, I had shut my eyes, forcibly abstracted my mind, and compelled it to represent a happy scene in which I was the chief actor. Thus I was enabled to overrule my sensations to the the point of becoming insensible to the tooth-ache. Now, whenever I suffer, I do the same, and the device is almost always successful. I

employ it in vain when my mother is in question. Instead of the picture of felicity which I evoke, the other picture presents itself to me, that of the intimate life of the being whom in all the world I most love, with the man whom I most hate. For I hate him, with an implacable hatred, and without being able to assign any other motive than that he has taken the first place in the heart which was all my own. Ah, me! I shall hear the slow hours struck, first from the belfry of a church hard by, and then by the school-clock—a grave and sonorous chime, then a treble ringing. I shall hear old Sorbelle walk through the whole length of the dormitory, and then go into the room which he occupies at the far end. How dull is the spectacle of the two rows of our little beds, with their brass knobs shining in the dim light; and how odious it is to be listening to the snores of the sleepers! At measured intervals the watchman, an old soldier with a big face and thick black moustaches, passes. He is wrapped in a brown cloth cape, and carries a dark lantern. Can it be that he is not afraid, all alone, at night, in those long passages, and on the stone staircases, where the wind rushes about with a dismal noise? How I should hate to be obliged to go down those stairs, shuddering in that darkness with the fear of meeting a ghost! I try to drive away this new idea, but in vain, and then I think. . . . Where is he who killed my father? Is it with fear, is it with horror that I shudder at this question? And I go on thinking. . . . Does he know that I am

here? Panic seizes upon me, with the idea that the assassin might be capable of assuming the disguise of a school servant, for the purpose of killing me also. I commend my soul to God, and in the midst of these awful thoughts I fall asleep at length, very late, to be awakened with a start at half-past five in the morning, with an aching head, shaken nerves, and an ailing mind, sick of a disease which is beyond cure.

CHAPTER VI

THREE years have passed away since the autumnal evening on which a hackney-coach had set down my stepfather and myself in that corner of one of the gloomy avenues of Old Versailles, which is made more gloomy by the walls of the school. I was to have remained at this school for ten months only —the period of my mother's stay in Italy. That evening was in the autumn of 1866; we are now in the winter of 1870, and I have been all this time imprisoned in the Lycée, 'where the air is so good, and I get on so well.' These are the reasons assigned by my mother for not taking me back to her home. My schoolfellows pass before me in the twilight of my remembrance of that distant time. Rocquain, more pasty-faced than ever, with his comic-actor-like red nose, sings café-concert songs, smokes cigarettes in secret places, and collects the photographs of the actresses in vogue. Gervais, still brown and surly, has a passion

for races, at which he is always playing, and is reconciled with Leyreloup, 'the hedgehog,' as we call him, whom he has infected with his dangerous mania. The two are constantly arranging insect or tortoise steeplechases. They have even contrived a betting system, and ten of us have joined it. The game is played by placing in front of a dictionary several bits of paper with the name of a horse written upon each of them. The dictionary is then opened and shut rapidly, and the bit of paper which is blown farthest away by the little breeze thus created, is the winner, and the boys who have backed it divide the stakes. Parizelle is bigger than ever; at sixteen he is already growing a beard, and has been entertained by some military acquaintances at a certain café, which he points out to us when we take our weekly walks. As for myself, I have a new friend, one Joseph Dediot, who has introduced me to some of the verses of De Musset. We go wild over this poet. Dediot's place in the schoolroom is by the side of Scelles, the bookseller's son, whom we call Bel-Œil, because he squints. Bel-Œil is as lazy as a lobster, and Dediot has made the oddest bargain with him. Dediot does all his exercises, and in return for each, Bel-Œil hands over to him a copy of twenty lines of 'Rolla.' In exchange for I know not how many versions, themes, and Latin verses, my friend has at last secured the entire poem, and we spout its most characteristic lines enthusiastically.

We have become sceptics and misanthropes.

We play at despairing Atheism, just as Parizelle and Rocquain play at debauchery, Gervais and others at sport and fashion, politics and love. Old Sorbelle, having been dismissed from the Lycée, has just published a pamphlet in which he figures under the name of Lebros, and the Provost under that of M. Bifteck. This little book occupies our attention throughout the whole winter, and induces us to form a conspiracy which leads to nothing. Here we are, then, playing at revolution! What a strange discipline is that of those infamous schools, where young boys ruin their years of happy youth by the puerile and premature imitation of passions from which they will have to suffer in reality some day, just as children, who are destined to die in war as men, play at soldiers, with their flaxen curls and their ringing laughter! Alas! for me the game was over too soon.

Nevertheless, this shabby, dull, mean school was my home, the only place in which I felt myself really 'at home,' and I loved it. Yes, I loved that hulks which was also partly barracks and partly hospital, because there at all events I was not perpetually confronted with the evidence of my double misfortune. After all, the influence of my age made itself felt there. the nervous strain upon me was relaxed, and I escaped from the fixed idea of the murderer of my father to be discovered, and my stepfather to be detested. My half-holidays were such misery to me that they would have made me dread the termination of my school time, only that I knew the same

date would place me in possession of my fortune, enabling me to devote myself entirely to the supreme aim and purpose of my life. I had sworn to myself that the mysterious assassin whom justice had failed to discover should be unearthed by me, and I derived extraordinary moral strength from that resolution, which I kept strictly to myself, without ever speaking of it. This, however, did not prevent me from suffering from trifles, whenever those trifles were signs of my doubly-orphaned state. How clearly present to me now are the torments of those sortie days! When the servant who was to take me to my mother's abode comes to fetch me on those Sunday mornings at eight, his careless manner makes me feel that I am no longer the son of the house. This wretch, this François Niquet, with his shaven chin and his insolent eye, does not remove his hat when I come down into the parlour. Sometimes, when the weather is bad, he presumes to grumble, and, although the smell of tobacco makes me sick, he lights his pipe in the railway carriage, and smokes without asking my leave. I would rather die than make any observation upon this, because I had once complained of my stepfather's valet, a vile fellow whom they made out to be in the right as against me, and I then and there resolved that never again would I expose myself to a similar affront. Besides, I had already suffered too much, and thus to suffer teaches one to feel contempt. The train proceeds, and I do not exchange a dozen words with the fellow. I know that I

am regarded as proud and unamiable; but the same bent of mind which made me sullen when quite a child now makes me take a pleasure in displeasing those whom I dislike. Amid silence and the reek of coarse tobacco, we reach the Montparnasse Station, where no carriage ever awaits me, no matter how bad the weather may be. We take the Boulvevard Latour-Maubourg, and pass by the long avenues lined with buildings, hospitals, and bric-à-brac shops, turn down by the Church of Saint François Xavier with its two slender towers, cross the Place des Invalides, and reach the door of our hotel. I hate the concierge, also a creature of M. Termonde's, and his broad flat face, in which I read hostility which is no doubt absolute indifference. But everything transforms itself into a sign of enmity, to my mind, from the faces of the servants, even to the aspect of my own room. M. Termonde has taken my own dear old room from me; a large handsome room, which used to be flooded with sunshine, with a window opening on the garden, and a door communicating with my mother's apartment. I now occupy a sort of large closet, with a northern aspect and no view except that of a woodstack. When I reach home on those Sunday mornings, I have to go straight to this room and wait there until my mother has risen and can receive me. No one has taken the trouble to light a fire; so I ask for one, and while the servant is blowing at the logs, I take a chair, and gaze at the portrait of my father, which is now banished to my quarters after

having figured for so long upon an easel draped with black, in my mother's morning-room. The odour of damp wood in process of kindling is mingled with the musty flavour of the room, which has been shut up all the week. I have some bitter moments to pass there. These mean miseries make me feel the moral forsakenness of my position more keenly, more cruelly. And my mother lives, she breathes at the distance of a few steps from me; yes, and she loves me!

Now that I can cast a lurid look back upon my unhappy youth, I am aware that my own temper had much to do with the misunderstanding between my poor mother and myself which has never ceased to exist. Yes, she loved me, and at the same time she loved her husband. It was for me to explain to her the sort of pain she caused me by uniting and mingling those two affections in her heart. She would have understood me, she would have spared me the series of small dumb troubles that ultimately made any explanation between us impossible. When at length I saw her on those 'sortie' days, at about eleven, just before breakfast, she expected me to meet her with effusive delight; how should she know that the presence of her husband paralysed me, just as it had done when we parted before her journey to Italy? There was an incomprehensible mystery to her in that absolute incapacity for revealing my mind, that stony inertness which overwhelmed me so soon as we were not alone, she and I—and we were

never alone. She used to come to see me at Versailles once a week, on Wednesday, and it hardly ever happened that she came without my stepfather. I never wrote a letter to her that she did not show to her husband; indeed, he saw every letter which she received. How well I knew this habit of hers, how she would say, 'André has written to me,' and then hand to him the sheet of paper on which I could not trace one sincere, heartfelt, trustful line, because of the idea that his eyes were to rest upon it! How many notes have I torn up in which I tried to tell her the story of the troubles amid which I lived! Yes, yes, I ought to have spoken to her, nevertheless, to have explained myself a little, confessed my sufferings, my wild jealousy, my brooding grief, my great need of having a corner in her thoughts for myself alone, were it only pity —but I dared not. It was in my nature to feel the pain that I must cause her by speaking thus, too strongly, and I was unable to bear it. All the various trouble of my heart then was bound up in a timid silence, in embarrassment in her presence which affected herself. Like many women she was unable to understand a disposition different from her own, a manner of feeling opposed to hers. She was happy in her second marriage, she loved, she was loved. In M. Termonde she had met a man to whom she had given her whole self, but she had also given to me freely, lavishly. I was her son, it seemed so natural to her that he whom she loved should also love her child. And, in fact, had not M. Termonde been to

me a vigilant and irreproachable protector? Had he not carefully provided for every detail of my education? No doubt he had insisted upon my being sent to school as a boarder, but I had also been of his opinion as to that. He had chosen masters for me in all branches of instruction; I learned fencing, riding, dancing, music, foreign languages. He had attended to, and he continued to attend to, the smallest details, from the New Year's gift that I was to receive—it was always very handsome—to the fixing of my allowance, my 'week,' as we called it, which was paid on each Thursday, at the highest figure permitted by the rules of the Lycée. Never had this man, who was so imperious by nature, raised his voice in speaking to me. Never once since his marriage had he varied from the most perfect politeness towards me; a woman who was in love with him would naturally see in this a proof of exquisite tact and devoted affection. Put my grievances against my stepfather into words? No, I could not do it. And so I was silent, and how was my mother to explain my sullenness, the absence of any demonstrativeness on my part towards my stepfather otherwise than by my selfishness and want of feeling? She did believe me, in fact, to be a selfish and unfeeling boy, and I, owing to my unhealthy mood of mind, felt that when I was in her presence I really became what she believed me. I shrank into myself like a surly animal. But why did she not spare me those trials which completed our alienation from each other?

Why, when we met on those wretched Sundays, did she not contrive that I should have the five minutes alone with her that would have enabled me, not to talk to her—I did not ask so much—but to embrace her, as I loved her, with all my heart? I came into the room which she had transformed into a private sitting-room—in every corner of it I had played at my free pleasure when I, the spoiled child whose lightest wish was a command, was the master—and there was M. Termonde in his morning costume, smoking cigarettes and reading newspapers. It needed nothing but the rustle of the sheet in his hand, the tone of his voice as he bade me good-day, the touch of his fingers—he merely gave me their tips—and I recoiled upon myself. So strong was my antipathy that I never remember to have eaten with a good appetite at the same table with him. My wretchedness was at its height during those Sunday breakfasts and dinners. Ah, I hated everything about him; his blue eyes, almost too far apart, which were sometimes fixed, and at others rolled slightly in their orbits, his high prominent forehead, and prematurely gray hair, the refinement of his features, and the elegance of his manners, such a contrast with my natural dullness and lack of ease—yes, I hated all these, and even to the finely-shaped foot which was set off by his perfect boots. I think that even now, at this present hour, I should recognise a coat he had worn, among a thousand, so living a thing has a garment of his seemed to me under the influence of

that aversion. Only too well did I, with my filial instinct, realise that he, with his slender graceful figure, his feline movements, his flattering voice, his native and acquired aristocratic ways, was the true husband of the lovely, highly-adorned, almost ideal creature whom I, her son, resembled as little as my poor father had resembled her. Ah, how bitter was that knowledge!

Out of the depths of the silence which I preserved on those wretched half-holidays, I followed with intense interest all the conversation that took place before me, especially during breakfast and dinner, in the dining-room—newly furnished, like all the rest of the house. The hours of those meals were no longer the hours of my father's time. This change, and the new furnishing of our dwelling, typified the newness of my mother's life. M. Termonde, who was the son of a stockbroker, and had been for some time in diplomacy, had kept up social relations of a kind quite different from our former ones. My mother and he went frequently into that mixed and cosmopolitan society which was then, and is now, called 'smart.' What had become of the familiar faces at the dinners, few and far between, which my father used to give at the Rue Tronchet? Those dinner parties consisted of three or four persons, the ladies in high gowns, and the gentlemen in morning dress. The talk was of politics and business; a former Minister of King Louis Philippe's, who had gone back to his practice at the bar, was the oracle of the little circle;

and the dinner hour was half-past six, instead of seven, on those days, because the old statesman always retired to rest at ten o'clock. In the wealthy but plain bourgeois life of our home, to go to a theatre was an event, and a ball formed an epoch. Thus, at least, did things represent themselves to my childish mind. Now the old ex-Minister came to the house no more, nor Mdme. Largeyx, the engineer's widow, whom papa was always quoting to mamma as a model, and whom my mother laughingly called her 'mother-in-law.' Now, my mother and my stepfather went out almost every evening. They had horses and several carriages, instead of the coupé hired by the month with which the wife of the renowned lawyer had been content. All the men who came in after dinner, all the women whom I met at six o'clock in my mother's drawing-room, were young and full of life and spirits, and their talk was solely of amusements; new plays, fancy balls, races, and dress. My father, who was full of the ideas of the Monarchy of July, like his old political friend, used to speak severely of the imperial régime; but now my mother was invited to the great receptions at the Tuileries. How could I have ventured to talk to her about the small miseries of my school life, which seemed to me so mean when I contrasted them with her brilliant and opulent existence? Formerly, when I was a day pupil at the Bonaparte, I used to relate to her every trifle concerning the school and my fellow pupils; but now, I should have been

ashamed to bore her with Rocquain, Gervais, Leyreloup, and the rest. It seemed to me that she could not possibly be interested in the story of how Joseph Dediot had been traitorously deserted by his faithless cousin Cécile; and yet, how tragic the case was, to my mind! Notwithstanding that two locks of hair had been exchanged, a bouquet offered and accepted, a kiss snatched and returned, the false girl had married an apothecary at Avranches. Dediot had even written two poems, inspired by his misfortune, and one of them, dedicated to me began thus :—

Sèche ton cœur, André, ne sois jamais aimant,

How could I have talked of all these small things to a lady who dined with the Duchesse d'Arcole, whose intimate friends were a Maréchale and two Marquises, and whose entertainments were described in the society journals? My mother was now the beautiful Madame Termonde, and so completely had her new name replaced the old, that I was almost the only person who remembered she was also the widow of M. Cornélis, he whose tragical death had been related in the very same newspapers. Had she herself forgotten it?

'Forgetfulness! Is this then in all reality the world's law?' I asked myself, with the indignant revolt of a young heart, which does not admit the inevitable compromises of feeling. And I made answer to myself, No! There was one person who remembered as well as I did, one person to whom my father's death still remained a hideous nightmare,

one person to whom I could tell all my thoughts and all my grief—my dear, good, kind aunt. In her case at least all the fond and tender things of the past remained unchanged. When August came, and I went to Compiègne for a portion of my holidays, I found everything in its place, both in the house and in the heart of the dear old maid.

For my sake, I knew it well, she had consented to keep up her former relations with my mother, and she dined with her three or four times a year. Dear Aunt Louise! She would listen with the utmost kindness to all my childish complaints, and she always sent me home softened, almost appeased; more indulgent towards my mother, and convinced that I was wrong in my judgment of M. Termonde.

Nevertheless, I did not tell Aunt Louise anything about my reprisals upon the man whom I accused of having stolen my mother's heart from me. I had perceived, very soon, certain signs of an antipathy towards myself on the part of my stepfather, similar to that which I entertained towards him. When I came rather suddenly into the salon, and he was engaged in a conversation either with my mother or one of his friends, my presence sufficed to cause a slight alteration in his voice; a change which, most likely, no one else would have perceived, but which did not escape me, for did not my own throat contract, and my lips quiver with sheer abhorrence?

I should not have been the sullen and

resentful boy I then was, if I had not planned how to utilise my strange power of disturbing the man whom I execrated, in the interest of my enmity. My system was to force him to feel the acute sensation which my presence inflicted on him by keeping silence, and steadily pursuing him with my gaze. Great as his self-control was, I never fixed my eyes upon him from the far end of the room, but, after a while, he would turn his eyes towards me. Then his glance avoided mine, and he would go on talking; but still he was looking at me, and presently our eyes would meet, and his would shift away again. I knew, by a frown which gathered on his forehad, that he was on the point of forbidding me to look at him in that way; but then he would put strong restraint upon himself, and sometimes he would leave the room.

That abstention from any kind of struggle with me was a fixed resolution on his part, I guessed, because I knew him to be very determined by nature and especially incapable of enduring that any one should brave him. He was fond of relating how, in his youth, when he was attached to the Embassy at Madrid, he had killed a bull at an amateur 'ring,' on being 'dared' to do it by a young Spaniard. It must have hurt his pride severely to permit me the silent insolence of my eyes; he did allow me to indulge it, however, and I did not acknowledge that petty triumph to Aunt Louise. I must set down everything here, and the truth is I was most unhappy; I knew myself to be so,

and I did not lessen my trouble in the least in dilating upon it; on the contrary, I rather exaggerated it so as to win that tender sympathy which did my sore heart good.

I once spoke to her of the vow I had taken, the solemn promise I had made to myself that I would discover the murderer of my father, and take vengeance upon him, and she laid her hand upon my mouth. She was a pious woman, and she repeated the words of the gospel: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Then she added: 'We must leave the punishment of the crime to Him; His will is hidden from us. Remember the divine precept and promise, "Forgive and you shall be forgiven." Never say: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Ah, no; drive this enmity out of your heart, Cornélis; yes, even this.' And there were tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER VII

My poor aunt! She thought me made of sterner stuff than I really was. There was no need of her advice to prevent my being consumed by the desire for vengeance which had been the fixed star of my early youth, the blood-coloured beacon aflame in my night. Ah! the resolutions of boyhood, the 'oaths of Hannibal' taken to ourselves, the dream of devoting all our strength to one single and unchanging aim—life sweeps all that away, together with our generous illusions, ardent

enthusiasm, and noble hopes. What a difference there is—what a falling off—between the boy of fifteen, unhappy, indeed, but so bold and proud in 1870, and the young man of eight years later, in 1878! And to think, only to think, that but for chance occurrences, impossible to foresee, I should still be, at this hour, the young man whose portrait hangs upon the wall above the table at which I am writing. Of a surety, the visitors to the Salon of that year (1878) who looked at this portrait among so many others, had no suspicion that it represented the son of a father who had come to so tragic an end. And I, when I look at that commonplace image of an ordinary Parisian, with eyes unlit by any fire or force of will, complexion paled by senseless dissipation, hair cut in the fashion of the day, strictly correct dress and attitude, I am astonished to think that I could have lived as I actually did live at that period. Between the misfortunes that saddened my childhood, and those of quite recent date which have finally laid waste my life, the course of my existence was colourless, monotonous, vulgar, just like that of anybody else. I shall merely note the stages of it.

In the second half of 1870, the Franco-Prussian war takes place. The invasion finds me at Compiègne, where I am passing my holidays with my aunt. My stepfather and my mother remain in Paris during the siege. I go on with my studies under the tuition of an old priest belonging to the little town, who prepared my father for his first communion.

In the autumn of 1871 I return to Versailles; in August, 1873, I take my bachelor's degree, and then I do my one year's voluntary service in the army at Angers under the easiest possible conditions. My colonel was the father of my old schoolfellow, Rocquain. In 1874 I am set free from tutelage by my stepfather's advice. This was the moment at which my task was to have been begun, the time appointed with my own soul; yet, four years afterwards, in 1878, not only was the vengeance that had been the tragic romance, and, so to speak, the religion of my childhood, unfulfilled, but I did not trouble myself about it.

I was cruelly ashamed of my indifference when I thought about it; but I am now satisfied that it was not so much the result of weakness of character as of causes apart from myself which would have acted in the same way upon any young man placed in my situation. From the first, and when I faced my task of vengeance, an insurmountable obstacle arose before me. It is equally easy and sublime to strike an attitude and exclaim: 'I swear that I will never rest until I have punished the guilty one.' In reality, one never acts except in detail, and what could I do? I had to proceed in the same way as justice had proceeded, to re-open the inquiry which had been pushed to its extremity without any result.

I began with the Judge of Instruction,[1] who

[1] The translator renders literally those terms and phrases relating to the French criminal law and procedure which have no analogous expression in English.

had had the carriage of the matter, and who was now a Counsellor of the Court. He was a man of fifty, very quiet and plain in his way, and he lived in the Ile de Paris, on the first floor of an ancient house, from whose windows he could see Notre Dame, primitive Paris, and the Seine, which is as narrow as a canal at that place.

M. Massol, so he was named, was quite willing to resume with me the analysis of the data which had been furnished by the Instruction. No doubt existed either as to the personality of the assassin, or the hour at which the crime was committed. My father had been killed between two and three o'clock in the day, without a struggle, by that tall, broad-shouldered personage whose extraordinary disguise indicated, according to the magistrate, 'an amateur.' Excess of complication is always an imprudence, for it multiplies the chances of failure. Had the assassin dyed his skin and worn a wig because my father knew him by sight? To this M. Massol said 'No; for M. Cornélis, who was very observant, and who, besides, was on his guard—this is evident from his last words when he left you—would have recognised him by his voice, his glance, and his attitude. A man cannot change his height and his figure, although he may change his face.' M. Massol's theory of this disguise was that the wearer had adopted it in order to gain time to get out of France, should the corpse be discovered on the day of the murder. Supposing that a description of a man with a very brown complexion and

a black beard had been telegraphed in every direction, the assassin, having washed off his paint, laid aside his wig and beard, and put on other clothes, might have crossed the frontier without arousing the slightest suspicion. There was reason to believe that the pretended Rochdale lived abroad. He had spoken in English at the hotel, and the people there had taken him for an American; it was therefore presumable either that he was a native of the United States, or that he habitually resided there. The criminal was, then, a foreigner, American or English, or perhaps a Frenchman settled in America. As for the motive of so complicated a crime, it was difficult to admit that it could be robbery alone. 'And yet,' observed the Judge of Instruction, 'we do not know what the note-case carried off by the assassin contained. 'But,' he added, 'the hypothesis of robbery seems to me to be utterly routed by the fact that, while Rochdale stripped the dead man of his watch, he left a ring, which was much more valuable, on his finger. From this I conclude that he took the watch merely as a precaution to throw the police off the scent. My supposition is that the man killed M. Cornélis for revenge.'

Then the former Judge of Instruction gave me some singular examples of the resentment cherished against medical experts employed in legal cases, Procureurs of the Republic, and Presidents of Assize. His theory was, that in the course of his practice at the bar my father might have excited resentment of a fierce

and implacable kind; for he had won many suits of importance, and no doubt had made enemies of those against whom he employed his great powers. Supposing one of those persons, being ruined by the result, had attributed that ruin to my father, there would be an explanation of all the apparatus of this deadly vengeance. M. Massol begged me to observe that the assassin, whether he were a foreigner or not, was known in Paris. Why, if this were not so, should the man have so carefully avoided being seen in the street? He had been traced out during his first stay in Paris, when he bought the wig and the beard, and that time he put up at a small hotel in the Rue d'Aboukir under the name of Rochdale, and invariably went out in a cab. 'Observe also,' said the Judge, 'that he kept his room on the day before the murder, and on the morning of the actual day. He breakfasted in his apartment, having breakfasted and dined there the day before. But, when he was in London, and when he lived at the hotel to which your father addressed his first letters, he came and went without any precautions.'

And this was all. The addresses of three hotels—such were the meagre particulars that formed the whole of the information to which I listened with passionate eagerness; the magistrate had no more to tell me. He had small, twinkling, very light eyes, and his smooth face wore an expression of extreme keenness. His language was measured, his general demeanour was cold, obliging, and

mild, he was always closely shaven, and in him one recognised at once the well-balanced and methodical mind which had given him great professional weight. He acknowledged that he had been unable to discover anything, even after a close analysis of the whole existing situation of my father, as well as his past.

'Ah, I have thought a great deal about this affair,' said he, adding that before he resigned his post as Judge of Instruction he had carefully reperused the notes of the case. He had again questioned the concierge of the Imperial Hotel and other persons. Since he had become Counsellor to the Court, he had indicated to his successor what he believed to be a clue; a robbery committed by a carefully made-up Englishman had led him to believe the thief to be identical with the pretended Rochdale. Then there was nothing more. These steps had, however, been of use in as much as they barred the rule of limitation, and he laid stress on that fact. I consulted him then as to how much time still remained for me to seek out the truth on my own account. The last Act of Instruction dated from 1873, so that I had until 1883 to discover the criminal and deliver him up to public justice. What madness! Ten years had already elapsed since the crime, and I, all alone, insignificant, not possessed of the vast resources at the disposal of the police, I presumed to imagine that I should triumph, where so skilful a ferret as he had failed! Folly! Yes; it was so. Nevertheless, I tried.

I began a thorough and searching investigation of all the dead man's papers. With that unbounded tenderness of hers for my stepfather, which made me so miserable, my mother had placed all these papers in M. Termonde's keeping. Alas! Why should she have understood those niceties of feeling on my part, which rendered the fusion of her present with her past so repugnant to me, any more clearly on this point than on any other? M. Termonde had at least scrupulously respected the whole of those papers, from plans of association and prospectuses to private letters. Among the latter were several from M. Termonde himself, which bore testimony to the friendship that had formerly subsisted between my mother's first husband and her second. Had I not known this always? Why should I suffer from the knowledge? And still there was nothing, no indication whatever to put me on the track of a suspicion.

I evoked the image of my father as he lived, just as I had seen him for the last time; I heard him replying to M. Termonde's question in the dining-room of the Rue Tronchet, and speaking of the man who awaited him to kill him: 'A singular man whom I shall not be sorry to observe more closely.' And then he had gone out and was walking towards his death while I was playing in the little salon, and my mother was talking to the friend who was one day to be her master and mine. What a happy home-picture, while in that hotel room—— Ah! was I never to find the key of the terrible enigma? Where was I to go?

What was I to do? At what door was I to knock?

At the same time that a sense of the responsibility of my task disheartened me, the novel facilities of my new way of life contributed to relax the tension of my will. During my school days, the sufferings I underwent from jealousy of my stepfather, the disappointment of my repressed affections, the meanness and penury of my surroundings, many grievous influences, had maintained the restless ardour of my feelings; but this also had undergone a change. No doubt I still continued to love my mother deeply and painfully, but I now no longer asked her for what I knew she would not give me, my unshared place, a separate shrine in her heart. I accepted her nature instead of rebelling against it. Neither had I ceased to regard my stepfather with morose antipathy; but I no longer hated him with the old vehemence. His conduct to me after I had left school was irreproachable. Just as in my childhood, he had made it a point of honour never to raise his voice in speaking to me, so he now seemed to pique himself upon an entire absence of interference in my life as a young man. When having passed my baccalaureate, I announced that I did not wish to adopt any profession, but without a reason—the true one was my resolution to devote myself entirely to the fulfilment of my task of justice—he had not a word to say against that strange decision; nay, more, he brought my mother to consent to it. When my fortune was handed over to me,

I found that my mother, who had acted as my guardian, and my stepfather, her co-trustee, had agreed not to touch my funds during the whole period of my education; the interest had been re-invested, and I came into possession, not of 750,000 francs, but of more than a million. Painful as I felt the obligation of gratitude towards the man whom I had for years regarded as my enemy, I was bound to acknowledge that he had acted an honourable part towards me. I was well aware that no real contradiction existed between these high-minded actions and the harshness with which he had imprisoned me at school, and, so to speak, relegated me to exile. Provided that I renounced all attempts to form a third between him and his wife, he would have no relations with me but those of perfect courtesy; but I must not be in my mother's house. His will was to reign entirely alone over the heart and life of the woman who bore his name. How could I have contended with him? Why, too, should I have blamed him, since I knew so well that in his place, jealous as I was, my own conduct would have been exactly similiar? I yielded, therefore, because I was powerless to contend with a love which made my mother happy; because I was weary of keeping up the daily constraint of my relations with her and him, and also because I hoped that when once I was free I should be better fitted for my task as a doer of justice. I myself asked to be permitted to leave the house, so that at nineteen I possessed absolute independence, an apartment

of my own in the Avenue Montaigne, close to the round-point in the Champs Elysées, a yearly income of 50,000 francs, the entrée to all the salons frequented by my mother, and the entrée, too, to all the places at which one may amuse oneself. How could I have resisted the influences of such a position?

