The Triumph of Death

by Gabriele D'Annunzio

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Gabriele D'Annunzio

THE ROMANCES OF THE ROSE

THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

BY

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR HORNBLOW

WITH A RECENT PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR

Nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum.—OVID.

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THE PAST.

CHAPTER I.

When she perceived a group of men leaning against the parapet and looking down into the street below, Hippolyte stopped and exclaimed: "What has happened?"

With a slight gesture, betraying fear, she placed her hand involuntarily on George's arm as if to restrain him.

After watching the men a moment George said: "Someone must have leaped from off the terrace." Then he added: "Shall we turn back?"

She hesitated a few moments, wavering between curiosity and fear, and then replied: "No. Let's see what it is."

They advanced along the parapet as far as the end of the walk.

Unconsciously, Hippolyte accelerated her pace towards the small crowd that had gathered.

On this March afternoon the Pincio was almost deserted. Occasional sounds died away in the gray and heavy atmosphere.

"That's what it is," said George. "Someone has killed himself."

They stopped close to the crowd. All the spectators had their gaze intently fixed upon the pavement below. Most of them were workmen without occupation. Their faces, each different, expressed neither compassion nor sorrow, and the immobility of the gaze imparted a sort of bestial dulness to their eyes.

A young lad came up, eager to see; but scarcely had he ensconced himself in a position satisfactory to himself than he was hailed by one of the bystanders, in an indefinable tone of jubilation and pleasantry, as if delighted that no new arrival could enjoy the spectacle. "You're too late," he cried; "they've taken him away."

"Where to?"

"To the Santa Maria del Popolo."

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead."

Another individual, emaciated and of a greenish complexion, with a large woollen muffler around his neck, leaned half over; then, removing a pipe from his mouth, he shouted: "What's that on the ground?"

His mouth was distorted on one side, seamed as if by a burn, and convulsed as if by an endless flow of bitter saliva. His voice was so deep that it sounded as if it emerged from a cavern.

"What's that on the ground?" he repeated.

Down in the street below, a wagon-driver was squatting close to the foot of the wall.

So as to hear his answer the better, the spectators became quiet and motionless. On the pavement could be seen a little blackish mud.

"It's blood," replied the wagon-driver without rising.

And with the point of a stick he continued his search in the bloody mire.

"Anything else?" asked the man with the pipe.

The wagon-driver rose. On the end of his stick he held something extended that could not be identified from above.

"Hair."

"What color?"

"Blond."

The precipice formed by the high walls lent a strange resonance to the voices.

"Let us go, George!" pleaded Hippolyte.

Disturbed and pale, she shook her lover's arm, as he leaned against the parapet near the group, fascinated by the horror of the scene.

They silently left the tragic spot. Both were preoccupied with painful thoughts of this death, and sadness was visible on their features.

"Happy are the dead!" exclaimed George at last. "They have no more doubts."

"That's true," replied his companion.

The weary tones in which both spoke seemed to indicate boundless discouragement.

She bent her head and added, with a bitterness mixed with regret: "Poor love!"

"What love?" asked George, preoccupied.

"Ours."

"Do you feel that it is growing cold?"

"In me, no," replied Hippolyte significantly.

"But you think it is in me?" persisted George.

An ill-concealed irritation lent sharpness to his words. Fixing his gaze on her, he repeated: "But you think it is in me? Don't you?"

She remained silent, her head drooping still lower.

"You won't answer? You know you're not telling the truth."

There was a pause. Both felt an unspeakable desire to read the other's heart. Then he continued:

"That is how the agony of love begins. You are not as yet aware of it, but since your return I have studied you ceaselessly and I daily discover in you a new symptom."

"What symptom?"

"A bad symptom, Hippolyte." Then, in a burst of mental agony, he exclaimed: "Oh, how horrible it is to love and yet not lose one's keenness of perception!"

She shook her head with a gesture of anger, and her face darkened. Once more, as on many previous occasions, hostility had risen between the two lovers. Each felt hurt by the injustice of suspicion, and secretly rebelled with that restrained anger which breaks out, from time to time, in brutal and irrevocable words, grave accusations and absurd recriminations. An indescribable fury seized them to torture themselves, to rend and martyrize their hearts.

Hippolyte became gloomy and silent. Her brows were knit in a frown and her lips were tightly pressed together. George regarded her with an irritating smile.

"Yes, that's how it will begin," he repeated, still smiling his disagreeable smile and fixing her with his keen glance. "You find at the bottom of your soul an inquietude, a sort of vague impatience which you cannot repress. When near me, you feel an instinctive repugnance arise in your breast against me—a repugnance which you cannot subdue. And then you become taciturn, you're obliged to make an enormous effort to speak to me at all; you misunderstand everything I say, and, perhaps unconsciously, you speak crossly even about the most trivial things."

She did not interrupt him even by so much as a gesture. Hurt by this indifference on her part, he continued to reproach her, spurred on to torment his companion not only by his sudden fit of temper, but also by a certain disinterested taste for investigation rendered the keener and the more literary by culture. He always tried to express himself with the accuracy and demonstrative precision which the works of the analysts had taught him; but, in the monologues, the formulas by which he interpreted his inner inquiry exaggerated and modified the mental condition under observation, while, in the dialogues, the preoccupation caused by being perspicacious often obscured the sincerity of his emotion and led him to err as to the secret motives which he claimed to discover in others. His brain, encumbered by a mass of psychological observations, personal or gathered from books, ended by confounding and confusing everything both as regarded himself and others.

He continued:

"Mind you, I make no reproach. I know it is not your fault. Every human soul has but a fixed quantity of sensitiveness for passion. It is inevitable that this quantity is exhausted in time and that no power can prevent the cessation of passion. Now, you have already loved me for a long time—almost two years! It will be the second anniversary of our love on the second of April. Had you thought of it?"

She nodded. He repeated, as if to himself: "Two years!"

They approached a bench and sat down. Hippolyte sank down with a weary sigh, as if overcome by an enervating weakness. The heavy black coach of a prelate passed by on the road below, the wheels rattling on the uneven cobblestones. The faint sound of a bugle came from the Flaminian Road, and then once more silence regained possession of the surrounding groves. A few drops of rain fell.

"Our second anniversary will be dismal," he went on, without pity for his moody companion. "But we must celebrate it all the same. I have a fondness for bitter fruits."

Hippolyte revealed her sorrow by a painful smile, and with unexpected gentleness said: "Why all these unkind words?"

She looked long and searchingly into George's eyes. A second time an inexpressible desire to read each other's hearts seized them. She knew well the horrible malady from which her lover suffered; she knew well the obscure cause of all his acrimony. To induce him to talk so he might unburden his heart, she added:

"What ails you?"

The tenderness of her tone, for which he was unprepared, threw him into some confusion. At this accent he knew that she understood him and pitied him; and he felt a great pity for himself swell in his bosom. A profound emotion stirred his whole being.

"What ails you?" repeated Hippolyte, touching his hand as though to sensually augment the power of her tenderness.

"What ails me?" he echoed. "I love!"

The aggressiveness had died away. In thus expressing his incurable weakness, he commiserated with himself on his own malady. The vague rancor which had ravaged his soul appeared to be dissipated. He recognized the injustice of all resentment against this woman because he recognized a superior order of fatal necessities. No, no human creature caused his misery. It arose from the very essence of life. He had to complain, not of the woman he loved, but of Love itself. Love, towards which his whole being reached out with invincible impetuosity, was, he thought, the greatest of human sorrows. And, until death possibly, he was condemned to this supreme misfortune.

As he remained silent and thoughtful, Hippolyte asked:

"Then do you think, George, that I don't love you?"

"I believe that you love me now," he answered. "But can you prove to me that

to-morrow, or in a month, or in a year, you will still be happy to be mine? Can you prove to me that to-day, even at this very moment, you are wholly mine? How much of you do I possess?"

"Everything," murmured Hippolyte.

"No," he went on, "nothing, or almost nothing. And I do not possess what I should like to possess. You are a perfect stranger to me. Like every other human being, you conceal within yourself a world which is impenetrable to me and to which no depth of passion can give me access. Of your sensations, your sentiments, your thoughts, I know but a small part. Speech is at best an imperfect sign. The soul is incommunicable. You cannot show me your soul. Even in our most ecstatic moments we are two, always two—separate, strangers, lonely at heart. I kiss your brow, and beneath that brow there exists possibly a thought that is not of me. I speak to you and what I say perhaps awakens in you memories of other days, and not of my love. A man passes, looks at you, and in your heart this slight fact gives rise to an emotion which I am unable to detect. And I never know what reflections of your past life may flash upon you even when you show most affection for me. Ah, I am so afraid of that past life of yours! I am by your side; I feel a delicious happiness invade my being, a happiness which at certain moments results from your presence alone. I caress you, I speak to you, I listen to you, I abandon myself entirely. All at once, a thought chills me. If, without being aware of it, I had evoked in your memory the phantom of a former sensation, melancholy relic of by-gone days? Never can I describe my anguish. This ardor, which induces in me the illusory feeling of I know not what communion between you and me, dies out all at once. You escape me, you steal away, you become inaccessible. And I remain alone in frightful solitude. Ten, twenty months of intimacy, are all as nothing. You seem to me as much a stranger as before your love for me began. And I—I cease to caress you, I no longer speak, I retire within myself, I avoid all external manifestation, I dread that the slightest shock should raise from the bottom of your soul the obscure

dregs deposited there by irrevocable life. And then there fall on us those long silences full of anguish, in which the energies of the heart are uselessly and miserably consumed. I ask you: 'Of what are you thinking?' And you reply: 'Of what are you thinking?' I am ignorant of your thoughts and you are ignorant of mine. Every moment the distance between us widens, until finally it becomes abysmal."

"But," objected Hippolyte, "I experience no such feelings. I give you more of myself than ever. I think my love is stronger."

This affirmation of superiority wounded anew the invalid.

"You think too much," she continued. "You pay too much attention to your thoughts. Possibly I have less attraction for you than your thoughts, because your thoughts are always different, always new, while now I have nothing that is new to offer you. In the beginning of our love you were less reflective and more spontaneous. You had not yet developed a taste for the bitter things in life; you were more lavish with your kisses than with your words. If, as you say, speech is an imperfect sign, it is not well to abuse it. And you do abuse it and in an almost always cruel manner."

Then, after an interval of silence, prompted to speak by something he said, she yielded to the temptation to express herself:

"Only cadavers are dissected."

But scarcely had she spoken than she regretted it. Her remark struck her as being vulgar, unfeminine, and acrimonious. She was sorry she had not preserved that gentle and indulgent tone which had moved her lover so strongly a few moments before. Once more she had failed in her resolution to be to him the most patient and tender of nurses.

"You see," she said repentantly, "it is you who spoil me."

He gave a faint smile. Both understood that in this quarrel their love only had been wounded.

The prelate's carriage repassed, the two black, long-tailed horses going at a trot. In the atmosphere which the haze of twilight rendered more and more livid, the trees assumed the appearance of spectres. Leaden-looking clouds darkened the height of the Palatine and the Vatican. A ray of light, yellow as sulphur, straight as a sword, lightly touched Mount Mario behind the pointed tops of the cypress-trees.

"Does she still love me?" George thought to himself. "Why is she so easily irritated? It may be that she feels that I speak the truth, or, at least, what will soon be the truth. Irritation is a symptom. But am I not conscious of a constant dull irritation in myself also? I know well the cause of my irritation. I am jealous. Of what? Of everything. Of the objects reflected in her eyes."

He looked at her. "She is very beautiful to-day. She is pale. It would please me to see her always depressed, always ill. When her color returns it seems to me as if it were no longer she. When she laughs I cannot repress a vague hostility, almost anger, at her laugh. Not always, though."

His thoughts died away in the shade of the twilight. He noticed suddenly how much the appearance of the evening reminded him of his beloved. From beneath the pallor of her dark face a light, violet-colored effusion shone through; and the narrow ribbon, of an exquisite shade of yellow, which she wore about her throat disclosed the brown marks of two beauty spots.

"She is very beautiful," he mused. "The expression of her face is nearly always profound, expressive, passionate. Therein rests the secret of her charm. Her beauty never tires me; it constantly suggests new dreams. What are the elements of this beauty? I cannot say. Materially, she is not beautiful. Sometimes, when I look at her, I am painfully surprised by a disillusion. That is because I then see only her physical characteristics; her face is not transfigured, illumined by the power of spiritual expression. She possesses, however, three divine elements of beauty: the brow, the eyes, and the mouth. Yes, divine."

Her laugh came to his mind.

"What did she tell me yesterday? I have forgotten what it was, some humorous incident that had happened at Milan during her visit to her sister's. 'How we laughed!' So then, even when away from me, she can laugh, be happy! Yet all her letters, which I have treasured, are full of sorrow, of tears, of hopeless regrets."

He felt as if he had received a wound, and then a great restlessness came upon him, as if he were cognisant of a serious and irreparable fact not entirely clear to him. The ordinary phenomena of sentimental exaggeration manifested themselves in him by means of associated images. This simple laugh was transformed in his imagination into an incessant hilarity, ever-present, daily, hourly, during the entire period of her absence. Hippolyte had led a gay, commonplace existence, with people unknown to him, among the companions of her brother-in-law, in a circle of stupid admirers. Her sad letters were only lies. He remembered a passage in one letter: "Life here is insupportable; friends weary us constantly and do not leave us a single peaceful hour. You know how cordial the Milanese are." In his imagination arose a vision of Hippolyte surrounded by a crowd of common clerks, advocates, and tradesmen. She smiled on them all, giving her hand to all, listening to witless conversations, making stupid answers, sinking herself to the same ordinary level.

And then there fell upon his heart all the weight of the misery he had endured for the past two years at the thought of the existence his mistress led and the unknown world in which she passed the time not spent with him.

"What does she do? Whom does she see? To whom does she speak? What is her behavior towards people who visit her, in whose life she is a factor?" Ever-recurring, unanswerable questions!

He thought, with anguish:

"Each one of these persons takes something from her, and consequently takes something from me. I shall never know what influence these people have over her,

the emotions and thoughts they arouse in her. Hippolyte's beauty is full of seductive power, the kind of beauty which torments men and arouses in them the passion of desire. Among that odious crowd, she must have been frequently desired. A man's desire is discernible in his look and the look is free, and the woman is without defence against the look of the man who desires her. What can be the impression of a woman who perceives that she is desired? She certainly cannot remain impassive. It must produce in her a feeling of disquietude, certainly some kind of emotion, if only one of repugnance and disgust. And thus the first man who comes along has the power to disturb the woman who loves me! In what, then, consists my possession of her?"

He suffered keenly because the physical pictures bore out his mental reasoning.

"I love Hippolyte; I love her with a passion which I should judge to be everlasting, did I not know that all human passion must cease at some time. I love her, and I cannot imagine keener voluptuous delights than those she gives me. More than once, however, at the sight of some passing woman, I have been seized with a sudden desire; more than once has the flash of a pair of feminine eyes thrown me into a melancholy train of thought; more than once I have dreamed of meeting some woman—a woman perceived in a drawing-room, or the mistress of a friend. What can be her way of loving? Of what does its voluptuous secret consist? And for some time this woman has haunted my mind, not, indeed, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, but at intervals and persistently. Such phantasies suddenly present themselves to my imagination even when I hold Hippolyte in my arms. Why should she not have been seized by desire upon sight of some passing man? Had I the gift of reading her soul and saw it traversed by such a desire, if but for a moment, I should, without the slightest doubt, consider my mistress sullied by an indelible stain and it seems to me that I should die of grief. This material proof I can never have, because the soul of my mistress is invisible and impalpable; this, however, does not prevent the soul from being as much or even more exposed to profanation than the

body may be. But the analogy enlightens me; the possibility is certain. Perhaps at this very moment my mistress is cognisant of a recent stain upon her conscience and sees this stain expand beneath her contemplation."

Stunned by his pain, he started violently.

"What ails you—of what are you thinking?" asked Hippolyte gently.

"Of you," he replied.

"Good or bad?"

"Bad."

She gave a sigh and then said: "Shall we go?"

"Yes—let us go."

They rose and regained the road by which they had come. Slowly and with tearful accents Hippolyte murmured: "What a sad evening, O my love!"

And she stopped as if to recall and live over again the sorrows scattered through the day that was about to close. Around them, now, the Pincio was deserted, full of silence, full of violet shadows in which the busts on their pedestals took on the appearance of funereal monuments. Below, the city was covered with ashes. A few drops of rain were falling.

"Where shall we go to-night? What are you going to do?" she asked.

He replied dejectedly: "What I shall do? I do not know."

They suffered, both of them, as they stood side by side; and they thought with terror of a greater agony which awaited them, well known and far more cruel—the horrible torture with which their nocturnal imaginations would rend their defenceless souls.

"If you like, I will remain with you to-night," said Hippolyte timidly.

Devoured by a secret rancor and spurred on by a furious desire to be spiteful and resentful, George replied: "No."

But his heart protested. "Stay far from her to-night? You cannot. No, you cannot." And in spite of his blind, hostile impulses, the conviction of this impossibility, the sure knowledge of this absolute impossibility, gave him a kind of internal thrill, a strange thrill of exalted pride at being controlled by such a great passion. He repeated to himself: "I could not stay away from her to-night; no, I could not." And he felt the indefinable sensation of being dominated by an unknown power. A tragic breath passed over his being. "George!" cried Hippolyte, frightened and clinging to his arm.

He started. He recognized the spot where they had stopped to look at the bloody stain left by the suicide. "Are you afraid?" he asked.

"A little," she replied, still holding his arm.

He disengaged himself from this restraint and, approaching the parapet, leaned over. Darkness had already enshrouded the street below; but he believed he could still distinguish the blackish spot on the cobblestones, because he still had the recent picture before his mind. The deepening twilight seemed to suggest and create a phantom corpse, the indefinite and bloody form of a blond young man. "Who was this man? Why did he kill himself?" In this phantom he seemed to recognize his own form. Rapid, incoherent thoughts coursed through his brain. He saw, as by a lightning flash, his poor uncle Demetrius, his father's youngest brother, also a suicide—a face covered by a black pall resting on a white pillow, a slender, pale, yet virile hand, and a small silver vessel containing holy water suspended from the wall by three small chains which, every now and then, rattled as they were swung by the breeze. "Suppose I threw myself over? A leap forward, a rapid fall! Does one lose consciousness when falling through space?" He imagined the shock of the body against the stones, and he shuddered. Then he felt in all his limbs a violent, agonizing repulsion, mingled with a feeling of strange lassitude. In his imagination he conjured up the delights of the coming night: to be lulled gradually into a state of

delicious languor; to awake with a superabundance of tenderness mysteriously accumulated during one's sleep. Fancies and ideas followed one another with extraordinary rapidity.

When he turned round, his eyes met those of Hippolyte. Her eyes were widely dilated and fixed upon him, and he believed he could read in their depths things which increased his pain. He passed his arm beneath that of his mistress with an affectionate gesture customary with him. And she pressed his arm firmly against her heart. Both felt a sudden desire to embrace, to dissolve one into the other, distractedly.

"All out! All out!"

The cry of the keepers resounded among the groves, disturbing the silence.

"All out!"

After the cry, the silence seemed heavier and more dismal than ever, and these few words, vociferated by men they could not see, gave the two lovers an insupportable shock. To show that they had heard and were preparing to leave, they hastened their step. But here and there, in the deserted paths, the voices obstinately repeated:

"All out!"

"Curse their cries!" exclaimed Hippolyte, with a gesture of impatience and exasperation, and increasing the rapidity of her pace.

The clock of the Trinita-de-Monti sounded the Angelus. Rome appeared, similar to an immense, grayish, formless cloud touching the earth. Already, in the neighboring houses, several windows were lit up, their lights enlarged by the fog. A few drops of rain were falling.

"You'll come to me to-night, won't you?" asked George.

"Yes, yes, I will come."

"Early?"

"About eleven."

"I should die if you did not come."

"I will come."

They gazed in each other's eyes, exchanging an intoxicating promise.

Overcome by his emotion, George murmured: "Am I forgiven?"

They looked at each other again, and their gaze was charged with caresses.

"Adored one!" he murmured.

"Addio!" she rejoined softly. "Think of me until eleven."

"Addio!"

They separated at the foot of the Via Gregoriana. She went down the Via Capo-le-Case. As long as he could see her going along the wet pavement, lit up by the reflection of the shop windows, his gaze followed her.

"Thus it is," he thought. "She leaves me; she enters a house of which I know nothing; she reënters upon her commonplace life, despoiled of all the ideality in which I have clothed her; she becomes another woman entirely. I no longer know her. The gross necessities of life occupy her, absorb her, and degrade her...."

A perfume of violets was carried to him from a florist's close by, and his heart swelled with confused aspirations.

"Ah! why is it not permitted us to conform our existence according to our dreams, and to live forever in ourselves alone?"

CHAPTER II.

At ten o'clock in the morning George was still buried in the profound and refreshing slumber which, in the young, follows a night of voluptuousness, when his servant entered to awaken him.

Turning in his bed, he cried ill-humoredly:

"I am at home to no one. Let me be."

But from the adjoining room he heard the importunate visitor's voice addressing him in beseeching accents:

"Excuse me, George; I must speak to you."

George recognized the voice of Alphonso Exili, and his annoyance was only the greater.

This Exili was a college chum, a man of mediocre intelligence, who, ruined by gambling and debauch, had become a parasite and adventurer.

He still appeared a handsome young man, in spite of his face devastated by vice; yet in his person and manners there was that indefinable cunning and ignobleness noticeable in persons reduced to living by their wits.

He entered, waited until the servant had retired, and assumed a distressed air. Then, swallowing half his words, he said: "Forgive me, George, if I have recourse once more to your kindness. I must pay a card debt. I want you to help me. It's a small sum. Only three hundred lira. Forgive me."

"What? You pay your card debts now?" said George. "I'm surprised."

He threw this insult at him with the most perfect sans-gêne. Not knowing how to break off all connection with the parasite, he treated him with contempt, just as one would use a stick to ward off a dirty animal.

Exili smiled.

"Come, don't be unkind," he pleaded, in supplicating tones, like a woman's. "You'll give me the three hundred lira, won't you? I will pay you back to-morrow, on my word of honor!"

George burst into laughter. He pulled the bell to summon the servant. The servant entered. "Get my bunch of keys out of those clothes there, on the sofa." The servant found the keys. "Open the second drawer. Give me the large card-case." The servant

passed him the card-case. "Very well, you may go."

"Couldn't you let me have four hundred lira?" asked Exili, with a half-timid, half-convulsive smile when the servant had left the room.

"No, there's three hundred. It's the last time. Now go."

Instead of handing him the bills, George laid them on the edge of the bed. Exili smiled, took them, and placed them in his pocket; then, in an ambiguous tone, in which irony was mixed with adulation, he said: "You have a noble heart."

His gaze wandered around the chamber, and he added: "You have a delicious bedroom."

He seated himself on the sofa, poured out a small glass of liqueur, and refilled his cigar-case.

"Who is your present mistress?" he went on. "What's her name? I believe it's no longer the one you had last year."

"Go away, Exili. I want to sleep."

"What a splendid creature! She has the handsomest eyes in Rome. She's away, I suppose. I have not met her for several days. She must be out of town. She has a sister in Milan, I think."

He refilled his petit verre and swallowed its contents at a single gulp. Possibly he gossiped only in order to gain time enough to empty the bottle.

"She's separated from her husband, isn't she?" he continued. "I imagine that her finances must be at a very low ebb, and yet she is always most elegantly dressed. About two months ago I met her in the Via del Babuino. You know your probable successor. But no, you can't know him. It's Monti, the mercante di campagna, a great big fellow, with dirty blond hair. That very day I saw her he was close at her heels in the Via del Babuino. You know one can see at a glance when a man is following a woman. Monti has money, too."

He uttered these last words in a curious tone; an odious tone of envy and cupidity. Then he drank for the third time, noiselessly.

"Are you asleep, George?"

Instead of answering, George pretended to sleep. He had heard everything, but he feared that Exili might see his heart-beats through the bedclothes.

"George!"

He feigned to start like a man suddenly awakened.

"What! You are still here? Aren't you going?"

"I am going now—but look! A tortoise-shell pin!"

He stooped to pick it up from the carpet, examined it with curiosity, and laid it on the coverlid.

"Lucky fellow!" he exclaimed in the same ambiguous tone. "And now, ta-ta—a thousand thanks."

He extended his hand, but George kept his beneath the clothes. The chatterbox turned towards the door.

"Your cognac is exquisite. I'll take another petit verre."

He drank, and then went away. George, in his bed, could relish the poison at his leisure.

CHAPTER III.

The second anniversary fell on the second of April.

"This time," said Hippolyte, "we will celebrate it away from Rome. We must pass a great week of love; all by ourselves, no matter where, but not here."

"Do you remember the first anniversary," asked George, "that of last year?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It was a Sunday, Easter Sunday. And I came to your rooms at ten o'clock in the

morning. And you wore that little English jacket that pleased me so. You had brought your prayer-book."

"Oh! that morning, I had not been to mass."

"You were in such a hurry."

"My departure from the house was like a flight," answered Hippolyte. "You know, on holy days, I could not call a moment my own. Yet, for all that, I found a way to remain with you until noon. And we had guests for lunch that day."

"Then, the rest of the day we could not see each other. It was a sad anniversary."

"Yes, it was," murmured Hippolyte.

"And that sun!"

"And that forest of flowers in your room," she laughed. "I, too, on that morning, had gone out for a moment; I bought up almost the entire flower market."

"You threw hands full of rose-leaves at me. You put a number of the leaves down my neck, in my sleeves. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And then, at the house, I found them all when I disrobed."

She smiled.

"And on my return my husband found leaves on my hat, in the folds of my dress."

"Yes, you told me."

"I did not go out again that day. I did not care to go out again. I thought, and rethought. Yes, it was a sad anniversary."

After an interval of silent revery, she spoke again.

"Did you believe, in your heart, that we should reach our second anniversary?"

"I—no," he replied.

"Nor I."

"What love!" thought George, "that which carries within itself the presentiment of its end." He then thought of the husband, without hate and even with a sort of compassionate benevolence. "Now she is free. Why, then, am I more uneasy now than formerly? The husband was a sort of guarantee for me; I looked on him as a guardian who shielded my mistress from all danger. Maybe these are illusions; because at that time, also, I suffered much. But the suffering which is passed seems always less severe than the present pain." Following his own reflections, he no longer listened to Hippolyte's words.

"Well," she said, "where shall we go? We must decide. To-morrow is the first of April. I have already said to my mother: 'You know, mamma, one of these days I am going on a short journey.' I must prepare her for my departure. Do not worry. I will invent a plausible pretext. Leave it to me."

She spoke gayly; she smiled. And in the smile which illuminated her closing remarks he believed he discovered the instinctive contentment which a woman feels when concocting some deception. The facility with which Hippolyte succeeded in deceiving her mother displeased him. He thought once more, and not without regret, of the marital vigilance. "Why suffer so cruelly on account of this liberty," he reflected, "when it is in the service of my pleasure? I do not know what I would give could I get away from my fixed idea, from my suspicions which do her injustice. I love her, and I wrong her; I love her, and I believe her capable of an unworthy action!"

"We must not go too far," she said. "You ought to know of some peaceful spot, secluded, full of trees, interesting. Not Tivoli, nor Frascati."

"Take the Baedeker—it's there on the table—and look."

"Let us look together."

She took the red book, knelt close to the couch on which he was seated, and with pretty gestures and infantile grace she began to turn over the pages. Every few

moments she read a few lines in a low tone.

He sat watching her, fascinated by the finesse of the nape of her neck, from which the little brown curls mounted towards the crown of her head, twisted into a sort of coil. He looked at the two little brown spots, beauty spots, the Twins placed one by the side of the other on the whiteness of the velvety neck to which they gave an ineffable charm. He remarked that she wore no earrings. In fact, for two or three days she had not worn her sapphire earrings. "Has she sacrificed them on account of some money embarrassment? Who knows? She may be suffering silently from the cares of hard, daily necessities." He had to forcibly compel himself to consider seriously the thought which haunted him. This thought was as follows: "When she becomes tired of me (and that will not be very long), she will fall into the hands of the first comer who will offer her an easy life, and who, in exchange for sensual pleasure, will keep her from want. This man may even be the mercante of whom Exili spoke. Disgusted with petty miseries, she will triumph over the other disgust; she will adapt herself. It is even possible that she will not have to overcome any repugnance."

