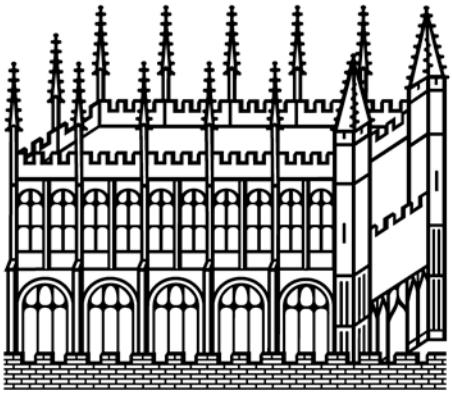

The Works of
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

NOTRE CŒUR

Newly Translated

NOTRE CŒUR

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(*In Preparation*)

The works of Guy de Maupassant

NOTRE CŒUR

NEWLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

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MAUPASSANT, Henri René Albert Guy de.—Born at the Château de Miromesnil, Seine-Inférieure, August 5th, 1850; died at Passy, Paris, July 6th, 1893. A French novelist. He went to school at Yvetot, and graduated from the college of Rouen, while Gustave Flaubert, his godfather, looked after his literary training. He spent about ten years in the Civil Service in the Navy Department. In February, 1879, his one-act play "Histoire du vieux temps" was performed in Paris, without, however, attracting any special attention. The next year, however, the success of his short story "Boule de Suif" stamped him at once as a writer of marked ability. Then he published in rapid succession "La Maison Tellier" (1881), "Mademoiselle Fifi" (1882), "Contes de la Bécasse" (1883), "Une Vie" (1883), "Miss Harriet" (1884), "Les Sœurs Rondoli" (1884), "Au Soleil" (1884), "Clair de Lune" (1884), "Yvette" (1884), "Bel-Ami" (1885), "Contes du jour et de la nuit" (1885), "Contes et nouvelles" (1885), "M. Parent" (1886), "La petite Roque" (1886), "Toine" (1886), "Contes Choisis" (1887), "Mont-Oriol" (1887), "Le Horla" (1887), "Pierre et Jean" (1888), "Sur l'eau" (1888), "Le rosier de Madame Husson" (1888), "Fort comme la mort" (1889), "La Main Gauche" (1889), "Histoire d'une fille de ferme" (1890), "La Vie errante" (1890), "L'Inutile Beauté" (1890), "Notre Cœur" (1890). Among his other works are "Trois contes," "En mer," "L'homme de lettres" (1892), and two plays, "Musotte" (1891) and "La paix du ménage" (*Comédie Française,* March 6th, 1893). The insanity and death of a brother unbalanced him, and he attempted suicide during a fit of depression in December 1891, general paresis set in, and he had to be confined in a private asylum.—From the "Century Cyclopædia of Names."

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PART I

II

MASSIVAL, the musician, the famous composer of "Rebecca," who for the last fifteen years had been recognised as the coming Master, one day asked his friend, André Mariolle:

"Why have you never arranged for an introduction to Madame Michèle de Burne? Take it from me, she's one of the most interesting women in modern Paris."

"Because I shouldn't feel at home in her world."

"Dear man, you're wrong. Her gatherings are unique, modern, vital. You'll find she has genuine taste and responds to every new movement. There's excellent music and conversation as good as any in the most famous salons of last century. You'll be much appreciated there, first because you play the fiddle perfectly, then because you have been discussed there already, and finally because it's generally said that you are worth meeting and yet scarcely go out at all."

Mariolle, flattered but still making some show of resistance, convinced that so pressing an invitation had not come without young Madame de Burne's approval, said: "Heavens! That sort of thing doesn't appeal to me!" But the scorn in his voice was belied by his expression, which indicated that he was already half-inclined to consent.

Massival began again:

"Shall I introduce you some day? Really you must know her pretty well already through the rest of us, who all know her. We discuss her often enough! She's an extremely pretty woman of twenty-eight, full of intelligence, who has no idea of marrying again as her first experience of marriage was so unhappy. She has turned her flat into a meeting place for pleasant people. You won't find too many of any one clique or set. Just enough to be effective. She'll be delighted if I bring you with me."

Mariolle gave way, saying:

"Very well, some day soon."

At the beginning of the following week the musician came into his rooms and asked him:

"Are you free to-morrow evening?"

"Why, yes; I'm doing nothing."

"Good. Then I'll take you to dine with Madame de Burne."

He added, smiling:

"Here's a note for you from her."

After a momentary reflective pause, purely for form's sake, Mariolle replied:

"That's settled, then."

André Mariolle at thirty-seven, a bachelor, with no profession, was rich enough to live as he pleased, to travel, and even to make a very fair collection of modern painting and ancient curios. Though a little fantastic and overbearing in his attitude, he was generally accepted as a wit, a trifle too capricious, a thought too disdainful, but a man who deliberately posed as a recluse, rather from pride than from shyness. Admirably gifted and with very fine taste, he was indolent, and, whilst capable

of universal sympathies and perhaps of great accomplishments, he was content to play the part of a spectator, or, rather, of an amateur. Had he been poor he would beyond a doubt have become a notable, possibly even a celebrated, figure: born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he was always regretting that he had never learned to make himself something of real signficance. He had, it is true, made various essays in the arts, but they lacked conviction. One had been in literature, when he had brought out a pleasant book of travels, lively and well written: another in violin playing, in which he had attained, even in the estimation of professional violinists, to a more than respectable amateur status: and finally an essay in sculpture, that art in which an original aptitude, a knack of hacking out bold, if specious, figures, takes the place in ignorant eyes, of knowledge and study. His clay statuette, The Tunisian Masseur, had even achieved a certain success in the Salon of the previous year.

A remarkably good horseman, he was also, so it was said, an excellent fencer, although he never fenced in public, for he could not, apparently, overcome a diffidence which made him shun social occasions on which serious rivalries were likely to be generated.

But his friends appreciated him and without exception praised him, perhaps partly because he never threatened to overshadow them. They said of him that he was trustworthy, loyal, friendly in all his relations, and personally congenial.

Of more than normal height, wearing his black beard short on his cheeks and trimmed to a careful point on his chin, his hair turning a little grey but still attractively

crisp, he looked the world frankly in the face with his brown eyes, clear, bright, mocking and a little hard.

Of his intimate acquaintance most were artists, Gaston de Lamarthe the novelist, Massival the musician, the painters Jobin, Rivollet, de Mandol, who appeared to value highly his intelligence, his friendship, his wit and even his judgment, although at heart, with the vanity inseparable from achieved success, they regarded him as a very amiable, a very intelligent, failure.

His lofty reserve seemed to say: "I am nothing because I have not wished to be anything." So he lived in a narrow circle, disdainful of the graceful life of the fashionable world and the publicity of the great houses, where others would have outshone him. He refused to be cast as one of the crowd on that worldly stage. He would visit only those houses where he was certain of appreciation of those solid qualities which he was at pains to conceal: and, if he had consented so readily to be taken to call upon Madame Michèle de Burne, it was because his best friends, those who invariably proclaimed his hidden merits, all enjoyed her acquaintance.

She lived in a pleasant flat, on the first floor, in the Rue Général-Foy, behind Saint-Augustin's. Two rooms overlooked the street, the dining-room and a drawing-room in which she received her visitors: two others faced the garden which the owner of the house kept for his own use. The first of these was another drawing-room, of great size, with three windows opening upon trees whose leaves brushed the awnings. It was furnished with pieces chosen for their rarity and simplicity of design, of pure and sober style and of very great value. The chairs, the tables, the dainty bureaux and sets of

shelves, the pictures, the fans and porcelain figurines in their glass prisons, the china and the statuettes, the huge design framed in a panel, every piece of decoration in her room drew or held the eye by some quality of form, of period, or of intrinsic beauty. To fashion that interior, of which she was almost as proud as of herself, she had laid under contribution the knowledge, the affection, the goodwill, and the instinct for discovering treasures, of all the artists whom she knew. They had found for her, their wealthy and liberal friend, all such things as were alive with originality and character, hidden from the perception of the ordinary amateur : and her achievement, the sum of their labours, was already famous, though charily displayed. Here, she believed, her friends could find more satisfaction, hither they would return more eagerly, than to the commonplace drawing-rooms of the ordinary women of the world.

It was even one of her favourite theories to assert that the tones of tapestry, of materials, the welcome of chairs and sofas, the harmony of form, the gracious effect of groupings, caressed, captivated, and set at ease even more surely than a smile. Rooms sympathetic or antipathetic, rich or poor, draw one, she would say, hold, or repulse, just as much as do those who inhabit them. They stir or numb the heart, they warm or chill the wits, evoke conversation or crush it, please or sadden, suggest to each who enters them an irrational desire to remain or to depart.

Almost in the centre of this quiet room, between two tall stages of flowers, stood a grand piano, the dominating feature. At the far end tall double doors led to a bedroom, which in turn opened into a large and beautifully

appointed dressing-room, hung with Persian fabrics, a summery room, in which, when she was alone, Madame de Burne spent her time.

Married to a blackguard whose polished exterior masked his rottenness, one of those domestic tyrants before whom everything must bend or break, she had at first been most unhappy. For five years she had had to put up with the demands, the harshness, the jealousy, even the violence, of this intolerable master, and terrified, bewildered by the unexpected, she had cowered unresisting before this revelation of married life, crushed beneath the despotic and avid lust of a male brutality of which she was the victim.

On his way home one night he died, through the rupture of an aneurism, and when she saw her husband's body carried in, wrapped in a sheet, she stared at it unable to believe in the reality of her deliverance, stirred by a deep, suppressed, thankfulness, and by a horrible fear that he could even now recognise it.

Her character was, in its essence, independent, full of gaiety, exuberance, adaptability and fascination, with flashes of that emancipated wit that is sown, who knows how, in the minds of many of the girl children of Paris, who seem to have breathed naturally from their babyhood the heady air of the boulevards into which blow, each evening, gusts of comedies, good or bad, through the wide-flung doors of the theatres. Yet she had retained from her five years' slavery a timidity that went oddly with her natural daring, a great fear of saying or doing too much, side by side with her ardent desire for freedom, her firm resolution never again to compromise her personal liberty.

In training her to be a hostess, her husband, very much a man of the world, had made of her a silent slave, elegant, polished, ready at every point. Amongst her tyrant's acquaintance were many artists whom she had entertained with concealed curiosity, listened to with enjoyment, never daring however to let them see how well she understood and appreciated them.

Her mourning finished, she invited several of them to dinner one night. Two excused themselves, three accepted the invitation and found to their astonishment a young woman of candid spirit and alluring charm who put them at their ease and told them gracefully of the pleasure they had given her when they had visited the house in other days.

Thus she made her choice, following her own tastes, among acquaintances who before had either ignored or misunderstood her, and prepared to entertain, as a widow, enfranchised, yet careful of her reputation, as many of the most sought after men as she could bring together. A few women were included.

Those first admitted became her intimates, formed a nucleus, drawing others after them, and gave to her circle the attraction of a little court to which each regular member brought something of value, were it only a name, for a few carefully chosen titles had been mixed with the commonalty of intelligence.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who lived in the flat below hers, served her for chaperon and preserved the conventions. An old dandy, with an air and a wit, he was delighted with her and treated her rather as a great lady than as a daughter. He sat at the head of her table at her Thursday dinner-parties, which soon became known

and discussed in Paris, and greatly sought after. Requests for presentation and for invitations poured in, and were canvassed, and not seldom were rejected after a sort of vote taken of the inner circle. Witty phrases escaped from that same circle and flew round Paris. There actors, artists, and young poets came to light, and received as it were their baptism into fame. Inspired young pianists brought by Lamarthe challenged Hungarian violinists introduced by Massival: and exotic dancers practised quivering poses there before they made their bow to the public at the Eden or the Folies-Bergère.

Madame de Burne, apart from the jealous guard kept over her by her friends, had distasteful recollections of her experience of the world under marital authority. She had the wisdom to keep her army of acquaintances from getting unwieldy. Snatching a fearful joy from the world's comments, she yielded to her somewhat Bohemian tastes, but with all the hedged prudence of the bourgeoisie. She set store by her good name, shrank from risks, preserved decorum in all her whims, moderation in her daring, and took pains to avoid exciting any suspicion of a flirtation or an intrigue of any kind.

Many had hoped to make her their mistress: none, so it was said, had succeeded. Men confessed it, acknowledged it among themselves with surprise, since men will never admit, maybe with reason, that the independent woman can be virtuous. A legend grew round her. They said that her husband had brought to their earliest marital relations so revolting a brutality, such astounding demands, that she was cured forever of any desire for the love of men. Her intimates indeed often discussed her case. And without fail they would arrive at the con-

clusion that a young girl, brought up to dream of a future all tenderness, in expectation of a disturbing mystery, an impropriety involving no degradation, would be utterly overwhelmed when the revelation of the marriage demands was made by a brute.

That worldly philosopher, Georges de Maltry, chuckled softly and said: "Her hour will come. It always does come for such women. The longer she delays, the more recklessly will she rush to it in the end. Given our dear lady's artistic tastes she will probably fall in love, at the last, with a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe thought otherwise.

As a novelist, observer and psychologist, vowed to the study of men and women of the world, of whom, too, he drew ironical and recognisable likenesses, he posed as capable of understanding and analysing women with infallible, unique penetration. He classed Madame de Burne among those abnormal contemporaries of whom he had drawn the type in his interesting novel, "One of Those." He had been the first to pin down on paper that new order of women, fretted by nerves, hysterical yet open to reason, hag-ridden by a thousand contradictory yearnings which scarcely ever defined themselves as actual desires, disillusioned of everything, without experience, through the fault of circumstance, women of their era, of their little day, of the atmosphere created by the modern novel, lacking ardour, never carried away by their emotions, combining the capriciousness of spoiled children with the dried-up sterility of aged sceptics.

He too had failed, like the rest, in his attempts on her virtue.

For each of the faithful of that inner group had taken his turn as would-be lover of Madame de Burne, and, the crisis over, was left more or less tenderly inclined, less or more subject, as his nature made him. Little by little they became a circle of worshippers, formed their private cult. She was their Madonna, of whom between themselves they never wearied of speaking, held as they all were by her charm, even at a distance from her. They chanted her praises, they boasted of her, they criticised her, they belittled her, according to their daily moods, their private troubles, the slights or preferences that she had happened to show them. They were eternally jealous of each other, even spied upon each other: above all they kept their ranks closed close about her to shield her from the approach of any dangerous rival. Seven there were of these inner guards: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, fat Fresnel, that young philosopher and man of the world, M. Georges de Maltry, famous for his paradoxical witticisms, his subtle and eloquent erudition, beyond the comprehension of even his most passionate adorers, and celebrated too for his mode of dressing, which was as carefully planned as were his impromptus. She had added to these chosen spirits a few simple worldlings who were credited with some social quality, the Count de Marantin, Baron de Grevil, and two or three others.

The two of this company of the élite who seemed most to enjoy her favour were Massival and Lamarthe, for they had, it would appear, the knack of amusing the lady, who appreciated their easy Bohemianism, their jesting, their way of poking fun at everyone and everything and even at her when she happened to be in the mood to

tolerate it. But the care, whether natural or acquired, which she took to avoid showing any one of her admirers any lasting or marked predilection, her mocking and detached flirtations, and the real equality in the distribution of her favours, kept alive among them a comradeship spiced with hostility and a liveliness which made them always amusing.

From time to time one of them, to steal a march on the others, would introduce a friend. But, as that friend was seldom either a very eminent or a very interesting person, the rest, up in arms against him, never had to waste much time in driving him out.

It was in such fashion that Massival brought his friend André Mariolle to her.

A servant in a black jacket announced their names:

"Monsieur Massival!"

"Monsieur Mariolle!"

Under a huge ruffled cloud of rose silk, a fantastically large lampshade, which focussed on a square table of ancient marble the brilliant light of a standard lamp supported by a tall column of gilded bronze, a woman and three men were bending over an album held by Lamarthe. Standing beside them the novelist offered his comments as he turned the pages.

One of the heads turned, and Mariolle as he came forward saw the clear fair skin that is associated with red hair, and wayward curls round her temples that seemed to burn like brushwood flames. Her dainty nose, tip-tilted, gave her a merry look: her mouth, whose lips were firmly defined, the deep dimples in her cheeks, her rather prominent cleft chin, lent her a mocking air, whilst her eyes, in bizarre contrast, suggested melan-

choly. They were blue, a faded blue, as if they had been washed dim, and the black pupils gleamed in them, round and dilated. Their brilliant and unusual gaze seemed to indicate morphia dreams, or possibly just the coquette's trick of belladonna.

Madame de Burne, rising, gave him her hand and made him welcome.

"Long ago I told our friends to bring you to see me," she told Mariolle, "but I always am made to repeat my orders before I can get them attended to."

She was collected, elegant, a little deliberate in her movements, quietly dressed, showing but little of her lovely fair shoulders that the kindly light made incomparably beautiful. Her hair, however, was not really red but of those indescribable colours which you may see in dead leaves that autumn has turned.

Then she introduced M. Mariolle to her father, who bowed gravely and shook his hand.

The men in the room had made three groups, talking easily, and seemed very much at home in what appeared to be a familiar little gathering to which their hostess's presence added the charm of courtly manners.

Fresnel the fat gossiped with Count de Marantin. Fresnel's constant attendance at the flat and the preference which Madame de Burne showed him often shocked and vexed his friends. Though he was still young he was as round as a bladder, and wheezed and blew. He was almost beardless, and his head was haloed in a misty cloud of fair fine hair. Common of soul and a bore, he obviously had but one merit in that lady's eyes, the merit, most vexatious to the others but all-important to her, of loving her blindly. more and better than any of the

others. He was nicknamed " the seal." Though he was married he had never suggested presenting his wife, who, so rumour had it, was excessively jealous somewhere away in the background. Lamarthe and Massival particularly resented their friend's unconcealed affection for this bladder of a man, but whenever they found themselves unable to refrain from pointing out to her her execrable taste, her positively vulgar egotism, she answered them, smiling:

" But I like him, just as one likes a fat, faithful poodle."

Georges de Maltry was deep in a discussion with Gaston de Lamarthe of the latest discovery, as yet unverified, of the bacteriologists.

M. de Maltry developed his theme with a hundred suggestive and subtle embroideries, and Lamarthe the novelist fastened upon it enthusiastically. He turned and tossed the new idea with all that eagerness with which the professional man of letters unhesitatingly, uncritically, pounces upon anything which strikes him as fresh or original.

The society philosopher, who was of a colourless flaxen fairness, was tall and thin, and his coat fitted him extremely tightly round his waist and hips. His refined pale face rose out of his high white collar, and was topped by fair hair flattened, glued almost, to his skull.

As for Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe, whose " de " had dowered him with certain pretentions to breeding and good manners, he was above all things a man of letters, a pitiless and formidable man of letters. Endowed with an eye that recorded images, attitudes, actions, with

the speed and precision of photography, and gifted with insight, the born novelist's extra sense, like a hound's scent, he stored up from morning till night his professional notes. With these two fundamental senses, a clear vision of outward forms and an instinctive understanding of the processes beneath them, he filled his books, which were innocent of the usual methods of the psychological novelists but conveyed rather the atmosphere of actual moments of human life which he had carved out of reality, with all the colour, tone, appearance and movement of life itself.

The production of each of his novels provoked in society disturbances, conjectures, amusement, anger, for everyone believed that he or she recognised individuals barely disguised by masks which the writer scarcely troubled to adjust: and his traversing a drawing-room started uneasy whispers. He had published also a volume of intimate memoirs where many men and women of his acquaintance figured. They were not perhaps actually maliciously drawn, but their portraits were so exact and so unsparing as to excoriate the originals. Someone labelled him, " Friends, Beware! "

His was an enigmatic personality, and his heart was beyond reach. It was said that he had once been passionately in love with a woman who had deliberately hurt him and that he had set himself thereafter to revenge himself on all others.

Massival and he understood each other extremely well, although the musician's temperament was very unlike his. Massival was more frank, more expansive, less unhappy perhaps, but more obviously sensitive. After two great successes, the one a work first played at Brussels and

later produced in Paris, where it was enthusiastically applauded at the Opéra-Comique, the second accepted and produced, immediately it was offered, at the Opera and himself acclaimed as a genius, he had succumbed to that arrest of development which seems to strike down the majority of contemporary artists like some premature paralysis. They do not grow old in fame and success, as did their fathers, but seem to be victims of impotence in the very flower of their youth. Lamarthe was wont to say:

"Nowadays in France we have nothing but great men miscarried."

Massival at this time appeared to be much preoccupied with Madame de Burne, and the circle gossiped more or less about it: and all eyes turned on him when he kissed her hand with an air of adoration.

He asked:

"Are we late?"

She answered:

"No, I am still expecting Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"Ah, the Marquise! Delightful! Then we shall have music to-night?"

"I hope so."

The two who were late came in at that moment.

The Marquise was perhaps just a little too short, for she was a plump creature. She was of Italian birth, lively, with black eyes, eyelashes, eyebrows, black hair too, so thick and unmanageable that it invaded her forehead and threatened her eyes. She was supposed to possess quite the most remarkable voice of any woman in society.

The Baron, who was very well bred, was hollow-

chested, and had an unusually large head. He never seemed complete without his 'cello in his hands. His love of music amounted to monomania and he only visited those houses in which music was held in honour.

Dinner was announced and Madame de Burne, taking André Mariolle's arm, allowed the rest of her guests to precede her. Then, in the instant in which they were left together in the room, as they moved forward, she cast one quick oblique glance at him from her pale eyes with their black centres, and he was aware, so he believed, of a deeper, more complex regard, a more questioning interest than pretty women are wont to bestow upon a casual newcomer to their tables.

Dinner was a subdued and almost gloomy affair. Lamarthe was ill at ease, and if not actually openly hostile, for he clung to an appearance of decent manners, was armed with that almost imperceptible ill-humour which blights the beginnings of conversation. Massival, concentrated, preoccupied, ate little but watched, from under his eyelids, the mistress of the house, who seemed to be anywhere rather than in her own home. She was inattentive, she made smiles serve for answers, then she would stiffen suddenly, apparently dreaming of something which, while it did not wholly absorb her, still was of more interest to her that evening than were her friends. She took pains to be pleasant, very considerable pains, so far as the Marquise and Mariolle were concerned: but they were dictated by her social sense and training, and her thoughts were obviously absent. Fresnel and M. de Maltry were quarrelling over modern poetry. Fresnel held, in regard to poetry, the current opinions of the man of the world, and

M. de Maltry had those delicate appreciations, to which the herd cannot attain, that come of patient endeavour to master the intricacies of verse making.

Several times during the dinner Mariolle had surprised again his hostess's penetrating glance, though it became more vague, less intent, less curious. The Marquise de Bratiane, Count de Marantin and Baron de Gravil alone maintained an uninterrupted conversation and covered innumerable subjects in their talk.

Then, later in the evening, Massival, who had grown yet more melancholy, sat down to the piano and struck a few isolated chords. Madame de Burne at once grew animated and arranged a little concert of the pieces which pleased her most.

The Marquise was in excellent voice and, inspired by the presence of Massival, sang like a genuine artiste. The master accompanied her with the melancholy expression which grew upon him as he sat down to play. His hair, which he wore long, curled on the collar of his coat and ran into his curly beard which, untrimmed, was glossy and fine. Many women had loved him, pursued him still, so it was said.

Madame de Burne, sitting close to the piano, listened with her whole being, and seemed to see nothing but him. Mariolle grew a little restive. He was not exactly jealous, but watching the intent gaze she bestowed on the famous man he felt his male vanity humiliated by the distinctions drawn by women between men according to the degree of fame to which they have attained. Often enough before he had smarted at such contact with well-known men when he had encountered them in the presence of women whose favour

was accounted in large measure as the supreme reward of success.

At about ten o'clock the Baroness de Frémines and two Jews from the financial world arrived on each other's heels. There was talk of a marriage just arranged, of an expected divorce.

Mariolle watched Madame de Burne, who sat beside a column which carried an enormous lamp.

Her delicate nose, a little tilted at the tip, the dimples in her cheeks and the dainty indentation of her chin, made of her face the mischievous mask of infancy, even though she was close upon her thirtieth year and though the suggestion of faded bloom gave a curious, disturbing mystery to her appearance.

She responded to the man's look that reached her right across the room, rose before long, and came to him, smiling, as though to a summons.

" You must find this rather boring," she said. " When one is not acclimatised to a house it is always rather dull."

He protested.

She took a chair close to him and sat beside him.

And then suddenly, easily, they began to talk. Conversation flashed instantaneously between them, as a fire may flame up suddenly when a match is put to it. It seemed that their opinions, their sensations, were already known to each other, that the same temperament, the same education, tastes, prejudices, had predisposed each to understand the other and predestined them to meet.

Perhaps this was largely due to her art: but the joy of finding some one who could listen, immediately comprehend, reply, turn back again with repartee to each essay, filled Mariolle with a wonderful feeling

of well-being. Flattered too by his reception, and completely captured by the provocative graces displayed for his conquest, he made a supreme effort to evoke for her pleasure that veiled delicacy of wit, so individual and allusive, by which he drew to himself, when he felt himself to be adequately appreciated, the rarest and most vivid affection.

Suddenly she said to him:

"It's really very pleasant to talk with you. And so they told me I should find, before ever I met you!"

He felt himself reddening, but replied boldly:

"And they told me, Madame, that you——"

But she interrupted him:

"That I am a coquette? So I am, with people whom I like! I don't attempt to disguise it, but, as you will see, my favours are bestowed impartially—which makes it possible to keep my friends, or to recapture them without ever having really lost them—yes, to hold my friends always."

And her expression seemed to him significant, as though she had actually said:

"Quietly, my friend! Don't imagine vain things, make no mistake. I have nothing more for you than for the others."

He replied lightly:

"Fair warning of the dangers one runs here! I appreciate such fair play."

She herself had now made it possible for him to give a personal turn to their talk, and he took advantage of it. He paid her first a few compliments and observed that she liked them: then he wakened her woman's curiosity by telling her what was said of her in the various

sets with which he was acquainted. She became a little uneasy and could not quite conceal her desire to hear more, even though she affected complete indifference to anything that could be thought of her mode of life or her tastes.

He painted a flattering portrait of a woman of independence, of intelligence, of wit and charm, who surrounded herself with eminent men and yet remained an accomplished woman of the world.

She protested with smiles, with little denials of satisfied egoism, much intrigued by all the details he gave her and laughingly plied him for more and more, questioning him cunningly, greedy for flattery.

He thought, as he observed her: "At heart she's just a child, like all other women." And he turned a neat phrase as he praised her genuine love of the arts, an impulse so rare in women.

Then she suddenly assumed an air of mockery, that cynical French attitude which seems to be in the very marrow of the race. Mariolle had overstrained his flattery: she showed him that she was no fool.

"Really," said she, "I vow I cannot be sure whether I sincerely like art and artists."

He answered:

"How can one like artists without liking art?"

"Because they are often much more odd and amusing than men of the world."

"Yes—but their defects are more annoying."

"True."

"Then you don't like music?"

She became serious of a sudden.

"Ah, I worship music. I believe that I love it more

than anything else. Massival all the same is convinced that I do not understand it at all."

"He has told you so?"

"No, but he thinks it."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, some of us can guess practically all that we don't actually know."

"So Massival thinks that you don't understand music at all?"

"I am certain. It is so clear to me, even in the way in which he explains it, or underlines subtleties while he looks as though he were thinking, 'This is all useless: I only do it because you are really rather charming.'"

"Nevertheless he has told me that one hears better music in your room than in any other house in Paris."

"Yes, thanks to him."

"And literature? Don't you like that?"

"I am very fond of it, and I even have the presumption to think that I can appreciate it very fairly, in spite of Lamarthe's belief."

"Who also holds that you cannot understand it?"

"Of course."

"But he too has never actually told you so?"

"Pardon me, Lamarthe has told me so. He holds that some women may have a delicate and just perception of sentiments expressed, of the truth of personalities, of psychology in general, but that they are totally incapable of discerning what is of value in his art. Once he has uttered that word, Art, there is nothing to be done but show him to the door."

Mariolle asked, smiling:

"And what is your own opinion, Madame de Burne?"

She pondered this a moment, and then turned upon him full face, to see whether he was disposed to listen to her and to understand her.

"Well, I certainly have thought a good deal about it. I believe—listen—I believe that a woman can fully appreciate and receive the essence of any work: but she probably will not retain it. You understand?"

"No, . . . not quite."

"I mean by that, that before we can assimilate an idea as you do, you must appeal to the fundamentally feminine in us before you make a direct claim upon our intelligence. We don't instinctively grow interested in anything unless a man has first made it appeal to us, for we look at everything in terms of sentiment. I don't say in terms of love—No. But habitually in the light of sentiment, with its innumerable forms, manifestations, shades. Sentiment is a thing which belongs to us, which you, you men, never really understand, for it bewilders you just as it clarifies things for us. Oh, I quite understand that this must seem very vague—that cannot be helped. It comes to this—if a man loves us and also pleases us, since it is indispensable to us to feel that we are loved before we can make such an effort, and, in addition, if that man stands out among men, he can, if he will take the trouble, real trouble, make us feel everything, see round everything, penetrate to the heart of everything; everything, I say, and impart to us, by flashes, by fractions, everything that his intelligence surveys. Oh, yes; often enough the knowledge disappears at once, vanishes, fades away, for we forget, we forget, as the air forgets the spoken word. We are intuitive, incandescent, but we are changeable too, impressionable, apt

to be moulded by our circumstances. If you could but understand in what different worlds I live, what different women they make of me, as time, my health, what I have just read, what has just been said to me, chance to suggest! A fact! There are days when positively my soul is that of a worthy mother of a family, though I have no children, and others when it's that of some light of love—with no lovers!"

Delighted, he pressed her:

"Do you think that the majority of intelligent women are capable of such volatile thought?"

"Yes," she said. "But they sleep, or their lives are so circumstanced that they are hemmed in on every side."

He asked her again:

"In your heart you prefer music to all else?"

"Yes. But, all the same, what I told you just now is true, is true. Certainly I should never have appreciated it as I do appreciate it or loved it as I love it without that angel, Massival. All the greatest works of the great masters, which I used to love passionately, he has fired with their real inner life in teaching me to play them. Unhappily, you know, he's married!"

That last sentence she spoke playfully: but so deep a regret underlay her words that it coloured all her theories on women and her appreciation of the arts.

Massival, as a fact, was married. He had made, before he became successful, one of those unions of the artist's world that, till death dissolves it, trails along across life and fame.

Moreover he never spoke of his wife, never introduced her though he himself went about much: and though he had three children no one seemed to be aware of it.

Mariolle began to laugh. There was no doubt that this woman was delightful, unexpected, an unusual type, extremely pretty too! He watched her, feeling that he would never tire of watching, with an insistent regard which however she evidently did not consider offensive. He scrutinised her face, so serious yet so gay, a trifle mutinous, the pert nose, the sensuous colouring, the warm soft fairness, the maturity so perfect, so tender, so rich, that she seemed to have reached the year, the month, the very moment of her fullest bloom. He wondered, could that hair be dyed? And he tried to discover that tiny line of lighter or darker colour at the roots, but could find none.

Heavy steps on the rugs behind him made him start and turn his head. Two servants were bringing in a tea table. The blue flame of a tiny lamp made the boiling water in the big silver urn, polished and complicated as some piece of chemical apparatus, sing softly.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" she asked him.

When he agreed she rose and walked, graceful yet with such freedom from affectation that her carriage was straight, almost stiff, to the table with the steaming urn which stood surrounded by trays of cakes and iced biscuits, sugared fruits and sweets.

Then, as she stood with her profile clearly outlined against a panel of tapestry, Mariolle observed the beautiful line of her back and waist, the slenderness of hips and thighs, the splendid shoulders and the full throat that he had admired earlier. As her long light dress trailed in folds behind her, prolonging on the carpet the lines of her figure, he thought crudely: "God, what a syren! There's not an unattractive point about her!"

Now she moved from one to another, offering her refreshments with exquisite grace of gesture.

Mariolle followed her with his eyes, but Lamarthe, who was prowling about, cup in hand, came up to him and said:

"Do we leave together?'

"Why, surely."

"At once, then. I am tired."

"At once. Come on then."

They went out together.

Out in the street, the novelist asked:

"Are you going home or looking in at the Club?"

"I'll spend an hour at the Club first."

"Sporting Club?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go with you as far as the door. Clubs bore me stiff. I never go inside one. If I ever go near one it's because they can always get hold of a cab for you."

Arm-in-arm they walked down towards Saint-Augustin's.

They had taken a few steps when Mariolle said:

"What an unusual creature! What d'you make of her?"

Lamarthe broke into a shout of laughter.

"The crisis! The crisis begins. You'll go through it like all the rest of us: I have recovered by now, but I've suffered from that malady! My dear friend, the crisis for her friends consists in an inability to talk of anything but her when they are together, whenever they meet, wherever they happen to be."

"In any case, so far as I'm concerned, this is the first

time. And it's only natural, surely, since I scarcely know anything of her?"

"Very well, let's talk of her. Now, in the first place, you will fall in love with her. It's fate. We all travel that road."

"Is she so seductive?"

"Yes and no. Those who worship the old Eve, the woman with a soul, the woman with a heart, the woman of sentiment, the woman of last year's novels, turn from her with disgust, and execrate her to such a pitch that they end by saying positively infamous things about her. The rest of us, we who can savour a modern charm, are forced to admit that she is exquisite, even though no one of us can get to grips with her. Yet that is what each one of us tries to do. One doesn't die of it—doesn't even suffer too deeply—but is enraged to find that she cannot be otherwise than as she is. You'll travel that road too, if it pleases her: as a matter of fact, she has gobbled you up already."

Mariolle cried, echoing his inner thought:

"Oh, I was merely the newest comer, and I think she would insist on her last ounce of flesh in every transaction."