Yes, I had dreamed of being an avenger, a justiciary, and I allowed myself to be caught up almost instantly into the whirlwind of that life of pleasure whose destructive power those who see it only from the outside cannot measure. It is a futile and exacting existence which fritters away your hours as it fritters away your mind, ravelling out the stuff of time thread by thread with irreparable loss, and also the more precious stuff of mental and moral strength. With respect to that task of mine, my task as an avenger, I was incapable of immediate action—what and whom was I to attack? And so I availed myself of all the opportunities that presented themselves of disguising my inaction by movement, and soon the days began to hurry on, and press one upon the other, amid those innumerable amusements of which the idle rich make a code of duties to be performed. What with the morning ride in the Bois, afternoon calls, dinner parties, parties to the theatre, and, after midnight, play at the club, or the pursuit of pleasure elsewhere—how was I to find leisure for the carrying out of a project? I had horses, intrigues, an absurd duel in which I acquitted myself well, because, as I believe, the tragic ideas that were always at the bottom of my life

favoured me. A woman of forty persuaded me that I was her first love, and I became her lover; then I persuaded myself that I was in love with a Russian great lady, who was living in Paris. The latter was—indeed she still is—one of those incomparable actresses in society, who, in order to surround themselves with a sort of court, composed of admirers who are more or less rewarded, employ all the allurements of luxury, wit, and beauty; but who have not a particle of either imagination or heart, although they fascinate by a display of the most refined fancies and the most vivid emotions. I led the life of a slave to the caprices of this soulless coquette for nearly six months, and learned that women of 'the world' and women of 'the half-world' are very much alike in point of worth. The former are intolerable on account of their lies, their assumption, and their vanity; the others are equally odious by reason of their vulgarity, their stupidity, and their sordid love of lucre. I forgot all my absurd relations with women of both orders in the excitement of play, and yet I was well aware of the meanness of that diversion, which only ceases to be insipid when it becomes odious, because it is a clever calculation upon money to be gained without working for it. There was in me something at once wildly dissipated and yet disgusted, which drove me to excess, and at the same time inspired me with bitter self-contempt. In the innermost recesses of my being the memory of my father dwelt, and poisoned my thoughts at their source. An impression of

dark fatalism invaded my sick mind; it was so strange that I should live as I was living, nevertheless, I did live thus, and the visible 'I' had but little likeness to the real. Upon me, then, poor creature that I was, as upon the whole universe, a fate rested. 'Let it drive me,' I said, and yielded myself up to it. I went to sleep, pondering upon ideas of the most sombre philosophy, and I awoke to resume an existence without worth or dignity, in which I was losing not only my power of carrying out my design of reparation towards the phantom which haunted my dreams, but all self-esteem, and all conscience. Who could have helped me reascend this fatal stream? My mother? She saw nothing but the fashionable exterior of my life, and she congratulated herself that I had 'ceased to be a savage.' My stepfather? But he had been, voluntarily or not, favourable to my disorderly life. Had he not made me master of my fortune at the most dangerous age? Had he not procured me admission, at the earliest moment, to the clubs to which he belonged, and in every way facilitated my entrance into society? My aunt? Ah, yes, my aunt was grieved by my mode of life; and yet, was she not glad that at any rate I had forgotten the dark resolution of hate that had always frightened her? And, besides, I hardly ever saw her now. My visits to Compiègne were few, for I was at the age when one always finds time for one's pleasures, but never has any for one's nearest duties. If, indeed, there was a voice that was constantly

lifted up against the waste of my life in vulgar pleasures, it was that of the dead, who slept in the day, unavenged; that voice rose, rose, rose unceasingly, from the depths of all my musings, but I had accustomed myself to pay it no heed, to make it no answer. Was it my fault that everything, from the most important to the smallest circumstance, conspired to paralyse my will? And so I existed, in a sort of torpor which was not dispelled even by the hurly-burly of my mock passions and my mock pleasures.

The falling of a thunderbolt awoke me from this craven slumber of the will. My aunt Louise was seized with paralysis, towards the end of that sad year 1878, in the month of December. I had come in at night, or rather in the morning, having won a large sum at play. Several letters and also a telegram awaited me. I tore open the blue envelope, while I hummed the air of a fashionable song, with a cigarette between my lips, untroubled by an idea that I was about to be apprised of an event which would become, after my father's death and my mother's second marriage, the third great date in my life. The telegram was signed by Julie, my former nurse, and it told me that my aunt had been taken ill quite suddenly, also that I must come at once, although there was a hope of her recovery. This bad news was the more terrible to me because I had received a letter from my aunt just a week previously, and in it the dear old lady complained as usual, that I did not come to see her. My answer to her

letter was lying half-written upon my writing-table. I had not finished it; God knows for what futile reason. It needs the advent of that dread visitant, Death, to make us understand that we ought to make good haste and love *well* those whom we do love, if we would not have them pass away from us for ever, before we have loved them enough. Bitter remorse, in that I had not proved to her sufficiently how dear she was to me, increased my anxiety about my aunt's state. It was two o'clock a.m., the first train for Compiègne did not start until six; in the interval she might die. Those were very long hours of waiting, which I killed by turning over in my mind all my shortcomings towards my father's only sister, my sole kinswoman. The possibility of an irrevocable parting made me regard myself as utterly ungrateful! My mental pain grew keener when I was in the train speeding through the cold dawn of a winter's day, along the road I knew so well. As I recognised each familiar feature of the way, I became once more the schoolboy whose heart was full of unuttered tenderness, and whose brain was laden with the weight of a terrible mission. My thoughts outstripped the engine, moving too slowly, to my impatient fancy, which summoned up that beloved face, so frank and so simple, the mouth with its thickish lips and its perfect kindliness, the eyes out of which goodness looked, with their wrinkled, tear-worn lids, the flat bands of grizzled hair. In what state should I find her? Perhaps, if on that night of repentance, wretchedness,

and mental disturbance, my nerves had not been strained to the utmost—yes, perhaps I should not have experienced those wild impulses when by the side of my aunt's death-bed, which rendered me capable of disobeying the dying woman. But how can I regret my disobedience, since it was the one thing that set me on the track of the truth? No, I do not regret anything, I am better pleased to have done what I have done.

CHAPTER VIII

My good old Julie was waiting for me at the station. Her eyes had failed her of late, for she was seventy years old, nevertheless she recognised me as I stepped out of the train, and began to talk to me in her usual interminable fashion so soon as we were seated in the hired coupé, which my aunt had sent to meet me whenever I came to Compiègne, from the days of my earliest childhood. How well I knew the heavy old vehicle, with its worn cushions of yellow leather, and the driver, who had been in the service of the livery stable keeper as long as I could remember. He was a little man with a merry roguish face, and eyes twinkling with fun, but he tried to give a melancholy tone to his salutation that morning.

'It took her yesterday,' said Julie, while the vehicle rumbled heavily through the streets, 'but you see it had to happen. Our poor demoiselle had been changing for weeks past. She was so trustful, so gentle, so just; she

scolded, she ferreted about, she suspected—there, then, her head was all astray. She talked of nothing but thieves and assassins; she thought everybody wanted to do her some harm, the tradespeople, Jean, Mariette, myself—yes, I too. She went into the cellar every day to count the bottles of wine, and wrote the number down on a paper. The next day she found the same number, and she would maintain the paper was not the same, she disowned her own handwriting. I wanted to tell you this the last time you came here, but I did not venture to say anything; I was afraid it would worry you, and then I thought these were only freaks, that she was a little crazy, and it would pass off. Well, then, I came down yesterday to keep her company at her dinner, as she always liked me to do, because, you know, she was fond of me in reality, whether she was ill or well. I could not find her. Mariette, Jean, and I searched everywhere, and at last Jean bethought him of letting the dog loose; the animal brought us straight to the wood-stack, and there we found her lying at full length upon the ground. No doubt she had gone to the stack to count the logs. We lifted her up, our poor dear demoiselle! Her mouth was crooked, and one side of her could not move. She began to talk. Then we thought she was mad, for she said senseless words which we could not understand; but the doctor assures us that she is perfectly clear in her head, only that she utters one word when she means another. She gets

angry if we do not obey her on the instant. Last night when I was sitting up with her she asked for some pins, I brought them and she was angry. Would you believe that it was the time of night she wanted to know? At length, by dint of questioning her, and by her yeses and noes, which she expresses with her sound hand, I have come to make out her meaning. If you only knew how troubled she was all night about you; I saw it, and when I uttered your name her eyes brightened. She repeats words, you would think she raves; she calls for you. Now look here, M. André, it was the ideas she had about your poor father that brought on her illness. All these last weeks she talked of nothing else. She would say: "If only they do not kill André also. As for me, I am old, but he so young, so good, so gentle." And she cried—yes, she cried incessantly. "Who is it that you think wants to harm M. André?" I asked her. Then she turned away from me with a look of distrust that cut me to the heart, although I knew that her head was astray. The doctor says that she believes herself persecuted, and that it is a mania; he also says that she may recover, but will never have her speech again.

I listened to Julie's talk in silence; I made no answer. I was not surprised that my aunt Louise had begun to be attacked by a mental malady, the trials of her life sufficiently explained this, and I could also account for several singularities that I had observed in her attitude towards me of late. She had surprised me much by asking me to bring back

a book of my father's which I had never thought of taking away. 'Return it to me,' she said, insisting upon it so strongly, that I instituted a search for the book, and at last unearthed it from the bottom of a cupboard where it had been placed, as if on purpose, under a heap of other books. Julie's prolix narrative only enlightened me as to the sad cause of what I had taken for the oddity of a fidgety and lonely old maid. On the other hand, I could not take the ideas of my aunt upon my father's death so philosophically as Julie accepted them. What were those ideas? Many a time, in the course of conversation with her, I had vaguely felt that she was not opening her heart quite freely to me. Her determined opposition to my plans of a personal inquiry might proceed from her piety, which would naturally cause her to disapprove of any thought or project of vengeance, but was there nothing else, nothing besides that piety in question? Her strange solicitude for my personal safety, which even led her to entreat me not to go out unarmed in the evening, or get into an empty compartment in a train, with other counsels of the same kind, was no doubt caused by morbid excitement; still her constant and distressing dread might possibly rest upon a less vague foundation than I imagined. I also recalled with a certain apprehension, that so soon as she ceased to be able completely to control her mind these strange fears took stronger possession of her than before. 'What!' said I to myself, 'am I becoming like her, that I let

such things occur to me? Are not these fixed ideas quite natural in a person whose brain is racked by the mania of persecution, and who has lost a beloved brother under circumstances equally mysterious and tragical?'

Thus reasoning with myself, almost in spite of myself, and listening to Julie, I arrived at my aunt's house. A gloomy place it looked on that bitter cold morning, sunk in the grimmest kind of silence, that of the country in winter. The dog, a big black-and-white Newfoundland, whom I had named Don Juan, whereat my aunt had been scandalised, jumped upon me when I got out of the old coupé; but I pushed him away almost roughly, so sore was my heart at the thought of what I was about to see in my aunt's room, whither I proceeded at once.

When I entered, the maid-servant, who was seated at the bed's foot, stopped me with a gesture at the threshold; my aunt was sleeping. I stole softly over the carpet to an easy-chair beside the fire, and looked at the invalid from that distance. She lay, with her face turned towards the wall, in the middle of the old bed with four carved posts, which had belonged to my grandmother. The curtains, of thick red stuff brocaded with black velvet, half hid her from my sight. I watched her sleeping; now listening to her short breathing, and again looking about the room, which was as familiar to me as the salon below stairs, where I had written my letter of congratulation to my stepfather on his marriage. Those red curtains were of an

old-fashioned shade, which harmonised with the antiquated shape of the furniture, the faded paper of the screen before the window, the white ground of the carpet, the discoloured reps with which the chairs were covered; in short, with all the waifs from the wreck of our family life, that had been piously observed by the dear old maid. She was so exact and orderly; her black-mittened hands were so skilful in pouncing upon any dust overlooked by Jean, who combined the functions of gardener and house-servant, that these old worn things, owing to the deep shining brown of the bedstead, the chairs, and the brass-handled chest of drawers, lent a homely aspect to the room such as the primitive painters loved to give to their pictures of the Nativity. The contrast between my apartment—the typical fashionable young man's rooms—and this peaceful retreat was striking indeed. I had passed from the one to the other too suddenly not to feel that contrast, and also the mute reproach that was conveyed to me by the sick room, with its atmosphere tainted by a medicinal odour instead of the fresh scent of lavender which I had always recognised there. How bitterly I reproached myself in that half hour, during which I listened to her breathing as she slept, and meditated upon her lonely life. What resolutions I formed! I would come here for long weeks together, when she should be better—for I would not admit that she was in danger of death—and I eagerly awaited the moment of her awakening, to beg her forgiveness, to

tell her how much I loved her. All of a sudden she heaved a deep sigh, and I saw her raise the free arm and move it up and down several times with a gesture that had something of despair in it.

'She is awake,' said Julie, who had taken the maid's place at the foot of the bed. I approached my aunt and called her by her name. I then clearly saw her poor face distorted by paralysis. She recognised me, and as I bent down to kiss her, she stroked my cheek with her sound hand. This caress, which was habitual with her, she repeated slowly several times. I placed her, with Julie's assistance, on her back, so that she could see me distinctly; she looked at me for a long time, and two heavy tears fell from the eyes in which I read boundless tenderness, supreme anguish, and inexpressible pity. I answered them by my own tears, which she dried with the back of her hand; then she strove to speak to me but could only pronounce an incoherent sentence that struck me to the heart. She saw, by the expression of my face, that I had not understood her, and she made a desperate effort to find words in which to render the thought evidently precise and lucid in her mind. Once more she uttered an unintelligible phrase, and began again to make the feeble gesture of despairing helplessness which had so shocked me at her waking. She appeared, however, to take courage when I put the question to her: 'What do you want of me dear aunt?' She made a sign that Julie was

to leave the room, and no sooner were we alone than her face changed. With my help she was able to slip her hand under her pillow, and withdraw her bunch of keys; then separating one key from the others she imitated the opening of a lock. I immediately remembered her groundless fears of being robbed, and asked her whether she wanted the box to which that key belonged. It was a small key of a kind that is specially made for safety locks. I saw that I had guessed aright; she was able to get out one word 'yes,' and her eyes brightened.

'But where is this box?' I asked. Once more she replied by a sentence of which I could make nothing; and seeing that she was relapsing into a state of agitation, with the former heart-rending movement, I begged her to allow me to question her and to answer by gestures only. After some minutes I succeeded in discovering that the box in question was locked up in one of the two large cupboards below stairs, and that the key of the cupboard was on the ring with the others. I went downstairs, leaving her alone, as she had desired me by signs to do. I had no difficulty in finding the casket to which the little key adapted itself; although it was carefully placed behind a bonnet-box and a case of silver forks. The casket was of sweet-scented wood, and the initials J. C. were inlaid upon the lid in gold and platinum. J. C., Justin Cornélis—so, it had belonged to my father. I tried the key in the lock, to make quite sure that I was not mistaken. I

then raised the lid, and glanced at the contents almost mechanically, supposing that I was about to find a roll of business papers, probably shares, a few trinket-cases, and rouleaux of napoleons, a small treasure in fact, hidden away from motives of fear. Instead of this, I beheld several small packets carefully wrapped in paper, each being endorsed with the words, 'Justin's Letters,' and the year in which they were written. My aunt had preserved these letters with the same pious care that had kept her from allowing anything whatever belonging to him in whom the deepest affection of her life had centred, to be lost, parted with, or injured. But why had she never spoken to me of this treasure, which was more precious to me than to any one else in the world? I asked myself that question as I closed the box; then I reflected that no doubt she desired to retain the letters to the last hour of her life; and, satisfied with this explanation, I went upstairs again. From the doorway my eyes met hers, and I could not mistake their look of impatience and intense anxiety. I placed the little coffer on her bed and she instantly opened it, took out a packet of letters, then another, finally kept only one out, replaced those she had removed at first, locked the box, and signed to me to place it on the chest of drawers. While I was clearing away the things on the top of the drawers, to make a clear space for the box, I caught sight, in the glass opposite to me, of the sick woman. By a great effort she had turned herself partly on her side, and

she was trying to throw the packet of letters which she had retained into the fire-place; it was on the right of her bed, and only about a yard away from the foot. But she could hardly raise herself at all, the movement of her hand was too weak, and the little parcel fell on the floor. I hastened to her to replace her head on the pillows and her body in the middle of the bed, and then, with her powerless arm she again began to make that terrible gesture of despair, clutching the sheet with her thin fingers, while tears streamed from her poor eyes.

Ah ! how bitterly ashamed I am of what I am going to write in this place ! I will write it, however, for I have sworn to myself that I will be true, even to the avowal of that fault, even to the avowal of a worse still. I had no difficulty in understanding what was passing in my aunt's mind; the little packet—it had fallen on the carpet close to the fender—evidently contained letters which she wished to destroy, so that I should not read them. She might have burned them, dreading as she did their fatal influence upon me, long since; yet I understood why she had shrunk from doing this, year after year, I, who knew with what idolatry she worshipped the smallest objects that had belonged to my father. Had I not seen her put away the blotting-book which he used when he came to Compiègne, with the paper and envelopes that were in it at his last visit? Yes, she had gone on waiting, still waiting, before she could bring herself to part for ever with those dear and dangerous

letters, and then her sudden illness came, and with it the terrible thought that these papers would come into my possession. I could also take into account that the unreasonable distrust which she had yielded to of late had prevented her from asking Jean or Julie for the little coffer. This was the secret—I understood it on the instant—of the poor thing's impatience for my arrival, the secret also of the trouble I had witnessed. And now her strength had betrayed her. She had vainly endeavoured to throw the letters into the fire, that fire which she could hear crackling, without being able to raise her head so as to see the flame. All these notions which presented themselves suddenly to my thoughts took form afterwards; at the moment they melted into pity for the suffering of the helpless creature before me.

'Do not disturb yourself, dear aunt,' said I, as I drew the coverlet up to her shoulders, 'I am going to burn those letters.'

She raised her eyes full of eager supplication, I closed the lids with my lips and stooped to pick up the little packet. On the paper in which it was folded, I distinctly read this date: '1864—Justin's letters.' 1864! that was the last year of my father's life. I know it, I feel it, that which I did was infamous; the last wishes of the dying are sacred. I ought not, no, I ought not to have deceived her who was on the point of leaving me for ever. I heard her breathing quicken at that very moment. Then came a whirlwind of thought too strong for me. If my aunt

Louise was so wildly, passionately eager that those letters should be burned, it was because they could put me on the right track of vengeance. Letters written in the last year of my father's life, and she had never spoken of them to me! I did not reason, I did not hesitate, in a lightning-flash I perceived the possibility of learning—what? I knew not; but—of learning. Instead of throwing the packet of letters into the fire, I flung it to one side, under a chair, returned to the bedside and told her in a voice which I endeavoured to keep steady and calm, that her directions had been obeyed, that the letters were burning. She took my hand and kissed it. Oh, what a stab that gentle caress inflicted upon me! I knelt down by her bedside, and hid my head in the sheets, so that her eyes should not meet mine. Alas! it was not for long that I had to dread her glance. At ten she fell asleep, but at noon her restlessness recurred. At two the priest came, and administered the last sacraments to her. She had a second stroke towards evening, never recovered consciousness, and died in the night.

Will you pardon me that falsehood which I told you in your last hours, O my beloved dead? Your desire that I should never read those fatal letters, which have begun to shed so terrible a light upon the past, arose from your solicitude to spare me the suspicions that had tortured yourself. On your death-bed your sole thought was for my happiness. Will you forgive me for having frustrated that foresight of the dying? I must speak to you,

although I know not whether you can see me this day, or hear me, or even feel the emotion which goes out to you, beloved one, from my inmost soul. But, I am ashamed of having lied to you, when you thought only of being good to me, so good, so good that no human creature was ever better to another; and I am forced to tell you this. You, at least, I have never doubted; there is only one touch of bitterness in my thoughts of you; it is that I did not cherish you sufficiently while you were here with me, that I betrayed you in the matter of the last earthly desire of your pure soul.

I see you now, and those eyes which revealed your stainless but sorely wounded heart. You come to me, and you pardon me; your hand strokes my cheek with that sad, sad caress which you gave me before you went away into the darkness, where hands may no more be clasped or tears mingled. If death had not come to you too quickly, if I had obeyed your last desire, you would have carried the secret of your most painful doubts to the grave. You do not blame me now for having wanted to know? You no longer blame me for having suffered? A destiny exists, and weighs upon us, which requires that light shall be cast upon the darkness of that crime, that justice shall resume its rights, and the avenger come. By what road? That power knows, and uses strange weapons for its task of reparation. It was decreed, dear and pious sister of my murdered father, that your faithful cherishing of his dear memory should

at last arouse my slumbering will. Reproach me not, O tender, unquiet spirit, with the torments which I have inflicted upon myself, with the tragic purpose to which I have sacrificed my youth. Rest, I say, rest! May peace descend upon the grave in which you sleep beside my father, in the cemetery at Compiègne, where I too shall find repose one day. And to think that to-morrow might be that day!

CHAPTER IX

My aunt died at nine o'clock in the evening. I closed her eyes, and sat by her side until eleven, when Julie came to me and persuaded me to go downstairs and eat something. I had taken nothing but a cup of black coffee at noon. What a mournful meal was that in the dining-room, with its walls adorned with old china plates, where I had so often sat opposite to my dear aunt! A lamp stood on the table and threw a light upon the table-cloth just in front of me, but did not dispel the shadows in the room, which was warmed by a big earthenware stove, all cracked by the heat. I listened to the noise of this stove, and it brought back the evenings in my childhood, when I used to roast chestnuts in the ashes of just such a fire, after I had split them lest they should burst. I looked at Julie, who insisted on waiting upon me herself, and found her drying the big tears that rolled down her wrinkled cheeks with the corner of her blue apron. I have passed

hours that were more cruel, but have never known any more poignant; and I may do myself the justice to record that grief absorbed every other feeling in me at first. During the whole of that dismal night I never for an instant thought of opening the packet of letters which I had obtained by so shameful a falsehood. I had forgotten its existence, although I had taken care to pick it up and take it to my own room. Where was now my curiosity to learn the secrets of those letters? I knew that I had just lost for ever the only being who had loved me entirely, and that knowledge crushed me. I wished to keep the watch by the side of the dead for part of the night, and I could not turn my gaze from that motionless face which had looked upon me for so many years with absolute and unbounded tenderness, but now lay before me with rigid features, closed lips, shut eyelids, and wearing an expression of profound sorrow such as I have never seen upon any other dead face. All the melancholy thoughts which had distilled their slow poison into her heart while she lived, were revealed by that countenance now restored to its truth. Ah ! that expression of infinite sadness ought to have driven me on the instant to seek for its mysterious cause in the letters which had occupied her mind to the very brink of the grave, but how could I have had strength to reason while gazing on that mournful face? I could only feel that the lips which had never spoken any words but those of tenderness to me would utter them no more, that the hands

which had caressed me so tenderly would clasp mine no more for ever. The nun who was watching the dead repeated the appointed prayers, and I found myself uttering the old forms in which I no longer believed. As I recited the Paternoster and the Ave, I thought of all the prayers which she, who lay at rest before me, had put up to God for my peace and welfare.

At three o'clock in the morning Julie came in to take my place, and I retired to my room, which was on the same floor as my aunt's. A box-room divided the two. I threw myself on my bed, worn out with fatigue, and nature triumphed over my grief. I fell into that heavy sleep which follows the expenditure of nerve power, and from which one awakes able to bear life again and to carry the load that seemed unendurable. When I awoke it was day, and the wintry sky was dull and dark like that of yesterday, but it also wore a threatening aspect, from the great masses of black cloud that covered it. I went to the window and looked out for a long time at the gloomy landscape closed in by the edge of the forest. I note these small details in order that I may more faithfully recall my exact impression at the time. In turning away from the window and going towards the fire which the maid had just lighted, my eye fell upon the packet of letters stolen from my aunt. Yes, stolen—'tis the word. It was in the place where I had put it last night, on the mantelshelf, with my purse, rings, and cigar case. I took up the little parcel with a beating

heart. I had only to stretch out my hand and those papers would fall into the flames and my aunt's dying wish be accomplished. I sank into an easy-chair and watched the yellow flame gaining on the logs, while I weighed the packet in my hand. I thought there must be a good many letters in it. I suffered from the physical uneasiness of indecision. I am not trying to justify this second failure of my loyalty to my dear aunt, I am trying to understand it.

Those letters were not mine, I never ought to have appropriated them. I ought now to destroy them unopened; all the more that the excitement of the first moment, the sudden rush of ideas which had prevented me from obeying the agonised supplication of my poor aunt, had subsided. I asked myself once more what was the cause of her misery, while I gazed at the inscription upon the cover, in my aunt's hand: 'Justin's Letters, 1864.' The very room which I occupied was an evil counsellor to me in this strife between an indisputable duty and my ardent desire to know; for it had formerly been my father's room and the furniture had not been changed since his time. The colour of the hangings was faded, that was all. He had warmed himself by a fire which burned upon that self-same hearth, and he had used the same low, wide chair in which I now sat, thinking my sombre thoughts. He had slept in the bed from which I had just risen, he had written at the table on which I rested my arms. No, that room deprived me of free will to act, it made my

father too living. It was as though the phantom of the murdered man had come out of his grave to entreat me to keep the oft-sworn vow of vengeance. Had these letters offered me no more than one single chance, one against a thousand, of obtaining one single indication of the secrets of my father's private life, I could not have hesitated. With such sacrilegious reasoning as this did I dispel the last scruples of pious respect; but I had no need of arguments for yielding to the desire which increased with every moment.

I had there before me those letters, the last his hand had traced; those letters which would lay bare to me the recesses of his life, and I was not to read them! What an absurdity! Enough of such childish hesitation. I tore off the cover which hid the papers; the yellow sheets with their faded characters shook in my hands. I recognised the compact, square, clear writing, with spaces between the words. The dates had been omitted by my father in several instances, and then my aunt had repaired the omission by writing in the day of the month herself. My poor aunt! this pious carefulness was a fresh testimony to her constant tenderness; and yet, in my wild excitement I no longer thought of her who lay dead within a few yards of me.

Presently Julie came to consult me upon all the material details which accompany death; but I told her I was too much overwhelmed, that she must do as she thought fit, and leave me quite alone for the whole of the morning.

Then I plunged so deeply into the reading of the letters that I forgot the hour, the events taking place around me, forgot to dress myself, to eat, even to go and look upon her whom I had lost while yet I could behold her face. Traitor and ingrate that I was! I had devoured only a few lines before I understood only too well why she had been desirous to prevent me from drinking the poison which entered with each sentence into my heart, as it had entered into hers. Terrible, terrible letters! Now it was as though the phantom had spoken, and a hidden drama of which I had never dreamed unfolded itself before me.

I was quite a child when the thousand little scenes which this correspondence recorded in detail took place. I was too young then to solve the enigma of the situation; and, since, the only person who could have initiated me into that dark history was she who had concealed the existence of the too-eloquent papers from me all her life long, and on her death-bed had been more anxious for their destruction than for her eternal salvation —she, who had no doubt accused herself of having deferred the burning of them from day to day as of a crime. When at last she had brought herself to do this, it was too late.

The first letter, written in January, 1864, began with thanks to my aunt for her New Year's gift to me—a fortress with tin soldiers —with which I was delighted, said the letter, because the cavalry were in two pieces, the man detaching himself from his horse. Then, suddenly, the commonplace sentences changed

into utterances of mournful tenderness. An anxious mind, a heart longing for affection, and discontent with the existing state of things, might be discerned in the tone of regret with which the brother dwelt upon his childhood, and the days when his own and his sister's life were passed together. There was a repressed repining in that first letter that immediately astonished and impressed me, for I had always believed my father and mother to have been perfectly happy with each other. Alas ! that repining did but grow and also take definite form as I read on. My father wrote to his sister every Sunday, even when he had seen her in the course of the week. As it frequently happens in cases of regular and constant correspondence, the smallest events were recorded in minute detail, so that all our former daily life was resuscitated in my thoughts as I perused the lines, but accompanied by a commentary of melancholy which revealed irreparable division between those whom I had believed to be so closely united. Again I saw my father in his dressing-gown, as he greeted me in the morning at seven o'clock, on coming out of his room to breakfast with me before I started for school at eight. He would go over my lessons with me briefly, and then we would seat ourselves at the table (without a table-cloth) in the dining-room, and Julie would bring us two cups of chocolate, deliciously sweetened to my childish taste. My mother rose much later, and, after my school days my father occupied a separate room in order to avoid

waking her so early. How I enjoyed that morning meal, during which I prattled at my ease, talking of my lessons, my exercises, and my school-mates! What a delightful recollection I retained of those happy, careless, cordial hours! In his letters my father also spoke of our early breakfasts, but in a way that showed how often he was wounded by finding out from my talk that my mother took too little care of me, according to his notions—that I filled too small a place in her dreamy, wilfully frivolous life. There were passages which the then future had since turned into prophecies. 'Were I to be taken from him what would become of him?' was one of these. At ten I came back from school; by that time my father would be occupied with his business. I had lessons to prepare, and I did not see him again until half-past eleven, at the second breakfast. Then mamma would appear in one of those tasteful morning costumes which suited her slender and supple figure so well. From afar, and beyond the cold years of my boyhood, that family table came before me like a mirage of warm home-life; how often had it became a sort of nostalgia to me when I sat between my mother and M. Termonde on my horrid half-holidays.