He remembered the mistress of one of her friends, the Countess Albertini. This woman, separated from her husband, left free without fortune, had descended progressively to lucrative amours, having enough cleverness to save appearances. He remembered a second example, which illustrated even more truly the possibility of what he feared. And confronted with this possibility, which emerged from the unfathomable future, he felt an inexpressible pain. Henceforth his apprehensions would give him no truce. Sooner or later, he was fated to witness the fall of the creature he had placed so high. Life was full of such forfeitures.

"I have found nothing," she said in a disappointed tone.

"Gubbio, Narni, Viterbo, Orvieto! Look at the map of Orvieto: the Monastery of Saint Peter, the Monastery of Saint Paul, the Monastery of Jesus, the Monastery of

Saint Bernardin, the Monastery of Saint Louis, the Convent of Saint Dominique, the Convent of Saint Francis, the Convent of the Servants of Mary."

She read in a sing-song tone, as if she were reciting a litany. All at once she began to laugh, threw back her head, and offered her beautiful forehead to the lips of her lover. She was in one of those moments of expanding kindness which gave her the air of a young girl.

"What a number of monasteries! How many convents! It must be a strange place. Shall we go to Orvieto?"

George experienced a sensation as if his soul had been overwhelmed by a sudden wave of freshness. He abandoned himself with gratitude to this comforting sign. And, as he pressed his lips to Hippolyte's brow, he gathered there the souvenir of the city of the Guelphs, of the deserted city which is silent in mute adoration of its marvellous Duomo.

"Orvieto! were you never there? Imagine to yourself, at the top of a rock of tufa, overlooking a melancholy valley, a city so perfectly silent as to seem without inhabitants; shutters closed; gray lanes in which the grass grows; a capuchin monk crossing a public square; a bishop descending from a black carriage in front of some hospital, with a decrepit domestic at the carriage-door; a tower against a white and rainy sky; a clock slowly tolling the hours; and all at once, at the bottom of a street, a miracle—the Duomo."

"What peace!" murmured Hippolyte, rather dreamily, as if she had before her eyes the vision of this silent city.

"I have seen Orvieto in February," he went on, "when the weather was like to-day, uncertain—a few drops of rain; a few beams of sunshine. I stayed there one day, and I was sorry to leave. I brought away with me a feeling of nostalgia for that peace. Oh! what peace! I had no other companion than myself, and I indulged in this dream: 'To have a mistress, or, to express it better, a sister-lover, who would be full

of devotion; and to come here, to live here for a month, a long April month, a rather rainy April, ashen but mild, with showers of sunshine; to pass hours and hours in, or before, or about the cathedral; to gather roses in the convents' gardens; to visit the houses of the sisters to get preserves; to drink delicious perfumed liqueurs from small Etruscan cups; to love a great deal, and sleep a great deal in a soft bed all veiled in virginal white.'"

This dream made Hippolyte smile with happiness. Putting on an innocent expression, she said: "I am pious, you know. Will you take me to Orvieto?"

And huddling at her lover's feet, she took both his hands in hers. An immense joy invaded her whole being; she had already a foretaste of the promised repose, idleness, melancholy.

"Tell me again."

He kissed her forehead, lingering over it with chaste emotion. Then for a long time he regarded her caressingly.

"Your forehead is so beautiful," he said, with a little thrill.

At that moment the real Hippolyte corresponded with the ideal Hippolyte which lived in his heart. He beheld her beautiful, tender, submissive, breathing a noble and sweet poesy. According to the motto he had invested her with, she was grave and suave—gravis dum suavis.

"Tell me again," she murmured.

A soft light entered from the balcony. From time to time the windows rattled gently under the breeze; and the raindrops pattered almost noiselessly on the panes.

CHAPTER IV.

"Since we have already enjoyed in imagination the essence of pleasure, since we have tasted all that our sensations and sentiments could experience of what is rarest and most delicate, I would advise that we renounce the experience of reality. Don't

let us go to Orvieto." And he chose another place: Albano-Laziale.

George was not acquainted with Albano, nor Ariccia, nor the Lake of Nemi. Hippolyte, during her infancy, had been taken to Albano to the house of an aunt, now dead. For him this trip would have the charm of the unknown, and for her it would evoke the souvenir of days long distant. Does it not seem as if a new vision of beauty renews and purifies love? Do not the memories of the virginal age embalm the heart with a perfume always fresh and soothing?

They decided to leave on the second of April, at noon, by train. Both were punctual at the rendezvous at the station, and when they found themselves amidst the crowd they felt a restless joy penetrate their souls.

"Shan't we be seen? Tell me, shan't we be seen?" asked Hippolyte, half-laughing and half-trembling, and imagining that all eyes were fixed on her. "How much longer before we start? Dio Mio! How afraid I am!"

They hoped to have a compartment to themselves; but, to their great regret, they were forced to resign themselves to having three travelling companions. George saluted a gentleman and lady.

"Who is that?" asked Hippolyte, leaning towards her lover's ear.

"I will tell you."

She examined the couple with curiosity. The gentleman was an old man with a long, venerable beard, a broad, bald, yellowish head, marked in the centre by a deep depression, a sort of enormous and deformed navel, like the imprint which would be caused by a large finger pressed into a soft substance. The lady, wrapped in a Persian shawl, showed, under a bonnet fashioned like a lamp-shade, an emaciated and meditative face; and in her dress as in her physiognomy could be found something of the English caricatures of the blue-stocking. The watery eyes of the elderly man had, however, a singular vivacity; they seemed illumined by an internal fire, like those of an ecstatic. He had acknowledged George's bow by a very amiable

smile.

Hippolyte racked her memory. Where could she have met these two persons? She could not succeed in refreshing her memory, but she had a confused feeling that these strange old people had been involved in one of her love-dreams.

"Who is it? Tell me," she repeated in a whisper.

"The Martlets—Mr. Martlet and his wife. They will bring us good luck. Do you know where we first met them?"

"No; but I am sure that I have seen them somewhere."

"It was in the chapel in the Via Belsiana, on April the 2d, when I first knew you."

"Ah! yes. I remember!"

Her eyes lighted up; the coincidence seemed marvellous to her. She examined anew the two old people, and felt a kind of emotion.

"What a good augury!"

A delicious melancholy came over her. She leaned her head against the back of the seat, and thought once more of bygone days. She saw again the little church in the Via Belsiana, mysterious, shrouded in a bluish penumbra; the gallery, which had a curve like a balcony; the posy of young girls chanting in the choir. Below, the group of musicians with their string instruments, standing in front of white-pine pulpits. Roundabout, in the stalls of oak, the seated auditors, few in number, almost all gray or bald. The chapel-master beat the time. A pious perfume of incense and violets mingled with the music of Sebastian Bach.

Overcome by the suavity of her recollections, she leaned over more towards her lover, and murmured: "Are you thinking of the old days too?"

She would have liked to be able to communicate her emotions, in order to prove to him that she had forgotten nothing, not even the slightest circumstance of that solemn event. He, with a furtive gesture, sought Hippolyte's hand beneath the large

folds of their travelling rug, and kept it slightly pressed in his own. Both felt in their souls a thrill which recalled to them certain delicate sensations of the first days of their love. And they remained in this attitude, pensive, somewhat exalted, somewhat lethargic from the warmth, soothed by the even and continuous movement of the train, at times seeing a green-clad landscape in the haze through the carriage windows. The sky was clouded; it was raining. Mr. Martlet dozed in a corner; Mrs. Martlet was reading a review-the Lyceum. The third traveller slept soundly, his cap down over his eyes.

"If the choir missed the tempo, Mr. Martlet beat time with energy, like the chapel-master. At a certain moment, all the old men beat time, as if moved by the spirit of the music. There was in the air an evaporated perfume of incense and violets." George abandoned himself with delight to the capricious workings of his memory. "Could I have dreamed of a stranger or more poetic prelude to my love? It seems like a recollection of some romantic tale; yet, on the contrary, it is a souvenir of my actual life. I constantly retain the smallest details of it before the eyes of my soul. The poetry of this beginning shed, later on, the shadow of a dream over my entire love." In the drowsiness of a light torpor, he dwelt on certain confused images which exerted a species of musical fascination over his mind. "A few grains of incense—a little bouquet of violets!"

"Look how Mr. Martlet sleeps!" said Hippolyte in a whisper. "As peacefully as an infant."

Then she added, smiling: "You, too, are sleepy, are you not? It is still raining. What a strange languor! My eyelids feel so heavy."

Her eyes half-shut, she looked at him from between her long eyelashes.

George thought to himself: "Her eyelashes pleased me at once. She was in the centre of the chapel, seated on a high-backed bench. Her profile was delineated in the light streaming from the window. When the clouds outside cleared away, the light

suddenly grew stronger. She made a slight movement, and in the light I saw the real length of her eyelashes—a prodigious length."

"Tell me," said Hippolyte, "will it be long before we arrive?"

The shrill whistle of the locomotive announced the proximity of a station.

"I'll wager," she added, "that we have gone beyond our station."

"Oh! no."

"Very well, inquire."

"Segni-Paliano," cried a hoarse voice on the platform.

George, somewhat startled, stretched out his head, and asked: "Is this Albano?"

"No, sir, this is Segni-Paliano," answered the man with a smile. "Are you going to Albano? Then you should have alighted at Cecchina."

Hippolyte burst into such a loud peal of laughter that Mr. and Mrs. Martlet looked at her with amazement. George immediately joined in the contagious hilarity.

"What shall we do?"

"First of all, we must get out of this train."

George handed their hand-bags to a porter, while Hippolyte continued to laugh—her fresh, hearty laugh—amused at this misadventure, which she considered capital fun. Mr. Martlet looked startled at this outburst of youth, which seemed to him like a wave of sunshine, but he smiled with benevolent condescension and bowed to Hippolyte, who at heart felt a vague regret at leaving the train.

"Poor Mr. Martlet!" she said, half in earnest, half in jest, as she watched the train moving away through the bleak and deserted country. "I am sorry to part with him. Who knows if I shall ever meet him again."

Then, turning towards George, she added, "What now?"

A railway employee gave them information.

"The train for Cecchina passes here at half-past four."

"We can manage, then," continued Hippolyte. "It is now half-past two. Now, from this moment, I declare that I will assume the management of this journey. You will simply permit yourself to be conducted. Come, my little George. Keep close to me, and take good care that you don't lose yourself."

She spoke to him as to a baby, in jest. They both felt full of gayety.

"Where is Segni? Where is Paliano?"

No village could be seen in the neighborhood. The low hills spread their uncertain verdure beneath a gray sky. Near the road, a single little tree, knotted and gnarled, swayed in the humid atmosphere.

As it still poured, the two wanderers sought shelter at the station, in a small room, with a chimney-piece without a fire. On a wall hung an old map in tatters, its surface a network of black lines. On another wall hung a square of pasteboard advertising an elixir. Opposite to the chimney, which had not even the memory of a fire, a couch, covered with a waxed cloth, was losing its species of stuffing by a thousand wounds.

"Look!" cried Hippolyte, who was reading the Baedeker. "At Segni there is the Gaetanino Hostelry."

This designation made them laugh.

"Suppose we smoke a cigarette?" said George. "It is three o'clock. It was at this time that I entered the church, two years ago."

And, once more, the memory of the great day occupied his mind. During several minutes they smoked without speaking, listening to the rain, which had increased in force. Through the drenched window-panes they saw the frail little tree, twisting and bending under the squall.

"My love is of older date than yours," said George. "It was born before that day."

She protested.

He, fascinated by the profound charm of the days irrevocably passed, continued tenderly: "I can see you again as you passed the first time. What an ineffaceable impression! It was towards evening, when the lights begin to be lit, when waves of azure fall on the streets.

"I was alone before the windows of Alinari. I was looking at the figures, but distinguished them with difficulty. It was an indefinable sensation—some lassitude, much sadness, with I know not what vague desire for ideality. That evening I had an ardent thirst for poetry, elevation, refined and spiritual things. Was it a presentiment?"

He made a long pause; but Hippolyte said nothing, waiting for him to continue, engrossed in the exquisite pleasure of listening to him among the light smoke of the cigarettes, which seemed to envelop the veiled memories in still another veil.

"It was in February. I was paying a visit to Orvieto at that very time. I even believe that if I was then at Alinari's, it was to ask him for a photograph of the reliquary. And you passed! Since then, on two or three other occasions—two or three, not more—I have seen you as pale, that singular pallor. You cannot imagine, Hippolyte, how pale you were. Never have I seen its equal. I thought: 'How can that woman keep up? She cannot have a single drop of blood in her veins.' It was a supernatural pallor, which in the flood of azure falling from the sky to the pavement gave you the appearance of a creature without a body. I paid no attention to the man who accompanied you; I did not wish to follow you; I did not receive even as much as a look from you. I recall another detail. You stopped a few steps farther on, because a lamp-lighter blocked the pavement. Ah! I still see in the air the scintillation of the small flame at the summit of the staff; I see the sudden lighting of the gas which bathed you in light."

Hippolyte smiled, but somewhat sadly, with that sadness which oppresses the heart of women when they regard their portraits taken in former days.

"Yes, I was pale," she said. "I had only quitted my bed a few weeks before, after a three months' illness. I had been at death's door."

A gust of rain dashed against the window-panes. The little tree could be seen bending and twisting under the wind in an almost circular movement, as if some hand were attempting to uproot it. For several minutes they both watched the fury of the elements, which, in the bleakness, nakedness, and inert torpor of the surrounding country, took on a strange appearance of conscious life. Hippolyte felt almost compassion. The imaginary suffering of the tree placed them face to face with their own sufferings. They mentally considered the great solitude which lay all around the station, a miserable hut before which passed from time to time a train-load of divers travellers, each of whom carried in his own bosom a different inquietude. Sad images rapidly succeeded one another in their thoughts, suggested by the same things they had seen an hour before with joyous eyes. And when the images faded away, when their consciences, ceasing to be impressed, returned to themselves again, they both found, at the bottom of their being, a unique and inexpressible anguish—a regret for days irrevocably lost.

Their love had behind it a long past. It dragged behind it, through the years, an immense and obscure net, full of dead things.

"What's the matter?" asked Hippolyte, her voice slightly changed.

"What's the matter with you?" asked George, looking fixedly at her.

Neither replied to the question. They remained silent, and renewed their gaze through the windows. The heavens seemed to smile tearfully. A faint glimmer lit up a hillock, bathed it in a fugitive golden glow, died away. Other sun-rays tried to pierce the moisture-laden cloud-banks, then disappeared.

"Hippolyte Sanzio!" said George, pronouncing the name slowly, as if to enjoy its charm. "How my heart beat when I finally learned that was your name! How many things have I seen and felt in that name! It was the name of one of my sisters, who is

dead. That beautiful name was familiar to me. With profound emotion, I immediately thought, 'Oh! if my lips could only resume their dear custom.' That day, from morning until night, the recollections of my dead sister mingled exquisitely with my secret dream. I did not go in search of you; I forbade myself such pursuit; I would never be importunate; yet, at heart, I had an inexplicable confidence. I was sure that, sooner or later, you would know me and love me. What delicious sensations were mine! I lived outside of the reality; my soul fed only on music and exalting books. One day it happened that I saw you at a concert given by Gian Sgambati; but I saw you only just as you were about to leave the hall. You gave me a glance. Another time, again, you looked at me—maybe you remember? It was when we met at the entrance to the Via del Babuino, opposite the Piale Library."

"Yes, I remember."

"You had a little girl with you."

"Yes; Cecilia—one of my nieces."

"I stopped on the sidewalk—so as to allow you to pass. I noticed that we were both of the same height. You were less pale than usual. A momentary feeling of pride flashed through me."

"You had guessed correctly," said Hippolyte.

"You remember? It was towards the end of March. I waited with growing confidence. I lived from day to day absorbed in thoughts of the great passion which I felt approaching. As I had seen you twice with a small bouquet of violets, I filled all my house with violets. Oh! that beginning of spring I shall never forget! And the morning slumbers, so light, so transparent! And those slow, dreamy awakenings, in which, while my eyes were becoming used to the light, my mind still delayed before resuming the sentiment of reality! I recall that certain childish artifices sufficed to throw me into a species of illusionary intoxication. I remember, one day, at a concert, while listening to a Beethoven sonata, in which a frequent and periodic

return of a sublime and passionate phrase recurred, I exalted myself almost to a state of madness by the interior repetition of a poetical phrase in which your name occurred."

Hippolyte smiled; but, hearing him speak with an evident preference for all the first manifestations of his love, at the bottom of her heart she felt displeased. Did those days seem sweeter to him than the present—were those distant recollections his dearest recollections?

George went on: "All the disdain which I have for a commonplace existence would never have sufficed to inspire me with the dream of an asylum as fantastic and mysterious as the abandoned oratory of the Via Belsiana. Do you recall it? The door at the head of the steps, opening on the street, was shut, and had been for years perhaps. One passed through a side alley which reeked of wine, and in which there was the red sign of a cabaret, with a large cork. Do you remember it? The entrance was at the rear, and one had to pass through a sacristy scarcely large enough to hold a priest and sacristan. It was the entrance to the sanctuary of Wisdom. What curious-looking old men, and women, on all sides, in the worm-eaten stalls! Where had Alexander Memmi been, to procure his audience? Doubtless you did not know, dear one, that you personified Beauty in this council of the music-mad. Mr. Martlet, you see, is one of the most confirmed Buddhists of our epoch; and his wife has written a book on the Philosophy of Music. The lady seated near you was Margherita Traube Boll, a celebrated doctor who is carrying on her defunct husband's investigations into the visual functions. The necromancer, in the long greenish cloak, who entered on tiptoe, was a Jew—a German physician, Dr. Fleichl, a superb pianist, a fanatic on Bach. The priest seated beneath the cross was Count Castracane, an immortal botanist. Another botanist, a bacteriologist, a microscopist, named Cuboni, was sitting in front of him. And there was also Jacopo Moleschott, that unforgettable old man, frank, enormous; also Blaserna, the collaborator of Helmholtz in the theory of sound; and Mr. Davys, a philosophical painter, a

Preraphaelite plunged into Brahmanism. The others, less numerous, were all superior people, rare minds given to the highest speculations of modern science, cold investigators of life and passionate adorers of dreams."

He interrupted himself in order to conjure up the picture, and then went on:

"These savants listened to the music with religious enthusiasm; one assumed an inspired attitude; others made unconscious gestures, in imitation of the chapel-master; others, in low tones, joined in chant with the choir. The choir, of men and women, occupied the rostrum, the painted wood of which still showed traces of gilding. In front the young girls formed a group, with their partitions kept on a level with their faces. Below, on the roughly made stands of the violinists, burned candles, spots of gold on a dark blue background. Here and there their small flames were reflected by the varnished body of an instrument, put a luminous point on the tip of a bow. Alexander Memmi, somewhat stiff, bald, with a short black beard and gold spectacles, kept time with severe and sober gestures. At the close of every piece a murmur arose in the chapel, and laughs, badly suppressed, descended from the gallery, amidst the rustling of music-pages being turned. When the sky brightened, the candle-flames grew pale; and a cross very high up, which had figured in former years in solemn processions, a cross all ornamented with golden olives and foliage, seemed as if detached from the wall, in a burst of light. The white and bald heads of the auditors shone on the oaken backs. Then all at once, by a new change in the sky, the shadow again began to creep among these things, like a light mist. A scarcely perceptible wave of some subtle odor—incense or benzoin?—invaded the nave.

"On the single altar, in glass vases, two bouquets of violets, somewhat faded, exhaled the breath of spring; and this double-fading perfume was like the poesy of dreams which the music evoked in the souls of the old men, while close by, in quite different souls, there developed another dream: like an aurora on melting snows."

It pleased him to reconstruct this scene, to render it poetical—to warm it again with

lyric breath.

"Is it not preposterous, unbelievable?" he cried. "At Rome, in the city of intellectual inertia, a master of music, a Buddhist who has published two volumes of essays on the philosophy of Schopenhauer, indulges in the luxury of having a mass by Sebastian Bach executed for his own pleasure, in a mysterious chapel before an audience of great music-mad savants, whose daughters sing in the chorus. Is it not a page from Hoffmann? On an afternoon of a somewhat gray but warm spring—these old philosophers quit their laboratories, where they have obstinately striven to wrest from life one of its secrets; and they assemble in a hidden oratory in order to satisfy, almost to intoxication, the passion that has drawn together their hearts, to leave their earthly bodies, and live ideally in dreams. And, in the midst of this old men's gathering, an exquisite musical idyll unfolds between the cousin of the Buddhist and the friend of the Buddhist, ideally speaking. And when the mass is finished, the Buddhist, suspecting nothing, presents the future lover to the divine Hippolyte Sanzio."

He began to laugh, and then arose. "I have made, it seems to me, a commemoration according to rule."

For an instant Hippolyte remained somewhat absorbed, then she said: "Do you remember, it was on a Saturday, the eve of Palm Sunday?"

She also arose, approached George, and kissed his cheek.

"Shall we go now? It is no longer raining."

They went out and strolled along the wet pavement, which reflected the subdued sunlight. The cold air made them shiver. Roundabout, the undulating hills were covered with verdure and furrowed with luminous streaks; here an there large pools of water reflected the pale image of a sky whose deep azure spread out between the flaky clouds. The little tree, dripping with rain, was illumined at intervals.

"That little tree will remain as one of our remembrances," said Hippolyte, stopping

to look at it. "It is so lonely, so lonely."

The bell announced the approach of the train, it was a quarter past four. A railway employee offered to get their tickets. "When shall we arrive at Albano?" George asked.

"About seven o'clock."

"It will be night," said Hippolyte.

As she felt rather cold, she took George's arm; and she was pleased to think that they would arrive at a strange hotel this chilly evening, and that they would dine alone before a bright fire.

George perceived that she trembled, and asked: "Do you wish to go in again?"

"No," she replied. "You see, the sun's coming out. I shall warm up."

An indefinable desire for intimacy had seized her. She pressed closely to him, became suddenly caressing, and her voice, look, contact, gestures—and all her being—were full of seduction. She wished to shed over the loved one the most feminine of her charms; she wished to intoxicate him, to dazzle him with a display of present happiness capable of eclipsing the reflection of bygone happiness. She wished to appear to him more amiable, more adorable, more desirable than ever before. A fear assailed her—an atrocious fear—that he might regret the woman of long ago, sigh for the vanished delights, believe that then only had he attained the height of intoxication. "His recollections," she thought, "have filled my soul with so much melancholy! I have restrained my tears with difficulty. And he too, perhaps, is sad at heart. How heavily the past hangs over our love! Perhaps he is tired of me? Perhaps he is unaware of this weariness, and does not avow it to himself, willing to live under the illusion? But he is perhaps incapable now of finding any happiness in me. If I am still dear to him, it is perhaps only because he recognizes in me an object for his dear sorrows. Alas! I too, when with him, taste true happiness only at rare intervals; I suffer too, and yet I love him, and I love my suffering, and my only

desire is to please him, and I cannot imagine life without this love. Why then are we so sad, since we love one another?"

She leaned heavily on her lover's arm, gazing at him with eyes to which the shadow of her thoughts imparted an expression of profound tenderness.

"Two years ago, about the same hour, we left the chapel together; and he spoke to me of things in no way connected with love, in a voice which moved my heart, which touched my soul as if with a caress of the lips; and this ideal caress I enjoyed like a long kiss. I trembled, I trembled incessantly, because I felt an unknown feeling born in me. Oh! it was a divine hour! We have reached our second anniversary to-day, and we still love one another. Just now he spoke; and if his voice affected me differently than it used to do, it still moves me to the bottom of my soul. We have before us a delightful evening. Why regret the days that are gone? Our liberty, our present intimacy, are they not worth the incertitude and hesitations of that time? Even our memories, so numerous, do they not add a new charm to our love? I love him—I give myself up to him entirely; in the presence of his desire I no longer know modesty. In two years he has transformed me; he has made of me another woman; he has given me new senses, a new soul, a new intelligence. I am creation. He can intoxicate himself through me as he would through one of his own thoughts. I belong entirely to him, now and forever."

Then, passionately pressing her form against his, she asked, "Are you not happy?"

The tone in which she spoke moved him; and, as if suddenly enveloped by a warm breath, he experienced a thrill of real happiness.

"Yes, I am happy," he answered.

And when the locomotive whistle was heard, their hearts had the same palpitation.

At last they were alone in their compartment. She closed all the windows, waited until the train was again in motion; they fell into each other's arms, kissed each other, and repeated all the caressing names which their tenderness of the last two

years had used.

Then they sat still, side by side, a vague smile on their lips and in their eyes, and with the sensation that, little by little, the rapid coursing of their blood was abating. Through the windows they watched the monotonous country as it rushed by and disappeared into the violet-colored fog.

"Rest your head on my knees, and lie down," said Hippolyte.

He laid his head on her knee. She said: "The wind has disarranged your mustache." With her finger-tips she raised several of the light hairs which had fallen on his mouth. He kissed her finger-tips. She passed her hand through his hair. She said: "You, too, have very long eyelashes."

To admire his lashes, she closed his eyes. Then she caressed his brow and temples; she made him kiss once more each one of her fingers, one after the other, her head bent over George. And from beneath, George saw her mouth open with infinite slowness, saw unfold the snowy whiteness of her teeth. She closed her mouth, then again slowly opened it, with an almost insensible movement—like a flower with two petals; and a pearly whiteness shone from within. This delightful sport threw them into a state of languor; they forgot everything—they were happy. The monotonous motion of the train soothed them. In low tones they exchanged terms of adoration.

"This is our first journey together," she said, smiling. "It is the first time we are alone in a train."

She took delight in repeating that this was a new experience for them.

George, who had already felt the spur of desire, became more animated. He raised himself up, he kissed her on the neck, just on the Twins; he whispered something in her ear. An inexpressible light lit up Hippolyte's eyes, but she answered with vivacity: "No, no, we must be good until this evening. We must wait."

Once more she saw a vision of the silent hotel, of the furnished chamber, of the large bed hidden beneath a white mosquito curtain.

"At this season of the year," she said, in order to distract her lover's attention, "there will scarcely be anyone at Albano. How nice it will be, all alone in an empty hotel. We shall be taken for a young couple."

She wrapped herself in her mantle with a thrill, and leaned against George's shoulder.

"It is cold to-day, isn't it? When we arrive we'll light a big fire, and we'll take a cup of tea."

For them it was an acute pleasure to imagine the approaching intoxication. They spoke in low tones, communicating the ardor of their blood, exchanging burning promises. But, as they talked of future voluptuousness, their present desire grew, became irresistible. They lapsed into silence, they united their lips; they heard nothing more but the tumultuous beating of their arteries.

* * * * *

Afterwards, it seemed to them both as if a veil had been torn from before their eyes, that an internal mist was being dissipated—that the enchantment was broken. The fire in the imaginary chamber went out; the bed seemed icy, and the silence of the empty hotel became heavy. Hippolyte leaned her head against the back of the seat, watching the vast, monotonous country disappearing in the darkness.

At her side, George had again fallen beneath the empire of his perfidious thoughts. A horrible vision tortured him, against which it was impossible for him to contend, because he saw it with the eyes of his soul, those eyes, pupil-less, that no force of will can shut.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Hippolyte, uneasy.

"Of you."

He thought of her, of her wedding-trip—of the ways in which the newly married generally act. "Without the least doubt, she found herself alone with her husband

just as she is now with me. And it is perhaps this remembrance which causes her sadness." He thought also of the rapid adventures between two stations, of the sudden disquietude caused by a look—of the seizures of sensuality during the suffocating length of an afternoon during the dog-days. "What horror! What horror!" He started violently, a particular kind of start that Hippolyte knew too well to be a sure symptom of the malady which afflicted her lover. She took his hand in hers and asked:

"Are you in pain?"

He nodded, looking at her with an unhappy smile. But she had not the courage to push her questioning further, because she feared a bitter and heart-breaking answer. She preferred to remain silent; but she kissed him on his forehead—a long kiss, as usual, in the hope of unloosening the tangle of cruel reflections.

"Here we are at Cecchina!" she cried with relief, as she heard the whistle announcing their arrival. "Quick—quick, love, we must get down."

In order to amuse him, she affected gayety. She lowered the window and looked out.

"The evening is cold, but beautiful. Make haste, love. This is our anniversary. We must be happy."

The sound of her strong and tender voice drove away his gloominess. On alighting in the fresh air, he felt himself restored to serenity.

A sky, limpid as a diamond, curved like a vault over the country drenched with water. In the transparent atmosphere there still flitted beams of crepuscular light. The stars came out one by one, as if shaken on the staffs of invisible lamp-bearers.