"My faith, yes, she'd claim her every right, even though she might make fun of it. But not the most famous man, the most sought after, nor the most distinguished will ever make half-a-dozen appearances in her salon if she doesn't really like him: and yet she is positively stupidly attached to that idiot Fresnel and that sticky fool, de Maltry. She flirts with fools for whom one can make no excuse, God knows why, perhaps because they amuse her more than we do, or perhaps because they

do actually love her more deeply than we, and all women are more moved by that than by anything else."

And Lamarthe went on talking of her, analysing, discussing, harking back on what he had just said in order to contradict himself, questioned by Mariolle and replying with genuine warmth, as a man does who is deeply interested, absorbed in his subject, a little off his bearings, too, for he was full of acute observations but false deductions.

He said: " She's not the only one, either. There are fifty, or more, like her. Why, the little Frémines creature who came in just before we left is just such another. A harder manner, perhaps, and married to an extraordinary fellow. It's resulted in their house becoming an asylum for all the most amusing madmen in Paris. I often look in on that crew."

They had strolled, without noticing the distance, along the Boulevarde Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, and the Avenue of the Champs-Elysés, and were come to the Arc de Triomphe, when Lamarthe abruptly pulled his watch out.

" My dear man," he said, " do you realise that we have been talking about her for an hour and ten minutes? That's enough for to-day. I'll take you round to your Club some other time. You'd better be off to bed, and so will I."

III

THE room was large and well-lighted, and hung, walls and ceilings, with fine Persian stuffs brought home by a friend in the Diplomatic Service. These stuffs had a yellow ground, as though they had been dyed in golden cream, and in their designs, of every shade of colour, in which Persian green was dominant, figured odd buildings with roofs which caved inwards, round which gambolled bewigged lions, and antelopes incredibly horned, with birds of Paradise circling about them.

It was sparsely furnished. Three long tables, topped by green marble slabs, bore all that pertains to a woman's toilet. On one, in the centre, were ewers and basins of thick crystal. Another displayed an array of flasks, boxes and vases of all sizes, which had silver stoppers with elaborate monograms. On the third were spread all the apparatus and instruments of beauty's cult, shaped for elaborate uses, mysterious, delicate. In this room there were only two sofa-chairs and a few low seats, padded and soft, made for the comfort of weary limbs and bodies released from harness. Then, taking up the whole of one wall there was an enormous mirror which opened like some serene horizon. It was made of three panels. The wings, which swung upon hinges, allowed her to see herself at once in face, in profile, and from the back, to surround herself with

her own reflections. At the right, in a recess which was usually screened by a curtain, was her bath, or rather a spacious pool, of green marble, to which she descended by two steps. A bronze Cupid, a dainty figurine by Prédolé, sat at its brim, and poured into it hot and cold water through two shells with which he was playing. At the back of the recess a canted Venetian mirror, whose panels leaned inwards, rose in an overhanging curve, and sheltered, enclosed, and reflected in all its parts the bath and the bather.

A little further off stood the writing table, a plain but beautiful modern English piece, covered with scattered papers, folded letters, little torn envelopes, on which gilt initials glittered. For in this room, when alone, she read and wrote and spent her time.

She lay stretched on her long chair, wrapped in a bath robe of Chinese foulard; her bare arms, beautiful, supple and firm, emerged boldly from the thick folds of the material. Her hair was caught up and lay in heavy masses about her head, in fair bright coils. Madame de Burne lay idly dreaming after her bath.

Her maid knocked and came in, bearing a letter.

She took it, looked at the writing, tore it open, read the first lines and then tranquilly told her maid that she would ring in another hour.

Alone, she smiled with triumphant joy. The first words had been enough to tell her that she had there, at last, Mariolle's declaration of love. He had held out far longer than she would have believed, since for three months she had beleaguered him with gracious advances, special attentions, and such expenditure of charm as she had never before been forced to

lavish. He had appeared defiant, aware of his danger, on guard against her, against the inexhaustible allure of her insatiable claim of sex. She had had need of many an intimate talk, to which she had brought all the physical appeal that was in her, all the charm of her intriguing wit, of many an evening of music when, with the piano still vibrant, with the appeal of the singing spirits of the master musicians yet in their ears, they had been strung to like emotion, before she at last saw in his eyes the avowal of the male who is conquered, the mendicant supplication of a passion that pleads for pity. For she knew it so well, each sign of its coming. She had so often brought to light, with her feline skill, her inexhaustible curiosity, that strange tortured trouble in the eyes of every man whom she had drawn into her toils. It used to afford her much amusement to feel them carried away little by little, conquered, dominated by her irresistible woman's power, to become for them the unique being, the capricious sovereign idol. The feeling had grown up in her gradually, like a hidden instinct developing, the instinctive craving for war and conquest. Perhaps, during the years of her married life, a need for such reprisal had been sown in her heart, an obscure necessity for returning upon men what she had endured at the hands of one of them, she being now the stronger, able to bend wills, to lash resistance, to inflict suffering in her turn. But her instinct to attack men was essentially a part of her, and when at last she found herself free to order her own life she set herself to pursue and ride down the amorous, as the hunter follows his quarry, for the sheer joy of bringing them down. Her heart, however, knew no craving for such emotions as the sentimental and tender of her

sex demand: she sought of man neither single-hearted love nor the satisfaction of passion. Only, she must have about her the admiration of all, homage, worship, the incense-cloud of tender affection. Whoever would gain the freedom of her circle must also admit himself the slave of her beauty, and no claims of mind or wit could hold her long if a man should resist her fascinations, remain aloof from love's distractions, pay such court perhaps elsewhere. He must love her if he would be her friend: and, that conceded, she would devise unimaginable kindnesses, delicious attentions, endless charming wiles to hold to her those whom she had thus made captives. Once enrolled in her company of worshippers it seemed that one was actually her property by right of conquest. She ruled her slaves with sapient address, each according to his failings, his virtues, and the quality of his jealousy. Those who asked too much she drove forth on their appointed day, and then when they had learned wisdom admitted them again, imposing hard conditions upon them: and the perverse creature found such amusement in the playing of this game of seduction that she took as much pleasure in driving elderly men to distraction as in turning the heads of the young.

It could even be said that she measured out her kindness by the degree of ardour which she had inspired: and Fresnel, gross animal, useless lumbering supernumerary, was always one of her favourites, thanks to the frenzy of passion which she divined in him, of which she felt him capable.

She was by no means unaware of the differing temper of the men about her: and she had had experience of the early stages of passions of which she alone was aware,

checked however at the very moment at which they might have proved dangerous.

Her protestants, each bringing the new notes of his love-song, the unknown quality of his nature, artists above all in whom she was aware of refinements, shades, delicate distinctions of emotion more acute, more fine, than in others, had often troubled her, had awakened in her an intermittent dream of a great love, an enduring attachment. But, a prey to prudent misgivings, undecided, tormented, moving among shadows, she had always withheld herself up to the very moment when her latest lover ceased to touch her emotions. Then, too, she was possessed of the sceptical eyes of the modern woman which would in a week or two strip the greatest men of their prestige. From the moment when they were at her feet, and had dropped, in their hearts' confusion, their exhibitionist poses and their parade manners, she found them all alike, poor creatures whom she dominated by her seductive strength.

Finally she thought that for a woman, like herself so perfect, to attach herself to any man would call for one of singular merit.

Nevertheless she suffered much from ennui. With no love of society, into which she went through conventional habit, where she endured long evenings with a yawn stifled in her throat and sleep hanging on her eyelids, she was amused only by displays of sentiment, or by her own sudden caprices, her shifting interests in certain things or persons, maintaining them only long enough to avoid boring herself, not long enough to discover a real pleasure in any affection, or any taste. She was tormented by her nerves, not by her desires, deprived

of all the absorbing preoccupations of simple or ardent souls, and existed in a state of frivolous boredom, with no belief in happiness, in search only of distraction, already succumbing to lassitude although she imagined herself satisfied with life.

She believed herself satisfied because she judged herself the most attractive and the most gifted of women. Proud of her charm, whose power she often tested, in love with her own irregular beauty, so bizarre, so seductive, sure of the delicacy of her perceptions, through which she, by divination and foreknowledge, came to an understanding of things which others never so much as saw; proud, too, of her wit which many men of distinction appreciated, and ignorant of the barriers that shut in her intelligence, she believed herself a creature almost unique, a rare pearl, incarcerated in this mediocre world which appeared to her a little empty and monotonous by comparison with herself.

She would never have suspected herself of being the unconscious cause of the incessant ennui from which she suffered, but she accused others of it and held them responsible for her moods of melancholy.

If they did not know how to distract her, amuse her, or even rouse some emotion in her, it was because they lacked talent and real worth. "Everyone," said she, smiling, "is tiresome. Only such people as please me are bearable, and they only because they please me."

And they pleased her best who found her incomparable. Knowing well enough that no success is achieved without effort, she took infinite pains to be charming, and found nothing so delightful as to savour the homage rendered

by glances which grew tender, and by the heart, that unstable organ which can be set beating by a word.

She had been much astonished at the trouble to which she had been put to conquer André Mariolle, for she had known certainly, from the first day, that she pleased him. Then little by little she had come to an understanding of his nature, secretive, envious, subtle and self-centred, and she had shown him, to defeat him through his weakness, so much regard, preference, and natural sympathy that in the end he had let himself be taken.

For the last month, certainly, she had known him captured, unquiet in her presence, taciturn yet feverish, but he held back from any declaration. At heart she had no love for avowals for, since they were apt to be too direct, too expressive, she sometimes saw herself driven to end relations. Twice she had actually been obliged to grow angry and order her doors to be closed to those suitors. What she loved were delicate manifestations, half-confidences, discreet allusions, a kneeling in spirit: and she deployed a marvellous tact, exceptional skill in managing situations, to win from her admirers just such reserve in revelation.

For a month, then, she had waited and watched for the word, clear or veiled according to his nature, on Mariolle's lips, by which his burdened heart should find relief.

He had said nothing: but he had written. It was a long letter, too, of four pages. She held it in her hands, thrilling with satisfaction. She lay back in her luxurious chair to be more at her ease, and let her little slippers drop to the carpet, and then she read. She was surprised. He told her in sober words that he had no wish to suffer for

her sake, and that he already knew her too well to consent to be her victim. In the most polished phrases, loaded with compliments, through which his repressed love was betrayed in every word, he nevertheless made it clear to her that he was well aware of her way of dealing with men, that he too was hit, but that he would free himself at the very outset of this servitude by going away. He would, in short, live a wanderer's life again. He was about to leave.

It was a farewell both eloquent and determined.

Beyond a doubt she was surprised as she read and re-read those four pages of prose so tenderly reproachful and impassioned. She rose, slipped her shoes on, walked up and down, her bare arms, free from their sleeves, her hands half thrust into the little pockets of her gown, and in one of them the crumpled letter.

Astounded at this unexpected declaration she thought: "How well he writes! It's sincere, and very moving. He writes better than Lamarthe. There's nothing of the novel about this."

She had a desire to smoke, went to the table that carried the scent bottles, and from a box of Saxe porcelain took a cigarette: then, having lit it, she walked to the mirror, observing how three young women approached her in the three obliquely set panels. When they were quite close she stopped, gave a little bow, a tiny smile, a little friendly movement of the head which said "Pretty; oh, very pretty." She examined her eyes, her teeth, raised her arms, put her hands on her hips and turned her profile, the better to inspect the whole of herself in the three mirrors, and gently bent her head.

There she remained standing, amorously, facing herself, absorbed in her triple reflection, which she found charming, ravished by the sight of herself, overcome by an egotistic physical delight at her own beauty, and savouring it with a tender satisfaction almost as sensual as a man's might have been.

Every day she thus gazed at her own image: and her maid, who had often taken her unaware, used to say, maliciously: "Madame looks at herself so much that one day she will have worn out every mirror in the place."

But this self-love was the secret of her charm and of her power over men. Through her admiration of herself, through cherishing the subtle beauties of her face, the daintiness of her body, and through seeking and finding everything that could set them off to better advantage, through the discovery of shades of subtleties which could render her charm more potent, her eyes more strange, through her pursuit of every artifice which might dress her to best advantage in her own opinion, she had naturally discovered all that could most enchant others.

Had she been more beautiful but more indifferent to her beauty, she would have had none of that seduction which drove all those who were not at the outset repelled by the nature of her power, into love with her.

Presently, a little tired by standing thus, she said to her reflection, which smiled at her always (and her reflections in the three mirrors moved their lips to reply)—

"We shall see, sir!"

Then she crossed the room and sat down at her writing-table. This is what she wrote:

" Dear Monsieur Mariolle,

Come to see me to-morrow, at four o'clock. I shall be alone, and I hope I shall reassure you on the imaginary danger which frightens you.

I call myself your friend, and I will convince you that I am.

Michèle de Burne."

She made an exquisitely simple toilet next day to receive André Mariolle. She wore a little grey dress, a light grey tinged with lilac, melancholy as the dusk, and perfectly simple, with a collar that clasped her neck, sleeves that fitted close to her arms, a corsage which clung to breast and waist, a skirt that moulded hips and limbs.

As he came in, grave of face, she went to him, holding out both hands. He kissed them, and they sat down : and she let the silence last some few moments to assure herself of his embarrassment.

He did not know what to say and waited for her to speak.

She came to a decision :

" Well, to the point. What is the point? Why, that you have written me a most insolent letter."

He answered :

" I am quite aware of it, and I offer you all my apologies. I am, I always have been excessively, brutally frank to everyone. I could have cleared out without the misplaced and wounding explanations which I sent you. I considered it more loyal to act as my nature dictates and to reckon upon your intelligence, which I know."

She replied on a tone of complacent pity :

" Come, come ! What is all this foolishness? "

He interrupted her:

"I would rather not talk of it."

She spoke quickly in turn, not allowing him to continue:

"But I brought you here to talk of it: and we will continue to talk of it until you are convinced that you run no danger whatever. . . ."

She began to laugh like a small girl and her plain little dress gave an infantile suggestion to her laughter.

He stammered:

"I wrote you the truth, the honest truth, the formidable truth of which I am afraid."

Becoming serious again she answered:

"Very well, I know what it means: with all my friends it has been the same. You wrote to me too that I am a scandalous coquette: I admit it, but no one has died of it: I even believe that no one suffers because of it. It is true that what Lamarthe calls 'the crisis' does happen. You have reached it, but it passes, and one falls into—how shall I put it?—a chronic love, that does no harm at all and that I keep gently aglow in all my friends, so that they may be very devoted, very attached, very faithful. See now, am I not sincere, frank too, and bold? Have you met so many women who would dare to say to a man what I have just said to you?"

Her expression was so elfish, and so downright, so simple and at the same time so provocative that he could not refrain in turn from smiling.

"All your friends," said he, "are men who have often been burned by that particular fire, even before you scorched them. Scorched and burnt before now, they can easily endure the fire in which you hold them: but I,

Madame de Burne, I am new to such an experience. And I have realised for some little time now that for me it will be a terrible experience if I give way to the feeling that is growing in my heart."

Suddenly she became confidential and said, leaning a little towards him with her hands clasped on her knees:

"Listen to me: I am serious. It distresses me to lose a friend through a fear which I know to be vain. You love me: very well. But men of to-day don't love women deeply enough to do themselves harm. Believe me, I know."

She was silent a moment, and then added with the odd smile of a woman who tells a truth whilst she means to deceive:

"Come, I am not a woman whom men love madly. I am too modern. See, I will be your friend, your dear friend, for whom you will have a real affection, but nothing more, for I will see to that."

In a more serious tone she added:

"In any case I warn you that, so far as I am concerned, I am incapable of becoming silly about anyone, no matter who he might be, and that I will treat you like the rest, like the most favoured of the others, but never better. I have a horror of despots and jealousy. From a husband I had to put up with anything: but from a friend, just a friend, I am not going to permit any of those affectionate tyrannies which are the bane of friendly relations. You see for yourself how friendly I am, how I talk to you as a friend, and hide nothing. Will you agree to give a fair trial to my proposal? If it does not work there will always be time for you to go, however serious your case may be. Lovers parted are lovers cured."

He looked at her, conquered already by her voice, by her gestures, by all the intoxication of her presence, and murmured, completely resigned and quivering to know her so near to him:

"I agree, I agree. And if I am wrong, so much the worse. You are well worth suffering for."

She interrupted him:

"Now let us say no more about it, never speak of it again."

And she led the conversation to subjects which could not possibly distress him.

He left at the end of an hour, tortured, for he loved her, and joyful, for she had demanded, and he had promised, that he would not leave her.

IIII

He was in torment, for he loved her. Unlike vulgar lovers, to whom the women their instincts have chosen appear in an aureole of perfections, he was attached to her even while he watched her with the clairvoyant eyes of the suspicious and defiant male who has never been completely enslaved. His restless nature, at once acute and indolent, always on the defensive against life, had saved him from passionate adventures. A few intrigues, two short liaisons that expired in boredom, bought pleasures dropped in disgust, this was all his amorous record. He thought of women as useful to those who wanted a well-run house and children, or as creatures of a strictly relative charm for those who desired dalliance.

When he had first encountered Madame de Burne he had been prejudiced against her because of his friend's confidences. What he knew of her interested him, intrigued him, even pleased him, but also faintly repelled him. On principle he had no liking for gamblers who never pay. After their first meetings he had summed her up as most amusing and endowed with a peculiar and contagious charm. The natural but highly cultivated beauty of this slim, refined fair woman, who seemed at once voluptuous and frail, whose lovely arms were formed to clasp, enlace, and crush, whose legs were long and slender, made for flight, deer-like, with feet so light

that they would leave no trace, seemed to him symbolic of vain hopes. Later he discovered a pleasure in his meetings with her that he believed could never be found in conversation with more worldly women. Dowered by nature with an intelligence full of quick wit, whimsical and chaffing, and of kindly irony, she yet allowed sentimental, intellectual influences to invade her occasionally, as though, behind her mocking gaiety, there was some hidden shadowy region in which the tender spirit of bygone poetry still lingered. At such times she was transformed to a thing of exquisite beauty.

She made much of him, intent upon subduing him as all the others : and he came to her flat as often as he could compass it, drawn by his growing need of seeing her more and more. It was as though power emanated from her and possessed him, a power of charm, of glance, smile, speech, irresistible even though he often came away vexed by something that she had said or done.

The more he felt himself invaded by that indefinable influence by which a woman can penetrate and enslave men, the more completely did he come to understand and also to suffer from her nature which he impotently wished were wholly different.

But the very thing in her of which he disapproved was that which beyond doubt had ensorcelled and tamed him, despite himself. For he was enamoured of her in defiance of his reason, rather than in love with her for her true qualities.

Her flirtations, with which she played quite frankly, as she might play with a fan, opening or closing them in men's faces as they amused her and talked with her : her habit of refusing to take any topic seriously—these tricks

which at first were entertaining he now found irritating: her ceaseless pursuit of distraction and of new ideas that remorselessly harried her wearied spirit, all exasperated him, sometimes so intensely that when he got home he would resolve to increase the intervals between his visits until finally they should cease.

And next day he would look for a pretext for calling upon her again at once. Yet he was aware, the more infatuated he became, that both the insecurity of such a love and the inevitability of suffering from it were increasing rapidly together.

He was perfectly clear-sighted: but like a man who drowns through fatigue, whose boat has gone down too far from shore, little by little he was sinking deeper. He understood her as well as a man could, the prescience that passion brings having heightened his powers of clairvoyance, and he found himself unable to stop thinking about her. With tireless persistence he was endlessly trying to analyse her, to throw light into the obscure recesses of her woman's soul, that incomprehensible confusion of gay intelligence and disillusion, of reason and childish folly, of steadfast-seeming affection and swift inconstancies, of all the contradictory traits which were united and co-ordinated in an abnormal nature, seductive and baffling.

But why was she able to enslave him thus? He questioned his mind ceaselessly, and still was far from understanding it, for with his reflective nature, which was at once coldly observant and self-respectingly modest, he ought, logically, to have sought in woman the traditional tranquil qualities of tender charm and loving constancy that seem to assure man's happiness.

But in her he encountered the unexpected, one of humanity's pioneers perhaps, stimulating by her quality of newness, one of those beings who are the beginning of a new generation, who bear no resemblance to that with which we are familiar, who spread about them, even through their imperfections, the tremendous appeal of a new era.

Following on the passionate romantic dreamers of the Restoration came the light hearts of the Imperial epoch, convinced of the reality of pleasure: and then appeared yet another transformation of the eternal feminine, a creature high-strung, of uncertain sympathies, an unquiet mind, vexed, irresolute, who would seem to have experimented with every drug that can soothe or madden the nerves, chloroforms that deaden, ether and morphine that stimulate dreams, drown the senses, set emotions to sleep.

He tasted in her the savour of artificiality, fashioned and trained to charm. She was a product of a refined luxury, attractive, exquisite, delicate, on which the eyes fastened, at which the heart beat, and desire stirred, just as hunger is aroused by appetising but inaccessible dishes.

When at last he was really convinced that he was slipping down the steep of an abyss, he began to think in panic on the dangers of his course. Where would he end? What would she do? Most certainly she would do with him what she had done with all the others: she would draw him surely into that state in which a man dances to the caprices of a woman as a dog follows the steps of his master, and she would find him a place in her collection of more or less distinguished favourites. But

had she actually played at this same game with all the rest? Was there not one, not even one, whom she had loved, really loved, for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those sudden transports, as suddenly suppressed, into which her heart was sometimes flung?

He talked of her interminably with the others as they came away from dinner parties at which they had been charmed by her presence. He felt that they were all still troubled, dissatisfied, enervated, men whom no reality had satisfied.

No, she had loved no single one of all these strutters in the public eye: but what would she make of him who was a nobody beside them, for whom no heads turned, whom no eyes followed, when his name was spoken in a crowded place or a drawing-room?

He was a nobody, a convenience, a mere man, the sort of man of whom notable women made their harmless familiars, useful but flavourless like the wine one mixes with water.

Had he been a well-known man, he would have been more inclined to accept his part, which his celebrity would have made less humiliating. As a nonentity he would not put up with it. And he wrote to bid her good-bye.

When her short answer reached him he was as moved as if some great good fortune had befallen him, and when she had made him promise not to leave her he was as joyful as if he had been set at liberty.

Several days passed without any intercourse between them: but, as the relaxation which follows upon a crisis began to wear away, he felt his need of her growing upon him, burning him, again. He had taken a vow that he would never again speak to her of certain things, but he

had said nothing about abstaining from writing: and one evening, when he could not sleep, since she filled his being with the wakefulness of passion's insomnia, he sat down, almost against his own will, at his desk and began to transcribe his feelings.

It was no letter: it was a collection of notes, phrases, thoughts, shudders of pain which somehow translated themselves into words.

It calmed him: it seemed to him to appease a little his suffering, and, lying down again, he at last went to sleep.

As soon as he woke next morning he re-read the few sheets, thought them atremble with anguish, put them into an envelope, addressed them, kept them until the evening, and then posted them late so that they should be in her hands when she rose next morning.

He felt sure that she would not be in the least vexed by those sheets of paper. The most timorous of women make infinite allowances for the written word which speaks of sincere love. And such letters, when written by shaking hands, whilst the eyes fill and the face twitches, have over their hearts an invincible power.

Late in the day he called upon her to see how she would receive him and what she would have to say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and gossiping with his daughter. He often spent whole hours together in her company in this way, for he seemed to approach her rather as a man than as a father. She had contrived to blend in their attitude and their affection towards one another a shade of that amorous homage which she always paid to herself and insisted upon from everyone else.

When she saw Mariolle come in, her face lit up with pleasure: she gave him her hand vivaciously: her smile said "I am really charmed with you."

Mariolle hoped that her father would soon go. But M. de Pradon had no intention of this. Well as he knew his child, and though he had long ago ceased to have any suspicious doubts about her, so lacking in sex instincts did he believe her to be, he always watched over her, attentively, with curiosity, with uneasiness, even with a slightly marital feeling. He wished to discover what chance this new friend had of durable success, what he was and what his worth. Was he a bird of passage like so many others, or would he become a member of the accepted circle?

So he settled himself down and Mariolle realised at once that he could not hope to dislodge him. He chose his line instantly. He even made up his mind to win the old man's liking, if he could contrive it, reckoning that goodwill, or at any rate neutrality, would help him more than hostility. He took considerable pains, was gay, set himself to amuse them both, and successfully banished any suggestion of the suitor from his manner.

She, well content, thought: "How clever! How well he plays a comedy part."

And M. de Pradon thought: "A nice young fellow. The child hasn't turned his head as she has all the other idiots'."

When Mariolle judged that the moment had come for him to take his leave he left them both delighted with him.

Yet he walked away from the house with a troubled spirit. In her presence he consciously suffered from the enthralment in which she now held him, feeling that he

would beat in vain against her heart as a prisoner beats with his naked hands against an iron door.

Possessed by her he now realised himself to be and he no longer sought to be free. Knowing that now there was no escape from his fate, he set himself to be cunning, patient, tenacious, designing to overcome her by his wits, by using the homage of which she was so greedy, the adulation which went to her head, even by means of the voluntary servitude to which he would allow himself to be reduced.

His letter had pleased her. He would write. He wrote. Almost every night, when he got home, at that hour when the mind, under the effects of all the day's impressions, considers that which interests or troubles it in a sort of intensified hallucination, he sat down at his table, under the lamp, and grew ecstatic as he thought of her. The poetic impulse which most indolent men allow, through mere idleness, to grow faint in them and die, flourished under these conditions. Through the strain of writing of the same things, the same thing, rather, his love, in terms which renewed daily his desire, he fired his ardour in this task of wooing by letter. All day long he sought and found for her that irresistible eloquence which overstimulated emotion sets blazing in the brain like a shower of sparks. So he fanned the flame of his heart and quickened it to a furnace, for such love-letters of genuine passion are often more dangerous to those that write than to those that receive them.

The effect of maintaining himself in such a state of effervescence, of heating his blood with phrases and accustoming his mind to dwell on a single idea, was to

make him lose, little by little, the sense of reality in relation to her. Ceasing to think of her as he first knew her, he saw her now no longer except through the medium of his own lyricism: and all that he wrote to her each night became transmuted in his own heart into so many facts. His daily task of idealising her showed her to him as he himself would have dreamed her to be. His early resistance crumbled, too, before the undeniable affection that Madame de Burne was showing him. It was certain that at this moment, although nothing was said between them, she preferred him to all the rest, and showed it openly. So he began to think, in a kind of madness of hope, that she might end perhaps by loving him.

She surrendered herself, with a pleasure at once complex and naive, to the influence of the letters. None had ever adored and petted her in such fashion, with such silent reserve. None had ever had the charming notion of sending to her bedside each morning as she woke, on the little silver tray that the maid held, such a feast of sentiment enclosed in an envelope. And the most delightful thing about it was that he never referred to it, almost seemed ignorant of it himself; in her rooms he was the chilliest of her friends, and never made the least allusion to the floods of tenderness with which in secret he overwhelmed her.

Of course she had had love letters before his, but of another tone, less reserved, more importunate, more like challenges. Through three months, the three months of his love-sickness, Lamarthe had dedicated to her the exquisite correspondence of a novelist in love sentimentalising in phrases. She kept, in her desk, in a special

drawer, these most delicate, most captivating epistles, by a man of letters who was genuinely in love with her and caressed her with his pen until the day came when he lost all hope of success.

Mariolle's letters were very different. Their concentrated desire was so powerful, their sincerity of expression so exact, their submission so complete, and their devotion promised such permanence, that she received, opened, and enjoyed them with a pleasure that no written words had ever given her before.

Her liking for him became strongly marked and she invited him to come to see her all the more often because he carried into all his relations with her such absolute discretion, and contrived to ignore in speaking to her the fact that he had ever made use of paper to tell her of his adoration. She felt, too, that the situation was original, worthy of a book, and found, in her deep satisfaction at keeping beside her a being who worshipped her thus, a kind of ferment of sympathy stirring in her which made him the object of her particular regard.

Hitherto she had had, despite her vanity in love, presentiments of preoccupations foreign to her in hearts which she had troubled: she did not always reign alone: she discovered, she could see, symptoms of emotions there which were not concerned with her at all. Jealous of music with Massival, of literature with Lamarthe, jealous always of something, discontented with the half-successes she won, lacking the power to drive everything else from the hearts of ambitious men, men of renown, or of artists to whom their profession is a mistress from whom nothing and nobody can detach them, she met for the first time a man to whom

she stood for everything. Fat Fresnel, too, loved her thus. But then he was fat Fresnel. Intuition told her that no one had ever been possessed by her like this : and her egotistic approval of the man who afforded her this triumph took on airs of tenderness. She now had a need of him, a need of his presence, of his eyes on her, of his service, a need of the intimate attentions of his affection. If he flattered her vanity less than did the others, he nevertheless ministered to those all-powerful cravings which sway the soul and body too of the coquette, her pride, and her lust for power, her unimpassioned ruthlessness.

Like a country of which one takes possession, so she overran her normal life with a succession of little invasions that grew more numerous each day. She organised entertainments, parties for the theatre, dinners at restaurants, to have him with her : she trailed him behind her with the satisfaction of a conqueror, unable to do without him, or rather without the slavery to which she had reduced him.

He followed her, happy to feel himself petted, caressed by her eyes, her voice, by all her caprices : and now he lived perpetually in a delirium of desire and love which maddened and burned him like a raging fever.

PART II

II

MARIOLLE had just called upon her. He waited for her, since she was not yet home, although he had arranged a meeting with her by telegram that morning.

In this room in which he loved to be, where everything pleased him, he yet felt, whenever he found himself alone, a sinking of the heart, a desire to sigh, an irritation of the nerves, which would not let him rest until she should have appeared. He moved about, in happy impatience, yet in fear lest some unexpected difficulty might prevent her return and postpone their meeting until the next day.

When he heard a cab stop at the street door he quivered with hope, and when the bell of the flat rang his fears finally left him.

She came in, with her hat still on, contrary to her invariable custom, and her air was both hurried and happy.

"I have news for you," she said.

"And what is it?"

She laughed as she watched his face.

"Why, I'm going down to the country for a while."

Disappointment, swift and sharp, seized him, and his expression showed it.

"And you tell me of it with an air of satisfaction!"

"Yes! Sit down. I will tell you all about it. You know—or perhaps you do not—that M. Valsaci, my poor

mother's brother, who is chief engineer in the Government Bridges Department, has a country place at Avranches, where he spends a good deal of time with his wife and children, for he can do a great deal of his work from there. And we always go to see them during the summer. This summer I did not want to go, but he was annoyed and showed his annoyance to father. By the way, in confidence I may tell you that father is jealous of you, and has given me some uncomfortable moments, pretending that I am compromising myself. You will have to see me less often. But don't distress yourself, I will arrange things. At any rate father scolded me and made me promise to spend ten days or perhaps a fortnight at Avranches. We go on Monday morning. Well, what have you to say about it?"

"I? That you hurt me."

"And that is all?"

"What do you expect me to say? I can't prevent your going!"

"You see nothing that can be done?"

"I . . . oh, . . . my dear, I don't know. What's in your mind?"

"Well . . . I have an idea. Avranches is quite near to Mont Saint-Michel. Do you know Mont Saint-Michel?"

"No."

"Very well, then. On Friday next you will have a sudden inspiration to go and see the wonderful place. You will stop at Avranches. You will, let us suppose, stroll on Saturday evening, at about sunset, in the public gardens, from which one overlooks the bay. Quite by chance we shall meet. Father will be angry, but I shall not take

that too seriously. I shall plan an expedition for the whole party to visit the Abbey next day. Be enthusiastic, be charming to them all, as you can be when you wish. Make a conquest of my aunt and invite us all to dine at the hotel at which we happen to stop. We shall decide to spend the night there and so we shall not part until the following morning. You will come back by Saint Malo, and a week later I shall be back in Paris. Haven't I planned it well? Am I not really kind?"

He murmured in passionate gratitude:

"You are all that I love in the world."

"Pooh!" said she.

And for some moments they gazed at each other. She smiled, conveying in her smile all the thanks in her heart, and a quality of sympathy, both sincere, and subtle, which had in it a new tenderness. He watched her, too, with eyes that devoured her. He longed to throw himself at her feet, to writhe, bite her dress, to cry aloud, above all to make her see something he knew not how to tell, something that turned in him like claws fixed in his brain, in his body and in his soul, inexpressibly painful because he could not show it, this love of his, this terrible, sweet love.

But she understood him without need of his explanations, as a marksman knows instinctively when his bullet has made its hole straight through the black bull on the target. There was nothing left in the man but her image. He was more hers than herself. And she was at last content and found him charming.

She said, in high good humour:

"It's settled, then: we'll go for our expedition."

He stammered, choked with emotion:

"Yes, yes, it's settled."

After a fresh silence she said, with no word of excuse:

"I can't let you stay longer to-day. I only came home to tell you all this because I go on the day after to-morrow. The whole of to-morrow is filled with engagements, and now I have still four or five visits to pay before dinner."

He at once jumped up, feeling a stab of pain. He had no other wish than that he might never leave her again. He kissed her hands and left her, his heart aching but full of hope.

He had four long days then to while away. He spent them in Paris, without seeing a soul, preferring silence to speech and isolation to company.

On Friday morning he caught the eight o'clock express. He had hardly slept, feverish through waiting for the journey. His quiet, darkened room, into which came only the rumbling sounds of belated cabs, evoking his longing to be gone, had, all through the night, oppressed him like a prison.

As soon as a lifting of the darkness could be discerned through the closed curtains, the grey sad dawn of earliest morning, he sprang from bed, opened the window, and studied the sky. A fear of bad weather haunted him. But it was fine. A light mist floated above the earth and promised heat. He dressed sooner than he had need, was ready two hours too soon, his heart gnawed by impatience to leave the house, to be at last on his way: and his servant had to go out to look for a cab before he was properly dressed, for fear lest he should not be able to find one later.

The first jolting movements of the cab caused him

tremors of happiness: but when he reached the Montparnasse station and found that fifty endless minutes separated him from the time of departure his heart sank.