And now I found proof in my father's letters that a divorce of the heart already existed between the two persons who, to my filial tenderness, were but one. My father loved his wife passionately, and he felt that his wife did not love him. This was the feeling

continually expressed in his letters—not in words so plain and positive, indeed; but how should I, whose boyhood had been strangely analogous with this drama of a man's life, have failed to perceive the secret signification of all he wrote? My father was taciturn, like me—even more so than I—and he allowed irreparable misunderstandings to grow up between my mother and himself. Like me afterwards, he was passionate, awkward, hopelessly timid in the presence of that proud, aristocratic woman, so different from him, the self-made man of almost peasant origin, who had risen to professional prosperity by the force of his genius. Like me—ah! not more than I—he had known the torture of false positions, which cannot be explained except by words that one will never have courage to utter. And, oh, the pity of it, that destiny should thus repeat itself; the same tendencies of the mind developing themselves in the son after they had developed themselves in the father, so that the misery of both should be identical!

My father's letters breathed sighs that my mother had never suspected—vain sighs for a complete blending of their two hearts; tender sighs for the fond dream of fully-shared happiness; despairing sighs for the ending of a moral separation, all the more complete because its origin was not to be sought in their respective faults (mutual love pardons everything), but in a complete, almost animal, contrast between the two natures. Not one of his qualities was pleasing to her;

all his defects were displeasing to her. And he adored her. I had seen enough of many kinds of ill-assorted unions since I had been going about in society, to understand in full what a silent hell that one must have been, and the two figures rose up before me in perfect distinctness. I saw my mother with her gestures—a little affectation was, so to speak, natural to her—the delicacy of her hands, her fair, pale complexion, the graceful turn of her head, her studiously low-pitched voice, the something unmaterial that pervaded her whole person, her eyes, whose glance could be so cold, so disdainful; and, on the other hand, I saw my father with his robust, working-man's frame, his hearty laugh when he allowed himself to be merry, the professional, utilitarian, in fact, plebeian, aspect of him, in his ideas and ways, his gestures and his discourse. But the plebeian was so noble, so lofty in his generosity, in his deep feeling. He did not know how to show that feeling; therein lay his crime. On what wretched trifles, when we think of it, does absolute felicity or irremediable misfortune depend!

The name of M. Termonde occurred several times in the earlier letters, and, when I came to the eleventh, I found it mentioned in a way which brought tears to my eyes, set my hands shaking, and made my heart leap as at the sound of a cry of sharp agony. In the pages which he had written during the night—the writing showed how deeply he was moved—the husband, hitherto so self-restrained, acknowledged to his sister, his kind and

faithful confidante, that he was jealous. He was jealous, and of whom? Of that very man who was destined to fill his place at our fireside, to give a new name to her who had been Madame Cornélis; of the man with cat-like ways, with pale eyes, whom my childish instinct had taught me to regard with so precocious and so fixed a hate. He was jealous of Jacques Termonde. In his sudden confession he related the growth of this jealousy with the bitterness of tone that relieves the heart of misery too long suppressed. In that letter, the first of a series which death only was destined to interrupt, he told how far back was the date of his jealousy, and how it awoke to life with his detection of one look cast at my mother by Termonde. He told her he had at once suspected a dawning passion on the part of this man, then that Termonde had gone away on a long journey, and that he, my father, had attributed his absence to the loyalty of a sincere friend, to a noble effort to fight from the first against a criminal feeling. Termonde came back; his visits to us were soon resumed, and they became more frequent than before. There was every reason for this; my father had been his chum at the Ecole de Droit, and would have chosen him to be his best man at his marriage had not Termonde's diplomatic functions kept him out of France at the time. In this letter and the following ones my father acknowledged that he had been strongly attached to Termonde, so much so, indeed, that he had considered his own jealousy as

an unworthy feeling and a sort of treachery. But it is all very well to reproach oneself for a passion, it is there in our hearts all the same, tearing and devouring them. After Termonde's return, my father's jealousy increased, with the certainty that the man's love for the wife of his friend was also growing; and yet, the unhappy husband did not think himself entitled to forbid him the house. Was not his wife the most pure and upright of women? Her very inclination to mysticism and exaggerated devotion, although he sometimes found fault with her for it, was a pledge that she would never yield to anything by which her conscience could be stained. Besides, Termonde's assiduity was accompanied by such evident, such absolute respect, that it afforded no ground for reproach. What was he to do? Have an explanation with his wife—he who could not bring himself to enter upon the slightest discussion with her? Require her to decline to receive his own friend? But, if she yielded, he would have deprived her of a real pleasure, and for that he should be unable to forgive himself. If she did not yield? So, my poor father had preferred to toss about in that Gehenna of weakness and indecision wherein dwell timid and taciturn souls. All this misery he revealed to my aunt, dwelling upon the morbid nature of his feelings, imploring advice and pity, deriding and blaming the puerility of his jealousy, but jealous all the same, unable to refrain from recurring again and again to the open wound in his heart, and

incapable of the energy and decision that would have cured it.

The letters became more and more gloomy, as it always happens when one has not at once put an end to a false position; my father suffered from the consequences of his weakness, and allowed them to develop without taking action, because he could not now have checked them without painful scenes. After having tolerated the increased frequency of his friend's visits, it was torture to him to observe that his wife was sensibly influenced by this encroaching intimacy. He perceived that she took Termonde's advice on all the little matters of daily life—upon a question of dress, the purchase of a present, the choice of a book. He came upon the traces of the man in the change of my mother's tastes, in music for instance. When we were alone in the evenings, he liked her to go to the piano and play to him, for hours together, at haphazard; now she would play nothing but pieces selected by Termonde, who had acquired an extensive knowledge of the German masters during his residence abroad. My father, on the contrary, having been brought up in the country with his sister, who was herself taught by a provincial music-master, retained his old-fashioned taste for Italian music.

My mother belonged, by her own family, to a totally different sphere of society from that into which her marriage with my father had introduced her. At first she did not feel any regret for her former circle, because her

extreme beauty secured her a triumphant success in the new one; but it was quite another thing when her intimacy with Termonde, who moved in the most worldly and elegant of Parisian 'worlds,' was perpetually reminding her of all its pleasures and habits. My father saw that she was bored and weary while doing the honours of her own salon with an absent mind. He even found the political opinions of his friend echoed by his wife, who laughed at him for what she called his Utopian liberalism. Her mockery had no malice in it; but still it was mockery, and behind it was Termonde, always Termonde. Nevertheless, he said nothing, and the shyness, which he had always felt in my mother's presence, increased with his jealousy. The more unhappy he was, the more incapable of expressing his pain he became. There are minds so constituted that suffering paralyses them into inaction. And then there was the ever present question, what was he to do? How was he to approach an explanation, when he had no positive accusation to bring? He remained perfectly convinced of the fidelity of his wife, and he again and again affirmed this, entreating my aunt not to withdraw a particle of her esteem from his dear Marie, and imploring her never to make an allusion to the sufferings of which he was ashamed, before their innocent cause. And then he dwelt upon his own faults; he accused himself of lack of tenderness, of failing to win love, and would draw pictures of his sorrowful home, in a few words, with heart-rending humility.

Rough, commonplace minds know nothing of the scruples that rent and tortured my father's soul. They say, 'I am jealous,' without troubling themselves as to whether the words convey an insult or not. They forbid the house to the person to whom they object, and shut their wives' mouths with, 'Am I master here?' taking heed of their own feelings merely. Are they in the right? I know not; I only know that such rough methods were impossible to my poor father. He had sufficient strength to assume an icy mien towards Termonde, to address him as seldom as possible, to give him his hand with the insulting politeness that makes a gulf between two sincere friends; but Termonde affected unconsciousness of all this. My father, who did not want to have a scene with him, because the immediate consequence would have been another scene with my mother, multiplied these small affronts, and then Termonde simply changed the time of his visits, and came during my father's business hours. How vividly my father depicted his stormy rage at the idea that his wife and the man of whom he was jealous were talking together undisturbed, in the flower-decked salon, while he was toiling to procure all the luxury that money could purchase for that wife who could never, never love him, although he believed her faithful. But, oh, that cold fidelity was not what he longed for—he who ended his letter by these words—how often have I repeated them to myself :—

'It is so sad to feel that one is in the way in

one's own house, that one possesses a woman by every right, that she gives one all that her duty obliges her to give, all, except her heart, which is another's, unknown to herself, perhaps, unless, indeed, that—— My sister, there are terrible hours in which I say to myself that I am a fool, a coward, that he is her lover, she is his mistress, that they laugh together at me, at my blindness, my stupid trust. Do not scold me, dear Louise. This idea is infamous, and I drive it away by taking refuge with you, to whom, at least, I am all the world.'

'Unless, indeed, that——' This letter was written on the first Sunday in June, 1864; and on the following Thursday, four days later, he who had written it, and had suffered all it revealed, went out to the appointment at which he met with his mysterious death, that death by which his wife was set free to marry his felon friend. What was the idea, as dreadful, as infamous as the idea of which my father accused himself in his terrible last letter, that flashed across me now? I placed the packet of papers upon the mantelpiece, and pressed my two hands to my head, as though to still the tempest of cruel fancies which made it throb with fever. Ah, the hideous, nameless thing! My mind got a glimpse of it only to reject it. But, had not my aunt also been assailed by the same monstrous suspicion? A number of small facts rose up in my memory, and convinced me that my father's faithful sister had been a prey to the same idea which had just laid hold of me so strongly. How many strange things I now understood,

all in a moment! On that day when she told me of my mother's second marriage, and I spontaneously uttered the accursed name of Termonde, why had she asked me, in a trembling voice: 'What do you know?' What was it she feared that I had guessed? What dreaded information did she expect to receive from my childish observation of things? Afterwards, and when she implored me to abandon the task of avenging our beloved dead, when she quoted to me the sacred words, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,' who were the guilty ones whom she foresaw I must meet on my path? When she entreated me to bear with my stepfather, even to conciliate him, not to make an enemy of him, had her advice any object except the greater ease of my daily life, or did she think danger might come to me from that quarter? When she became more afraid for me, owing to the weakening of her brain by illness, and again and again enjoined upon me to beware of going out alone in the evening, was the vision of terror that came to her that of a hand which would fain strike me in the dark—the same hand that had struck my father? When she summoned up all her strength in her last moments, that she might destroy this correspondence, what was the clue which she supposed the letters would furnish? A terrific light shone upon me; what my aunt had perceived beyond the plain purport of the letters, I too perceived. Ah! I dared to entertain this idea, yet now I am ashamed to write it down. But could I have escaped from the

hard logic of the situation? If my aunt had handed over those letters to the Judge of Instruction in the matter, would he not have arrived at the same conclusion that I drew from them? No, I could not. A man who has no known enemies is assassinated; it is alleged that robbery is not the motive of the murder; his wife has a lover, and shortly after the death of her husband she marries that lover. 'But it is they—it is they who are guilty, they have killed the husband,' the judge would say, and so would the first-comer. Why did not my aunt place those letters of my father's in the hands of justice? I understood the reason too well; she would not have had me think of my mother what I was now in a fit of distraction thinking—that she had deceived my father, that she had been Termonde's mistress, that therein lay the secret of the murder. To conceive of this as merely possible was to be guilty of moral parricide, to commit the inexpiable sin against her who had borne me. I had always loved my mother so tenderly, so mournfully; never, never had I judged her. How many times—happening to be alone with her, and not knowing how to tell her what was weighing on my heart—how many times I had dreamed that the barrier between us would not for ever divide us. Some day I might, perhaps, become her only support, then she should see how precious she still was to me. My sufferings had not lessened my love for her; wretched as I was because she refused me a certain sort of affection, I did not condemn

her for lavishing that affection upon another. As a matter of fact, until those fatal letters had done their work of disenchantment, of what was she guilty in my eyes? Of having married again? Of having chosen, being left a widow at thirty, to construct a new life for herself? What could be more legitimate? Of having failed to understand the relations of the child who remained to her with the man whom she had chosen? What was more natural? She was more wife than mother, and besides, fanciful and fragile beings such as she was recoil from daily contests; they shrink from facing realities which would demand sustained courage and energy on their part. I had admitted all these explanations of my mother's attitude towards me, at first from instinct and afterwards on reflection. But now, the inexhaustible spring of indulgence for those who really hold our heartstrings was dried up in a moment, and a flood of odious, abominable suspicion overwhelmed me instead.

This sudden invasion of a horrible, torturing idea was not lasting. I could not have borne it. Had it implanted itself in me then and there, definite, overwhelming in evidence, impossible of rejection, I must have taken a pistol and shot myself, to escape from agony such as I endured in the few minutes which followed my reading of the letters. But the tension was relaxed, I reflected, and my love for my mother began to strive against the horrible suggestion. To the onslaught of these execrable fancies I opposed the facts,

in their certainty and completeness. I recalled the smallest particulars of that last occasion on which I saw my father and mother in each other's presence. It was at the table from which he rose to go forth and meet his murderer. But was not my mother cheerful and smiling that morning, as usual? Was not Jacques Termonde with us at breakfast, and did he not stay on, after my father had gone out, talking with my mother while I played with my toys in the room? It was at that very time, between one and two o'clock, that the mysterious Rochdale committed the crime. Termonde could not be at one and the same moment, in our salon and at the Imperial Hotel, any more than my mother, impressionable and emotional as I knew her to be, could have gone on talking quietly and happily, if she had known that her husband was being murdered at that very hour. Why, I must have been mad to allow such a notion to present its monstrous image before my eyes for a single moment, and it was infamous of me to have gone so far beyond the most insulting of my father's suspicions. Already, and without any proof except the expression of jealousy acknowledged by himself to be unreasonable, I had reached a point to which the unhappy but still loving man had not dared to go, even to the extreme outrage against my mother, of believing that she had been Termonde's mistress. What if, during the lifetime of her first husband, she had inspired him whom she was one day to marry with too strong a sentiment, did

this prove that she had shared it? If she had shared it, would that have proved her to be a fallen woman? Why should she not have entertained an affection for Termonde, which, while it in no wise interfered with her fidelity to her wifely duties, made my father not-unnaturally jealous?

Thus did I justify her, not only from any participation in the crime, but from any failure in her duty. And then again my ideas changed; I remembered the cry that she had uttered in presence of my father's dead body: 'I am punished by God!' I was not sufficiently charitable to her to admit that those words might be merely the utterance of a refined and scrupulous mind which reproached itself even with its thoughts. I also recalled the gleaming eyes and shaking hands of Termonde, when he was talking with my mother about my father's mysterious disappearance. If they were accomplices, this was a piece of acting performed before me, an innocent witness, so that they might invoke my childish testimony on occasion. These recollections once more drove me upon my fated way. The idea of a guilty tie between her and him now took possession of me, and then came swiftly the thought that they had profited by the murder, that they alone had an engrossing interest in it. So violent was the assault of suspicion that it overthrew all the barriers I had raised against it. I accumulated all the objections founded upon a physical alibi and a moral improbability, and thence I forced myself to say it was, strictly speaking, impossible

they could have anything to do with the murder; impossible, impossible! I repeated this frantically; but even as it passed my lips, the hallucination returned, and struck me down. There are moments when the disordered mind is unable to quell visions which it knows to be false, when the imaginary and the real mingle in a nightmare-panic, and the judgment is powerless to distinguish between them. Who is there that, having been jealous, does not know this condition of mind? What did I not suffer from it during the day after I had read those letters! I wandered about the house, incapable of attending to any duty, struck stupid by emotions which all around me attributed to grief for my aunt's death. Several times I tried to sit for a while beside her bed; but the sight of her pale face, with its pinched nostrils, and its deepening expression of sadness, was unbearable to me. It renewed my miserable doubts. At four o'clock I received a telegram. It was from my mother, and announced her arrival by evening train. When the slip of blue paper was in my hand my wretchedness was for a moment relieved. She was coming. She had thought of my trouble; she was coming. That assurance dispelled my suspicions. What if she were to read my criminal thoughts in my face? But those absurd and infamous notions took possession of me once more. Perhaps she thinks, so ran my thoughts, that the correspondence between my father and my aunt had not been destroyed, and she is coming in order to get hold of those letters before I

see them, and to find out what my aunt said to me when she was dying. If she and Termonde are guilty, they must have lived in constant dread of the old maid's penetration. Ah ! I had been very unhappy in my childhood, but how gladly would I have gone back to be the schoolboy, meditating during the dull and interminable evening hours of study, and not the young man who walked to and fro that night in the station at Compiègne, awaiting the arrival of a mother, suspected as mine was. Just God ! Did not I expiate everything in anticipation by that one hour?

CHAPTER X

THE train from Paris approached, and stopped. The railway officials called out the name of the station, as they opened the doors of the carriages one after another, very slowly as it seemed to me. I went from carriage to carriage seeking my mother. Had she at the last moment decided not to come ! What a trial to me if it were so ! What a night I should have to pass in all the torment of suspicions which, I knew too well, her mere presence would dispel. A voice called me. It was hers. Then I saw her, dressed in black, and never in my life did I clasp her in my arms as I did then, utterly forgetting that we were in a public place, and why she had come, in the joy of feeling my horrible imaginations vanish, melt away at the mere touch of the being whom I loved so profoundly, the

only one who was dear to me, notwithstanding our differences, in the very depths of my heart, now that I had lost my aunt Louise. After that first movement, which resembled the grasp in which a drowning man seizes the swimmer who dives for him, I looked at my mother without speaking, holding both her hands. She had thrown back her veil, and in the flickering light of the station I saw that she was very pale and had been weeping. I had only to meet her eyes, which were still wet with tears, to know that I had been mad. I felt this, with the first words she uttered, telling me so tenderly of her grief, and that she had resolved to come at once, although my stepfather was ill. M. Termonde had suffered of late from frequent attacks of liver-complaint. But neither her grief nor her anxiety about her husband had prevented my poor mother from providing herself, for this little excursion of a few hours, with all her customary appliances of comfort and elegance. Her maid stood behind her, accompanied by a porter, and both were laden with three or four bags of different sizes, of the best English make, carefully buttoned up in their waterproof covers; a dressing-case, a writing-case, an elegant wallet to hold the traveller's purse, handkerchief, book, and second veil; a hot-water bottle for her feet, two cushions for her head, and a little clock suspended from a swinging disc.

'You see,' said she, while I was pointing out the carriage to the maid, so that she might get rid of her impedimenta, 'I shall not have

my right mourning until to-morrow'—and now I perceived that her gown was dark brown and only braided with black—'they could not have the things ready in time, but will send them as early as possible.' Then, as I placed her in the carriage, she added: 'There is still a trunk and a bonnet-box.' She half smiled in saying this, to make me smile too, for the mass of luggage and the number of small parcels with which she encumbered herself had been of old a subject of mild quarrel between us. In any other state of mind I should have been pained to find the unfailing evidence of her frivolity side by side with the mark of affection she had given me by coming. Was not this one of the small causes of my great misery? True, but her frivolity was delightful to me at that moment. This then was the woman whom I had been picturing to myself as coming to the house of death, with the sinister purpose of searching my dead aunt's papers and stealing or destroying any accusing pages which she might find among them! This was the woman whom I had represented to myself, that morning, as a criminal steeped in the guilt of a cowardly murder! Yes! I had been mad! I had been like a runaway horse galloping after its own shadow. But what a relief to make sure that it was madness, what a blessed relief! It almost made me forget the dear dead woman. I was very sad at heart in reality, and yet I was happy, while we were rattling through the town in the old coupé, past the long lines of lighted

windows. I held my mother's hand; I longed to beg her pardon, to kiss the hem of her dress, to tell her again and again that I loved and revered her. She perceived my emotion very plainly; but she attributed it to the affliction that had just befallen me, and she condoled with me. She said, 'My André,' several times. How rare it was for me to have her thus, all my own, and just in that mood of feeling for which my sick heart pined!

I had had the room on the ground floor, next to the salon, prepared for my mother. I remember that she had occupied it, when she came to Compiègne with my father, a few days after her marriage, and I felt sure that the impression which would be produced upon her by the sight of the house in the first instance, and then by the sight of this room, would help me to get rid of my dreadful suspicions. I was determined to note minutely the slightest signs of agitation which she might betray at the contact of a resuscitated past, rendered more striking by the aspect of things that do not change so quickly as the heart of a woman. And now, I blushed for that idea, worthy of a detective; for I felt it a shameful thing to judge one's mother: one ought to make an Act of Faith in her which would resist any evidence. I felt this, alas! all the more, because the innocent woman was quite off her guard, as was perfectly natural. She entered the room with a thoughtful look, seated herself before the fire, and held her slender feet towards the flames, which touched her pale cheeks with

red; and, with her jet black hair, her elegant figure, which still retained its youthful grace, she shed upon the dim twilight of the old-fashioned room that refined and aristocratic charm of which my father spoke in his letters. She looked slowly all around her, recognising most of the things which my aunt's pious care had preserved in their former place, and said, sorrowfully: 'What recollections!' But there was no bitterness in the emotion depicted on her face. Ah! no; a woman who is brought after twenty years, into the room which she had occupied, as a bride, with the husband whose murder she has contrived after having betrayed him, has not such eyes, such a brow, such a mouth as hers.

Every detail of all that passed that evening served to prove to me how basely my puerile and disgraceful fancies had calumniated her who ought to have been sacred in my sight. Julie had prepared a sort of supper, and wished to attend at table herself. I observed the former mistress and the old servant brought thus face to face, and, although I knew that they had not got on well together in past days, I saw that they were well pleased to meet again. Poor Julie especially, who was a simple creature, incapable of deceit or dissimulation, was so glad that she took me aside a few minutes before the frugal meal, to tell me what a consolation it was to her in her grief to see my mother so kind and affectionate to me, and to wait on us both at the same table, as in the bygone time. Had there been in my mother's past life one of

those guilty secrets which faithful servants are more quick than any others to divine, the honest and true-hearted woman who had tended both my father and myself would neither have been ignorant of it nor capable of condoning it. I should have detected the trace of it in her wrinkled face with the drawn-in lips, for its every wrinkle spoke eloquently to me. Nor would my mother have been pleased and easy in the presence of this witness of a sin of the past; her manner would have betrayed a secret disturbance, were it only by the haughtiness with which, as it were, one repels the silent censure of an inferior by anticipation.

Julie's face made one among the many things which recalled her first marriage to my mother's mind; and, either because the almost sudden death of my aunt had deeply moved her, or because this sentimental recurrence to the past was an indulgence of her taste for the romantic, far from avoiding such recollections, she yielded to them fully, while I silently blessed her for thus destroying the last vestiges of my mute calumny. How fervent was my mental thanksgiving, when, later in the night, she asked to see my dear dead aunt, so that she might take a last farewell of her! We entered the room where the dying woman had striven with the last earthly solicitude from which I had drawn such black conclusions. Death had strengthened the resemblance that existed in her lifetime between my aunt and my father. The motionless and livid face forcibly recalled

that other face still living in my sad memory, and in whose presence my mother had clasped me in so warm an embrace; and the resemblance was made more striking by the chin-cloth which kept the mouth closed. Once more we stood side by side before a funereal spectacle; but I was no longer a child, and my mother was no longer a young woman.

How many years lay between those two deaths—and what years! The comparison struck my mother too; she did not speak for a while—then she whispered: 'How like him she is!' She bent over the bed, pressed a kiss upon the ice-cold brow, and kneeling at the foot of the bed, she prayed. This trying ordeal, of which I had hardly ventured to dream, she herself had sought in so natural, so simple a way. . . . Since then I have had many other tokens of the absolute blamelessness of my mother, I have heard words uttered by him who had contrived and arranged the whole crime, which fully exonerated the noble woman; but there was no need of them. The sight of her kneeling beside the dead sister of my dear father had sufficed to exorcise the phantom.

After her prayer, she expressed a wish to remain in the room; but I objected, fearing that the trial would be too severe for her strength, and induced her to go downstairs with me. She was too much affected to sleep, and she begged of me to stay with her for a while. I complied with joy, so afraid was I that when out of her sight I might be revisited by the hallucinations that had been

so completely banished by her demeanour. I felt myself once more so entirely her child for this one night, that I was in delight with her least actions, her slightest gestures, just as I used to be in my real childhood. I admired the skill with which she instantly transformed the chimney corner of the salon into a quiet little retreat, just the place for a comfortable long talk. She made me arrange the screen so as to shut in the sofa, and place a little table within its shelter; on this she set out her travelling-cloak, her smelling-bottle, and my box of cigarettes. She put on a white dressing-gown, wrapped round her head and shoulders a black-lace mantilla, and when she was settled snugly on the sofa she tucked round her a soft covering of pink wool decked with ribbons. She leaned her cheek on one of the two little red silk cushions that she used in the railway carriage, and daintily smelled some wood violets which Julie had placed in a little vase. The fresh scent of the flowers mingled with the perfume of her garments and her hair, and I liked to see her thus, to revive my earliest impressions of her by the aid of her refined luxuriousness. Above all I liked her to talk as she now talked, opening her mind to me, and letting so many recollections escape from it. She had begun by questioning me about my aunt's illness, and then she went on to speak of my father. This was very rare with her; it was also rare for her and me to be so familiar and so united. It was a strange sensation to hear her tell the story of her

marriage in that salon, filled with the relics of the dead, and with the ever present remembrance of the letters which I had read that day in my mind.

She told me—but this I already knew—how her marriage was brought about. She met my father at a ball given by a great lawyer, who was intimate with her family; their name was De Slane. She described her own dress at this ball, and then sketched my father for me, in his black coat, with an ill-tied white cravat and ill-fitting gloves. 'A young girl is always so foolish,' she said. 'He had himself introduced to us, and he proposed for me twice over. I refused him each time, just because I had those ill-fitting gloves in my mind. The third time he asked to see me in private. Mamma wished very much for the marriage, notwithstanding certain differences in station and education. Your father was such a good man, so clever and hard-working, and then he adored my mother with frank simplicity, just as if she were an idol. Well, she consented to the interview. I received your father with the firm intention of saying "No" to him, and he spoke to me so nicely, with so much eloquence and such perfect tact, I saw so plainly how much he loved me, that I said "Yes." . . .'

What a commentary upon the whole of my father's correspondence was this entry into marriage, what a symbol of the years that were to follow! Yes, even until their last breakfast together before the murder, they

had lived thus; she allowing herself to be loved, with the indulgent pride of a woman who knows herself to be the superior in refinement and distinction, and he—the hard-working man of business, only a little above 'the people'—loving that refined and charming woman with an idolatrous sense of her superiority, and a single-hearted unconsciousness of his own. The fatal poison of the heart is silence; I had already learned this too well on my own behalf, and I felt it on that of my father, whose sombre and reserved nature I had inherited. And my mother went on—how heartrending it was to hear her—dwelling on my father's good qualities, on his uprightness, his perseverance, and also certain points in his character which had always puzzled her. 'Since he died so sadly,' she resumed, 'I have often asked myself whether I made him as happy as he might have been. I was very young then, and we had no tastes in common. I have always liked society—that was born with me—and he did not care about it, he did not feel at ease in it. I was very pious, and he was of the school of Voltaire. He believed other men to be as good as himself, and thought we could do without religion. . . . We have seen since his time what that brings us to. He was not jealous, he never once made a remark to me upon the few men friends I had, but there was a restless tendency in him. When he was obliged to leave Paris for a short time, if I chanced to send my daily letter to the post too late, there would surely come a telegram

urgently requesting news of my health. If, in the evening, I came home a little later than usual, I would find him in great anxiety, full of the notion that an accident had happened. And then, he was subject to causeless fits of depression, prolonged spells of silence. I did not venture to question him. You take after him in this, my poor André.'

She went on to speak of his mysterious death :—

'I wept so much for it,' she said, 'and I have since thought so much of it. Your father had not an enemy; his life was too upright for that. My conviction is that the assassin reckoned on his taking a large sum of money with him; bear in mind that we do not know what your father had in his note-case. Ah, my André, you little know what I went through. That was the time when I learned who were my true friends.' She went on to speak of M. Termonde, and to dwell on the proofs of friendship he had given her. I was not angry with her, because she did not understand that she could not pronounce his name at that moment without inflicting a wound upon me. Once set going upon the road of reminiscence, what should check her steps? Why should she scruple to speak to me of her second marriage and the consolation it had brought her? Of course it was terribly sad for me to listen to these confidences, which formed the cruel counter-part of those contained in my father's letters to my aunt. But, sorrowful as it was to

sound the depths of the gulf which had separated those two beloved beings, what was this in comparison with the tragic idea that had assailed me? Throughout the long winter's evening I listened to my mother as she talked to me, with the sweet, blessed certainty that never again could my monstrous suspicions recur to my mind. My father's letters were fully explained; he had been profoundly jealous of his wife, and he had never dared to avow that jealousy. It arose from a moral influence of which the person over whom it was exercised was probably ignorant. No, the gentle creature who related all this past history to me with such frank clear eyes, so sweet a voice, such ingenuousness in the acknowledgment of her mistakes, such evident, all pervading sincerity, must either have been entirely innocent of the suffering she inflicted, or else she must now be a monster of hypocrisy. At all events, I never thought *that* of you, O my mother! weak but good woman as you were, capable indeed of passing by pain unnoticed, but quite incapable of wilfully inflicting it, and since that evening my faith in you has never been assailed. No impious doubt crossed my mind from thenceforth, during the night which followed this interview, or the day after, which was that of the funeral, or when my mother had left me.