"We must be happy." George heard internally the echo of Hippolyte's remark; and his soul swelled with indefinite aspirations. On this solemn and pure night the quiet chamber, the flaming hearth, the bed with its white-gauze draperies, appeared to him to be elements too humble for happiness. "It is our anniversary—we must be happy." Of what had he thought—what was he doing, at this same hour two years ago? He

had wandered aimlessly through the streets, pressed on by an instinctive desire to seek more deserted spots, yet attracted nevertheless towards the populous quarters, where his pride and joy seemed to grow by contrast with the common life; where the ambient noises of the city sounded in his ears only like a distant murmur.

CHAPTER V.

The old hotel of Ludovico Togni, with the walls of its long vestibule done in stucco and painted to imitate marble, with its landing-places with green doors, decorated all over with commemorative stones, gave an immediate impression of quasi-conventional peace. All the furniture had an aspect of being heirlooms. The beds, the chairs, the sofas, the couches, the chests of drawers, had the style of another age, now fallen into disuse. The delicately colored ceilings, bright yellow and sky-blue, were decorated at their centres with garlands of roses or other usual symbols, such as a lyre, a torch, or a quiver. On the paper-hangings and woollen carpet the bouquets of flowers had faded, and had become almost invisible; the window curtains, white and modest, hung from poles from which the gilt had worn off; the rococo mirrors, while reflecting these antique images in a dull mist, imparted to them that air of melancholy, and almost of unreality, which solitary pools sometimes give at their edges.

"How pleased I am to be here!" cried Hippolyte, penetrated by the charm of this peaceful spot. "I wish I could stay here forever."

And she drew herself up in the great armchair, her head leaning against the back, which was decorated with a crescent, a modest crochet-work in white cotton.

She thought once more of her dead aunt Jane and of her distant infancy.

"Poor aunt!" she said; "she had, I recall, a house like this—a house in which, for a century, the furniture had not been moved from its place. I always recollect her unhappiness when I broke one of those glass globes beneath which artificial flowers are preserved, you know. I remember she cried over it. Poor old aunt! I can see her

black-lace cap, with her white curls which hung down her cheeks."

She spoke slowly, pausing from time to time, her gaze fixed on the fire which flamed in the fireplace; and, every now and then, so as to smile at George, she raised her eyes, which were somewhat downcast and surrounded by dark violet rings; while from the street arose the monotonous and regular noise of pavers beating the pavement.

"In the house, I can recall, there was a large hay-loft with two or three windows, where we kept the pigeons. You reached the loft by means of a small, straight stairway, against the wall of which hung, heaven knows since when, skins of hares, hairless and dried, stretched from two ends of crossed reeds. Every day I carried food to the pigeons. As soon as they heard me coming, they clustered around the door. When I entered, it was a veritable assault. Then I would sit on the floor and scatter the barley all around me. The pigeons surrounded me; they were all white, and I watched them pecking up their food. The sound of a flute stole in from a neighboring house; always the same air at the same hour. This music seemed delicious to me. I listened, my head raised to the window, my mouth wide open, as if to drink in the notes which showered. From time to time a belated pigeon arrived, beating her wings on my head, and filling my hair with white feathers. And the invisible flute went on playing. The air still rings in my ears; I could hum it. That is how I acquired a passion for music, in a dovecote, when a child."

And she repeated mentally the air of the ancient flute of Albano; she enjoyed its sweetness with a melancholy comparable to that of the wife who, after many years, discovers a forgotten sugar-plum at the bottom of her wedding-box. There was an interval of silence. A bell sounded in the corridor of the peaceful residence.

"I remember. A lame turtle-dove hopped into the room; and it was one of my aunt's greatest favorites.

"One day a little girl of the neighborhood came to play with me—a pretty little

blond girl named Clarisse. My aunt was confined to bed by a cold. We amused ourselves on the terrace, to the great damage of the vases of pinks. The turtle-dove appeared on the sill, looked at us without suspicion, and squatted down in a corner to enjoy the sunshine. Scarcely had Clarisse perceived it, however, when she started forward to seize it. The poor little creature tried to escape by hopping away, but it limped so comically that we could not control our laughter. Clarisse caught it; she was a cruel child. From laughing, we were both as drunk. The turtle-dove trembled with fear in our hands.

"Clarisse plucked one of its feathers; then (I shudder still when I think of it) she plucked the dove almost entirely, before my eyes, with peals of laughter which made me laugh too. One could have believed that she was intoxicated. The poor creature, despoiled of its feathers, bleeding, escaped into the house as soon as it was liberated. We started to pursue it, but, almost at the same moment, we heard the tinkle of the bell, and the calls of my aunt who was coughing in her bed. Clarisse escaped rapidly by the stairway; I hid myself behind the curtains. The turtle-dove died that same night. My aunt sent me to Rome, convinced that I was guilty of this barbarity. Alas! I never saw Aunt Jane again. How I have wept! My remorse will last forever."

She spoke slowly, pausing from time to time, fixing her dilated eyes on the flaming hearth, which almost magnetized her, which began to overcome her with a hypnotic torpor, while from the street arose the monotonous and regular noise of pavers beating the pavement.

CHAPTER VI.

One day the lovers came back from Lake Nemi somewhat fatigued. They had dined at the Cesarini Villa, beneath showy camellias in bloom. Alone, with the emotion felt only by him who contemplates the most secret of secret things, they had contemplated the Mirror of Diana, as cold, as impenetrable to the view as the deep blue of a glacier.

As usual, they ordered tea. Hippolyte, who was looking for something in a valise, turned suddenly towards George, showing him a packet tied with a ribbon.

"You see, these are your letters. They never leave me."

George, with visible satisfaction, cried: "All? have you kept all?"

"Yes, all. I have even the notes—even the telegrams. The only one missing is the little note which I threw into the fire to prevent its falling into my husband's hands. But I saved the burnt fragments; you can still read a few words."

"Let me see, will you?" said George.

But, with a jealous movement, she hid the package. Then, as George advanced towards her with a smile, she fled into the adjoining room.

"No, no; you shall see nothing. I won't let you."

She refused, partly in jest, partly too because, having always guarded them preciously as a hidden treasure, with pride and fear, it was repugnant to her to show them even to him who had written them.

"Let me see them, I beg of you. I am so curious to reread my letters of two years ago. What did I write you?"

"Words of fire."

"Please let me see them."

She finally consented, laughing, vanquished by her friend's persuasive caresses.

"Let us wait at least until the tea is brought; then we will reread them together. Shall I light a fire for you?"

"No," he replied, "it is almost hot to-day."

It was a cloudless day, with silvery reflections diffused through the inert atmosphere. The waning day was softened in its passage through the gauze curtains. Fragrant violets, gathered at the Villa Cesarini, had already perfumed the entire chamber. Someone knocked at the door.

"Here is Pancrazio," said Hippolyte.

The worthy domestic, Pancrazio, brought in his inexhaustible tea, and his inextinguishable smile. He placed the tea-things on the table, promised something good for dinner, and withdrew with light and elastic steps. All bald as he was, he preserved a juvenile air. Extraordinarily obliging, he had, like certain Japanese gods, eyes that were laughing, long, narrow, and somewhat oblique.

"Pancrazio is more amusing than his tea," said George.

In fact, the tea had no aroma, but the accessories lent it a strange taste. The sugar-bowl and cups had a form and capacity never before seen; the tea-service was decorated with the history of an amorous pastoral; the plate, garnished with small slices of lemon, bore on its centre a rhymed enigma, done in black letters.

Hippolyte poured out the tea, and the cups steamed like censers. Then she untied the package! The letters appeared, properly classified, divided into small bundles.

"What a quantity!" cried George.

"There are not so many; only two hundred and ninety-four. And in two years, dear one, there are seven hundred and thirty days."

They both smiled, sat down side by side near a table, and began to read. In the presence of these documents of his love, George felt come over him a strange emotion—an emotion delicate yet strong. The first letters perplexed him.

Such or such an extreme state of mind, of which the letters bore the imprint, at first seemed to him incomprehensible. The lyric flight of such and such a phrase filled him almost with stupor. The violence and tumult of his early passion caused in him a sort of terror, by contrast with the calm which possessed him now, in this modest and quiet house.

One of the letters said: "How my heart sighed for you that night! A gloomy anguish overwhelmed me, even during the short intervals of slumber; and I reopened my

eyes in order to escape the phantoms which rose from the depths of my soul. I have now but one thought—only one thought, which tortures me—that you might go far away from me. Never, no, never, has this possibility pierced my soul with a more maddening pain and terror. At this moment I have the certitude, the positive, clear, evident certitude, that without you life for me is an impossibility. When I think that I might lose you, the day becomes suddenly dark—the sunlight becomes odious to me, the earth appears to me like a bottomless tomb, I enter a state of death." Another letter, written after Hippolyte's departure, read: "I make an enormous effort to hold my pen. I have no more energy, no will. I succumb to such discouragement that the only sensation which remains to me of my external existence is an insupportable loathing of life. The day is gray, suffocating, heavy as lead; a day to kill in, so to speak. The hours pass with inexorable slowness, and my misery grows, second by second, always more horrible and more savage. It seems to me that at the bottom of my being are pools of stagnant water, dead, and deadly. Is this a physical or moral suffering? I do not know. I live on, stupid and inert beneath a burden which crushes me, without killing me." Another letter read: "At last, to-day, at four o'clock, when almost hopeless, I have received your reply. I have read and reread it a thousand times, to find between your words the inexpressible—what you could not express—your soul's secret, something more alive and sweeter than the words written on the soulless paper. I am possessed with a terrible desire for you."

So the love-letters cried and groaned, on the table covered with a table-cloth, and loaded with rustic cups in which an innocent infusion peacefully steamed.

"You remember," said Hippolyte. "It was the first time that I left Rome, and only for fifteen days."

George was absorbed in the memories of his mad infatuation; he sought to revive it within him, and to understand it. But the environing comfort was unfavorable for internal effort.

The sensation of this comfort imprisoned his soul, enveloping it loosely. The veiled sunlight, the hot drink, the perfume of the violets, the contact of Hippolyte, benumbed him. "Am I, then, so far from the ardor of former days?" he thought. "No, because during her last absence my anguish was not less cruel." But he did not succeed in filling the interval between the I of long ago and the I of to-day.

In spite of all, he could no longer identify himself with the same man of whom those written phrases attested such consternation and despair; he felt that these effusions of his love had become strangers to him, and he also felt all the emptiness of the words. These letters resembled the epitaphs which one reads in cemeteries. Just as the epitaphs give a coarse, false idea of the dead, so these letters represented inaccurately the divers conditions of the soul through which his love had passed. He knew well the singular fever which seizes a lover when writing a love-letter. In the heat of this fever, all the different waves of sentiment are agitated and mixed in a confused turmoil. The lover does not know precisely what he wishes to express, and he is embarrassed by the material insufficiency of the terms of endearment; so he gives up trying to describe his internal passion such as it is, and attempts to express its intensity by the exaggeration of the phrases and by the employment of vulgar rhetorical effects. This is the reason why all amorous correspondences resemble each other, and why the language of the most exalted passion is almost as poor as jargon.

"In these letters," thought George, "all is violence, excess, convulsion. But where are my delicate feelings? Where my exquisite and complex melancholies? Where my profound and sinuous sorrows, in which my soul went astray as in an inextricable labyrinth?" He now had the regret to perceive that his letters lacked the rarest qualities of his mind—those which he had always cultivated with the greatest care. In the course of his reading, he began to skip the long passages of pure eloquence, and sought instead the indication of particulars—the details of events that had occurred—the allusions to memorable episodes.

He found in one letter: "Towards six o'clock I entered mechanically the usual place, the Morteo Garden, where I had seen you so many evenings. The thirty-five minutes that preceded the exact hour of your departure were a torture for me. You left, yes, you left without my having been able to bid you good-by, to cover your face with kisses, to repeat to you once more, 'Don't forget! don't forget!' Towards eleven o'clock a kind of instinct made me turn round. Your husband entered with his friend, and the lady who usually accompanies them. Without any doubt, they had come back from seeing you home. I had then such a cruel spasm of pain that I was soon forced to rise and go out. The presence of these three persons, who spoke and laughed as on other evenings, as if nothing new had happened, exasperated me. Their presence was for me the visible and indubitable proof that you were gone, irremissibly gone."

He thought over more of the summer evenings, when he had seen Hippolyte seated at a table, between her husband and a captain of infantry, opposite to a little, insignificant woman. He did not know any of these three persons, but he suffered at each of their gestures, at each of their attitudes, and at all that was vulgar in their appearance; and in imagination he pictured to himself the imbecility of the talk to which his refined mistress appeared to pay sustained attention.

In another letter he found: "I am in doubt. To-day I feel hostile towards you; I am filled with a dull anger."

"That," said Hippolyte, "was the time when I was at Rimini: August and September—what tempestuous months they were! Do you remember when you finally arrived on the Don Juan?"

"Here is a letter written on board ship: 'To-day at two o'clock we have anchored at Ancona, having sailed from Porto San Giorgio. Your prayers and wishes have sent us a favorable wind. Marvellous sailing, which I will recount to you. At the break of day we shall again make the offing. The Don Juan is the king of coasters. Your flag

floats from the mast-head. Addio—maybe till to-morrow. September 2d.'"

"We saw one another again; but what days of suffering! Do you remember? We were watched incessantly. Oh, that good sister! Do you recall our visit to the Temple of the Malatestas? Do you remember our pilgrimage to the Church of San Giuliano, the evening before your departure?"

"Here is another from Venice."

They read it together, with equal palpitation.

"Since the ninth, I am at Venice, sadder than ever. Venice stupefies me. The most radiant of dreams does not equal in magnificence this dream of marble which emerges from the waves and blossoms in an illusionary sky. I am dying of melancholy and desire. Why are you not here? Oh! if you had come! If you had only executed your former project! Maybe we should have been able to steal one hour from espionage; and in the treasury of our souvenirs we should have counted one more, the most divine amongst them all." On another leaf they read again: "I have a strange thought, which, from time to time, pierces my soul like a lightning flash, and disturbs my whole being; a foolish thought—a dream. I think that you could come here, suddenly, alone, to be entirely mine!" Further on again: "The beauty of Venice is the natural frame of your beauty. The colors of your complexion, so rich and warm—all pale amber and dull gold, in which are mixed possibly several shades of drooping rose—are the ideal colors which harmonize the most happily with the Venetian air. I do not know how Catherine Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus, looked; but, I do not know why, I imagine she resembled you."

"You see," said Hippolyte, "it was a continual seduction, refined and irresistible. I suffered more than you can imagine. Instead of sleeping, I passed nights in seeking a means of going out alone, without awakening the suspicions of my guests. I was a prodigy of cleverness. I no longer know what I did. When I found myself alone with you in the gondola, on the Grand Canal, that September dawn, I did not believe that

it was real. Do you recollect? I burst into sobs, unable to say a word to you."

"But I—I was waiting for you. I was sure that you would come, at any cost."

"And that was the first of our great imprudences."

"It is true."

"What does it matter?" murmured the young woman. "Was it not better so? Was it not better so, now that I belong to you entirely? For my part, I regret nothing."

George kissed her on the temple. She spoke for a long time of this episode, which was one of the most pleasant and extraordinary among their souvenirs. They lived over again, minute by minute, the two days of their secret stay at the Hotel Danieli—two days of oblivion, supreme intoxication, in which it seemed as if they had both lost all notion of the world, and all consciousness of their previous being.

Those days had marked the commencement of Hippolyte's ruin. The letters which followed alluded to her first trials. "When I think that I am the initial cause of your sufferings and of all your domestic troubles, an inexpressible remorse torments me; and in order to obtain pardon for the ill of which I am the cause, I want you to know the entire depth of my passion. Do you know my passion? Are you sure that my love will be able to repay you for your long anguish? Are you sure of it—certain—deeply convinced of it?" The ardor went on increasing page by page. Then, from April to July, there was an obscure interval without documents. It was during these four months that the catastrophe happened. The husband, too weak, not having found any means of conquering Hippolyte's open and obstinate rebellion, had, so to say, taken flight, and left behind him very much involved business affairs, in which he had sunk the greater part of his fortune. Hippolyte had sought refuge with her mother, then with her sister at Caronno, in a country-house. And then a terrible malady from which she had already suffered in her infancy—a nervous malady analogous to epilepsy—seized upon her. The letters dated in August spoke of it: "No, you could never conceive the fright that my mind is in. What tortures me above all is the

implacable lucidity of my imaginary vision. I see you writhing—I see your face become distorted and pallid—I see your eyes roll hopelessly beneath their lids; I see your hands shrivelled and shrunk, and between your fingers the curl of torn-out hair; and, whatever effort I make, I cannot succeed in dispelling the terrible vision. And then, I hear you call me; I have actually in my ears the sound of your voice—a hoarse and lamentable sound—the voice of a person who calls for help without the hope of being helped." A little way further on: "You write me: 'If this illness should seize me when I am in your arms! No, no, I will not see you again! I do not wish to see you again!' Were you mad when you wrote that? Did you think of what you wrote? It is as if you had taken my life, as if I could no longer breathe. Quick, another letter! Tell me you will recover, that you still hope, that you want to see me again. You must recover. Do you hear, Hippolyte? You must recover."

During the convalescence, the letters were gentle and playful. "I send you a flower gathered on the sands. It is a species of wild lily, marvellous when growing, and of an odor so penetrating that I often find at the bottom of the chalice an insect in a swoon of intoxication. The whole coast is covered with these passionate lilies, which, beneath the torrid sun, on the broiling sand, flower in one minute, and only live a few hours. See how charming this flower is, even when dead! See how delicate it is, and fine, and feminine!"

Up to the month of November the letters followed one another without interruption; but, little by little, they became bitter, full of suspicions, doubts, reproaches.

"How far you have gone from me! I am tortured by something else than the chagrin of mere material separation. It seems to me that your soul has also left and abandoned me. Your fragrance makes others happy. To look at you, to hear you, is not that—to enjoy you? Write to me; tell me that you belong entirely to me, in all your acts, in all your thoughts, and that you desire me, and that you regret me, and that, separated from me, you find no beauty in any instant of life." Further on: "I

think, I think, and my thought goads me; and the sting of this thought causes in me an abominable suffering. At times I am seized with a frenzied desire to pluck from my throbbing temples this impalpable thing, which is, however, stronger and more inflexible than a dart. To breathe is an insupportable fatigue for me, and the throbbing of my arteries goes through me as would the sound of hammer blows that I might be condemned to hear. Is that love? Oh, no. It is a kind of monstrous infirmity which can blossom only in me, for my joy and my martyrdom. I please myself by believing that no other human creature has ever felt as I do." Further on: "Never, no, never, shall I have complete peace and complete security. I could be content only on one condition—that I absorbed all, all your being; that you and I no longer were more than a single being; that I lived your life; that I thought your thoughts. Or, at least, I would wish that your senses were closed to all sensations that did not originate in me. I am a poor, ill patient. My days are but a long agony. I have rarely desired them to end, as much as I desire and pray for it now. The sun is about to set, and the night which descends on my soul envelops me in a thousand horrors. The shadows issue from every corner of my room and advance towards me as would a live person whose footsteps and breathing I could hear, whose hostile attitude I 'could see.'"

To await Hippolyte's return, George had returned to Rome in the first days of November; and the letters dated at that time alluded to a very unhappy and dismal episode. "You wrote me: 'I have had great difficulty in remaining true to you!' What do you mean by that? What were the terrible events which have upset you? My God! How you are changed! It makes me suffer inexpressibly, and my pride is irritated at my suffering. Between my eyebrows is a furrow, deep as the cleft of a wound, in which is heaped my repressed anger, in which gathers all the bitterness of my doubts, my suspicions, my disgusts. I believe that even your kisses would not suffice to rid me of it. Your letters, trembling with desires, disturb me. I am not grateful to you for them. For two or three days, I have something against you in my heart. I do

not know what it is. Perhaps a presentiment? Perhaps a divination?"

While he read, George suffered as from a wound reopened. Hippolyte would have liked to stop him from continuing. She remembered that evening when her husband had called unexpectedly at the house in Caronno, with a cold, calm face, but with the look of a madman, declaring that he had come to take her back; she recalled the moment when she was alone with him, face to face, in an out-of-the-way room, the window curtains of which were blown about by the wind—in which the light abruptly flared up and then decreased—to which the moaning of the trees was borne up from below; she remembered the silent, savage fight sustained then against that man who had suddenly clasped her—horror!—in order to take her by force.

"Enough! enough!" she said, drawing George's head to her. "Enough! Don't let us read any more."

But he wanted to continue. "I cannot understand the reappearance of that man, and I cannot prevent a feeling of anger which is directed even at you, too. But, to spare you pain, I will abstain from writing you my thoughts on this subject. They are bitter and gloomy thoughts. I feel that my affection is poisoned for some time. It were better, I think, if you never saw me again. If you wish to avoid useless pain, do not return now. Now I am not in a good frame of mind. My soul loves you to adoration; but my thought rends and sullies you. It is a contrast which recommences incessantly, and which will never end." In the next day's letter he wrote: "A pain, an atrocious pain, intolerable, never felt before! O Hippolyte, come back! come back! I want to see you, to speak to you, to caress you. I love you more than ever. Yet, spare me the sight of your bruises. I am incapable of thinking of them without fear and without anger. I feel that, if I saw the marks impressed in your flesh by the hands of that man, my heart would break. It is horrible!"

"Enough, George! don't let us read anymore!" begged Hippolyte again, taking the loved one's head between her hands, and kissing his eyes. "Please, George!"

She succeeded in drawing him away from the table. He smiled that indefinable smile, which sometimes invalids have when they yield to the entreaties of others, knowing full well that the remedy is late and useless.

CHAPTER VII.

On Good Friday evening they started on their return to Rome.

Before their departure, about five o'clock, they took tea. They were taciturn. The simple existence they had led in this old house appeared extraordinarily beautiful and desirable to them, now it was about to end. The intimacy of the modest lodging seemed sweeter and more profound to them. The places where they had promenaded their melancholy and their tenderness were illuminated by ideal lights. It was, then, still another fragment of their love and of their being that fell, annihilated, into the abyss of time.

"That, too, is past," said George.

"What can I do?" said Hippolyte. "It seems to me as if I could no longer sleep anywhere than on your heart!"

They looked into each other's eyes, communicating each other's emotion, feeling the rising wave choking their throats. They remained silent; they listened to the regular and monotonous sound made by the pavers beating the pavement. But the irritating noise augmented their uneasiness.

"That is insupportable," said George, rising.

The measured blows revived in him the sentiment of the flight of time, which he had already so strongly felt; they inspired in him that sort of anxious terror which he had already often experienced when listening to the oscillations of a pendulum. And yet, on the preceding days, had not the same noise lulled him into a vague state of comfort? He thought: "In two or three hours we shall separate. I shall recommence my usual life, which is only a series of petty miseries. My habitual illness will inevitably seize upon me again. Moreover, I know the troubles that Spring revives in

me. I shall suffer without cease. And I have already a premonition that one of my most pitiless tormentors will be the idea that Exili has put in my head. If Hippolyte wished to cure me, could she? Maybe, at least partly. Why should she not come with me to some lonely place, not for a week, but for a very long time? She is adorable in intimacy, full of trifling kind attentions and of childish graces. Maybe, by her constant presence, she would succeed in curing me, or at least in making me take life more lightly."

He stopped before Hippolyte, took her two hands in his, and asked: "Have you been very happy during these few days? Answer me."

His voice was agitated and persuasive. "I was never so happy before," she replied.

Feeling a deep sincerity in this answer, George pressed her hands with force, and continued: "Will it be possible for you to go back to your every-day existence?"

"I do not know," she answered; "I do not look before me. You know all is lost."

She lowered her eyes. George seized her in his arms, passionately.

"You love me, do you not? I am the only aim of your existence; you see only me in your future."

With an unexpected smile, which raised her long eyelashes, she said: "Yes, you know it."

He added once more in a low voice, his face bowed down: "You know my malady."

She seemed to have guessed her lover's thought. As if in confidence, in a whispering voice which seemed to draw closer the circle in which they breathed and palpitated together, she asked, "What can I do to cure you?"

They were silent, clasped in each other's arms. But in the silence their two souls dwelt and decided upon the same thing.

"Come with me," he cried, at length. "Let us go to some unknown country; let us stay there all Spring, all Summer, as long as we can—that will cure me."

Without hesitation she replied: "I am ready. I belong to you."

They disengaged themselves, comforted. The hour of departure had come; they strapped the last valise. Hippolyte gathered all her flowers, already withered in the glasses: the violets of the Villa Cesarini, the cyclamens, the anemones, and the periwinkles of the Chigi Park, the simple roses of the Castel-Gandolfo, a branch of an almond-tree gathered in the neighborhood of Diana's Baths, on their way home from the Emissary. These flowers could have told all their idylls. Oh, the frolicsome course in the park, in descending a steep incline, on the dry leaves in which their feet sank to the ankles! She shouted and laughed, pricked on the legs by the sharp nettles through the fine stockings: and then, before her, George beat down the sharp stems with blows of his cane, so that she could trample upon them without danger. Very green and innumerable nettles adorned the Diana's Baths, the mysterious cave in which favorable echoes were transformed into the music of slowly dropping water. And, from the depths of the humid shadow, they saw the country all covered with almond-trees and silver-and-pink peach trees, infinitely delightful beneath the light-green pallor of the limpid waters. So many flowers, so many souvenirs!

"See," she said, showing George a ticket, "it is the ticket for Segni-Paliano! I shall keep it."

Pancrazio knocked at the door. He brought George the receipted bill. In the emotion produced by the signor's generosity, he was all confused in his expressions of thanks and good wishes. Finally, he drew two visiting-cards from his pocket, and offered them to the signor and signora to recall to them his humble name, begging to be excused for his boldness.

Scarcely had he retired than the false newly wed couple began to laugh. The cards bore, in pompous letters, PANCRAZIO PETRELLA.

"I will keep them too as a remembrance," said Hippolyte.

Pancrazio knocked a second time at the door. He brought signora a gift—four or five

magnificent oranges. His eyes sparkled in his rubicund visage. He warned them, "It is time to go down."

In descending the staircase the two lovers felt a certain sadness and a sort of fear fall upon them, as if on leaving this peaceful asylum they were about to face some unknown peril. The old hotel-keeper took leave of them at the door, saying with regret, "I had such beautiful larks for this evening."

George answered, with a contraction of his lips: "We will come again soon—we will come again soon."

While they proceeded to the station the sun sank below the sea, at the extreme horizon of the Roman campagna fiery-colored amidst the thick mists. At Cecchina it began to drizzle. When they separated, Rome, on that Good Friday evening, humid and foggy, appeared to them like a city in which one could only die.

II.

THE PATERNAL ROOF.

CHAPTER I.

About the end of April, Hippolyte left for Milan where her sister, whose mother-in-law was dying, had called her. George Aurispa had arranged to leave also, in search of a new and unfrequented place. Towards the middle of May they were to meet again.

But, just at that time, George received an alarming letter from his mother. She was unhappy, almost in despair. In consequence, he could no longer defer his return to the paternal house.

When he became convinced that his duty urged him to hasten at once where there was real sorrow, he was seized by feelings of anguish which overcame by degrees his first sentiment of filial piety, and he felt rise within him a sharp irritation which increased in acuteness as the scenes of the coming conflict, clearer and more

numerous, surged through his conscience. And this irritation soon became so acute that it dominated him entirely, persistently nourished by the material annoyances of the departure, by the heart-breaking farewells.

The separation was more cruel than ever. George passed through a period of the most intense sensibility; the exasperation of all his nerves kept him in a constant state of uneasiness. He appeared to no longer believe in the promised happiness, the future peace. When Hippolyte bade him good-by, he asked:

"Shall we meet again?"

When he kissed her lips for the last time, as she passed through the door, he noticed that she lowered a black veil over the kiss, and this insignificant trifle caused him profound distress, assumed in his imagination the importance of a sinister presentiment.

On arriving at Guardiagrele, at his birthplace, under the paternal roof, he was so exhausted that, when he embraced his mother, he began to cry like a child. But neither the embrace nor his tears comforted him. It seemed to him that he was a stranger in his own home—that he was visiting a family which was not his own. This singular sensation of isolation, already experienced under other circumstances connected with his kin, returned now more vivid and more importunate than ever. A thousand little particulars of the family life irritated him, hurt him. During lunch, during dinner, certain silences, during which only the sounds of the forks were heard, made him feel horribly uncomfortable. Certain refinements, to which he was accustomed, received every moment a sudden and painful shock. The air of discord, hostility, and open warfare which weighed heavily on this household almost choked him.