A coupé happened to be free: he engaged it, to be undisturbed and dream at his ease. When he found himself moving, gliding over the rails towards his love, borne along with the swift, smooth movement of the express, his excitement, instead of diminishing, grew and he found himself longing, with a child's unreason, to push with both hands, with all his strength, on the padded partition opposite him, to force the train along faster.

Almost till midday, he was absorbed in his preoccupation and paralysed by hope. Then little by little, when Argentan had been left behind, his eyes were drawn towards the windows by the panorama of the green wealth of Normandy.

The train was running through an undulating countryside, intersected by little valleys, where peasants' holdings, grass lands and apple orchards, were framed by great trees whose cloudlike tops shone to the touch of the sun's rays. July was drawing to an end, the fruitful season in which this fecund generous soil poured forth its sap. In all the fields, separated and yet linked by high leafy walls, huge tawny beasts, cows whose flanks were splashed with odd irregular markings, red bulls with grand heads and ample ruffs of hairy folds of flesh, with their air of insolence and pride, stood about under the fences or couched in the ample pastures that swelled their bellies. They streamed across his view in endless succession through the lush land, a land prodigal of beef and cider.

Everywhere ran slender streams by the feet of the

poplars, under the shimmering veil of the willows: rivulets flashed in the deep grass for a moment, disappeared to appear again further on, laved all that land in fresh fecundity.

And Mariolle sped through it enraptured, his passion soothed by the swift continuous flight through this lovely park of fruit trees and of herds.

But after changing trains at Folligny impatience to reach the end of his journey tormented him again, and during the last forty minutes he drew his watch from his pocket a score of times. Every few moments he leaned out of the window, and at last he could see, set upon a rising slope, the town in which she waited for him. The train was late and barely an hour remained before he should meet her, as if by chance, in the public gardens.

An hotel omnibus picked him up, its sole freight, and began to climb, at the slow walk of its horses, the scarped road to Avranches, whose houses, crowning the crest of the hill, gave the place from a distance the look of a fortress. Close at hand it became a charming old Norman town, with little conventional dwellings nearly all alike, crowded one against another, with an appearance of ancient dignity and modern comfort, an air of the Middle Ages and of rural prosperity.

As soon as Mariolle had seen his suitcase put into his room he asked the way to the Botanical Gardens and set out at a fast walk, even though he was still ahead of time, hoping that she too might be early.

But a glance round the gardens from the entrance gates showed him that they were still empty or nearly so. Three old men strolled in them, burgesses of the

town no doubt, accustomed daily to enjoy there the leisure of their old age: and a family of English boys and girls, with stringy legs, played round a fair-haired governess whose inattentive gaze spoke of far away dreaming.

Mariolle with a beating heart walked quickly forward, exploring the paths. He came to a broad alley of elms whose vivid green cut the gardens in half, driven straight across them, a broad dense barrier of foliage: passing beyond them he was approaching a terrace commanding the further horizon when suddenly he was surprised by his first sight of the wonder which was the ostensible reason for his journey.

From the foot of the hill which he had now surmounted spread to the horizon a vast plain of sand which melted into sea and sky in front and on either side of him. A river wound its way through that desert, and under the blazing blue of the empyrean, lakes of water spread their gleaming surfaces like open rents in another sky.

In the midst of this tawny waste, still wet with the retreating sea, there heaved aloft, eight or ten miles from the coast, the monumental silhouette of a pointed rock, a fantastic pyramid capped by a cathedral.

Its only neighbour, in that immense sandy plain, was an arid reef of humpbacked rock, crouching in the shifting pools: Tombelaine.

Far away, in the blue mist of distant waters, other rocks, half-drowned, showed their brown heads: and the eye, following the line of the horizon to the right, discovered, fringing the formless solitude of sand, the immense green stretch of Normandy, so rich in trees as to

look like some illimitable wood. Every aspect of nature was offered to his eye in one glance, her splendour, her strength, her fresh beauty, her grace: and his eye swept back from that vision of forest to the apparition of the mountain of granite, lone tenant of the waste, which reared upon the boundless sands its amazing Gothic pile.

The odd satisfaction, which often made Mariolle shiver with pleasure in face of the surprises which unknown places hold for strangers' eyes, invaded him so suddenly that he stood motionless, his spirit overwhelmed and saddened, so that he forgot the troubles of his heart. But the note of a bell vibrating released him and he turned about, captured again by ardent hope of speedy reunion. The gardens were still empty. The English children had disappeared. The three old men alone continued their monotonous promenade. He, too, set off walking.

At any moment she might suddenly come into sight. He would see her at the end of the further path leading to the marvellous terrace. He would recognise first her shape, her bearing, then her face and her smile, and would hear her voice. What happiness was come again! He felt her close to him, somewhere quite near, invisible still, but thinking of him, and aware, as he was, that she was in an instant more to see him.

He almost shouted, for a blue sunshade, just the dome of a sunshade, showed suddenly far down under the slope of the terrace. It must be she. A little boy ran into sight, bowling a hoop: then two ladies—he recognised her—then two men: her father and another. She was all in blue, the blue of an April sky. Now he could clearly recognise her, though her features were still invisible: but he dared not hurry to meet her, feeling that he would

be tongue-tied, confused, that he would not be able to explain the chance encounter under M. de Pradon's suspicious eye.

However, he strolled on towards the meeting, constantly raising his field-glasses to his eyes, occupied, it seemed, in examining the tremendous view. It was she who called him, taking no trouble to pretend surprise.

"Good morning, M. Mariolle," she said. "It's marvellous, isn't it?"

Startled by her greeting, he did not know in what tone to reply, and stammered:

"Oh! Oh, it's you, Madame! What luck to meet you. I have long wanted to see this lovely country."

She answered, smiling:

"And you have chosen a time when I am here too. Very charming of you to arrange it so!"

Then she introduced him:

"One of my dearest friends, M. Mariolle: my aunt, Madame Valsaci; my uncle, the bridge builder."

After the introductions, M. de Pradon and the young man exchanged a frigid shake of the hand and all went on together.

She had placed him between herself and her aunt, giving him one quick glance, one of those glances that imply the dropping of barriers.

But she continued to speak:

"And what do you think of this country?"

"I think," he said, "that I have never looked at anything more lovely."

And she:

"Ah, but if you had spent several days here, as I have, you would feel how it takes hold of you. One's im-

pression goes beyond the compass of phrases. Those invasions and retreats of the sea across the sand, that huge restless ocean, that twice a day floods the whole enormous plain, so fast that a horse at full gallop cannot escape it, the astounding spectacle that Heaven provides us; oh, I tell you that it makes me beside myself. I hardly know myself. Isn't that true, aunt?"

Madame Valsaci, a woman already old, grey-haired, clearly the distinguished provincial dame, the worthy wife of a chief engineer, bearing the indelible stamp of the highest rank of the public service, stated that she had never actually observed her niece in such an extremity of enthusiasm.

"But," she added, after reflection, "it would not, perhaps, be so very surprising in one who, like my niece, is accustomed only to see and admire theatre settings."

"But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year."

The old lady began to laugh.

"To Dieppe and Trouville one goes merely to meet one's friends. The sea is only there to afford a convenient rendezvous."

She spoke very simply and possibly without malice.

They turned back to the terrace which drew them irresistibly. Every idler in the gardens was drawn there, sooner or later, from every side of the park, like balls rolling down a slope. The setting sun seemed to spread behind the lofty silhouette of the Abbey a curtain of thin gold, light and transparent. That structure, like some gigantic shrine reared before a flaming canopy, grew slowly darker. But Mariolle had eyes only for the beloved figure that moved beside him, in her misty blue garments. Never had she looked so adorable to him.

She seemed changed, though he could not define the change, fresh with a freshness of skin, eyes, hair, which had also touched her spirit, the freshness of the sweet air blowing in this country, out of its skies. Never had he so seen or loved her.

He walked beside her, without a word to say to her: and the rustle of her dress, the occasional touch of her arm, the meeting of their glances which spoke for them, overcame him completely, as though they had killed his personality within him. He felt himself, in a flash of recognition, destroyed by this woman, swallowed up in her, so that he had become nothing but desire, appeal, adoration. She had done away with all his old existence as an old letter flames to nothing in the fire.

She saw clearly, she understood, her absolute conquest, and, vibrant yet touched, more full of life too in this intoxicating atmosphere, all rays of light and springing sap, between sea and land, she said to him, without looking at him:

"I am so happy to see you."

Suddenly she added:

"How long are you staying here?"

He answered:

"Two days, if to-day counts as a day."

Then he added, turning to her aunt:

"Would Madame Valsaci consent to do me the honour to spend to-morrow with me on Mont Saint-Michel, with M. Valsaci also?"

Madame de Burne answered for her relations:

"I shall not allow them to refuse, after our extraordinary luck in meeting you."

The engineer's wife added:

" Yes, we shall be delighted, on condition that you dine with us to-night? "

He expressed his thanks pleasantly.

Suddenly he was in the grip of delirious joy, such an inner transport as seizes one who hears of the success of his dearest hope. Yet what had he gained? What new thing had come into his life? Nothing: and yet he felt himself being carried away by an intoxicating presentiment which he dared not attempt to define.

For some time they continued to walk on the terrace, waiting for the setting of the sun, to lose no moment of the spectacle of the jagged black shadow of the Mount outlined against that horizon of flame.

And their talk for the moment was simple and unaffected, of such things as they could discuss before strangers, whilst they stole momentary glances at one another.

Then they returned to the villa, on the outskirts of Avranches, set in the midst of a fine garden which looked down upon the Bay.

Anxious not to be indiscreet, somewhat disturbed, too, by M. de Pradon's cold, almost hostile, attitude, Mariolle took his leave at an early hour. As he bent over Madame de Burne's hand she whispered to him, twice, in an odd tone: " To-morrow, till to-morrow."

As soon as he had gone M. and Madame Valsaci, who had long ago adopted the ways of the provinces, suggested going to bed.

" Don't delay for me," Madame de Burne said, " I shall stroll in the garden first."

Her father added: " So shall I."

She threw a shawl about her and they went out to-

gether, walking slowly side by side on the pale sand of the alleys which under the light of the full moon shone like winding streamlets traversing the lawns and rounding the thickets.

After a long silence, M. de Pradon said in a low, quiet voice:

"My dear child, you must do me the justice to remember that I have never bothered you with advice."

She felt his unsympathetic opposition, and prepared for the attack:

"I beg your pardon, father, but you once gave me serious advice."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Advice as to . . . as to the conduct of your life?"

"Yes, and very bad advice. And I am determined, if you insist upon advising me in serious matters again, to disregard your advice."

"How did I advise you?"

"You advised me to marry M. de Burne. And that proved that your judgment was unsafe, that you lacked insight, a knowledge of men in general and of your own daughter in particular."

For a few moments he was silent, somewhat surprised and embarrassed. Then he went on gently:

"Yes, I was wrong then. But I am very sure that I am not wrong to-day in the loving and fatherly advice which I must offer you now."

"Let me hear it, then. I will take what may help me."

"You are on the point of compromising yourself."

She began to laugh, a laugh unnaturally gay and nervous, and completed his thought for him:

"With M. Mariolle, of course."

"With M. Mariolle."

"You forget," she said, "that I have already compromised myself with M. Georges de Maltry, with M. Massival, M. Gaston de Lamarthe and a dozen others of whom at different times you have been jealous. I cannot meet a man with pleasant and attractive manners but the whole of my circle turns furiously jealous, and you the most jealous of them all, you, my father, given me by all-wise Nature as my pattern and guide!"

"Nonsense!" he said sharply. "You have never compromised yourself with anyone. On the contrary, you bring to all your relations with them an admirable tactfulness."

Her answer was frank, even harsh.

"My dear father, I am no longer a young girl, and I promise you I shall compromise myself no more with M. Mariolle than with the others. You have no reason for fear. At the same time I had better tell you that it was at my suggestion that he came to Avranches. I find him delightful, quite as intelligent and much less egotistic than the others. That, by the way, was also your opinion of him until you came to believe that I showed him a certain preference . . . over yourself? No, of course not, you are not quite so malicious as that! I know you very well, father. I could tell you a great deal about yourself! But M. Mariolle amuses me. I thought it would be very good fun to arrange a chance meeting and excursion with him, and in any case it's stupid to deny oneself, when one runs no possible risk, anything that can amuse one.

And I run no risk of compromising myself if you are with us, dear, do I?"

And she laughed frankly at that, knowing very well that each word had told, that she had disarmed him by unmasking her suspicion of his curious jealousy which she had long ago discovered: and she found a secret excitement, a sense of blind-fold daring, in dragging her discovery to light.

He sat silent, very ill at ease and ill content, irritated, feeling, too, that she was guessing at the mysterious rancour, hidden deep beneath his paternal affection for her, the savage opposition whose origin he himself refused to recognise.

She added:

"Don't be afraid. It's perfectly natural at this time of year to make up a party to go to Mont Saint-Michel, a party, too, which consists of my uncle, my aunt, my father and a friend. And no one will know of it. And if they did there's no story to be made out of it. And when we are back in Paris the friend takes his place in the general circle of friends."

"Oh, very well," he said. "We'll suppose that I never spoke to you about it."

They took a few steps together, when M. de Pradon asked:

"Shall we go back to the house? I am tired. I shall go to bed."

"Oh, no; I shall walk up and down a little longer. The night is lovely."

He murmured, not without meaning:

"Don't go too far. One never knows who may not be abroad."

"But I shall stay under the windows."

"Very well, then, dear child. Good-night."

He kissed her forehead lightly and went in.

She moved away and sat down on a little rustic bench set under the shadow of an oak. The night was warm, full of the rising scents of the fields, the breath of the sea, and a luminous haze, for, under the full moon floating in the still sky, the bay was wreathed in shifting veils of mist, like white smoke wreaths, which hid the sandy acres the rising tide must now be covering.

Michèle de Burne, hands crossed on her knees, eyes on nothingness, sought to look into her own soul, through a fog as pale and impenetrable as that which covered the sands.

Many a time before this, in her luxurious dressing-room in Paris, sitting in this same attitude before her mirror, she had asked herself: "What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope? What do I want? What am I?"

Beyond the pleasure of being herself, and her profound instinct to please, to which she gave full rein, she could never discover in her innermost thoughts more than evanescent curiosities. Yet she was not ignorant of her own nature, being far too practised in the examination and study of her face and whole person to have overlooked her own soul. Hitherto she had been quite clear in her own mind as to her proper attitude towards that errant interest which, overwhelming others, was powerless to touch her to passion, which could at most only distract her thoughts.

And yet each time that she felt intimate thoughts of any man stirring in her, each time that a rival, disputing

possession with her of some man whom she wished to retain, firing her feminine instincts, set burning in her veins some little fever of desire, she had experienced in those sham love affairs a far livelier emotion than the mere pleasure of success could afford. But it never lasted. And the reason? That she grew tired, knew distaste, saw things perhaps too stark? Everything that first pleased her in a man, that had animated her, stirred, moved and attracted her, soon seemed to her obvious, robbed of bloom, boring. All of them were too much alike without actually ever being the same: and hitherto not one of them had appeared before her endowed with the nature and qualities that alone could compel her attention and set her heart afire.

She did not know whether the fault lay in them or in her. Did they lack something which she needed, or was she without the power to fall in love? Does one love because one meets one day a being whom one truly believes was created for one, or does one love simply because one is born with a faculty for loving? Sometimes it seemed to her that the heart, like the body, should possess arms, gentle outstretched arms to touch, hold, enfold, and that her own was born crippled. It had but eyes, her heart.

Often one saw fine men fall madly in love with girls wholly unworthy of them, witless, spiritless, sometimes even unlovely. Whence this mysterious impulse? But it was not only through preordained meetings that this crisis of the human life developed, it was due rather to a kind of germ which one carried in one's veins, which suddenly would start to life. She had received confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even

watched with her own eyes the instant transfiguration that comes of that intoxication flaring up in another being, and had pondered long upon it.

In the world, in the every-day routine of visits, entertainments, all the various absurdities with which the wealthy and the unoccupied fill their time, she detected now and again, always with envious, jealous, almost incredulous surprise, both women and men, to whom, beyond any doubt, some miraculous experience had come. There was no obvious, no striking sign of it: but with her restless intuition she became aware of it. In their expression, their smile, above all in their eyes, something inexpressible, rapturous, deliciously happy, appeared, a joy of the inner soul permeating the whole body, glowing through the very flesh and shining in the eyes.

Without knowing why, she yet envied them. Lovers had always irritated her, and she ascribed that dull profound ache, which the sight of those whose hearts throbbed with passion always caused her, to disdain. She recognised them, she believed, with a swiftness, an infallible discernment, which were exceptional. Often, in fact, she had scented and detected liaisons long before they were suspected by society.

When she gave thought to this subject, to the tender folly into which another's existence, the sight, speech, thought of them can plunge us, the vague inward essence of personality for which the heart yearns, she judged herself incapable of such response. And yet how often, when weary of everything, dreaming of indefinable desires, tormented by a febrile craving for change, for the unknown, which perhaps was nothing more than an

unacknowledged hunger for affection, she had longed, though her pride made of it a secret shame, to meet a man who would, were it but for a time, a few months, sweep her into that magical frenzy of mind and body: for she felt that life, in such periods of emotion, must take on a strange hue of ecstacy and delirium.

Not only had she wished for such an encounter, but she had even gone a little way to look for it, but with an indolence that could not maintain its purpose.

In every stirring of interest in unusual men who had captured her attention for a week or two there came a moment when the brief flowering of her emotions withered at some disenchanting discovery. She expected overmuch of their essential worth, their depth of feeling, their strength of character, their delicacy, their quality in short. In every case she had at last been forced to admit to herself that the failings of famous men are often more obvious than their merits, that talent is a special gift, like good sight or a perfect digestion, a gift for the workroom only, a thing in itself, with no bearing upon the aggregation of personal traits which sweeten or embitter human encounters.

But since she had met Mariolle another interest drew her to him. Did she then love him, love him with passion? Lacking prestige, fame, he had captured her thoughts by his affection, by his tenderness, by his quick intelligence, by all the true and simple attractions his presence had for her.

He had conquered, for she thought of him unceasingly: unceasingly she wanted him beside her: no one else in the world was so satisfying, so sympathetic, so indispensable. But was this, then, love?

She could feel no faintest sign of that flame of which all the world of lovers had spoken, but she did acknowledge a sincere desire, for the first time, to be more to a man than an attractive friend. Did she love him? Did real love demand a being of exceptional attraction, different from, standing above, all others, in the flaming aureole which the heart sets afire round its chosen—or is it enough that a man should please, please so much that one cannot do without him?

For if so much suffice, she loved him, or at least was near to loving. And after deep reflection, almost bitterly intent, she at last answered her own question: "Yes, I love him, but I lack intensity: my nature itself is to blame."

But of intensity of feeling she nevertheless began to be aware before long, when she first saw him coming towards her along the terrace in the gardens at Avranches. For the first time she had felt a touch of that indescribable force which carries us, pushes, thrusts us towards some one: she had known a great joy in walking beside him, in having him close to her, burned up as he was with love of her, in watching the sun set behind the shadow, like some visible legend, of Mont Saint-Michel. Was not love itself a kind of legend of the soul, in which some had faith by nature, whilst others, by dint of dreaming of it, ended by themselves sometimes believing in it? Was she, too, to end in finding belief? She knew a tender, odd, desire to rest her head on this man's shoulder, to be closer, much closer, to him, to reach that "quite close" to which none can ever attain, to give him that which forever is offered in vain, forever retained: the secret inner intimacy of self.

Now she had known intense feeling towards him, and was conscious of it still at the bottom of her heart. Perhaps it would be enough for her to yield herself to him for her to know love's real possession. She resisted too strenuously, reasoned too clearly, fought too strongly against men's attraction. Would it not be sweet, on an evening such as this, to wander with him beside the willows on the river's edge, and, to recompense his passion, to offer him, now and again, her lips?

A window of the villa opened. She turned her head. No doubt it was her father trying to see her below in the darkness.

She called:

"Are you not asleep yet?"

And he answered:

"If you do not come in you will catch cold."

So she rose and came back to the house. Then, when she was within her own room again, she drew aside the curtains to watch the mists in the bay grow white and whiter under the moon, whilst in her heart, so it seemed to her, the clouds grew radiant with the rising tenderness she discovered there.

All the same she slept well, and the maid had to rouse her for their early departure to lunch on the Mount.

A waggonette came to take them. On hearing it crunch over the gravel before the porch she leaned from her window and suddenly met Mariolle's searching eyes. Her heart began to beat perceptibly. She was aware, with surprise and uneasiness, of this strange pulse throbbing thus, making the blood run fast because she had seen one man. Just as all the evening, before she went up to bed, so now she repeated: "Then I am going to love him!"

Then when she found herself face to face with him, she felt him so smitten, so sick with love, that she had a keen desire to open her arms to him and give him her mouth.

They did but exchange one glance, which left him pale with delight.

The waggonette moved off. It was a clear summer morning, full of the song of birds and flowering youth. They went down the hill, crossed the river, and passed through several villages by a stony little road which jolted the travellers this way and that. After a long silence Madame de Burne began to rally her uncle on the state of the road: the ice was broken: and the gaiety which danced in the air seemed to saturate all their minds.

Suddenly, as they left a village, the bay came in sight, no longer tawny as the evening before, but shining with clear water which covered everything, sand, salt marshes, and, said the coachman, even the road itself a little further on.

So for an hour they moved at a walk to allow the floods to sink back into the sea.

The belts of elms or oaks girdling the farms by which they passed hid from them every now and again the growing outline of the Abbey crowning its rock, rising now out of deep water. Then again, suddenly, in a gap between two barns, it reappeared, always closer, always more striking. The sunshine lit with ruddy lights the jagged granite church crouching upon its stony pedestal.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle watched it, and then turned to look each at the other, each letting the poetry of that vision in the rose red July morning sink into the growing, poignant trouble of their hearts.

All the party talked with unaffected ease. Madame Valsaci told some tragic stories of drownings, the dark drama of the engulfing sands that swallow men alive. M. Valsaci defended the embanked road, decried by the artists, and insisted upon the advantages of uninterrupted communications with the Mount, and of reclaiming the dunes, first for grazing and later for cultivation.

Then the waggonette came to a halt. The sea covered the road beyond them. It was shallow now, a wet sheet filming the stone causeway: but there was the risk of running into broken places, deep holes from which it would be impossible to pull out. They were obliged to wait.

"Oh, it's going down fast!" M. Valsaci insisted, pointing out with his finger the line of the road from which the shallow water slid away, as though swallowed by the earth or withdrawn by some mysterious and powerful agency.

They got down to watch from the very edge this strange, swift, silent ebbing of the sea, and followed its retreat step by step. Already green splashes of submerged vegetation began to appear where here and there the gentle undulations rose to the surface: and the green splashes grew, solidified, became islands. Soon the islands linked up into continents divided by lilliputian seas: and at last over the whole expanse of the gulf the sea was in flight and the waters disappeared into the distance. It was for all the world as if an immense silver veil, full of holes, with ragged edges and frayed, was being drawn off the land, leaving bare wide prairies of short coarse grass, whilst beyond them the yellow sands began to emerge.

They got back into the brake and all stood up to get a better view. As the road dried before them the horses moved forward, though still at a foot pace: and as the wheels jolted now and again André Mariolle was suddenly aware of Madame de Burne's shoulder pressing his own. At first he thanked the luck of a chance stumble for this contact with her: but she did not draw away, and each shock from the wheels sent a shiver through him from that proximity which set his body in an ague, his heart in a frenzy. He dared no longer look at her, he was paralysed with joy at a familiarity which he could not have dared to imagine, and his mind turned and twisted in a disorder of thoughts like the chaotic ideas of a drunkard: "Can it be true? Could this be possible? Were they both beside themselves with rapture?"

As the horses broke into a trot all were forced to sit down. Then Mariolle felt a sudden impulse, both compelling and puzzling, to make a pleasant impression on M. de Pradon, and he made his attentions subtly flattering. Almost as susceptible to such compliments as his daughter, her father let himself be charmed, and presently showed a smiling face to the day.

At last they were rolling along the embankment and moving swiftly towards the Mount that rose at the end of the straight road laid across the waste of sand. The Pontorson river washed its left slope: on its right the grazing lands covered with scanty grass, which the driver called the sea-meadows, had given way to sodden sand dunes, impregnated by the sea.

And the towering buildings rose against the blue sky, their silhouettes sharp in all their details, scarp, belfries and turrets, and crowning all the Abbey with its grotesque

array of fearsome gargoyles with which the terror-inspired beliefs of our ancestors completed their Gothic sanctuaries.

It was close upon one o'clock before they reached the hotel at which lunch had been ordered. The landlady, prudent creature, had not finished her preparations, and they were forced to wait. They sat down eventually, but very late, and all were ravenous. Thus the champagne immediately filled them with gay good humour.

All were cheerful, and two of the party believed themselves on the brink of happiness. With the dessert, when the spirit of the wine they had drunk and the pleasure of their cross fire of conversation had developed in them that warm enjoyment of living which now and again glows in one at the end of a good dinner and disposes one to approve of all that happens, Mariolle asked:

"What should you say to staying here until to-morrow? It would be beautiful to see all this by moonlight, and very pleasant to dine together again this evening."

Madame de Burne agreed at once: the two men fell in with the suggestion. Madame Valsaci alone hesitated, because of her little boy left alone at home, but her husband reassured her, reminding her that she had been away from him like this before. He even wrote, without leaving the table, a short telegram to his office. He thought Mariolle, who had approved of the embankment, to flatter him, and had declared it far less out of character with the Mount than general opinion considered it, a delightful man.

When they left the table they went to visit the famous buildings. They made their way along the ramparts.

The town, a pile of houses built in the Middle Ages, climbing one upon another up the colossal block of granite which carries on its summit the Abbey, is separated from the sands by a high crenellated wall. This wall sweeps up, as it circles the ancient city, in elbows and angles, platforms, outlook turrets, a score of surprises for the eye which discovers, at each new twist, another aspect of the amazing sweep of the horizon. They were silent, somewhat scant of breath after their heavy luncheon, and astounded at each fresh vision of the amazing edifice. Above them it soared into the sky, a prodigious assembly of spires, flowers in granite, arches flung from one tower to another, an incredible, immense and most delicate lacework of architecture, embroidered by day upon an azure field, and from it jutted out, as if about to launch into flight, a menacing and fantastic army of gargoyles with the faces of beasts. Between the sea and the Abbey, on the northern flank of the Mount, a wild, almost perpendicular slope, called the Forest because it was covered with aged trees, began where the houses ended and opposed its sombre mass of green to the yellow of the illimitable sands. Madame de Burne and André Mariolle, who were walking in front, stopped to look at it. She leaned upon his arm benumbed by an enchantment such as she had never felt before. Then on she climbed with him, lightly, happily climbing towards that house of dreams, and towards other dreams likewise. She could have wished that this battlemented way might never come to an end, for now she found herself almost wholly content for the first time in her life.

She whispered:

" Ah, God, how lovely ! "

He answered, with his eyes upon her :

" I can think of nothing but you."

She smiled, replying :

" I'm not a very poetical being, but this seems to me so beautiful that I really feel deeply moved."

He stammered :

" And I am mad for love of you."

He felt a gentle pressure on his arm and they moved upwards again.

An attendant met them at the door of the Abbey, and they went in by that superb stairway, between the two towers, which led to the old Guard Room. Thence they went from chamber to chamber, court to court, from one dungeon to another, listening, marvelling, delighted with all they saw, admiring all, the crypt with its huge pillars, whose very strength is beauty, which supports on its tremendous columns the whole choir of the church above, and the granite group called the Marvel, an awe-inspiring construction of three tiers of Gothic buildings superimposed one upon another, the most extraordinary masterpiece of all the monastic and military architecture of the Middle Ages.

Then they came to the cloisters. Their surprise was so complete that they stopped speechless at that great square lawn enclosed by the lightest, most graceful, most charming colonnade of all the world's cloisters. In their double ranks the slim little columns topped by delicious capitals carry, along the whole range of the four galleries, an unbroken garland of ornament and Gothic flowers of an infinite variety, an invention ever fresh, the exquisite phantasy of those simple old artists whose

dreams and thoughts bit into the stones with mallet and chisel.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle walked very slowly round the cloisters, arm-in-arm, dwelling on each step, whilst the others, a little weary, admired the effect from a distance, seated near the doorway by which they had entered.

" Ah, how I love all this," she said, and stood still.

He answered:

" I—I don't know where I am, what I am, nor what I see. I feel that you are near me—nothing else."

Then she looked him squarely in the face, smiling, and murmured:

" André! "

He understood that she was making the gift of herself. They spoke no more, but walked on again.

The exploration of the buildings continued, but they scarcely used their eyes.

The lacework flight of stairs, however, was able to hold their attention for a moment or two. Imprisoned in its arch soaring from one turret to another clear across the sky, it seemed to scale the clouds: and again they were struck with surprise when they came to the Fool's Road, a dizzy granite footway that, without a parapet, circles the topmost tower just below its roof.

" May one go round that way? " she asked.

" No, it's forbidden," the guide replied.

She produced twenty francs. The man hesitated. The others, feeling already seriously disturbed by a glance at the abyss and the immensity of space around them, objected strongly to such a folly.

She asked Mariolle:

" You'd face it, wouldn't you? "

He laughed:

" I've ventured upon worse places."

And with no more concern for the others they set off.

He went first on the narrow ledge, walking on the edge of the gulf, and she followed him, slipping along by the wall, her eyes lowered so as not to see the drop below them, frightened now and almost collapsing with fear, clinging to the hand which he held out to her: but she felt that he was steadfast, untroubled by the ordeal, sure both of head and foot, and she thought, delighted in spite of her panic, " Oh, but this is a man! " They were alone in space, high as ever the sea birds glide, high over the same horizons that the white-winged creatures ceaselessly patrol as they explore its distances with their little yellow eyes.

Feeling her tremble, Mariolle asked:

" You are feeling dizzy? "

She answered in a low voice:

" A little, but with you here I am not afraid."

Coming closer to her he put one arm about her to hold her up, and she felt so reassured by the material support that she raised her head to look about her.

He was almost carrying her, and she surrendered herself, rejoicing in the strong support which let her tread those heights, and she felt a rush of gratitude, a woman's romantic appreciation, for his restraint in not spoiling with kisses their aery pilgrimage.

When they rejoined the others, who had been waiting, tormented with anxiety, for them, M. de Pradon, thoroughly exasperated, said to her:

"Good God, what an idiotic trick you have just played!"

But she answered with entire assurance:

"No, for it was played successfully. Nothing is idiotic if it succeeds."

He shrugged his shoulders, and they went down again. They stopped at the caretaker's lodge and bought photographs, and by the time they reached the hotel it was almost time to dine. The hotelkeeper advised a short walk on the sands, towards the open sea, in order to see the Mount from what was said to be its most imposing aspect.

Although tired they all set out again, rounded the ramparts and went some little way into the sinister dunes, so treacherously soft though apparently firm, where their feet, planted upon the beautiful yellow floor stretching in front of them, that seemed so hard, suddenly sank to the ankle in deceitful golden wreaths of sand.

From this side the Abbey, losing immediately the aspect of some cathedral of the sea with which it captured the imagination of those on the solid land, took on, to overawe the ocean, a warlike air, as of some feudal fortress, with its great crenellated wall pierced by picturesque loop-holes, upheld every here and there by giant buttresses whose cyclopean bases were welded into the foundations of the extraordinary Mount itself. But Madame de Burne and André Mariolle had no more thought to spare for this. They were entirely occupied with themselves, bound together by the cord which they felt straining one to the other, enclosed in that prison in which one knows no more of the every-day world, where one sees no more than one other being.

But when they found themselves sitting before their full plates, under the bright lights, they seemed to wake, and discovered that in spite of other preoccupations they were both hungry.

The party spent a long time at table, and when the dinner came to an end the moonlight views were forgotten in enjoyable conversation. Besides, no one wanted to go out again, and no one spoke of the earlier suggestion. The huge moon might burnish with faery light the thin little lip of the rising tide that already was creeping over the outer sands with the almost imperceptible, the terrifying lisp of moving water: she might illuminate the ramparts that coiled round the Mount, and, in the unique setting of the illimitable bay, shining upon the shivering advance of the bright waters over the dunes, disclose the romantic masses and spires of the Abbey: no one wanted to see anything more.

It was not yet ten o'clock when Madame Valsaci, overcome with sleep, began to speak of going to bed. And her suggestion was accepted without a word of opposition. After an exchange of most cordial phrases each one went off to his or her room.

André Mariolle knew very well that he had no hope of sleep: he lit the two candles on the mantelpiece, opened his window, and leaned out to watch the night.

His whole body grew weak under the torture of his despairing hope. He was aware of her, so near to him, divided by two doors only, and it was almost as impossible to reach her as it was to arrest the rising flood of the sea now drowning all the land. In his throat was an urgency to cry aloud, and in his nerves such torture of expectation at once insatiable and vain, that he began to

ask himself what he should next do, being no longer able to bear the loneliness of this night of sterile joy.

Little by little all noises died away in the hotel and down below in the one twisting street of the town. Mariolle still leaned out from his window, aware only that at least time was passing, watching the silver carpet of the full tide, and putting off the hour for going to bed, as though he were somehow aware of some marvellous turn of fortune coming towards him.

Of a sudden it seemed to him that some hand had touched the handle of his door. In one swift wrench he had turned about. His door slowly opened. A woman stole in, her head veiled in white lace and her figure wrapped in one of those huge cloaks that seem a compound of silk and fur and snow. She shut the door behind her carefully: then, as if she had not seen him standing there, dumbfoundered with joy, in the clear dark frame of his window, she walked straight to the fireplace and blew out the two candles.

II

They had agreed to meet again by the hotel entrance next morning to say good-bye. Mariolle, who was down first, waited for her appearance with much uneasiness, half afraid, half happy. What would she do? How would she take the situation? What were their future relations to be? On what happy or disastrous adventure was he now to embark? She had power to do with him what she would, make of him a divine dreamer such as only opium worshippers could match or cast him like a lost soul into outer darkness. He walked nervously up and down beside the two carriages, for now they were parting, he to travel on to Saint-Malo to round off his tale of holiday-making, they to return to Avranches.