It was, however, quite another thing with regard to my stepfather. When suspicion is awakened upon a point of such tragic interest as the murder of a father, that suspicion

cannot be lulled to sleep again, without having touched, handled, grasped a certainty. I had grasped this certainty, at the moment when I clasped my mother in my arms, and heard her speak; but did my mother's innocence prove that of my stepfather also? No sooner was I alone, and free to study the fatal letters, in minute detail this time, than the new aspect of the problem presented itself to my mind. Except in those moments when he was driven into injustice by excess of pain, my father had always distinguished between the responsibility of his wife and that of his friend, in the relation that excited his jealousy. In his thoughts he had always acquitted my mother; but, on the other hand, he had never treated Termonde's passion for her as doubtful. There, then, was the positive, undeniable fact, of which I had been ignorant until I read the letters—this man had an immense interest in the 'suppression' of my father. Before I read the letters I was free to believe that his feelings towards my mother were not awakened until she was free to marry him. Notwithstanding my jealousy, I had never denied that it was most natural for a young, beautiful, and grief-stricken woman to inspire a passionate desire to console her, easily transformed into love, in even the most intimate friend of her dead husband. Things now appeared to me in a different light. In the solitude of the house at Compiègne, where I lingered on instead of returning to Paris, professedly in order to regulate some affairs, but in reality

because I was like the wounded animals who slink away to endure their pain, I read those letters over and over again. One relic in particular, among all those in the house, aroused the desire for vengeance and for justice that had been so strong in my childhood. This was a calendar, one of those from which one tears off a leaf daily, that lay beside the blotting-book formerly belonging to my father and already mentioned, on a small bureau in his old room, now mine. The calendar was for the year 1864, and my aunt had kept it, untouched, at the date of the day that had brought her the terrible news of the murder. Saturday, the 11th of June, was the day marked by the leaf which lay uppermost upon the bulk of the others, and those others marked the days of that year, days which my father never saw. The 11th of June, 1864! It was then, on Thursday, the 9th, that he had been killed. I was nine years old at that time, I was now twenty-four, and his death was still unavenged. Why? Because chance had not furnished me with any indication; because I had not been able to form any hypothesis resting upon a fact that was observed, verified, certain. Now that I had laid hold of one of those indications, however doubtful, one of those hypotheses, however improbable, I had no right to draw back, I was bound to push my suspicions to their extreme. 'If I were to go to M. Massol,' I reflected, 'to place this correspondence in his hands and to consult him, would he regard that revelation of

our domestic life, of the feelings of the victim, and of those of my mother's second husband, as a document to be neglected?' No—a thousand times no—so strongly was I convinced of this that I would not have dared to take the letters to him. I should have been afraid to set the bloodhounds of justice on this track. He and I had pondered and studied so long that crucial question—who could possibly have had an interest in the crime? If he had thought of my stepfather, he had never spoken of him. What indication did he possess which could have authorised him for a moment to raise so great a disturbance in my mind? None; but I could now furnish him with such an indication, and my instinct told me that it was very grave, and of formidable significance. How could I have prevented myself from fastening upon it, turning it over and over in my mind, and abandoning myself completely to its absorbing suggestions?

A strange contrast existed between the tempest within my breast and the profound quiet of the house of the dead. My life glided on in apparent monotony; but in reality it was one of torment and perplexity. I rose late and took my breakfast alone, always waited on by Julie. I had, however, as companions in the silent room, Don Juan, the watch dog, and two half-bred Angora cats, given by me to my aunt long ago, and named respectively, Boule-de-Poil and Pierrot. I fed these creatures, each in its turn, reminding myself of Robinson Crusoe, the beloved hero of my childhood, and the scenes in which

the solitary man is described as sitting at his table surrounded by his private menagerie. The cats hissed when Don Juan came near them, and if I neglected them they put out their claws and tore the table-cloth, poking their prying little noses up at me. The old clock ticked solemnly, as it had done for more years than I knew of, and there I sat, amid these homely surroundings, discussing with myself the arguments for and against my stepfather's guilt. I put the matter to myself thus: 'The great objection to be made to an inquiry is the established alibi; the alibi attaches to the physical data of the crime, and in every analysis of this kind the series of moral data exists alongside of the series of physical data. If these do not coincide, there is room for doubt, and the chief care of a clever assassin is to create that doubt. If the appearance of material impossibility were to prevent investigation, how many "instructions" would be abandoned?' When these thoughts pressed upon me too heavily, I rose and walked towards the wood. Around me spread the vast silence of the afternoon in winter. The dry leaves crackled under my feet, while my mind still toiled over the argument for and against. Granted that M. Termonde is guilty. He was, he is still passionate to the point of violence; that is the first fact. He was madly in love with my mother; that is a second fact. My father was painfully jealous of him; that was a third fact. Here begins the uncertainty! Was M. Termonde aware of that jealousy? Had he

and my father had some of those silent scenes, after which a man of the world is aware that the house of his friend, to whose wife he is making love, is about to be closed to him? This supposition would, I thought, be admitted without any difficulty. It was less easy to understand the transition from that point to the fierce longing to be rid of an obstacle which is felt to be for ever invincible; but yet the thing is possible. At this stage of my analysis, I came in contact with what I called the physical data of the crime. The false Rochdale existed; this again was a fact. He had been seen by certain persons, who had also heard him speak. He was waiting in a room at the Imperial Hotel, while M. Termonde was at our table talking with us. For M. Termonde to be guilty of the crime, it would be necessary to establish a complicity between the two men; one of them, the false Rochdale, must needs have been an instrument, a bravo hired to kill, for the advantage of the other.

The exceptional character of this fresh hypothesis was too evident for me to yield to it immediately; indeed, the first time the idea occurred to me, I ridiculed myself mercilessly. I remembered my childish terror and the many proofs I had had of my readiness and ingenuity in confounding the imaginary with the real. How like my former self I still was, how incapable of chasing away the phantoms which suddenly appeared before me! In vain did I urge this upon myself, because it was no more than an

improbability that the false Rochdale should be bribed by M. Termonde to murder my father; it was not an absolute impossibility. The least reflection shows that in the matter of crime everything happens. I then set to work to recall all the extraordinary stories of the Cour d'Assises which I could remember. My imagination turned blood-colour, like the horizon where the sun was setting behind the long line of wintry trees. I re-entered the house, I dined, as I had breakfasted, all alone, and then I passed the evening in the salon, sitting where my mother had sat. So afraid was I of the furies of thought that I asked Julie to rejoin me after her supper. The old woman settled herself on a low Breton chair, in a corner of the hearth, and went on with her knitting. Her needles flashed as they moved in and out amid the brown wool of which she was fabricating a stocking, and her spectacles gleamed in the firelight. Sometimes she worked on the whole evening without uttering a word, with Boule-de-Poil, her favourite, purring at her feet, and Pierrot, who was of a jealous disposition, rubbing his head against her, and standing on his hind paws. At other times she talked, answering my questions about my aunt. She repeated what I already knew so well; the solicitude of the dear old woman for me, her dread of possible danger for me, her terrible anxiety on her death-bed. She dwelt upon my aunt's inconsolable regret for my mother's second marriage, and her unconquerable dislike to M. Termonde.

'Each time that she made up her mind to go to your mother's house,' said Julie, 'for your sake, Andre, she was ill from agitation beforehand, and sunk in melancholy for a full week after she came back.' These particulars were not new to me, I had known them long before, but in my present mood they threw me back upon my cruel suspicions. I resumed the analysis of my thoughts concerning M. Termonde from another point of view. Granted that he is guilty, I argued, is there a single fact since the event which is not made clear by his culpability? My aunt's horror is, moreover, an indication that I am not a madman, for she entertained suspicions similar to my own. But she also suspected my mother, otherwise she would have steadfastly opposed a marriage which she must have regarded as a frightful sacrilege. Yes; but she may have been mistaken about my mother, and right with respect to my stepfather. Is not M. Termonde's antipathy to me also a sign? Has there not always been something more in this than the not-uncommon antagonism between stepfather and stepson? Is not that 'something more' bitter detestation of one who recalls his victim at every turn, sickening aversion to the presence of the son of the murdered man? Again, I considered the capricious humours of the man, his alternate craving for excitement and for solitude, and the fits of silence and brooding to which my mother told me he was subject. Hitherto I had explained these freaks by attributing them to the liver-complaint

which had hollowed out his cheeks, darkened his eyelids, and from time to time stretched him on his bed in such paroxysms of pain that the strong man cried aloud. But these oddities, this malady itself, might not they be the effect of that obscure but undeniable phenomenon which assumes such strange and various shapes—remorse? Did I not know by experience the close relation between the moral and the physical in man, the ravages which a fixed idea makes in one's health, the killing and irresistible power of thought, I, who could not go through strong emotion of any kind without being attacked by neuralgia? Once more, suspicion took hold of me. How wretched is he whom such dreadful doubts assail! Tossed upon a troubled sea, the sick and weary mind knows no repose.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was but one remedy to be applied to this unbearable malady—that remedy which had already been successful in the case of my suspicions of my mother. I must at once proceed to place the real in opposition to the suggestions of imagination. I must seek the presence of the man whom I suspected, look him straight in the face, and see him as he was, not as my fancy, growing more feverish day by day, represented him. Then I should discern whether I had or had not been the sport of a delusion; and the sooner I resorted to this test the better, for my sufferings were terribly increased by solitude. My head

became confused; at last I ceased even to doubt. That which ought to have been only a faint indication, assumed to my mind the importance of an overwhelming proof. In the interest of my inquiry itself it was full time to resist this, if I were ever to pursue my inquiry further, or else I should fall into the nervous state which I knew so well, and which rendered any kind of action in cold blood impossible to me. I made up my mind to leave Compiègne, see my stepfather, and form my judgment of whether there was or was not anything in my suspicions, upon the first effect produced on him by my sudden and unexpected appearance before him. I founded this hope on an argument which I had already used in the case of my mother, namely, that if M. Termonde had really been concerned in the assassination of my father, he had dreaded my aunt's penetration beyond all things. Their relations had been formal, with an undercurrent of enmity on her part which had assuredly not escaped a man so astute as he. If he were guilty, would he not have feared that my aunt would have confided her thoughts to me on her death-bed? The attitude that he should assume towards me, at and after our first interview, would be a proof, complete in proportion to its suddenness, and he must have no time for preparation.

I returned to Paris, therefore, without having informed even my valet of my intention, and proceeded almost immediately to my mother's hotel. I arrived there at two

o'clock in the afternoon—an hour at which I was pretty sure of finding M. Termonde at home, and smoking his cigar in the hall after the second breakfast. A little later he and my mother would go their separate ways until dinner-hour, which was seven o'clock. I had come on foot in order to steady my nerves by exercise, and all the way along I had been pouring contempt upon myself, for, as I drew near to the reality, the phantoms which I had summoned up in my solitude seemed like the dreams of a sick child. I remembered how the humiliating and the ridiculous were mingled in the arrival of my mother at Compiègne. I went to meet her, as Orestes might have gone to meet Clytemnestra, and I found a woman wholly occupied with her mourning, her travelling-bag, and her little cushions. Would the same ironical contrast present itself in this first interview with my stepfather? Very likely, and I should be convinced once more of my readiness to be intoxicated with my own ideas. It was always painful to me to be convicted of that weakness, and also of my abiding inability to form clear, precise, and definite views. I mentally compared myself with the bulls which I had seen in the bull-ring at San Sebastian—stupid animals, they foamed and stamped at a red rag instead of rushing straight upon the alert 'toreador,' who mocked their rage. In this disheartened mood I rang the bell. The door was opened, and the narrow court, the glass porch, the red carpet of the staircase, were before me. The concierge,

who saluted me, was not he by whom I had fancied myself slighted in my childhood; but the old valet de chambre who opened the door to me was the same. His close-shaven face wore its former impassive expression, the look that used to convey to me such an impression of insult and insolence when I came home from school. What childish absurdity! To my question the man replied that my mother was in, also M. Termonde, and Madame Bernard, a friend of theirs. The latter name brought me back at once to the reality of the situation. Madame Bernard was a prettyish woman, very slight and very dark, with a 'tip-tilted' nose, frizzy hair worn low upon her forehead, very white teeth which were continually shown by a constant smile, a short upper lip, and all the manners and ways of a woman of society well up to its latest gossip. I fell at once from my fancied height as an imaginary Grand Justiciary into the shallows of Parisian frivolity. I was about to hear chatter upon the last new play, the latest suit for separation, the latest love affairs, and the newest bonnet. It was for this that I had eaten my heart out all these days! The servant preceded me to the hall I knew so well, with its Oriental divan, its green plants, its strange furniture, its slightly faded carpet, its Meissonier on a draped easel, in the place formerly occupied by my father's portrait, its crowd of ornamental trifles, and the wide-spreading Japanese parasol open in the middle of the ceiling. The walls were hung with large pieces of Chinese stuff embroidered in black and white silk.

My mother was half-reclining in an American rocking-chair, and shading her face from the fire with a hand-screen; Madame Bernard, who sat opposite to her, was holding her muff with one hand and gesticulating with the other; M. Termonde, in walking-dress, was standing with his back to the chimney, smoking a cigar, and warming the sole of one of his boots. On my appearance, my mother uttered a little cry of glad surprise, and rose to welcome me. Madame Bernard instantly assumed the air with which a well-bred woman prepares to condole with a person of her acquaintance upon a bereavement. All these little details I perceived in a moment, and also the shrug of M. Termonde's shoulders, the quick flutter of his eyelids, the rapidly-dismissed expression of disagreeable surprise which my sudden appearance called forth. But what then? Was it not the same with myself? I could have sworn that at the same moment he experienced sensations exactly similar to those which were catching me at the chest and by the throat. What did this prove but that a current of antipathy existed between him and me? Was it a reason for the man's being a murderer? He was simply my step-father, and a stepfather who did not like his stepson.

Matters had stood thus for years, and yet, after the week of miserable suspicion I had lived through, the quick look and shrug struck me strangely, even while I took his hand after I had kissed my mother, and saluted Madame Bernard. His hand? No,

only his finger tips as usual, and they trembled a little as I touched them. How often had my own hand shrunk with unconquerable repugnance from that contact! I listened while he repeated the same phrases of sympathy with my sorrow which he had already written to me while I was at Compiègne. I listened while Madame Bernard uttered other phrases to the same effect; and then the conversation resumed its course, and, during the half-hour that ensued, I looked on, speaking hardly at all but mentally comparing the physiognomy of my stepfather with that of the visitor, and that of my mother. The contemplation of those three faces produced a curious impression upon me; it was that of their difference, not only of age, but of intensity, of depth. There was no mystery in my mother's face, it was as easy to read as a page in clear handwriting! The mind of Madame Bernard, a worldly, trumpery, poor mind, but harmless enough, was readily to be discerned in her features which were at once refined and commonplace. How little there was of reflection, of decision, of exercise of will, in short of individuality, behind the poetic grace of the one and the pretty affectations of the other! What a face, on the contrary, was that of my stepfather, with its strong individuality and its vivid expression! In this man of the world, as he stood there talking with two women of the world, in his blue, furtive eyes, too wide apart, and always seeming to shun observation, in his prematurely gray hair, his mouth set round with

deep wrinkles, in his dark, blotched, bilious complexion, there seemed to be a creature of another race. What passions had worn those furrows? what vigils had hollowed those eyeballs? Was this the face of a happy man, with whom everything had succeeded, who, having been born to wealth and of an excellent family, had married the woman he loved; who had known neither the wearing cares of ambition, the toil of money-getting, nor the stings of wounded self-love? It is true, he suffered from liver complaint; but why was it that, although I had hitherto been satisfied with this answer, it now appeared to me childish and even foolish? Why did all these marks of trouble and exhaustion suddenly strike me as effects of a secret cause, and why was I astonished that I had not sooner sought for it? Why was it that in his presence, contrary to my expectations, contrary to what had happened about my mother, I was plunged more deeply into the gulf of suspicion from which I had hoped to emerge with a free mind? Why, when our eyes met for just one second, was I afraid that he might read my thoughts in my glance, and why did I shift them with a pang of shame and terror? Ah! coward that I was, triple coward! Either I was wrong to think thus, and at any price I must know that I was wrong; or, I was right and I must know that too. The sole resource henceforth remaining to me for the preservation of my self-respect, was ardent and ceaseless search after certainty.

That such a search was beset with difficulty

I was well aware. How was I to get at facts? The very position of the problem which I had before me forbade all hope of discovering anything whatsoever by a formal inquiry. What, in fact, was the matter in question? It was to make myself certain whether M. Termonde was or was not the accomplice of the man who had led my father into the trap in which he had lost his life. But I did not know that man himself; I had no data to go upon except the particulars of his disguise and the vague speculations of a Judge of Instruction. If I could only have consulted that Judge, and availed myself of his experience? How often since have I taken out the packet containing the denunciatory letters, with the intention of showing them to him and imploring advice, support, suggestions, from him. But I have always stopped short before the door of his house; the thought of my mother barred its entrance against me. What if he, the Judge of Instruction in the case, were to suspect her as my aunt had done? Then I would go back to my own abode, and shut myself up for hours, lying on the divan in my smoking-room and drugging my senses with tobacco. During that time I read and re-read the fatal letters, although I knew them by heart, in order to verify my first impression with the hope of dispelling it. It was, on the contrary, deepened. The only gain I obtained from my repeated perusals was the knowledge that this certainty, of which I had made a point of honour to myself, could only be psychological. In

short, all my fancies started from the moral data of the crime, apart from physical data which I could not obtain. I was therefore obliged to rely entirely, absolutely, upon those moral data, and I began again to reason as I had done at Compiègne. 'Supposing,' said I to myself, 'that M. Termonde is guilty, what state of mind must he be in? This state of mind being once ascertained, how can I act so as to wrest some sign of his guilt from him?' As to his state of mind I had no doubt. Ill and depressed as I knew him to be, his mind troubled to the point of torment, if that suffering, that gloom, that misery were accompanied by the recollection of a murder committed in the past, the man was the victim of secret remorse. The point was, then, to invent a plan which should give, as it were, a form to his remorse, to raise the spectre of the deed he had done roughly and suddenly before him. If guilty, it was impossible but that he would tremble; if innocent, he would not even be aware of the experiment. But how was this sudden summoning-up of his crime before the man whom I suspected to be accomplished? On the stage and in novels one confronts an assassin with the spectacle of his crime, and keeps watch upon his face for the one second during which he loses his self-possession; but in reality there is no instrument except unwieldy, unmanageable speech wherewith to probe a human conscience. I could not, however, go straight to M. Termonde and say to his face: 'You had my father killed!' Innocent or guilty, he would

have had me turned from the door as a madman.

After several hours of reflection, I came to the conclusion that only one plan was reasonable, and available: this was to have a private talk with my stepfather at a moment when he would least expect it, an interview in which all should be hints, shades, double meanings, in which each word should be like the laying of a finger upon the sorest spots in his breast, if indeed his reflections were those of a murderer. Every sentence of mine must be so contrived as to force him to ask himself: 'Why does he say this to me if he knows nothing? He does know something. How much does he know?' So well acquainted was I with every physical trait of his, the slightest variations of his countenance, his simplest gestures, that no sign of disturbance on his part, however slight, could escape me. If I did not succeed in discovering the seat of the malady by this process, I should be convinced of the baselessness of those suspicions which were constantly springing up afresh in my mind since the death of my aunt. I would then admit the simple and probable explanation—nothing in my father's letters discredited it—that M. Termonde had loved my mother without hope in the lifetime of her first husband, and had then profited by her widowhood, of which he had not even ventured to think. If, on the contrary, I observed during our interview, that he was alive to my suspicions, that he divined them, and anxiously followed my words; if I

surprised that swift gleam in his eyes which reveals the instinctive terror of an animal, attacked at the moment of its fancied security, if the experiment succeeded, then—then—I dared not think of what then? The mere possibility was too overwhelming. But should I have the strength to carry on such a conversation? At the mere thought of it, my heart-beats were quickened, and my nerves thrilled. What! this was the first opportunity that had been offered to me of action, of devoting myself to the task of vengeance, so coveted, so fully accepted during all my early years, and I could hesitate? Happily or unhappily, I had near me a counsellor stronger than my doubts, my father's portrait, which was hung in my smoking-room. When I awoke in the night and plunged into these thoughts, I would light my candle and go to look at the picture. How like we were to each other, my father and I, although I was more slightly built! How exactly the same we were! How near to me I felt him, and how dearly I loved him! With what emotion I studied those features, the lofty forehead, the brown eyes, the rather large mouth, the rather long chin, the mouth especially, half-hidden by a black moustache cut like my own; it had no need to open, and cry out: 'André, André, remember me!' Ah, no, my dear dead father, I could not leave you thus, without having done my utmost to avenge you, and it was only an interview to be faced, only an interview!

My nervousness gave way to determination

at once feverish and fixed—yes, it was both—and it was in a mood of perfect self-mastery, that, after a long period of mental conflict, I repaired to the hotel on the boulevard, with the plan of my discourse clearly laid out. I felt almost sure of finding my stepfather alone; for my mother was to breakfast on that day with Madame Bernard. M. Termonde was at home, and, as I expected, alone in his study. When I entered the room, he was sitting in a low chair, close to the fire, looking chilly, and smoking. Like myself in my dark hours, he drugged himself with tobacco. The room was a large one, and both luxurious and ordinary. A handsome bookcase lined one of the walls. Its contents were various, ranging from grave works on history and political economy, to the lightest novels of the day. A large, flat writing-table, on which every kind of writing-material was carefully arranged, occupied the middle of the room, and was adorned with photographs in plain leather cases. These were portraits of my mother and M. Termonde's father and mother. At least one prominent trait of its owner's character, his scrupulous attention to order and correctness of detail, was revealed by the aspect of my stepfather's study; but this quality, which is common to so many persons of his position in the world, may belong to the most commonplace character as well as to the most refined hypocrite. It was not only in the external order and bearing of his life that my stepfather was impenetrable, none could tell whether profound

thoughts were or were not hidden behind his politeness and elegance of manner. I had often reflected on this, at a period when as yet I had no stronger motive for examining into the recesses of the man's character than curiosity, and the impression came to me with extreme intensity at the moment when I entered his presence with a firm resolve to read in the book of his past life.

We shook hands, I took a seat opposite to his on the other side of the hearth, lighted a cigar, and said, as if to explain my unaccustomed presence :—

'Mamma is not here?'

'Did she not tell you, the other day, that she was to breakfast with Madame Bernard? There's an expedition to Lozano's studio—' Lozano was a Spanish painter much in vogue just then—'to see a portrait he is painting of Madame Bernard. Is there anything you want to have told to your mother?' he added, simply.

These few words were sufficient to show me that he had remarked the singularity of my visit. Ought I to regret or to rejoice at this? He was, then, already aware that I had some particular motive for coming; but this very fact would give all their intended weight to my words. I began by turning the conversation on an indifferent matter, talking of the painter Lozano and a good picture of his which I knew, 'A Gipsy-dance in a Tavern-yard at Grenada.' I described the bold attitudes, the pale complexions, the Moorish faces of the 'gitanas,' and the red carnations

stuck into the heavy braids of their black hair, and I questioned him about Spain. He answered me, but evidently out of mere politeness. While continuing to smoke his cigar, he raked the fire with the tongs, taking up one small piece of charred wood after another between their points. By the quivering of his fingers, the only sign of his nervous sensitiveness which he was unable entirely to keep down, I could observe that my presence was then, as it always was, disagreeable to him. Nevertheless he talked on with his habitual courtesy, in his low voice, almost without tone or accent, as though he had trained himself to talk thus. His eyes were fixed on the flame, and his face, which I saw in profile, wore the expression of infinite weariness that I knew well, an indescribable stillness and sadness, with long deep lines, and the mouth was contracted as though by some bitter thought ever present. Suddenly, I looked straight at that detested profile, concentrating all the attention I had in me upon it, and, passing from one subject to another without transition, I said :—

'I paid a very interesting visit this morning.'

'In that you are agreeably distinguished from me,' was his reply, made in a tone of utter indifference, 'for I wasted my morning in putting my correspondence in order.'

'Yes,' I continued, 'very interesting. I passed two hours with M. Massol.'

I had reckoned a good deal on the effect of this name, which must have instantly recalled the inquiry into the mystery of the Imperial

Hotel to his memory. The muscles of his face did not move. He laid down the tongs, leaned back in his chair, and said in an absent manner :—

'The former Judge of Instruction? What is he doing now?'

Was it possible that he really did not know where the man, whom, if he were guilty, he ought to have dreaded most of all men, was then living? How was I to know whether this indifference was feigned? The trap I had set appeared to me all at once a childish notion. Admitting that my stepfather's pulses were even now throbbing with fever, and that he was saying to himself with dread: 'What is he coming to? What does he mean?' why, this was a reason why he should conceal his emotion all the more carefully. No matter. I had begun; I was bound to go on, and to hit hard.

'M. Massol is Councillor to the Court,' I replied, and I added—although this was was not true—'I see him often. We were talking this morning of criminals who have escaped punishment. Only fancy his being convinced that Troppmann had an accomplice. He founds his belief on the details of the crime, which presuppose two men, he says. If this be true it must be admitted that "Messieurs les assassins" have a kind of honour of their own, however odd that may appear, since the child-killing monster let his own head be cut off without denouncing the other. Nevertheless, the accomplice must have put some bad time over him, after the discovery

of the bodies and the arrest of his comrade. I, for my part, would not trust to that honour, and if the humour took me to commit a crime, I should do it by myself. Would you?' I asked jestingly.

These two little words meant nothing, were merely an insignificant jest, if the man to whom I put my odd question was innocent. But, if he were guilty, those two little words were enough to freeze the marrow in his bones. He surrounded himself with smoke while listening to me, his eyelids half veiled his eyes; I could no longer see his left hand, which hung over the far side of his chair, and he had put the right into the pocket of his morning-coat. There was a short pause before he answered me—very short—but the interval, perhaps a minute, that divided his reply from my question, was a burning one for me. But what of this? It was not his way to speak in a hurry; and besides, my question had nothing interesting in it if he were not guilty, and if he were, would he not have to calculate the bearing of the phrase which he was about to utter with the quickness of thought? He closed his eyes completely—his constant habit—and said, in the unconcerned tone of a man who is talking generalities :—

'It is a fact that scraps of conscience do remain intact in very depraved individuals. One sees instances of this especially in countries where habits and morals are more genuine and true to nature than ours. There's Spain, for instance, the country that

interests you so much; when I lived in Spain, it was still infested by brigands. One had to make treaties with them in order to cross the Sierras in safety; there was no case known in which they broke the contract. The history of celebrated criminal cases swarms with scoundrels who have been excellent friends, devoted sons, and constant lovers. But I am of your opinion, and I think it is best not to count too much upon them.'

He smiled as he uttered the last words, and now he looked full at me with those light blue eyes which were so mysterious and impassible. No, I was not of a stature to cope with him, to read his heart by force. It needed capacity of another kind than mine to play in the case of this personage the part of the magnate of police who magnetises a criminal. And yet, why did my suspicions gather force as I felt the masked, dissimulating, guarded nature of the man in all its strength? Are there not natures so constituted that they shut themselves up without cause, just as others reveal themselves; are there not souls that love darkness as others love daylight? Courage then, let me strike again.

'M. Massol and I,' I resumed, 'have been talking about what kind of life Troppmann's accomplice must be leading, and also Rochdale's, for neither of us has relinquished the intention of finding him. Before M. Massol's retirement he took the precaution to bar the limitation by a formal notice, and we have several years before us in which to search for the man. Do these criminals sleep in peace?

Are they punished by remorse, or by the apprehension of danger, even in their momentary security? It would be strange if they were both at this moment good, quiet citizens, smoking their cigars like you and me, loved and loving. Do you believe in remorse?'

'Yes, I do believe in remorse,' he answered.

Was it the contrast between the affected levity of my speech, and the seriousness with which he had spoken that caused his voice to sound grave and deep to my ears? No, no; I was deceiving myself, for without a thrill he had heard the news that the limitation had been barred, that the case might be reopened any day—terrible news for him if he were mixed up with the murder—and he added, calmly, referring to the philosophic side of my question only :—

'And does M. Massol believe in remorse?'

'M. Massol,' said I, 'is a cynic. He has seen too much wickedness, known too many terrible stories. He says that remorse is a question of stomach and religious education, and that a man with a sound digestion, who had never heard anything about hell in his childhood, might rob and kill from morning to night without feeling any other remorse than fear of the police. He also maintains, being a sceptic, that we do not know what part that question of the other life plays in solitude; and I think he is right, for I often begin to think of death, at night, and I am afraid;—yes, I, who don't believe in anything very much, am afraid. And you,' I continued, 'do you believe in another world.'