The very evening of his arrival, his mother had taken him aside to recount her troubles and her ailments, to tell him about the bad behavior and dissoluteness of her husband. In a voice trembling with anger, looking at him with tears in her eyes, she

had said to him:

"Your father is an infamous man!"

Her eyelids were somewhat swollen, reddened by the large tears; her cheeks were hollow; her whole person bore the signs of long-endured suffering.

"He is an infamous man! A wretch!"

As he went upstairs to his bedroom, George still had the sound of her voice in his ears; he saw before him his mother's attitude; he continued to hear the ignominious accusations against the man whose blood ran in his veins. And his heart was so heavy that he believed he could carry it no longer. But, suddenly, a furious rapture created a diversion, carried his thoughts back to his absent mistress; and he felt that he owed his mother no thanks for reciting to him all those woes—he felt he would have liked much better not to know of, or in any way to occupy himself with, anything but his love, to suffer from nothing but his love.

He entered his room, and locked himself in. The May moon illuminated the windows of the balconies. Thirsty for the night air, he opened the windows, leaned on the balustrade, drank in with deep breaths the cool air of the night. An infinite peace reigned below in the valley; and the Majella, still all white with snow, seemed to deepen the azure by the solemn simplicity of its outlines. Guardiagrele, like a flock of sheep, slept around the Santa Maria Maggiore. A single window lit up, in the house opposite, made a spot of yellowish light.

He forgot his recent wound. Before the splendor of the night he had but one single thought—"This is a night lost to happiness!"

He began to listen. Amidst the silence, he heard the stamping of a horse in a neighboring stable, then a feeble tinkling of small bells. His eyes wandered to the lighted window; and in the rectangle of light he saw shadows flit, as of persons in active motion within. He listened intently. He believed he heard a light knock at his door. He went to open it, although not sure.

It was his aunt Joconda. She entered.

"Have you forgotten me?" she said, kissing him.

In fact, not having seen her when he arrived, he had not thought of her. He excused himself, took her hand, made her sit down, spoke to her in an affectionate tone.

Aunt Joconda, his father's eldest sister, was almost sixty. She limped as the result of a fall, and she was rather short, but an unhealthy stoutness, flabby, pallid. Given entirely to religious practices, she lived by herself in her room, on the top floor of the house, without having almost any connection with the family, neglected, but little loved, considered as being weak-minded. Her little world was full of consecrated images, relics, emblems, symbols; she did nothing else but follow religious exercises, doze in the monotony of her prayers, endure the cruel tortures caused by her gormandizing. She had a greedy passion for confectionery, and all other nourishment she had no taste for. But often she lacked sweets; and George was her favorite, because, each time he came to Guardiagrele, he brought her a box of bon-bons and a box of rossolis.

"So," she said in a mumbling voice from between her almost empty gums, "so you have come back—eh! eh! You have come back——"

She regarded him with a sort of timidity, finding nothing else to say; but a manifest expectancy showed in her eyes. And George felt his heart contract with anxious pity. "This miserable creature," thought he, "has sunk to the lowest degradations of human nature; I am bound to this poor bigoted gormand by ties of blood; I am of her race!"

A visible uneasiness had taken possession of Aunt Joconda; a look that was almost impudent came into her eyes. She repeated:

"So—so."

"Oh! forgive me, Aunt Joconda," he said at last, with a painful effort. "I forgot to bring you some candy."

The old woman changed countenance, as if she were on the point of fainting; her eyes became dim; she stuttered: "It doesn't matter——"

"But to-morrow I will get you some," added George consolingly, yet with a sinking heart. "I will write——"

The old woman became livelier. She said very rapidly: "You know, at the Ursulines ... it's to be had."

A silence followed, during which Aunt Joconda had, without doubt, a foretaste of the morrow's delicacies; because her toothless mouth gave forth the little sound that one makes in re-swallowing the superabundant saliva.

"My poor George! Ah! if I had not my George! You see, what has occurred in this house is a punishment from heaven. But go, boy, go out on the balcony and look at the vases. I—I am the only one who waters them; I always think of George; formerly, I had Demetrius, but now I have no one but you."

She rose, took her nephew by the hand, and led him to one of the balconies. She showed him the flowering vases; she plucked a bergamot leaf and held it out to him. She stooped down to feel if the earth were dry.

"Wait!" she said.

"Where are you going, Aunt Joconda?"

"Wait!"

She went off with her limping gait, left the room, returned a minute later with a pitcher full of water which she could scarcely carry.

"But, aunt, why do you do this work? Why give yourself this trouble?"

"The vases require to be watered. If I did not think of them, who would?"

She sprinkled the vases. Her respiration was heavy, and the hoarse panting of her senile chest distressed the young man.

"That will do! That will do!" he said, taking the pitcher from her hands.

They stayed on the balcony, while the water from the vases dropped into the street with a light splash.

"What is that lighted window?" asked George, to break the silence.

"Oh," replied the old woman. "It is Don Defendente Scioli, who is dying."

And both watched the moving shadows in the rectangle of yellow light. The old woman began to shiver in the cold night air.

"Come! Go to bed, Aunt Joconda."

He wanted to escort her to her room, on the floor above. While following a lobby, they met something which was dragging itself heavily along the floor. It was a tortoise. The old woman stopped to say: "It is as old as you are—twenty-five; and it has become lame like myself. Your father, with a blow of his heel——"

He remembered the plucked turtle-dove and Aunt Jane, and certain hours spent at Albano.

They arrived at the threshold of her chamber. A disgusting odor of sickness emanated from the interior. By the feeble light of a lamp, one could see the walls covered with madonnas and crosses, a torn screen, an arm-chair showing the stuffing and the springs.

"Will you come in?"

"No, thanks, Aunt Joconda; go to bed."

She entered quickly, then came back to the door with a paper packet, which she opened before George, and emptied a little sugar on the palm of her hand.

"You see? It is all I have left."

"To-morrow, aunt; come, go to bed. Good night!"

And he left her, his courage exhausted, his stomach upset, his heart saddened.

He returned to his balcony.

The full moon was suspended in the middle of the sky. The Majella, inert and glacial, resembled one of those selenious promontories which the telescope has brought close to the earth. Guardiagrele slumbered at the foot of the mountain. The bergamots filled the air with fragrance.

"Hippolyte! Hippolyte!"

At that hour of supreme anguish, all his soul went out towards the loved one, demanding assistance.

Suddenly, from the lighted window, a cry arose in the silence, the cry of a woman. Other cries followed; then there was a continued sobbing, which rose and fell like a rhythmic chant. The agony had ended; a soul had dissolved itself into the serene and funereal night.

CHAPTER II.

"You must help me," said his mother. "You must speak to him; you must make him listen to you. You are his first-born. Yes, George, it is essential."

She continued to enumerate her husband's faults, to lay bare before the son the shame of the father. This father had for a concubine a chamber-maid, formerly in the service of the family, a degraded and very mercenary woman; it was for her and the children born in adultery that he dissipated all his fortune, without regard for anybody—careless of his affairs, neglecting his property, selling his crops at a sacrifice to the first comer, in order to obtain money. And he went so far that, sometimes, through his fault, the house lacked necessities; and he refused to give a dowry to his younger sister, although she had been engaged for a long time; and if any observation was made to him, he responded by cries, insults, sometimes even by the most brutal violence.

"You live far from us, and do not know in what a hell we live. You cannot even imagine the smallest part of our sufferings. But you are the eldest. You must speak to him. Yes, George, you must."

His eyes cast down, George remained silent; and to repress the exasperation of all his nerves in the presence of this unhappiness, which disclosed itself to him in so brutal a manner, he required a prodigious effort. What? Was this his mother? That contorted mouth, so full of bitterness, which was contracted so sharply when she uttered coarse words, was that his mother's mouth? Had misery and anger changed her so much? He raised his eyes and looked at her, to see if traces of the old-time gentleness still lingered on the maternal visage. How gentle he had always known this mother to be formerly! What a beautiful and tender creature she always was! And how tenderly he had loved her in his childhood, in his adolescence. In those days Donna Silveria was tall and svelte, pale and delicate; her hair was almost blond, her eyes black; all her person bore the stamp of a noble race, for she descended from that Spina family which, like the Aurispas, has its armorial bearings sculptured beneath the portal of the Santa Maria Maggiore. What an affectionate being she used to be! Why, therefore, this great change? The son was distressed by all his mother's abrupt gestures, at the bitterness of her words, at all the ravages which a rancorous hate had made in her features; and he was distressed also to see his father covered with so much ignominy, to find such a terrible abyss yawning between the two beings to whom he owed his existence. And what an existence!

"You understand, George!" insisted his mother. "You must be energetic. When will you speak to him? Make up your mind."

He heard her, and he felt at the bottom of his entrails the shock of a thrill of horror; and he said to himself: "Oh! mother, demand of me everything, ask of me the most atrocious of sacrifices; but spare me this step, do not compel me to do that. I am a coward." At the thought that he must face his father, that he must accomplish an act of vigor, and of his own will, an unconquerable repugnance arose from the very roots of his being. He would prefer to have a hand cut off.

"Very well, mother," he replied gloomily. "I will speak to him. I will wait for a

favorable opportunity."

He took her in his arms and kissed her cheeks as if to tacitly demand forgiveness for the lie; for he said to himself: "I shall not find a favorable opportunity. I shall not say anything."

They stayed in the embrasure of the window. The mother opened the shutters, saying:

"They are about to take away Don Defendente Scioli's body."

They leaned on the balcony, side by side. Then, looking up at the sky, she added:

"What a day this has been!"

Guardiagrele, the city of stone, shone resplendent in the serenity of May. A fresh breeze agitated the grasses on the gargoyles. In every crevice, from the base to the summit, Santa Maria Maggiore was adorned with minute, delicate plants, bloomed with innumerable violet flowers, and as the old cathedral reared its head in the azure sky it seemed clad in a double mantle of marble flowers and of living flowers.

"I will not see Hippolyte again," thought George. "I have dark forebodings. I know that, in five or six days, I shall go to seek the hermitage of our dreams; but, at the same time, I know that it will be in vain, that I shall achieve nothing, that I shall hurl myself against an unknown obstacle! How strange and indefinable are my feelings! It is not I who know; but some one in me knows that all is about to end."

He thought: "She does not write to me any more. Since I am here I have received from her only two short telegrams—one from Pallanza, the other from Bellagio. I never felt so far away from her. Perhaps at this moment another man pleases her. Is it possible that love falls out of a woman's heart all at once? Why not? Her heart is tired; at Albano, warmed anew by buried memories, it palpitated for perhaps the last time. I was mistaken. But certain incidents, for him who knows how to consider them under their ideal forms, bear in themselves secret significance, precise and independent of appearances. Well! when I examine in thought all the little incidents

constituting our life at Albano, they assume an unquestionable significance and an evident character; they are final. On the evening of Good Friday, when we arrived at the station at Rome, and when we said good-by, and the cab carried her off in the fog, did it not seem to me that I had just lost her forever? Had I not the innate conviction that all was at an end?" His imagination presented to him the gesture with which Hippolyte had lowered her black veil after the last kiss. And the sun, the azure, the flowers, the general joyousness of nature, suggested to him only this reflection: "Without her, life for me is impossible."

At this moment his mother leaned over the balustrade, looked towards the porch of the cathedral, and said:

"The procession is leaving the church."

The funereal brotherhood left the porch with its insignia. Four men in cowled robes carried the coffin on their shoulders. Two long files of men, also in cowled robes, marched behind with lighted tapers, only their eyes being visible through the two holes in their hoods. From time to time the breeze made the tiny and almost invisible flames flicker, and even extinguished some of them; and the candles consumed themselves in tears. Each cowled man had at his side a barefooted child, who collected the melted wax in the hollow of his two hands.

When the whole cortège had spread out in the street, musicians dressed in red with white facings struck up a funeral march. The undertaker's assistants regulated their steps to the time of the music; the brass instruments glittered in the sun.

"What sadness and ridicule in the honors rendered to the dead!" thought George. He saw himself in a coffin, imprisoned between the boards, carried by that masquerade of people, escorted by those candles and that horrible noise of trumpets; and the idea filled him with disgust. Then his attention was attracted to the ragged urchins who strove to collect the waxen tears, walking unevenly, painfully, the body bent, their eyes fixed on the flickering flames.

"Poor Don Defendente!" murmured the mother, watching the cortège as it disappeared in the distance.

Then, immediately, as if she were addressing herself and not her son, she added wearily:

"Why poor? He is at peace now; it is we who are to be pitied."

George looked at her. Their eyes met; and she smiled at him, but a smile so faint that not a line of her face was moved. It was like a very light veil, scarcely visible, which had spread over this face ever stamped with sorrow. But the imperceptible gleam of this smile had the same effect on George as some sudden great illumination; and then, for the first time, he saw distinctly on the maternal face the irremediable work of a great grief.

Confronted with the terrible revelation which came to him from this smile, an impetuous wave of tenderness welled up in his bosom. His mother, his own mother, could no longer smile but in that way—only in that way. Henceforth the stigmas of suffering would be indelible on the dear face which he had seen bent over him so often, and with such affection, in sickness and in affliction! His mother, his own mother, was killing herself little by little, was wearing herself out day by day, was drifting slowly to the inevitable tomb! And what caused his own suffering just now, while his mother was breathing out her distress, was not the maternal sorrow so much as the wound inflicted on his egotism, the shock given his unstrung nerves by the unvarnished expression of this sorrow.

"Oh! mother," he stammered, suffocated by tears.

And he took her hands and drew her into the room.

"What's the matter, George? What's the matter, my child?" asked the mother, frightened at seeing his face all bathed in tears.

"What's the matter? Tell me."

Ah, now he had found the dear voice again, that unique, unforgettable voice, which touched his soul to its very bottom; that voice of consolation, of forgiveness, of good advice, of infinite goodness, which he had heard in his darkest days—he had found it again, he had found it! In short, he recognized the tender creature of long ago, the adored one.

"Oh! mother, mother!"

And he pressed her in his arms, sobbing, wetting her with burning tears; kissing her cheeks, her eyes, her forehead, in a wild transport.

"My poor mother!"

He made her sit down, knelt before her, and looked at her. He looked at her for a long time, as if it were the first time he had seen her after a long separation. She, her mouth contracted, with a sob but badly concealed which choked her, asked:

"Have I pained you very much?"

She dried her son's tears and caressed his hair. Then, in a voice interspersed with convulsive starts, she said:

"No, George. No! It is not for you to suffer. God has kept you far away from this house. It is not for you to suffer. All my life, since your birth, all my life, always, always, I have sought to spare you a single pain, a moment's unhappiness. Oh! why did I not have the strength to remain silent this time? I should have said nothing; I should not have told you. Forgive me, George. I did not think I should cause you so much unhappiness. Don't cry any more, I entreat you. George, I entreat you, don't cry any more. I cannot bear to see you cry."

She was on the point of breaking down, overcome by anguish.

"See," he said, "I am not crying now."

He leaned his head on his mother's knees, and beneath the caress of the maternal fingers soon became calm. From time to time a sob shook his body. Through his

mind, in the form of vague sensations, passed once more the distant afflictions of his adolescence. He heard the twittering of the swallows, the grating of the scissors grinder's wheel, the shrill cries on the streets—familiar sounds, heard in the afternoons of long ago, which used to make his heart grow faint. After the crisis, his soul found itself in a state of indefinable fluctuation. But the image of Hippolyte reappeared; and he felt within him a new upheaval, so tumultuous that the young man gave vent to a sigh on his mother's knees.

"How you sigh!" she murmured, bending over him. Without raising his eyelids, he smiled; but an immense prostration came over him—a desolate lassitude, a desperate desire to withdraw from this truceless struggle.

The desire to live left him little by little, as the heat gradually leaves a corpse.

Of the recent emotion nothing remained; his mother had once more become a stranger to him. "What could he do for her? Save her? Restore peace to her? Restore to her health and happiness? But was not the disaster irreparable? Henceforth, was not this woman's existence forever poisoned? His mother could no longer be a refuge for him as in the days of his childhood, in the bygone years. She could neither understand, console, nor cure him. Their souls, their lives, were too different. She could only offer him the spectacle of his own torture!"

He arose, embraced her, disengaged himself, went out, ascended to his room, and leaned on the balcony. He saw the Majella all pink in the twilight, enormous and delicate, against a greenish sky. The deafening cries of the swallows which were whirling around drove him in. He went to lie down on his bed.

As he lay on his back, he thought to himself: "Good; I live, I breathe. But what is the substance of my life? To what forces is it subjected? What laws govern it? I do not belong to myself—I escape from myself. The sensation I have of my being resembles that of a man who, condemned to hold himself upright on a surface constantly in oscillation and never in equilibrium, feels support constantly lacking,

no matter where he places his foot. I am in a perpetual anguish, and even this anguish is not well defined. Is it the anguish of the fugitive who feels someone at his heels? Is it the anguish of the follower who can never reach his aim? Perhaps it is both."

The swallows twittered as they passed and repassed in flocks, like black arrows, before the pale rectangle formed by the balcony.

"What do I lack? What is the lacuna of my moral being? What is the cause of my impotency? I have the most ardent desire to live, to give all my faculties a rhythmic development, to feel myself complete and harmonious. And, on the contrary, I secretly destroy myself every day; each day my life goes out by invisible and innumerable fissures; I am like a half-emptied bladder, which becomes misshapen in a thousand different ways at every agitation of the liquid it contains. All my strength does not serve me more than to enable me to drag, with immense fatigue, a little grain of dust to which my imagination gives the weight of a gigantic rock. A perpetual conflict confuses all my thoughts and renders them sterile. What is it I lack? Who is it holds in his power that portion of my being which eludes my consciousness and yet which, I feel sure, is indispensable for the continuance of my life? Or rather, is not this portion of my existence already dead, so that only death will enable me to regain it? Yes, that is it. In fact, death attracts me."

The bells of Santa Maria Maggiore tolled for vespers. Again he saw the funeral convoy, the coffin, the cowled men, and the ragged children who strove to collect the waxen tears, walking unevenly, painfully, the body bent, their eyes fixed on the flickering flames.

These children greatly preoccupied him. Later, when he wrote to his mistress, he developed the secret allegory which his mind, interested in such studies, had confusedly perceived:

"One of them, sickly, yellowish, leaning with one arm on a crutch and collecting the

wax in the hollow of his disengaged hand, dragged himself along by the side of a species of giant with a hood, whose enormous fist brutally grasped the taper. I still see them both, and I shall not forget them. Perhaps there is something in myself which makes me resemble that child. My real life is in the power of some one, a mysterious and unknowable being who holds it in a grasp of iron; and I see it being consumed, and I drag myself after it, and I tire myself trying to collect at least a few drops, and every drop that falls burns my poor hand."

CHAPTER III.

On the table, in a vase, there was a bunch of fresh roses, May roses, which Camille, his younger sister, had gathered in the garden. Around the table were seated the father, the mother, the brother Diego, Albert—Camille's fiancé, invited to dinner—and the elder sister Christine, with her husband and child, a blond boy with a snowy-white complexion, fragile as a blooming lily.

George was seated between his father and mother. Christine's husband, Don Bartolomeo Celaia, Baron of Palleaura, was speaking of municipal intrigues in an irritating tone. He was a man approaching fifty, dried up, bald at the top of his head, as if tonsured, his face clean shaven. The almost insolent acrimony of his gestures and manners contrasted strangely with his ecclesiastic aspect.

As George listened to him, and observed him, he thought: "Can Christine be happy with that man? Can she love him? Dear Christine, the affectionate, melancholy creature, whom I have so often seen weep from sudden effusions of tenderness, to be tied for life to that heartless creature, almost an old man, soured by the silly wrangles of provincial politics! And she has not even the consolation of finding comfort in maternity; she must be racked with worry and anguish for her child—sickly, anæmic, always pensive. Poor creature!"

He gave his sister a look full of sympathetic kindness. Christine smiled at him over the roses, inclining her head slightly to the left, with a graceful movement peculiar

to her.

Seeing Diego by her side, he thought: "Who would believe they were of the same race? Christine has largely inherited the amiability of her mother; she has her mother's eyes, and, above all, has her ways and gestures. But Diego!" He observed his brother with that instinctive repulsion that every being feels in the presence of an uncongenial, contradictory, absolutely opposite being. Diego ate voraciously, without once raising his head from above his plate, wholly absorbed in his work. He was not yet twenty, but he was thick-set, already heavy on account of a commencing embonpoint, and his face was congested. His eyes, small and grayish, beneath a low forehead, did not reveal the slightest intellectual light; a yellow down covered his cheeks and strong jaws, and cast a shadow on his projecting, sensual mouth; the same down was noticeable also on his hands, the badly kept nails of which attested a disdain for personal cleanliness.

"Can I love him?" thought George. "Even to address a single insignificant word to him—even to respond to his simple greeting, I have to surmount an almost physical repugnance. When he speaks to me, his eyes never meet mine; and if by chance our eyes do meet, he averts his immediately with a strange precipitation. He reddens before me almost continually, and without apparent cause. How curious I am to know his sentiments regarding me! Without a doubt, he hates me."

By a spontaneous transition, his attention was transferred to his father, to the man whose traits Diego most truly inherited.

Stout, sanguine, powerful, the man seemed to exhale from his whole body an inexhaustible warmth of carnal vitality. His jaws were heavy, his mouth thick-lipped, imperious, full of a vehement respiration, his eyes restless and malignant-looking; his nose was swollen, freckled, and twitched spasmodically; every feature of his face bore the impress of a violent and cruel nature. Every gesture, every attitude, had the abruptness of an effort, as if the whole muscular

system of his massive body was in continual struggle with the encumbering fat. His flesh, that coarse stuff full of veins, nerves, tendons, glands, and bones, full of instincts and necessities; the flesh that sweats and stinks; flesh which deforms and sickens, ulcerates and is covered with wrinkles, pimples, warts, and hairs; that bestial stuff, flesh, flourished in him with a species of impudence, and inspired in the refined visitor an unconquerable repulsion. "No, no," said George to himself. "Ten or fifteen years ago he was not like that. I remember distinctly that he was not like that. This growth of latent and unsuspected brutality appears to have occurred slowly, progressively. And I—I am that man's son!"

He observed his father. He noticed that at the angle of his eyes, on his temples, the man had a number of wrinkles, and beneath each eye a swelling, or species of violet-colored pouch. He noted the short neck, swollen, congested, apoplectic. He perceived that the mustache and hair bore traces of dye. The beginning of old age in the voluptuary, the implacable work of vice and time, the vain and clumsy artifice to hide the senile grayness, the menace of a sudden death—all these sad, miserable, and tragic things of human life filled the son's heart with profound distress. An immense pity entered into his heart, even for his father. "Blame him? But he suffers, too. All this flesh, which inspires such a strong aversion in me, all this heavy mass of flesh, is inhabited by a soul. What anguish he may have felt, and what weariness! He certainly has a terrible fear of death." Suddenly, he had a mental vision of his father in his death agony. An attack had overthrown him, stricken him mortally; he panted, still alive, livid, mute, unrecognizable, his eyes full of the horror of death; then, as if stricken to earth by a second blow of the invisible sledge-hammer, he lay motionless, a mass of inert flesh. "Would my mother weep?"

"You are not eating anything," his mother said to him. "You do not drink. You have eaten almost nothing. Perhaps you are not well?"

"No, mother," he replied. "I have no appetite this morning."

The sound of something dragging itself along near the table caused him to turn. He perceived the decrepit tortoise, and remembered the words of Aunt Joconda: "She became lame like me. Your father, with a blow of his heel——"

While he was looking at the tortoise, his mother said to him, with the glimmer of a smile:

"She is as old as you are. I was carrying you when it was given to me."

With the same imperceptible smile, she added: "She was quite small. The shell was almost transparent; she resembled a toy. She has lived in our house ever since, growing bigger every year."

She took an apple paring and offered it to the tortoise. She looked for a moment at the poor animal, which moved its yellowish, old, serpent-like head with a kind of dazed trembling. Then dreamily she began to peel an orange for George.

"She remembers," thought George, seeing his mother so absorbed. He guessed the inexpressible sadness which, without any doubt, entered her soul at the recollection of the happy days, now that the ruin was complete, now that, after so many treasons, after so many infamies, all was irreparably lost. "She was loved by him formerly; she was young; perhaps she had not yet suffered! How her heart must sigh! What regret, what hopelessness must well up from her entrails!" The son suffered from the maternal suffering—reproduced in himself his mother's anguish. And he dwelt so long, savoring the supreme delicacy of his emotion, that his eyes became veiled in tears. He repressed the tears by an effort, and felt them fall, very softly, within himself. "Oh! mother, if you only knew."

On turning round, he saw that Christine was smiling at him over the roses.

Camille's fiancé was just saying:

"That is what one might call being ignorant of the first word of the Code. When one claims to——"

The baron approved the young doctor's arguments, and repeated after each sentence:

"Assuredly, assuredly."

They were demolishing the mayor.

Young Albert was seated beside Camille, his fiancée. He was dressed foppishly and his complexion was pink and white, like a wax figure; he wore a little pointed beard, his hair was parted in a straight line, a few curls were coquettishly arranged around his forehead, and a pair of gold-mounted glasses were on his nose. "That is Camille's ideal," thought George. "For several years they have loved one another with an all-powerful love. They believe in their future happiness. They have long sighed for that happiness. Without doubt, Albert has promenaded with this poor girl on his arm through all the commonplaces of the idyll. Camille is not robust; she suffers imaginary ailments; she does nothing from morning to night but weary her confidant, the piano, with nocturnes. They will get married. What will be their lot? A young man vain and empty, a sentimental young girl, in the petty provincial world—" An instant longer he followed in imagination the development of these two mediocre existences, and he felt moved by pity for his sister. He looked at her.

Physically, she resembled him somewhat. She was tall and slim, with beautiful chestnut-colored hair. Her eyes were bright but changing, green, blue, or ashen in turn. A light application of poudre de ris rendered her still paler. She wore two roses on her bosom.

"Perhaps she, too, resembles me otherwise than in he features. Perhaps, unknown to her, her soul bears some of the fatal germs which have developed in my consciousness with such might. Her heart must be full of mediocre anxieties and melancholies. She is ill, without knowing what her trouble is."

At this moment his mother rose. They all followed her excepting the father and Don Bartolomeo Celaia, who remained at the table to chat; which rendered them both more odious to George. He had put one arm around his mother's waist and the other

around Christine's waist, affectionately, and so they passed into the adjoining room, he almost dragging them. He felt his heart swollen by extraordinary tenderness and compassion. At the notes of the nocturne which Camille commenced to play, he said to Christine:

"Will you come down into the garden?"

The mother remained near the engaged couple. Christine and George went down, accompanied by the silent child.

At first they walked side by side, without speaking. George had taken his sister's arm, as he was accustomed to do with Hippolyte. Christine stopped, murmuring:

"Poor, neglected garden! Do you remember our games when we were little?"

And she looked at her son Luke.

"Go, my Luchino; run and play a little."

But the child did not move from his mother's side; on the contrary, he seized her hand. She sighed, looking at George.

"You see! It is always the same! He never runs, he never plays, he never laughs. He never leaves me, never wishes to be away from me. He's afraid of everything!"

Absorbed in thoughts of his absent mistress, George did not hear what Christine was saying.

The garden, half in the sun, half in the shade, was girt by a wall on the top of which glittered fragments of broken glass fixed in the cement. Along one side ran a vine. Along the other side, at equal distances, reared tall cypresses, slim and straight as candles, with a meagre tuft of sombre foliage, almost black, shaped like a lance-head, at the summit of their trunks. In the part exposed to the south, on a sunny strip of ground, flourished several rows of orange and lemon trees, just then in bloom. The rest of the ground was strewn with rose-bushes, lilacs, and aromatic herbs. Here and there could be seen several small myrtle-bushes planted at regular

intervals, and which had served to line the now ruined borders. In one corner there was a handsome cherry-tree; in the centre there was a round basin, filled with gloomy-looking water in which were growing lentils.

"Tell me," said Christine, "do you remember the day you fell into the basin, and how poor Uncle Demetrius dragged you out? How you frightened us that day! It was a miracle that you were taken out alive."

At the name of Demetrius, George started. It was a well-beloved name, the name which always made his heart palpitate when he heard it mentioned. He listened to his sister; he watched the water, over which long-legged insects made rapid flights. An anxious desire came to him to speak of the dead, to speak of him freely, to revive all his memories; but he checked himself, feeling that selfish pride which prompts one to conceal a secret, in order that the soul may feed upon it in solitude. He experienced a sensation almost akin to jealousy at the thought that his sister should have been touched and moved at the memory of the dead man. That memory was his own property exclusively. He guarded it, in the intimacy of his soul, with a grieved and profound cult, forever. Demetrius had been his veritable father; he was his only and unique parent.