When would he meet her again? Would she cut short her visit to her relations, or would she delay her return? He felt a sharp fear of her first appearance, looks, words, for he had never seen her nor had an articulate word been spoken during that short night's union.

She had given him her body deliberately, yet with a certain modesty, and without shrinking yet also without any overt delight in his endearments. Then she had slipped away with her light step, whispering:

"Till to-morrow, dear one."

André Mariolle after that strange swift encounter in the darkness was left with a confused sense of deception.

He was empty, a man who had somehow failed to reap the full harvest of a love which he had believed to be ripe for his taking, and yet he was fresh from the intoxication of long desired triumph. At least he still had the hope, even now not fully assured, of ultimate complete fulfilment of his heart's desire.

He heard her voice and started. She was speaking sharply, obviously irritated by some remark made by her father, and when he saw her on the last steps of the staircase there was at either corner of her mouth the little wrinkle that always betrayed her ill-temper.

Mariolle involuntarily took two steps forward. When she saw him she at once began to smile. In her eyes, grown suddenly peaceful, some lovely thought took shape and irradiated all her face. Then, in the hand which she suddenly, gently, held out to him, he found assurance, freely given, with no suggestion of reservation, of that gift of herself which she had already made in the hours of the night.

"So we are to separate?" she said.

"Unhappily! And it hurts me more than I dare admit."

She murmured:

"It shall not be for long."

Then, as M. de Pradon joined them, she added in a whisper:

"Tell them that you are making a fortnight's tour in Brittany—but don't really do it."

Madame Valsaci, much distressed, bustled up to them.

"What's this your father tells me? You are planning to leave us the day after to-morrow? But you should have stayed with us at least till the following Monday!"

Madame de Burne, in a rather listless voice, only answered:

"Father is tactless. He does not know when to keep his own counsel. The sea air has given me, every year, the same neuralgic pains, which are really quite unpleasant! I spoke to him of cutting my visit short to avoid spending a month later in recovering from it. But this is not exactly the moment to discuss it, is it?"

Mariolle's driver urged him to start at once, so that he should not miss the Pontorson train.

Madame de Burne asked him:

"And when are you going to return to Paris?"

He apparently hesitated for a moment:

"I'm not very sure, really. I want to see Saint-Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, Dead Men's Bay, the Raz Head, Audierne, Penmarch, Morbihan, the whole of this famous Brittany headland. I expect it will take me. . . ."

After a silence filled by fictitious calculations he exaggerated his instructions:

"Well, from a fortnight to three weeks."

"Some little time!" said she laughing. "So far as I am concerned, if I suffer from nervous pains as I did last night, I shall go back within two days."

Choked by emotion, he longed to cry "Thank you!" but he held himself in hand and only kissed her hand—with a lover's ardent kiss—which she now gave him for the last time.

And so, after a score of friendly expressions, an exchange of thanks, and hopes of renewed acquaintance between himself and the Valsacis and M. de Pradon (who seemed a little comforted by the announcement of the itinerary he had set himself), he scrambled into his cab

and drove off, with his head turned back towards her so long as he could see her.

He went straight through to Paris without stopping, and saw nothing on his journey. The whole night long, alone in his coupé, eyes half-shut, arms folded, his spirit deep in reverie, he could summon up no other thought than that of the dream which had been brought down to earth. From the moment that he reached home, from the first moment after his arrival, in the silence of the library in which he usually sat, worked, wrote his letters, where he could almost always count upon a peaceful mood in the friendly company of his books, piano, violin, there began that unending torture of impatience which works like a fever in all hungry hearts. Astonished to find that he could settle to nothing, occupy his attention with nothing, that even his accustomed habits, the normal occupations of his private life, his reading, his music, were impotent to keep his body still, much less absorb his thoughts, he began to wonder how he should find means to ease this new distress. A craving to go out, to walk, amid new surroundings had taken possession of him, a need at once physical and beyond physical comprehension, the torment with which the mind inoculates the body; in short, the instinctive, insatiable desire of one individual for another.

He put on his overcoat, took his hat, opened the door, and, walking down the staircase, asked himself where he was to go. Then there came to him an idea which had never occurred to him before. To mask their meetings, he must have a secret nest, both safe and attractive.

He prowled, walked many miles, searched endless

avenues and roads, interviewed with uneasiness hall porters with too-understanding smiles, landlords whom he instinctively disliked, flats and furnished rooms with sordid furniture, and at last returned late at night, much depressed. By nine o'clock next morning he was on the trail again, and ended by discovering, as night fell, at Auteuil, in a side street, in a garden from which there were three different ways of escape, a lonely little house which a local furnisher promised to refit to his orders within two days. He chose the materials, ordered the simplest of furniture, in plain varnished deal, and the thickest of carpets. The garden was under the care of a baker who lived near one of the three gates. He came to an arrangement at once with the man's wife to do all the work of the house. A market-gardener close by undertook to fill all the flower-beds and attend to the garden.

These and other matters kept him busy until after eight o'clock, and when he got home worn out with fatigue he saw, whilst his heart beat wildly, a telegram on his writing-desk. Tearing it open, he read:

" Shall be home to-morrow. Instructions by letter.

Miche."

He had not written to her as yet, lest a letter might annoy her whilst she was still at Avranches. But immediately after dinner he sat down at his desk to tell her of his love. It was a long and difficult task, for every expression, every phrase, and the very ideas themselves seemed so feeble, so commonplace, and so silly, to put

into language a gratitude at once so delicate and so passionate.

The letter from her which reached him next morning confirmed her promise to return to Paris that same evening. It begged him not to show himself for some days yet, so that the story of his wandering holiday should not be discredited. But at the same time she invited him to stroll along the garden terrace of the Tuileries, overlooking the Seine, about ten o'clock next morning.

He was there an hour too soon, and wandered about that wide space, where only hurrying workers passed, Government clerks late for their offices on the left bank of the river, typists, workers of all kinds. He tasted to the full the pleasure of watching these folk whose need of daily bread drove them in such haste to their soul-destroying tasks, and of comparing with them his own fortune, who waited there to meet his mistress, one of this world's queens. He realised how amazingly fortunate he was, how privileged, how far removed from the hustle of the market-place. His chest heaved with the longing to thank that clear blue sky, since Providence, for him, was no more than that Luck which sends rainy days or cloudless, which orders at its mocking will the destinies of men.

A few minutes before ten he walked up on to the terrace and began to watch for her coming.

"She is sure to be late," he thought. But the ten strokes of the hour had scarcely dropped into silence from a neighbouring tower before he believed that he had seen her, far away, crossing the Gardens in haste, like a worker hurrying, late, to her morning's work. He hesitated: "Is it she?" He had recognised her walk,

yet was astonished at the difference in her air, which struck him as timidly modest in the plain black dress she was wearing. Nevertheless she made as straight for the broad stairs that lead to the terrace as if she had learned her way there before.

"Yes," he said to himself, "she evidently loves this place and walks here sometimes." He watched her lift her skirt to meet the first step, and hasten up the shallow flight, and, as he moved quickly forward to meet her, she said as they reached each other, with a friendly smile that half-hid a little uneasiness:

"You are very reckless! You mustn't show yourself openly like this. I could see you all the way from the Rue de Rivoli. Come, we'll go and sit on one of the seats behind that little orange grove. And you must wait for me there another time."

He could not help asking:

"Then you often come here?"

"Yes, I love this place. And then, as I walk every morning, I can get some exercise here and enjoy the countryside. Charming! Yes? And then one never meets a soul here, whilst the Bois! Impossible! But you must not betray my secret life!"

He laughed:

"Believe me, I'll guard it with mine!"

He took her hand, a little hand that hung in hiding under the folds of her dress, and whispered:

"How I love you! I am sick with waiting for you. Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, and thank you. It moved me."

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"No. Why should I be angry? You are very dear to me."

He tried to find burning words, words vibrant with memories and emotion. Finding none, and too shaken to control his choice of phrases, he repeated, breathlessly:

"How I love you!'

"I made you meet me here because there are boats and water here too. They are not a bit like those others —but all the same it's not a bad view, is it?"

They were sitting on a bench close to the stone balustrade that borders the river, and found themselves almost alone, with none to overlook them on any side. Two gardeners and three nursemaids were the only living beings at that hour on the long vista of the terrace.

Carriages rattled along the quay at their feet, invisible to them. Steps were audible on the pavement directly below them, close against the wall which supported the terrace. Still unable to find what it was that they wished to tell each other they looked out together over the lovely view of Paris that stretches from the Ile Saint-Louis and the towers of Notre Dame to the rising slopes of Meudon. And she repeated:

"It's not a bad view, is it?"

But he was seized of a sudden by the breathless recollection of their adventure in the sky, on the summit of the Abbaye tower, and sick with regret for a vanished emotion, cried:

"Ah, do you remember how we circled the Fools' Way?"

"Yes, but I am a little frightened when I think of it now. Oh, but I should be giddy if I had to do it again! I was drunk with that wonderful air, and the sun and the

sea. Look, my dear, how magnificent this view in front of us is! I love Paris."

He was astonished, and had a confused idea that something which had been a part of her away in the country was missing now. He whispered:

"What does the view matter when I am beside you?"

Without speaking she pressed his hand. Then, more deeply penetrated by happiness through that light touch than he could have been perhaps through any tender phrase, his heart relieved of the uneasiness which had weighed it down since they had met again, he found himself able at last to talk.

He told her quickly, in words which almost sounded solemn, that he had given her his life forever, that she might do with it as she pleased.

She, daughter of modern scepticism, prisoned beyond redemption by rusty cynicism, though she believed him, smiled at him as she answered:

"Don't bind yourself for too long!"

He turned completely towards her, and, looking deep into her eyes, with a penetrating gaze which was almost a touch, repeated what he had just said, at greater length, with more ardour, with lyrical phrases. All he had ever written to her in those scores of passionate letters, he poured out to her in such a fervour of conviction that, as she listened, she could imagine herself a goddess hidden in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed, in every fibre of her woman's being, by those adoring lips, more passionately, more wonderfully, than ever before. When at last he was silent she answered quietly:

"And I, too, I love you dearly."

They held each other's hands then, like a young couple

walking, side by side, along a country lane, and watched the boats go drifting down the river in their dream. They were alone in Paris, in that confused enormous mass of sound, now near, and now withdrawn, which floated about them, alone in the city's life which was full of the lives of thousands close about them, more completely alone than they had been on the top of that tower in the sky: and for some seconds both forgot entirely that there was anything else upon earth than themselves.

She was the first to come back to realities and to the passing of their hour.

"Shall we meet here to-morrow?" she asked.

He thought for a moment and then, uncomfortable at the question he meant to put, stammered:

"Yes . . . oh, yes; certainly. But . . . shall we never meet anywhere else? Of course, this place is quite deserted . . . however . . . well, anyone after all can come here."

She hesitated.

"Yes, that's true. But all the same you simply must not be seen by anybody, for another fortnight at least, or they will not believe you ever went travelling. It will be delightful and mysterious to meet when everyone thinks you are far away from Paris. But you can't possibly come to see me. So . . . I don't see. . . ."

He could feel himself growing red as he answered:

"And I can't ask you to come to my rooms. But is there no other way, no other place?"

She was neither surprised nor shocked, being a woman who had always faced realities, whose logical sense was strong, and unclouded by false shame.

"Yes," she said. "Only it will take time to find it."

"But I have found it already."

"Already!"

"Yes, I have!"

"Well?"

"Do you know the Rue Vieux-Champs, at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It is crossed by the Rue Tournemine at one end and the Rue Jean-de-Saulge at the other."

"Well?"

"In that road—or rather, alley—there is a garden. In the garden a little house which has gates on to each of the other two roads."

"Yes?"

"And that little summer cottage is waiting for you."

She considered it and, with no trace of embarrassment, put the two or three questions her feminine prudence suggested. He offered explanations, which appeared to satisfy her for she murmured as she rose:

"Very well. I will be there to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three."

"I will wait for you behind the door of Number Seven. Don't forget. Knock once as you pass."

"Yes, and good-bye, dear one, until to-morrow."

"To-morrow. Good-bye. Thank you. I love you."

They were standing facing one another.

"Don't come with me," she said. "Wait here for ten minutes and then slip away by the quay."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

She walked away quickly, with an air so discreet, so

modest, and so hurried, that she looked exactly like one of those neat, hard-working daughters of Paris who hurry over the pavements each morning on their honest errands.

He drove out to Auteuil, fretted lest the house should not be quite ready for the morrow.

But he found it full of workmen. The walls were already hung with their fabrics, and rugs were laid on the parquet floors. Men hammered, screwed, washed, and were everywhere at once. In the garden, which was of considerable size, part of an old park and still boasting a few magnificent old trees, dense thickets suggested woodlands beyond, and round the two lawns paths skirted their impenetrable masses. Here the gardener, whom he had discovered, had already planted rose trees and beds of carnations, geraniums in groups, banks of mignonette, and twenty other kinds of flowers whose summer had been advanced or retarded by the florists' skill to bring them all together in one flowering, where but a few days earlier there had been an unbroken waste.

Mariolle was as delighted as though he had just come from some new success with his beloved mistress, and, having wrung an oath from the foreman of the furniture firm that everything should be in place by midday next day, went off to visit various shops, to buy treasures to adorn the interior also. He chose for the walls those admirable modern reproductions of famous pictures, for the chimney-shelves and the tables rare pieces of china, and some few of those small personal things which all women love to have about them.

He spent during that day two months' income, and spent it with profound pleasure, thinking how for ten years he had invested savings, not for love of econo-

mising but from lack of desires to gratify. Now he was free to spend money royally.

At dawn next day he was back at the secret pavilion, watched the furniture arrive, decided the position of each piece, himself hung most of the pictures, perched upon a ladder. He burned perfume, and sprayed the linen and the rugs. In his feverish excitement, in the delicious thrill which allowed him no peace, he had the impression that he had never found so amusing, so utterly delightful an occupation. At every moment he looked at his watch and calculated how long a time still separated him from the moment when she should come, and he harassed the workmen with constant rearrangements by which he hoped to discover the best possible position for the treasures which he had bought.

Prudently he dismissed his army at two o'clock, and then, as the hands of his watch moved slowly round their last short journey, in the silence which had settled upon the pavilion he waited for his hour of ecstasy, savouring in imagination, as he prowled from room to room, talking to himself inconsequently, laughing aloud, the maddest joy of loving that he was ever destined to know.

At last he went out into the garden. The rays of sunshine pierced the leaves and warmed the grass and lit up one most charming arch of roses. Heaven itself lent every aid to adorn their meeting-place. Then he hid himself beside the door which from time to time he set ajar, for fear that she might yet miss it.

Three o'clock sounded, repeated a dozen times by the convents and the factories round about. Now he was waiting, watch in hand, and he shivered with amazement when two little knocks sounded on the wood against which

his ear was pressed, for he had heard no sound of footsteps in the lane.

He opened. It was she. She looked about her in surprise. Her first uneasy glance was for the near-by houses and at once she was reassured. It was obviously impossible that she should know or be recognised by any of the respectable little bourgeois whom such houses would shelter. Then she looked round the garden with a contented curiosity. And last she pressed the backs of her hands, from which she had been stripping her gloves, against her lover's lips, and took his arm.

At every step she repeated:

"Oh, how pretty! How delightfully unexpected!" and "Oh, how charming!"

As she came upon the bank of roses which the sun, through a rent in the trees, illumined, she cried:

"Oh, my dear, my dear, it's fairyland!"

She plucked one, kissed it, and tucked it into her dress. Then they entered the little house, and she seemed so well pleased that he nearly threw himself on his knees before her, even though at the bottom of his heart he felt that she might perhaps have shown herself more interested in him, and a little less in the house. She looked about her with the excited delight of a child over a new toy just put into its hand, and, untroubled by scruple in the elaborate tomb he had constructed for her virtue, she enjoyed the connoisseur's satisfaction in the deference paid to her individual taste. She had been shrinking, on her way here, from the idea of a commonplace meeting in surroundings whose furnishings would be soiled by other secrets. But here everything was new, unexpected, charming, and had clearly cost him a great deal of thought

and money. André seemed to her even more delightful than she had imagined him.

Turning quickly to him she raised both arms in an irresistible invitation, and they were linked in one of those embraces which give to lovers as they shut their eyes a strange dual sensation of pure happiness and of oblivion.

There in the inviolable silence of their retreat they spent three hours together, minds, bodies, and lips in unison, until for André Mariolle ecstasy of sense mingled with the desire of his heart indistinguishably.

Before they parted they walked together in the garden and rested in one of the green bowers where from no point could they be overlooked. André, full of vitality, talked to her as to a goddess who had descended to earth for him alone, and she listened in a langour of fatigue with that look of weariness that he had so often seen in her eyes after too long a visit from men who bored her. Yet she was still affectionate, and a smile, even though it seemed a little mechanical, lit her face tenderly, and as she held his hand she pressed it, but with a constant pressure which perhaps was involuntary rather than conscious.

Clearly she had not been aware of what he had been saying, for she broke into the middle of a phrase to say suddenly:

"I must go. At six I ought to be with the Marquise de Bratiane, and I shall be very late."

He led her gently to the door by which he had admitted her. They kissed, and after a furtive glance up and down the lane she slipped away in the shadow of the wall.

When he was alone, when he experienced the sudden emptiness that, after her kisses, a woman leaves with us, and that odd little wound in the heart that retreating footsteps make, he seemed to be abandoned and alone, as though he had had nothing of her; and he began to walk up and down the sandy paths, puzzling over the eternal contradiction between hope and reality.

He waited there until night fell, growing gradually calmer and surrendering himself to her in her absence more completely than she, even in his arms, had given herself to him. Then at last he went home, dined without noticing what he had eaten, and began to write to her.

The next day seemed long to him, and the night interminable. He wrote to her again. He could not understand why she had not written to him, had had nothing to say to him. But a brief telegram came for him on the second morning giving him another rendezvous at the same hour on the following day. The little blue slip of paper freed him from the pain which her unaccountable delay had begun to inflict upon him.

She came, as at their first meeting, punctually to the minute, and was as affectionate, as lit by smiles: and their meeting in the little house at Auteuil differed in no way from the first. André, surprised at first and vaguely uneasy not to find unfold between them the ecstatic passion of whose coming he had experienced the presentiment, forgot by imperceptible degrees in a more sensual delight his dream of a complete possession. The pleasure of physical possession lulled his secret uneasiness. He was linked to her by their bodily union, a formidable chain, the strongest of all perhaps,

the only fetter from which, once it has been firmly bound and has bitten into the flesh, one can never wholly free oneself again.

Three weeks slipped softly, lightly, away. He began to believe that they would never end, that he would stay in the enchanted cottage forever, lost to his world and living in her alone. In the strong but wayward fancies in which his sterile artistic nature sought relief from its incessant mortifying failures to find other expression, there came to life a fantastic hope of a whole life thus spent, discreet, happy, hidden.

Every three days she came to him, giving herself willingly, drawn, it seemed, as much by the amusing little rendezvous, by the charm of the little house which had become a showroom for rare flowers, by the novelty of this lovers' life, as by the spell of her lover's adoration and ever-increasing passion. It lacked danger, perhaps, since no one had the right to follow her, but it was delightfully mysterious nevertheless.

And then one day she said:

"Now, dear friend, the time has come for you to return to the world. To-morrow you will spend the afternoon at my flat. I have told our friends that you are back in Paris."

He was hurt.

"But . . . why so soon?"

"Because, if anyone discovered that you had come back, your being here would be so impossible to explain that rumours would begin to fly about."

It was so obvious that she was right that he at once agreed to call on her next day. He asked her if she was to hold one of her receptions.

"Yes," she said. "In fact it's quite an important little affair."

The news was anything but pleasant.

"What kind of affair?"

She laughed with pleasure at the thought of it.

"I have got Massival, by means of the most outrageous flattery, to promise to play his 'Dido,' which no one has yet heard. It's a poem on love in the ancient days. Madame de Bratiane, who considers herself sole owner of Massival, is exasperated. But she will be there, too, because she is to sing. Haven't I been clever?"

"And is there a crowd coming?"

"Oh, no. Only our intimate friends. You know nearly all of them."

"May I not excuse myself from attending this affair? I am so happy in my solitude."

"My dearest friend, you may not. Why, I would rather have you there than any of them."

His heart raced.

"Thank you," he said. "I will come."

III

"Ah, good evening!"

Mariolle was quick to notice that he was no longer the "dear friend" of Auteuil, and that her handshake was brief, the light touch of the preoccupied hostess, intent upon her social duties. He passed into the drawing-room as Madame de Burne went forward to greet the lovely Madame Le Prieur, whose daring toilettes and insistence upon her statuesque form had earned her the mocking nickname, "the Goddess." She was the wife of a member of the Institute, whose interests lay in the Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres section.

"Hello, Mariolle!" Lamarthe greeted him, "whence have you sprung? We thought you dead."

"I went to explore Finisterre," he said, and was beginning to talk of his impressions when the novelist interrupted him.

"D'you know the Baroness de Frémines?"

"No; only by sight, but I've heard any amount of gossip. A peculiar creature?"

"Maddest of the mad! But a savour, a charm of modernity. Come along and I'll introduce you."

He took André by the elbow and steered him towards a girl who was invariably compared to a doll, such a fair and exquisite little doll, invented and created by the devil

for the damnation of all the bearded babies who desired to play with her. She had long, clever, narrow eyes, slanting very slightly up towards her temples, a subtle suggestion of the Chinese. Their blue enamel glance escaped between her eyelids which seldom opened wide, sleepy eyelids made to veil their treasures, to droop and conceal whatever intimate mystery might be behind them.

Her fair hair had the silvery shimmer of silk, and her small mouth with its delicate lips might have been designed by a miniaturist and modelled by the light hand of a sculptor. The voice that danced airily away from them rang with little crystal vibrations, and her unexpected biting phrases expressed her sharp individuality. She was malicious and amusing, and her charm was disintegrating. Her seductive allure was a cold corruption, and the aloof and complex soul of the soiled little neurasthenic profoundly affected her close companions, subjecting them to violent and passionate disturbances.

She was known to all Paris as the most unbalanced of the pleasure seekers in the inner social world, and perhaps the wittiest of them: but few knew her real self or what she thought or how far she would go. For the most part her power over men was unlimited. And her husband was another mystery. His breeding and manners were unassailable and he appeared to see nothing. The world wondered whether he were blind, indifferent, or complaisant. Perhaps he really saw nothing but eccentricities which amused him. Everyone had his own theory about the husband's position. A number of unpleasant rumours were in circulation, and some even hinted that he found his own profit in his wife's secret vices.

Between her and Madame de Burne there were natural

attractions and ferocious jealousies, periods of intimacy followed by crises of savage dislike. They delighted in each other, distrusted each other and yet could not keep apart for long, like two professional duellists who each appreciated the other's quality and longed to kill.

The Baroness de Frémines was at the moment enjoying a triumph. She had won a complete and notable victory. She had made a conquest of Lamarthe and stolen him from her rival, plucked him away and carried him off to attach him very obviously to her train of confessed servants. The novelist was apparently enamoured of her, intrigued, charmed and bewildered by all the discoveries he was making about the fantastic little creature, and must needs tell all the world about her, at which the world was already chuckling.

At the moment of the introduction Madame de Burne's glance lit on him from the other end of the room, and he smiled, whispering in André's ear:

"Do look at our dear Queen! She does not appear to be pleased."

André lifted his eyes but Madame de Burne was already turning to Massival who had just appeared at the further door. He was immediately followed by the Marquise de Bratiane, which prompted Lamarthe to say:

"So we are only to have the second performance of 'Dido'! Obviously the first took place in the Marquise's coupé!"

And Madame de Frémines added:

"Madame de Burne's collection is losing all its chief jewels."

Anger and personal dislike of the woman at his side blazed up together in Mariolle. A furious gust of hatred

which embraced the whole crew, their way of living, their ideas, their tastes, their amusements, their futile puppet-dance, upset his balance. So, taking advantage of a moment when Lamarthe was bending down to whisper some salacious witticism in her ear, he turned on his heel and moved away.

Madame Le Prieur happened to be alone, a few steps away. He went to greet her. According to Lamarthe the beauty represented the remnant of the old world surrounded, overridden, by the advance-guard of the new. Young, tall, and pretty, with regular features and auburn hair in which flickered flame colours, good natured, attractive through her quiet and kindly charm, a gentle but entirely competent coquetterie which had for origin a lively desire to please masked by a surface air of sincere and simple affection, she had many devoted partisans, but took care not to expose them to her more dangerous rivals. Her house was reputed sacred to a small and intimate group, whose members moreover were at one in praising the good qualities of her husband.

She and Mariolle were soon contentedly talking. She thoroughly appreciated his intelligence and courteous reserve and fancied that he might be worth a good deal more than the other men present, possibly even because he caused so little comment.

The last guests were now arriving. Fresnel, whom everyone called "Fat Fresnel," puffing, still wiping his damp and shining countenance as he came into the room, Georges de Maltry the society philosopher, and then, coming in abreast, Baron de Gravil and Count de Marantin. M. de Pradon shared with his daughter the duties of the afternoon. He made himself particularly

pleasant to Mariolle. But Mariolle, with a sore heart, watched her coming and going, always occupied, yet not with him. Twice, as a matter of fact, she contrived to flash glances at him across the room which said plainly "But my thoughts are for you," yet so brief were they that he might perhaps have mistaken their meaning. And then he could not miss seeing that Lamarthe's aggressive siege of Madame de Frémines genuinely angered Madame de Burne. "It's only a surface annoyance," he thought, "the pique of a hostess one of whose stars has been stolen." Nevertheless he was hurt: above all it hurt him to admit that she was watching them ceaselessly in a furtive way which affected unconcern, and that it obviously did not disturb her on the other hand to see him sitting beside Madame Le Prieur. For, he thought, she is sure of me, but she is afraid of losing him. Then how much did their love, born but yesterday, mean to her? In him it had left no room for a single thought which was not concerned with her.

M. de Pradon was calling for silence and Massival was opening the piano, whilst Madame de Bratiane was pulling off her gloves and taking up her position beside it, since she was to sing the transports of "Dido," when the door opened again and a young man appeared, attracting all eyes. He was tall and slim, his whiskers were curled, and his hair fair, short and waved, and he had an unmistakable air of breeding. Even Madame Le Prieur appeared to be impressed.

"Who is he?" Mariolle asked.

"What! Don't you know?"

"No; honestly."

"Count Rodolphe de Bernhaus."

"The man who fought the duel with Sigismond Fabre?"

"Yes."

The affair had become notorious. Count de Bernhaus, Councillor at the Austrian Embassy, a young diplomat with a wonderful future, a "Bismarck of the blood" as they called him, having overheard at an official function a slighting remark about his Emperor, had the following day called out the offender, a famous swordsman, and killed him. After this duel, on which public opinion was very sharply divided, Count de Bernhaus found himself overnight as great a celebrity as Sarah Bernhardt, with the difference that an aureole of knighthood and romance crowned him. He was in any case a delightful young man, a fine talker, and good to look on. Lamarthe said of him: "Here's one to tame our wild women."

He sat down beside Madame de Burne with a charming air of gaiety, and Massival settled himself to the piano, and ran his fingers up and down the keys.

There was a general movement through the rooms. The guests grouped together, the better to hear and also to see the singer. Lamarthe found himself sitting next to Mariolle, shoulder to shoulder.

Then followed a long respectful silence in which attention was focussed, and then the musician began a slow, very slow, succession of notes reminiscent of the usual piano recital. Then came pauses, light echoes of the opening phrases, now languorous, now feverish, always unquiet, but alive with an arresting originality. Mariolle dreamed. He saw a woman, the Queen of Carthage, in the full tide of her ripe youth and matured beauty, wandering along a sandy shore washed by the sea.

He could feel that she was in pain, that some great sorrow filled her soul: and he turned to look at Madame de Bratiane.

Motionless, pallid under the masses of her hair, as black as night, the singer, whose glance was fixed upon distance, stood waiting. In her face, so full of energy as to seem hard, on which her eyes and brows and lashes showed like black smudges, in her dark, strong, and passionate personality, one was aware of a quality of menace, that threat of storm which lurks behind thundercloud skies.

Massival continued the poignant story which his strong fingers drew from the ivory keys. His head with its great mane of hair moved gently to his rhythms.

Suddenly the singer quivered into life: from her lips there came a wail of anguish, interminable, agonising. This was no clamour of tragic despair such as divas pour forth with dramatic gesture, not one of those great love laments that shake the theatre with a frenzy of applause, but a cry, of the flesh, not of the spirit, forced forth like the soul of some tortured beast. It was the authentic voice of a woman betrayed. Then she was silent: and Massival continued the living tale, now more articulate and more tormented, of that unhappy Queen whom the man she loved had abandoned.

Then the woman's voice rose again. In a recitative she told of the intolerable torture of solitude, her unappeasable longing for caresses that would never come again, her pain in the knowledge that he would never return.

Her warm, vibrant voice made all hearts throb. She seemed to suffer all the agony of which she sang, as if

her self, that dark Italian woman crowned by midnight, were in the throes of that untameable passion. When she was silent again her eyes were brimming with tears which she slowly wiped away. Lamarthe, leaning against Mariolle, shaken by an artist's exaltation, whispered:

"My God, isn't she lovely now, just at this moment! A real woman, a woman, the only one here."

But after a moment's reflection he leaned sideways again to add:

"Yet who can tell? Probably there's nothing in it but a musical illusion, and nothing exists that is not illusion. But the consummate art that can produce such illusion! Yes, and the art behind all illusion whatever. . . ."

Then came an interval between the first and the second parts of the musical poem, and everyone congratulated composer and singer. Lamarthe was especially warm in his compliments, and he was entirely sincere in this, for he was endowed with sensibilities quick to feel, understand and appreciate every form in which beauty could express itself. The expressions he used to convey to Madame de Bratiane what he had felt whilst listening to her were so flattering that he made her blush unexpectedly: whilst the other women who heard him were disgusted at his frank and strong phrases. It is possible that he was well aware of the impression which he was making. As he returned to his seat he caught sight of Rodolphe de Bernhaus sitting down beside Madame de Frémines. At once her expression showed that their conversation had slipped straight into the personal, and they exchanged subtle smiles as though their intimacy had an enchanting ravishing quality. Mariolle, growing more and more sulky, leaned against a door. The novelist

crossed the room to keep him company. Fat Fresnel, Georges de Maltry, Baron de Gravil and the Count de Marantin surrounded Madame de Burne, who stood by a table pouring out tea. She seemed imprisoned by a circlet of admirers. So Lamarthe said to Mariolle ironically, adding:

"A circlet, a hostess' crown, lacking jewels, and I am certain she would give every one of those Rhinestones for the one diamond she covets."

"Who's the diamond?" Mariolle asked.

"Why, Bernhaus, of course; the handsome, the irresistible, incomparable Bernhaus. It was only for him that this fête was arranged, for him that she worked the miracle of persuading Massival to consent to his Florentine Dido making her debut here."

André, though incredulous, felt his heart contract with sudden chagrin.

"Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no. Ten days at most. But she has made stupendous efforts in the time, the whole technique of the charmer. If you had been here, my boy, how you would have laughed!"

"Oh! Why?"

"She met him for the first time at Madame de Frémines'. I was dining there that night. Bernhaus is very much at home in that circle, as you may see for yourself. One glance was enough! There, at the very moment that their glances crossed for the first time, our dear friend Madame de Burne had launched her campaign for the conquest of the unique Austrian. And she succeeded and will succeed, even though the little Frémines is very much her superior in naughtiness, in

real indifference, and possibly in perversity. But our friend is the more versed in coquetterie, more woman—modern woman, I mean, of course—that's to say she's irresistible through her skill in the wiles of seduction which takes the place of the natural charm of another generation. And yet it's not so much guile as the aesthetics of femininity. All her power lies there. She knows herself perfectly because her first aim is to please herself, and she never makes a mistake as to the best way of attracting a man, and of setting the highest price upon herself and so enslaving us."

Mariolle protested.

"I think you . . . exaggerate. With me she has always shown herself most charmingly candid."

"Because candour is what appeals to you. In any case I'm not speaking evil of her, as I see it. To me she seems far above almost all women of her type—only they are not women."

Massival struck a few chords, and so stopped their conversation, and Madame de Bratiane sang the second half of the poem, when she showed herself a Dido of superb physical passion and sensuous despair.

But Lamarthe's eyes never left the tête-à-tête between Madame de Frémines and the Count de Bernhaus.

The moment the last vibration of the piano was lost in applause he began again, as irritably as though he were in the midst of an argument, and were replying to an opponent.

"No, they are not women! The more straightforward of them are shameless. The more I know them, the less I can experience that sweet intoxication your true woman inspires. They turn one's head, yes, but by exasperating

one's nerves, for they are sophisticated. Oh, the drink is heady, but it's not the real wine of other days. Look, André, there are two things only for which woman was created and put into the world, and through these two only can her great, her most admirable qualities come to flower: love, and children. I know I sound like a copy-book. But these creatures are incapable of love, and won't have children: if by any accident babies do come, it's a misfortune, an imposition. In sober fact, Mariolle, they are monstrous."

Astounded at the novelist's violence and at the angry light that flashed in his eyes, Mariolle asked him why it was then that he spent half his life playing round their petticoats.

"Why? Good God, you ask why? Because it amuses me. Isn't that enough for you? And then . . . would you forbid a doctor to visit hospitals to observe diseases? It's my clinic, this drawing-room world."

Having delivered himself of this observation he appeared to become calm again.

"And in any case," he added after a moment, "I love 'em because they do so indubitably belong to their period. For that matter I am at bottom no more a man than they are women. When I am becoming a little attached to one of them I amuse myself by discovering and examining what exactly it is that attracts me, with the curiosity of a chemist who poisons himself to observe the symptoms of poisoning."