'Yes.' This time I was sure that there was an alteration in his voice.

'And in the justice of God?'

'In His justice and His mercy,' he answered, in a strange tone.

'Singular justice,' I said vehemently, 'which is able to do everything, and yet delays to punish! My poor aunt used always to say to me when I talked to her about avenging my father: "I leave it to God to punish," but for my part, if I had got hold of the murderer, and he was there before me—if I were sure—no, I would not wait for the hour of that tardy justice of God.'

I had risen while uttering these words, carried away by involuntary excitement which I knew to be unwise. M. Termonde had bent over the fire again, and once more taken up the tongs. He made no answer to my outburst. Had he really felt some slight disturbance, as I believed for an instant, at hearing me speak of that inevitable and dreadful morrow of the grave which fills myself with such fear now that there is blood upon my hands? I could not tell. His profile was, as usual, calm and sad, The restlessness of his hands—recalling to my mind the gesture with which he turned and returned his cane while my mother was telling him of the disappearance of my father—yes, the restlessness of his hands was extreme; but he had been working at the fire with the same feverish eagerness just before. Silence had fallen between us suddenly; but how often had the same thing happened? Did it ever fail to

happen when he and I were in each other's company? And then, what could he have to say against the outburst of my grief and wrath, orphan that I was? Guilty, or innocent, it was for him to be silent, and he held his peace. My heart sank; but, at the same time, a senseless rage seized upon me. At that moment I would have given my remaining life for the power of forcing their secret from those shut lips, by any mode of torture.

My stepfather looked at the clock—he, too, had risen now—and said: 'Shall I put you down anywhere? I have ordered the carriage for three o'clock, as I have to be at the club at half-past. There's a ballot coming off to-morrow.' Instead of the down-stricken criminal I had dreamed of, there stood before me a man of society thinking about the affairs of his club. He came with me so far as the hall, and took leave of me with a smile.

Why, then, a quarter of an hour afterwards, when we passed each other on the quay, I, going homewards on foot, he in his coupé—yes—why was his face so transformed, so dark and tragic? He did not see me. He was sitting back in the corner, and his clay-coloured face was thrown out by the green leather behind his head. His eyes were looking—where, and at what? The vision of distress that passed before me was so different from the smiling countenance of a while ago that it shook me from head to foot with an extraordinary emotion, and forced me to exclaim, as though frightened at my own success:—

'Have I struck home?'

CHAPTER XII

THIS impression of dread kept hold of me during the whole of that evening, and for several days afterwards. There is an infinite distance between our fancies, however precise they may be, and the least bit of reality. My father's letters had stirred my being to its utmost depths, had summoned up tragic pictures before my eyes; but the simple fact of my having seen the agonised look in my stepfather's face, after my interview with him, gave me a shock of an entirely different kind. Even after I had read the letters repeatedly, I had cherished a secret hope that I was mistaken, that some slight proof would arise and dispel suspicions which I denounced as senseless, perhaps because I had a foreknowledge of the dreadful duty that would devolve upon me when the hour of certainty had come. Then I should be obliged to act on a resolution, and I dared not look the necessity in the face. No, I had not so regarded it, previous to my meeting with my enemy, when I saw him cowering in anguish upon the cushions of his carriage. Now I would force myself to contemplate it. What should my course be, if he were guilty? I put this question to myself plainly, and I perceived all the horror of the situation. On whatever side I turned I was confronted with intolerable misery. That things should remain as they were I could not endure. I saw my mother

approach M. Termonde, as she often did, and touch his forehead caressingly with her hand or her lips. That she should do this to the murderer of my father! My very bones burned at the mere thought of it, and I felt as though an arrow pierced my breast. So be it! I would act; I would find strength to go to my mother and say: 'This man is an assassin,' and prove it to her—and lo! I was already shrinking from the pain that my words must inflict on her. It seemed to me that while I was speaking I should see her eyes open wide, and, through the distended pupils, discern the rending asunder of her being, even to her heart, and that she would go mad or fall down dead on the spot, before my eyes. No, I would speak to her myself. If I held the convincing proof in my hands I would appeal to justice. But then a new scene arose before me. I pictured my mother at the moment of her husband's arrest. She would be there, in the room, close to him. 'Of what crime is he accused?' she would ask, and she would have to hear the inevitable answer. And I should be the voluntary cause of this, I, who, since my childhood, and to spare her a pang, had stifled all my complaints at the time when my heart was laden with so many sighs, so many tears, so much sorrow, that it would have been a supreme relief to have poured them out to her. I had not done so then, because I knew that she was happy in her life, and that it was her happiness only that blinded her to my pain. I preferred that she should be

blind and happy. And now? Ah! how could I strike her such a cruel blow, dear and fragile being that she was? The first glimpse of the double prospect of misery which my future offered if my suspicions proved just, was too terrible for endurance, and I summoned all my strength of will to shut out a vision which must bring about such consequences. Contrary to my habit, I persuaded myself into a happy solution. My stepfather looked sad when he passed me in his coupé; true, but what did this prove? Had he not many causes of care and trouble, beginning with his health, which was failing from day to day? One fact only would have furnished me with absolute, indisputable proof; if he had been shaken by a nervous convulsion while we were talking, if I had seen him (as Hamlet, my brother in anguish, saw his uncle) start up with distorted face, before the suddenly-evoked spectre of his crime. Not a muscle of his face had moved, not an eyelash had quivered;—why, then, should I set down this untroubled calm to amazing hypocrisy, and take the discomposure of his countenance half an hour later for a revelation of the truth? This was just reasoning, or at least it appears so to me, now that I am writing down my recollections in cold blood. They did not prevail against the sort of fatal instinct which forced me to follow this trail. Yes, it was absurd, it was mad, gratuitously to imagine that M. Termonde had employed another person to murder my father; yet I could not prevent

myself from constantly admitting that this most unlikely suggestion of my fancy was possible, and sometimes that it was certain. When a man has given place in his mind to ideas of this kind he is no longer his own master; either he is a coward, or the thing must be fought out. It was due to my father, my mother, and myself that I should *know*. I walked about my rooms for hours, revolving these thoughts, and more than once I took up a pistol, saying to myself: 'Just a touch, a slight movement like this'—I made the gesture—'and I am cured for ever of my mortal pain.' But the very handling of the weapon, the touch of the smooth barrel, reminded me of the mysterious scene of my father's death. It called up before me the sitting-room in the Imperial Hotel, the disguised man waiting, my father coming in, taking a seat at the table, turning over the papers laid before him, while a pistol, like this one in my hand, was levelled at him, close to the back of his neck; and then the fatal crack of the weapon, the head dropping down upon the table, the murderer wrapping the bleeding neck in towels and washing his hands coolly, leisurely, as though he had just completed some ordinary task. The picture roused in me a raging thirst for vengeance. I approached the portrait of the dead man, which looked at me with its motionless eyes. What! I had my suspicions of the instigator of this murder, and I would leave them unverified because I was afraid of what I should have to do

afterwards! No, no; at any price, I must in the first place know!

Three days elapsed. I was suffering tortures of irresolution, mingled with incoherent projects no sooner formed than they were rejected as impracticable. To know?—this was easily said, but I, who was so eager, nervous, and excitable, so little able to restrain my quickly-varying emotions, would never be able to extort his secret from so resolute a man, one so completely master of himself as my stepfather. My consciousness of his strength and my weakness made me dread his presence as much as I desired it. I was like a novice in arms who was about to fight a duel with a very skilful adversary; he desires to defend himself and to be victorious, but he is doubtful of his own coolness. What was I to do now, when I had struck a first blow and it had not been decisive? If our interview had really told upon his conscience, how was I to proceed to the redoubling of the first effect, to the final reduction of that proud spirit? My reflections had arrived and stopped at this point, I was forming and re-forming plans only to abandon them, when a note reached me from my mother, complaining that I had not gone to her house since the day on which I had missed seeing her, and telling me that my stepfather had been very ill indeed two days previously with his customary liver complaint. Two days previously that was on the day after my conversation with him. Here again it might be said that fate was making sport of me, redoubling

the ambiguity of the signs, the chief cause of my despair. Was the imminence of this attack explanatory of the agonised expression of my stepfather's face when he passed me in his carriage? Was it a cause, or merely the effect of the terror by which he had been assailed, if he was guilty, under his mask of indifference, while I flung my menacing words in his face? Oh, how intolerable was this uncertainty, and my mother increased it, when I went to her, by her first words.

'This,' she said, 'is the second attack he has had in two months; they have never come so near together until now. What alarms me most is the strength of the doses of morphine he takes to lull the pain. He has never been a sound sleeper, and for some years he has not slept one single night without having recourse to narcotics; but he used to be moderate—whereas, now——'

She shook her head dejectedly, poor woman, and I, instead of compassionating her sorrow, was conjecturing whether this, too, was not a sign, whether the man's sleeplessness did not arise from terrible, invincible remorse, or whether it also could be merely the result of illness.

'Would you like to see him?' asked my mother, almost timidly, and as I hesitated she added, under the impression that I was afraid of fatiguing him, whereas I was much surprised by the proposal, 'he asked to see you himself; he wants to hear the news from you about yesterday's ballot at the club.' Was this the real motive of a desire to see me, which I could not but regard as singular,

or did he want to prove that our interview had left him wholly unmoved? Was I to interpret the message which he had sent me by my mother as an additional sign of the extreme importance that he attached to the details of 'society' life, or was he, apprehending my suspicions, forestalling them? Or, yet again, was he, too, tortured by the desire to *know*, by the urgent need of satisfying his curiosity by the sight of my face, whereon he might decipher my thoughts?

I entered the room—it was the same that had been mine when I was a child, but I had not been inside its door for years—in a state of mind similar to that in which I had gone to my former interview with him. I had, however, no hope now that M. Termonde would be brought to his kness by my direct allusion to the hideous crime of which I imagined him to be guilty. My stepfather occupied the room as a sleeping-apartment when he was ill, ordinarily he only dressed there. The walls, hung with dark green damask, ill-lighted by one lamp, with a pink shade, placed upon a pedestal at some distance from the bed, to avoid fatigue to the sick man's eyes, had for their only ornament a likeness of my mother by Bonnat, one of his first female portraits. The picture was hung between the two windows, facing the bed, so that M. Termonde, when he slept in that room, might turn his last look at night and his first look in the morning upon the face whose long-descended beauty the painter had very finely rendered. No less finely had

he conveyed the something half-theatrical which characterised that face, the slightly affected set of the mouth, the far-off look in the eyes, the elaborate arrangement of the hair. First, I looked at this portrait; it confronted me on entering the room; then my glance fell on my stepfather in the bed. His head, with its white hair, and his thin yellow face were supported by the large pillows, round his neck was tied a handkerchief of pale blue silk which I recognised, for I had seen it on my mother's neck, and I also recognised the red woollen coverlet that she had knitted for him; it was exactly the same as one she had made for me; a pretty bit of woman's work on which I had seen her occupied for hours, ornamented with ribbons and lined with silk. Ever and always the smallest details were destined to renew that impression of a shared interest in my mother's life from which I suffered so much, and more cruelly than ever now, by reason of my suspicion. I felt that my looks must needs betray the tumult of such feelings, and while I seated myself by the side of the bed, and asked my stepfather how he was, in a voice that sounded to me like that of another person, I avoided meeting his eyes. My mother had gone out immediately after announcing me, to attend to some small matters relative to the well-being of her dear invalid. My stepfather questioned me upon the ballot at the club which he had assigned as a pretext for his wish to see me. I sat with my elbow on the marble top of the table and my fore-

head resting in my hand; although I did not catch his eye I felt that he was studying my face, and I persisted in looking fixedly into the half-open drawer where a small pocket-pistol of English make, lay side by side with his watch, and a brown silk purse, also made for him by my mother. What were the dark misgivings revealed by the presence of this weapon placed within reach of his hand and probably habitually placed there? Did he interpret my thoughts from my steady observation? Or had he, too, let his glance fall by chance upon the pistol, and was he pursuing the ideas that it suggested in order to keep up the talk it was always so difficult to maintain between us? The fact is that he said, as though replying to the question in my mind: 'You are looking at that pistol, it is a pretty thing, is it not?' He took it up, turned it about in his hand, and then replaced it in the drawer, which he closed. 'I have a strange fancy, quite a mania; I could not sleep unless I had a loaded pistol, there, quite close to me. After all it is a habit which does no harm to any one, and might have its advantages. If your poor father had carried a weapon like that upon him when he went to the Imperial Hotel, things would not have gone so easily with the assassin.'

This time I could not refrain from raising my eyes and seeking his. How, if he were guilty, did he dare to recall this remembrance? Why, if he were not, did his glance sink before mine? Was it merely in following

out an association of ideas that he referred thus to the death of my father; was it for the purpose of displaying his entire unconcern respecting the subject-matter of our last interview; or was he using a probe to discover the depth of my suspicion? After this allusion to the mysterious murder which had made me fatherless, he went on to say :—

'And, by the bye, have you seen M. Massol again?'

'No,' said I, 'not since the other day.'

'He is a very intelligent man. At the time of that terrible affair, I had a great deal of talk with him, in my capacity as the intimate friend of both your father and mother. If I had known that you were in the habit of seeing him latterly, I should have asked you to convey my kind regards.'

'He has not forgotten you,' I answered. In this I lied; for M. Massol had never spoken of my stepfather to me; but that frenzy which had made me attack him almost madly in the conversation of the other evening had seized upon me again. Should I never find the vulnerable spot in that dark soul for which I was always looking? This time his eyes did not falter, and whatever there was of the enigmatical in what I had said, did not lead him to question me further. On the contrary he put his finger on his lips. Used as he was to all the sounds of the house, he had heard a step approaching, and knew it was my mother's. Did I deceive myself, or was there an entreaty that I would respect the unsuspecting security of an innocent woman in the

gesture by which he enjoined silence? Was I to translate the look that accompanied the sign into: 'Do not awaken suspicion in your mother's mind, she would suffer too much;' and was his motive merely the solicitude of a man who desires to save his wife from the revival of a sad remembrance? She came in; with the same glance she saw us both, lighted by the same ray from the lamp, and she gave us a smile, meant for both of us in common, and fraught with the same tenderness for each. It had been the dream of her life that we should be together thus, and both of us with her, and, as she had told me at Compiègne, she imputed the obstacles which had hindered the realisation of her dream to my moody disposition. She came towards us, smiling, and carrying a silver tray with a glass of Vichy water upon it; this she held out to my stepfather, who drank the water eagerly, and, returning the glass to her, kissed her hand.

'Let us leave him to rest,' she said, 'his head is burning.' Indeed, in merely touching the tips of his fingers, which he placed in mine I could feel that he was highly feverish; but how was I to interpret this symptom, which was ambiguous like all the others, and might, like them, signify either moral or physical distress? I had sworn to myself that I would *know*; but how?—how?

I had been surprised by my stepfather's having expressed a wish to see me during his illness; but I was far more surprised when, a fortnight later, my servant announced M.

Termonde in person, at my abode. I was in my study, and occupied in arranging some papers of my father's which I had brought up from Compiègne. I had passed these two weeks at my poor aunt's house, making a pretext of a final settlement of affairs, but in reality because I needed to reflect at leisure upon the course to be taken with respect to M. Termonde, and my reflections had increased my doubts. At my request, my mother had written to me three times, giving me news of the patient, so that I was aware he was now better and able to go out. On my return, the day before, I had selected a time at which I was almost sure not to see any one for my visit to my mother's house. And now, here was my stepfather, who had not been inside my door ten times since I had been installed in an apartment of my own, paying me a visit without the loss of an hour. My mother, he said, had sent him with a message to me. She had lent me two numbers of a review, and she now wanted them back as she was sending the yearly volume to be bound; so, as he was passing the door, he had stepped in to ask me for them. I examined him closely while he was giving this simple explanation of his visit, without being able to decide whether the pretext did or did not conceal his real motive. His complexion was more sallow than usual, the look in his eyes was more glittering, he handled his hat nervously.

'The reviews are not there,' I answered; 'we shall probably find them in the smoking-room.'

It was not true that the two numbers were

not there; I knew their exact place on the table in my study; but my father's portrait hung in the smoking-room, and the notion of bringing M. Termonde face to face with the picture, to see how he would bear the confrontation, had occurred to me. At first he did not observe the portrait at all; but I went to the side of the room on which the easel supporting it stood, and his eyes, following all my movements, encountered it. His eyelids opened and closed rapidly, and a sort of dark thrill passed over his face; then he turned his eyes carelessly upon another little picture hanging upon the wall. I did not give him time to recover from the shock; but, in pursuance of the almost brutal method from which I had hitherto gained so little, I persisted :—

'Do you not think,' said I, 'that my father's portrait is strikingly like me? A friend of mine was saying the other day that if I had my hair cut in the same way, my head would be exactly like——'

He looked first at me, and then at the picture, in the most leisurely way, like an expert in painting, examining a work of art, without any other motive than that of establishing its authenticity. If this man had procured the death of him whose portrait he studied thus, his power over himself was indeed wonderful. But—was not the experiment a crucial one for him? To betray his trouble would be to avow all? How ardently I longed to place my hand upon his heart at that moment and to count its beats.

'You do resemble him,' he said at length, 'but not to that degree. The lower part of the chin especially, the nose and the mouth, are alike, but you have not the same look in the eyes, and the brows, forehead, and cheeks are not of the same shape.'

'Do you think,' said I, 'that the resemblance is strong enough for me to startle the murderer if he were to meet me suddenly here, and thus?'—I advanced upon him, looking into the depths of his eyes as though I were imitating a dramatic scene. 'Yes,' I continued, 'would the likeness of feature enable me to produce the effect of a spectre, on saying to the man, "Do you recognise the son of him whom you killed?" '

'Now we are returning to our former discussion,' he replied, without any further alteration of his countenance; 'that would depend upon the man's remorse, if he had any, and on his nervous system.'

Again we were silent. His pale and sickly but motionless face exasperated me by its complete absence of expression. In those minutes—and how many such scenes have we not acted together since my suspicion was first conceived—I felt myself as bold and resolute as I was the reverse when alone with my own thoughts. His impassive manner drove me wild again; I did not limit myself to this second experiment, but immediately devised a third, which ought to make him suffer as much as the two others, if he were guilty. I was like a man who strikes his enemy with a broken-handled knife, holding

it by the blade in his shut hand; the blow draws his own blood also. But no, no; I was not exactly that man; I could not doubt or deny the harm that I was doing to myself by these cruel experiments, while he, my adversary, hid his wound so well that I saw it not. No matter, the mad desire *to know* overcame my pain.

'How strange those resemblances are,' I said, 'my father's handwriting and mine are exactly the same. Look here.'

I opened an iron safe built into the wall, in which I kept papers which I especially valued, and took out first the letters from my father to my aunt which I had selected and placed on top of the packet. These were the latest in date, and I held them out to him, just as I had arranged them in their envelopes. The letters were addressed to 'Mademoiselle Louise Cornélis, Compiègne;' they bore the post-mark and the quite legible stamp of the days on which they were posted in the April and May of 1864. It was the former process over again. If M. Termonde were guilty, he would be conscious that the sudden change of my attitude towards himself, the boldness of my allusions, the vigour of my my attacks were all explained by these letters, and also that I had found the documents among my dead aunt's papers. It was impossible that he should not seek with intense anxiety to ascertain what was contained in those letters that had aroused such suspicions in me? When he had the envelopes in his hands I saw him bend his brows, and

I had a momentary hope that I had shattered the mask that hid his true face, that face in which the inner workings of the soul are reflected. The bent brow was, however, merely a contraction of the muscles of the eye, caused by regarding an object closely, and it cleared immediately. He handed me back the letters without any question as to their contents.

'This time,' said he, simply, 'there really is an astonishing resemblance.' Then, returning to the ostensible object of his visit—'And the reviews?' he asked.

I could have shed tears of rage. Once more I was conscious that I was a nervous youth engaged in a struggle with a resolutely self-possessed man. I locked up the letters in the safe, and I now rummaged the small book-case in the smoking-room, then the large one in my study, and finally pretended to be greatly astonished at finding the two reviews under a heap of newspapers on my table. What a silly farce! Was my stepfather taken in by it? When I had handed him the two numbers, he rose from the chair that he had sat in during my pretended search in the chimney-corner of the smoking-room, with his back to my father's portrait. But, again, what did this attitude prove? Why should he care to contemplate an image which could not be anything but painful to him, even if he were innocent?

'I am going to take advantage of the sunshine to have a turn in the Bois,' said he. 'I have my coupé; will you come with me?'

Was he sincere in proposing this *tête-à-tête* drive which was so contrary to our habits? What was his motive: the wish to show me that he had not even understood my attack, or the yearning of the sick man who dreads to be alone? I accepted the offer at all hazards, in order to continue my observation of him, and a quarter of an hour afterwards we were speeding towards the Arc de Triomphe in that same carriage in which I had seen him pass by me, beaten, broken, almost killed, after our first interview. This time, he looked like another man. Warmly wrapped in an overcoat lined with seal fur, smoking a cigar, waving his hand to this person or that through the open window, he talked on and on, telling me anecdotes of all sorts, which I had either heard or not heard previously, about people whose carriages crossed ours. He seemed to be talking before me and not with me, so little heed did he take of whether he was telling what I might know, or apprising me of what I did not know. I concluded from this—for, in certain states of mind, every mood is significant—that he was talking thus in order to ward off some fresh attempt on my part. But I had not the courage to recommence my efforts to open the wound in his heart and set it bleeding afresh so soon. I merely listened to him, and once again I remarked the strange contrast between his private thoughts and the rigid doctrines which he generally professed. One would have said that in his eyes the high society, whose principles he habitually defended, was

a brigand's cave. It was the hour at which women of fashion go out for their shopping and their calls, and he related all the scandals of their conduct, false or true. According to him, one of these great ladies was the mistress of her husband's brother, another was notoriously under the protection of an old diplomatist who had enriched himself by a disgraceful marriage, a third had married an imbecile widower, and, in order that she might inherit the whole of his fortune, had incited the man's son to so vicious a life that it had killed him at nineteen. He dwelt on all these stories and calumnies with a horrid pleasure, as though he rejoiced in the vileness of humanity. Did this mean the facile misanthropy of a profligate, accustomed to such conversations at the club, or in sporting circles, during which each man lays bare his brutal egotism, and voluntarily exaggerates the depth of his own disenchantment that he may boast more largely of his experience? Was this the cynicism of a villain, guilty of the most hideous of crimes, and glad to demonstrate that others were less worthy than he? To hear him laugh and talk thus threw me into a singular state of dejection. We had passed the last houses in the Avenue de Bois, and were driving along an alley on the right in which there were but few carriages. On the bare hedgerows a beautiful light shone, coming from that lofty, pale blue sky which is seen only over Paris. He continued to sneer and chuckle, and I reflected that perhaps he was right, that the seamy side of

the world was what he depicted it. Why not? Was not I there, in the same carriage with this man, and I suspected him of having had my father murdered! All the bitterness of life filled my heart with a rush. Did my stepfather perceive, by my silence and my face, that his gay talk was torturing me?

Was he weary of his own effort? He suddenly left off talking, and as we had reached a forsaken corner of the Bois, we got out of the carriage to walk a little. How strongly present to my mind is that bypath, a gray line between the poor spare grass and the bare trees, the cold winter sky, the wide road at a little distance with the carriage advancing slowly, drawn by the bay horse, shaking its head and its bit, and driven by a wooden-faced coachman—then, the man. He walked by my side, a tall figure in a long overcoat. The collar of dark brown fur brought out the premature whiteness of his hair. He held a cane in his gloved hand, and struck away the pebbles with it impatiently. Why does his image return to me at this hour with an unendurable exactness? It is because, as I observed him walking along the wintry road, with his head bent forward, I was struck as I had never been before with the sense of his absolute unremitting wretchedness. Was this due to the influence of our conversation of that afternoon, to the dejection which his sneering, sniggering talk had produced in me, or to the death of nature all around us? For the first time since I knew him, a pang of pity mingled with my hatred of him, while he

walked by my side, trying to warm himself in the pale sunshine, a shrunken, weary, lamentable creature. Suddenly he turned his face, which was contracted with pain, to me, and said :—

'I do not feel well. Let us go home.' When we were in the carriage, he said, putting his sudden seizure upon the pretext of his health :—

'I have not long to live, and I suffer so much that I should have made an end of it all years ago, had it not been for your mother.' Then he went on talking of her with the blindness that I had already remarked in him. Never, in my most hostile hours, had I doubted that his worship of his wife was perfectly sincere, and once again I listened to him, as we drove rapidly into Paris in the gathering twilight, and all that he said proved how much he loved her. Alas ! his passion rated her more highly than my tenderness. He praised the exquisite tact with which my mother discerned the things of the heart, to me, who knew so well her want of feeling ! He lauded the keenness of her intelligence to me, whom she had so little understood ! And he added, he who had so largely contributed to our separation :—

'Love her dearly, you will soon be the only one to love her.'

If he were the criminal I believed him to be, he was certainly aware that in thus placing my mother between himself and me, he was putting in my way the only barrier which I could never, never break down, and I on my side understood clearly, and with bitterness

of soul, that the obstacles so placed would be stronger than even the most fatal certainty. What, then, was the good of seeking any further? Why not renounce my useless quest at once? But it was already too late.

CHAPTER XIII

HAVE I been a coward? When I think of what I have accomplished with the same hand that holds my pen, I am forced to answer: 'No.' How then shall I explain that these first scenes, that in which I had tried to torture my stepfather by talking to him of crimes committed by confederates, and the danger of complicity; that in which I said to him as I sat by his bedside and looked him full in the face: 'No, M. Massol has not forgotten you;' that in my room, when I placed the accusing letters in his hands;—yes, how shall I explain that these three scenes were succeeded by so many days of inaction? The proof that lies to one's hand, that stares one in the face like a living thing, was furnished to me by chance. It was not I who dragged it out of the darkness where it lurked into the light. But was this my fault? From the moment when my stepfather had the courage to resist my first attack, the most sudden and unexpected of the three, what was there for me to do beyond watching for the slightest indications and probing the deepest recesses of his character? I recurred to my first course of reasoning: since material proofs were not

to be had, let me at least collect all the moral reasons that existed for believing more or believing less in the probability of the complicated crime of which I accused the man in my thoughts. To do this I had to depart from my usual custom, and live much at my mother's house. Our association was necessarily an intolerable torment to M. Termonde and to myself. How did he endure me, feeling himself suspected in this way? How did I bear his presence, suspecting him as I did? Ah, well, it was like a serpent's tooth at my heart when I saw him by my mother's side, in all the security of love and luxury, loving his wife, beloved by her, respected by all, and when I said to myself :—

'And yet, this man is an assassin, a base, cowardly assassin.'

Then I saw him, in my mind's eye, as he ought to have been, approaching the scaffold in the chill dawn, livid, with cropped hair, and bound hands, with the agony of expiation in his eyes, and in front of him the guillotine, black against the pale sky. Instead of this, it was: 'Are you in any pain dearest? At what hour do you want the carriage, Jacques? Mind you wrap yourself up well. Whom shall we ask to dinner on Wednesday?' It was on Wednesday they received their friends that winter and until the spring. Thus spoke the soft voice of my mother, and the evidence of their perfect union tortured me; but the thirst *to know* was stronger and fiercer than that pain. My suspicions rose to fever heat, and produced in me an irresistible craving

to keep him always under my eyes, to inflict the torment of my constant presence upon him. He yielded to this with a facility which always surprised me. Had he sensations analogous to mine? Now, when the whole mystery is unveiled, and I know the part he took in the horrible plot, I understand the torturing kind of attraction which I had for him. He was wholly possessed by the fixed idea of his accomplished crime, and I formed a living portion of that fixed idea, just as he formed a living portion of my dark and continuous reflections. Henceforth he could think only of me, just as I could think of none but him. Our mutual hate drew us together like a mutual love. When we were apart the tempest of wild fancies broke out with too great fury. At least, this was so in my case; and although his presence was painful to me, it stilled at the same time the kind of internal hurricane which hurled me from one extremity of the possible to the other, when he was out of my sight. No sooner was I alone than the wildest projects suggested themselves to me. I had a vision of myself, seizing him by the throat, with the cry of 'Assassin! assassin!' and forcing him to confession by violence. I fancied myself inducing M. Massol to resume the abandoned *Instruction* on my account, and pictured his coming to my mother's house with the new data supplied by me. I fancied myself bribing two or three rascals, carrying off my stepfather and shutting him up in some lonely house in the suburbs of Paris, until he should have confessed the

crime. My reason staggered under these vagaries into which the excess of my desire, still further stimulated by the sense of my powerlessness, drove me. And he too must have lived through hours like these; when I was not there, he must have formed and renounced a hundred plans. He asked of himself, 'What does he know?' he answered, according to the hours, 'He knows all—he knows nothing. What will he do?' and concluded, by turns, either that I would do all, or that I would do nothing. But, when we were together, face to face, the reality asserted itself, and put fancy to flight. We remained together, studying each other, like two animals about to attack each other presently; but each of us was perfectly aware of how it was with the other. He could not fully manifest his distrust, nor I my suspicions, we merely made it evident to one another that we had not advanced one step since our first conversation on my return from Compiègne. And, on my part, the evidence of this, while it discouraged me, somewhat tranquillised; it eased my conscience of the reproach of inaction. I did nothing, true; but what could I do?