And he reappeared to his mind, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile melancholy, and a single white curl in the centre of his forehead, among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

"Do you remember," said Christine, "the evening that you hid yourself and passed the whole night out of doors without showing yourself until morning? How frightened we were that time, too! How we looked for you! How we cried!"

George smiled. He remembered having hid himself, not out of fun, but from a cruel curiosity, to make his people believe he was lost, and to make them weep for him. During the evening—a humid, calm evening—he had heard the voices calling him, he had listened eagerly for the slightest sounds which came from the house in an

uproar, he had held his breath with a joy mixed with terror on seeing the persons who were seeking him pass near his hiding-place. After the entire garden had been ransacked without result, he still lay crouching in his hiding-place. And then, at the sight of the household in confusion, which could be seen by the quick going and coming of shadows before the lighted windows, he was seized by an extraordinary emotion, acute to the point of tears; he felt sorry for his parents and for himself, just as though he were really lost; but, in spite of all, he obstinately persisted in concealing himself. And then the morning came; and the slow diffusion of the light in the silent immensity had swept from his brain as if a mist of folly, had given him the consciousness of the reality, had awakened in him remorse. He had thought of his father and the punishment with terror and despair; and the basin had fascinated him. He felt himself attracted by that pale and gentle piece of water which reflected the sky—the water in which a few months before he had almost perished.

"It was during Demetrius's absence," he remembered again.

"Do you smell that perfume, George?" said Christine. "I will gather a bouquet."

The air, impregnated with a warm humidity, and charged with heavy perfumes, disposed one to indolence. The bunches of lilac, the orange-blossom, the roses, thyme, marjoram, sweet basil, myrtle—all their essences combined to form one single essence, delicate yet powerful.

All at once, Christine asked:

"Why are you so thoughtful?"

The perfume had just aroused in George a great tumult, a furious resurrection of all his passion, a desire for Hippolyte which had routed every other sentiment, a thousand recollections of sensual delights which coursed through his veins.

Smiling and hesitating, Christine added:

"You are thinking—of her?"

"Ah! it is true, you know," said George, reddening suddenly under his sister's indulgent gaze.

He remembered he had spoken to her of Hippolyte the previous autumn, in September, at the time he stayed at her house at Torricelle di Sarsa, on the seacoast.

Still smiling, still hesitating, Christine again asked:

"Do you—still love her as much as you did?"

"Still."

Without further speech, they directed their steps towards the orange and lemon trees, both disturbed, but in a different manner. George felt his regrets augmented by having confided in his sister; Christine felt a confused revival of her smothered aspirations, as she thought of the unknown woman whom her brother adored. Their eyes met and they smiled, and the smile seemed to diminish their pain.

She made a few rapid steps towards the orange-trees, exclaiming:

"Goodness! what a quantity of flowers!"

She began to pluck the flowers, her arms raised, shaking the boughs to break off the small branches. The corollas fell on her head, shoulders, and bosom. All around, the ground was strewn with the fallen petals, as if with a fragrant snow. She was charming in this attitude, with her oval face and long, white neck. The effort animated her visage. All at once her arms dropped, she grew pale, and tottered as if overcome by vertigo.

"What's the matter, Christine? Are you ill?" cried George, frightened, as he supported her with his arm.

But a violent nausea choked her, and she was unable to answer. She motioned that she wished to be taken away from the trees, and, supported by her brother, she made a few uncertain steps forward, while Luke watched her with terrified eyes. Then she stopped, gave a sigh, regained her color little by little, and in a voice that was still

weak said:

"Do not be alarmed, George. It is nothing. I am enceinte. The strong odor made me feel ill. It is gone now. I am all right now."

"Shall we go back to the house?"

"No. Let us stay in the garden. Let us sit down."

They sat under the vine, on an old stone bench. Noticing the child's grave and absorbed look, George called him to rouse him from his stupor.

"Luchino!"

The child leaned his heavy head on his mother's knees. He was frail as a lily-stem; he seemed to have difficulty in carrying his head upright on his shoulders. His skin was so delicate that every vein was visible, delineated as if threads of blue silk. His hair was so blond that it was almost white. His eyes, gentle and humid, like those of a lamb, showed their pale azure from between long, fair eyelashes.

His mother caressed him, pressing her lips together to restrain a sob. But two tears welled up, and rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, Christine!"

Her brother's affectionate tone only increased her emotion. Other tears welled up, and rolled down her cheeks.

"You see, George! I have never claimed anything; I have always accepted everything; I have always been resigned to everything; I have never complained—never rebelled. You know that. George. But now this—now this! Oh! Not even to be able to find a little consolation in my son!"

She spoke tearfully, and in a desolate tone.

"Oh! George, you see; you see how it is. He does not speak, or laugh, or play; he is never merry, and he never does what other children do. And it seems to me that he loves me so much, that he adores me! He never leaves my side, never. I begin to

believe that he only lives from my breath. Oh! George, if I were to tell you of certain days, long, long days, which seem endless. I work near the window; I raise my eyes, and I meet his eyes gazing, gazing at me. It is a slow torture, a punishment that I cannot describe. It is as if I felt my blood flowing drop by drop from my heart."

She stopped, choked by anguish. Drying her tears, she went on:

"If at least the one I am bearing is born, I will not say beautiful, but with health! If, for this once, God will come to my aid!"

She became silent, attentive, as if to draw an omen from the trembling of the new life which she carried in her womb. George took her hand. And for several minutes the brother and sister sat mute and motionless on the bench, overwhelmed by existence.

Before them stretched out the solitary and abandoned garden. The cypress-trees, straight and motionless, reared their tall trunks religiously towards the sky, like votive candles. The rare zephyrs which passed over the neighboring rose-trees had scarcely enough strength to cause the fall of the leaves of the few faded roses. From time to time, after intervals of silence, came sounds of a piano from the distant house.

CHAPTER IV.

"When? When? The action they wish to force on me becomes inevitable then? I shall be obliged, then, to face that brute?" George saw the hour approach with ungovernable dread. An insurmountable repugnance arose from the roots of his being at the very thought that he was going to find himself alone, in a closed room, in a tête-à-tête, with that man.

As the days passed, he felt increase his anxiety and humiliation, caused by culpable inertia. He felt that his mother, that his sister, that all the victims, expected from him, the first-born, some energetic action, some kind of protest—protection. Why, in fact, had he been summoned? Why had he come? From now on, it no longer seemed

possible for him to leave without having done his duty. Without doubt, at the last minute, he could have escaped without saying good-by, and then written a letter justifying his conduct by any plausible pretext. When his distress was at its height, he ventured to think of this ignominious resource; he stopped to consider a way, to arrange the most trifling details, to picture the results. But, in the scenes conjured up, the unhappy and ravaged face of his mother awoke in him an intolerable remorse. The reflections which he made on his egotism and his weakness revolted him against himself: and he sought with puerile fury to find some particle of energy which he could excite and efficaciously employ against the greater part of his being, and which would permit him to triumph over it as over a cowardly brute. But this false energy did not last, did not serve in the least to press him to a manly resolution. Then he undertook to calmly examine his situation, and he deluded himself by the very vigor of his reasoning. He thought: "What good could I do? What evils could my intervention remedy? Will this unhappy effort which my mother and the rest demand from me yield any real advantage? And what advantage?" As he had not found in himself the energy necessary for the execution of the act, as he had not succeeded in provoking in himself a satisfactory revolt, he had recourse to the opposite method—he attempted to demonstrate to his own satisfaction the uselessness of the effort. "What would be the result of the interview? It would certainly have none. According to my father's humor or according to the trend of his conversation, he would be either violent or persuasive. In the first case, his violence and insults would take me by surprise. In the second case, my father would find a mass of arguments to prove to me either his innocence or the necessity of his faults, and I should be taken equally by surprise. The facts are irreparable. When vice is rooted in the intimate substance of a man, it becomes indestructible. Now, my father is at the age when vice can no longer be rooted out, when habits can no longer be changed. For years he has been associated with that woman and those children. Have I the slightest chance to convince him that he ought to break off all those ties?

Yesterday, I saw the woman. It sufficed to see her, to guess that she will never let go her hold on the man whose flesh she holds in her clutches. She will dominate him until his death. The thing is now irremediable. And then, there are those children and those children's rights. Besides, after all that has occurred, would a reconciliation be possible between my father and mother? Never. All my attempts would then be fruitless. And then? There still remains the question of material damage, of money squandered, of dilapidation. But does it fall on me to put all this in order, since I live far away from the house? It would require constant vigilance to do that, and only Diego could do it. I will speak to Diego; I will arrange with him. In short, the most urgent matter just now is Camille's dowry. Albert frequently brings the subject up, and is even the most annoying of all my solicitors. Perhaps I shall be able to make some arrangement without difficulty."

He intended to favor his sister by contributing towards her dowry; for, the heir of all his uncle Demetrius's fortune, he was rich, and already in possession of his property. The intention to perform this generous act raised him once more in his own conscience. He believed himself freed from all other duties, from any other disagreeable step, by the sacrifice which he consented to make of his money.

When he turned his steps towards his mother's room he felt less uneasy, lighter, more comfortable. Moreover, he had learned that since morning his father had returned to the country place where he usually went in order to have more freedom in his actions. And it relieved him greatly to think that in the evening, at table, a certain place would be vacant.

"Ah! George, you have come just in time," cried his mother, directly she saw him enter.

The angry voice gave him such a rude and unexpected shock that he stopped, and he looked at his mother with stupor, so transfigured by the transport of anger as to be almost unrecognizable. He also looked at Diego, not understanding; he looked at

Camille, who stood still, mute and hostile.

"What is the matter?" stammered George, fixing his eyes once more on his brother, attracted by the bad expression which he saw for the first time on the young man's face.

"The strong box in which the silverware is kept is no longer in its place," said Diego, without raising his eyes, contracting his eyebrows and mumbling. "They charge me with having made away with it."

A flood of bitter words fell from the unhappy woman's mouth.

"Yes, you—in league with your father. You are your father's accomplice. Oh! what infamy. And now this frightful thing! Now this frightful thing! The child who has nursed at my breast to turn against me! But you are the only one who resembles him. God has been more merciful with the others. O God, blessed be thy name, blessed forever, for having spared me that supreme misfortune! You are the only one who resembles him, the only one——"

She turned towards George, who stood paralyzed, motionless, voiceless. Her chin trembled spasmodically; and she was so convulsed that one would have believed that she was going to sink down on the floor at any moment.

"Do you see now the life that we lead? Tell me, do you see it now? Every day, some new infamy. Every day, the same struggle to prevent the pillage of this unfortunate house. Are you convinced now that, if your father could, he would turn us into the streets, snatch the bread from our mouths? And it will come to that; we shall end by seeing that. You will see, you will see."

She continued, panting, with a choking sob in her throat at every pause, giving vent at times to hoarse shrieks, which expressed an almost savage hate, a hate inconceivable in a creature apparently so delicate. And once more accusations fell from her lips. The man had no longer the slightest consideration, the slightest shame. He would stop at nothing and for nobody to make money. He had become insane; he

seemed a prey to uncontrollable madness. He had ruined his real estate, cut down his woods, sold his herds at hazard, blindly, to the first comer, to the one who offered most. Now he began to despoil the house in which his children were born. For a long time he had had designs upon the silver, family silver, old and hereditary, piously guarded as a relic of the house of Aurispa, preserved intact until now. Hiding it had proved useless. Diego was in league with his father; and the two confederates, eluding the keenest vigilance, had taken it, to do with it God only knows what.

"Have you no shame?" she went on, turning towards Diego, who restrained with difficulty an explosion of his violence. "Are you not ashamed to take part with your father against me—against me, who have never refused you anything, who have always done as you wished? And yet you know, you know perfectly well, where the silver has gone And you are not ashamed? You've nothing to say? Won t you answer? Look, there's your brother. Tell me where the box has gone. I must know, do you hear?"

"I have already said that I don't know, that I haven't seen the box, and that I did not take it," cried Diego, unable to longer contain himself, with an explosion of brutality, and shaking his head; and the sombre flame which lit up his face made him resemble the absentee. "Do you understand?"

The mother, pale as death, looked at George, to whom the look seemed to impart a similar color.

Seized with a fit of trembling impossible to hide, the elder brother said to the younger:

"Diego, leave the room."

"I'll leave when it pleases me," replied Diego insolently, shrugging his shoulders, without, however, looking his brother in the face.

Then a sudden exasperation seized George, one of those extreme exasperations which, in feeble and irresolute men, have such an excessive vehemence that they

cannot manifest themselves by any external act, but cause to pass before the thwarted will flashes of criminal visions. The hatred between brothers, that odious hate which, since the creation, breeds secretly at the bottom of human nature to break out at the first discord, more ferocious than every other hate—that inexplicable hostility which exists, latent, between the males of the same blood, even though the customs and peace of the birthplace have created between them affectionate bonds; and, also, that horror which accompanies the execution or the thought of a crime, and which is perhaps only the vague sentiment of the law inscribed by secular heredity in the Christian conscience—all this surged confusedly in a sort of vertiginous whirl which, for a second, superseded all other sentiment in his soul, and gave him an aggressive impulse. The very aspect of Diego, his thick-set and sanguine body, his fallow head on the bull-like neck, the evident physical superiority of this robust, muscular fellow, the offence against his authority as the elder—all contributed to augment his fury. He would like to have had a prompt means of dominating, subjugating, felling this brute, without resistance and without a struggle. Instinctively he looked at his fists, those large, powerful fists, covered with a reddish down, which at dinner, employed in the service of a voracious appetite, had already caused him such a strong repulsion.

"Leave the room! Leave the room immediately!" he repeated in a higher and more commanding key; "or else ask my mother's pardon immediately."

He advanced towards Diego, his hand extended as if to grasp an arm.

"I do not permit anyone to give me orders," cried Diego, at last looking his elder brother in the face.

And, beneath his low forehead, his little gray eyes expressed a resentment which had been brooding for years.

"Take care, Diego!"

"You don't frighten me."

"Take care!"

"Who are you, I'd like to know? What business have you here?" shouted Diego angrily. "You have no right to interfere. You are a stranger. I do not want to know you. What has been your rôle up to now? You have never done anything for anybody; you have always thought only of your comfort, and your interest. The caresses, the preferences, the adorations, have all been for you. What do you want now? Go back to Rome and squander your heritage as you choose; but don't meddle in what does not concern you."

So he breathed out all his rancor, all his jealousy, all his envious hate against the fortunate brother who, in the great city yonder, lived a life of unknown pleasures, a stranger to his family, as though a being of another race, favored by a thousand privileges.

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue!"

And the mother, beside herself, and throwing herself between them, slapped Diego's face.

"Leave the room! Not another word! Get out of here! Go to your father! I don't want to hear you any more! I don't even want to see you again!"

Diego hesitated, shaken by the quivering of fury, perhaps only waiting for a gesture from his brother to fling himself on him.

"Go!" repeated the mother, at the end of her energy.

And she fell fainting into Camille's arms, extended to receive her.

Then Diego went out, livid with rage, muttering between his teeth a word which George did not understand, and they heard his heavy steps grow fainter as he passed through the gloomy enfilade of rooms in which the daylight was already dying.

CHAPTER V.

It was a rainy evening. Stretched out on his bed, George felt himself so broken

physically, and so sad, that he had given up thinking, so to speak. His thoughts wavered, vague and incoherent; but his sadness was modified and exasperated by the influence of the slightest sensations—occasional words pronounced in the street by passersby, the tick-tick of the clock on the wall, the tinkling of a distant bell, the stamping of a horse, a whistle, the banging of a door. He felt alone, isolated from the rest of the world, separated from his own anterior existence by the abyss of incalculable time. His imagination represented to him, in an indistinct vision, the gesture with which his mistress had lowered her black veil after the last kiss; it represented to him the child with the crutch collecting the waxen tears. He thought: "There is nothing more left to me but to die." Without definite cause, his anguish increased all at once, and became unbearable. The palpitations of his heart choked him, as if in a nightmare. He threw himself from his bed and paced up and down his room, distracted, agitated, incapable of containing his anguish. And his steps resounded in his brain.

"Who is there? Someone calling me?" The sound of a voice rang in his ear. He strained his ear to listen. He heard nothing more. He opened the door, walked in the corridor, and listened. All was silent. His aunt's room was open, and lit up. A strange fear seized him, a sort of panicky terror, as he thought that he might all at once see that old woman, with the mask of a cadaver, appear on the threshold. One doubt crossed his mind; she was perhaps dead, seated over there in her easy-chair, motionless, her chin on her bosom—dead. This vision had the clearness of reality, and froze him with veritable fright. He did not stir, no longer dared make a movement, standing still with a band of iron around his head, a band which, like some cold and elastic substance, expanded and contracted according to the pulsation of his arteries. His nerves tyrannized him, imposing on him the disorder, the excess, of their sensations. The old woman commenced to cough, and that made him start. Then he retired softly, quietly, on tiptoe, so as not to be heard.

"What is the matter with me this evening? I cannot stay any longer alone in this

room. I must go down." Besides, he foresaw that, after the atrocious scene, it would be equally impossible for him to bear his mother's unhappy appearance. "I will go out. I will go to Christine's." What prompted him to make this visit was the recollection of the touching and sad hour spent with his sweet sister in the garden.

It was a rainy evening. In the streets, already almost deserted, the few gas-jets threw out a dull glow. From a closed bakery came the voices of the bakers at work, and an odor of bread; from a cabaret came the sounds of a guitar and the refrain of a popular air. A band of wandering dogs ran by and was lost in the sombre alleys. The hour struck in the belfry.

By degrees, the walk in the open air calmed his exaltation. He seemed to have freed himself from the phantasies which encumbered his conscience. His attention was attracted to all he saw and heard. He stopped to listen to the sounds of the guitar, to smell the odor of the bread. Someone passed in the shadow on the other side of the street, and he thought he recognized Diego. Meeting him caused him agitation; but he felt that all his rancor was gone, that no violence remained at the bottom of his sorrow. Certain of his brother's words came back to his memory. He thought: "Who knows if he did not speak the truth? I have never done anything for anybody; I have always lived for myself alone. Here I am a stranger. Everyone here judges me perhaps in the same way. My mother said: 'You see now the life we lead? You see now, don't you?' I might see all her tears flow, and still should not have the strength to save her." ...

He arrived at the gate of the Celaia palace. He entered, and crossed the vestibule. As he traversed the court, he raised his eyes. Not a light was visible at any of the high windows; there was in the air an odor of rotten straw; the tap of a water-fountain dripped in an obscure angle; beneath the portico, beneath an image of the Virgin covered with a grating, a little lantern was burning, and through the grating, at the feet of the Virgin, could be seen a bouquet of artificial roses; the steps of the large

stairway were hollowed in the centre by usage, like those of an antique altar, and every hollow in the stone shone with yellowish reflections. Everything expressed the melancholy of the old, hereditary house to which Don Bartolomeo Celaia, left to solitude, and arrived at the threshold of old age, had conducted his bride and in which he had begotten his heir.

As he went upstairs, George saw with the eyes of his soul the young, pensive wife and the anæmic child; he saw them in the distance, at a chimerical distance, at the end of an out-of-the-way room to which nobody could penetrate. For a moment he had the idea to turn back, and he stopped, perplexed, in the middle of the high and silent white staircase. He was in a state of indefinable uneasiness. Once more he had lost the sense of the present reality; he felt himself once more under the influence of a vague terror, like a short time before in the corridor, when he had perceived the door open and the room empty. But, suddenly, he heard a noise, and a voice as if someone were chasing something; and a gray dog, a gaunt and dirty-looking mongrel, doubtless driven to enter the house by hunger, came flying down the stairway half a dozen steps at a time, and brushed by him. A servant, noisily chasing the fugitive, appeared on the landing.

"What is the matter?" asked George, visibly agitated by the surprise.

"Oh, nothing, sir. I am chasing a dog, an ugly, dirty beast, that gets into the house every night, no one knows how, just like a ghost."

This trifling, insignificant fact, combined with the servant's words, aroused in him that inexplicable uneasiness which resembled the confused anguish of a superstitious presentiment. It was this anguish which prompted the question:

"Is Luchino well?"

"Yes, sir; thanks to God."

"Is he asleep?"

"No, sir; he has not yet gone to bed."

Preceded by the domestic, he crossed the large rooms, which seemed almost empty, and in which the furniture, old-fashioned in design, was placed symmetrically. Nothing indicated the presence of inhabitants, as if the rooms had remained closed up to then. And he said to himself that Christine could not love this dwelling, since she had not shed over it the grace of her soul. Everything had remained there just as it was, in the same order in which the bride found it on entering on her wedding-day, in the same order left by the last of the wives of the house of Celaia.

George's unexpected visit delighted his sister, who was alone and preparing to put the child to bed.

"Oh! George, how good you are to have come!" she exclaimed, with an effusion of sincere joy, pressing him in her arms, and kissing his forehead; and this tenderness had the immediate effect of dilating her brother's depressed heart. "Look, Luchino, look; there's your uncle George. Have you nothing to say to him? Come, give him a kiss."

A feeble smile appeared upon the child's pale mouth; and as he had lowered his head, his long, blond eyelashes were lit up from above and threw their trembling shadow on his blanched cheeks.

George took him in his arms, unable to prevent a sensation of profound emotion in feeling beneath his hands the leanness of the child's chest, in which beat so debilitated a heart. And he was almost afraid, as if his slight pressure were sufficient to extinguish the pitiful little life. He felt both fear and pity, as he used to do in his boyhood when he held a little scared bird prisoner in his hand.

"Light as a feather!" he said.

The emotion which trembled in his voice did not escape Christine.

He seated the child on his knees, caressed his head, and asked him:

"Do you love me very much?"

His heart was filled with unusual tenderness. He felt a melancholy desire to see the poor, sickly child smile, to see his cheeks tinted at least once a fleeting rouge, to see a light effusion of blood beneath the diaphanous skin.

"What have you here?" he asked, seeing a finger wrapped up in linen.

"He cut himself the other day," said Christine, whose attentive eyes followed her brother's slightest gestures. "A slight cut, but it is obstinate in healing."

"Let me see, Luchino," said George, prompted by a painful curiosity, but smiling to call forth a smile. "I will cure it by blowing on it."

The child, surprised, permitted the bandage to be removed from his finger. Watched anxiously by his sister, George took infinite precautions in untying it. The end of the linen had adhered to the slight wound, and he had not the heart to detach it; but at the edge exposed to view he saw appear a whitish drop, resembling whey. His lips trembled. He raised his eyes; he saw that the face of his sister, intent on his every movement, had undergone a change and was contracted by grief. He felt that at that moment the poor woman's soul was wholly concentrated in that little hand.

"It is nothing," he said. And he forced a smile, as he breathed on the cut, to give the illusion to the child, who was waiting for the miracle. Then he rebound the finger with infinite care. He thought once more of the strange anguish which had seized him on the deserted staircase, of the chase after the dog, of the servant's words, of the questions which a superstitious fear had suggested to him, of all his baseless anxiety.

Noticing how absorbed he was, Christine said to him:

"What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing."

Then, all at once, without thinking, without having any other intention than to say something which would arouse the attention of the already sleepy child, he said:

"Do you know, I met a dog on the staircase."

The child opened wide his eyes.

"A dog which comes every night."

"Yes," said Christine, "Gian spoke to me about it."

But she stopped at the appearance of the dilated and terrified eyes of the child, who was on the point of bursting into sobs.

"No, no, Luchino; no, no, it's not true," she cried, lifting him from George's knees, and pressing him to her bosom. "No, it's not true. Your uncle said that for fun."

"It's not true, it's not true," repeated George, rising in consternation at these tears, which no other child would weep, for they seemed to ravage the poor creature.

"Come, come," said the mother in a coaxing tone; "Luchino's going to bed now, isn't he?"

She passed into the adjoining room, still caressing and rocking her weeping child.

"Come, too, George."

While she undressed the child, George watched her. She undressed him slowly, with infinite precautions, as if she were afraid to break him; and each of his gestures showed sadly the wretchedness of his slender limbs, which already began to show the deformities of an incurable rachitis. The neck was long and flexible, like a withered stem; the breastplate, the ribs, the shoulder-blades, almost visible through the skin, making a projection which the shadows cast in the hollowed parts accentuated even more strongly; the enlarged knees appeared to be knotted; the abdomen somewhat swollen, the navel projecting, rendering still more prominent the angular leanness of the hips. When the child raised its arms while the mother changed its chemise, George felt a painful pity, almost an anguish, on perceiving the fragile little arm-pits, which, in this simple act, appeared to express the difficulty of an effort required to overcome the deathly languor in which this feeble life was on

the point of being extinguished.

"Kiss him," said Christine to George. And she held the child out to him, before putting him beneath the bedclothes. Then she took the child's hands, carried that having the bandaged finger from the face to the chest, then from the left to the right shoulder, to make the sign of the cross; and then she joined them, saying: Amen.

In all this there was a funereal solemnness. The child, in his long white night-shirt, had already the appearance of a little corpse.

"Sleep, now; sleep, my love. We will stay near you."

The brother and sister, united once more in the same sorrow, sat down one on each side of his bed.

They spoke no more. The odor of the medicines heaped together on a table near the bed pervaded the room. A fly detached itself from the wall, flew with a loud buzz towards the flame of the lamp, and alighted on the coverlid. A piece of furniture creaked in the heavy silence.

"He is falling asleep," said George in a low voice.

Both were absorbed in the contemplation of the child's slumber, which suggested to both the image of death. A species of oppressive stupor dominated them, without their being able to distract their thoughts from the picture.

An indefinite time passed.

Suddenly the child gave a frightful cry, opened wide his eyes, raised himself on his pillow as if terrified by some horrible vision.

"Mamma! Mamma!"

"What is it, what is it, my love?"

"Mamma!"

"What is it, my love? I am here."

"Chase it away! Chase it away!"

CHAPTER VI.

At supper, at which Diego had abstained from showing himself, had not Camilla repeated the accusation in a veiled form when she said, "When the eyes do not see the heart does not suffer"? And, in his mother's words,—oh, how quickly his mother had forgotten the tears with which the conversation at the window had ended,—even in his mother's words, had the accusation not cropped up several times?

George thought, not without bitterness: "Everybody here judges me in the same way. In short, nobody forgives me either for my voluntary renunciation of my rights as the eldest, or for the inheritance left me by my uncle Demetrius. I ought to have stayed at home to look after the conduct of my father and my brother, to defend the domestic happiness! According to them, nothing would have happened if I had remained here. Consequently, I am the guilty one, and this is the expiation." The farther he advanced in the direction of the suburban villa to which the enemy had retired and towards which he had been pushed by extreme measures, by merciless cudgel blows, so to speak, the more he felt the weight of a kind of vexatious oppression, the indignation provoked by an unjust compulsion.

He was, in fact, in his own eyes the victim of cruel and implacable persons, who were unwilling to spare him any kind of torture. And the recollection of certain phrases uttered by his mother in the embrasure of the window on the day of the funeral, amid their joint tears, augmented his bitterness, soured his irony: "No, George, no! It is not for you to suffer! I ought to have said nothing. I shouldn't have told you. Don't cry any more. I can't bear to see you cry." And, nevertheless, since that day no kind of torture had been spared him. That little scene had not made any change in his mother's attitude towards him. The following day, and ever since, she had been just as angry and violent; she had insisted on his listening over and over again to old and new accusations, aggravated by a thousand odious particulars; she had morally forced him to count on her face, one by one, the marks of the suffering

endured; she had almost said to him: "See how my eyes are scorched by tears; how deep my wrinkles have become; how white my hair has grown at the temples And what would it be could I show you my heart?" What had been the good, therefore, of the grief of the other day? Was it necessary for his mother to see burning tears shed to be moved to pity? Then she did not appreciate the cruelty of the pain she inflicted uselessly on her son? "Oh, how rare on earth are those beings who know how to suffer in silence and accept the sacrifice with a smile!" Still disturbed and exasperated by the recent excesses of which he had been an involuntary witness, already pervaded by the horror of the decisive act which he was preparing to accomplish, he had thus come to despise his mother to the point of complaining that she did not know how to suffer with sufficient perfection.