After a marked silence he went on again:

"On those lines I shall never get badly bitten. I play their own game as well as they can, possibly better, and it results in my books, whereas for them it has no result

of any kind. What fools they are. All second-rate, darling little second-rate creatures who end, if they realise the way in which their lives are spent, by writhing with shame as they begin to grow old."

As he listened to him Mariolle felt a depression descending on him as palpable as the misty melancholy which covers the earth after continuous rain. He knew very well that the novelist was, on the whole, right, yet he could not admit that he was wholly right.

So, somewhat irritably, he began to argue, not so much with the idea of defending women as of analysing the causes of their disenchanted aimlessness as it was exhibited in the literature of the day.

"When romancers and poets exalted them," he said, "and made dreamers of them, they looked for and believed that they found in life the equivalent of their emotional experiences in their reading. To-day you are at great pains to suppress all poetical or attractive traits in order to show nothing but disillusion and 'reality.' And the result, my dear fellow, of the disappearance of love from your books is the disappearance of love from life. You are the accredited inventors of ideals, and they believe in your inventions. Nowadays you do nothing but echo vulgarisms too faithfully, and they in your wake have set themselves to believe in vulgarity."

Lamarthe, to whom literary discussions always appealed, had begun a dissertation on this theme when Madame de Burne came up to them.

She was very evidently feeling and looking her best, beautifully dressed, with that air, at once daring and provocative, which the sense of conflict always gave her. She sat down beside them.

" I like nothing better," she said, " than to surprise two men talking who are not talking to please me. Besides, you are the only two in the room who are interesting to listen to. What were you talking about? "

Lamarthe, on a tone of raillery, and without a suggestion of embarrassment, sketched the question as it had developed. Then he ran over his own arguments with a brilliance accentuated by the desire to shine before women which stirs so quickly in those who live by their reputations.

She immediately warmed to the subject of their argument, and herself a little excited by it, took part, defending modern women with considerable wit, nimbleness, and point. A few phrases, which seemed obscure and pointless to the novelist, on the fidelity, the deep attachments of which the most frivolous might be capable, made Mariolle's heart beat, and, when she went to talk to Madame de Frémines, who kept the Count continually in attendance, Mariolle and Lamarthe, delighted by the pretty exhibition of feminine skill and grace, agreed at least that she herself was undeniably perfect.

" Oh, ho ! Look there ! " the novelist suddenly said.

For the duel had clearly begun. The guests were now wondering what the two women, with the Austrian between them, were saying. Madame de Burne had arrived at the very moment when a duologue between two persons, even when they appreciate each other, becomes monotonous : and she broke it up by repeating, with a pretty air of indignation, all that she had just heard from Lamarthe. Obviously the whole of it might apply to Madame de Frémines; it was inspired by her latest conquest, and was repeated in front of an extremely intelligent man who

was quite capable of reading between the lines. The eternal subject of love inspired them again: and their hostess beckoned to Lamarthe and Mariolle to join them. Then, as their voices rose, she brought the whole room into the dispute.

A general discussion followed, by turns gay and passionate, in which each had a say, but Madame de Burne contrived to be at once the wittiest and the most amusing, twisting fine sentiments, when they threatened to sound forced, into fantastic shapes. She had never achieved a greater triumph, for she was more vivacious, more witty, and even more beautiful than she had ever shown herself before.

IV

No sooner had André Mariolle left Madame de Burne than the poignant charm of her presence evaporated. He was conscious of the swift vanishing from mind and spirit, from the air he breathed and the whole earth, of the bright joy in living which had sustained and animated him week after week.

Yet what had happened? Nothing, or almost nothing. She had been charming to him at the end of the afternoon, saying in one or two long looks: "There is no one here but you for me." And yet he felt that she had just forced upon him a revelation to which he would gladly have been blind. That, too, was nothing, or almost nothing: and yet he felt shocked, as a man who discovers his father or mother guilty of some mean action, when he learned that during those three weeks which he had believed she had consecrated, as he, minute by minute to the fresh and vital emotion of their hidden love, she had resumed her usual life, paid visits, launched schemes, laid plans, engaged again in those distasteful flirtations, outmanœuvred rivals, captured men, revelled in compliments, and displayed so lavishly all her charms.

So soon, he thought; she has begun again so soon! Later, a little later, and he would not have been surprised. He was not ignorant of his world, nor of women, nor of the ways of love; he would never, with his wide comprehension, have made unreasonable demands or

harboured gloomy doubts. She was beautiful, she was made to please, to attract homage, to enjoy endless compliments. Among all her courtiers she had chosen him, and given herself frankly, even royally. He should have remained, he swore he would still be, the grateful servant of her caprice, the resigned spectator of the spoilt beauty's life she led. Yet something, in the dark depths of the soul where the most sensitive feelings hide, turned in pain.

Doubtless he was at fault, as he had been at fault in this particular ever since he had been aware of himself. Always in his passage through life he had preserved a too tender sensibility. His heart was sensitive. Thence had come the isolation in which he had lived, through fear of contacts and jars. He was at fault, because such sensitiveness comes of possessing that which no one will tolerate in another, a character markedly different from that of others. He knew this, for he had often observed it: but he was none the less incapable of modifying the special traits of his own.

Undoubtedly he had nothing with which to reproach Madame de Burne: for, if she had kept him away from her circle, safe hidden during those ecstatic days which she had given him, it had admittedly been to escape comment, defeat the curious, be the more unreservedly his. Then why should he suffer so? Ah, but that was because he had believed her wholly his, and now he began to recognise, even to understand, that he could never seize and possess every side of a woman who belonged so completely to her own world.

And he knew well enough that all life is made up of compromises, and hitherto he had managed to acquiesce,

hiding his discontent under a cloak of assumed mockery. But this time he had hoped that he would achieve that " thing in itself " for which he had always yearned. But the " thing in itself " is not to be found in this world.

He spent a melancholy evening and attempted to console himself by reasoning about the painful impression which he had received.

But when he sought his bed this impression, instead of fading, grew sharper, and as he never shrank from self-analysis, he followed up even the smallest clues to these new pains. They came, they went, and came again like little puffs of an icy wind, stirring at the heart of his love an anguish, faint, still, and far away, but disturbing as those faint symptoms of neuralgia that waken to some draught, the forerunners of some vile attack of pain.

And first he realised that he was jealous, not merely with the jealousy of the infatuated lover, but of the possessive male. So long as he had not seen her among her courtiers he had ignored the feeling, even though faintly aware of it. Yet he had believed it was something quite different from what it had now become. Meeting his mistress again—whom he had believed solely occupied with him through the many secret days in their hiding-place, during those spring-like days of their first embraces that should have been days of ardent emotion in complete isolation—meeting her again just as much, perhaps even more, amused and delighted than before her surrender, with all her old vain and foolish flirtations, in the conscious display of herself to everycomer, so that little of herself could be left over for one

whom she singled out for preference, he felt himself in the grip of a jealousy which had roots rather in the flesh than the spirit, not in any vague emotion or fever of unrest, but in a definite sensation, for he now ceased to trust her.

At first his distrust was instinctive, its origin in an uneasy feeling which ran rather in his veins than his thoughts, the all but physical discontent of the man who is not sure of his mate. But on the heels of that distrust he began to suspect her.

Where did he stand with her? Her first or her tenth lover? Direct successor to de Burne, her husband, or successor to Lamarthe, to Massival, to Georges de Maltry, and precursor of Count de Bernhaus perhaps? What did he know about her? Only that she was pretty enough to drive a man wild, more perfectly finished than any woman he knew, intelligent, subtle, witty, but changeable, soon bored, wearied, displeased, interested essentially in herself only, insatiably greedy of attention. Had she had a lover?—or many lovers?—before him? If she had not, would she have surrendered herself with such calm effrontery? Would she have dared to open his door so unconcernedly, that night at the inn? And would she then have come to him so readily at Auteuil? For before coming she had only asked him the two or three questions which the prudent woman of more than a little experience might have put. He had answered them with the assurance of a man accustomed to manage such matters efficiently: and at once she had said "Yes," confidently, obviously reassured, probably because other adventures had taught her the technique.

With what discreet assurance had she not knocked at

the little door behind which he, whose knees trembled and whose heart beat so thickly, had crouched, waiting! With what unconcern had she not stepped in, her only thought for the risk of recognition from the neighbouring houses. How completely at home she had been, on the instant, in that dubious rendezvous, hired and furnished for the stripping of her defences. Would a woman, however much mistress of herself, superior to moral codes, contemptuous of conventions, have shown herself so little moved at her noviciate, her first affair?

Would she have felt nothing of mental trouble, physical hesitation, the instinctive shrinking of feet set on an unknown path, if she had not had some experience of these amorous encounters, if familiarity had not already blunted the sensitiveness of bodily shame?

Feverish, suffering from that intolerable nervous irritability with which the love troubles of the heart banish sleep, Mariolle tossed about, as helpless in his chain of doubts as the dreamer slipping on some giddy slope. From time to time he struggled to stop himself, to break from their endless coil: he sought, found, and comforted himself with sensible and reassuring thoughts: but the seeds of doubt had taken root in him and he was powerless to check their incalculable growth.

And yet what reason had he for reproaching her? No other whatever than that she was not made in his own image, that she did not look on life with his eyes, that her heart was not set to beat to exactly the rhythm of his own.

But the instant that he woke on the following morning a desire to see her again at once, to reassure himself in her presence, grew in him like a hunger, and he could

hardly wait for a reasonable hour at which to call upon her.

When she saw him coming into her own private room where, all alone, she sat writing letters, she came quickly to him with both hands outstretched.

"Ah, good morning, dear one!" she said, with so living a joy, such warmth of sincerity, that every evil thought which he had harboured, whose shadows still darkened his soul, vanished at her greeting.

He took a seat beside her and at once began to tell her how he loved her, for his love now was a different thing from that which it had been. He explained with infinite tenderness that there are two races of lovers on this earth: those whose lust is that of madmen, whose ardour cools on the morrow of its triumph, and those whom possession enslaves and captures, in whom sensual love, mingling with the inexpressible intangible desires with which a man's heart sometimes yearns for the beloved, grows to its completion, to servitude utter and torturing, the tyranny of a great passion.

Torture it is, he told her, and unending, for no matter how happy that lover may be, his desire for the beloved never leaves him and is never satisfied.

Madame de Burne listened with delight, gratitude even, and thrilled to his voice, thrilled as at a play when an actor rises magnificently to his part, and moves us with the echo of our own lives which it wakes in us. The echo was there, echo of sincere passion: but it was not in her that it throbbed. Yet she felt so delighted at having given birth to such passion, so pleased that it should live in a man capable of expressing it thus, in one who really charmed her, to whom she

was quite honestly attracted, of whom she felt herself becoming more and more in need, not because of her body, but for the worship of that mysterious femininity which hungered for tenderness, homage, service; she felt so happy that she longed to touch him, surrender her mouth to him, yield her body, so that he should never cease to worship her thus.

She answered him without any reserve or prudery, with the deep wisdom with which some women are endowed, showing him that he, too, had made a growing impression on her heart. And in the sitting-room, to which as chance would have it no one came until evening had already fallen, they sat side by side talking endlessly of the one subject, with caressing words which rang so differently in each other's ears.

Lamps had already been brought in when Madame de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle rose to take leave, and, as Madame de Burne walked with him across the outer room, he asked her:

"When shall I see you out there?"

"Would you like me to come on Friday?"

"Oh, yes! When?"

"The same time. Three o'clock."

"Friday, then. Good-bye. I adore you."

During the two days of waiting which separated him from their meeting he discovered, was painfully aware, of a feeling of emptiness far sharper than any he had yet suffered. The one woman was missing and nothing beside her had any reality. And as that woman was near at hand, could be found, whilst mere social conventions hindered him from reaching her when he would, from living near her, he grew exasperated in his loneli-

ness, during the interminable progression of seconds that ticked away so slowly, at the utter impossibility of satisfying so simple a need.

On the Friday he came three hours early to their rendezvous: but to wait in the place to which she was coming pleased him, soothed his nerves, after all he had suffered through waiting in spirit in places to which she would never come.

He took his place behind the door long before those three chimes on which he waited would sound, but when they rang out he became frantic with impatience. The quarter chimed. He glanced down the road cautiously, slipping his head through the door. It was empty from end to end. The minutes became slow torture. He pulled his watch out repeatedly: and as the hand reached the half hour felt that he had been standing there for some incalculable period. Suddenly he heard the light sound on the pavement and the little tap of a gloved hand on the wood, and his anguish disappeared and left him full of gratitude.

Breathing fast, she asked him: "Am I very late?"

"No, no. Not too late."

"Just think! I almost could not come. The flat was full of people, and I was at my wits' end to get rid of them. Tell me, do you go by your own name here?"

"No. But why?"

"So that I can send you a telegram if I am absolutely prevented from coming."

"I am M. Nicolle here."

"Good. I won't forget. Oh, how lovely this garden is!"

The flowers, beautifully cared for and renewed and

added to daily by the gardener when he discovered that his employer paid absurd prices without demur, splashed the turf with five huge scented groups of colour.

Stopping before a seat backed with a bank of heliotrope she told him to sit down.

"I have a most amusing tale to tell you!"

And she told him a brand new scandal at which she was still laughing. It appeared that Madame Massival, an old flame whom the artist had married, maddened by jealousy had burst into Madame de Bratiane's house during an evening party at the very moment that the Marquise was singing to the composer's accompaniment, and had made the most appalling scene, to the fury of the singer, and the surprise and delight of the guests.

Massival, utterly confounded, had tried to lead her away, to get rid of her, whilst she had struck him in the face, clawed his hair and beard, bitten him, and torn his clothes. She had clung to him and made him helpless, whilst Lamarthe and two servants whom the din had brought running in had struggled to drag him from the talons and teeth of the fury.

Peace was only established after they had both gone. Since then the musician had been seen by no one, whilst the novelist, eye-witness of the scene, had been going everywhere telling the story in the most amusing and fantastic vein.

Madame de Burne was completely absorbed in it and nothing could distract her. The names of Massival and Lamarthe, incessantly on her tongue, set Mariolle's teeth on edge.

"You have just heard it?" he asked.

"Not an hour ago!"

And he thought bitterly: "So that is why she was late!"

Then he asked:

"Shall we go in?"

Submissive but with her mind far away she murmured: "Yes."

When she had left him, an hour later, for she professed herself in a hurry, he returned alone to the little lonely house and sat down in a low chair in their bedroom. Deep in his very being, in his very soul, the feeling that he had no more possessed her than if she had never come left a sort of night-black pit into which he peered. He saw nothing there: he could not understand: his mind could grasp nothing. Though she had not shrunk from his kisses she had at least escaped from his groping tenderness through a mysterious absence of desire to be his. She had not refused him her body but she herself had evaded him. For it seemed as though her heart was not there with her body. It held aloof, far off, untouched, occupied with other little concerns.

Then he became sharply aware that he loved her as much with his senses as with his soul, and it might even be more. The mockery of her empty caresses maddened him to a crazy desire to pursue, drag her back, repossess her. Yet why? To what purpose? For her light mind was occupied with some other interest to-day. It was clear that he must wait upon the days and hours when to his unstable mistress there might come, as any other caprice, an amorous mood.

He went home, then, very wearily, feet heavy, eyes on the ground, out of love with life. And it occurred to him that they had arranged no future meeting, either at her flat, or anywhere at all.

V

UNTIL winter was close upon them she still was irregularly faithful to their tryst—faithful, but not punctual.

During the first three months she came, but sometimes half an hour, sometimes as much as two hours, late. When the autumn rain forced Mariolle to wait under an umbrella behind the garden door, feet in wet mud, and shivering, he had a little wooden shanty built, where, shut in and sheltered, he could wait without so much risk of catching cold at each of their meetings. No leaves were left on the trees. Where the roses and all the other flowers had been were now deep rows of white and red, violet, purple and yellow chrysanthemums, shedding upon the damp air, heavy with the melancholy smell of rain on rotting leaves, their sharp and balsam scent, the sadness of the failing splendour of the last flowers of the year. In front of the cottage door rare varieties in odd combinations of colour, the sterile triumphs of cultivation, made a big Maltese cross of delicate and ever-changing hues, the gardener's pride, where all new and odd varieties were displayed. Mariolle could not pass it without a contraction of the heart. The cross of flowers seemed to hide a grave.

By now those long delays in the little shelter behind the garden door had grown familiar. The rain fell on

the roof above his head, then dripped from the ends of the planks around him: and at every penance suffered in the Chapel of Unease the same thoughts, the same arguments recurred to him and he ran through the same gamut of hope, fear, and discouragement.

For him it became a silent, ceaseless, demoralising war, fought in his spirit, bitterly, to exhaustion, with an intangible adversary whose existence he sometimes doubted: his mistress' heart. Their meetings were strange indeed.

Sometimes she would come with a smile, longing to gossip, and would sit down without taking off her hat, or her gloves, or even raising her veil, without the ghost of a greeting. She did not often remember now to kiss him. Her head was full of distracting fancies, whims far more attractive than any offering of her lips to the kiss of a lover whom despair turned haggard. He would sit down beside her, in his heart and on his lips burning phrases, that never escaped: he listened, he answered, and whilst he appeared really interested in what she said he would try to take her hand—and she would leave it in his without a thought, in dispassionate friendliness.

Sometimes she seemed more kind, more his: but he who watched her with uneasy eyes, keen-sighted eyes, the eyes of a lover who finds himself powerless to take complete possession, understood that the comparative tenderness only meant that her thoughts just then were not stirred or troubled by any other person, or any other thing.

And her recurrent unpunctuality made it clear to Mariolle how little she was drawn to their meetings. For one hastens, when one loves, even when one merely likes, to one's object: but one always arrives too soon

when there is no attraction, and any little pretext serves to delay, to put off the faintly uncomfortable hour. An odd comparison out of his own experience forced itself on him, importunately. In summer time a longing for cold water hurried his rising : in the winter a thousand idle thoughts served to delay him, an hour or more. Their meetings at Auteuil reminded him of his cold bath in December.

And for some little time now she had begun to make the intervals between meetings longer, she put them off to the next day, sent telegrams at the last moment, took what seemed a wilful pleasure in inventing reasons which made meetings impossible, and expounding them plausibly, though they threw him into nervous storms and physical lassitude which were becoming intolerable.

Had she but shown some cooling off, some boredom, as she saw his passion steadily grow, he might perhaps have been exasperated, chilled, discouraged, and at last have found peace. But on the contrary she showed herself plainly more drawn to him, more flattered by his love, more anxious to retain it, and yet gave no more in return than the purely friendly preference which though it failed to appease him began to have its effect upon her other admirers.

In her own house she could never see enough of him, and the same telegram which advised André of another postponement at Auteuil always begged insistently that he would come to dine or to spend the evening with her. At first he had taken these invitations as attempted recompense, but it was not long before he had to realise that she enjoyed seeing him there more than any other person, that she had real need of him, of his worship, his

adoring eyes, of his affection wrapping her closely, of the discreet caress which his mere presence conveyed. She had need of them, as an idol, to become a god, has need of prayers and faith. In an empty chapel she was no more than carved wood. But so soon as a worshipper entered the sanctuary, offered adoration, impassioned, prostrate, groaning his fervour, drunk with his faith, she took her place with Brahma, Allah, or Christ, since every creature worshipped becomes thereby a god.

More than any other woman Madame de Burne felt herself born to the rôle of idol, for the purpose, for which Nature fashioned her, of being adored and besought, of triumphing over Man by her beauty, grace, charm and attraction.

She was truly of that order of human goddesses, delicate, disdainful, exacting and aloof, whom the worship of men, like incense, inflates with pride and inspires with a belief in their own divinity.

And she showed her affection for Mariolle, her marked preference, almost ostentatiously, without any heed as to what might be said, possibly even with a secret hope of exasperating and inflaming others. It was impossible now to call upon her without finding him there, usually settled comfortably in a huge armchair which Lamarthe called "the curate's stall": and she was conscious of sincere pleasure in spending whole evenings alone with him, talking and listening to him.

She found pleasure in the intimacy which he taught her to enjoy, the constant contact with a delightful, well-read, experienced mind, of which she was as wholly the owner as she was of the pretty toys

scattered on her writing-table. And she surrendered to him, too, more and more of herself, of her thoughts, of her secret being, in such affectionate confidences as are as sweet to give as to receive. With him she felt more free, sincere, and frank, more at home than with others, and loved him the more for it. She felt, too, that expansiveness that women love, the impression they have of really giving something, of confiding to another all that is theirs, a sensation she had never before experienced.

A great thing to her, to him it seemed poor enough. He waited and hoped always for the great surrender of self that comes when the very soul is offered on the lips.

Caresses seemed to her almost debasing, sometimes tiresome, always a penance. When, as they talked, he took her hand to kiss her fingers, and hold them a moment between his lips, drawing them to him as though they were sweets to be sucked, she always seemed eager to take them back and he could feel her arm stiffen in a repressed effort to escape.

When, at the end of his visits, he pressed on her neck between the collar of her dress and the golden tendrils of hair a long kiss that drank the perfume of her body in its sheath of silk, always she shrank a little, and her flesh shuddered at the touch of another's mouth.

These involuntary movements were like dagger thrusts, and he went away with wounds that bled ceaselessly in his heart. How was it that she had not at least experienced an instant of that passionate frenzy that almost every woman knows when she makes voluntary unpurchased surrender of her body? It may be momentary, and followed by weariness and then disgust.

But how rare it is not to know it at all, not even a day of it, even an hour! His mistress had made of him not a lover but, as it were, an intelligent associate in her existence.

Yet why should he complain? Perhaps those who give everything have not so much to give?

But he did not complain: he was afraid. He was afraid of that other man, of him who would appear of a sudden, to-morrow or the day after, artist, man of the world, officer, wastrel, whatever he might be, who, born to please her woman's eyes, would please for no other reason but that he was *the* man, the one man who would teach her for the first time the imperious desire to open wide to him her arms.

He was already jealous of the future as he had been, at times, of the unknown past: while all his mistress' friends began to grow jealous of him. They jested bitterly among themselves, and even to her face indulged in discreet and obscure allusions. Some thought him her lover. Others, following Lamarthe's lead, affected to believe that she was amusing herself, after her wont, by driving him crazy, playing thus at the same time on their nerves and exasperating them, and nothing more. Her father was disturbed, and ventured upon comment which she received with disdain: and the more clearly she heard rumour raising its voice about her the more she persisted in an open display of her preference for Mariolle, a course oddly at variance with all the prudence of her earlier life.

But he became uneasy as the murmur of suspicion swelled. He even spoke to her about it.

"What do I care?" she asked.

" I would not care if you really did love me."

" Don't I love you well, my friend? "

" Yes and no. You love me well enough here, but not so well elsewhere! I should prefer it the other way about."

She laughed softly.

" One does what one can! "

He answered:

" If you only knew what torments I suffer in trying to wake you, my beautiful! I feel as though I were trying to clasp the intangible, as though I had my arms about a block of ice, that freezes me even whilst it melts away in them."

She made no answer, disliking the subject, and over her face came the little air of distraction which she wore at Auteuil.

He dared not insist further. He looked at her in silence as one gazes on the treasures of a museum that fill one with impotent envy, treasures one can never take away to enjoy.

His days and nights held nothing now but hours of suffering, for he was haunted by his fixed idea, by a feeling rather than a thought that she was his, yet not his, conquered, yet free, held, yet unattainable. He lived in her company, close to her, without reaching her, and he loved her with every desire of soul and body unappeased. As in the beginning of their liaison, he set himself to write to her. Once with his pen he had overcome the initial defence of her virtue: now perhaps with his pen he could break through her ultimate unacknowledged resistence. Spacing his visits at longer intervals, he repeated daily all the follies of his passion. From time to time, when he had been particularly eloquent,

passionate, unhappy, she answered him. Her letters, dated in affectation with the minute and hour of the small hours of the morning, were clear, crisp, cleverly turned, devoted, encouraging, yet desolating. Her phrasing was never at fault, she was witty, she was playful. But, reread them as he might, find them perfect, intelligent, finished, gracious, and satisfying to his man's vanity, they never contented his heart. They were no more comforting than the kisses at Auteuil.

He wondered why. And, through learning them by heart, he ended by understanding them so well that he discovered the reason, for it is always through the written word that one penetrates most deeply into the mind of another. The spoken word dazzles and deceives, because it is masked by the face, because one sees it come from the lips, and the lips enchant and seduce one's reason. But black words upon white paper are naked thoughts.

Men, through tricks of rhetoric, through professional experience, and the habit of using a pen to deal with all the affairs of life, often succeed in disguising their personalities in impersonal prose, whether of the business or of the literary world. But women never write except of themselves, and put something of themselves into every word. They are never concerned with subtleties of style, but give themselves away in unstudied sentences. He called to mind the correspondence and memoirs of famous women which he had read. How clearly they revealed themselves, blue-stockings, witty women, romantic women! What struck him most about Madame de Burne's letters was the utter lack of sympathetic understanding in them. Thought she knew, but not emotion. Then he remembered other letters. He

had received many. A little middle-class woman, whom he had met on a journey and loved for three months, had written him exquisite vibrant little notes, full of surprises and unexpected turns of thought. He had been amazed at the suppleness, the lovely tone, the variety of her phrasing. Whence came her gift? From her response to emotion, nothing else. Such a woman does not labour over her expression: her direct emotion splashes it on to the paper: she does not turn the pages of a dictionary. When she feels strongly she expresses herself well, without effort, without anxious labour, out of the volatile sincerity of her nature.

It was to find this sincerity of nature that he strove to read between the lines of his mistress' letters. She was at least kindly and fastidious. But how was it that she found nothing more to give him, when he had so much to give, and could express it in words as real and burning as living coals?

When his valet brought him his letters, one quick glance told him whether the beloved writing was there or no, and, once seen, emotion surged up in him, and his heart beat furiously. Out went his hand and closed upon the letter. Again he read the address, and at last tore the envelope open. What would she say? Would he read the words " I love you "? Never had she written them, never even said them, but always she had added " very much "— " I love you very much," or, " Do you think that I don't love you at all? " Oh, he knew now all the variations, which said so little because they said too much. Are there degrees in love? Can one measure " not at all," or " very much "? " Very much " . . . how miserably little! One loves, not more, not less. To add is to subtract. There is

no more, to imagine or to say. Short, perhaps, but there is the body, soul, life, the very essence. It is to be felt, as the heat in the blood, breathed, as the air, born, as thought, for it is thought's very self. Nothing more exists. Love is not a word, but a state of being, symbolised by four letters. Whatever one happens to be doing, nothing is as before, neither movement, sight, thought, judgment, pleasure, nor pain. Mariolle had become the victim of that little word, and his eye raced along the lines, looking for some revelation of a passion to match his own. He found just enough to warrant: "She does love me a little," nothing to justify: "She loves me!" Her correspondence simply continued the pretty story begun at Mont Saint-Michel, a love story, not love.

When he had ended his reading and rereading he slipped the dear and disappointing sheets into a drawer and sat down to his desk. Many difficult hours had been spent there.

As time went on her replies became short, and a certain weariness of phrase-making and repetition became obvious. Moreover she was living through a phase of social effervescence and André suffered as one can only suffer from a series of small hurts.

The winter was one of incessant gaiety. A wave of extravagant pleasure-seeking rolled over Paris, and hired carriages and private broughams rattled through the streets all night, and women in evening dress peered from their closed windows. All the world was astir, and the talk was of fêtes and dances, matinées and the night's amusement. The madness had infected everyone and every class of society, and Madame de Burne was as bitten as any by the craving for excitement.

For her it began with her success as a society beauty at the ballet given at the Austrian Embassy. Count de Bernhaus had effected an introduction for her to the Ambassador's wife, Princess de Malten, of whom Madame de Burne had made an immediate and overwhelming conquest. In no time she became one of the more intimate friends of the Princess and thus rapidly improved her relations with the diplomatic world and the inner circle of society. Her grace, seduction, elegance and wit won the day for her, made her the fashion, and the greatest nobles in France went out of their way to be seen in her salon.

Every Monday a long line of crested carriages stood in the Rue du General-Foy, and her servants lost their heads and mixed Duchesses and Marquises, Countesses and Baronesses, as they announced the ringing names at the drawing-room door.

Her success went to her head. Compliments, invitations, and flattery, the knowledge that she had become a favourite, one of the chosen whom Paris applauds, adores, worships so long as the vogue lasts, the joy of being in the world's eye, admired, besought, invited everywhere, brought on a violent attack of snobbery.

Her artist following fought against it: and an alliance of all her old friends grew out of the crisis. Fresnel himself was counted as one of them, was enrolled, and became a power among them, and Mariolle became their leader, since they were driven to admit his ascendancy and the friendship she showed for him.

But Mariolle watched her drifting away on the breath of a modish vogue much as a small boy, who has let go the string, watches his crimson balloon disappearing.

For it seemed to him that she was escaping into the worldly, variegated, puppet show from that living secret world for which he longed: and he was helplessly jealous of everything, of men, women, and events. He loathed the life she led, the people she met, the functions to which she went, dances, concerts, theatres, since each absorbed some little part of her, and together claimed all her days and nights, till nothing was left of their intimacy but an occasional barren hour. Under the strain of the rancour and suffering he grew ill, and one day he called on her with so drawn a face that she asked him what ailed him.

"What's the matter? You are so changed and thin?"

"Well, you see, I love you."

She gave him an approving glance.

"One can never love too well!"

"You assure me of that?"

"Surely?"

"And you cannot understand that I am dying because I get no response?"

"Why, it isn't true that you get no response! And no one dies of love. And all our friends at any rate are jealous of you, which at least proves that I don't treat you so very badly."

He snatched her hand.

"You don't understand."

"Oh, yes, I understand you very well."

"You can hear the despairing appeal I make to your heart?"

"Yes, I hear it."

"Well?"

"Well . . . it distresses me, for I really do like you, tremendously."

" And then? "

" And then? You cry to me: ' Be like me, think, feel, express yourself exactly as I do.' But I cannot, dear friend. I am as I am. You must accept me as God made me, since I gave myself thus to you, since I don't regret it, don't want to take back my gift, since you are dearer to me than anyone else I have ever known."

" You don't love me."

" I love you with all the power of loving that I possess. Is it my fault that it is not different, greater? "

" If I were sure of that much, perhaps I could be content with it."

" What do you mean by that? "

" I mean that I believe you capable of loving differently but that I believe myself no longer capable of inspiring you with real love."

" No, my dear, you are wrong. You are more to me than anyone has ever been and more than anyone will ever be, and that I honestly believe. With you I have such a splendid sense of relief, no need to lie, no need to hide my feelings, even though many other women in my place might have done so. Be thankful for so much, don't fret yourself, don't tear at your nerves, but have confidence in my affection for you, for you have it, all of it, in all sincerity."

He murmured, realising how far apart they were:

" Oh, my dear, what a quaint way of understanding love—and speaking of it! To you I am, in fact, just someone whom you like to have often in a chair beside you. But for me you fill the world: I know nothing but you, see nothing but you, need nothing but you."

She smiled appreciatively.

" I know it, I can divine it, I do understand it. I am enraptured, and I tell you, Love me always as splendidly, if that be possible, for it warms my very soul, but don't drive me to play a part, for that would hurt me and be unworthy of us. I have known this crisis was coming for some time now: it has hurt me cruelly, for I am deeply, deeply attached to you, but I cannot twist my nature to make it like yours. Take me as I am."

Suddenly he asked:

" Have you ever thought, ever believed, if it was only for a day, an hour even, before or after we met, that you could love me differently? "

She was at a loss for a reply and thought for some moments.

He waited in agony, and then burst out again:

" Ah, you see, you see! You have dreamed of something different! "

She murmured gently:

" I might have been mistaken about myself for an instant."

He exclaimed:

" Oh, curse this finesse and philosophy! It isn't possible to reason like this about love."

Absorbed in her own thoughts, in this introspection, she continued:

" Before I loved you as I now love you I may have believed for just a moment that I should be more . . . more . . . carried away by you, in fact: but then I should certainly have been less single-minded and candid . . . possibly even less sincere, later."

" Why less sincere later? "

" Because you prison love in a phrase—All or Nothing —and this all or nothing means, to my mind, All at first and Nothing later. And it is when Nothing begins that the woman begins to lie."

He answered, feeling worn out:

" But don't you understand my misery or the torture of thinking that you might have loved me differently? You have felt the difference: so you will love another like that some day."

She answered without hesitation:

" I don't think so."

" Why not? From the moment that you had that presentiment of love, that you were touched by a suggestion of that inexpressible torturing longing to mingle life, soul, and flesh with another's, to be merged in him, to absorb him, that you guessed at the possibility of that incommunicable impulse, it was certain that you would suffer it some day or other."

" No, it was my imagination that deceived me, that was at fault about me. I give you all that I have to give. I have thought so much about our relations since I became your mistress. See, you'll admit I'm not afraid, even of words! Honestly, I am convinced that I cannot love otherwise or better than I do to-day. You can surely feel that I am talking to you as I talk to myself. I do it because you are extremely intelligent, because you can understand, because you can see below the surface, and because I believe that to hide nothing from you is the best, the only way of binding us closely and for long. And that is what I hope for, dear friend."

He drank her words as one dying of thirst, he fell on his knees, buried his face in her skirts. He held her two

small hands to his lips, stammering " Thank you; oh, my dear, my dear, thank you! " When he raised his head to seek her face, he saw tears in her eyes: then she put her arms about his neck and drew him gently to her, leaned down to him, and kissed his eyelids.

" Sit here," she said. " It's not too wise to be kneeling at my feet in this room."

He sat down, and after a minute's silence, in which they gazed at each other, she asked him if he would take her, one day soon, to an exhibition of Prédolé's work. The sculptor was being much discussed. She had, in her dressing-room, a bronze Eros of his, a charming figurine which poured water into her bath, and she wished to go to the Varin Gallery to see the collected works of so delightful an artist—one, too, who had, in the last week, become the rage of Paris.

They arranged a day and Mariolle rose to go.

" Would you like to meet at Auteuil to-morrow? " she whispered.