Until the month of May of that year, 1879, I lived this strange life, seeing my stepfather almost every day; a prey, when he was not there, to the torments of my fancy, and when he was there sufferin g agonies from his presence. My field of action was restricted to the closest study of his character, and I devoted myself to the anatomy of his moral being

with ardent curiosity, which was sometimes gratified and sometimes defeated, in proportion as I caught certain significant points, or failed to catch them. I observed the least of these, purposely, for they were more involuntary, less likely to deceive, and more useful in aiding my search into the innermost recesses of his nature. We rode in the Bois, in the morning, several times a week, and, contrary to our usual custom, together. He came for me, or met me, without having made any appointment: we were drawn towards each other by the force of our common obsession. While we were riding side by side, talking of indifferent matters, I observed him handling his horse so roughly that several times he narrowly escaped being thrown, although he was a good horseman. He preferred restive horses, and displayed a cold ferocity in his treatment of the animals. What he did with his horses, unjust, despotic, and implacable as he was, I thought within myself he had done with life, bending all things and all persons about him to his will. He was excessively vindictive, to the point indeed of asserting that he did not attach any meaning to the word 'forgiveness,' and he had made for himself a place apart in the world, being little liked, much feared, and yet received by the most exclusive section of society. Under the perfect elegance and correct style of his exterior, he hid the daring courage which had been proved during the war, when he had fought with great gallantry under the walls of Paris. From his bearing on horseback, I arrived at

far other conclusions; his innate violence convinced me that he was capable of anything to gratify his passions. In the courage which he displayed in 1870, I thought I could discern a kind of bargain made with himself, a rehabilitation of himself in his own eyes, if indeed he had committed the crime. Again, I wondered whether it was merely an outcome of his innate ferocity, only a vent for the pent-up despair in which he lived, for all his outside show of happiness. But whence this despair? Was it only the moral effect of his bad health? Then, as I rode by his side, I set myself to examine the physiology of the man, searching for a correspondence between the construction of his frame, and the signs and tokens given in specialist books upon the subject, as those which indicate criminals; the upper part of his body was too heavy for his legs, his arms were too strongly developed, the expression of the lower jaw was hard, and his thumb too long. The latter peculiarity assumed additional importance to my mind from the fact that my stepfather had a habit of closing his hand with the thumb inwards as though to hide it. I was well aware that I must not set any real store by observations of this kind; I rejected them as puerile, but I returned to them again, in order to supplement them by others which gave value and importance to the former.

I reflected deeply upon the hereditary probabilities of M. Termonde's character, during our rides in the Bois. His maternal

grandfather had shot himself with a pistol; his own brother had drowned himself, after having dissipated his fortune, taken service in the army, and deserted under disgraceful circumstances. There were tragic elements in the family history. How often as we rode together, boot almost touching boot, have I turned those mad, sad, bad fancies in my head, and worse ones still!

We would return, and sometimes I would go in to breakfast with my mother, or call at her hotel after my solitary meal taken in my little dining-room in the Avenue Montaigne. M. Termonde and I were very rarely alone together during my visits to the hotel on the Boulevard Latour-Marbourg. What did it matter to me now? If he was the criminal whom I was bent on running down, he was forewarned; I had no longer any chance of wresting his secret from him by surprise. I much preferred to study him while he was talking, and in the course of his conversation with one person or another, in my presence, I learned how perfect was his self-control. In my childhood and my early youth, I had hated that power of mastering himself completely, which he possessed to a supreme degree, while I was so foolish, so helpless a victim to my nervous sensibility, so incapable of the cold-bloodedness that hides violent emotion with the mask of calmness. Now, it gave me a sort of pleasure to contemplate the depth of his hypocrisy. He had such an inveterate habit of dissimulation, such a mania for it, indeed, that he kept silence

respecting the smallest events of his life, even to his wife. He never spoke of the visits he made, the people he met, the plans he formed, or the books he read. He had evidently trained himself to forecast the most remote consequences of every sentence that he uttered. This unremitting watch kept upon himself in a life apparently so easy, prosperous, and happy, could not fail to impress even the least observant people with an idea that the man was an enigmatical personage. On putting together the various pieces of his strange character and connecting his dissimulation with the passionate frenzy which I had observed in him, he appeared to me in the light of an infinitely dangerous being. He asked a great many questions, and he spoke very deliberately, very temperately, unless he were in a certain singular mood like that in which he had intoxicated himself with his own words, on the occasion of our drive in his coupé. Then he would talk on and on, with a nervous, sneering laugh, and give utterance to theories so cynical, and to ideas and conceits so peculiar that the whole thing made me shudder. He had, for instance, an extraordinary knowledge of all questions relating to medical jurisprudence. A case, which made a great sensation, was tried during that winter, and in the course of an animated discussion in which several persons took part, my stepfather chanced to mention the date of the arrest of the notorious criminal Conty de la Pommerais. I verified the statement; it was correct. How strangely full of

things connected with crime his mind must have been, and how strongly this bore upon certain data, for which I was indebted to my interviews with M. Massol! For, was it not an instance of the all absorbing, single thought which the old judge declared he had discerned in the great majority of murderers, that which leads them to return to the scene of murder, to approach the body of their victim when it is exposed in a public place, to read every line of the newspapers in which details of their crimes are to be found, to follow the record of deeds similar to their own with eager attention? At other times, my stepfather fell into a deep silence from which it was impossible to rouse him, and he smoked cigar after cigar while the silent mood was upon him, notwithstanding the reiterated prohibition of the doctors. Tobacco by day, morphine by night—what suffering was it he tried to baffle by such an abuse of narcotics? Was it the pain of his malady, or torture of another kind, such as I imagined when I gave myself up to my tragic conjectures? Again, he had intervals of lassitude so great that even my presence could not rouse him—the lassitude of a man who has reached the limit of what he can suffer, and who can feel no more, because he has felt too much. I found him in this condition two or three times, alone in the twilight, so utterly sunk in weariness that he took no notice of me when I seated myself opposite to him and gazed at him, also in silence. I was tempted to cry out to him: 'Confess, confess, confess

at once!' And I should not have been surprised had he surrendered, allowed his secret to escape him, and answered: 'It is true.' On these occasions I felt the inanity of the small facts I had so carefully collected. What if he were not guilty? I kept silence, a prey to the fever of doubt which had been devouring me for weeks, and at last he emerged from his taciturnity to talk to me of my mother. Why? Was he thinking of her so intently just then because he was very ill and believed that he was on the eve of an eternal parting? Or was he merely striving to defend himself against me with that buckler before which I always must retreat? Was this a supplication to me to spare her a supreme grief? Yes; the latter was the true explanation. With his inborn courage and his natural violence, he would not have endured the outrage of my steady immovable gaze, the menacing allusions I frequently made, the continuous threat of my presence, but for his desire to spare my mother a scene between us, at any cost, although he might be ever so sure that no solidly certain proof could spring up accidentally in the course of it. But—rather than be accused of this thing in her presence—he preferred to suffer as he was suffering. For he loved her. However intolerable that sentiment might appear to me, it was indispensable that I should admit it, even in the hypothesis of the crime, in that case above all indeed. And then I knew that notwithstanding our mutual enmity we felt ourselves obliged to act in common

so as not to endanger the happiness of the being who was so dear to both of us. Nevertheless, the difference between us was great. He might have a feeling of sudden jealousy because of my attachment to my mother, but it could not give him the shudder of horror that passed over me with the thought that he loved her as much as I did, and was beloved by her, and yet had my father's blood upon his conscience!

He loved her! It was for her that he had bought the assassin's hand, and caused that blood to be shed, and it was she who brought him to destruction at last, she who moved about between us with the same look of happy tenderness she had cast upon us both, on the evening when she found me by her ailing husband's bedside, and when her smile had beamed so softly upon him and me—the very same smile! The efforts he made to preserve the tranquillity of that woman's heart of hers were destined to destroy him. Yes, all the precautions he had taken with a view to warding off eventualities which he thought possible, were the cause of his ultimate ruin, from the cunning disclosures he made to the gentle unsuspecting creature, even to the false affection which he pretended for me in her presence. If he and I had not made a pretence of mutual regard, she would never have spoken to me as she did speak, I should never have learned from her what I did learn, with the result that the silent duel in which my useless energies were being exhausted was brought to a sudden

end. Is there then an overruling fate, as certain men have believed, ay, even those who, like Bonaparte, have striven most vigorously with stern realities? What I gather from the contemplation of my life, from beyond the accomplished events of it, is that there is a logical law of situation and character, which develops all the consequences of our actions even to their end, so inexorably that the very success of our criminal projects contains that which will crush us some day. When I think this out for a little while, remembering how it was she, the woman whom he so loved, who put the effectual clue for which I had ceased to hope into my hand, and that it led to the certainty from which there was no drawing back, a vertigo of terror seizes upon me, as though the awful breath of destiny swept over my brow. Yes, I am terrified, because I too have blood upon my hands; but at the same time it comforts me because I can say to myself that I have but been the instrument of an inevitable deed, the necessary slave of an invisible master. Poor mother! If you had known? You also were the deadly weapon in the hand of fate, blind, like the knife that kills and knows it not. Whereas I—I have seen, I have known, I have willed. Ah! Until now I have been strong enough to keep the compact made with myself, that I would confess my story simply, detail by detail, passing no judgment on myself. And now, as the scene approaches which determined the new and last period of the drama of my life, my

spirit shrinks. Coward! coward! coward! Once more I yield to a kind of stupefaction at the thought that it is really my own story I am setting down, that thus I acted, that there is in my memory—— No, I have pledged my word; I will go on. Yes, with this hand that holds my pen I have done the deed. Yes, I have blood, blood, an indelible stain upon these fingers. They falter, but they must needs obey me and write out the story to its end.

CHAPTER XIV

At the beginning of the summer, six months after my aunt's death, I was exactly in the same position with respect to my stepfather as on that already distant day when, maddened with suspicion by my father's letters, I entered his study to play the part of the physician who examines a man's body, searching with his finger for the tender spot that is probably a symptom of a hidden abscess. I was full of intuitions now, just as I was at the moment when he passed me in his carriage with his terrible face, but I did not grasp a single certainty. Would I have persisted in a struggle in which I felt beforehand that I must be beaten? I cannot tell; for, when I no longer expected any solution to the problem set before me for my grief, a grief, too, that was both sterile and mortal, a day came on which I had a conversation with my mother so startling and appalling that to this hour my heart stands still when

I think of it. I have spoken of never-to-be forgotten dates; among them is the 25th of May, 1879.

My stepfather, who was on the eve of his departure for Vichy, had just had a severe attack of liver-complaint, the first since his illness after our terrible conversation in the month of January. I know that I counted for nothing—at least in any direct or positive way—in this acute revival of his malady. The fight between us, which went on without the utterance of a word on either side, and with no witnesses except ourselves, had not been marked by any fresh episode; I therefore attributed this complication to the natural development of the disease under which he laboured. I can exactly recall what I was thinking of on the 25th of May, at five o'clock in the evening, as I walked up the stairs in the hotel on the Boulevard de Latour-Marbourg. I hoped to learn that my stepfather was better, because I had been witnessing my mother's distress for a whole week, and also —I must tell all—because to know he was going to this watering-place was a great relief to me, on account of the separation it would bring about. I was so tired of my unprofitable pain! My wretched nerves were in such a state of tension that the slightest disagreeable impression became a torment. I could not sleep without the aid of narcotics, and such sleep as these procured was full of cruel dreams in which I walked by my father's side, while knowing and feeling that he was dead. One particular nightmare used

to recur so regularly that it rendered my dread of the night almost unbearable. I stood in a street crowded with people, and was looking into a shop window; on a sudden I heard a man's step approaching, that of M. Termonde. I did not see him, and yet I was certain it was he. I tried to move on, but my feet were leaden; to turn my head, but my neck was immovable. The step drew nearer, my enemy was behind me, I heard his breathing, and knew that he was about to strike me. He passed his arm over my shoulder. I saw his hand, it grasped a knife, and sought for the spot where my heart lay; then it drove the blade in, slowly, slowly, and I awoke in unspeakable agony. So often had this nightmare recurred within a few weeks, that I had taken to counting the days until my stepfather's departure, which had been at first fixed for the 21st, and then put off until he should be stronger. I hoped that when he was absent I should be at rest at least for a time. I had not the courage to go away myself, attracted as I was every day by that presence which I hated, and yet sought with feverish eagerness; but I secretly rejoiced that the obstacle was of his raising, that his absence gave me breathing-time, without my being obliged to reproach myself with weakness. Such were my reflections as I mounted the wooden staircase, covered with a red carpet, and lighted by stained-glass windows, that led to my mother's favourite hall. The servant who opened the door informed me in answer to my question that

my stepfather was better, and I entered the room with which my saddest recollections were connected, more cheerfully than usual. Little did I think that the dial hung upon one of the walls was ticking off in minutes one of the most solemn hours of my life! My mother was seated before a small writing-table, placed in a corner of the deep glazed projection which formed the garden-end of the hall. Her left hand supported her head, and in the right, instead of going on with the letter she had begun to write, she held her idle pen, in a golden holder with a fine pearl set in the top of it (the latter small detail was itself a revelation of her luxurious habits). She was so lost in reverie that she did not hear me enter the room, and I looked at her for some time without moving, startled by the expression of misery in her refined and lovely face. What dark thought was it that closed her mouth, furrowed her brow, and transformed her features? The alteration in her looks and the evident absorption of her mind contrasted so strongly with the habitual serenity of her countenance that it at once alarmed me. But, what was the matter? Her husband was better; why, then, should the anxiety of the last few days have developed into this acute trouble? Did she suspect what had been going on close to her, in her own house, for months past? Had M. Termonde made up his mind to complain to her, in order to procure the cessation of the torture inflicted upon him by my assiduity? No. If he had divined my meaning

from the very first day, as I thought he had, unless he were sure he could have said to her: 'André suspects me of having had his father killed.' Or had the doctor discerned dangerous symptoms behind this seeming improvement in the invalid? Was my stepfather in danger of death? At the idea, my first feeling was joy, my second was rage—joy that he should disappear from my life, and for ever; rage that being guilty he should die without having felt my full vengeance. Beneath all my hesitation, my scruples, my doubts, there lurked that savage appetite for revenge which I had allowed to grow up in me, revenge that is not satisfied with the death of the hated object unless it be caused by oneself. I thirsted for revenge as a dog thirsts for water after running in the sun on a summer day. I wanted to roll myself in it, as the dog in question rolls himself in the water when he comes to it, were it the sludge of a swamp. I continued to gaze at my mother without moving. Presently she heaved a deep sigh and said aloud: 'Oh, me, oh, me! what misery it is!' Then lifting up her tear-stained face, she saw me, and uttered a cry of surprise. I hastened towards her.

'You are in trouble, mother,' I said. 'What ails you?'

Dread of her answer made my voice falter; I knelt down before her as I used to do when a child, and, taking both her hands, I covered them with kisses. Again, at this solemn hour, my lips were met by that golden

wedding-ring which I hated like a living person; yet the feeling did not hinder me from speaking to her almost childishly. 'Ah,' I said, 'you have troubles, and to whom should you tell them if not to me? Where will you find any one to love you more? Be good to me,' I went on; 'do you not feel how dear you are to me?'

She bent her head twice, made a sign that she could not speak, and burst into painful sobs.

'Has your trouble anything to do with me?' I asked.

She shook her head as an emphatic negative, and then said in a half-stifled voice, while she smoothed my hair with her hands, as she used to do in the old times :—

'You are very nice to me, my André.'

How simple those few words were, and yet they caught my heart and gripped it as a hand might do. How had I longed for some of those little words which she had never uttered, some of those gracious phrases which are like the gestures of the mind, some of her involuntary tender caresses. Now I had what I had so earnestly desired, but at what a moment and by what means! It was, nevertheless, very sweet to feel that she loved me. I told her so, employing words which scorched my lips, so that I might be kind to her.

'Is our dear invalid worse?'

'No, he is better. He is resting now,' she answered, pointing in the direction of my stepfather's room.

'Mother, speak to me,' I urged, 'trust yourself to me; let me grieve with you, perhaps I may help you. It is so cruel for me that I must take you by surprise in order to see your tears.'

I went on, pressing her by my questions and my complaining. What then did I hope to tear from those lips which quivered but yet kept silence? At any price *I would* know; I was in no state to endure fresh mysteries, and I was certain that my stepfather was somehow concerned in this inexplicable trouble, for it was only he and I who so deeply moved that woman's heart of hers. She was not thus troubled on account of me, she had just told me so; the cause of her grief must have reference to him, and it was not his health. Had she too made any discovery? Had the terrible suspicion crossed her mind also? At the mere idea a burning fever seized upon me; I insisted and insisted again. I felt that she was yielding, if it were only by the leaning of her head towards me, the passing of her trembling hand over my hair, and the quickening of her breath.

'If I were sure,' said she at length, 'that this secret would die with you and me.'

'Oh ! mother !' I exclaimed, in so reproachful a tone that the blood flew to her cheeks. Perhaps this little betrayal of shame decided her, she pressed a lingering kiss on my forehead, as though she would have effaced the frown which her unjust distrust had set there.

'Forgive me, my André,' she said, 'I was wrong. In whom should I trust, to whom

confide this thing, except to you? From whom ask counsel?' And then she went on as though she were speaking to herself, 'If he were ever to apply to him?'

'He! Whom?'

'André, will you swear to me by your love for me, that you will never, you understand me, never, make the least allusion to what I am going to tell you?'

'Mother!' I replied, in the same tone of reproach, and then added at once, to draw her on, 'I give you my word of honour!'

'Nor——' she did not pronounce a name, but she pointed anew to the door of the sick man's room.

'Never.'

'You have heard of Edmond Termonde, his brother?' Her voice was lowered, as though she were afraid of the words she uttered, and now her eyes only turned towards the closed door, indicating that she meant the brother of her husband. I had a vague knowledge of the story; it was of this brother I had thought when I was reviewing the mental history of my stepfather's family. I knew that Edmond Termonde had dissipated his share of the family fortune, no less than 1,200,000 francs, in a few years; that he had then enlisted, that he had gone on leading a debauched life in his regiment; that, having no money to come into from any quarter, and after a heavy loss at cards, he had been tempted into committing both theft and forgery. Then, finding himself on the brink of being detected, he had deserted. The end was that he did justice

on himself by drowning himself in the Seine, after he had implored his brother's forgiveness in terms which proved that some sense of moral decency still lingered in him. The stolen money was made good by my step-father; the scandal was hushed up, thanks to the scoundrel's disappearance. I had reconstructed the whole story in my mind from the gossip of my good old nurse, and also from certain traces of it which I had found in some passages of my father's correspondence. Thus, when my mother put her question to me in so agitated a way, I supposed she was about to tell me of family grievances on the part of her husband which were totally indifferent to me, and it was with a feeling of disappointment that I asked her :—

'Edmond Termonde? The man who killed himself?'

She bent her head to answer, yes, to the first part of my question; then, in a still lower voice, she said :—

'He did not kill himself, he is still alive.'

'He is still alive,' I repeated, mechanically, and without a notion of what could be the relation between the existence of this brother and the tears which I had seen her shed.

'Now you know the secret of my sorrow,' she resumed, in a firmer, almost a relieved tone. 'This infamous brother is the tormentor of my Jacques; he puts him to death daily by the agonies which he inflicts upon him. No; the suicide never took place. Such men as he have not the courage to kill

themselves. Jacques dictated that letter to save him from penal servitude after he had arranged everything for his flight, and given him the wherewithal to lead a new life, if he would have done so. My poor love, he hoped at least to save the integrity of his name out of all the terrible wreck. Edmond had, of course, to renounce the name of Termonde, to escape pursuit, and he went to America. There he lived—as he had lived here. The money he took with him was soon exhausted, and again he had recourse to his brother. Ah! the wretch knew well that Jacques had made all these sacrifices to the honour of his name, and when my husband refused him the money he demanded, he made use of the weapon which he knew would avail. Then began the vilest persecution, the most atrocious levying of blackmail. Edmond threatened to return to France; between going to the galleys here or starving in America, he said, he preferred the galleys here, and Jacques yielded the first time—he loved him, after all, he was his only brother. You know when you have once shown weakness in dealing with people of this sort you are lost. The threat to return had succeeded, and the other has since used it to extort sums of which you have no idea. This abominable persecution has been going on for years, but I have only been aware of it since the war. I saw that my husband was utterly miserable about something; I knew that a hidden trouble was preying on him, and then, one day, he told me all. Would you believe it?

It was for me that he was afraid. "What can he possibly do to me?" I asked my Jacques. "Ah," he said, "he is capable of anything for the sake of revenge." And then he saw me so overwhelmed by distress at his fits of melancholy, and I so earnestly entreated him, that at length he made a stand. He positively refused to give any more money. We have not heard of the wretch for some time—he has kept his word—André, he is in Paris !'

I had listened to my mother with growing attention. At any period of my life, I, who had not the same notions of my stepfather's sensitiveness of feeling which my dear mother entertained, would have been astonished at the influence exercised by this disgraced brother. There are similar pests in so many families, that it is plainly to the interest of society to separate the various representatives of the same name from each other. At any time I should have doubted whether M. Termonde, a bold and violent man as I knew him to be, had yielded under the menace of a scoundrel whose real importance he would have estimated quite correctly. Then I would have explained this weakness by the recollection of his childhood, by a promise made to his dying parents; but now, in the actual state of my mind, full as I was of the suspicions which had been occupying my thoughts for weeks, it was inevitable that another idea should occur to me. And that idea grew, and grew, taking form as my mother went on speaking. No doubt my

face betrayed the dread with which the notion inspired me, for she interrupted her narrative to ask me :—

'Are you feeling ill,' André?

I found strength to answer, 'No; I am upset by having found you in tears. It is nothing.'

She believed me; she had just seen me overcome by her emotion; she kissed me tenderly, and I begged her to continue. She then told me that one day in the previous week a stranger, coming ostensibly from one of their friends in London, had asked to see my stepfather. He was ushered into the hall, and into her presence, and she guessed at once by the extraordinary agitation which M. Termonde displayed that the man was Edmond. The two brothers went into my stepfather's private room, while my mother remained in the hall, half dead with anxiety and suspense, every now and then hearing the angry tones of their voices, but unable to distinguish any words. At length the brother came out, through the hall, and looked at her as he passed by with eyes that transfixed her with fear.

'And the same evening,' she went on, 'Jacques took to his bed. Now, do you understand my despair? Ah, it is not our name that I care for. I wear myself out with repeating, "What has this to do with us? How can we be spattered by this mud?" It is his health, his precious health! The doctor says that every violent emotion is a dose of poison to him. Ah!' she cried, with a gesture of despair, 'this man will kill him.'

To hear that cry, which once again revealed to me the depth of her passion for my step-father, to hear it at this moment, and to think what I was thinking!

'You saw him?' I asked, hardly knowing what I said.

'Have I not told you that he passed by me, there?' and, with terror depicted in her face, she showed me the place on the carpet.

'And you are sure that the man was his brother?'

'Jacques told me so in the evening; but I did not require that; I should have recognised him by the eyes. How strange it is! Those two brothers, so different; Jacques so refined, so distinguished, so noble-minded, and the other, a big, heavy, vulgar lout, common-looking, and a rascal—well, they have the same look in their eyes.'

'And under what name is he in Paris?'

'I do not know. I dare not speak of him any more. If he knew that I have told you this, with his ideas! But then, dear, you would have heard it at some time or other; and besides,' she added with firmness, 'I would have told you long ago about this wretched secret if I had dared! You are a man now, and you are not bound by this excessively scrupulous fraternal affection. Advise me, André, what is to be done?'

'I do not understand you.'

'Yes, yes. There must be some means of informing the police and having this man arrested without its being talked of in the newspapers or elsewhere. Jacques would

not do this, because the man is his brother; but if we were to act, you and I, on our own side? I have heard you say that you visit M. Massol, whom we knew at the time of our great misfortune; suppose I were to go to him and ask his advice? Ah! I must keep my husband alive—he must be saved! I love him too much!'

Why was I seized with a panic at the idea that she might carry out this project, and apply to the former Judge of Instruction—I, who had not ventured to go to his house since my aunt's death for fear he should divine my suspicions merely by looking at me? What was it that I saw so clearly, that made me implore her to abandon her idea in the very name of the love she bore her husband?

'You will not do this,' I said; 'you have no right to do it. He would never forgive you, and he would have just cause; it would be betraying him.'

'Betraying him! It would be saving him!'

'And if his brother's arrest were to strike him a fresh blow? If you were to see him ill, more ill than ever, on account of what you had done?'

I had used the only argument that could have convinced her. Strange irony of fate! I calmed her, I persuaded her not to act—I, who had suddenly conceived the monstrous notion that the doer of the murderous deed, the docile instrument in my stepfather's hands, was this infamous brother—that Edmond Termonde and Rochdale were one and the same man.

CHAPTER XV

THE night which followed that conversation with my mother remains in my memory as the most wretched I had hitherto endured; and yet how many sleepless nights had I passed, while all the world around me slept, in bitter conflict with a thought which held mine eyes waking and devoured my heart! I was like a prisoner who has sounded every inch of his dungeon—the walls, the floor, the ceiling—and who, on shaking the bars of his window for the hundredth time, feels one of the iron rods loosen under the pressure. He hardly dares to believe in his good fortune, and he sits down upon the ground almost dazed by the vision of deliverance that has dawned upon him. 'I must be cool-headed now,' said I to myself, as I walked to and fro in the smoking-room, whither I had retired without tasting the meal that was served on my return. Evening came, then the black night; the dawn followed, and once more the full day. Still I was there, striving to see clearly amid the cloud of suppositions in which an event, simple in itself (only that in my state of mind no event would have seemed simple), had wrapped me. I was too well used to these mental tempests not to know that the only safety consisted in clinging to the positive facts, as though to immovable rocks. In the present instance, the positive facts reduced themselves to two: first, I had just learned that a brother of M. Termonde,

who passed for dead, and of whom my stepfather never spoke, existed; secondly, that this man, disgraced, proscribed, ruined, an outlaw in fact, exercised a dictatorship of terror over his rich, honoured, and irreproachable brother. The first of these two facts explained itself. It was quite natural that Jacques Termonde should not dispel the legend of the suicide, which was of his own invention, and had saved the other from the galleys. It is never pleasant to have to own a thief, a forger, or a deserter, for one's nearest relation; but this, after all, is only an excessively disagreeable matter. The second fact was of a different kind. The disproportion between the cause assigned by my stepfather and its result in the terror from which he was suffering was too great. The dominion which Edmond Termonde exercised over his brother was not to be justified by the threat of his return, if that return were not to have any other consequence than a transient scandal. My mother, who regarded her husband as a noble-minded, high-souled, great-hearted man, might be satisfied with the alleged reason; but not I. It occurred to me to consult the Code of Military Justice, and I ascertained, by the 184th clause, that a deserter cannot claim immunity from punishment until after he has attained his forty-seventh year, so that it was most likely Edmond Termonde was still within the reach of the law. Was it possible that his desire to shield his brother from the punishment of the offence of desertion should throw

my stepfather into such a state of illness and agitation? I discerned another reason for this dominion—some dark and terrible bond of complicity between the two men. What if Jacques Termonde had employed his brother to kill my father, and proof of the transaction was still in the murderer's possession? No doubt his hands would be tied so far as the magistrates were concerned; but he had it in his power to enlighten my mother, and the mere threat of doing this would suffice to make a loving husband tremble, and tame his fierce pride.

'I must be cool,' I repeated, 'I must be cool;' and I put all my strength to recalling the physical and moral particulars respecting the crime which were in my possession. It was my business now to try whether one single point remained obscure when tested by the theory of the identity of Rochdale with Edmond Termonde. The witnesses were agreed in representing Rochdale as tall and stout, my mother had described Edmond Termonde as a big heavy man. Fifteen years lay between the assassin of 1864, and the elderly rake of 1879; but nothing prevented the two from being identical. My mother had dwelt upon the colour of Edmond Termonde's eyes, pale blue like those of his brother; the concierge of the Imperial Hotel had mentioned the pale blue colour and the brightness of Rochdale's eyes in his deposition, which I knew by heart. He had noticed this peculiarity on account of the contrast of the eyes with the man's bronzed complexion. Edmond

Termonde had taken refuge in America after his alleged suicide, and what had M. Massol said? I could hear him repeat, with his well-modulated voice, and methodical movement of the hand: 'A foreigner, American or English, or, perhaps, a Frenchman settled in America.' Physical impossibility there existed none. And moral impossibility? That was equally absent. In order to convince myself more fully of this, I took up the history of the crime from the moment at which my father's correspondence concerning Jacques Termonde became explicit, that is to say, in January, 1864.