The farther he advanced on his way (he had not wished to take the carriage, and had started on foot, so as to be free to lengthen at his will the time of the journey, and perhaps, also, to have the possibility, at the last moment, of retracing his steps, or to lose himself on the country roads)—the farther he advanced, he felt grow that indomitable horror; so much so, that finally it surmounted every other sentiment and masked every other thought. The one image of his father occupied his mind, and with the relief of an actual figure. And he began to imagine the scene which would take place soon—he studied the countenance which he would assume, prepared his first sentences, lost himself in improbable hypotheses, explored the most distant memories of his childhood and adolescence, tried to represent the successive attitudes of his soul towards his father during the successive periods of his past life. He thought: "Perhaps I have never loved him." And, in fact, in not one of his clearest recollections did he find a spontaneous movement of confidence, or a warm effusion of tenderness, or an intimate and agreeable emotion. What he did find, in the memories of his early childhood, was a continual fear which oppressed all affection—the fear of corporal punishment, of cross words followed by blows. "I have never loved him." Demetrius had been his real father; he was his sole and only

parent.

And he appeared to his mind, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile melancholy, and a single white curl in the centre of his forehead among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

As always, the image of the dead man solaced him immediately and banished from his mind the things which had just preoccupied him. His uneasiness became composed, his bitterness disappeared, and his repugnance gave place to a new sensation of tranquil security. What had he to fear? Why did his imagination exaggerate so childishly the suffering which awaited him and which henceforth was inevitable? And once more he had the intimate consciousness that he had radically transported himself from his present life, from the present state of his being, from the contingencies which had most troubled him. Once more, under the influence that his uncle exercised on him from the depth of his tomb, he felt himself enveloped by a sort of isolating atmosphere, and lost the precise notion of what had occurred and what was still going to occur; the real events seemed to be divested of all significance as far as he was concerned, and to have but a momentary importance. It was like the resignation of a man whom fatality obliged to submit to a trial in order to attain the future deliverance of which his soul had already had the prevision and certitude. This interruption of internal care, this singular respite which he had obtained without effort and which did not surprise him, permitted his eyes to be opened finally to the spectacle of the solitary and magnificent landscape. The attention he gave to it was calm and serene. In the aspect of the country he believed he recognized a symbol of his own sentiments and a visible imprint of his thoughts.

It was the afternoon. A clear and liquid sky bathed all the terrestrial objects in its own color, and appeared to subtilize all matter by an infinitely slow penetration. The various forms of vegetation, distinct close by, became effaced in the distance, lost by degrees their contours, appeared to evaporate at the top, tended to become combined

into a single form, immense and confused, which a single rhythmic respiration would animate. Little by little, beneath a deluge of azure, the hills became equal in size, and the depths of the valley took on the appearance of a peaceful gulf which reflected the sky. From this united gulf the isolated mass of the mountain soared up, opposing to the liquid space the immovable solidity of its ridges, which the whiteness of the snows illumined with an almost supernatural light.

CHAPTER VII.

At last the villa appeared, between the trees, close by, with its two broad lateral terraces provided with balustrades supported by little stone pilasters, and ornamented with terra-cotta vases in the shape of busts representing kings and queens upon whose heads the sharp points of the aloes formed living crowns.

The view of these coarse reddish figures, several of which stood out clearly outlined against the luminous azure, suddenly awakened in George new memories of his distant childhood, confused recollections of rural recreations, of sports, of races, of romances imagined concerning these motionless and deaf kings, in whose hearts of clay the tenacious plants had fastened their roots. He even recalled that he had long had a predilection for a queen whose thick and long hair was formed by the hanging foliage of a fertile plant, which, in Spring, dotted it with innumerable golden flowerets. He looked for her with curiosity, while in his mind he multiplied the images of the obscure and intense life with which his childish phantasy had animated her. As he recognized her on a corner pilaster, he smiled as if he had recognized a friend; and, for several seconds, all his soul inclined towards the irrevocable past with an agitation which was not without sweetness. Thanks to the final resolution which had assumed shape in him since his unexpected calmness in the midst of the pale green and silent country, he found now in his sensations a forgotten savor, and took pleasure in tracing, to its most remote sinuosities, the course of his own existence, so close, thenceforth, to the end determined upon. This

curiosity for the manifestations, even the most fugitive, that his being had dispersed in the past, this agitated sympathy for the things with which he had formerly been in affinity, tended to change into a languishing, tearful, and almost feminine tenderness. But, when he heard voices near the railing, he shook off this languor; and when he perceived an open window at which the cage of a canary-bird hung between the white curtains, he came back to the sentiment of the present reality, and felt anew his previous anguish. The surroundings were calm, and one could distinctly hear the singing of the imprisoned bird.

"My visit is unexpected," he said to himself, his heart sinking. "If that woman should be with him?" Near the railing he saw the children playing in the sand; and, without having time to observe them, he guessed they were his adulterine brothers, the sons of the concubine. He advanced; and the two children turned round, began to gaze at him with astonishment, but without intimidation. Healthy, robust, flourishing, with cheeks crimson with health, they bore the manifest imprint of their origin. The sight of them upset him; an irresistible terror assailed him; he had the idea of hiding himself, to turn back, to flee; and he raised his eyes to the window, with the fear of perceiving between the curtains the face of his father or that of the odious woman of whose perfidies, covetousness, turpitudes, he had so often been told.

"Ah, you here, sir?"

It was the voice of a domestic, who came to meet him. At the same time his father cried to him from the window:

"Is that you, George? What a surprise!"

He resummoned his courage, composed his face into a smile, and tried to assume an air of unconcern. He had felt that already, between his father and himself, had just been reëstablished those artificial relations, almost ceremonious in form, which they had used for several years towards one another in order to hide their embarrassment

when they found themselves in immediate and inevitable contact. And he had felt, besides, that his will had just totally left him, and that he would never be capable to expose frankly the true motive of his unexpected visit.

"Aren't you coming up?" said his father to him, from the window.

"Yes, I am coming up."

He would have liked to make believe that he had not noticed the two children. He started to go up by the open-air stairway leading to one of the large terraces. His father came to meet him. They embraced. There always was in his father's manner a manifest ostentation of affection.

"So you finally decided to come?"

"I wanted a walk, and it landed me here. I have not seen the place for so long! It's just as it always was, it seems."

His eyes wandered over the asphalt-covered terrace; he examined the busts, one after the other, with more curiosity than was natural.

"You're almost always here now, aren't you?" he said, in order to say something, to escape the embarrassing intervals of silence which he foresaw would grow longer and more frequent.

"Yes; I come here often now, and stay here," replied his father, with a shade of sadness in his voice which surprised his son. "I believe the air does me good—since my heart began to trouble me."

"Is your heart affected?" cried George, turning towards him with sincere emotion, struck by the unexpectedness of the news. "How? Since when? I never knew anything of it—nobody has ever breathed a word of it to me."

He looked now at his father's face, in the strong light shed by the sun's oblique rays and reflected by the wall, and fancied he could detect the symptoms of the mortal malady. And it was with sympathetic compassion that he remarked the deep

wrinkles, the swollen, worried-looking eyes, the white hairs that bristled on the unshaven cheeks and chin, his mustache and hair to which the dye gave an indefinite color between a greenish and a violet, the thick lips through which the respiration came like the gasping of asthma, the short neck which appeared to be colored by an extravasation of blood.

"Since when?" he repeated, without concealing his anxiety.

And he felt his repugnance to this man diminish as a rapid succession of images, clear almost as the reality might be, represented him beneath the menace of death, disfigured by the death agony.

"Does one ever know when it begins?" answered his father, who, in the presence of his son's sincere emotion, exaggerated his suffering in order to sustain and increase a pity by which he might succeed perhaps in profiting. "Can one ever tell when it begins? These kind of maladies breed for years; and then, one fine day, suddenly make their presence felt. Then there is no remedy. One must be resigned, await the end from one minute to another——"

Speaking in this strain, in a changed voice, he seemed to lose his hardness and massive brutality, to become older, more feeble, more of a physical and moral wreck. It was like a sudden dissolution of his entire person, yet with an artificiality, exaggeration, and theatricalism which did not escape George's perspicacity. And the young man thought instantly of those comedians who, on the stage, have the facility of instantly undergoing a metamorphosis, as they take off and replace a mask. He had even a sudden intuition of what was about to follow. Without doubt, his father had divined the motive of this unexpected visit; and now he sought to obtain some useful effect by the exhibition of his malady. Doubtless, too, he purposed to attain some definite object. What was that object? George felt no indignation, no internal anger; he made no preparation, either, to defend himself against the ambush which he foresaw with such certitude; on the contrary, his inertia increased in proportion to

his lucidity. And he waited for the comedy to follow its course, ready to accept all that might happen, sad and resigned.

"Will you come in?" said his father.

"If you like."

"Very well. Let us go in. I have some papers I wish to show you."

The father passed in first, directing his steps towards the room the open window of which shed over the entire villa the singing of the canary-bird. George followed him, without looking around. He perceived that his father had also changed his walk, so as to simulate fatigue; and it gave him a poignant chagrin to think of the degrading impostures of which he would soon be the spectator and the victim. He felt in the house the presence of the concubine; he was sure that she was hidden in some room, that she was listening, that she was spying. He thought: "What papers is he going to show me? What does he expect to get from me? He doubtless wants money. He is taking advantage of the opportunity." And he thought he could still hear certain of his mother's invectives; he recalled certain and almost unbelievable particularities which he had learned from her. "What shall I do? What shall I say?"

The canary in its cage sang in a limpid and strong voice, varying its modulations; and the white curtains puffed out like two sails, permitting a view of the distant azure. The breeze disturbed some of the papers that littered the table; and on this table George perceived, in a crystal disk which served as a paper-weight, a licentious vignette.

"What a bad day I have had to-day," murmured his father, who, affecting to be tormented by palpitation of the heart, dropped heavily into a chair, half-closed his eyelids, and began to breathe like an asthmatic.

"Are you suffering?" said George, almost timidly, not knowing if the suffering were real or simulated, nor what face he should put upon the matter.

"Yes—but it will pass in a moment. As soon as I have the slightest excitement, the

least anxiety, I feel worse. I need quiet and rest. And, on the contrary——"

He began again to speak in that mournful, complaining tone which, owing to a vague resemblance in accent, awoke in George the recollection of his aunt Joconda, the poor idiot, when she tried to excite his pity in order to get sweetmeats. The feint was now so evident, so vulgar, so ignoble, and, in spite of all, there was so much human misery in the condition of this man, reduced to such base means to satisfy his implacable vice, there was so much true suffering in the expression of his lying face, that it appeared to George that not one of the sorrows of his past life was comparable with the horrible anguish of that present moment.

"On the contrary?" he echoed, to encourage his father to continue, as if to hasten the end of his own torture.

"On the contrary, for some time everything has been going from bad to worse, and catastrophes succeed one another without cease. I have had considerable losses. Three bad consecutive years, the failure of the vines, the devastated flocks, the rents reduced by half, the taxes increased in enormous proportions— Look here. Here are the papers I wished to show you."

And he took from the table a bundle of papers, spread them out before his son's eyes, began to explain confusedly a number of very involved business matters relative to unpaid landed taxes which had accumulated during several months. It was absolutely necessary that he make a settlement at once, in order to avoid incalculable injury. Their effects had already been attached, and at any moment the bills of sale might be posted. What could be done to remove the momentary embarrassment in which he found himself without any fault of his own? The amount involved was considerable. What could be done?

George was silent, his eyes fixed on the papers which his father was turning over in his puffed-up, almost monstrous hand, with its visible pores, and white with a pallor that made a singular contrast with his sanguine face. At intervals he lost the sound of

the words; but in his ear still sounded the monotony of that voice in contrast with the shrill singing of the canary and the intermittent cries which rose from the path where the two little bastards were still doubtless playing in the sand. The curtains stirred in the windows when an unusually strong breeze swelled their folds. And all these voices, all these sounds, bore an inexpressible expression of sadness for the silent visitor, who regarded with a sort of stupor these bailiffs' wits over which passed that swollen, pale hand, with its small, apparent scars left by blood-letting. An image surged through his memory, a strangely distinct remembrance of his childhood: his father was near a window, his face grave, his shirt-sleeve rolled up on one arm, which he held plunged in a basin of water; and the water was reddened by the flow of blood from the open vein; and by his side stood the surgeon, watching the flow of blood and holding the bandages ready for the ligature. One image recalled another. He saw the bright lances in the green leather case; he saw his mother carrying from the room a basin full of blood; he saw the hand held in a sling by a black ribbon which was crossed on his fleshy, soft back, sinking into it a little. Noticing his pensiveness, his father asked him:

"Are you listening to me?"

"Yes, I am listening."

At that moment, the father perhaps expected a spontaneous offer. Disappointed, he made a slight pause; then, surmounting his embarrassment, said:

"Bartolomeo could save me if he gave me the amount."

He hesitated, and his physiognomy took on an indefinable expression in which the son believed he recognized the last symptom of a modesty vanquished by the almost desperate necessity of attaining his object.

"He would give me this sum for a note, but—I believe he would require your signature."

At last the trap was sprung.

"Ah! my signature," stammered George, embarrassed, not at the demand, but at the odious name of this brother-in-law, whom the maternal accusations had already presented to him as a bird of ill omen, eager to prey upon the remains of the house of the Aurispas.

And as he remained perplexed and gloomy, without saying anything, the father, fearing a refusal, laid aside all reserve, and had recourse to supplications.

That was the only way now to avoid a disastrous judicial sale which would certainly determine all his other creditors to swoop down on him. Disaster would be inevitable. Did his son wish to be a witness of his ruin? Or, did he not understand that, by interposing in this instance, he would act for his own interest and protect a heritage which was soon to come to his brother and himself?

"Oh! It won't be so long; it will come from one day to the other, perhaps to-morrow!"

And he began again to speak of his incurable malady, of the continual peril that threatened him, of his worries and troubles that were hastening the hour of his death.

At the end of his strength, unable to stand longer that voice and this scene, yet restrained nevertheless by the thought of his other executioners—those who had forced him to this place and who now awaited him to demand an account of his mission—George stammered:

"But will you really use this money for the purpose you have stated?"

"So! you too, you too!" cried his father, who, beneath an apparent explosion of sorrow, repressed clumsily one of his violent fits. "So they have been telling you, too, what is always being gossiped about everywhere—that I am a monster, that I have committed every crime, that I am capable of every infamy. And you have believed it, too! Why, why do they hate me to this extent, in that house yonder? Why do they desire my death? Oh! you don't know how much your mother hates me! If you went back to her now and told her that you had left me in my death

agony, she would kiss you and say, 'God be praised!' Oh! you don't know."

In the brutality of his tone, in the peculiar expression of his mouth, which added bitterness to his words, in the vehement respiration which dilated his nostrils, in the irritated redness of his eyes, the real man was exposed in spite of himself; and against this man the son felt a new impulse of his primitive aversion, an impulse so sudden and so impetuous that, without reflecting, by a desire to appease his father and to be freed from him, he interrupted him, saying in a convulsed voice:

"No, no; I know nothing. Tell me, what must I do? Where must I sign?"

And he arose dismayed, approached the window, returned to his father. He saw him seek something in a drawer, with a species of nervous impatience; he saw him lay on the table a promissory note not yet made out.

"Here. Place your signature here; that will do——"

And with his enormous index, whose flat nail sank into the folds of flesh, he pointed to the place for the signature.

Without sitting down, without having a clear consciousness of what he was doing, George took a pen and signed rapidly. He would have liked to be already free and away from that room, to run in the open air, to go far away, to be alone. But when he saw his father take the note examine the signature, dry it by sprinkling it with a pinch of sand, then replace it and lock the drawer; when he remarked in everyone of these acts the ignoble joy, badly dissimulated, of a man who had succeeded in an evil purpose; when, in his soul, he felt the certitude that he had permitted himself to be duped into a shameful fraud, when he thought of the interrogations that awaited him in the other house-then the useless regret for his act upset him so, that he was on the point of giving play to his extreme indication, and to finally revolt with all his power against the scoundrel, in defence of himself, his family, and of the violated rights of his mother and sister. "Ah! it was true, then—all that his mother had told him was true! This man had not a shadow of shame, not a trace of self-respect. He

recoiled from nothing and before nobody when it was a question of getting money." And he felt once more the presence of the concubine, of the rapacious, insatiable woman who was certainly hidden in an adjoining room, eavesdropping, spying, waiting for her share of the plunder.

Without succeeding in repressing the tremor that shook him, he said:

"You promise that this money will not be used—for any other purpose?"

"Why, yes; of course," replied his father, allowing his son to see now how much this insistance annoyed him, and who had manifestly changed countenance since it was no longer necessary for him to beg and feign in order to obtain.

"Take care! I shall know," added George, who had become very pale, and in a choking voice betraying an effort to restrain the outburst of indignation which increased in proportion as the man appeared more truly in his odious aspect, in proportion as the consequences of the precipitate step that he had taken became more clearly defined. "Take care! I do not wish to become your accomplice against my mother."

Affecting to be hurt by this suspicion, suddenly raising his voice as if to intimidate his son, who was undergoing torture while compelling himself to look him in the face, the father roared:

"What do you mean to insinuate? When will that viper of a mother of yours cease spitting her venom? When will she finish? Does she want me to close her mouth forever? Very well! I'll do it one of these days. Ah! what a woman! For fifteen years, yes, fifteen years, she has not given me one minute's peace. She has poisoned my life, she is killing me by slow fire. If I am ruined, it is her fault. Do you understand? It is her fault!"

"Be silent!" cried George, beside himself, unrecognizable, pale as death, trembling in all his limbs, seized by a fury like that which he had already felt against Diego. "Be silent! Do not speak her name! You are not worthy to kiss her feet. I came here

to speak to you of her. I allowed myself to be played upon by your comedy. I permitted myself to be caught in a trap. What you wanted was a present for your ribald companion, and you succeeded. Oh! what shame! And you have the heart to insult my mother!"

His voice failed him; he choked; a veil covered his eyes; his knees shook beneath him as if all his strength was about to abandon him.

"Now, good-by! I am going. Act as you like. I am your son no longer. I never want to see you or know anything of you. I will take my mother away; I will take her away with me to some distant place. Farewell!"

He went out tottering, a shadow before his eyes. As he passed through the rooms to reach the terrace, he heard the frou-frou of skirts, and a door which closed, as if behind someone retiring in haste, in order not to be surprised.

As soon as he was in the open air, outside the railings, he felt a mad desire to weep, to cry, to run across the fields, to knock his head against a rock, to seek a precipice where all would end. His nerves trembled painfully in his head, and caused him cruel twinges as if they were being broken one after the other. And he thought, with a terror that the dying day rendered more atrocious: "Where shall I go? Shall I go back there this evening?" The house seemed to him to be moved back an infinite distance; the length of the road appeared impossible to traverse; all that was not immediate and absolute cessation of his frightful torture seemed to him inadmissible.

CHAPTER VIII.

The following morning, when he opened his eyes after a very restless night, the events of the previous evening seemed but a confused memory. The tragic deepening of the twilight on the silent country; the grave sound of the Angelus, which, prolonged in his ears by a hallucination of hearing, had seemed endless; the anguish which had come over him on approaching the house, at the sight of the

lighted windows crossed at intervals by shadows; the feverish excitement which had seized him when, pressed with questions by his mother and sister, he had related the interview, exaggerating the violence of the invectives and the atrocity of the altercation; the almost delirious desire to keep on speaking, to add to the recital of the real facts the incoherence of his imagination; the ejaculations of contempt or of tenderness with which his mother had interrupted him, as he went on describing the brute's attitude and his own energy in reproaching him; then the sudden hoarseness, the rapid exasperation of the pain which hammered his temples, the spasmodic efforts at a bitter and non-coercible vomiting, the severe cold which had chilled him in bed, the horrible dreams which had caused him to start while in the first torpor of his enfeebled nerves—all this came back confusedly to his memory, augmented his painful physical stupor, from which, however, he would not have been willing to emerge but to enter into a state of complete extinction, into the insensibility of a corpse.

The necessity of death was still suspended over him with the same imminence; but it was unendurable for him to think that, in order to put his design into execution, he would have to shake off his inertia, accomplish a series of fatiguing acts, conquer the physical repugnance which discouraged him from all effort. Where could he kill himself? How? At the house? That same day? With a firearm? With poison? His mind had not yet conceived the precise and definite idea. Even the torpor that paralyzed him, and the bitterness of his mouth, suggested to him the idea of a narcotic. And, vaguely, without stopping to seek a practical means by which he could procure an efficacious dose, he imagined its effect. Little by little the images multiplied, became particularized, became more distinct; and their association formed a visible scene. What he tried to imagine was, not so much the sensations of his slow death-agony, as the circumstances which would lead to his mother, sister, and brother learning of the catastrophe. He tried to imagine the manifestations of their sorrow, their attitudes, their words, their gestures. Still following the same idea,

his curious attention extended to all the survivors, not only his immediate relatives but to the entire family, to his friends, to Hippolyte, the far-distant Hippolyte, so distant that she had almost become as a stranger to him.

"George!"

It was the voice of his mother, who was knocking at the door.

"Is it you, mother? Come in."

She entered, approached the bed with affectionate eagerness, leaned over him, placed a hand on his forehead, and asked:

"How do you feel? Any better?"

"A little. I'm still dizzy—I have a bitter taste in my mouth. I should like a drink."

"Camille is going to bring you up a cup of milk. Shall I open the windows more?"

"Just as you like, mother."

His voice was changed. His mother's presence aroused in him that sentiment of pity for himself which had given birth to the imaginary picture of funereal regrets, the time for which he believed was close at hand. In his mind, the actuality of his mother opening the windows became identified with the imaginary action which would bring about the terrible discovery; and his eyes grew moist with commiseration for himself and for the poor woman whom he destined to receive such a cruel blow; and the tragic scene appeared before him with all the distinctness of a thing actually seen: his mother, a little frightened, turns round in the light, calls him again by name; trembling, she approaches the bed, touches him, shakes him, finds his body inert, cold, rigid; and then she falls, fainting, prostrate over his corpse. "Perhaps dead. Such a shock might kill her." And his anxiety increased; and the moment seemed solemn to him, like all that is final; and his mother's appearance, actions, and words assumed in his eyes such an unusual signification and value that he followed them with almost anxious attention. Drawn suddenly from his spiritual

torpor, he had just recovered an extraordinarily active consciousness of life. There reappeared in him a well-known phenomenon, the singularity of which had often attracted his attention. It was an instantaneous passage from one state of consciousness to another; between the new state and the anterior state there was the same difference as exists between waking and slumber, and that recalled to his mind the sudden change produced in the theatre when the footlights are unexpectedly turned up and project their strongest light.

So, as on the day of the funeral, the son gazed on his mother with eyes that were no longer the same, and saw her as he had seen her then, with strange lucidity. He felt that this woman's life was brought closer to, became connected with as if adherent to, his own life; he felt the mysterious relation of the blood, and the affliction of the fate which menaced them both. And when his mother came close to him again and sat down by his bedside, he raised himself a little on his pillow, took one of her hands, tried to dissimulate his agitation by a smile. Under the pretext of looking at the cameo of a ring, he examined the long and thin hand, to which each particularity imparted an extraordinary expression of life and whose contact caused him a sensation resembling no other. His soul still enveloped in the gloomy images recently evoked, he thought: "When I am dead, when she touches me, when she feels the icy—" And he shuddered as he remembered his own aversion to touching a corpse.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother.

"Nothing—a little nervous, that's all."

"Oh! you are not well," she went on, shaking her head. "Where do you feel ill?"

"Nowhere, mother. I am naturally a little upset."

But the unnatural and convulsive look in her son's face did not escape the maternal eye.

"How sorry I am that I sent you there! How wrong it was of me to send you."

"No, mother. Why? It was necessary, sooner or later."

And all at once, without the slightest confusion henceforth, he relived the frightful hour; he saw once more his father's gestures, heard once more his voice; he heard again his own voice, that voice so changed, which, contrary to all expectation, had uttered such grave words. It seemed to him he was a stranger to that action and these uttered words; and nevertheless, at the bottom of his soul, he felt a sort of obscure remorse; he felt something akin to an instinctive consciousness of having passed beyond bounds, of having committed an irreparable transgression, of having trampled under foot something human and sacred. Why had he departed with such violence from the great, calm resignation with which the funereal image of Demetrius had inspired him, when it had appeared to him in the midst of the silent country? Why had he not persisted in considering with the same painful and clairvoyant pity the baseness and ignominy of that man upon whom, as upon all other men, weighed an invincible destiny? And he himself, he who carried that blood in his veins, did he not also bear, perhaps, at the bottom of his substance, all the latent germs of those abominable vices? If he continued to live, did not he, too, risk falling into a similar abjection? And then, all the cholers, all the hates, all the violences, all the punishments, appeared to him to be unjust and useless. Life was a heavy fermentation of impure matters. He believed he felt that in his substance he had a thousand forces, occult, unrecognizable, and indestructible, whose progressive and fatal evolution had made up his existence up to then, and would make up his future existence, if it had not happened precisely that his will had to obey one of these forces that now imposed on him the supreme action. "In short, why regret what I did yesterday? Could I have prevented myself from doing it?"

"It was necessary," he repeated, with a new signification, as if speaking to himself.

And he sat a spectator, lucid and attentive, at the unrolling of the little of the life that remained for him to live.

CHAPTER IX.

When his mother and sister had left him alone, he stayed in bed a few moments longer, through a physical repugnance to do anything whatever. It seemed to him that, to rise, he would have to make an enormous effort. It seemed to him too fatiguing to leave that horizontal position in which, in one hour perhaps, he was going to find eternal repose. And, once more, he thought of a narcotic. "Close the eyes and wait for sleep!" The virginal light of that May morning, the azure reflected in the window-panes, the beam of sunlight that streamed on the floor, the voices and murmurs that arose from the street, all those living signs that seemed to rise above the balcony and reach as far as him and reconquer him, all inspired him with a kind of fright mixed with rancor. And he saw again, in his mind, the image of his mother going through the gesture of opening the window. He saw Camille once more at the foot of the bed; he reheard the words of both, always relating to the same man. What he most clearly remembered was a cruel exclamation, uttered by his mother, with lips overflowing with bitterness; and with it he associated the vision of the paternal features, those features on which he believed he had discovered, over there, on the terrace, in the strong light reflected by the whiteness of the wall, the symptoms of a mortal malady. In front of Camille and himself, his mother had said passionately: "If that were only true! Heaven grant it is true!" So that, then, was the last impression left in his heart, on the eve of his departure from the world, by the creature who was formerly in his house the source of every tenderness!

An energetic impulse suddenly came over him; he threw himself from his bed, definitely resolved to act. "It will be done before evening. Where shall I do it?" He thought of Demetrius's closed rooms. He had not yet a definite plan; but he felt morally certain that, during the hours that still remained to run, the means would be spontaneously offered, by a sudden suggestion which he would be forced to obey.

While he proceeded to make his toilet, the preoccupation haunted him to prepare his

body for the tomb. He, too, had that species of funereal vanity that has been remarked in certain criminals condemned to death, and in suicides. He rendered this sentiment more intense on observing it in himself. And a regret came over him at having to die in this little, obscure town, at the bottom of that wild province, far from his friends, who for a long time, perhaps, would be ignorant of his death. If, on the contrary, the act were done in Rome, in the great city where he was well known, his friends would have grieved for him; they would, doubtless, have given to the tragic mystery the adornment of poetry. And, once more, he tried to picture what would follow his death—his attitude on the bed, in the chamber of his amours; the profound emotion of the youthful souls, the fraternal souls, at the sight of the corpse reposing in austere peace; the dialogues at the funereal vigil, by the light of the candles; the coffin covered with wreaths, followed by a crowd of young and silent men; the words of farewell pronounced by a poet, Stefano Gondi: "He died because he could not make his life correspond to his dreams." And then Hippolyte's sorrow, despair, and loss of reason.

Hippolyte! Where was she? What were her thoughts? What was she doing?

"No," he thought, "my presentiment does not deceive me." And he saw again, in imagination, his mistress's gesture as she lowered her black veil after the last kiss; and he went over in his mind the little final points. Yet there was one thing he could not explain, and that was the almost absolute acquiescence of his soul at the necessary and definite renunciation which dispossessed him of this woman, only lately the object of so many dreams and of so much adoration. Why, after the fever and anguish of the first days, had hope abandoned him little by little? Why had he fallen into the melancholy certainty that all effort would be useless to resuscitate that dead and incredibly distant thing, their love? Why had all that past been so entirely separated from him that during these last days, beneath the shock of recent tortures, he had barely felt a few vibrations reverberate clearly in his conscience?

Hippolyte! Where was she? What were her feelings? What was she doing? On what sights were her eyes resting? From what words, from what contacts, did she suffer uneasiness? What could have happened, that, for two weeks, she had not found the means to send him news less vague and brief than four or five telegrams sent from always different places?