" Would I like to . . . ? "

He went away dazed with joy, intoxicated by that " perhaps " which never dies in a lover's heart.

VI

MADAME DE BURNE'S brougham, drawn by a fast pair, swept along the Rue de Grenelle. The hail of a belated storm—for this was in the early day of April—rattled insistently upon the window panes, and danced on the pavements, where the white hailstones were beginning to lie on the smooth surface. Pedestrians hurried along under umbrellas, with the collars of their overcoats up to their ears. After two weeks of wonderful weather a vile return of winter had set the world a-shiver.

With her feet on a hot-water-bottle and her body enveloped in a fur cloak whose sleek and velvety caress, at once impersonal and tender, warmed her through her dress and soothed deliciously her skin that so shrank from personal contacts, she thought with distaste that within an hour at most she must set out in a cab to meet Mariolle at Auteuil.

A frantic desire to send him a telegram obsessed her, but she had promised, more than two months ago, never to put him off in that way except as a last resort, for she had been trying for some time to love him as she was herself loved.

When she had at last seen how deeply he suffered she had been filled with pity and, after the conversation which ended in her kissing his eyes, in a genuine transport of

tenderness, her sincere affection for him actually for a short time became warmer and more expansive.

Disturbed at the realisation of her own involuntary coldness, she had puzzled over her inability to love him as, after all, most women love their lovers, the more so because she was aware of a deep-rooted attachment to him. He pleased her more than any other man she had met.

This impersonality of affection must come, she supposed, from a kind of emotional laziness, that could be overcome like any other manifestation of slackness.

She made efforts. She tried to grow ecstatic in thinking of him, to experience emotion on their trysting days. Sometimes she succeeded, just as at night one can be scared by thinking of burglars or ghosts.

This playing at passion induced in her a nervous excitement, and she even forced herself to put life into her caresses, to thrill in turn to their bodily embraces. And at first she succeeded well enough. He was blind with happiness.

And then she believed that there was kindling in her some such flame as she knew was scorching him. The old dream that had sometimes visited her, the love dream, which on that evening when, musing under the milky moonlit mists in the bay of Mont Saint-Michel, she had decided to give herself to him, had seemed as though it was to be realised, that love dream awoke again in her. It was not so airy-fragile now, so veiled in poetry and idealism, but it was human, clear, stripped of foolish illusions after her experience of their liaison.

She sought for and awaited in vain those tremendous surges of the whole being towards another that are born,

so they say, when the frenzy of the soul impels to physical union. But those intensities never were attained.

Nevertheless she drove herself to simulate the abandonment of passion, to multiply their meetings, to protest: "I feel I love you more and more." But a weariness was creeping upon her, a powerlessness to deceive herself or him longer. She noticed with astonishment that his kisses irritated her in the end, even though she was not unaffected by them. It was emphasised by the vague lassitude she began now to expect on waking on the days when she was to join him. She began to ask herself how it was that she did not feel, on those mornings, as women feel who are expecting their lovers, restless, fretted by waiting for those disturbing delicious embraces. She now merely suffered them, submitted in tender resignation, was overcome, brutally mastered, thrilled despite herself, but never rapt out of her own possession. Was it that her dainty body, so delicately nurtured and hypersensitive, clung to its subconscious denials, the physical shrinking of an animal better bred, almost holy, even though such distinctions to her modern mind had as yet no meaning?

Little by little Mariolle awoke to comprehension. He saw the feigned transports fading away. He guessed at her attempted self-sacrifice: and a mortal, an inconsolable grief invaded his soul.

She knew now, as he, that the attempt had been made, and that hope was dead. And so to-day, warmly wrapped in her furs, her feet comforted by the foot-warmer, shuddering voluptuously to see the hail spatter on the windows of her coupé, she could not summon up courage

to abandon the warmth and hide in a freezing cab to go to join her unhappy lover.

Nevertheless she had not entertained for a moment the idea of withdrawing, snapping their ties, escaping the tyranny of love's usage. She knew well enough that to hold a man wholly and to keep him completely her own, in a world of her rivals, she must give herself to him, and bind him to her by the bonds which link body to body. She knew that, and accepted its indisputable, inexorable logic. To do so implies a certain loyalty, and she intended to play loyally her rôle of mistress to lover. So then she would give herself, always be ready to give herself—but was it necessary to give so often? Would their rarer meetings, even for him, not take on an added charm, a freshness which he would thus appreciate the more?

At each of their visits to Auteuil she had the feeling of bringing him the most precious of gifts, a pearl of great price. And when one gives in that spirit the joy of giving is inseparable from a certain sense of self-sacrifice: no triumph in surrender, but a pride and satisfaction in bestowing happiness.

She even calculated that there was more chance of André's love lasting if she refused herself to him occasionally, for all hunger is increased by fasting, and sensual desire is only appetite. No sooner had she come to this decision than she made up her mind that she would keep the appointment at Auteuil but would pretend that she was not feeling well. The journey through the hail storm that a moment before had seemed such penance immediately became quite amusing: and she understood, smiling at herself and the sudden changed aspect of

things, how it was that she found it so hard to go through with so normal an affair. A moment ago she was reluctant: now she looked forward to going. She had not wanted to go just now because she had been living through all the thousand little annoyances that she would have to put up with. She always pricked herself on pins, for her fingers were clumsy: she never could find the clothes she had just thrown down in her hasty undressing, with her mind already preoccupied with the nauseating task of dressing herself again unaided.

She stopped on that thought, glancing a second time at it, realising it at last. Was this lovemaking by time-table, at an hour arranged a day, two days, before, like a business appointment or a visit to the dentist, not just a little vulgar, an error in taste? After a long tête-à-tête, seductive, unrestrained, what more natural than that lips should meet lips, already charmed, intoxicated, excited by tender and passionate words? But how different from that was the prearranged embrace, which she had to expect once a week, watch in hand. So true was this reflection, that she remembered that she had once or twice, on days when she was not to see André, felt some vague desire to seek him out, whilst such a desire never made itself felt when she had to go to him like a hunted thief, by devious ways, in disgusting old cabs, her heart alienated by all the squalor.

That appointed hour at Auteuil! She had seen it on the clock in every friend's house: she had seen it creeping closer, minute by minute, at Madame de Frémines', at the Marquise de Bratiane's, the lovely Madame Le Prieur's, when she was killing time before crossing Paris, any-

where rather than at home where an unexpected visit might have upset her plans.

She said of a sudden: "To-day, since it's my first day on strike, I'll go late so as not to upset him too much." Whereupon she opened a little invisible cupboard concealed in the black silk with which the coupé, as elegant as any boudoir, was lined. When the two tiny doors of this hiding-place were folded back a mirror on hinges was disclosed, which she slid upwards until it came to the level of her face. Where the glass had been now appeared little satin-lined shelves, and a number of little silver trinkets on them. There were her powder box, her lip-stick, two scent bottles, an inkpot, penholder, scissors, a tiny paper knife, and the latest novel to while away her travels. An exquisite clock, as small and round as a little golden walnut, was fastened to the back of the cupboard: and its hands pointed to four o'clock.

Madame de Burne said to herself: "I still have an hour at any rate," and touched a little button which warned the footman, where he sat beside the coachman, to pick up the speaking-tube for orders.

She drew the other end from a fold of the lining and, putting her lips to the little mouthpiece, carved out of a piece of rock-crystal, she said, crisply:

"To the Austrian Embassy."

Then she examined herself in the mirror. She looked at herself, as she always did, with the deep content one feels on meeting the best beloved: and then opened her furs to appraise once more the corsage of her dress. It was designed for the last shiver of disappearing winter. The throat was edged with a band of delicate white

feathers that shone in their transparent perfection. They spread as they reached the shoulders and merged into pearly greys, wing-like. The whole corsage was clipped close and covered with down, giving the suggestion of some strange wild bird. On her tight little hat other feathers of gayer colour stood up, and her bright beauty seemed dressed for a flight with the teal across the grey sky under the hail.

She was still admiring the effect when the carriage swung abruptly and threaded the great gate of the Embassy. She wrapped her furs smoothly about her, lowered her mirror, shut its little doors, and, when the coupé stopped, told the coachman to go home, that she would not need him again.

Then she asked the footman who came down the wide steps to meet her:

"The Princess is at home?"

"Yes, Madame."

She went in, climbed the staircase, and found her own way into a little room in which the Princess de Malten sat writing letters.

When she saw her friend come in the Princess jumped up and ran to meet her with shining eyes: and they kissed each other twice on the lips before speaking.

Then they sat down side by side in two little armchairs before the open fire. They were extremely fond of one another, pleased one another completely, understood each other at all points, and essentially were almost exactly alike. For they were of the same world of femininity, breathing the same atmosphere, appreciative of the same sensations even though Madame de Malten was a Swede

who had married an Austrian. Each exercised over the other a mysterious and abnormal attraction out of which came a real feeling of well-being and profound contentment whenever they came together. Their chatter lasted without a break through whole afternoons, so empty and yet so satisfying to both because of the easy intercourse that came of exactly similar tastes.

" See how I love you ! " Madame de Burne exclaimed. " You are dining with me to-night and yet I could not refrain from coming to see you this afternoon. A grand passion, my dear ! "

" Which I share," said the other, smiling.

And from professional instinct they courted one another as though they were entertaining men, yet with this difference in their coquetry that their exchanges were consciously those of rivals, not antagonists.

Madame de Burne watched the clock whilst she talked. Five o'clock struck. He had been waiting for an hour. " I think that will do," she thought, and rose.

" So soon? " the princess asked.

But she replied firmly :

" Yes, I must go, I am late. But I would far rather stay with you."

They kissed again, and Madame de Burne, who had asked for a cab to be called, went away.

The horse was lame and dragged the ancient cab painfully after him : and his lameness and dejection entered into her. The journey became as long and weary for her as for him. Now the pleasure of seeing André consoled her, now the thought of what she intended to do weighed on her like a sorrow.

She found him frozen behind his little door. Bitter

gusts whipped the trees. The hail pattered on his umbrella as they hurried to the little house, and their feet slipped in the icy slush.

The garden was grey and miserable, dead, decayed. And André himself was pale and in pain. They stumbled in.

"Oh, how cold it is!" she complained.

And yet great fires blazed in the two rooms which they used. But as they had not been lit until after lunch the heat had made no impression upon the cold damp walls. Both she and André shivered.

She said:

"I simply cannot take off my furs."

She opened her heavy coat, and appeared, half-seen in her light down-trimmed dress, like some migrant bird that does not know where to settle.

He came close to her.

She began at once to talk.

"I am having a dinner party to-night which should be delightful. I'm looking forward to it."

"Who's coming, then?"

"Why, you, to begin with, and then Prédolé, whom I have been longing to meet."

"Prédolé coming?"

"Yes. Lamarthe is bringing him."

"But Prédolé isn't in the least the kind of man for you. Sculptors as a race are unsuited for drawing-rooms, and Prédolé more so than most."

"My dear, don't be so absurd! Why, I adore his work."

In the last two months, after his show in the Varin Galleries, Prédolé had conquered Paris. His reputation

had been steadily growing and one heard: "He's too marvellous! He makes the most exquisite little figures." Once the artistic world and the connoisseurs and the world of fashion had decided to flock to the Varin exhibition, there was an outburst of enthusiasm.

It almost seemed as if he had succeeded in evoking a new charm, so individual was his gift of expressing elegance and grace, as if he were bringing to birth a new conception of the beauty of form.

He specialised in statuettes, lightly draped, whose delicate veiled contours he achieved with amazing perfection. His little dancing girls, particularly, of which he had made scores of charming studies, showed in their gestures and poses, through the harmony of their attitudes and movements, every rare and supple grace of which the feminine body is capable.

For a month Madame de Burne had made ceaseless efforts to get him to her receptions. But, so it was said, the artist was a shy creature, even a bit of a boor. At last she had succeeded through Lamarthe's good offices, to whom the sculptor was indebted for a sincere even if somewhat exaggerated critical appreciation in the Press.

Mariolle asked: "And who else is coming?"

"The Princess de Malten."

This annoyed him, for he disliked the woman.

"Anyone else?"

"Massival, Bernhaus, and Georges de Maltry. That's all. Only the pick of my people. You know Prédolé, don't you?"

"A little."

"What do you think of him?"

" A delightful creature. I never met a man more in love with his own art, or more interesting when talking about it."

She was as frankly pleased as a child, and said half-a-dozen times: " This dinner is going to be perfect! "

He had captured her hand under her furs. He pressed it gently and now ventured to kiss it. Then she remembered suddenly that she had forgotten to say that she was not feeling well, and seeking hastily for some other excuse, shivered suddenly.

" Oh," she whimpered, " how wickedly cold it is."

" You're cold? "

" Frozen to the bone."

He got up to look at the thermometer, which certainly was low enough. Then he sat down beside her again.

She had not needed to say more than that she was cold for him to understand what passed in her mind. For three weeks now he had been aware of a progressive slackening in her attempts at tenderness. He guessed well enough that she was growing so weary of dissimulation that she was almost incapable of keeping it up and he himself was so exasperated, so torn by his vain and wild desire for her that he had come to admit to himself in hours of despair that it would be better to break with the woman definitely than to prolong the cruel farce.

He asked, to make sure that he had guessed her thoughts:

" You won't even take your furs off, to-day? "

" Oh, no," she said. " I have had a little cough ever since I woke. This weather irritates my throat. I am afraid of catching a real chill."

After a marked silence she added:

"If I hadn't been determined to see you I would never have come out."

Since he made no reply she began again, furiously annoyed and feeling unexpectedly guilty:

"After the six wonderful days we have just had, this return to winter is very dangerous."

She looked out at the garden where the trees were already beginning to show green, powdered though they were with the snow that had settled on their branches.

He watched her, thinking: "And that's all the love she has for me!" For the first time a kind of hate swelled up hotly in him, and the thwarted masculinity in him turned him savagely hostile to her, to her face, to her unattainable soul, to her body which all pursued but none could hold.

"She pretends to be cold!" he thought. "She's only cold because she's here with me. If it were a pleasure party, one of the stupid whims which make up the senseless existence of these futile idiots, she'd brave anything and risk her life without a single thought. To show her latest toilette she'd drive cheerfully through the worst weather, in an open carriage, too, for that matter. And d'you think she'd wrap up then? These modern women are all alike."

He looked, deliberately, in her face. And he realised that behind that face, that darling flower face, there stirred a longing to put an end to a situation which was becoming impossibly painful.

Could it be true that there ever had been, or would ever be again, passionate women, who could be shaken by emotion, could suffer, weep, surrender in ecstasy,

cling to a lover, grip him and groan in their anguish, love with their flesh where they loved with their hearts, with their whispering mouths and their straining eyes, their throbbing hearts and their fondling fingers, women who would risk all for love, and come, day or night, braving suspicious eyes or open threats, trembling but dauntless, to the arms that would hold them, women beside themselves with happiness and surrender?

To what a vile travesty of love he found himself committed: a love without fulfilment, or end, without joy or triumph, nerve-rotting, exacerbating, gnawed by regrets: a passionless love, cold, sober, a thing made of previsions and after-thoughts, of distress and despair, bringing a realisation of the happiness of kisses shared only through the intolerable knowledge that response could never be won from cold lips, sterile and dry as dead trees.

He looked at her, so charming in her swan's down dress. There were the enemies, so much more potent than the woman herself, which must be overcome, her dresses, her conventions, those jealous guardians, the dainty and the intangible barriers erected between him and his mistress.

"Your dress is perfectly charming," he said, smiling, determined to conceal his torture from her.

She answered with another smile:

"But wait until you see the dress I wear to-night!"

Then she coughed three or four times and added:

"I am catching a real cold. Let me go, dear. The sun will come again, and so shall I."

He did not attempt, in this mood of failure, to dissuade her. He realised that no conceivable effort could trans-

form the lifelessness of this sparkless existence, that hope was dead forever, that those serene lips could never stammer with passion, nor those eyes lighten. And suddenly he felt a definite resolve, a furious determination to escape this humiliating slavery forever. She had nailed him upon a cross: he bled from every wound and she looked on at his agony in stupid lack of understanding, pleased a little perhaps at having somehow put him there. But he would wrench himself free from his tree of death, leaving shreds of his limbs, fragments of flesh, his tortured heart. He would escape like a beast whom the hunters have all but slain, and find sanctuary where in loneliness it might be that his wounds would scar over, and he feel no more than those dull pains that the mutilated endure to their death.

"Good-bye, then," he said.

She was struck by the sadness in his voice, and answered:

"Until to-night, dear friend."

And he repeated:

"Until to-night."

He took her to the garden gate and came back to sit down, alone, before the drawing-room hearth.

Alone! And how cold it was when one noticed it. And how miserably sad. Finished. A vile thought. An end of hope, of waiting. No more dreams, with a flame in one's heart that made life flower, now and again, in a dreary existence, with fireworks flashing suddenly against the gloom. An end to those nights of solitary turmoil when he walked about until dawn, thinking about her, and an end to the mornings when he told himself, almost as he opened his eyes: "Soon I shall see her in our funny little house."

How he loved her—loved her! And how hard it would be to cure himself of that love. She had gone because it was chilly! He could see her as she had been a moment ago, watching him, bewitching him, the more surely to sap his heart. And how completely she had drained it, to the last ultimate, reluctant drop! He was always conscious of his wound, an old wound now, half open, dressed by her, which could never heal for she broke into it again and again with the probe of her deadly indifference. And he was aware, too, that something continually seeped away into his body from that wounded heart, filled his veins, rose into his throat, choked him. And then, putting his hands to his face as if to hide even from himself his weakness, he broke into tears. She had gone because it was so chilly! He would have struggled naked through the snow to have met her anywhere. He would have thrown himself from a roof-top merely to fall at her feet. A tale from ancient history came back to him, from which arose the legend of the Two Lovers' Tower, which is still to be seen at Rouen. A young girl, at the cruel caprice of her father, who forbade her marriage with her lover unless she carried him to the crest of the hill that overhangs the city on the east, dragged him there, crawling on hands and knees, and died as she reached the top. Love, too, is now no more than legend, a thing to be sung in verse or told of in lying story.

His mistress had herself used a phrase, in one of their first meetings, which he had never forgotten: "Men of to-day don't love women enough to hurt themselves. Believe me, I know something of them both." She was wrong so far as he was concerned, though not in her

own case, for she had added: "In any case I warn you that I am wholly incapable of being moved by any man, whoever he might be."

"Whoever he might be"? Was that so certain? Moved by him, no. He was very sure of that now, but by no man . . . not so sure.

By him? She could not love him. Was not able to love him. Why?

And then the feeling that he had somehow missed everything in life, which for years had all but obsessed him, poured over him and overwhelmed him. He had done nothing, succeeded in nothing, won nothing, overcome nothing. The Arts had tempted him, but he had not found within himself the courage to give himself wholly to any one of them, nor the obstinate determination by which alone comes success. No success had ever warmed his heart, nor had any fine pursuit of the beautiful ever ennobled him or contributed to his spiritual growth. His one sincere effort to win a woman's heart had failed like the rest. He was then wholly a failure.

He went on weeping through the hands he pressed against his eyes. His tears, coursing down his cheeks, soaked his moustache and were salt upon his lips.

And their bitterness, as he tasted them, seemed to make more acute his misery and despair.

When he raised his head he found that night had fallen. He had only just time to get home and dress for her dinner.

VII

ANDRÉ MARIOLLE was the first to arrive at Madame de Burne's. He sat down and saw all about him the treasures, the fabrics, the trinkets and furniture, all of them dear to him because they were hers, the familiar setting in which he had first met her, come to know her, seen her again and again, learned to love her, discovered the quality of passion in himself and watched it grow day by day up to the moment of its barren victory. In this dainty room, made into an exquisite shrine for the exquisite creature, so perfect a frame for her, he had so often waited, burning with love for her. How well he knew the scent of her rooms, a delicate iris perfume, at once rare and simple. Here he had shivered on the brink of experience, trembled as each new hope seemed to beckon, explored every emotion, and, at the end, every depth of pain. He found himself clutching at the arms of the big chair in which he had so often sat beside her, gripping them like the hands of a friend who says good-bye forever. There she had smiled on him and talked softly with him. He wished that she would not come, that none would come, and that he might still sit there, right through the night, dreaming of his love, as one who watches beside the dead. And then he would have slipped away as dawn came, for years, perhaps forever.

The door opened. She came in and walked across to him, holding out her hand. He held himself in check, showing no emotion. He could not see her as a woman. She was nothing but a nosegay, charmingly arranged.

A rope of carnations was hung round her waist, and carnations cascaded down her dress to her feet. Round her bare arms and shoulders forget-me-nots and lilies of the valley were garlanded, and three fantastic orchids peeped from the opening of her dress and caressed with their exotic rose and red the whiteness of her bosom. Her fair hair was starred with tiny enamel violets and sparkling diamond dust. And other larger diamonds on their gold pins shone like dew drops in the flower clusters of her gown.

"I shall have a shocking headache," she said, "but it can't be helped. This dress suits me."

As she moved, Spring breathed from her: and she was more fresh and sweet than her flowers. André stared at her in amazement, and the thought forced itself on him that to take her in his arms would be more brutally Philistine than to trample a flower garden underfoot. Women's bodies, then, were no more than excuses for adornment, jewellers' settings. It was almost impossible to see them as living things to love. They were like flowers, or birds, a thousand pretty things rather than women. Their mothers and all the generations of women before them had employed every art of coquetry to add to their charm, but their first thought had been to please, by the direct natural appeal of their bodies, by the unsophisticated charm of their physical allure, by the irresistible attraction which a woman's beautiful body has for a man. But now coquetry is all; artifice is an

end in itself, and women make use of it rather to tease the eyes of rivals and to provoke their sterile jealousy than to join issue with men.

Then for what was the elaborate dress designed, the pleasure of her lover, or the humiliation of the Princess de Malten?

The outer door opened: a maid announced the Princess.

Madame de Burne came to life at the name: even whilst she contrived to protect her orchids and lilies she caught and kissed her, lips apart, a little gesture of tenderness which André had never known. It was an adorable little kiss, warmly given and warmly returned, love upon the lips of each.

Mariolle shook with pain. Never once had she run to him with such happy haste: she had never kissed him with such lips: and revulsion seized him. "Those women were never made for men," he thought, and ground his heel into the carpet savagely.

Massival came in, and behind him M. de Pradon. Then came the Count de Bernhaus, and Georges de Maltry, the latter in the latest English cut of clothes, and very conscious of them.

Only Lamarthe and Prédolé were missing: and everyone talked of the sculptor's success. Every comment was eulogistic.

"He has recovered the charm of gracefulness, rediscovered the Renaissance tradition and added to it modern sincerity." According to M. Georges de Maltry he was "the heaven-sent interpreter of mortal grace." Such phrases for the last two months had been current everywhere, had passed from every mouth to every ear.

At last he came in. Everyone was shocked. He was

a man of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a labourer, a big head with very marked features, a grey mane and grizzled beard, a big fleshy nose and coarse lips, and a timid and embarrassed manner. He held his arms away from his body, clumsily, no doubt because of his heavy muscles and enormous hands. They were gigantic, extraordinarily thick, with hairy muscular fingers, the hands of a Hercules or a butcher: and they seemed conscious of their own awkwardness, slow, ungainly, uncomfortable at finding themselves in a drawing-room, and quite unable to escape notice.

But the face was lit up by clear grey eyes, very penetrating and amazingly brilliant. They seemed to live a life of their own in that mass of a man. They looked about them, examined, rejected, shot here and there a keen swift lively lightning of their own, and it was obvious that a great and vivacious intelligence informed them.

Madame de Burne, for the moment robbed of her poise, pointed to a seat, where the artist politely settled himself. And once there he seemed rooted, more than a little confused at finding himself in such an assembly.

Lamarthe, the experienced go-between, hurried across to his friend to prevent the ice from setting.

"Let me tell you all about the room you are in," he said, smiling. "To begin with you have set eyes upon our charming hostess. Now look at the treasures about you."

He pointed out a genuine bust by Houdon on the mantelpiece, a Boule writing-table, two women dancing, entwined, by Clodion, and then, upon a shelf to themselves, four Tanagra statuettes, perfect among the perfect.

At that Prédolé's face lit up suddenly, as though he had come upon his own children in a wilderness. He got up and stumped across to the four statuettes: and as he snatched up two at once in those enormous slaughterer's hands Madame de Burne shivered for her darlings. But the moment he touched them it was clear that he loved them and understood them, for he handled them with astonishing suppleness and dexterity, turning them about in the thick fingers which now were as clever and sure as a juggler's. To watch him handle and turn them thus was to realise that there was there, in the soul and in the fingers of that great brute, a unique feeling, exquisite and tender, for all dainty diminutive things.

"Aren't they charming?" Lamarthe asked.

Then the sculptor praised them, as though he were congratulating living things on their loveliness, and went on to talk of the finest he had come across, in a voice hushed but very sure and tranquil, wholly at the service of a clear and confident mind which understood exactly the value of the terms which it employed.

Then under the novelist's guidance he inspected the rest of the show pieces which Madame de Burne, with her friends' advice, had collected. He did not attempt to disguise his astonishment and delight at finding such jewels in such a place, and always he took them up in his hands, and returned them again to their place with exceeding delicacy, as though he loved the light contact. A bronze statuette was hidden away in a dark corner, and weighed as much as a child. He lifted it out with one hand, carried it across to the lamp, admired it for several minutes, and then replaced it without any apparent effort.

Lamarthe said:

"Nature made the old bruiser to war with marble and hack granite!"

And everyone watched him sympathetically.

Then a servant came in:

"Dinner is served, Madame."

The mistress of the house took the sculptor's arm and led him to the dining-room, and when she had settled him at her right asked him, much as she might have asked the bearer of some illustrious name of the origin of his house:

"And your art has the advantage, hasn't it, of being the oldest of all the arts?"

In his deep steady voice he replied:

"Why, Madame, the shepherds of the Bible played on the flute: music would seem to be the oldest, even though to our ideas real music only dates from yesterday. But real sculpture dates from the immemorial past."

She answered: "You love music?"

And he, with deep conviction, said: "I worship all the Arts."

She asked again:

"Is it known who invented your own?"

He reflected for a moment, and then, in a quiet balanced tone, as though he were embarking upon some enthralling tale, replied:

"According to Hellenic tradition it was Dædalus, the Athenian. But the prettiest legend is that which attributes the discovery to a Sicyonian potter called Dibutades. His daughter Kora drew, in outline only, the shadow of her lover's profile, and her father filled up the silhouette with

clay and worked it into shape. And thus my art was born."

Lamarthe murmured: "Charming!" and then in the silence which followed, added:

"Ah, Prédolé, if only you would!"

And then, addressing himself directly to Madame de Burne: "You cannot imagine, Madame, how intensely interesting the man can be when he speaks of what he loves, how brilliantly he can explain, expose, compel worship!"

But the sculptor refused to pose or perorate. He had tucked a corner of his napkin between his neck and collar to protect his shirt and was swallowing his soup with appreciation, with that real respect which your peasant always has for broth.

And then he swallowed a glass of wine at a gulp and sat back much more cheerfully, obviously beginning to feel acclimatised.

Every now and again he tried to twist round in his chair, for he could see, reflected in a mirror opposite him, a very modern group directly behind him, on the massive mantelpiece. He did not know it and was guessing at the artist.

At last, unable to wait, he asked, across the conversation:

"Is that a Falgnières? It is, isn't it?"

Madame de Burne laughed.

"Yes, it's a Falgnières. But how could you tell that, from seeing a reflection in a glass?"

He smiled in turn.

"Ah, Madame, I can tell, at a glance, even if I cannot explain how, the sculpture of men who are also painters,

and the painting of men who also practise sculpture. It's never in the least like the work of a man who confines himself to one Art."

Lamarthe, anxious to see his friend shine, demanded an explanation, and Prédolé proved complaisant.

He defined, illustrated, and characterised the painting of sculptors and the sculpture of painters in a way so clear, original and fresh, in his quiet precise speech, that eyes as well as ears attended to him. His commentary ran through the history of art, picking its illustrations from epoch after epoch, until he had led them back to the early Italian Masters, painters and sculptors at once, Nicolas and John of Pisa, Donatello, Leonardo da Vinci, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He touched on the curious views of Diderot on the subject, and in conclusion cited the Gates of the Baptistery of St. John at Florence, Ghiberti's work, bas-reliefs so vivid and dramatic that they seem more like painted canvas than bronze.

With his heavy hands at work as though they were full of modelling clay, and so light and supple in their movements as to fascinate his hearers, he made the examples of which he spoke live with such conviction that the whole table followed the movements of his fingers, as they gesticulated swiftly and quietly above the plates and glasses, shaping the ideas to which his words gave utterance.

Then some dish was offered him which he liked and he was silent, devoting all his attention to the food on his plate.

Until the dinner's end he scarcely spoke again, and paid little attention to the conversation, which flickered from some theatrical gossip to a political rumour, from a ball

to a marriage, from an article in the Revue des Deux Mondes to the Horse Show which had just begun. He ate well and drank freely, without however showing it, his mind being clear, sane, difficult to disturb, scarcely to be affected by wine.

When they returned to the drawing-room Lamarthe, who had not got from the sculptor all that he wanted, drew him across the room to a glass case to show him a priceless possession, a silver inkstand, a show piece quoted in the catalogues, historic, wrought by Benvenuto Cellini himself.

A kind of intoxication possessed the sculptor. He examined it as a lover scans his mistress, and in the grip of genuine emotion he gave expression, as he talked of the master's work, to ideas as gracious and perfect as the dead man's art. Then, feeling that everyone wished to hear him, he let himself go completely and, sitting solid in a huge armchair, fondling and examining the masterpiece in his huge hands, he gave them his impressions of every miracle of art which he had come across, stripped his feelings bare to them, made visible to them that strange madness with which the grace of form filled him as it entered his soul through his eyes. For ten years he had wandered through the world with eyes for nothing but marble and stone, bronze and wood, wrought by loving hands, or gold, silver, ivory and copper, amorphous substance turned at the fairy touch of the chisel into living loveliness.

And he too chiselled as he spoke, in arresting reliefs and exquisite pieces of modelling, formed by the perfect precision of the phrases he employed.

The men, in a half-circle round him, listened with

extraordinary interest, whilst the two women, sitting together near the fire, seemed a little bored, and whispered together from time to time, clearly somewhat disconcerted to find that it was possible to take so keen an interest in the mere contours of things.

When Prédolé came to an end Lamarthe, carried off his feet with delight, wrung his hand and exclaimed in the friendliest tones, touched to sincerity by their common love of art:

"My dear man, I want to hug you! You are the only artist, the one impassioned, really great, man living to-day, the one man who genuinely loves his work, who finds happiness in it, who is never weary nor discouraged. You handle Art the Eternal in her purest, simplest, highest and most inaccessible shape. You bring Beauty to birth in the curve of a line, and you waste no thought on anything else. I'll drink my brandy to your health, old man!"

Conversation again became general, but languished, stifled by the storm of ideas which had swept through the atmosphere of the pretty room and its furniture of precious things.

Prédolé left early, explaining, as his reason for leaving, that he always began work at daybreak.

As soon as he had gone, Lamarthe, bursting with excitement, clamoured for Madame de Burne's opinion of him.

She answered after some hesitation, half vexed and half captured:

"Interesting enough, but a rough diamond."

The novelist smiled, and thought to himself, "My God, he didn't admire your dress, and you yourself were the

only one of all your treasures for which he could not spare a thought." Then, after a few friendly phrases he left her and sat down beside the Princess de Malten, whom he set himself to impress. Count de Bernhaus came over to his hostess, picked up a footstool and settled himself at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, de Maltry and de Pradon went on discussing the sculptor, who had made a very deep impression upon them. M. de Maltry compared him with the old masters whose whole lives were adorned and illuminated by their jealous hungry love of every manifestation of Beauty: and he philosophised on the subject, in subtle, wise, and wearisome phrases.

Massival, bored with the interminable talk of an art other than his own, rejoined the Princess and sat down beside Lamarthe, who presently left him the field in order to go and talk with the men.

"Let's get away," said he to Mariolle.

"Delighted. We'll go now."

The novelist loved to stroll along the pavements at night and, under pretext of seeing a friend home, to talk. His crisp, strident, biting tones seemed to hang about the walls. He was at his best, eloquent and clear-sighted, witty and fantastic, on these nocturnal rambles, which became more monologue than discussion. He acquired a reputation for inspired criticism which he enjoyed, and such gentle exercise of lungs and legs as insured sound sleep.

Mariolle was at the end of his tether. All his misery, ill-luck, secret humiliation, all his knowledge, hitherto denied, of his irremediable failure, boiled up in him as he left her door. He was finished, had no more heart to try again. He was leaving her forever.

When he had said good-night to her she had scarcely taken the trouble to answer him.

The two men found themselves alone in the street. The wind had changed and the bitter cold had broken. It was mild and warm, and smelt like the end of a spring shower, fresh and sweet. The sky, full of stars, shimmered as if, up in the heavens, a breath of summer had quickened the myriad worlds.

The pavements were already dry, though in the roads pools of water still shone darkly under the lamps.

Lamarthe broke the soft silence, saying:

"Prédolé is extraordinarily lucky. He lives only for the one thing, his art, thinks of nothing else. It's his only love. It fills his life for him, is his consolation. It stands to him for happiness. It makes his life cheerful and wholesome. He is a great artist straight out of the great days of old. What does he care for women? He can ignore our mannequins, all frills and follies. Did you notice how little attention he paid to our two lovely ladies, attractive though they are? But then he needs the genuine thing, no substitutes for him. Our dear hostess actually considered him intolerable! I fancy she thought him half-witted! For her a bust by Houdon, Tanagra figurines, an inkstand made by Benvenuto Cellini, are only the trifling accessories necessary for the appropriate setting for that work of art, herself: Her and Her Dress, since her dress is actually part of her: the new touch which she gives to her beauty. How damned futile and personal women are!"