So as to rid my judgment of every trace of personal enmity, I suppressed the names in my thoughts, reducing the dreadful occurrence by which I had suffered to the bareness of an abstract narrative. A man is desperately in love with the wife of one of his intimate friends, a woman whom he knows to be absolutely, spotlessly virtuous; he knows, he feels, that if she were free she would love him; but that, not being free, she will never, never be his. This man is of the temperament which makes criminals, his passions are violent in the extreme, he has no scruples, and a despotic will; he is accustomed to see everything give way to his desires. He perceives that his friend is growing jealous; a little later and the house will no longer be open to him. Would not the thought come to him—if her husband could be got rid of? And yet——? This dream of the death of him, who forms the sole obstacle to his happiness, troubles the man's head, it recurs once,

twice, many times, and he turns the fatal idea over and over again in his brain until he becomes used to it. He arrives at the 'If I dared,' which is the starting point of the blackest villainies. The idea takes a precise form; he conceives that he might have the man whom he now hates, and by whom he feels that he is hated, killed. Has he not, far away, a wretch of a brother, whose actual existence, to say nothing of his present abode, is absolutely unknown? What an admirable instrument of murder he should find in this infamous, depraved, and needy brother, whom he holds at his beck and call by the aid in money that he sends him! And the temptation grows and grows. An hour comes when it is stronger than all besides, and the man, resolved to play this desperate game, summons his brother to Paris. How? By one or two letters in which he excites the rascal's hopes of a large sum of money to be gained, at the same time that he imposes the condition of absolute secrecy as to his voyage. The other accepts; he is a social failure, a bankrupt in life, he has neither relations nor ties, he has been leading an anonymous and haphazard existence for years. The two brothers are face to face. Up to that point all is logical, all is in conformity with the possible stages of a project of this order.

I arrived at the execution of it; and I continued to reason in the same way, impersonally. The rich brother proposes the blood-bargain to the poor brother. He offers him

money; a hundred thousand francs, two hundred thousand, three hundred thousand. From what motive should the scoundrel hesitate to accept the offer? Moral ideas? What is the morality of a rake who has gone from libertinism to theft? Under the influence of my vengeful thoughts I had read the criminal news of the day in the journals, and the reports of criminal trials, too assiduously for years past, not to know how a man becomes a murderer. How many cases of stabbing, shooting, and poisoning have there not been, in which the gain was entirely uncertain, and the conditions of danger extreme, merely to enable the perpetrators to go, presently, and expend the murder-money in some low haunt of depravity! Fear of the scaffold? Then nobody would kill. Besides, debauchees, whether they stop short at vice or roll down the descent into crime, have no foresight of the future. Present sensation is too strong for them; its image abolishes all other images, and absorbs all the vital forces of the temperament and the soul. An old dying mother, children perishing of hunger, a despairing wife; have these pictures of their deeds ever arrested drunkards, gamblers, or profligates? No more have the tragic phantoms of the tribunal, the prison, and the guillotine, when, thirsting for gold, they kill to procure it. The scaffold is far off, the brothel is at the street corner, and the being sunk in vice kills a man, just as a butcher would kill a beast, that he may go thither, or to the tavern, or to the low

gaming-house, with a pocket full of money. This is the daily mode of procedure in crime. Why should not the desire of a more elevated kind of debauch possess the same wicked attraction for men who are indeed more refined, but are quite as incapable of moral goodness as the rascally frequenters of the lowest dens of iniquity? Ah! the thought that my father's blood might have paid for suppers in a New York night-house was too cruel and unendurable. I lost courage to pursue my cold, calm, reasonable deductions, a kind of hallucination came upon me—a mental picture of the hideous scene—and I felt my reason reel. With a great effort I turned to the portrait of my father, gazed at it long, and spoke to him as if he could have heard me, aloud, in abject entreaty. 'Help me, help me!' And then, I once more became strong enough to resume the dreadful hypothesis, and to criticise it point by point. Against it was its utter unlikelihood; it resembled nothing but the nightmare of a diseased imagination. A brother who employs his brother as the assassin of a man whose wife he wants to marry! Still, although the conception of such a devilish plot belonged to the domain of the wildest fantasies, I said to myself: 'This may be so, but in the way of crime, there is no such thing as unlikelihood. The assassin ceases to move in the habitual grooves of social life by the mere fact that he makes up his mind to murder.' And then a score of examples of crimes committed under circumstances as strange and exceptional

as those whose greater or less probability I was then discussing with myself, recurred to my memory. One objection arose at once. Admitting this complicated crime to be possible only, how came I to be the first to form a suspicion of it? Why had not the keen, subtle, experienced old magistrate, M. Massol, looked in that direction for an explanation of the mystery in whose presence he confessed himself powerless? The answer came readily. M. Massol did not think of it, that was all. The important thing is to know, not whether the Judge of Instruction suspected the fact, or did not suspect it; but whether the fact itself is, or is not real. Again, what indications had reached M. Massol to put him on this scent? If he had thoroughly studied my father's home and his domestic life, he had acquired the certainty that my mother was a faithful wife, and a good woman. He had witnessed her sincere grief, and he had not seen, as I had, letters written by my father in which he acknowledged his jealousy, and revealed the passion of his false friend. But, even supposing the judge had from the first suspected the villainy of my future stepfather, the discovery of his accomplice would have been the first thing to be done, since, in any case, the presence of M. Termonde in our house at the time of the murder was an ascertained fact. Supposing M. Massol had been led to think of the brother who had disappeared, what then? Where were the traces of that brother to be found? Where and how? If Edmond and Jacques

had been accomplices in the crime, would not their chief care be to contrive a means of correspondence which should defy the vigilance of the police? Did they not cease for a time to communicate with each other by letters? What had they to communicate, indeed? Edmond was in possession of the price of the murder, and Jacques was occupied in completing his conquest of my mother's heart. I resumed my argument: all this granted again, but, although M. Massol was ignorant of the essential factor in the case, although he was unaware of Jacques Termonde's passion for the wife of the murdered man, my aunt knew it well, she had in her hands indisputable proofs of my father's suspicions, how came she not to have thought as I was now thinking? And how did I know that she had *not* thought just as I was thinking? She had been tormented by suspicions, even she, too; she had lived and died haunted by them. The only difference was that she had included my mother in them, being incapable of forgiving her the sufferings of the brother whom she loved so deeply. To act against my mother was to act against me, so she had forsworn that idea for ever. But, if she would have acted against my mother, how could she have gone beyond the domain of vague inductions, since she, no more than I, could have divined my stepfather's alibi, or known of the actual existence of Edmond Termonde? No; that I should be the first to explain the murder of my father as I did, proved only that I had come into possession

of additional information respecting the surroundings of the crime, and not that the conjectures drawn from it were baseless.

Other objections presented themselves. If my stepfather had employed his brother to commit the murder, how came he to reveal the existence of that brother to his wife? An answer to this question was not far to seek. If the crime had been committed under conditions of complicity, only one proof of the fact could remain, namely, the letters written by Jacques Termonde to Edmond, in which the former recalled the latter to Europe and gave him instructions for his journey; these letters Edmond had of course preserved, and it was through them, and by the threat of showing them to my mother, that he kept a hold over his brother. To tell his wife so much as he had told her was to forestall and neutralise this threat, at least to a certain extent; for, if the doer of the deed should ever resolve on revealing the common secret to the victim's widow, now the wife of him who had inspired it, the latter would be able to deny the authenticity of the letters, to plead the former confidence reposed in her respecting his brother, and to point out that the denunciation was an atrocious act of revenge achieved by a forgery. And, besides, if indeed the crime had been committed in the manner that I imagined, was not that revelation to my mother justified by another reason?

The remorseful moods by which I believed my stepfather to be tortured were not likely to escape the observant affection of his wife;

she could not fail to know that there was a dark shadow on his life which even her love could not dispel. Who knows but she had suffered from the worst of all jealousy, that which is inspired by a constant thought not imparted, a strange emotion hidden from one? And he had revealed a portion of the truth to her so as to spare her uneasiness of that kind, and to protect himself from questions which his conscience rendered intolerable to him. There was then no contradiction between this half-revelation made to my mother, and my own theory of the complicity of the two brothers. It was also clear to me that in making that revelation he had been unable to go beyond a certain point in urging upon her the necessity of silence towards me—silence which would never have been broken but for her unforeseen emotion, but for my affectionate entreaties, but for the sudden arrival of Edmond Termonde, which had literally bewildered the poor woman. But how was my stepfather's imprudence in refusing money to this brother, who was at bay and ready to dare any and everything, to be explained? This, too, I succeeded in explaining to myself. It had happened before my aunt's death, at a period when my stepfather believed himself to be guaranteed from all risk on my side. He believed himself to be sheltered from justice by the statute of limitation. He was ill. What, then, was more natural than that he should wish to recover those papers which might become a means of levying blackmail upon his widow

after his death, and dishonouring his memory in the heart of that woman whom he had loved—even to crime—at any price? Such a negotiation could only be conducted in person. My stepfather would have reflected that his brother would not fulfil his threat without making a last attempt; he would come to Paris, and the accomplices would again be face to face after all these years. A fresh but final offer of money would have to be made to Edmond, the price of the relinquishment of the sole proof whereby the mystery of the Imperial Hotel could be cleared up. In this calculation my stepfather had omitted to forecast the chance that his brother might come to the hotel on the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg, that he would be ushered into my mother's presence, and that the result of the shock to himself—his health being already undermined by his prolonged mental anguish—would be a fresh attack of his malady. In events, there is always the unexpected to put to rout the skilful calculations of the most astute and the most prudent, and when I reflected that so much cunning, such continual watchfulness over himself and others had all come to this —unless indeed these surmises of mine were but fallacies of a brain disturbed by fever and the consuming desire for vengeance—I once more felt the passage of the wind of destiny over us all.

However, whether reality or fancy, there they were, and I could not remain in ignorance or in doubt. At the end of all my various

arguments for and against the probability of my new explanation of the mystery, I arrived at a positive fact: rightly or wrongly I had conceived the possibility of a plot in which Edmond Termonde had served as the instrument of murder in his brother's hand. Were there only one single chance, one against a thousand, that my father had been killed in this way, I was bound to follow up the clue to the end, on pain of having to despise myself as the veriest coward that lived. The time of sorrowful dreaming was over; it was now necessary to act, and to act was to know.

Morning dawned upon these thoughts of mine. I opened my window, I saw the faces of the lofty houses livid in the first light of day, and I swore solemnly to myself, in the presence of re-awakening life, that this day should see me begin to do what I ought, and the morrow should see me continue, and the following days should see the same, until I could say to myself: 'I am certain.' I resolutely repressed the wild feelings which had taken hold of me during the night, and I fixed my mind upon the problem: 'Does there exist any means of making sure whether Edmond Termonde is, or is not, identical with the man who in 1864 called himself Rochdale?' For the answer to this question I had only myself, the resources of my own intelligence, and my personal will to rely upon. I must do myself the justice to state that not for one minute, during all those cruel hours, was I tempted to rid myself once for all of the difficulties of my tragic task by

appealing to justice, as I should have done had I not taken my mother's sufferings into account. I had resolved that the terrible blow of learning that for fifteen years she had been the wife of an assassin should never be dealt to her by me. In order that she might always remain in ignorance of this story of crime, it was necessary for the struggle to be strictly confined to my stepfather and myself. And yet, I thought, what if I find that he is guilty? At this idea, no longer vague and distant, but liable to-day, to-morrow, at any time, to become an indisputable truth, a terrible project presented itself to my mind. But I would not look in that direction, I made answer to myself: 'I will think of this later on,' and I forced myself to concentrate all my reflections upon the actual day and its problem: How to verify the identity of Edmond Termonde with the false Rochdale? To tear the secret from my stepfather was impossible. I had vainly endeavoured for months to find the flaw in his armour of dissimulation; I had but broken not one dagger, but twenty against the plates of that cuirass. If I had had all the tormentors of the Middle Ages at my service, I could not have forced his fast-shut lips to open, or extorted an admission from his woebegone and yet impenetrable face. There remained the other; but in order to attack him, I must first discover under what name he was hiding in Paris, and where. No great effort of imagination was required to hit upon a certain means of discovering

these particulars. I had only to recall the circumstances under which I had learned the fact of Edmond Termonde's arrival in Paris. For some reason or other—remembrance of a guilty complicity or fear of a scandal—my stepfather trembled with fear at the mere idea of his brother's return. His brother had returned, and my stepfather would undoubtedly make every effort to induce him to go away again. He would see him, but not at the house on the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg, on account of my mother and the servants. I had, therefore, a sure means of finding out where Edmond Termonde was living; I would have his brother followed.

There were two alternatives: either he would arrange a meeting in some lonely place, or he would go himself to Edmond Termonde's abode. In the latter case, I should have the information I wanted at once; in the former it would be sufficient to give the description of Edmond Termonde just as I had received it from my mother, and to have him also followed on his return from the place of meeting. The spy-system has always seemed to me to be infamous, and even at that moment I felt all the ignominy of setting this trap for my stepfather; but when one is fighting, one must use the weapons that will avail. To attain my end, I would have trodden everything underfoot except my mother's grief. And then? Supposing myself in possession of the false name of Edmond Termonde and his address, what was I to do? I could not, in imitation of the police, lay my hand upon him

and his papers, and get off with profuse excuses for the action when the search was finished. I remember to have turned over twenty plans in my mind, all more or less ingenious, and rejected them all in succession, concluding by again fixing my mind on the bare facts.

Supposing the man really had killed my father, it was impossible that the scene of the murder should not be indelibly impressed upon his memory. In his dark hours the face of the dead man, whom I resembled so closely, must have been visible to his mind's eye. Once more I studied the portrait at which my stepfather had hardly dared to glance, and recalled my own words: 'Do you think the likeness is sufficiently strong for me to have the effect of a spectre upon the criminal?' Why not utilise this resemblance? I had only to present myself suddenly before Edmond Termonde, and call him by the name—Rochdale—to his ears its syllables would have the sound of a funeral bell. Yes! that was the way to do it: to go into the room he now occupied, just as my father had gone into the room at the Imperial Hotel, and to ask for him by the name under which my father had asked for him, showing him the very face of his victim. If he was not guilty, I should merely have to apologise for having knocked at his door by mistake; if he was guilty, he would be so terrified for some minutes that his fear would amount to an avowal. It would then be for me to avail myself of that terror to wring the whole of his secret from him. What motives

would inspire him? Two, manifestly—the fear of punishment, and the love of money. It would then be necessary for me to be provided with a large sum when taking him unawares, and to let him choose between two alternatives, either that he should sell me the letters which had enabled him to blackmail his brother for years past, or that I should shoot him on the spot. And what if he refused to give up the letters to me? Is it likely that a ruffian of his kind would hesitate? Well, then, he would accept the bargain, hand me over the papers by which my stepfather is convicted of murder, and take himself off? And I must let him go away just as he had gone away from the Imperial Hotel, smoking a cigar, and paid for his treachery to his brother, even as he had been paid for his treachery to my father! Yes, I must let him go away thus, because to kill him with my own hand would be to place myself under the necessity of revealing the whole of the crime, which I am bound to conceal at all hazards. 'Ah, mother! what will you not cost me!' I murmured with tears. Fixing my eyes again upon the portrait of the dead man, it seemed to me that I read in its eyes and mouth an injunction never to wound the heart of the woman he had so dearly loved —even for the sake of avenging him. 'I will obey you,' I made answer to my father, and bade adieu to that part of my vengeance. It was very hard, very cruel to myself; nevertheless, it was possible; for, after all, did I hate the wretch himself? He had struck

the blow, it is true, but only as a servile tool in the hand of another. Ah! that other, I would not let *him* escape, when he should be in my grip, he who had conceived, meditated, arranged, and paid for the deed, he who had stolen all from me, all, all, from my father's life even to my mother's love, he, the real, the only culprit. Yes, I would lay hold of him, and contrive and execute my vengeance, while my mother should never suspect the existence of that duel out of which I should come triumphant. I was intoxicated beforehand with the idea of the punishment which I would find means to inflict upon the man whom I execrated. It warmed my heart only to think of how this would repay my long, cruel martyrdom. 'To work! to work!' I cried aloud. I trembled lest this should be nothing but a delusion, lest Edmond Termonde should have already left the country, my stepfather having previously purchased his silence. At nine o'clock I was in an abominable Private Inquiry Office—merely to have passed its threshold would have seemed to me a shameful action, only a few hours before. At ten, I was with my broker, giving him instructions to sell out 100,000 francs worth of shares for me. That day passed, and then a second. How I bore the succession of the hours, I know not. I do know that I had not courage to go to my mother's house, or to see her again. I feared she might detect my wild hope in my eyes, and unconsciously forewarn my stepfather by a sentence or a word, as she had

unconsciously informed me. Towards noon, on the third day, I learned that my step-father had gone out that morning. It was a Wednesday, and on that day my mother always attended a meeting for some charitable purpose in the Grenelle quarter. M. Termonde had changed his cab twice, and had alighted from the second vehicle at the Grand Hotel. There he had paid a visit to a traveller who occupied a room on the second floor (No. 353); this person's name was entered in the list of arrivals as Stanbury. At noon I was in possession of these particulars, and at two o'clock I ascended the staircase of the Grand Hotel, with a loaded revolver and a note-case containing one hundred bank-notes, wherewith to purchase the letters, in my pocket.

Was I about to enter on a formidable scene in the drama of my life, or was I about to be convinced that I had been once more made the dupe of my own imagination?

At all events, I should have done my duty.

CHAPTER XVI

I HAD reached the second floor. At one corner of the long corridor there was a notification that the numbers ran from 300 to 360. A waiter passed me, whistling; two girls were chattering and laughing in a kind of office at the stair-head; the various noises of the courtyard came up through the open windows. The moment was opportune for the execution of my project. With these people about

the man could not hope to escape from the house. 345, 350, 351, 353—I stood before the door of Edmond Termonde's room; the key was in the lock; chance had served my purpose better than I had ventured to hope. This trifling particular bore witness to the security in which the man whom I was about to surprise was living. Was he even aware that I existed? I paused a moment before the closed door. I wore a short coat, so as to have my revolver within easy reach in the pocket, and I put my right hand upon it, opened the door with my left, and entered without knocking.

'Who is there?' said a man who was lying rather than sitting in an arm-chair, with his feet on a table; he was reading a newspaper and smoking, and his back was turned to the door. He did not trouble himself to rise and see whose hand had opened the door, thinking, no doubt, that a servant had come in, he merely turned his head slightly, and I did not give him time to look completely round.

'M. Rochdale?' I asked.

He started to his feet, pushed away the chair, and rushed to the other side of the table, staring at me with a terrified countenance; his light blue eyes were unnaturally distended. his face was livid, his mouth was half open, his legs bent under him. His tall, robust frame had sustained one of those shocks of excessive terror which almost paralyse the forces of life. He uttered but one word—Cornélis !

At last I held in my victorious hand the

proof that I had been seeking for months, and in that moment I was master of all the resources of my being. Yes, I was as calm, as clear of purpose as my adversary was the reverse. He was not accustomed to live, like his accomplice, in the daily habit of studied dissimulation. The name, 'Rochdale,' the terrifying likeness, the unlooked-for arrival! I had not been mistaken in my calculation. With the amazing rapidity of thought that accompanies action I perceived the necessity of following up this first shock of moral terror by a shock of physical terror. Otherwise, the man would hurl himself upon me, in the moment of reaction, thrust me aside and rush away like a madman, at the risk of being stopped on the stairs by the servants, and then? But I had already taken out my revolver, and now I covered the wretch with it, calling him by his real name, to prove that I knew all about him.

'M. Edmond Termonde,' I said, 'if you make one step towards me, I will kill you, like an assassin as you are, as you killed my father.'

Pointing to a chair at the corner of the half-open window, I added :—

'Sit down!'

He obeyed mechanically. At that instant I exercised absolute control over him; but I felt sure this would cease so soon as he recovered his presence of mind. But even though the rest of the interview were now to go against me, that could not alter the certainty which I had acquired. I had wanted

to know whether Edmond Termonde was the man who had called himself Rochdale, and I had secured undeniable proof of the fact. Nevertheless, it was due to myself that I should extract from my enemy the proof of the truth of all my conjectures, that proof which would place my stepfather at my mercy. This was a fresh phase of the struggle.

I glanced round the room in which I was shut up with the assassin. On the bed, placed on my left, lay a loaded cane, a hat and an overcoat, on a small table were a steel 'knuckle-duster' and a revolver. Among the articles laid out on a chest of drawers on my right a bowie-knife was conspicuous, a valise was placed against an unused door, a wardrobe with a looking-glass stood before another unused door, then came the toilet-stand, and the man, crouching under the aim of my revolver, between the table and the window. He could neither escape, nor reach to any means of defence without a personal struggle with me; but he would have to stand my fire first, and besides, if he was tall and robust, I was neither short nor feeble. I was twenty-five, he was fifty. All the moral forces were for me, I must win.

'Now,' said I, as I took a seat, but without releasing him from the covering barrel of my pistol, 'let us talk.'

'What do you want of me?' he asked roughly. His voice was both hoarse and muffled; the blood had gone back into his cheeks; his eyes, those eyes so exactly like his brother's, sparkled. The brute-nature

was reviving in him after having sustained a fearful shock, as though astonished that it still lived.

'Come, then,' he added, clenching his fists, 'I am caught. Fire on me, and let this end.'

Then, as I made him no answer, but continued to threaten him with my pistol, he exclaimed :—

'Ah ! I understand; it is that blackguard Jacques who has sold me to you in order to get rid of me himself. There's the statute of limitations—he thinks he is safe ! But has he told you that he was in it himself, good, honest man, and that I have proof of this? Ah ! he thinks I am going to let you kill me, like that, without speaking? No, no, I shall call out, we shall be arrested, and all will be known.'

Fury had seized upon him; he was about to shout 'Help !' and the worst of it was that rage was rising in me also. It was he, with that same hand which I saw creeping along the table, strong, hairy, seeking something to throw at me—yes—it was he who had killed my father. One impulse more of anger and I was lost; a bullet was lodged in his body, and I saw his blood flow. Oh, what good it would have done me to see that sight ! But no, I had made the sacrifice of this particular vengeance. In a second, I beheld myself arrested, obliged to explain everything, and my mother exposed to all the misery of it. Happily for me, he also had an interval of reflection. The first idea that must have occurred to him was that his

brother had betrayed him, by telling me one-half of the truth, so as to deliver him up to my vengeance. The second, no doubt, was that, for a son who came to avenge his dead father, I was making a good deal of delay about it. There was a momentary silence between us. This allowed me to regain my coolness, and to say: 'You are mistaken,' so quietly that his amazement was visible in his face. He looked at me, then closed his eyes, and knitted his brow. I felt that he could not endure my resemblance to my father.

'Yes, you are mistaken,' I continued deliberately, giving the tone of a business conversation to this terrible interview. 'I have not come here either to have you arrested, or to kill you. Unless,' I added, 'you oblige me to do so yourself, as I feared just now you would oblige me. I have come to propose a bargain to you, but it is on the condition that you listen, as I shall speak, with coolness.'

Once more we were both silent. In the corridor, almost at the door of the room, there were sounds of feet, voices, and peals of laughter. This was enough to recall me to the necessity of controlling myself, and him to the consciousness that he was playing a dangerous game. A shot, a cry, and some one would enter the room, for it opened upon the corridor. Edmond Termonde had heard me with extreme attention, a gleam of hope succeeded by a singular look of suspicion had passed over his face.

'Make your conditions,' said he.

'If I had intended to kill you,' I resumed, so as to convince him of my sincerity by the evidence of his senses, 'you would be dead already.' I raised the revolver. 'If I had intended to have you arrested, I would not have taken the trouble to come here myself; two policemen would have been sufficient, for you don't forget that you are a deserter, and still amenable to the law.'

'True,' he replied simply, and then added, following out a mental argument which was of vital importance to the issue of our interview :—

'If it is not Jacques, then who is it that has sold me?'

'I held you at my disposal,' I continued, without noticing what he had said, 'and I have not availed myself of that. Therefore I had a strong reason for sparing you yesterday, ere yesterday, this morning, a little while ago, at the present moment; and it depends upon yourself, whether I spare you altogether.'

'And you want me to believe you,' he answered, pointing to my revolver which I still continued to hold in my hand, but no longer covering him with it. 'No, no,' and he added—with an expression which smacked of the barrack-room, 'I don't tumble to that sort of thing.'

'Listen to me,' said I, now assuming a tone of extreme contempt. 'The powerful motive which I have for not shooting you like a mad dog, you shall learn. I do not choose that my mother should ever know what a man she

married in your brother. Do you now understand why I resolved to let you go; provided you are of the same mind, however; for even the idea of my mother would not stop me, if you pushed me too far. I will add, for your guidance, that the limitation by which you supposed yourself to be safe from pursuit for the murder in 1864 has been traversed; you are therefore staking your head at this moment. For ten years past you have been successfully levying blackmail on your brother. I do not suppose you have merely played upon the chord of fraternal love. When you came from America to assume the personality of Rochdale, it was clearly necessary that he should send you some instructions. You have kept those letters. I offer you one hundred thousand francs for them.'

'Sir,' he replied slowly, and his tone showed me that for the moment he had recovered his self-control, 'how can you imagine that I should take such a proposal seriously? Admitting that any such letters were ever written, and that I had kept them, why should I give up a document of this kind to you? What security should I have that you would not have me laid by the heels the moment after? Ah!' he cried, looking me straight in the face, 'you know nothing! That name! That likeness! Idiot that I am, you have tricked me.'

His face turned crimson with rage, and he uttered an oath.

'You shall pay for this!' he cried; and at

the same instant, when he was no longer covered by my pistol, he pushed the table upon me so violently, that if I had not sprung backwards I must have been thrown down; but he already had time to fling himself upon me and seize me round the body. Happily for me the violence of the attack had knocked the pistol out of my hands, so that I could not be tempted to use it, and a struggle began between us in which not one word was spoken by either. With his first rush he had flung me to the ground; but I was strong, and the strange premonitions of danger, from which I suffered in my youth, had led me to develop all my physical energy and adroitness. I felt his breath on my face, his skin upon my skin, his muscles striving against mine, and at the same time the dread that our conflict might be overheard gave me the coolness which he had lost. After a few minutes of this tussle, and just as his strength was failing, he fastened his teeth in my shoulder so savagely that the pain of the bite maddened me; I wrenched one of my arms from his grasp and seized him by the throat at the risk of choking him. I held him under me now, and I struck his head against the floor as though I meant to smash it. He remained motionless for a minute, and I thought I had killed him. I first picked up my pistol, which had rolled away to the door, and then bathed his forehead with water in order to revive him.

When I caught sight of myself in the glass, with my coat-collar torn, my face bruised,

my cravat in rags, I shuddered as if I had seen the spectre of another André Cornélis. The ignoble nature of this adventure filled me with disgust; but it was not a question of fine-gentleman fastidiousness. My enemy was coming to himself, I must end this. I knew in my conscience I had done all that was possible to fulfil my vow in regard to my mother. The blame must fall upon destiny. The wretch had half-raised himself, and was looking at me; I bent over him, and put the barrel of my revolver within a hair's breadth of his temple.

'There is still time,' I said. 'I give you five minutes to decide upon the bargain which I proposed to you just now; the letters, and one hundred thousand francs, with your liberty; if not, a bullet in your head. Choose. I wished to spare you on account of my mother; but I will not lose my vengeance both ways. I shall be arrested, your papers will be searched, the letters will be found, it will be known that I had a right to shoot you. My mother will go mad with grief; but I shall be avenged. I have spoken. You have five minutes, not one more.'

No doubt my face expressed invincible resolution. The assassin looked at that face, then at the clock. He tried to make a movement, but saw that my finger was about to press the trigger.

'I yield,' he said.

I ordered him to rise, and he obeyed me.

'Where are the letters?'

'When you have them,' he implored, with

the terror of a trapped beast in his abject face, 'you will let me go away?'

'I swear it,' I answered; and, as I saw doubt and dread in his quailing eyes, I added, 'by the memory of my father. Where are the letters?'

'There.'

He pointed to a valise in a corner of the room.

'Here is the money.'

I flung him the note-case which contained it. Is there a sort of moral magnetism in the tone of certain words and in certain expressions of countenance? Was it the nature of the oath which I had just taken, so deeply impressive at that moment, or had this man sufficient strength of mind to say to himself that his single chance of safety resided in belief in my good faith? However that may be, he did not hesitate for a moment; he opened the iron-bound valise, took out a yellow-leather box with a patent lock, and, having opened it, flung its contents—a large sealed envelope—to me, exactly as I had flung the bank-notes to him. I, too, for my part, had not a moment's fear that he would produce a weapon from the valise and attack me while I was verifying the contents of the envelope. These consisted of three letters only; the two first bore the double stamp of Paris and New York, the third those of New York and Liverpool, and all three bore the January or February postmarks of the year 1864.

'Is that all?' he asked.

'Not yet,' I answered; 'you must undertake to leave Paris this evening by the first train, without having seen your brother or written to him.'

'I promise; and then?'

'When was he to come back here to see you?'

'On Saturday,' he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'The bargain was concluded. He was determined to wait until the day came for me to set out for Havre before paying me the money, so that he might make quite sure I should not stay on in Paris.—The game is up,' he added, 'and now I wash my hands of it.'