"Perhaps she is already giving way to desire for another man. That brother-in-law of whom she was continually speaking—" And the frightful thought aroused by the old habit of suspicion and accusation suddenly mastered him, overwhelmed him as in the gloomiest hours of his past life. A tumult of bitter recollections arose in him. Leaning on the same balcony where, the first evening, amidst the perfume of the bergamots, in the anguish of first regrets, he had invoked the name of the loved one, he relived in one second the miseries of two years. And it seemed to him that, in the splendor of this May morning, it was the recent happiness of the unknown rival that blossomed, and was diffused as far as where he stood.

CHAPTER X.

As if to initiate himself in the profound mystery into which he was about to enter, George desired to see once more the deserted apartment where Demetrius had passed the last days of his life.

In willing all his fortune to his nephew, Demetrius had also willed him this apartment. George had kept the rooms intact, with pious care, as one guards a reliquary. The rooms were situated on the upper floor, and looked south over the garden.

He took the key and went upstairs, treading cautiously, to avoid being questioned. But, as he traversed the corridor, he was necessarily obliged to pass by his Aunt Joconda's door. Hoping to pass unnoticed, he walked softly, on tip-toe, holding his breath. He heard the old woman cough; he made a few quicker strides, believing that the noise of the cough would cover the sounds of his footsteps.

"Who's there?" demanded a hoarse voice from within.

"It is I, Aunt Joconda."

"Ah! It's you, George? Come in, come in——"

She appeared upon the threshold, with her ugly, yellowish face, which, in the shadow, was almost cadaveric; and she glanced at her nephew's hands before looking at his face, as if to see first if his hands had brought something.

"I am going in the next apartment," said George, repelled by the ignoble bodily odor, which filled him with disgust. "I must air the rooms a little."

And he resumed his steps in the corridor, until he came to the other door. But, as he turned the key, he heard behind him the limping of the old woman.

George felt his heart sink, as he thought that perhaps he would not find a way to disembarrass himself of her, that perhaps he would be obliged to listen to her stammering voice amid the almost religious silence of these rooms, with their beloved yet terrible souvenirs. Without saying anything, without turning round, he opened the door and entered.

The first room was dark, the air somewhat warm and suffocating, impregnated with that singular odor peculiar to old libraries. A streak of faint light showed where the window was. Before opening the shutters, George hesitated; he strained his ear to hear the gnawing of the wood-ticks. Aunt Joconda began to cough, invisible in the darkness. Then, feeling on the window to find the iron catch, he felt a slight thrill, a fugitive fear. He opened it, and turned round; he saw the vague shapes of the furniture in the greenish penumbra produced by the shutters; he saw the old woman in the middle of the room, one side distorted, swaying her flaccid body to and fro, chewing something. He pushed back the shutters, which creaked on their hinges. A flood of sunlight inundated the interior. The discolored curtains fluttered.

At first he was undecided: the presence of the old woman prevented him from abandoning himself to his feelings. His irritation increased to such a degree that he

did not speak a single word to her, fearing that his voice would only be cross and angry. He passed into the adjoining room and opened the window. The light spread everywhere, and the curtains fluttered. He passed into the third room and opened the window. The light spread everywhere, and the curtains fluttered. He went no farther. The next room, in the angle, was the bedroom. He wished to enter it alone. He heard, with nausea, the limping gait of the unfortunate old woman rejoining him. He took a chair and relapsed into an obstinate silence, waiting.

The old woman crossed the threshold slowly. Seeing George seated, and not speaking, she was perplexed. She did not know what to say. The fresh air that blew in from the window unquestionably irritated her catarrh; and she began to cough again, standing in the middle of the room. At every spell her body seemed to swell and then to subside, like the bag of a bagpipe beneath an intermittent breath. She held her hands on her breast—fat hands, like tallow, with nails bordered with black. And in her mouth, between the toothless gums, her whitish tongue quivered.

As soon as her fit of coughing was over, she drew from her pocket a dirty paper bag, and took out a pastille. Still standing, she chewed, staring at George in a stupid manner.

Her gaze wandered from George towards the closed door of the fourth room. And the old woman made the sign of the cross, then went and sat down on the seat nearest to George. Her hands on her abdomen, and the eyelids lowered, she recited a Requiem.

"She is praying for her brother," thought George; "for the soul of the damned." It seemed inconceivable to him that this woman should be the sister of Demetrius Aurispa! How could the proud and generous blood which had soaked the bed in the adjoining room, the blood sprung from a brain already corroded by the highest cares of the intelligence, have come from the same source as that which coursed, so impoverished, in the veins of this peevish and disgusting old woman? "With her, it

is greediness—the greediness which regrets the liberality of the donor. How strange, this prayer of gratitude from an old, dilapidated stomach towards the most noble of suicides! How odd life is!"

All at once, Aunt Joconda began to cough again.

"You had better go from here, aunt; it isn't good for you," said George, who no longer had the strength to master his impatience. "The air here is bad for your cough. You had better go, really. Come, I will see you back to your room."

Aunt Joconda looked at him, surprised at his abrupt speech and unusual tone. She rose, and went limping through the rooms. When she reached the corridor, she again made the sign of the cross, as if muttering an exorcism. When she had gone, George closed the door, and gave the key a double turn. At last, he was alone and free, with an invisible companion.

He remained motionless for a few moments, as if under magnetic influence. And he felt his whole being invaded by the supernatural fascination which that man, existing without life, exercised over him from the bottom of the tomb.

And he reappeared to his mind, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile melancholy, and with a single white curl in the centre of his forehead, among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

"For me," thought George, "he exists. Since the day of his corporeal death I have felt his presence every minute. Never so much as since his death have I felt our consanguinity. Never so much as since his death have I had the perception of the intensity of his being. All that he consumed in contact with his fellow-creatures; every action, every gesture, every word that he has sown in the course of time; every diverse manifestation which determined the special character of his being in relation with other beings; every characteristic, fixed or variable, which distinguished his personality from other personalities and made of him a man apart in the human multitude; in short, all that which differentiated his own life from other lives—all

now seems to me to be collected, concentrated, circumscribed in the unique and ideal tie that binds him to me. He does not exist for anyone but me alone; he is freed from all other contact, he is in communication with me alone. He exists, purer and more intense than ever."

He took a few steps, slowly. The heavy silence was disturbed at moments by little, mysterious noises, scarcely perceptible. The fresh air, the warmth of the day, contracted the fibres of the benumbed furniture, accustomed to the obscurity of the closed windows. The breath of heaven penetrated the pores of the wood, shook the particles of dust, swelled the folds of the hangings. In a ray of sunlight, myriads of atoms whirled about. The odor of the books was overcome gradually by the perfume of the flowers.

The things suggested to the survivor a crowd of recollections. From these things arose a light and murmuring chorus which enveloped him. From every side arose the emanations of the past. One would have said that the things emitted the odors of a spiritual substance which had impregnated them. "Do I exalt myself?" he asked himself, at the aspect of the images that succeeded one another in his mind with prodigious rapidity, clear as visions, not obscured by a funereal shadow, but living a superior life. And he remained perplexed, fascinated by the mystery, seized by a terrible anguish at the moment of venturing on the confines of that unknown world.

The curtains, which a rhythmic breath seemed to swell, undulated softly, giving glimpses of a noble and calm landscape. The slight noises made by the wainscoting, the papers, and the partitions continued. In the third room, severe and simple, the recollections were musical, and came from mute instruments. On a long, violet-wood piano, whose varnished surface reflected things like a mirror, a violin reposed in its box. On a chair a page of music rose and fell at the pleasure of the breeze, and almost in time with the curtains.

George picked it up. It was a page from a Mendelssohn motet: DOMENICA II

POST PASCHA: Andante quasi allegretto. Surrexit pastor bonus— Farther on, on a table, there was a heap of parts for the violin and piano, Leipzig editions: Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, Rode, Tartini, Viotti. George opened the case, examined the fragile instrument that slept on olive-colored velvet, with its four strings still intact. A curiosity seized him to awaken them. He touched the treble string, which gave a plaintive moan that vibrated through the entire body. It was a violin made by Andrea Guarneri, dated 1680.

Demetrius reappeared, tall and slender, a little bent, his neck long and pale, his hair brushed back, and with the single white lock in the centre of his forehead. He held the violin. He passed one hand through his hair on the temple, near the ear, with his usual gesture. He tuned the instrument, rosined the bow, then attacked the sonata. His left hand, shrivelled and proud, ran up and down the neck; the tips of his thin fingers pressed the strings, and, beneath the skin, the play of his muscles was so visible as to be painful; his right hand, when drawing the bow, moved with a long, faultless motion. Sometimes he held the instrument tighter with his chin, his head inclined, his eyes half-closed, enjoying keenly his inner voluptuousness.

Sometimes he drew himself erect, looked fixedly before him, his eyes strangely brilliant; smiled a fugitive smile; and from his brow beamed an extraordinary purity.

Thus the violinist reappeared to the survivor. And George lived again the hours of life already lived; he lived them again, not in pictures only, but in actual and profound sensations. He lived again the long hours of close intimacy and forgetfulness, the time when Demetrius and himself, alone, in the warm room to which no noise could penetrate, executed the music of their favorite masters. How they used to forget their very existence! In what strange raptures this music, executed by their own hands, soon threw them! Often the fascination of a single melody held them prisoners an entire afternoon, without their being able to leave the magic circle in which they were enclosed. How often they had rehearsed that Song

without Words of Mendelssohn, which had revealed to them both, at the bottom of their hearts, a sort of inconsolable hopelessness! How often they had rehearsed a Beethoven sonata which seemed to grasp their souls, to carry them away with a vertiginous rapidity across the infinity of space, and hover with them, during the flight, over every abyss!

The survivor went back in his recollections as far as the autumn of 188-, to that unforgetful autumn of melancholy and poetry, when Demetrius had scarcely emerged from convalescence. That was to be the last autumn! After a long period of enforced silence, Demetrius took up his violin again with strange disquietude, as if he feared having lost all his aptitude and all his mastery, all his knowledge of the instrument. Oh, what trembling of the enfeebled fingers on the strings and the incertitude of the bowing when he essayed the first tones! And those two tears that formed slowly in the cavity of his eyes, rolled down his cheeks, and were arrested in the threads of his beard, rather long and still untrimmed.

The survivor again saw the violinist about to improvise, while he himself accompanied him on the piano with an almost insupportable anguish, attentive in following him, in anticipating him, always fearing to break the measure, strike a false note, make a discord, or miss a note.

In his improvisations, Demetrius Aurispa was almost always inspired with poetry. George remembered the marvellous improvisation that, on a certain October day, the violinist had composed on a lyric poem by Alfred Tennyson, in The Princess. George himself had translated the verse so that Demetrius could understand it, and he had proposed it to him as a theme. Where was that page?

The curiosity of a sad sensation prompted George to search for it in an album placed among the pieces of music. He was sure he could find it; he remembered it very clearly. And, in fact, he found it.

It was a single sheet, written in violet ink. The characters had paled and the sheet

had become rumpled, yellowish, without consistency, soft as a spider's web. It bore the sadness of pages traced a long time ago by a dear hand, gone henceforth forever.

George, who scarcely recognized the characters, said to himself: "It is I who wrote this page! This writing is mine!" It was a rather timid hand, unequal, almost feminine, recalling a schoolboy's writing, preserving the ambiguity of the recent adolescence, the hesitating delicacy of a soul that dares not yet know all. "What a change in that, too!" And he read again the poet's verse:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine despair

Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,

In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,

And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,

That brings our friends up from the underworld.

Sad as the last which reddens over one

That sinks with all we love below the verge;

So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns

The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds

To dying ears, when unto dying eyes

The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;

So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,

And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd

On lips that are for others; deep as love,

Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;

O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

Demetrius improvised standing, beside the piano, a trifle paler, a trifle more bent; but from time to time he drew himself erect beneath the breath of inspiration, as a bent reed straightens beneath the breath of the wind. He kept his eyes fixed in the direction of the window, where, as if in a frame, appeared an autumn landscape, reddish and misty. According to the vicissitudes of the heavens without, a changeable light flooded at intervals his person, flashed in the humidity of his eyes, gilded his extraordinarily pure brow. And the violin said: "Sad as the last which reddens over one that sinks with all we love below the verge; so sad, so fresh, the days that are no more." And the violin repeated, with sobs: "O Death in Life, the days that are no more."

At the reminiscence, at the vision conjured up, a supreme anguish assailed the survivor. When the images had passed, the silence seemed to him still heavier. The delicate instrument through which Demetrius's soul had sung its loftiest songs had again sunk to sleep, with its four strings still intact, in the velvet-lined case.

George lowered the lid, as on a corpse. Around him the silence was lugubrious. But he still retained, at the bottom of his heart, like a refrain indefinitely prolonged, this sigh: "O Death in Life, the days that are no more."

He remained a few moments before the door which shut off the tragic chamber. He felt that henceforth he was no longer master of himself. His nerves dominated him, imposed on him the disorder and excess of their sensations. He felt about his head a band that contracted and enlarged according to the palpitations of his arteries, as if it were an elastic and cold substance. The same cold chill ran down his spinal column.

With sudden energy, in a sort of rage, he turned the knob and entered. Without looking about him, walking in the ray of light which, projected through the open door, was shed across the floor, he went straight towards one of the balconies,

opened the two shutters. He also opened the shutters of the other balcony. After this rapid action, accomplished under the impulse of a sort of horror, turned, agitated, gasping. He felt his flesh creep.

What he saw before anything else was the bed stationed in front of him, with its green counterpane, all of walnut, but simple in form, without carving, without ornaments without curtains. For several moments he saw nothing but the bed, like on that terrible day when, crossing the threshold of the room, he had stopped petrified at the sight of the corpse.

Evoked by the survivor's imagination, the corpse, with its head enveloped in a black veil and its arms stretched alongside the body, retook its place on the mortuary couch. The strong light which entered from the wide-open balconies did not succeed in dissipating the phantom. It was a vision, not continuous but intermittent, seen now and then, as if by a rapid closure of the eyelids, although the witness's eyelids remained immovable.

In the silence of the room, and in the silence of his soul, George heard, very distinctly, the scratching of the wood-tick. And this trifling fact sufficed to dissipate momentarily in him the extreme violence of the nervous tension, as the prick of a needle suffices to empty a swollen blister.

Every particular of the terrible day came back to his memory: the unexpected news brought to Torricelle di Sarsa, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, by a breathless messenger who stammered and wept; the exhausting journey on horseback, in the heat of the dog-days, across the scorched hills, and, during the journey, the sudden fainting spells which made him reel in his saddle; then the house filled with sobs, filled with noises of doors banged by the gale, filled with the buzzing he had in the arteries; and, finally, the impetuous entry into the room, the sight of the corpse, the curtains swelling and swishing, the tinkling of the holy-water basin suspended on the wall.

The deed had been done on the morning of the fourth of August, without any suspicious preparations. The suicide had left no letter, not even for his nephew. The will by which he constituted George his sole legatee was already of old date. Demetrius had taken evident precautions to conceal the causes of his resolution, and even to avoid every pretext for hypotheses; he had taken care to destroy even the least traces of the acts which had preceded the supreme act. In the apartment, everything was found in order, in an order almost excessive; not a paper remained on the desk, not a book was missing from the shelves of the bookcase. On the little table, near the bed, was the pistol-case, open; nothing more.

For the thousandth time, a question arose in the mind of the survivor: "Why did he kill himself? Had he a secret which gnawed at his heart? Or else, was it the cruel sagacity of his intelligence which rendered life insupportable? He bore his destiny within himself, as I bear mine in myself."

He looked at the little silver emblem still suspended on the wall at the head of the bed, a symbol of religion, a maternal pious souvenir. It was a fine piece of workmanship by an old master goldsmith of Guardiagrele, Andrea Gallucci—a sort of hereditary jewel. "He loved religious emblems, sacred music, the odor of incense, crucifixes, the hymns of the Latin Church. He was a mystic, an ascetic, the most passionate contemplator of the inner life; but he did not believe in God."

He looked at the pistol-case; and a thought, latent in the deepest recesses of his brain, was revealed to him as by a lightning flash. "I, too, will kill myself with one of these pistols—with the same, on the same bed." After a short appeasement, his exaltation took hold of him again; again he felt his flesh creep. Once more he felt the actual and profound sensation of the shudder already experienced on the tragic day, when he had wished to raise, with his own hands, the black veil spread over the dead man's face, and when, through the linen wrappings, he believed he could see the ravages of the wound, the horrible ravage made by the explosion of the firearm, by

the impact of the ball against the bone of the skull, against that brow so delicate and so pure. In reality, he had seen only a portion of the nose, the mouth, and the chin. The rest was hidden by the bandages several times folded, perhaps because the eyes had started from their sockets. But the mouth, intact, permitted a view of the beard, silky and thin—the mouth, pale and withered, which, living, opened so softly for the unexpected smile—the mouth had received from the seal of death an expression of superhuman calmness, rendered more extraordinary by the bloody havoc hidden by the bandages.

This image, fixed in an ineffaceable imprint, was graven in the soul of the inheritor, in the centre of his soul; and after five years it still preserved the same evidence, preserved by a fatal power.

In thinking that he also would stretch himself on the same bed, and that he would kill himself with the same weapon, George did not feel that tumultuous and vibrant emotion which sudden resolutions impart; it was rather an indefinable feeling, as if it concerned a project formed a long time ago, and approved in a rather indefinite fashion, and that the time had come to decide about it and to accomplish it. He opened the case, examined the pistols.

They were fine weapons, rifled duelling pistols, of old English make, with a stock perfectly fitted to the hand. They reposed on a light-green velvet, a little frayed at the edges of the compartments which contained everything necessary for loading them. As the barrels were of large calibre, the balls were large; those which, when they touch their object, always produce a decisive effect.

George took one and weighed it in the palm of his hand. "In less than five minutes I could be dead. Demetrius has left on this bed the hollow where I shall lie." And by an imaginary transposition it was himself whom he saw stretched on the couch. But that wood-tick! That wood-tick! He had a perception of being gnawed by the insects, as distinctly and as frightfully as if the animals were in his brain. This implacable

gnawing came from the bed, and he perceived it. Then he understood the sadness of the man who, before dying, hears beneath him the gnawing of the wood-tick. When he pictured himself in the act of pressing the trigger, he felt an agonized and repulsive contraction of all his nerves. When he came to the conclusion that nothing forced him to kill himself, and that he could wait, he felt at the deepest recesses of his substance the spontaneous expansion of intense relief. A thousand invisible ties still bound him to life. "Hippolyte!"

He went towards the balcony, towards the light, with a sort of impetuosity. A background of an immense landscape, bluish and mysterious, melted in the languor of the day. The sun was slowly setting on the mountain, which it flooded with gold, like the couch of a mistress who awaited. The Majella, enormous and white, all bathed in this liquid gold, reared its huge mass in the sky.

III.

THE HERMITAGE.

CHAPTER I.

In her letter of May 10th, Hippolyte had said: "I can at last dispose of a free hour to write you a long letter. My brother-in-law has now been dragging his pain from hotel to hotel around the lake for the last ten days; and we both follow him like troubled souls. You could never imagine the melancholy of this pilgrimage. I myself am utterly exhausted; I await the first favorable opportunity to leave them. Have you already found the Hermitage?" She had said: "Your letters increase my torment inexpressibly. I know well your malady; and I divine that words fail you to express your suffering. I would give half of my blood to succeed in convincing you, once for all, that I am yours, absolutely yours, forever, until death. I think of you, of you only, uninterruptedly, every instant of my life. Away from you, I cannot enjoy one moment's calm and happiness. Everything disgusts and irritates me. Oh, when will it be given me to be with you entire days, to live your life! You will see; I shall no

longer be the same woman. I shall be amiable, tender, gentle. I shall take care to be always the same, always discreet. I shall tell you all my thoughts, and you will tell me all yours. I shall be your mistress, your friend, your sister; and, if you believe me worthy, I will be also your counsellor. I have a lucid intuition of things, and a hundred times I have experienced this lucidity, which has never led me into error. My sole care will be to please you always, never to be a burden in your life. In me you should find only sweetness and repose.... I have many faults, my friend; but you will aid me to conquer them. You will make me perfect, for yourself. I await from you the first encouragement. Later, when I am sure of myself, I will say to you: Now I am worthy; now I have the consciousness of being what you desire. And you, too, will be proud to think that I owe you all, that I am your creature in everything; and then it will seem to you that I am more intimately yours, and you will love me always more, always more. It will be a life of love such as has never before been seen."

In a postscript: "I send you a rhododendron gathered in the park of Isola Madre.... Yesterday, in the pocket of that gray dress which you know, I found the note from Albano which I had asked you for as a souvenir. It is dated April 9th. It has been marked with several baskets of wood. Do you recall our great fires of love? Courage, courage! The renewal of happiness is approaching. In one week, in ten days at the most, I shall be wherever it pleases you. With you, no matter where."

CHAPTER II.

And George, who at heart hardly believed in success, but who was suddenly seized by an insensate ardor, attempted the supreme test.

He left Guardiagrele for the littoral, in quest of the Hermitage. The country, the sea, the motion, the physical activity, the variety of the incidents strewn along the course of this exploration, the singularity of his own condition—all these new things stirred him, restored his equilibrium, gave him an illusory confidence. It seemed to him that

he had just escaped by a miracle from the assault of a mortal malady in which he had been face to face with death. For the first few days, life had for him that sweetness and depth which it only has for convalescents. Hippolyte's romantic dream floated about his heart.

"If she should succeed in curing me! To cure me would require a healthy and strong love." He avoided looking into the very bottom of his conscience; he fought shy of the interior sarcasm that those two adjectives provoked. "On earth, there is but one durable intoxication: security in the possession of another creature, absolute and unshakable security. This intoxication I am seeking. I would like to be able to say: My loved one, present or absent, lives entirely in me; my will is her only law; if I ceased to love her she would die; in dying, she will regret only my love." Instead of resigning himself to enjoy love in the form of suffering, he persisted in following it in the form of pleasure. He felt that his mind was corroded irreparably. Once more he felt he had degraded his manhood. He discovered the Hermitage at San Vito, in the land of the furze, on the borders of the Adriatic. It was the ideal Hermitage—a house built on a plateau, half-way up on the cliffs, in a grove of orange and olive trees, facing a little bay closed in by two promontories.

Very primitive, the architecture of the house. An outer stairway led up to a loggia on which opened the four doors of four rooms. Each room had its door, and vis-à-vis, in the wall opposite, a window looking out on the olive-grove. To the upper loggia there was a corresponding lower loggia; but the rooms on the ground floor, with the exception of one, were uninhabitable.

On one side, the house was contiguous to an old ruin inhabited by the peasants who owned it. Two enormous oaks, that the persevering breath of the northerly winds had bent towards the hill, shaded the court and protected the stone tables, useful for dining in summer time. This court was surrounded by a stone parapet, and, rising above the parapet, acacia-trees, loaded with odorous bloom, delineated against the

background of the sea the delicate elegance of their foliage.

This house was used only for lodging strangers who rented it for the bathing season, according to the industry practised by all the villagers of the coast in the region of San Vito. It was about two miles distant from the borough, on the border of a territory called Portelles, in quiet and mild solitude. Each of the two promontories was pierced by a tunnel, the two openings of which were visible from the house. The railroad ran from one to the other in a straight line, along the shore, a distance of from five to six hundred yards. At the extreme point of the right-hand promontory, on a bank of rocks the Trabocco stretched, a strange fishing machine, constructed entirely of beams and planks, like a colossal spider-web.

The tenant, out of season, was greeted like an unhoped for and extraordinary piece of good fortune.

The head of the family, an old man, said:

"The house is yours."

He refused to name a price, and said: "If you are satisfied with it, you will give me what you wish and when you please."

While uttering these cordial words, he examined the stranger with an eye so scrutinizing that the latter was embarrassed and surprised by this too piercing look. The old man was blind with one eye, bald on the top of his head, with two little tufts of white hair on the temples; his chin was shaven, and he carried his entire body before him, sustained by two bow legs. His limbs were deformed by hard work: by the labor at the plough, which advances the right shoulder and twists the body; by the labor of mowing, which forces the knees apart; by the labor of thinning the vines, which bends the body in two; by all the slow and patient labors of agriculture.

"You'll give what you wish."

He had already scented in this affable young man, with his somewhat distracted and almost wandering air, the generous milord, inexperienced, careless of money. He

knew that the generosity of his guest would be much more profitable for him than if he made his own terms.

George asked:

"Is the place quiet, without visitors, without noise?"

The old man pointed to the sea and smiled:

"Look; you will hear nothing but that."

He added:

"Sometimes the sound of the loom, too. But now Candia hardly weaves at all."

And he smiled, pointing to the threshold where stood his daughter-in-law, blushing.

She was enceinte, already very large at the waist, blond, a clear carnation, her face sown with freckles. She had big gray eyes, the iris veined like agates. She wore in her ears two heavy gold rings, and on her bosom the presenfoso, a large star of filigree work, with two hearts in the centre. On the threshold beside her was a little girl of ten, a blonde also, with a sweet expression.

"One could drink down that little madcap in a glass," said the old man. "That's all! There are only us and Albadora."

He turned toward the olive-grove and began to call:

"Albadora! Albadò!"

Then, addressing his granddaughter:

"Helen, go and call her," he said.

Helen disappeared.

"Twenty-two children!" cried the old man. "Albadora gave me twenty-two children—six boys and sixteen girls. I have lost three boys and seven girls. The other nine girls are married. One of my boys went to America; another has made his home in Tocco, and works in the petroleum mines; the youngest, the one whom

Candia married, is employed on the railway, and only visits us every two weeks. We are left all alone. Ah! signor, it is well said that one father supports a hundred children, and that a hundred children do not support one father."

The septuagenarian Sibyl appeared, bearing in her apron a heap of large earth-snails, a slimy and flaccid heap, from which protruded long tentacles. She was a woman of tall stature, but bent, emaciated, broken by fatigue and by frequent pregnancies, weakened by childbirths, with a small head, wrinkled like a withered apple, on a neck full of hollows and tendons. In her apron the snails stuck together, twisted about one another, glued to one another, greenish, yellowish, whitish, frothy, with colorations of pale iridescent reflections. One of them had crawled up on her hand.

The old man exclaimed:

"This gentleman wishes to rent the house from to-day on."

"God bless you!" she cried.

And, with a rather silly yet kind air, she drew closer to George, leering at him with eyes sunk deep in their orbits, almost sightless.

She added:

"It's Jesus come back to earth. God bless you! May you live as long as there's bread and wine. May you become as great as the sun!"

And, with a joyous step, she passed on into the house, through the same door which all her twenty-two children had passed through on their way to baptism.

The old man said to George:

"My name is Colas di Cinzio; but, as my father's surname was Sciampagne, everybody calls me Colas di Sciampagne. Come and see the garden."

George followed the peasant.

"The crops are very promising this year."

The old man, walking in front, praised the plantations, and, as is common with

persons who have grown old in the midst of nature, he made prognostications. The garden was luxuriant, and seemed to enclose in its circle all the gifts of abundance. The orange-trees shed such waves of perfume that, at moments, the atmosphere acquired a sweet and powerful savor, like that of a generous wine. The other fruit-trees were no longer in flower, but their innumerable fruits hung from nourishing branches, rocked by the breath of heaven.

George thought: "This, perhaps, is what the superior life would be: a limitless liberty; a noble and fruitful solitude which would envelop me with its warmest emanations; to journey on amidst the vegetal creation as one would amongst a multitude of intelligences; to wrest from it the occult thought and to divine the mute sentiment which reigns beneath the externals; to successively render my being comfortable with each of these beings, and to successively substitute for my weakened and oblique soul each of these simple and strong souls; to contemplate nature with such a continuity of attention that I should succeed in reproducing, in my own person, the harmonious palpitation of all creatures; finally, by a laborious and ideal metamorphosis, identify myself with the robust tree whose roots absorb the invisible subterranean ferments, and whose summit imitates, by its agitation, the voice of the sea. Would not that be truly a superior life?" At the sight of the spring-time exuberance that transfigured the surrounding places, he permitted himself to be dominated by a sort of drunken panic. But the fatal habit of contradiction cut short this transport, brought him back to his old ideas, opposed reality to dreams. "We have no contact whatever with nature. We have only the imperfect perception of exterior forms. It is impossible for man to enter into communion with things. Man has certainly the power to inject into things all his own substance; but he never receives anything in return. The sea will never speak to him in an intelligible language, the earth will never reveal to him its secret. Man may feel all his blood circulate in the fibres of the tree, but the tree will never give him one drop of its vital sap."