He stopped abruptly, striking the pavement so sharply with his cane that the sound went ringing down the silent street. He thought for a moment and went on:

"They know, they understand, and they appreciate their own value and accessory values very exactly: the fashion in toilettes or jewellery, which is never the same two years running: but they have scarcely a notion of permanent values, of selection, delicate and eternal, of the deep and exquisite appreciation of your true artist, of disinterested pure aesthetics. In any case their feminine perceptions are entirely rudimentary, far from developed, insensitive to anything which does not minister directly to the egoism which swamps any possible intellectual development in them. Their finesse is primitive, like an Indian's, that of the chase and the snare. They are actually incapable of appreciating the material pleasures which call for even purely physical education, for refined appreciation of any kind—of epicureanism, for instance. If ever, as an exception, a woman comes to an understanding of the finer points of cookery, she is utterly incapable of appreciating a good wine. Wine speaks only to a man's palate—for a good wine can speak."

Again, on the last word, he thumped his cane on the footpath, pointing his statement.

He went on after a long pause:

"One mustn't ask too much of them, in any case. But that lack of taste and understanding which darkens their intellectual life often blinds them completely when they have to deal with men. It is useless, if you want to win them, to possess spirit, heart, or intelligence, any exceptional quality or merit, such as placed a man in the old days. Women of to-day are second-rate actresses, playing, very badly, at love: playing over and over again, merely because it draws, a comedy of which they have studied

the tradition without a shred of appreciation of the underlying values. And they need stock players to give them their cues and they murder the play to their mincing satisfaction."

For some moments they walked along together in silence. Mariolle listened to him in dazed exhaustion, mentally repeating his phrases, in his own wretchedness finding some comfort in them. And of course he knew that an Italian adventurer, just come to Paris to give exhibitions of swordsmanship, Prince Epilati, whose life was spent in the sporting clubs, of whom everyone was talking at the moment, whose much vaunted beauty and supple strength, clad in thin black clinging silk, were nightly paraded before society and the footlights, now engaged the eyes and the fickle heart of the little Baroness de Frémines.

When Lamarthe's prolonged silence forced itself upon his consciousness he turned to him, saying:

"But it's our own fault. We have chosen badly. There are other women in the world."

The novelist answered, drearily:

"The only women capable, nowadays, of genuine feeling are little shop girls and the sentimental middle-classes, when they are poor and unhappily married. I've gone to the rescue of one or two such damsels in distress. They slop over with sentiment: but it's so essentially vulgar that to swap it for one's own is a penitential process. No, I tell you that in our wealthy cultured society, in which the women have neither wants nor needs unsatisfied, and have no desire to be more than kept amused, well on this side of danger, in which the men have made a routine of pleasure as of work, the old, delightful, potent, natural

attraction which drew the two sexes together has disappeared."

Mariolle muttered agreement.

His longing to escape became unbearable. He determined to leave the puppets to their sham passions, their silly mockery of the lovely tender relations of days before the savour and sweetness had faded out of life.

"Good-night," he said curtly, "I'm off to bed."

He went home, sat down at his desk, and wrote:

"Good-bye. Do you remember my first letter? I said Good-bye then, too, but I did not go. How wrong I was! I shall have left Paris when you get this. Need I explain why? Men like me should never court women like you. Were I an artist and able to relieve my feelings by expressing them in my work, no doubt you would provide me with inspiration. But I am only an unhappy man whose love for you is stained with intolerable pain. When I first met you I did not think myself capable of such depths of emotion and suffering. Another woman, in your place, might have filled my heart with divine happiness, fullness of life. But you are unable to do other than torture it. In spite of yourself! Yes, I know that. I am not reproaching you. I haven't the least wish to do that. I have no right to say even this much. Forgive me. You are so made that you cannot feel as I feel, that you have no conception of what it means to me to come into a room in which you are, to hear your voice, to look at you. Oh, you were kind to me, you took me, you even offer me a tranquil reasonable happiness for which I ought to thank you on my knees, all my life. But I don't want it. Oh, how horrible, how unbearably cruel,

is this love which endlessly clamours for life, for the flaming word, the passionate clasp, and can never be satisfied! My heart is as sick and empty as the belly of a beggar who runs behind you for ever with empty outstretched hand. You throw him pretty toys—but never bread. It is bread, it is love, which I need. I go, then, a miserable and starving man, starving for your love which would have given me life. Of all the joys of life I have nothing. I am bankrupt save for one unhappy thought that never leaves me, which I must somehow kill. That is why I must go and that is what I must do.

"Good-bye, then. Forgive me—thank you—forgive me. This very evening I love you with all my life. But . . .

"Good-bye.

"André Mariolle."

PART III

II

A RADIANT morning lit the city. Mariolle stepped into the cab that stood outside his door, with his bag and two trunks on the roof. He had wakened his valet late that night and with his help had packed all the linen and clothes he could want for a long absence, and he now left with no more settled address than the post office at Fontainebleau. He went without his man, since he felt he could not bear a face which reminded him of Paris or a voice which had been familiar during the last few months.

He called "Gare de Lyon!" to the cabman, and they were off. And at once his thoughts went back to that other departure for Mont Saint-Michel, last spring. In three months it would be a year since she—— To escape his thoughts he stared out at the street.

The cab swung into the avenue of the Champs-Elysées, bathed in waves of spring sunshine. The green of young leaves, which earlier weeks had released from their tight sheaths, had escaped unhurt from the last two days of snow and sleet, and seemed to breathe, so swiftly did they open in that radiant sunlight, the fresh scent of sap rising into new branches.

For it was one of those mornings of sudden blossoming when, in every public park and all along the avenues, every billowy chestnut in Paris flowers in a day, candles

lit by the sunshine. Earth comes to life for the summer, and even the macadam roads split here and there where the great roots swell under their smooth surface.

He thought, as he jolted along in the cab, "At last I shall know what peace means. I shall watch spring come to birth in the deserted forest."

The journey seemed long. He was so overtired by recent insomnia that he could have wept over his own unhappiness; he was exhausted as if he had watched for a week beside a dying friend. When he reached Fontainebleau he made straight for a lawyer, through whose hands most of the local property passed, and asked him if he had any furnished houses to let in the Forest. He was told of several and looked through some photographs. That which he liked best had just been left by two young people, a man and a woman, who had spent the whole winter at Montigny-sur-Loing. The lawyer, though a grave and sober man of middle age, smiled. He obviously knew of something in the nature of a love story. He asked:

"Are you alone, sir?"

"I am alone."

"Without servants even?"

"Without my servants. I have left them in Paris. I wish to engage servants locally. I have come here to be able to work in absolute quiet."

"Oh, you'll get that, at this time of year."

A few minutes later an open landau carried Mariolle and his trunk down the road to Montigny.

The forest was astir. At the foot of the great trees, whose tops were already misty with tiny leaves, the ferns were pushing up. The birch trees were early and their

silvery branches were already dressed to meet the summer, but the enormous oaks showed only, at the ends of their gnarled branches, tiny soft green tufts where soon the rich leaves would be. The beech trees, their pointed buds pushing bravely forward, had still a few of last year's leaves to shed.

All along the forest road the growing carpet of young green, not yet hidden by the impenetrable shade of the summer tree tops, was crisp, shining, enamelled by the rising sap : and the scent of growing things which Mariolle had noticed in the Champs-Elysées, now enfolded him, bathed him in immense sweet waves of fecundity warmed by a triumphant sun. He drew deep breaths, like a man released from prison, and as though real fetters had just been struck off he spread his two arms wide, gently and luxuriously, and let his hands hang limp above the wheels.

It was wonderful to breathe that great free pure atmosphere, but it would need deep draughts and many, even of that sweet air, so to saturate him as to relieve his pain, so to fill his lungs as to send health stealing through him, to heal his heart and calm his outraged nerves.

They passed Marlotte, where the coachman pointed out the Hotel Corot, just opened and said to be the latest thing of its kind. Then they followed a white road between the Forest on the left and a wide plain on the right, dotted with great trees which grouped into little woods on the horizon. They came to the long empty street of the village, dusty white, blinding in the sunshine, bordered by tiny houses roofed with tiles. Here and there great lilacs in full flower swelled above the garden walls.

The road followed a little ravine which went down steeply to a dancing stream. When Mariolle caught sight

of it he smiled involuntarily. The little river, so swift and gay and shallow, turned and twisted, washing the walls and gardens on one bank and on the other caressing the rich margin of the plain. On that side frail trees overhung the water and their slender pale green branches swayed above the rippling stream.

Mariolle immediately discovered the house to which he had been sent and fell in love with it. It was an old house which had been restored by a painter, who had lived there five years, grown tired of the country, and left it in the lawyer's hands to let furnished. It was on the river bank, only separated from the stream by a gay little garden which ended in a grassy terrace bordered by limes. The Loing, which here tumbled joyously over a tiny waterfall two or three feet high, ran at the bottom of the terrace in fantastic eddies, singing a little song. Through the long garden windows, beyond the delicate lime trees, the whole plain was spread before him.

" Oh, I shall grow whole here," Mariolle murmured.

All arrangements had been made with the lawyer in case the house pleased him. The coachman took back his answer. He had nothing to do but walk in, for the Mayor's clerk found two women for him, one to cook, the other to sweep out his rooms and look after his linen.

On the ground floor there was a large drawing-room, a dining-room, kitchen, and two small rooms: on the floor above an immense bedroom, and a long room fitted up by the painter as a studio. And the whole house was furnished with understanding, with taste and a considerable outlay of money. House and garden had obviously made a profound appeal to their owner. But to-day it wore an air of staleness, disarray, the

forlorn and widowed atmosphere of a house abandoned by its tenants.

But it was apparent that the house had not been empty long. A faint but still fresh scent of verbena hung about it. Mariolle sniffed, and jumped to a conclusion: "Ah, verbena! A homely scent. Then the woman who lived here cannot have been a complicated soul. Lucky man!"

Then came evening, after a day filled by a score of small activities. He sat down by a window, inhaling the damp sweet freshness of dewy grass, watching the deepening shadows invade the further slopes. He could hear the two servants talking as they got his dinner ready, and their voices rose, muffled, up the staircase. Through the window came the lowing of cows and the barking of their attendant dogs, and now and again the voices of men calling across the fields to one another.

It was miraculously calm and restful.

For the thousandth time since wakening Mariolle wondered how she would take his letter. . . .

And now he asked aloud: "What is she doing at this moment?"

He looked at his watch—half-past six—"She is home by now. Probably there's a crowd in her rooms."

He could see her drawing-room so clearly, and his mistress laughing with the Princess de Malten, Madame de Frémines, Massival and Count de Bernhaus.

Of a sudden his spirit rose in a kind of blind fury. He should have been there. He was there every day at this hour. And he felt sick, not with any weakening of his will, for that was irrevocably set, but with a shudder of the body, a weakness such as overcomes a sick man whose accustomed injection of morphia has been refused him.

The field went black before his eyes. He could see only his mistress, surrounded by her friends, the happy victim of a thousand little worldly cares that had robbed him of her. "Oh, God, I *must* stop thinking of her," he groaned.

He got up and walked into the garden, and went down to the terrace and the limes. Mists rose chill from the waterfall, as if evoked by his despondency. He went back to the house. The table was already laid in the dining-room. He hurried over dinner, and, having nothing to do and being afraid of the sickness of soul which had settled down upon him, went to bed. He lay down conscientiously and shut his eyes. The effort defeated itself. He could not keep his thoughts from his mistress, whose face moved before his eyes, whose voice sounded in his ears.

Whose was she now? Bernhaus would have her. The Count, the man of the moment, the dandy, the exquisite, would appeal to her love of effect. And he attracted her, or she would not have used all her arts to enslave him even whilst she was another man's mistress.

Obsessed by bitter reflections, his mind, as it grew drowsy, was driven down wintry avenues to watch through bright windows two lovers in the warmth beyond. Deep sleep never came to him. All through the night he saw them floating about him, mocking him, maddening him, fading away as though to leave him to rest, and then, as forgetfulness seemed about to enfold him, appearing again, wakening him with a cruel stab of jealousy.

In the early hours he sprang up and dressed and went out into the forest, picking up in the hall a sturdy ash-plant left behind by the last tenant. The rising sun

slanted through the leafless tops of the oaks across a tapestry of earth, here young green, there brown of old leaves, briars russet and gold after their wintering: and yellow butterflies danced along the forest ride, like tiny flickering flames.

A hillock, almost a hill, crowned with pine trees and purple boulders, came into sight on the right of his path. Mariolle broke away towards it and climbed slowly, and when he reached the top threw himself down on a flat-topped rock, out of breath. His knees were shaking so that they would hardly carry him: his heart was beating wildly: his whole being seemed as exhausted as if he had just finished some great physical feat.

Such exhaustion, he realised, was certainly not due to the morning's efforts. It was her doing, the result of many months of love that had weighed on him like leaden fetters. He struck at the short turf, muttering: "How the devil does she come to ride me like this? I've never let life master me before."

His overheated imagination, stricken by fear of a condition which he could not understand, turned inwards and searched his soul, plumbing the depths of his being, striving to know and understand it better, to discover the why and the how of a crisis which as yet he could not justly estimate.

He talked to himself.

"I have never yet been carried off my feet. I am neither hysterical nor passionate by nature. I have more judgment than instinct, curiosity than appetite, I am naturally more an amateur than an expert. In the end I am really only a dilettante, of delicate taste, perhaps, intelligent, difficult to please. I have always loved life

without committing myself deeply, drunk its wine without losing my head, knowing too much to risk too much. I always look round things, I generally analyse my own desires far too well to obey them blindly. In fact that's my great fault, the real cause of my ineffectiveness. And see how this woman has imposed herself on me, in spite of me, in spite of my fear and understanding of her. And now she possesses me as if she had plucked one by one all my aspirations, every thought that went to make up me. Perhaps that's the explanation. I have frittered myself away upon inanimate things, on nature whose moods have pleased and saddened me, on music, a kind of idealised caress, on thought, the epicure's treatment of the life of the spirit, on all the pleasant and lovely things of life.

" And then I met a woman who summed up in herself all my hesitating insincere desires, and in centralising them all, made love grow. She pleased my eyes with her elegance and her beauty: she pleased my spirit with her keen shrewd wit: and she won my heart through some mysterious affinity, of mind and of body, a secret irresistible emanation of her essence which conquered me as surely as some flowers stupefy.

" She has taken the place of my every thought, for I have not an aspiration left, a need, a want. Nothing that matters is left.

" At any other time I should have thrilled with pleasure to watch these woods new born. To-day I can't see them, feel them, I am not really here at all. I am wrapped up in a woman whom I no longer wish to love.

" Oh, come on! I must kill thought with fatigue. I shall never cure myself otherwise."

He jumped up, scrambled down the stony slopes, and set off again, striding along. But his obsession clung to him and rode him savagely.

He hurried forward, and every now and again, as the sunshine streamed down through the trees, or some breath of fir trees hung aromatic in a mossy glade, there came to him a brief knowledge of appeasement, like a foretaste of consolation to come.

Suddenly he stopped. "This isn't walking," he said, "it's a flight!" And in truth he was in flight from himself, from realisation of the ruins of his love.

So he set off again more quietly. The look of the Forest was changing, growing more leafy and dim, for he was coming to the sheltered slopes, where the famous beeches towered. Here no memory of winter lingered. A marvellous spring-time was abroad, born overnight, so fresh it was and young.

Mariolle wandered down green glades under the gigantic trees that soared to heaven, and walked steadily on for an hour, two hours, then three, here stooping under branches, there pushing through a thousand tiny snares of undergrowth, and everywhere about him shone the new green leaves, polished and bright with sap. The tree-trunks soared, column-like and smooth, some straight, some sweeping up in splendid curves, some pale, and others dark or mottled with minute mosses clinging to their bark. Far as the eye could see on every side they rose, and above them the immense vault of the tree tops shut out the sky. In the shade beneath smaller slenderer trees were dwarfed. Here and there cataracts of fierce sunshine poured down from the far-off canopy. The light streamed down and flashed upon the shining

green, and the trees were no longer trees, but a shimmering mist of verdure shot with golden rays.

Mariolle stopped, breathless with wonder for which he had no words. Was he indeed in the Forest, or sunk to the bed of a strange sea, where green forms swayed suspended in the light, in that green and gold transparency.

He felt better, further from his trouble, hidden, calmer, and he lay down to rest upon a russet carpet of last year's dead leaves which the trees had only parted with when the new leaves had come.

Happy in the touch of the fresh earth and the caress of the pure sweet air he was presently aware of vague regrets which gradually crystallised, and he found himself saying: " Ah, if only she were here with me! "

At that, Mont Saint-Michel rose before his eyes, and, remembering how different she had been there from the woman he had known in Paris, how warm had been that sudden affection which had flowered in the wide air, the great spaces, he believed that there perhaps, for half a day, for an hour at least, she had really loved him a little. At least on the causeway from which the tide was streaming back across the sands, in the cloister of the marvellous old building, her whispered " André " had seemed to mean, " I am your own," and on the Fool's Way where he had almost had to carry her, between earth and heaven, she had seemed to sway to a gust of passion. But all that had passed as soon as her little high-heeled shoes felt the pavements of Paris under them again.

But had she found herself with him here, in this strange sea of rising sap, would she not have known once more

that sweet fleeting emotion which they had both felt in Normandy?

He lay on his back, embittered by memory and conjecture, his eyes dazzled by the sunny ripples in the tree-tops: and his eyelids grew more and more heavy in the deep unbroken peace of the Forest. Presently he fell asleep, and, when he woke, he discovered that it was already two o'clock.

When he found himself on his feet again he had to admit that his sorrow and sense of loss was not so sharp, and he set off with a certain relief. At length he saw the wood thinning out, and came upon a cross-roads in the Forest from which six magnificent avenues branched, canyons cut through the splendid trees, losing themselves in leafy distances. A sign-post named the place "Le Bouquet du Roi." And it certainly was the capital of this country of royal beeches.

A carriage came jogging along, and, as it happened, free. Mariolle took it and asked to be driven to Marlotte, from which he planned, after lunch at the inn, to walk back to Montigny.

He remembered, under the stress of hunger, having had his attention called to the newly opened hotel, the Hotel Corot, a modern place in the style of the Middle Ages, something like the Chat Noir in Paris. There he got down and walked through the open door into an immense room furnished with old-fashioned tables and fitted with uncomfortable benches built for the topers of olden times. At the end of the room a young woman, a maid no doubt, was balancing on the top of some ricketty steps, trying to hook old plates in wire rings to nails almost out of her reach. Now at full stretch on tiptoe, now leaning

sideways on one foot, she twisted this way and that, one hand against the wall, a plate in the other, with the most delightful and adroit movements, for her figure was beautiful and the moving line, heel to neck, took on a new grace with each new pose. Her back was turned as Mariolle came in, and she did not hear him. He stopped a moment to watch her. A memory of Prédolé flashed across his mind. "The lovely little thing," he said. "How amazingly supple she is!"

He coughed. She nearly fell in her surprise: but the moment she had recovered her balance she jumped to the floor from the top of the ladder with the lightness of a ballet dancer, and came, smiling, to greet the customer. She asked, self-possessed:

"Yes, sir?"

"Lunch, please."

She replied frankly:

"It's more like dinner, sir. It's after half-past three."

"Dinner, then, if you like. I got lost in the forest."

So she told him what food there was in the house, and he made his choice and sat down.

She hurried away with his orders and then came back to lay one of the tables.

His eye followed her and found her neat, alert, clean and bright. Dressed for her work, outer skirt pinned up, sleeves rolled back, her throat open, she had a brisk little grace which appealed to the eye: and her clothes did not disguise a figure of which she might, quite justifiably, have been proud.

"The little peach!" he said to himself. Her face was chubby and rosy, reddened by the unchecked caresses of sun and wind. Yet it had the fresh charm of

a flower just opening to the kindly warmth, great brown shining eyes which danced to every reflection, a generous mouth, and brilliant white teeth, and she had masses of chestnut hair whose gleaming wealth betokened the abundant energy of her strong young body.

She brought him radishes and butter and, beginning his meal, he thought no more about her. With the idea of dulling his nerves he ordered a bottle of champagne, and not only emptied that but drank two glasses of Kummel after his coffee: and as he had been fasting, except for a crust of bread before his walk, since the day before, he felt comforted, drowsy, even stupidly cheerful, and he congratulated himself on an approaching cure. His thoughts, regrets, and grief were all dulled if not quite drowned in the clear dry wine which in twenty minutes had turned his agonies of mind into dull apathy.

He walked slowly back to Montigny, went indoors, and finding himself heavy-eyed and sleepy went to bed as soon as night fell and slept as soon as his head was on the pillow.

But he woke when dawn was scarcely grey, with a sense of uneasiness, a feeling that a nightmare from which he had escaped for an hour or two had appeared again, stealthily, to disturb his sleep. There was Mme. de Burne, haunting him again, and Bernhaus always with her. "Lord," he said, "I'm jealous, am I? Now, why?"

But he knew very well why he was now tormented by jealousy. In spite of all his fears and pain he felt instinctively that so long as he was still her lover she was faithful to him, with no joyous attachment, no passion,

but nevertheless with unswerving loyalty. Now he had broken off their affair and freed her: the whole thing was irrevocably ended. She might go for some time without a lover, but he felt that it would not be for very long. And he wondered, at that, whether the faithfulness she had shown might not, unconsciously, have been due to a vague presentiment that if she left André, through disillusioned weariness, she would one day or other have to replace him, not through passionate choice but because of loneliness. Some women are true to their lovers through a fatalistic resignation, and fear of change. Then again to change from one man to another would somehow not have seemed decent, probably, to a woman like Mme. de Burne, who though too intelligent to accuse herself of sin or dishonour, was nevertheless naturally of so fastidious a nature as to reject instinctively anything sordid. A woman of the world, not a middle class prude, she was not in the least afraid of a secret love affair, but her temperate flesh would have shrunk in disgust from the idea of a succession of lovers.

He had freed her . . . for what? Now, he was certain, she would take another lover. And it would be Count de Bernhaus. Of that, too, he was certain, and the thought of it gnawed him remorselessly.

Why had he broken with her? He had abandoned her whilst she was still faithful, friendly, and charming to him. Was it because he was really a sensual brute, incapable of appreciating a love which had not violent physical manifestations to offer him?

Was that it? . . . Yes . . . and yet there was something more to be said than that. There was, to begin with, fear of further pain. He had fled from the anguish of not

being loved as he himself loved, from the cruel difference between them, the kisses which had such different values, from the sickness of heart which would not heal, might perhaps never be cured. He had torn himself away, in fear of too bitter suffering, of facing for years torments which he had guessed at for months, realised for weeks. He had no powers of endurance, and as always had recoiled from such intensity of pain just as, all through his life, he had recoiled from all great effort.

Then, clearly he was incapable of carrying anything through to its end, of giving himself wholly to love as of throwing himself into science or art. Doubtless it was impossible to love greatly without suffering greatly also. Until full day came he returned again and again to this chain of thought, realising all the bitterness of failure: then he dragged himself up and went out to the river.

A fisherman was at work with a casting-net close to the little waterfall. The water danced in the sunlight, and when the man hauled in his nets to empty them into his punt the little fishes shimmered under the brown lace-work like living silver.

Mariolle regained control of himself in the calm warmth of the morning air, in the soft mist that hung above the waterfall, where tiny rainbows shone: and the swift current at his feet seemed to him to be drawing pain out of him and bearing it out of sight. And he said to himself: "But I was right, I was right. I should have been too unhappy."

Returning to the house he brought out a hammock which he had noticed in the studio, and, hanging it between two lime trees, he lay back in it and tried to empty

his mind of thought as he watched the stream eddying past him.

Thus the morning slipped on to lunch time, and in a pleasant drowsiness he was aware of a growing sense of well-being which affected his mind as well as his body. He lingered over lunch, enjoying his idleness. A sudden wonder about the post disturbed his calm. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau to have any correspondence forwarded to him. Nothing had reached him and a feeling of isolation depressed him. It was useless to remind himself that he had nothing pleasant or consoling to look forward to, and that the postman's flat brown bag would only bring him useless invitations and boring correspondence. Nevertheless he ached for the sight of letters as though his happiness depended upon them. He realised that at the bottom of his heart lurked the vain hope that she would write to him.

He asked one of the old servants:

"When does the post come?"

"About midday, sir."

It was twelve o'clock now. He began to listen for passing steps in a rising fever of uneasiness. A sudden knocking on the outer door brought him to his feet. But the postman had nothing for him but a few newspapers, and three letters of no importance. Mariolle read the papers, looked them through again, yawned, flung them down and went out.

He could not make up his mind to do anything. He came back to the hammock and stretched himself out in it again: but in half an hour an irresistible desire to do something else pulled him to his feet. The Forest? Yes, the Forest was perfect, but the loneliness of it was

worse than the emptiness of the house and the village, where sounds of life could occasionally be heard. And he feared that the silent solitude of the great trees would fill him anew with melancholy and regret and thrust him back into his misery. In memory he retraversed his long walk of yesterday, and when he came to the pretty picture of the brisk little maid at the Hotel Corot, an idea occurred to him.

"Come!" he said, "I'll walk to the village and have dinner there!" The idea made him more cheerful. It was something definite to do, a way of filling a few hours: and he got his stick and set off at once.

The long road from Montigny stretched straight like a white ribbon along the valley, between the double row of low white houses, covered with red tiles, some following the line of the road, others set back behind little courtyards where lilac bushes flowered, fowls pecked and strutted in warm manure heaps, and wide wooden staircases slanted up against the houses to doors opening on the upper floor. Peasants worked in a leisurely way at various household tasks in their doorways. A bent old hag, her hair still streaked with brown despite her age, for the peasant seldom grows quite white, hobbled past him, wrapped in a torn and dirty jacket, her thin and knotted legs easily discernible under a calico skirt hitched up awkwardly by her crooked stoop. She stared before her with vacant eyes which had never learned to see more than the few simple material objects that went to make her life.

Another, younger, woman was hanging linen to dry in her little countyard. The movements of her arms swung her skirts about and showed, in their blue stockings,

great clumsy ankles and scraggy calves, whilst her throat and waist were as thick and clumsy as those of a man, and her shapeless body was the repulsive negation of all that he understood by the idea of woman.

Mariolle thought: "Women! These are women? Another race of animals altogether." And a vision of Mme. de Burne grew clear before his eyes. He saw her exquisite elegance and loveliness, her beautiful movements, the conscious grace and ease elaborated to give pleasure, and shivered with sick regret for his irreparable loss.

He quickened his steps to shake off the black despair that rode him.

When he reached the hotel at Marlotte the little maid recognised him at once and said with a frankness that, though it verged on familiarity, was not without charm:

"Good afternoon, sir. Isn't it a lovely day?"

"Good afternoon. It is."

"Will you have anything to drink?"

"Why, I think I will. And I will have dinner here too, later."

They discussed what he should drink and then what he should later eat. He asked her advice, to make her talk, for she expressed herself well, with the decisive accents of Paris, and an ease of speech as supple as the movements of her body.

He thought to himself as he listened to her: "It's a charming little creature. She has a touch of the natural flirt about her."

He asked:

"Do you come from Paris?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been here long?"

"A fortnight, sir."

"And you like it?"

"Not very much, but it's too soon to say: and then I was exhausted by the air of Paris, and the country has certainly done me good. That was why I made up my mind to try it. Shall I bring a vermouth, sir?"

"If you please: and tell the chef or the cook to pay particular attention to my dinner."

"You need have no uneasiness about that, sir!"

She went away, leaving him alone in the room.

He went out to the garden and sat down at a table under a little tree and sipped his vermouth. There he spent the rest of the afternoon, listening to a thrush whistling in its cage on the wall of the kitchen, and lazily watching the movements of the little maid as from time to time she passed him. Well aware of his approval, she put on pretty airs and graces to catch his eye.

As on the evening before, he went away with a bottle of champagne inside him: but as the long shadows across the road and the chill of nightfall overcame his momentary lightness of heart, an irresistible melancholy invaded him again. He wondered what he could do to fill his days, if he should go or stay, if he was condemned to long years of sterile loneliness. It was very late before sleep released him.

Next day he swung in his hammock again, and the reappearance of the man with the fishing-net gave him the idea of whiling away time by fishing also. The village grocer sold primitive nets and fishing lines and showed him how to handle them, and even offered to come and give him lessons in casting. Mariolle accepted

the offer and, between nine o'clock and twelve, with a great expenditure of effort and unrelaxed attention, he succeeded in catching three tiny fish.

And in the afternoon he went back to Marlotte, merely, he thought, to kill time.

The little maid saw him from the door of the inn and began to laugh.

He smiled in turn, amused at the personal greeting, and set himself to make her talk.

With increasing but still timid familiarity she began to chatter to him. Her name was Elizabeth Ledru.

Her mother, a needlewoman who had worked at home, had died the year before: and the husband, an accountant's clerk, nearly always drunk and out of work, who lived on the earnings of his wife and daughter, disappeared, on finding that his daughter, left alone with her sewing in the garret, could not earn enough to feed two. Tired of her solitary endless task she got a place as waitress in a cheap restaurant, and spent a year there, when she began to suffer from overwork. Then the owner of the Hotel Corot, of Marlotte, who was generally waited on by her when he came to Paris, engaged her for the summer with two other girls who were to follow a little later. Undoubtedly, Mariolle thought, the hotel-keeper realised how to attract custom.

The story interested Mariolle, who, by adroit questions and by treating her with a certain amount of deference, extracted a great deal of curious detail concerning the gloomy little garret home ruined by a drunkard. The poor little wandering soul, with never an anchorage in the world, cheerfully gay nevertheless with the vitality of youth, realising instinctively the sincerity of the

stranger's interest in her, began to talk with confidence, and with an almost visible expansion of soul which she could in such conditions have no more repressed than the lively movements of her young limbs.

When her story came to an end he asked:

"And . . . you'll be a good little girl always?"

"How should I know, sir? How can I tell what may happen to me to-morrow?"

"Yet one must think of the future."

For a moment she looked reflective, but the shadow passed quickly from her features, and she answered cheerfully:

"Oh, well, so much the worse! I'll just take what comes."

They parted good friends.

He came again a few days later, and then again, and again, vaguely drawn to the place by the naive talk of the little waif, whose careless chatter soothed his spirits.

But when he came back on foot to Montigny in the late evening, he fell into terrible moods of despair. With dawn Mme. de Burne ceased to haunt him and his heart grew lighter. Yet at night sickening regrets and savage jealousy took possession of him again. He was without news. He had written to no one and not a soul had written to him. He knew nothing. But as he trailed along his dark path in loneliness of spirit he conjured up visions of the progress of the liaison which he had foreseen as inevitable between his mistress of yesterday and Count de Bernhaus. This fixed idea became day by day more settled in him. The man, he thought, would give her exactly what she wanted: a distinguished, assiduous lover, making no outrageous demands upon

her, satisfied and flattered to be the chosen of so delicious and finished a darling of the world.

He drew endless comparisons between the Count and himself. The other man certainly would not be made up of nervous excitement, wearying impatience, and those feverish demands for tenderness and passion, which had brought his own love story to disaster. He would, as a real man of the world, be content with little. Pliant, experienced, and disillusioned, he was certainly not one of those passionate souls who suffer and come to grief.

One day, as André Mariolle walked up to the Hotel Corot, he saw at one of the little tables in the courtyard two bearded young men, wearing berets and smoking pipes.

The proprietor, a fat man with a gross red face, came up to greet him, since he had a not wholly disinterested interest in so faithful a client, and said:

"I have two new visitors, painters, since yesterday."

"Those men over there?"

"Yes. And they are fairly well known already. The little one won a second medal last year."

And having told Mariolle all he had been able to glean about the budding artists he asked:

"And what will you have to-day, M. Mariolle?"

"Send me my usual vermouth, please."

The proprietor disappeared.

Elizabeth appeared in the doorway, carrying a tray with a glass, a bottle, and a decanter of water. And immediately one of the painters shouted:

"Hullo, little 'un! Still angry?"

She made no reply and when she came close to Mariolle he saw that her eyes were red.

" Have you been crying? " he asked.

" A little," she said, as simply as a child.

" Why, what's happened? "

" Those gentlemen have been behaving very badly to me."

" What have they done? "

" They took me for a . . . for . . . for a real good-for-nothing."

" Didn't you complain to the proprietor? "

She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly.

" The proprietor? Oh, well, I know better than that, now."

Mariolle, moved by her distress, said shortly:

" Well, tell me all about it."

She told him of the brutal advances made to her by the two young blackguards immediately on their arrival the evening before. Then she began to cry again, asking what in the world she was to do, lost in the depths of the country, without protection, or anyone to go to, or money, or any resources whatever.

Mariolle suddenly asked her:

" Would you like to take service with me? You would be well treated with me: and when I return to Paris you will be free to go where you like."

She looked into his face with anxious eyes.

Then abruptly she said:

" Yes. I should like to, sir."

" What are your wages here? '

" Sixty francs a month."

She added hastily, seized by anxiety:

" And I have a small share in the tips as well. It comes to about seventy-five in all."

"I will give you a hundred."

Surprised, she repeated:

"A hundred francs a month?"

"Yes. Will that suit you?"

"I should think it would, sir!"

"You will only have to bring me my meals, look after my things for me—linen and clothes and so on—and do my room."

"I see, sir."

"When can you come?"

"To-morrow if that suits you. After what has happened I shall go and see the Mayor and break my engagement here at once."

Mariolle drew two louis from his pocket and gave them to her.

"Take these as earnest money."

Delight shone from her eyes and she said in a tone of great decision:

"I shall be with you to-morrow, before midday, sir."

II

ELIZABETH came to Montigny next morning, followed by a peasant wheeling her trunk on a barrow. Mariolle had got rid of one of his old women, paying her off generously, and the newcomer took possession of a little room on the second floor next door to the cook.

When she first appeared before him he noticed that she had altered somehow from the brisk little maid of the Hotel Corot. She was less expansive, more humble, was transformed into the servant of the gentleman of whom she had been the little friendly acquaintance under the trees in the garden of the inn.