'Edmond Termonde,' said I, rising, but not loosing him from the hold of my eye, 'remember that I have spared you; but you must not tempt me a second time by putting yourself in my way, or crossing the path of any whom I love.'

Then, with a threatening gesture, I quitted the room, leaving him seated at the table near the window. I had hardly reached the corridor when my nerves, which had been so strangely under my control during the struggle, failed me. My legs bent under me, and I feared I was about to fall. How was I to account for the disorder of my clothes? I made a great effort, concealed the torn ends of my cravat, turned up the collar of my coat to hide the condition of my shirt, and did my best to repair the damage that had been done to my hat. I then wiped my face with my handkerchief, and went downstairs with

a slow and careless step. The inspector of the first floor was, doubtless, occupied at the other end of the corridor; but two of the waiters saw me and were evidently surprised at my aspect. They were, however, too busy, luckily for me, to stop me and inquire into the cause of my discomposure. At last I reached the courtyard. If anybody who knew me had been there? I got into the first cab and gave my address. I had kept my word. I had conquered.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT was I going to do with those letters of my stepfather's which I had bought so dear, since I had paid for them by the sacrifice of one-half of my vengeance? The letters placed him at my mercy, even as they had held him for long years at the mercy of his brother—what was I going to do with them?

I began to read them in the cab on my way to the Avenue Montaigne. The first, which was of great length, reminded Edmond of his past faults and the hopelessness of his actual condition, and then indicated, without entering into any particulars, a possible means of at least partially repairing all these disasters and once more gaining a fortune. The first condition was that the outlaw should scrupulously obey the orders of his brother. He was to begin by announcing his departure from New York to all his ordinary associates, and then to remove into another quarter of the city under a new name, and wait there

for the next letter. That one, the second, made it evident that an answer from Edmond had been received prior to its despatch, and that he had accepted the offer. By this second letter the wretch was enjoined to go to Liverpool and to await further instructions there. These instructions, contained in the third letter—a mere note—were limited to an appointment at an early date, at ten o'clock in the evening in Paris, on the portion of the footpath of the Rue de Jussieu which faces the Rue Guy-de-la-Brosse. At that hour, those two streets, situated between the old Jardin des Plantes and the buildings of the Entrepôt des Vins, are as solitary as the streets of a country town. There was no more mention in this note than in the two preceding letters of the plan that had been laid by Jacques Termonde, and which was to be discussed by the brothers at their first meeting after so many years; but, even if I had not had the false Rochdale's own avowal, extorted by his surprise and terror, the coincidence of date between this clandestine recall and the assassination of my father constituted an undeniable proof. I read and re-read those accusing pages—as I had read and re-read my father's letters written at the same time—first in the cab, and then in the solitude of my own apartment, and the horrible plot which had made me fatherless was fully revealed to me with all its terrible details.

After a while I arose and resolutely put away the image of Edmond Termonde,

substituting that of his brother. If 'vengeance is a dish to be eaten cold,' I had full leisure to prepare mine at my ease. My stepfather could not fly as his accomplice had done; his marriage with my mother, the successful result of his crime, made him my prisoner. I knew where to find him always, and should always be free to approach him and bring about the scene between us which the execution of my design demanded. What design? What but that which had already haunted me, that which had appeared to offer sufficient compensation, if I did not allow one of my two enemies to escape; the design that had taken the form in my mind of a resolution? I uttered aloud the words, 'I am going to kill him.' Several times I repeated, 'I am going to kill him, I am going to kill him,' with a kind of frenzy, as though I were intoxicated. So I was, by a vision of my mother's infamous husband, stiff, stark, dead; those eyes whose glance I had suffered from so long, sightless; that mouth which had proposed the blood bargain, mute. Never would that body, whose movements I had so detested, move again. A strange wild delight came over me, while the vision born of my hate was before my mind's eye. 'At last, at last,' I again said aloud, 'I am going to kill him!' Immediately after came the inevitable question: how?

I had to prevent at any cost my mother's learning the truth respecting the death of my father. I had not sacrificed my first vengeance, allowing the wretch who actually did the deed to go free, to permit the consequence

of the second to wound the unhappy woman far more cruelly. I had therefore to plan this second act of justice so as to secure beyond all risk my own escape from the law. I should have to employ, in the killing of my stepfather, all the cautious precaution that he had employed in procuring the killing of my own father. Let me speak plainly: I was bound to assassinate him. Yes, to assassinate him; that is the name by which the act of killing a man who does not defend himself is called.

'Well, then,' said I to myself, 'I will assassinate my stepfather, since that is the right word. Was he afraid to assassinate my father? He killed: he shall be killed. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; that is the primitive law, and all the rest is a lie.'

Evening had come while this strife was raging in my soul. I was labouring under excitement which contrasted strangely with the calmness I had felt a few hours previously, when ascending the stairs in the Grand Hotel. The situation also had undergone a change; then I was preparing for a struggle, a kind of duel; I was about to confront a man whom I had to conquer, to attack him face to face without any treachery, and I had not flinched. It was the mean hypocrisy of clandestine murder that had made me shrink from the idea of killing my stepfather, by luring him into a snare. I had controlled this trembling the first time; but I was afraid of its coming again, and that I should have a sleepless night, and be unfit to act

next day with the cool calmness I desired. I felt that I could not bear suspense; on the morrow I must act. The plan on which I should decide, be it what it might, must be executed within the twenty-four hours. The best means of calming my nerves was by making a beginning now, at once; by doing something beforehand to guard against suspicion. I determined upon letting myself be seen by persons who could bear witness, if necessary, that they had seen me, careless, easy, almost gay. I dressed and went out, intending to dine at a place where I was known, and to pass the most of the night at the club. When I was in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, crowded with carriages and people on foot—the May evening was delicious—I shared the physical sensation of the joy of living, which was abroad in the air. The sky quivered with the innumerable throbs of the stars, and the young leaves shook at the touch of a slow and gentle breeze. Garlands of light illumined the various pleasure-gardens. I passed in front of a restaurant where the tables extended to the edge of the footpath, and young men and women were finishing their dinner gaily. The contrast between the spring-festival aspect of Paris and the tragedy of my own destiny came home to me too strongly. What had I done to Fate to deserve that I should be the one only person, amid all this crowd, condemned to such an experience? Why had my path been crossed by a man capable of pushing passion to the point of crime, in a society

in which passion is ordinarily so mild, so harmless, and so lukewarm? Probably there did not exist in all the 'good' society of Paris four persons with daring enough to conceive such a plan as that which Jacques Termonde had executed with such cool deliberation under the influence of his passion. And this villain, who could love so intensely, was my stepfather! Once more the breath of fatality, which had already thrilled me with a kind of mysterious horror, passed over me, and I felt that I could no longer bear the sight of the human face. Turning my back upon the lit-up, noisy quarter of the Champs-Élysées, I walked in towards the Arc de Triomphe. Without thinking about it I took the road to the Bois, bore to the right to avoid the vehicles, and turned into one of the loneliest paths. Had I unconsciously obeyed one of those almost animal impulses of memory, which bring us back to ways that we have already trodden? By the soft, bluish light of the spring moon I recognised the place where I had walked with my stepfather in the winter, on the occasion of our first drive to the Bois. It was on that day I obliged him to look the portrait of his victim in the face, on that day he came to me on the pretext of asking for the Review which my mother had lent me. In my thoughts I beheld him as he then was, and recalled the strange pity which had stirred my head at the sight of him, so sad, broken-down, and, so to speak, conquered. He stood before me, in the light of that remembrance, as living and

real as if he had been there, close beside me, and the acute sensation of his existence made me feel at the same time all the signification of those fearful and mysterious words: to kill. To kill? I was going to kill him, in a few hours it might be, at the latest in a few days. I heard voices, and I withdrew into the shade. Two forms passed me, a young man and a girl, lovers, who did not see me. The moonlight fell upon them, as they went on their way, hand in hand. I burst into tears, and wept long, unrestrainedly; for I too was young; in my heart there was a flood of pent-up tenderness, and here I was, on this perfumed, moonlit, starlit night, crouching in a dark corner, meditating murder!

No, not murder, an execution. Has my stepfather deserved death? Yes. Is the executioner who lets down the knife on the neck of the condemned criminal to be called an assassin? No! Well, then, I shall be the executioner and nothing else. I rose from the bench where I had shed my last tears of resolution and cowardice—for thus I regarded those hot tears to which I now appeal, as a last proof that I was not born for what I have done.

While walking back to Paris, I multiplied and reiterated my arguments. Sometimes I succeeded in silencing a voice within me, stronger than my reasoning and my longing for vengeance, a voice which pronounced the words formerly uttered by my aunt: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord God.' And

if there be no God? And if there be, is not the fault His, for He has let this thing be? Yes, such were my wild words and thoughts; and then all these scruples of my conscience appeared to me mere vain futile quibbles, fitting for philosophers and confessors. There remained one indisputable, absolute fact; I could not endure that the murderer of my father should continue to be the husband of my mother. There was a second no less evident fact; I could not place this man in the hands of justice, without, probably, killing my mother on the spot, or, quite certainly, laying her whole life waste. Therefore I would have to be my own tribunal, judge, and executioner in my own cause. What mattered to me the arguments for or against? I was bound to give heed first to my filial instinct, and it cried out to me 'Kill!'

I walked fast, keeping my mind fixed on this idea with a kind of tragic pleasure, for I felt that my irresolution was gone, and that I should act. All of a sudden, as I came close to the Arc de Triomphe, I remembered how, on that very spot, I had met one of my club companions for the last time. He shot himself the next day. Why did this remembrance suddenly suggest to me a series of new thoughts? I stopped short with a beating heart. I had caught a glimpse of the way of safety. Fool that I had been, led away as usual by an undisciplined imagination! My stepfather should die. I had senteneed him in the name of my inalienable right as an avenging son; but could I not condemn him

to die by his own hand? Had I not that in my possession which would drive him to suicide? If I went to him without any more reserves or circumlocution, and if I said to him, 'I hold the proof that you are the murderer of my father. I give you the choice—either you will kill yourself, or I denounce you to my mother,' what would his answer be? He, who loved his wife with that reciprocated devotion by which I had suffered so much, would he consent that she should know the truth, that she should regard him as a base, cowardly assassin? No, never; he would rather die. My heart, weary and worn with pain, rushed towards this door of hope, so suddenly opened. 'I shall have done my duty,' I thought, 'and I shall have no blood on my hands. My conscience will not be stained.' I experienced an immense relief from the weight of foreseen remorse that had caused me such agony, and I went on drawing a picture of the future, freed at last from one dark image which had veiled the sunshine of my youth. 'He will kill himself; my mother will weep for him; but I shall be able to dry her tears. Her heart will bleed, but I will heal the wound with the balm of my tenderness. When the assassin is no longer there, she and I will live over again all the dear time that he stole from us, and then I shall be able to show her how I love her. The caresses which I did not give her when I was a child, because the other froze me by his mere presence, I will give her then; the words which I did not speak, the tender words that were

stopped upon my lips, she shall hear then. We will leave Paris, and get rid of these sad remembrances. We will retire to some quiet spot, far, far away, where she will have none but me, I none but her, and I will devote myself to her old age. What do I want with any other love, with any other tie? Suffering softens the heart: her grief will make her love me more. Ah! how happy we shall be.' But once more the voice within resumed: 'What if the wretch refuse to kill himself? What if he were not to believe me when I threaten to denounce him?' Had I not been acting for months as his accomplice in maintaining the deceit practised upon my mother? Did he not know how much I loved her, he who had been jealous of me as her son, as I had been jealous of him as her husband? Would he not answer: 'Denounce me!' being well assured that I would not deal such a blow at the poor woman? To these objections I replied, that, whereas I had suspected previously, now I knew. No, he will not be entirely convinced that the evidence I hold will make me dare everything. Well then, if he refuse, I shall have attempted the impossible to avoid murder—let destiny be accomplished!

CHAPTER XVIII

It was four o'clock in the afternoon on the following day, when I presented myself at the

hotel on the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg. I knew that my mother would most probably be out. I also thought it likely my stepfather would be feeling none the better of his early excursion to the Grand Hotel on the previous day, and I therefore hoped to find him at home, perhaps in his bed. I was right; my mother was out, and he had remained at home. He was in his study, the room in which our first explanation had taken place. That upon which I was now bent was of far greater importance, and yet I was less agitated than on the former occasion. At last I was completely certain of the facts, and with that certainty a strange calmness had come to me. I can recall my having talked for a few moments with the servant who announced me, about a child of his who was ill. I also remember to have observed for the first time that the smoky chimney of some manufacturing works at the back of the garden, built, no doubt, during the last winter, was visible through the window of the staircase. I record these things because I am bound to recognise that my mind was quite clear and free—for I will be sincere to the end—when I entered the spacious room. My stepfather was reclining in a deep arm-chair at the far side of the fire-place, and occupied in cutting the pages of a new book with a dagger. The blade of this weapon was broad, short, and strong. He had brought the knife back from Spain, with several other kinds of arms, which lay about in the rooms he habitually occupied. I now understood the order of

ideas which this singular taste indicated. He was dressed for walking; but his altered looks bore witness to the intensity of the crisis through which he had passed. It had affected his whole being. Very likely my face was expressive of an extraordinary resolution, for I saw by his eyes as our looks met, that he had read the depths of my thoughts at a glance. Nevertheless, he said: 'Ah, is it you, André? It is very kind of you to come,' thus exhibiting once more the power of his self-control, and he put out his hand. I did not take it and my refusal, contrasting with his gesture of welcome, the silence which I kept for some minutes, the contraction of my features, and, no doubt, the menace in my eyes, entirely enlightened him as to the mood in which I came to him. Very quietly, he laid down his book and the Spanish knife he had been using, on a large table within his reach, and then he rose from his chair, leaned his back against the mantelpiece, and crossing his arms, looked at me with the haughty stare I knew so well, and which had so often humiliated me in my boyhood. I was the first to break the silence; replying to his polite greeting in a harsh tone, and looking him straight in the face, I said:—

'The time of lies is past. You have guessed that I know all?'

He bent his brows into the stern frown he always assumed when he felt anger he was bound to suppress, his eyes met mine with indomitable pride, and he merely replied:—

'I do not understand you.'

'You do not understand me? Very well, I am about to enlighten you.' My voice shook in uttering these words; my coolness was forsaking me. The blood flew to my head, and my heart beat rapidly, as I went on:—

'Allow me to take up the matter a little further back. In 1864, there was in Paris a man who loved the wife of his most intimate friend. Although that friend was very trusting, very noble, very easily duped, he became aware of this love, and he began to suffer from it. He grew jealous—although he never doubted his wife's purity of heart—jealous as every one is who loves too well. The man who was the object of his jealousy perceived it, understood that he was about to be forbidden the house, knew that the woman whom he loved would never degrade herself by listening to a lover, and this is the plan which he conceived. He had a brother somewhere in a distant land, an infamous scoundrel who was supposed to be dead, a creature sunk in shame, a thief, a forger, a deserter, and he bethought him of this brother as an instrument ready to his hand wherewith to rid himself of the friend who stood in the way of his passion. He sent for the fellow secretly, he appointed to meet him in one of the loneliest corners of Paris—in a street adjoining the Jardin des Plantes, and at night—you see I am well informed. It is easy to imagine how he persuaded the former thief to play the part of bravo. A few months after, the husband was assassinated by this brother, who eluded justice. The felon-friend

married almost immediately the woman whom he loved ; he is now a man in society, wealthy and respected, and his pure and pious wife loves, admires, nay, worships him. Do you now begin to understand ?'

'No more than before,' he answered, with the same impassive face. He did well not to flinch. What I had said might be only an attempt to wrest his secret from him by feigning to know all. Nevertheless, the detail concerning the place where he had appointed to meet his brother had made him start. That was the spot to hit, and quickly.

'The cowardly assassin,' I continued, 'yes, the coward, because he dared not commit the crime himself, had carefully calculated all the circumstances of the murder ; but he had reckoned without certain little accidents, for instance, that his brother would keep the three letters he had received, the first two at New York, the last at Liverpool, and which contained instructions relating to the stages of this clandestine journey. Neither had he taken into account that the son of his victim would grow up, would become a man, would conceive certain suspicions of the true cause of his father's death, and would succeed in procuring overwhelming proof of the dark conspiracy. Come, then,' I added fiercely, 'off with the mask ! M. Jacques Termonde, it is you who had my unhappy father killed by your brother Edmond. I have in my possession the letters you wrote him in January, 1864, to induce him to come to Europe, first under the false name of Rochester and

afterwards under that of Rochdale. It is not worth your while to play the indignant or the astonished with me—the game is up.'

He had turned frightfully pale; but his arms still remained crossed, and his bold eyes did not droop. He made one last attempt to parry the straight blow I had aimed at him, and he had the hardihood to say:—

'How much did that wretch Edmond ask as the price of the forgery which he fabricated in revenge for my refusal to give him money?'

'Be silent, you——' said I still more fiercely. 'Is it to me that you dare to speak thus—to me? Did I need those letters in order to learn all? Have we not known for weeks past, I, that you had committed the crime, and you, that I had divined your guilt? What I still needed was the written, indisputable, undeniable proof, that which can be laid before a magistrate. You refused him money? You were about to give him money, only that you mistrusted him, and chose to wait until the day of his departure. You did not suspect that I was upon your track. Shall I tell you when it was you saw him for the last time? Yesterday, at ten o'clock in the morning, you went out, you changed your cab first at the Place de la Concorde, and a second time at the Palais Royal. You went to the Grand Hotel, and you asked whether Mr. Stanbury was in his room. A few hours later, I, I myself, was in that same room. Ah! how much did Edmond Termonde ask from me for the letters? Why, I tore them

from him, pistol in hand, after a struggle in which I was nearly killed. You see now that you can deceive me no more, and that it is no longer worth your while to deny.'

I thought he was about to drop dead before me. His face changed, until it was hardly human, as I went on, on, on, piling up the exact facts, tracking his falsehood, as one tracks a wild beast, and proving to him that his brother had defended himself after his fashion, even as he had done. He clasped his hands about his head, when I ceased to speak, as though to compress the maddening thoughts which rushed upon him; then, once more looking me in the face, but this time with infinite despair in his eyes, he uttered exactly the same sentence as his brother had spoken, but with quite another expression and tone:—

'This hour too was bound to come. What do you want from me now?'

'That you should do justice on yourself,' I answered. 'You have twenty-four hours before you. If, to-morrow at this hour, you are still living, I place the letters in my mother's hands.'

Every sort of feeling was depicted upon his livid face while I placed this ultimatum before him, in a firm voice which admitted of no further discussion. I was standing up, and I leaned against the large table; he came towards me, with a sort of delirium in his eyes as they strove to meet mine.

'No,' he cried, 'no, André, not yet! Pity me, André, pity me! See now, I am a con-

demned man, I have not six months to live. Your revenge! Ah! you had no need to undertake it. What! If I have done a terrible deed, do you think I have not been punished for it? Look at me, only look at me; I am dying of this frightful secret. It is all over; my days are numbered. The few that remain, leave, oh leave them to me! Understand this, I am not afraid to die; but to kill myself, to go away, leaving this grief to her whom you love as I do! It is true that, to win her, I have done an atrocious deed; but say, answer, has there ever been an hour, a minute since, in which her happiness was not my only aim? And you would have me leave her thus, inflict upon her the torment of thinking that while I might have grown old by her side, I preferred to go away, to forsake her before the time? No, André, this last year, leave it to me! Ah, leave it to me, leave it to us, for I assure you that I am hopelessly ill, that I know it, that the doctors have not hidden it from me. In a few months —fix a date—if the disease has not carried me off, you can come back. But I shall be dead. She will weep for me, without the horror of that idea that I have forestalled my hour, she who is so pious! You only will be there to console her, to love her. Have pity upon her, if not upon me. See, I have no more pride towards you, I entreat you in her name, in the name of her dear heart, for well you know its tenderness. You love her, I know that; I have guessed truly that you hid your suspicions to spare her pain.

I tell you once again, my life is a hell, and I would joyfully give it to you in expiation of what I have done; but she, Andre, she, your mother, who has never, never cherished a thought that was not pure and noble, no, do not inflict this torture upon her.'

'Words, words,' I answered, moved to the bottom of my soul in spite of myself, by the outburst of an anguish in which I was forced to recognise sincerity. 'It is because my mother is noble and pure that I will not have her remain the wife of a vile murderer for a day longer. You shall kill yourself, or she shall know all.'

'Do it then if you dare,' he replied, with a return to the natural pride of his character, at the ferocity of my answer. 'Do it if you dare! Yes, she is my wife, yes, she loves me; go and tell her, and kill her yourself with the words. Ha, you see! You turn pale at the mere thought. I have allowed you to live, yes, I, on account of her, and do you suppose I do not hate you as much as you hate me? Nevertheless, I have respected you because you were dear to her, and you will have to do the same with me. Yes, do you hear, it must be so——'

It was he who was giving orders now, he who was threatening. How plainly had he read my mind, to stand up before me in such an attitude. Furious passion broke loose in me; I took in the facts of the situation. This man had loved my mother madly enough to purchase her at the cost of the murder of his most intimate friend, and he loved her

after all those years passionately enough to desire that not one of the days he had still to pass with her might be lost to him. And it was also true that never, never should I have the courage to reveal the terrific truth to the poor woman. I was suddenly carried away by rage to the point of losing all control over my frenzy. 'Ah!' I cried, 'since you will not do justice on yourself, die then, at once!' I stretched out my hand and seized the dagger which he had recently placed upon the table. He looked at me without flinching, or recoiling, indeed presenting his breast to me, as though to brave my childish rage. I was on his left, bending down, and ready to spring. I saw his smile of contempt, and then with all my strength I struck him with the knife in the direction of the heart. The blade entered his body to the hilt. No sooner had I done this thing than I recoiled, wild with terror at the deed. He uttered a cry. His face was distorted with terrible agony, and he moved his right hand towards the wound, as though he would draw out the dagger. He looked at me, convulsed with unbearable agony; I saw that he wanted to speak; his lips moved, but no sound issued from his mouth. The expression of a supreme effort passed into his eyes, he turned to the table, took a pen, dipped it into the inkstand, and traced two lines on a sheet of paper within his reach. He looked at me again, his lips moved once more, then he fell down like a log. I remember—I saw the body stretched upon the carpet, between the table and the

tall mantelpiece, within two feet of me. I approached him, I bent over his face. His eyes seemed to follow me even after death. Yes, he was dead. The doctor who certified the death explained afterwards that the knife had passed through the cardiac muscle without completely penetrating the left cavity of the heart, and that, the blood not being shed all at once, death had not been instantaneous. I cannot tell how long he lived after I struck him, nor do I know how long I remained in that same place, overwhelmed by the thought: 'Some one will come, and I am lost.' It was not for myself that I trembled. What could be done to a son who had but avenged his murdered father? But, my mother? This was what all my resolutions to spare her at any cost, my daily solicitude for her welfare, my unseen tears, my tender silence, had come to in the end. I must now, inevitably, either explain myself, or leave her to think that I was a mere murderer. I was lost. But if I called, if I cried out suddenly that my stepfather had just killed himself in my presence, should I be believed? And, besides, had he not written what would convict me of murder, on that sheet of paper lying on the table? Was I going to destroy it, as a practised criminal destroys every vestige of his presence before he leaves the scene of his crime? I seized the sheet of paper; the lines were written upon it in characters rather larger than usual. How it shook in my hand while I read these words: 'Forgive me, Marie. I was suffering

too much. I wanted to be done with it.' And he had had the strength to affix his signature! So then, his last thought had been for her. In the brief moments that had elapsed between my blow with the knife, and his death, he had perceived the dreadful truth, that I should be arrested, that I would speak to explain my deed, that my mother would then learn his crime—and he had saved me by compelling me to silence. But was I going to profit by this means of safety? Was I going to accept the terrible generosity by which the man, whom I had so profoundly detested, would stand acquitted towards me for evermore? I must render so much justice to my honour; my first impulse was to destroy that paper, to annihilate with it even the memory of the debt imposed upon my hatred by the atrocious but sublime action of the murder of my father. At that moment I caught sight of a portrait of my mother, on the table, close to where he had been sitting. It was a photograph, taken in her youth; she was represented in brilliant evening attire, her bare arms shaded with lace, pearls in her hair, gay, ay, better than gay, happy, with an ineffably pure expression overspreading her face. My stepfather had sacrificed all to save her from despair on learning the truth, and was she to receive the fatal blow from me, to learn at the same moment that the man she loved had killed her first husband, and that he had been killed by her son? I desire to believe, so that I may continue to hold myself in some esteem, that only the vision of

her grief led me to my decision. I replaced the sheet of paper on the table, and turned away from the corpse lying on the carpet, without casting a glance at it. The remembrance of my flight from the Grand Hotel, on the previous day, gave me courage; I must try a second time to get away without betraying discomposure. I found my hat, left the room and closed the door carelessly. I crossed the hall and went down the staircase, passing by the footman who stood up mechanically, and then the concierge who saluted me. The two servants had not even put me out of countenance. I returned to my room as I had done the day before, but in a far more tragic state of suspense! Was I saved? Was I lost? All depended on the moment at which somebody might go into my stepfather's room. If my mother were to return within a few minutes of my departure; if the footman were to go upstairs with some letter, I should instantly be suspected, in spite of the declaration written by M. Termonde. I felt that my courage was exhausted. I knew that, if accused, I should not have moral strength to defend myself, for my weariness was so overwhelming that I did not suffer any longer. The only thing I had strength to do was to watch the swing of the pendulum of the timepiece on the mantelshelf, and to mark the movement of the hands. A quarter of an hour elapsed, half an hour, a whole hour. It was an hour and a half after I had left the fatal room, when the bell at the door was rung. I heard it

through the walls. A servant brought me a laconic note from my mother scribbled in pencil and hardly legible. It informed me that my stepfather had destroyed himself in an attack of severe pain. The poor woman implored me to go to her immediately. Ah, she would now never know the truth!

CHAPTER XIX

THE confession that I wished to write is written. To what end could I add fresh facts to it now? I hoped to ease my heart by passing in review all the details of this dark story, but I have only revived the dread memory of the scenes in which I have been an actor; from the first—when I saw my father stretched dead upon his bed, and my mother weeping by his side, to the last—when I noiselessly entered a room in which the unhappy woman was again kneeling and weeping. Again upon the bed there lay a corpse, and she rose as she had done before, and uttered the same despairing cry: 'My André—my son.' And I had to answer her questions; I had to invent for her a false conversation with my stepfather, to tell her that I left him rather depressed, but with nothing in his appearance or manner to indicate a fatal resolution. I had to take the necessary steps to prevent this alleged suicide from getting known, to see the commissary of police and the 'doctor of the dead.'

I had to preside at the funeral ceremonies, to receive the guests and act as chief mourner. And always, always, he was present to me, with the dagger in his breast, writing the lines that had saved me, and looking at me, while his lips moved. Ah, begone, begone, abhorred phantom! Yes! I have done it; yes! I have killed you; yes! it was just. You know well that it was just. Why are you still here now? Ah! I *will* live; I *will* forget. If I could only cease to think of you for one day, only one day, just to breathe, and walk, and see the sky, without your image returning to haunt my poor head which is racked by this hallucination, and troubled? My God! have pity on me. I did not ask for this dreadful fate; it is Thou that hast sent it to me. Why dost Thou punish me? Oh, my God, have pity on me! *Miserere mei, Domine.*

Vain prayers! Is there any God, any justice, is there either good or evil? None, none, none, none. There is nothing but a pitiless destiny which broods over the human race, iniquitous and blind, distributing joy and grief at haphazard. A God who says, 'Thou shalt not kill,' to him whose father has been killed? No, I don't believe it. No, if hell were there before me, gaping open, I would make answer: 'I have done well,' and I would not repent. I do not repent. My remorse is not for having seized the weapon and struck the blow, it is that I owe to him—to him—that infamous good service which he did me—that I cannot to the present hour

shake from me the horrible gift I have received from that man. If I had destroyed the paper, if I had gone and given myself up, if I had appeared before a jury, revealing, proclaiming my deed, I should not be ashamed; I could still hold up my head. What relief, what joy it would be if I might cry aloud to all men that I killed him, that he lied, and I lied, that it was I, I, who took the weapon and plunged it into him! And yet, I ought not to suffer from having accepted—no—endured the odious immunity. Was it from any motive of cowardice that I acted thus? What was I afraid of? Of torturing my mother, nothing more. Why, then, do I suffer this unendurable anguish? Ah, it is she, it is my mother who, without intending it, makes the dead so living to me, by her own despair. She lives, shut up in the rooms where they lived together for sixteen years; she has not allowed a single article of furniture to be touched; she surrounds the man's accursed memory with the same pious reverence that my aunt formerly lavished on my unhappy father. I recognise the invincible influence of the dead in the pallor of her cheeks, the wrinkles in her eyelids, the white streaks in her hair. He disputes her with me from the darkness of his coffin, he takes her from me, hour by hour, and I am powerless against that love. If I were to tell her, as I would like to tell her, all the truth, from the hideous crime which he committed, down to the execution carried out by me, it is I whom she would hate, for having killed him. She will grow

old, thus, and I shall see her weep, always, always—— What good is it to have done what I did, since I have not killed him in her heart?

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