He explained briefly what he expected her to do. She listened very carefully, settled herself into the ways of the house, and took up her work quietly.

A week passed without any appreciable improvement in Mariolle's unhappy condition. He noticed as the only difference that he spent more time in the house now that he had no excuse for walking over to Marlotte for dinner, and that the atmosphere of the house itself seemed less dreary than it had been at first. The first fever of his loss had abated a little, as all things will grow calm in time: but to take its place there was born in him an insurmountable mood of depression, a profound melancholy, like the state of mind which sometimes accompanies a slow chronic illness and kills its victim before the disease itself would have run its course.

All his old activities, his intellectual curiosity, his lively interest in the things which hitherto had occupied and amused him, were dead, and their place taken by distaste for everything, an invincible lassitude which left him without even the energy to leave the garden. He could not force himself to go out, and lounged from the drawing-room to the hammock, from the hammock to the drawing-room. His only amusements were to watch the Loing slide past him, and the fisherman cast his net.

After the first days of reserve and caution Elizabeth grew bolder, and, having with her woman's intuition perceived the strain behind her master's constant lassitude, she sometimes asked him, when the older maid-servant was not present:

"You are bored here, sir, perhaps?"

To which he answered patiently:

"Why, yes, more or less."

"You should go for walks, sir."

"And that doesn't amuse me much, you know."

She was always doing little unobtrusive things for him. Every morning when he came into the sitting-room he found it full of flowers and scented like some hidden garden. Elizabeth must have enlisted the services of every urchin in the village to bring her primroses and violets from the Forest and armfuls of buttercups, and little bunches of flowers from the village gardens where the old people potter about in the evenings with their watering cans. Even through his distress, his torpor, his inability to concentrate upon his affairs, he felt some faint pleasure when he became aware of her gentle attentions and guessed at her earnest desire to please him even in the smallest things.

It seemed to him, too, that she was becoming prettier, more careful of her appearance, that her face was paler and almost, he thought, more refined. He even noticed one day when she brought him some tea that her hands were no more those of a scullery-maid, but of a lady, with well-shaped nails irreproachably cared for. Another time he saw that she was wearing good shoes. Then, one afternoon, when she had been up to her room, she came down in a charming little grey dress, extremely simple and in excellent taste. He exclaimed, as he saw her come into his sitting-room:

"Why, Elizabeth, how well you dress!"

She reddened up to the eyes and stammered:

"Me? Oh, no, sir! I'm a little tidier as I can afford a little more for my clothes."

"But when did you buy a dress like that?"

"I made it myself, sir."

"What! Made it? But when? You seem to be at work all day long."

"In the evening, sir."

"And where did you get the stuff? And who on earth cut it for you?"

So she told him how the little general shop at Montigny had got patterns for her from Fontainebleau. She had chosen her material and paid for it with the two louis of earnest money which Mariolle had given her. The cut and the making up had offered no difficulties, since she had worked four years with her mother on commissions for large shops.

He could not resist saying:

"It suits you admirably. You look very pretty in it."

And again she coloured up to the roots of her hair.

When she left him he wondered: "Can she possibly be in love with me?" He thought it over, hesitated, doubted, but ended by convincing himself that it was at any rate possible. He had been kindly, compassionate, helpful, and almost friendly. What was there surprising in the girl becoming attracted to a man who had done so much for her? Moreover the notion was not exactly disagreeable, for the little creature was quite passable and not of the servant class. His male vanity, so chilled, hurt, slighted and crushed by one woman, was flattered and soothed, almost comforted, by another. It was the slightest and lightest of compensations, yet it was to some extent real, for when love comes to a human being, no matter whence, he must needs be capable of inspiring it. His subconscious egoism was gratified also. It would be engaging, perhaps help to heal him, to watch the little heart warm and beat for him. The thought did not move him to send the girl away, to save her from the danger of such bitter sorrow as he himself had suffered, to take any more pity upon her than had been shown to him, for compassion is not an emotion associated with sentimental successes.

So he watched her and soon saw that he had made no mistake. Day by day little details contributed to his certainty. One day when she brushed his sleeve as she served him at table he noticed scent on her clothes, a cheap scent doubtless sold to her by the general store or by the chemist. So he made her a present of a bottle of chypre-water which he always used himself, of which he always kept a good supply. He gave her expensive soaps, too, and toothpaste, and bought rice powder

for her. Delicately he helped in her transformation and watched its daily progress with an eye at once curious and flattered.

For whilst she was careful to keep to her rôle of discreet and faithful servant she was becoming a woman, swayed by passion, in whom all the instincts of attraction were developing with touching naivety.

He was himself conscious of a gentle attraction towards her. He was amused, touched, a little grateful. He played with the idea of this growing tenderness as one welcomes any distraction in hours of pain. He had no other feeling for her than that vague desire which arises in any man for any comely woman, whether pretty servant or peasant girl endowed with the body of a goddess, a rustic Venus. Chiefly he was attracted to her by knowledge of the desire which he had discovered under her demure manner. He had a need of it, a confused and irresistible need which the other woman whom he loved had wakened in him, the deep mysterious longing which Nature has implanted in the male for the company, the physical contact of women, the subtle, ideal, or merely sensual aroma which every seductive woman, of every class, whether pure animal of the East with her great dark eyes, or child of the North with cold blue gaze and subtle soul, exhales for every man in whom persists the immemorial response to woman.

This tender incessant attention, so caressing, so secret, felt rather than known, covered his hurt with balm which protected it more and more from the attacks of pain. His memories still survived, nevertheless, and flickered and buzzed about him like flies over a wound. It was enough if one of them touched him smartly

for all his agony to wake again. As he had refused to disclose his address when he fled, his friends respected his silence and now he was distressed by the absence of letters and news. From time to time he saw in the papers Lamarthe's name or Massival's amongst the guests at some great banquet or ball. One day he came on the name of Mme. de Burne, cited as one of the loveliest and best-dressed women present at a ball given at the Austrian Embassy. A shudder shook him from head to foot. The name of the Count de Bernhaus appeared two lines lower. And till evening jealousy reborn ravaged Mariolle's soul. The liaison he had always expected seemed to him now certain beyond doubt. It was now a fixed idea of his, born only of imagination, more maddening than any accepted fact. He could neither rid himself of it nor resign himself.

He found he could no longer bear his ignorance, and decided to write to Lamarthe, who, knowing him well enough to guess what pain he had to endure, would probably touch upon his suspicions even without being directly told of them.

One evening then he settled down to write a long clever letter, vaguely unhappy, full of veiled questions and long passages upon the beauty of spring in the heart of the country.

Four days later when his letters were brought to him he recognised almost before he saw it the strong upright characters of his friend's writing.

Lamarthe sent him a hundred scraps of news and gossip which bore directly upon his own agonised question. He spoke of many people, emphasising none, and yet whilst giving no more details about Mme. de Burne

and Count de Bernhaus than about the rest he contrived to link them by those tricks of style of which he was a master, by which he could draw the attention exactly to the point he wished to make without openly betraying his design.

It was clear from his letter that all Mariolle's suspicions were at least well-founded. His fears would be realised to-morrow if they were not already facts to-day.

His mistress had not changed: her way of life was as febrile, brilliant and worldly as ever. There had been a little gossip about his own disappearance, as there always is about those who drop out, but, it would seem, very little real interest in it. He was thought to be exploring the world, bored by the smallness of Paris.

After getting the letter he lay in the hammock until evening came. Then he found that he could not eat: and then that sleep had forsaken him: and by the morning he had fever. He was worn out, discouraged: he was so utterly weary of his monotonous days, between the deep and silent forest, now dark under its full verdure, and the little chattering stream that ran beneath his windows, that he kept to his bed.

When Elizabeth came in, prompt to his bell, and saw him still in bed, she stopped, startled, at the open door, turned white, and asked:

"Are you ill?"

"Not well."

"Shall I send for the doctor, sir?"

"No. I've had this sort of attack before."

"What can I do for you, sir?"

He asked for his bath to be got ready, for eggs only for lunch, and said that he would have tea during the

day. But in the early afternoon he became so restless and irritable that he felt that he must get up. Elizabeth, who had had to answer his bell a dozen times to attend to the exacting demands of an illness which existed only in his fevered mind, now came, full of uneasiness, full, too, of anxiety to be of some use and comfort to him, to look after him and to make him well, and seeing how nervous and excited he seemed to be, suggested, blushing at her own boldness, that she should read to him.

He asked her if she could read well.

" Oh, yes, sir. At the schools in Paris I won all the prizes for reading, and I read so many novels to my mother that I have forgotten most of their titles."

His curiosity roused, he sent her off to the studio to find among the books which he had had sent to him one of his greatest favourites, " Manon Lescaut."

Then she helped him to settle himself more comfortably in bed, slipped two more pillows under his shoulders, drew up a chair and began. She read well, even very well, with a natural gift which had been trained with due regard to accent, emphasis, and pronunciation. From the very beginning of the book she took so lively an interest in it, and followed the tale with so much feeling that every now and again he would interrupt her to ask her questions about it and discuss passages with her.

Through the open window there came in upon the warm breeze, scented with spring, the songs of birds, the trills and roulades of mating time, from every tree and thicket.

André watched the young girl, herself so responsive to the call of the spring, where she sat following with her shining eyes the story as it grew from page to page.

To the questions he asked she answered with an innate understanding of the world of tenderness and passion, a just appreciation, though at times amusingly ignorant of the manners of that world. And he thought: " She would grow into an intelligent and refined woman if she were well taught. What an amusing child it is ! "

He was alive now to the appeal of her sex and it comforted him on that warm and quiet afternoon and blended curiously in his tired mind with the mysterious and all-powerful charm of Manon herself, strangest and most subtle essence of woman's appeal ever evoked by human art.

He was caressed by the voice beside him and borne away into another world by the old tale, ever new, and he dreamed of a mistress elusive and seductive as des Corieux's, faithless yet constant, sweet and attractive in spite of her vilest faults, made to draw out of a man every possibility in him of tenderness and fury, imperious desire and passionate hate, jealousy and lust.

If only she whom he had just left had had in her veins the treacherous love, the sensual needs of that maddening courtesan, perhaps they would never have parted. Manon betrayed her lover, but she loved him: she cheated, but she gave herself wholly.

After his day of idleness Mariolle, when night fell, drifted into sleepy reverie in which all these women mixed and mingled. He had had no exercise since the day before, had scarcely moved during the whole afternoon, and so, though he drowsed, his sleep was light, and he suddenly became aware of some unusual sound in the house.

Once or twice already in the last few days he thought

he had caught the faint sound of steps or movements somewhere on the ground floor, not, he thought, directly below him, but in the little rooms near the kitchen—the storeroom, bathroom, and a room in which his luggage was stored. But he had never paid any attention to the odd noises.

But to-night, weary of lying in bed, knowing that sleep was far away, he listened carefully and made out a curious pattering sound.

He decided to investigate. He sat up, lit his candle and looked at the time. It was only ten o'clock. He slipped on some clothes very quietly, put his pistol in his pocket, and crept downstairs as quietly as a cat.

In the kitchen he discovered to his surprise that the furnace was roaring away with no one about. It was impossible, close to it, to hear anything else, but he thought he caught the sound of people moving or whispering in the little lime-washed room, empty except for the bath.

He tiptoed towards it, turned the handle without making a sound, and flung the door violently open. He saw, her arms floating in the water, the buds of her breasts breaking the surface, the loveliest woman's body that he had ever beheld.

She cried out quickly, terrified, unable to escape.

By then he was on his knees beside the bath, devouring her with his famished eyes, his lips yearning for her.

She understood : and, suddenly, lifting her two streaming arms Elizabeth clasped them behind her master's head.

IIII

WHEN she called him on the following morning, bringing him his tea, and their eyes met, she began to tremble so uncontrollably that cup and sugar-bowl slid together and clattered on the tray.

Mariolle came across the room to her, took the tray from her, put it down on the table and said, as she dropped her eyes:

"Look at me, little one."

She looked at him, her eyes full of tears.

He went on:

"I can't have you crying, little one."

As he drew her close against him he felt her shudder from head to foot, and she whispered: "Oh, my God!" He knew that it was not pain, nor regret, much less remorse, which made her stammer those three words, but happiness, utter happiness. He was suddenly aware of a marvellous egotistic contentment, more physical than mental, at feeling crushed against his body, this little creature that so frankly wanted him. He thanked her in his heart as might some wounded man thank a woman who, passing him as he lay by the roadside, turned to succour him: with all his hurt heart he thanked her, he so bitterly betrayed by his own wild hopes, so eager for tenderness after the cold indifference he had known: and even he pitied her a little at the bottom of his heart.

Studying her as she now was, pale and tearful, her eyes burning with love's heat, he suddenly heard himself say: "Why, she is beautiful! How swiftly a woman is transformed, becomes whatever she has to be, following the longings of her heart or the needs of her daily life."

"Sit down," he said.

She sat down. He took her hands, the pitiful hands of the worker, now white and cared for, all to please him: and gently, with cunningly planned phrases, he talked to her of the attitude towards one another that they would have to adopt. She was his servant no more, but would have to keep up that appearance a little longer, to avoid open scandal in the village. She should now live as though she were his secretary, and read to him regularly, which would give colour to the story. Then a little later on, when the idea of her secretarial work had become accepted, she should share his meals in his sitting-room.

When he had finished speaking she answered him very simply:

"No, sir. I am and I will still be your servant. I don't want any gossip and I don't want anyone to know what has happened."

She would not give way at all, though he pressed her hard: and when after some time he drank the tea, she picked up the tray and went away with it, whilst he followed her with eyes which now expressed genuine affection.

When she had gone he thought: "Well, when all's said, she's a woman. All women are equal when they please us. I have made a mistress of my maid! She's

pretty, and she may become quite charming. In any case she is younger and fresher than women in my world or the half-world. What the deuce does it matter, really? Many famous actresses were caretakers' daughters and the like. They are none the less received as ladies, adored like the heroines of romantic novels, and princes treat them as queens. And is that because of their talent, which is often to seek, or due to their beauty, which is often doubtful enough? No. But a woman can always hold any position by the illusions about herself which she contrives to create."

That day he went for a long walk, and even though at the bottom of his heart he was still aware of the old pain, and though his feet dragged as if sorrow had sapped every spring of energy, something in him rejoiced in its new birth as a small bird rejoices at the coming of spring. He was less lonely, less lost and abandoned. The very Forest seemed to him less silent and empty, less deserted. And he strode back with an eager hope of seeing Elizabeth coming to greet his return with love and worship in her eyes.

For close upon a month the idyll on the banks of the little river lasted. Mariolle was loved as perhaps few men are, with reckless elemental passion, as a child by its mother or a keeper by his dog.

He was everything to her, earth and Heaven, her delight and her happiness. He responded to all her ardent yet naive advances, giving her in a kiss all that she could conceive of ecstasy. He filled her eyes, her soul, heart and body, and she was as drunk with happiness as a boy who tastes wine for the first time. He fell asleep in her arms, woke to her kisses, and she gave her-

self to him in a frenzy of abandon. Astonished and delighted, he accepted unreservedly her frank gift, and the impression grew upon him that here was love poured out for him at the very source of love, the secret source of Nature herself.

Yet he could not shake off his sadness and disenchantment, which never left him to peaceful forgetfulness. His little mistress gave him happiness: and yet the other was always missing. And as he walked in the meadows beside the sparkling Loing he searched his mind to discover why he could not be rid of the constant preoccupation: but no sooner had the thought of Paris touched his nerves than so intolerable a cloud of misery encompassed him that he hurried back to be no longer alone.

Then he swung in his hammock under the limes and Elizabeth, sitting on a folding chair beside him, read to him. Even whilst he listened to her and watched her he remembered the delightful light talk of those evenings spent alone with the other woman. Then a miserable longing to cry made his eyelids smart: and such sharp pain seared his heart that he wanted to spring up, rush out, go to Paris or to the ends of the earth, anywhere, at once.

Seeing dark melancholy settle on him, Elizabeth asked:

"Are you in pain? I can see tears behind your eyes."

But he answered:

"Kiss me, little one. You wouldn't understand."

She kissed him, but was uneasy, with a presentiment of some approaching tragedy of which she knew nothing. But he, comforted by her kisses, thought: "Ah, that a woman could be these two at once, with the love of the one and the charm of the other! Why can one never

find one's dreams come true or ever discover more than the second best in life?"

He dreamed, lulled by the monotonous tones of her voice, of all that had conquered, vanquished, enslaved him in his deserted mistress. He said to himself, under the obsession of her memory, her imaginary presence, by which he was haunted as a madman by a phantom: "Am I then a damned soul, never to be delivered from her?"

Again he began to take long walks, to wander through the wildest thickets, in the unconscious hope of losing her somewhere, at the bottom of a ravine, behind a boulder, in the tangle of the undergrowth, as a man, to rid himself of some faithful beast that he cannot bring himself to kill, will try to shake it off his track on a long tramp through strange country.

One day, in the course of one of his longest walks, he found himself back in the country of the giant beech-trees. It was by now a sombre forest, almost in darkness, and the foliage overhead had become impenetrable. He walked under the immense, damp, dark vault, regretting the glorious waves of sunny young leaves, scarcely open when he had last seen them: and, following a narrow path, he suddenly stopped, startled, before two trees inextricably enlaced.

No image of his own love more forcible or more moving could have sprung up before his eyes or his imagination: a vigorous beech was crushing in its embrace a slim, tall oak.

Like some despairing lover, the strong and desperate beech had with two huge arm-like branches clasped the trunk of the oak and wrapped it round. The oak, im-

prisoned, rose high above its jailor, and its slender height seemed disdainful of the twisted embrace from which it could never escape. But despite its strivings towards the sky, its scornful repudiation of the outrage inflicted upon it, it bore in its trunk two deep grooves, where the scarred bark had been crushed and driven inwards by the irresistible arms of the beech. United for ever by those deep wounds they grew together and their very sap mingled, and in the veins of the conquered flowed the life-blood of the conqueror.

Mariolle sat down to contemplate this portent. To his sick soul the trees seemed symbolic, at once terrifying and marvellous, two motionless wrestlers whose attitudes would betray to every eye that might see them their endless struggle.

At last he moved away, sadder than before, and suddenly as he went, with hanging head, he saw, half-hidden in some grass, stained with mud and rain, an old telegraph form dropped or lost by some other wanderer. He stopped, wondering what good or bad news that scrap of blue paper had brought to the unknown person who had read it.

He could not resist the temptation to pick it up, but with curious yet shrinking fingers unfolded it. It was still possible to trace a word or two: "Come . . . me . . . four o'clock. . . ." No other words, no names, were decipherable.

Memories assailed him, cruel yet sweet, of all the many telegrams he had received from her, now to give him the hour of a meeting, and again to tell him that she would not come. Never had anything so stirred his feelings, made him shake so with emotion, so chilled, so driven

his harassed heart as those messages, promising heaven or barring him out from it.

For a time a sense of desolation, the thought that he would never again open another telegram from her, seemed like his death-blow. But as life moved again in him he wondered anew what had happened after he had left her, whether she too had suffered at the loss of the friend whom her indifference had at last driven from her, or whether she had perhaps welcomed his disappearance, hurt only, if at all, in her vanity.

And his longing to know became so fierce, so unnerving, that a fantastic and audacious thought, still half-hesitant, sprang to his mind. He hurried to Fontainebleau. When he got there he went to the telegraph office, in a fever of indecision and uneasiness. But an irresistible impulse of his heart forced him on.

So with a hand that shook uncontrollably he took a telegraph form and wrote on it Mme. Michèle de Burne's name and address——

" I must know what you think of me. I cannot forget. André Mariolle. Montigny."

He went out, called a cab, and drove back to Montigny, troubled and ashamed at what he had done, and already regretting it.

He had calculated that, if she did indeed deign to reply, he would get her letter two days later : but he would not leave the house next day, fearing and hoping that a telegram might come from her.

He was drowsing under the limes on the terrace at about three o'clock when Elizabeth came out to tell him that a lady had called to see him.

The shock was so great that for a moment he was

half-suffocated, and he walked to the house with shaking knees and a heart which throbbed so as to bring a feeling of nausea. Yet he would not let himself hope that it was she.

When he opened the door Mme. de Burne, who had been sitting on a sofa, rose to her feet, smiling, yet faintly reserved in expression and attitude, and gave him her hand, saying:

"I have come to get news of you, as the telegram didn't tell me enough."

He turned so pale at the sight of her that a light of joy shone in her eyes: and so intense was his emotion that he could not speak for a moment, but stood pressing to his lips the hand she had given him.

"Oh, God! How kind you are," he said at last.

"No, but I don't forget my friends—and I worry about them."

She looked him straight in the face, a penetrating glance, the woman's first full glance which discovers all it needs, traces thoughts to their motives, and detects insincerities. Doubtless she was satisfied, for a smile lit up her face.

She said:

"Your retreat is delightful. Are you happy here?"

"No."

"Really? In this lovely country, in this beautiful forest, beside this delightful little stream? But you ought to be full of peace and contentment here!"

"But I am not."

"Why not?"

"Because I cannot forget."

"And you must forget things to be happy?"

"Yes."

"May one ask why?"

"But you know."

"Well?"

"Well, I am full of misery."

She said, with complacent pity:

"I guessed it when your telegram came, and that is why I am here. But I meant to leave at once if I found I was wrong."

After a moment's silence she added:

"But as I am not to return immediately may I not see your hermitage? There is a little alley of limes over there which looks charming. It would be fresher there than in your room."

They went out. She was wearing a mauve dress which harmonised so well with the green of the trees and the blue of the sky that she seemed as unreal as a vision to him, seductive and pretty in a wholly new and delightful way. Her long supple body, her face so fine and clear, the charming fair curls just peeping from under the brim of her mauve hat round which a long curled ostrich plume waved like an aureole, her two slim arms whose hands held her closed parasol across her, and her straight, proud carriage, brought into the little country garden a touch of the abnormal, unexpected, exotic, the odd, delicious flavour of a figure out of a fairy tale, an old engraving, a picture by Watteau, the child of a poet's or a painter's dream, created by fantastic impulse here in the country-side to show how lovely she could be.

Mariolle, watching her with the deep delight of his old passionate love revived, remembered how he had had a vision of the two women in one, on the road to Montigny.

She said to him suddenly:

"Who or what is that little person who opened the door to me?"

"My maid."

"She hardly has the air of . . . a maid?"

"No. She's really rather a nice little thing."

"Where did you find her?'

"Near here, at an hotel where painters stay. Some of them threatened her virtue."

"Which you preserved?"

He reddened, but answered:

"Which I preserved."

"To your own advantage, perhaps?"

"To my advantage certainly, for I'd much rather have about me a pretty face than a plain."

"And that's all that she suggested to you?"

"Perhaps she even suggested the irresistible need of seeing you again, for every woman if she attracts my eye, even for a moment, turns it back to you."

"Neatly turned! And does she love her preserver?"

He blushed more deeply. Swift as a flash of lightning the certainty that all jealousy serves to stimulate the hearts of women decided him, if he lied, only to lie by halves.

So he hesitated perceptibly as he answered:

"I don't really know. It may be. She is wonderfully attentive and thoughtful for me."

There was a hint of vexation in her voice:

"And you?"

He turned on her inflamed and passionate eyes:

"Nothing could turn my least thought away from you."

He had managed the scene well, but she was not watching him now, so undeniably did the phrase seem to her to express sincerity. Could a woman like her doubt it? And in fact she had no doubt, and thought no more of Elizabeth.

They sat down on two canvas chairs under the shade of the limes, above the singing water.

Then he asked:

"What did you think of me . . . then?"

"That you were very unhappy."

"My fault or yours?"

"Through our fault."

"And then?"

"And then, since I could feel that you were terribly excited, I reflected that the wisest thing would be to leave you to yourself, to grow calmer. And I waited."

"What were you waiting for?"

"A word from you. I got it, and here I am. Now we will talk like two serious sensible people. So you love me, always? No, I am not asking lightly. . . . I ask as your friend."

"I love you, forever."

"And what do you hope for?"

"How should I know? I am in your hands."

"Oh, my ideas are very well defined. But I shall not tell you them until I have heard your own. Talk to me of yourself, tell me what happened to you, to your heart and your mind, after you made your escape."

"I thought of you, I never did anything else."

"Yes, but how? In what way? What conclusion did you come to?"

He told her of his resolution to be healed of her, of his flight, of his coming to the great woods where he could never escape her, his days haunted by memories, his nights an abomination of jealousy: he told her of everything frankly and fully, save only of the love story of Elizabeth, and of that not a word.

She listened delightedly, certain that he was not lying, convinced more by her knowledge of her power over him than by any impression of sincerity in his voice: she was enraptured at her triumph, at having recaptured him, for she loved him, too, in her own fashion.

And then despairing of this endless struggle, and, in the boundless relief of expressing all his suffering after long lonely hours of thinking upon it, he reproached her, with passionate fervour, yet without anger or bitterness, at once in revolt against and defeated by fate. He taunted her with the sterile inability to love which numbed her like paralysis.

He repeated:

"Others have not the power to please, but you, you have not the gift of loving."

She interrupted him with spirit, full of reasons and arguments:

"I have at least the gift of constancy! Would you be less unhappy if, after adoring you for ten months, I were madly in love with another man to-day?"

He cried:

"Is it utterly impossible for a woman to love one man only?"

But she answered, unimpressed:

"One can't go on loving for ever: one can only be faithful. And do you really believe that that wild de-

lirium of the senses ought to last for years? No, no! As for the majority of passionate women, who are proud of their violent attachments, whether long or short, they live their lives in romantic episodes. The heroes are different, the circumstances and settings unexpected and always changing, and the endings may vary. Amusing and distracting for them of course, I admit, for the emotions of beginning, development, and end are renewed each time. But when it's over . . . it is over . . . so far as that particular man is concerned. Do you see?"

"Yes, there's truth in that. Yet I don't see what you are after."

"This: there is no such thing as a passion which lasts long, I mean a burning torturing passion such as that from which you still suffer. It's a crisis which I have made painful, most painful, for you, I know and feel, by my . . . by the barrenness of my affection and the impotence of my emotions. But the crisis will pass. It cannot last for ever."

She was silent. He questioned her anxiously:

"And then?"

"Then, I think that for such a woman as I, a reasonable and a calm being, you would make a charming lover, for you are so tactful. But you would make an impossible husband. But in any case there's no such thing, there cannot be such a thing as a good husband."

He asked in surprise, chilled by her words:

"Why keep a lover whom one does not love, or has ceased to love?"

She answered with conviction:

"I love after my own fashion, dear friend. It's a barren cold love: but I do love, nevertheless."

He replied, resignedly:

"You have a need, at any rate, of being loved . . . of having love lavished on you."

She answered:

"That is true. I adore it. But I need, too, a secret friend. My frivolous taste for public homage doesn't prevent me from being devoted and faithful, or from believing that I can give to some one man something intimate and real which no other man can have of me: my loyal friendship, the sincere affection of my heart, the absolute secret confidence of my real self, and in return receiving from him, with all his lover's tenderness, the rare and sweet conviction that I am not utterly alone. That isn't in the least love as you understand it: but surely it is worth something!"

He leaned towards her, trembling with emotion, and stammered:

"You want me to be that man?"

"Yes, but a little later, when you will feel it less. And in the meantime you must just accept the fact that I shall hurt your feelings from time to time. It will pass. Since you must suffer in any case, surely it's better that you should be near me than far from me?"

And her smile seemed to say to him: "Trust me, my dear." And as she watched how he shivered under the stresses of emotion there swept over her a sense of well-being, deep satisfaction, which was all she knew of happiness, that same happiness which a hawk feels when it swoops upon its fascinated prey.

"When are you thinking of coming back?" she asked.

He answered: "Why . . . why, to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Good. Then you must dine with me."

" Thank you ! "

" And now I must go," she said, glancing at the tiny watch set in the handle of her sunshade.

" Oh, why so soon? " he stammered.

" I must catch the five o'clock from Fontainebleau. There are fourteen to dinner to-night . . . the Princess, de Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, Maltry, a new man, M. de Charlaine, the explorer who has just got back from upper Cambodia after rather a wonderful voyage, and others. Everyone is talking about de Charlaine."

Mariolle's heart contracted. The names, one after another, stung him like wasps. They held poison.

" Then," he said, " would you like to start at once, and we can drive round through the Forest? "

" Yes, I should like that. But won't you offer me first a cup of tea and some toast? "

When the tea was ready Elizabeth could not be found.

" She has gone out somewhere," said the cook.

Mme. de Burne felt no surprise. After all, what possible uneasiness could the little maid cause her?

Then they climbed into the old landau which had been waiting at the door, and Mariolle instructed the driver to take a roundabout route which led them past the Gorge-aux-Loups.

As they drove beneath those lofty clouds of leaves, with their fresh waves of scent, and songs of nightingales, she said suddenly, overwhelmed by the inexpressible sensation which the all-powerful, mysterious loveliness of the world can sometimes force upon the body through the eyes:

" Ah, but how unbelievably good this is ! How good, how lovely, how restful ! '

She breathed with the happiness and deep emotion of the sinner who has received absolution, and is saturated with a sense of relaxation and tenderness. And she laid her hand softly upon André's.

But his thoughts ran: "Ah, yes! Nature? Mont Saint-Michel again." And before his eyes sped a vision of a train which hurried away to Paris. He went with her to the station.

As she left she said: "Until eight o'clock to-morrow?"

"Eight o'clock."

She was radiant when she left him: and he went home in the landau content, very happy, yet greatly disturbed too since there was no finality in sight.

But why strive longer? He could not. Her charm, though he now despaired of understanding it, enchanted him and was the strongest influence in his life. Flight would not deliver him from it nor separate him from her but was merely intolerable privation, whilst, if he could achieve a certain resignation, he would at least have of her all that she had promised, for she never lied.

The horses trotted along under the trees and he remembered that during all their long meeting she had never thought, never had any impulse, to offer him her lips. She was always consistent. She would never alter and he would probably always suffer at her hands for the same reason. The memory of bitter hours which he had passed, hours of long endurance, and the intolerable knowledge that he would never succeed in moving her, made his heart contract, gave him foreknowledge and fear of the struggle to come and the like distress to be borne again on the morrow. But he was now prepared to suffer anything rather than lose her again, resigned to the undying desire

in his veins which had become, as it were, a raging hunger, never appeased, which burned his flesh like fire.

The passionate fury which he had known so often on his solitary returns from Auteuil blazed up again and shook him as he sat in the landau that rolled along in the cool of the great trees. But suddenly the thought of Elizabeth, waiting for him, so sweet and young and pretty, her heart full of love for him and kisses on her lips, came to him and filled him with peace. Soon he would hold her in his arms and, his eyes closed, deceiving himself as much as her, confounding in the ecstasy of that embrace the woman he loved and the woman who loved him, he would possess both women at once. Assuredly at that moment he felt a genuine emotion for her, the grateful attachment at once of body and of soul with which the thought of love one has aroused and pleasure one has shared always so deeply moves the human animal. For would not this child whom he had seduced prove, to his arid withering love, a little spring discovered as day ended, the promise of living water to support his failing energy across the desert?

But when he reached the house the girl was not to be found and he began to be afraid, and after a while questioned the other maid:

"You are sure she went out?"

"Quite sure, sir."

So he went out too, hoping that he might meet her.

When he had gone a few yards, before turning into the road which climbed the valley, he became aware of the large low ancient church opposite him, with its squat belfry, crouching upon a little rise and brooding over its tiny village like a hen over her chickens.

A fancy, almost a presentiment, sent him straight forward. Who knows what strange thoughts are born in women's hearts? What had she thought, or what had she not understood? Where else would she have taken refuge if not there, if some shadow of the truth had moved across her vision?

The church was dim and silent, for evening had fallen. Only the little lamp at the end of its chain revealed in the sanctuary the mystic presence of the Divine Comforter. Mariolle moved lightly past the empty benches. When he reached the choir he saw a woman on her knees, her face hidden in her hands. He came close to her, recognised her, touched her shoulder. They were alone.

She trembled uncontrollably as she turned her head. She was weeping.

"What is it?" he said.

She whispered:

"Oh, I understand now. You came here because she had hurt you. She has come to find you."

He groaned, moved by a sorrow which he began himself to feel:

"You are wrong, little one. Why, I am going back to Paris, but I am taking you with me."

Incredulous, she repeated again and again:

"It isn't true; oh, it isn't true."

"I swear it is."

"When, then?"

"To-morrow."

Beginning to cry again, she sobbed: "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Then he took her round the waist, lifted her, drew her away, led her down the slope into the deep shadows of

the night: and when they reached the bank of the river he made her sit down, and himself sat down beside her. He could hear her heart beating, her breath come gasping, and, troubled with remorse, he drew her to him, whispering into her ear such soft words as he had never used before. Softened by pity and burning with desire he scarcely lied, deceived her not at all: yet he asked himself, astonished at all that he now expressed and deeply felt, how, still quivering from the presence of the other whose slave he would always be, he could burn thus with desire and emotion whilst he consoled this passionate anguish.

He swore to love her well—he did not say simply, love—to give her, near him, a pretty little flat, with dainty furniture and a maid to wait upon her.

She grew calm as she listened to him, little by little reassured, unable to imagine that he might perhaps be deceiving her. From the tones of his voice, she knew that he was sincere. Convinced at last, and dazzled by the vision of herself as a lady she became intoxicated with greed and gratitude and pride, which mingled inextricably with her love for André. Here was the dream of the pauper child, the restaurant waitress, come true, and she would be the established mistress of a rich kind gentleman.

Throwing her arms round his neck she stammered as she covered his face with kisses:

"Oh, I love you so! There's nothing else for me in all the world but you!"

He murmured, deeply moved, as he returned her kisses:

"Dear, dear little one!"

And almost at once she forgot the apparition of the strange woman who had caused her such grief only an hour ago. One faint doubt still stirred in her, and in a coaxing voice she asked him:

"Honestly, you'll always love me just as you do now?"

Without a tremor he answered:

"I'll love you always, just as I do now."