Pointing out with his finger such or such a marvel of luxuriance, the one-eyed old peasant said:

"A stableful of dung performs more miracles than a churchful of saints."

Pointing with his finger to a field of flowering beans at the end of the garden, he said:

"The bean is the spy of the year."

The field undulated almost imperceptibly. The small leaves, of a grayish green, agitated their thin points beneath the white or azure flowering. Every flower resembled a half-closed mouth, and bore two spots, black as eyes. Among those that were not yet faded, the superior petals slightly covered the spots, like pale eyelids on pupils which regard sidewise. The quivering of all those lipped and eyed flowers had a strange animal expression, attractive and indescribable.

George thought: "How happy Hippolyte will be here! She has a delicate and passionate taste for all the humble beauties of the earth. I remember her little cries of admiration and pleasure on discovering some plant of unknown form, a new flower, a leaf, a bay, a bizarre insect, a shadow, a reflection." He pictured her to himself, slim and agile, in graceful attitudes, among the verdure. And an anguish suddenly overwhelmed him: the anguish of taking her again, of reconquering her entirely, of making himself loved immensely by her; of giving her a new joy every second. "Her eyes will be always filled with me. All her senses will remain closed to all sensations but those that will come to her from me. My words will seem to her more delicious than any other sound." Suddenly the power of love appeared to him to be unlimited. His inner life acquired a vertiginous acceleration.

When he mounted the stairway of the Hermitage, he believed that his heart would break under the pressure of his increasing anxiety. Arrived at the loggia, he took in the landscape with an intoxicated look. In his profound agitation, he believed he felt that at that minute the sun beamed truly on the bottom of his heart.

The sea, stirred by an equal and continuous thrill, reflecting the happiness scattered in the sky, seemed to refract this happiness in myriads of inextinguishable smiles. Through the crystal air, all the distant vistas were clearly defined—the Vasto Point, Mount Gargano, the Tremiti Islands, on the right; Cape Moro, the Nicchiola, Cape Ortona, on the left. The white Ortona resembled a glittering Asiatic city on a hill in Palestine, standing boldly against the azure, all in parallel lines, without minarets. That chain of promontories and gulfs, in the shape of a half-moon, suggested the image of a row of offerings, because each handle bore a cereal treasure. The furze spread its mantle of gold over the entire coast. From every bush arose a dense cloud of effluvia, as from a censer. The air respired was just as delicious as a sip of elixir.

CHAPTER III.

The first few days, George gave all his care to the little house which was to receive the New Life within its great peace; and to help him in the preparations he had Colas di Sciampagne, who seemed expert at all trades. On a band of fresh plastering he had written with the point of a reed this old device, suggested by the illusion: Parva domus, magna quies. And he saw a favorable presage even in the three blades of bay sown by the wind between the interstices of the raised edge of the window.

But, when all was ready and this false energy had gone, he found again in his inmost self the inquietude, the discontent, and that implacable anguish the true cause of which he did not know; he felt confusedly that his destiny had once more pushed him into an oblique and perilous pass. It seemed to him that, from another house and from other lips, there came to him now a voice of recall and reproach. In his soul there revived the heartbreaking farewells, tearless and yet so cruel, in which he had lied from shame on reading in his deceived mother's tired eyes the question, too sad: "For whom are you abandoning me?"

Was it not this mute question, the recollection of that blush and that lie, which inspired him with the inquietude, the discontent, and the anguish, at the moment that

he was about to enter the New Life? And how could he silence that voice? By what intoxication?

He did not dare reply. In spite of his deep trouble, he wished still to believe in the promise of her who was going to come; he hoped to be able still to attribute to his love a high moral signification. Had he not an ardent desire to live, to give to all the forces of his nature a rhythmic development, to feel himself complete and harmonious? Love would finally effect this prodigy; he would finally find in love the plenitude of his humanity, deformed and diminished by so many miseries.

With these hopes and these vague tendencies, he sought to cheat his remorse; but what dominated him in presence of this woman's image was always desire. In despite of all his platonic aspirations, he could not succeed in seeing in love anything else but the work of the flesh, could not imagine the days to come but as a succession of already familiar sensual pleasures. In that benign solitude, in the company of that passionate woman, what life could he live, if not a life of idleness and voluptuousness?

And all the past sorrows came back to his mind, with all the painful pictures: his mother's haggard face and swollen red eyes, scorched by tears; Christine's sweet and heart-broken smile; the large head of the sickly child, always leaning on a bosom barren of all but sighs; the cadaveric mask of the poor idiotic gormand.

And his mother's tired eyes asked: "For whom are you abandoning me?"

CHAPTER IV.

It was the afternoon. George explored the tortuous path which, by a succession of ups and downs, led towards the Vasto Point on the edge of the sea. He gazed before and around him with a curiosity always awake, almost betraying an effort to be attentive, as if he wished to surprise some obscure thought translated by these simple semblances, or to render himself master of some unseizable secret.

In a fold of the hill which followed the sea line, the water of a stream derived from a

sort of small aqueduct, made from hollowed trunks and sustained by dead trees, traversed the dale from one shore to the other. There were also trenches carried in hollow tiles, as far as the fertile field where the crops were prospering; and here and there on the reflecting and murmuring trenches, beautiful violet flowers bent with airy grace. All these humble things appeared to have a profound life.

And the excess of water ran and spread on the slope towards the sandy beach, passing beneath a small bridge. In the shade of the arch, several women were washing linen, and their gestures were reflected in the water as in a mobile mirror. On the beach, the linen spread out in the sun was of dazzling whiteness. A man was walking along the railroad tracks, his feet naked, carrying his shoes hanging in his hand. A woman came out of the toll-house and, with a rapid gesture, threw some débris from out of a basket. Two little girls, loaded with linen, were running, each trying to outdo the other, laughing. An old woman was hanging blue-colored skeins from a pole.

Beyond, on the slope of the earth wall that bordered the path, small shells made white spots, fragile roots fluttered in the wind. The traces of the pickaxe that had cut into the fawn-colored earth were still distinguishable. From the top of a heap of earth hung a tuft of dead roots, as light as the scales of a serpent.

Farther on was a large farmhouse, with a porcelain flower at the summit of its tiled roof. An outer stairway led up to a covered gallery. At the head of the stairway two women were spinning, and, beneath the sun, their distaffs had the resplendency of gold. One could hear the clicking of a weaving machine. Through the window could be seen a weaver, and her rhythmic gesture as she plied the shuttle. Lying down in a neighboring field was a gray ox, a beast of enormous size, shaking ears and tail, peacefully and unceasingly, in order to chase away the flies. Around him, chickens were scratching.

A little farther, a second stream traversed the path—laughing, rippling, gay, frisking,

limpid.

A little farther on still, near another house, there was a silent garden, full of bushy laurels, closed all round. The stems, slender and straight, rose up motionless, with their crown of shining foliage. And one of these laurels, the most robust, was entirely enveloped by a large, amorous bryonia which triumphed over the austere foliage by the delicacy of its snowlike flowers, and by the freshness of its nuptial perfume. Below, the earth seemed to have been newly turned over. In a corner a black cross shed over the mute enclosure that sort of resigned sadness which reigns in cemeteries. At the end of the path could be seen a stairway, half in the sun and half in the shadow, by which one mounted to a half-open door, which protected two branches of a blessed olive-tree, suspended at the rustic architrave. Below, on the last step, an old man was seated, asleep, his head bare, his chin on his breast, his hands resting on his knees; and the sun was about to touch his venerable brow. From above, through the half-open door, as if to favor the senile slumber, descended the equal sound of a cradle rocking and the equal cadence of a hummed ballad.

All these humble things seemed to have a profound life.

CHAPTER V.

Hippolyte announced that, according to her promise, she would arrive at San Vito, Tuesday, May 20th, by train direct, about one o'clock in the afternoon.

That would be in two days. George wrote to her:

"Come, come! I await you, and never was waiting more tantalizing. Every minute that passes is irremediably lost to happiness. Come. Everything is ready. Or rather, no, nothing is ready, save my desire. It is necessary, my friend, that you provide yourself with an inextinguishable fund of patience and indulgence; because, in this savage and impracticable solitude, every commodity of life is lacking. Oh, how impracticable! Picture to yourself, my friend, that from the station of San Vito to the Hermitage takes three-quarters of an hour by road; and to cover this distance, the

only means is to follow on foot the path cut through the granite, rising perpendicularly from the sea. You must be careful to come provided with heavy shoes, and gigantic parasols. As to dresses, it is useless to bring many; a few gay and durable costumes for our morning walks will suffice. Do not forget your bathing suit....

"This letter is the last I shall write you. You will get it a few hours before you start. I am writing you in the library, a room in which there are heaps of books which we are hardly likely to read. The afternoon is grayish, and the sea stretches out in endless monotony. The hour is discreet, languorous, propitious for delicate sensualities. Oh, if you were with me! This evening will be my second night at the Hermitage, and I shall spend it alone. If you only saw the bed! It is a rustic bed, a monumental hymeneal altar, large as a field, deep as the slumber of the just—thalamus thalamorum! The mattresses contain the wool of an entire flock, the straw-bed contains the shucks of an entire field of maize. Can these chaste things have the presentiment of your nudity?

"Good-by, good-by. How slowly the hours go by! Who says time has wings? I do not know what I would give if I could go to sleep in this enervating languor, and not awake until Tuesday morning. But no, I will not sleep. I, too, have killed my sleep. I have the constant vision of your mouth."

CHAPTER VI.

For several days voluptuous visions had haunted him without a truce. Desire awoke in his flesh with inconceivable violence. A warm puff of air, a waft of perfume, the rustle of a skirt, mere trifles, sufficed to modify his entire being, to make him languorous, to light up his face with a flame, to accelerate the pulsations of his arteries, to throw him into an agitation bordering on delirium.

At the profoundest depths of his substance he bore the germs inherited from his father. He, the creature of thought and sentiment, had in his flesh the fatal heredity

of that brutish being. But in him instinct had become a passion, and sensuality had assumed almost morbid forms. He was as grieved over this as if it were a shameful malady: he had a horror of these fevers which assailed him unexpectedly, which consumed him miserably; which left him debased, arid, powerless to think. He suffered from certain passions as though they degraded him. Certain sudden passages of brutality, similar to hurricanes over a growing field, devastated his mind, dried up all his inner sources, made painful furrows which for a long time he could not succeed in filling up.

At the dawn of the great day, as he awoke after a few hours of a restless dozing, he thought, with a thrill of all his nerves: "She arrives to-day! To-day, in the light of to-day, my eyes will see her! I will hold her in my arms! It almost seems to me as if it will be the first possession; it seems to me, too, that I could die of it." The vision conjured up gave him so rude a shock that he felt his body traversed from tip to toe by a start similar to that caused by an electric discharge. In him appeared those terrible physical phenomena against the tyranny of which he was defenceless. All his conscience fell beneath the absolute empire of desire. Once more the hereditary lewdness broke out with an invincible fury in this delicate lover whom it pleased to call his mistress "sister," and who had a thirst for spiritual communions. He contemplated, in mind, his mistress's beauty; and every contour, seen through the flame, assumed in his eyes a radiant splendor, chimerical, almost superhuman. He contemplated, in mind, his mistress's grace; and every attitude assumed a voluptuous fascination of inconceivable intensity. In her, all was light, perfume, and rhythm.

This admirable creature he possessed—he, he alone.... But, spontaneously, as the smoke rises from a poor fire, a jealous thought disengaged itself from his desire. To dissipate the agitation which he felt growing, he sprang from the bed.

At the window, at dawn, the olive-tree branches had an imperceptible undulation, pale, between gray and white. The sound of the sparrows discreetly twittering was

heard above the dull, monotonous wash of the sea. In a stable a lamb bleated timidly.

He went out into the loggia, comforted by the tonic virtue of a bath, and drank in deeply the morning air charged with savory odors. His lungs dilated; his thoughts took their flight, agile, each marked with the image of the waited-for woman; a feeling of renewed youth made his heart palpitate.

Before him was the maturity of the sun, pure, simple, without a vestige of clouds, without mystery. Above the silver sea arose a crimson disk, clearly defined, almost sharp, like a disk of metal fresh from the forge.

Colas di Sciampagne, who was busy cleaning the court, cried out to him:

"To-day is a great holiday. The lady is coming. The corn comes into the ear without waiting for the Ascension."

George smiled at the courteous remark of the old man, and asked:

"Did you think of the women to gather the furze flowers? The entire length of the road must be strewn with them."

The old man gave an impatient gesture, as if to signify that he required no reminder.

"I sent for five!"

And he named them, showing the places where the young girls lived.

"The Monkey's daughter, the Ogress's daughter, Favetta, Splendor, and Garbin's daughter."

These names provoked in George a sudden mirth. It seemed to him that all the spirit of springtime entered into his heart, that a wave of fragrant poesy inundated it. Did not these virgins step out of a fairy tale to strew flowers on the road under the feet of the beautiful Roman?

He abandoned himself to the anxious enjoyment of expectation. He asked, restlessly:

"Where are they gathering their harvest of furze?"

"Up yonder," replied Colas di Sciampagne, pointing to the hillock; "up yonder, on the Chesnaie. Their singing will guide you."

In fact, a feminine chant came at intervals from the hill. George started up the incline, in search of the singers. The small, tortuous path wound through a copse of young oaks. At a certain place it branched out into a number of paths, the ends of which could not be seen; and the narrow groves, hollowed between the thickets, crossed by innumerable roots close to the ground, formed a sort of mountainous labyrinth in which the sparrows twittered and the blackbirds whistled. George, led by both chant and perfume, did not go astray. He found the field of furze.

It was a plateau on which the furze flourished so plentifully that it presented to the eye the uniformity of a vast yellow mantle, sulphur-colored, resplendent. The five lasses were gathering the flowering branches in order to fill their baskets, and were singing. They were singing at the top of their voices, in a perfect chord of the third and fifth. When they came to the refrain, they straightened up above the bushes to permit the note to more freely emerge from their unconfined chests; and they held the note a long time, looking in each other's eyes, holding before them their hands full of flowers.

At the sight of the stranger they stopped, and bent over the bushes. Ill-suppressed laughter ran along the yellow carpet. George asked:

"Which of you is named Favetta?"

A young girl, brown as an olive, rose to reply, astonished, almost afraid.

"It is I, signor."

"Aren't you the best singer in San Vito?"

"No, signor. That is not true."

"It is true, it is true!" cried all her companions. "Make her sing, signor."

She denied it, laughing, her face on fire; and while her companions insisted, she

twisted her apron. She was of small stature, but very well formed, her bosom large and heaving, developed by singing. She had curly hair, heavy eyebrows, an aquiline nose, a rather defiant carriage of her head.

After several refusals, she consented. Her companions threw their arms around her, imprisoned her in their circle. They emerged from among the flowering tufts up to their waists, amid the buzzing of the diligent bees.

Favetta commenced, at first timidly; then, note by note, her voice became more assured. She had a limpid voice, fluid, crystalline as a spring of water. She sang a distich, and her companions took up the refrain in chorus. They prolonged the final notes in unison, their mouths close together so as to make but one vocal wave; and this wave undulated in the light with the slowness of liturgic cadences.

Favetta sang:

All the fountains are dry,

My love is dying of thirst,

Tromme lari, lira....

Love, forever!

Love, I am thirsty, oh! so thirsty,

Where is the water you bring me?

Tromme lari, lira....

Love, forever!

I bring you a bowl of potter's clay.

Suspended from a chain of gold,

Tromme lari, lira....

Love, forever!

And her companions repeated:

Love, forever!

This salutation of May to love, gushing from these bosoms, which perhaps did not know it yet, which perhaps would never know its veritable sorrows, resounded in George's ears like a good augury. The girls, the flowers, the woods, the sea, all these free and unconscious things which breathed around him the voluptuousness of life—all that caressed the surface of his soul, soothed, lulled him in the habitual sentiment that he had concerning his own being, gave him an increasing, harmonious, and rhythmic sensation of a new faculty which had developed little by little in the intimacy of his substance, and that would be revealed to him in a very vague manner, as in a sort of confused vision of a divine secret. It was a fugitive enchantment, a state of consciousness so exceptional and so incomprehensible that he could not retain even its phantom.

The singers pointed to the already overflowing baskets—a heap of flowers humid with dew. Favetta asked:

"Will that do?"

"No, no, that won't be enough. Keep on gathering them. The entire road from the Trabocco to the house must be strewn. The stairway, the loggia, must be covered."

"But what shall we do for Ascension Day? Won't you leave a single flower for Jesus?"

CHAPTER VII.

She had arrived. She had trod on the flowers, like the Madonna who is going to perform a miracle; she had trod on a carpet of flowers. She had at last arrived! She had at last crossed the threshold!

And now, tired, happy, she presented to her lover's lips a face all bathed in tears, without speaking, with a gesture of inexpressible abandon. Tired, happy, she wept and smiled beneath the innumerable kisses of the adored one. What mattered the recollections of the days from which he had been absent? What mattered the

miseries, the chagrins, the anxieties, the heart-breaking struggles against the inexorable brutalities of life? What mattered all the discouragements and all the despairs, in comparison with this supreme joy? She lived, she respired between her lover's arms; she felt herself infinitely loved. All else disappeared, returned to oblivion, seemed to have never existed.

"Oh, Hippolyte, Hippolyte! Oh, my soul! how much, how much I have longed for you! And here you are! And now, you will stay with me a long, long time, will you not? Before leaving me, you will kill me."

And he kissed her on the mouth, on the cheeks, on the neck, on the eyes, insatiable, profoundly thrilled every time he met a tear. Those tears, that smile, that expression of felicity on the tired-looking face, the thought that this woman had not hesitated for a second in consenting; the thought that she had come to him from a great distance, and that, after a fatiguing journey, she wept beneath his kisses, powerless to say a word because her heart was too full—all these passionate and delightful things refined his sensations, freed his desire from impurity, gave him an emotion of almost chaste love, exalted his soul.

Removing the long pin that fastened the hat and veil, he said:

"How tired you must be, my poor Hippolyte! You are very pale!"

Her veil was raised on her brow; she still had on her travelling cloak and her gloves. He removed the veil and hat, with a gesture that was customary with him. The beautiful brown head appeared, unencumbered, with that simple coiffure which made of the hair a sort of adherent helmet, without altering the delicate and elegant outline of the occiput, without hiding any of the nape of the neck.

She wore a gorget of white lace, and a narrow black velvet ribbon which was defined with exquisite violence against the whiteness of the skin. Under the cloak could be seen a gray cloth dress—the dress of the memorable Albano days. She spread around her a faint odor of violets, the familiar perfume.

George's lips became more ardent, and, as she used to say, more voracious. He checked himself; he removed her cloak; he helped her to remove her gloves; he took her bare hands and pressed them against his temples, in a mad desire to be caressed. And Hippolyte, holding him thus by the temples, drew him towards her, enveloped him in a long caress, passed over his entire face a mouth which, languishing and warm, crept along in a multiple kiss. George recognized the divine, the incomparable mouth, the mouth which, he had thought so often, felt as if it rested on the surface of his soul, for a voluptuousness which would surpass carnal sensibility and would communicate itself to an ultra-sensible element of the inner being.

"You will kill me," he murmured, vibrating like a bundle of stretched cords, feeling at the back of his neck a lancinating cold which, from vertebra to vertebra, was propagated through all the marrow.

And, at the bottom of himself, he noticed a vague movement of that instinctive terror which he had already observed under other circumstances.

Hippolyte disengaged herself.

"Now, I'll leave you," she said. "Where is—my room? Oh, George, how comfortable we shall be here."

She glanced around her, smiling. She made a few steps towards the threshold, stooped to gather a handful of furze, breathed in the perfume with visible sensual pleasure. She once more felt agitated, and as if intoxicated by this sovereign homage, by this fragrant glory which George had scattered along her path. Was she not dreaming? Was it she herself—was it really Hippolyte Sanzio who, in this unknown place, in this magic landscape, found herself surrounded and glorified by all this poesy?

Suddenly, with new tears in her eyes, she threw her arms around George's neck, and said:

"How grateful I am to you."

This poesy intoxicated her heart. She felt herself lifted above her humble existence by the ideal apotheosis which enveloped her lover; she felt that she lived another life, a superior life which at times gave to her soul that kind of choking sensation which a strong wind provokes in a breast accustomed to breathe an impoverished air.

"How proud I am to belong to you! You are my pride. One single minute passed near you suffices to make me feel another woman, absolutely other. You suddenly communicate to me another blood and another mind. I am no longer Hippolyte, the Hippolyte of yesterday. Give me a new name."

He named her:

"Soul!"

They fell into each other's arms in a furious embrace, as if to pluck and unroot the kisses which blossomed on their lips. Then Hippolyte disengaged herself, and repeated:

"Now, I'll leave you. Where's my room? Let me see it."

George passed an arm around her waist and led her into the bedroom. She gave a cry of admiration when she perceived the thalamus thalamorum, draped with a large yellow damask counterpane.

"But we shall get lost in it!"

And she laughed as she walked all round the monument.

"The most difficult thing will be to get into it."

"First, you'll place your foot upon my knee, in accordance with the old-time custom of the peasants in these parts."

"What a lot of saints!" she exclaimed, looking at the long line of pious images on the wall, at the head of the bed.

"They must be covered."

"Yes, you are right."

Both had difficulty in finding words; both their voices were changed in tone; both of them trembled, agitated by irresistible desire, feeling almost faint at the thought of the approaching ecstasies.

They heard someone knock at the door of the staircase. George went into the loggia. It was Helen, Candia's daughter; she came to say that luncheon was ready.

"What do you wish to do?" said George, turning toward Hippolyte, irresolute, almost convulsed.

"Really, George, I have not the least appetite. I will eat this evening, if you'll let me."

In an agonized voice, George said:

"Come into your room. Everything is ready for your bath. Come!"

He led her into a room which he had covered all over with large rustic mats.

"You see, your trunks and your boxes are already here. Now, I'll leave you—alone. Be quick. Remember, I'm waiting. Every minute's delay will be one torture more. Remember——"

He left her alone. A few moments later he heard the splashing of the water which ran from the enormous sponge and fell back again into the bath-tub. He knew the icy coldness of this spring water well, and he imagined the little starts of Hippolyte's body, that long and flexible body, beneath the refreshing shower.

Then there remained nothing in his mind than thoughts of fire. Everything about him disappeared. And, when the splashing stopped, he was seized by a trembling so strong that his teeth began to chatter, as if shivering from a mortal fever. With the terrible eyes of desire, he saw the woman disengage herself from her dressing-gown, already dried, pure, delicate as an alabaster with golden tones.

CHAPTER VIII.

More fatigued now, almost fainting, Hippolyte sank gradually into slumber. By degrees the smile on her mouth became unconscious, disappeared. Her lips met for a second; then, with infinite slowness, they opened, and from between appeared a jasminelike whiteness. Again the lips met for a second; and again, slowly, very slowly, they parted, and from between reappeared the whiteness, moistened.

Raised on one elbow, George looked at her. She appeared so beautiful, so beautiful, beautiful in the same way as he had seen her the first time, in the mysterious oratory, in front of the philosopher Alexander Memmi's orchestra, amidst the evaporated perfume of the incense and the violets. She was pale, very pale, just as on that day.

She was pale, but it was that singular pallor which George had never found in any other woman—an almost mortal pallor, a profound and dead pallor which, when in the shade, became almost livid. A long shadow was cast on the upper part of her cheeks by the eyelashes; a masculine shadow, barely perceptible, veiled the upper lip. The mouth, large if anything, had a sinuous curve, very soft and yet sad, which, in the absolute silence, took on a very intense expression.

George thought: "How spiritual her beauty becomes in illness and in languor! Tired as she is now, she pleases me more. I recognize the unknown woman who passed before me that February evening—the woman who had not a single drop of blood left in her body. I believe that when she is dead she will attain the supreme perfection of her beauty.... Dead? And if she were to die? She would then become an object for thought, a pure ideality. I should love her after life without jealous inquietude, with a soothed and always even sorrow."

He recalled that in other circumstances he had already imagined Hippolyte's beauty in the peacefulness of death. "Oh, that day of the roses! Great sheafs of white roses languished in the vases in June, at the beginning of their love. She was dozing on the divan, motionless, almost breathless. And he had contemplated her for a long time; then a sudden phantasy had taken him to cover her with roses, softly, softly, so as

not to awaken her; and he had arranged a few roses in her hair. But thus flowered and garlanded, she had appeared to him like a body without a soul, a corpse. This spectacle had filled him with terror; he had shaken her to arouse her; but she remained inert, paralyzed by one of those syncopes to which she was subject at that time. Oh, what terror, what anguish, until she recovered her senses! And also what enthusiasm for the sovereign beauty of that face, which was so extraordinarily ennobled by that reflection of death!" This episode recurred to his memory; but while he lingered over these strange thoughts, he felt a sudden impulse of pity and of remorse. He bent over to kiss the forehead of the sleeper, who remained unconscious of his kiss. It was with the greatest difficulty that he restrained himself from embracing her more ardently, so that she might be cognizant of his caress, and respond to it. And then he felt all the vanity of a caress which would not be to the loved object a rapid communication of joy; he felt all the vanity of a love which would not be a continual and immediate correspondence of acute sensations; he felt the impossibility of becoming intoxicated unless an equally intense intoxication should correspond with his own.

"Am I certain," he thought, "am I positively certain that always, when I have enjoyed her, she has enjoyed me? How often has she been present, a lucid witness, during my moments of delirium? How often has my ardor appeared senseless to her?" A heavy wave of anxieties invaded him while he contemplated the sleeping woman. "The true and profound sensual communion is also a chimera. The senses of my mistress are as obscure as her soul. Never shall I succeed in surprising in her fibres a secret disgust, an appetite unsatisfied, an irritation unappeased. Never shall I succeed in knowing the different sensations which are given to her by a similar caress repeated at different moments. In the course of a single day, an organism as unhealthy as hers passes through a great number of physical states, each in discord with the other, and sometimes in complete opposition. Such an instability misleads the most penetrating clairvoyance. The same caress which, at dawn, draws from her

moans of pleasure, may, an hour later, seem to her importunate. Consequently, it is possible that her nerves become hostile towards me, in spite of her will. A kiss which I prolong too far, and which gives me the vertigo of supreme enjoyment, may in her flesh arouse impatience. In the matter of sensuality, however, simulation and dissimulation are common to all women, to those who love and to those who do not. What do I say? The woman who loves, the passionate woman, is more inclined to physical simulation and dissimulation; because she fears to grieve her lover if she shows she is little disposed to surrender herself entirely. Moreover, the passionate woman often delights in exaggerating the semblance of pleasure; because she knows well that that will flatter the man's virile pride and increase his ecstasy. I confess that a proud joy swells my heart when I see Hippolyte delirious with sensual delight. I feel she is happy at thus showing herself so vanquished and prostrated by my power; and she also knows that my vain ambition as a young lover is precisely to succeed in making her plead for mercy, in drawing from her a convulsive cry, in seeing her fall back exhausted on the pillow. Which, then, in these demonstrations, is the share of the physical sincerity and that of the passionate exaggeration? Is not her ardor an artificial attitude, assumed to please me? Does she not often sacrifice herself to my desire without desiring me? Has she not, at times, to repress a commencement of repugnance?"

Attentive and almost anxious, he leaned over the impenetrable creature. But, little by little, the contemplation of her beauty seemed to appease him. And he began to consider his new state. So, from this day on, a new life commenced for him.

For a minute, he concentrated mind and ear, in order to lose nothing of the great peace surrounding him. Only the slow, monotonous wash of the calm sea was to be heard in the propitious silence. Against the window-panes the branches of the olive-tree swayed imperceptibly, silvered by the sun, balancing light shadows on the whiteness of the curtains. At intervals a few human voices were heard, and almost unintelligible.

After this perception of the environing peace, he leaned once more over the adored one. A manifest harmony existed between the respiration of the woman and the respiration of the sea; and the concordance of the two rhythms gave an added charm to the sleeper.

She reposed on her right side, in a graceful attitude. Her form was supple and long, rather too long perhaps, but of serpentine elegance. The narrowness of the thigh made it resemble that of an adolescent. The sterile abdomen had preserved its primitive virginal purity. The bosom was small and firm, as if sculptured in very delicate alabaster, and the points of her extraordinarily erect breasts were of a rose-violet hue. The posterior part of her body, from the nape of the neck down to the middle, made one think once more of an Ephebe: it was one of those fragments of the ideal human type which Nature sometimes throws among the multitude of mediocre imprints by which the race perpetuates itself. But the most precious singularity of this body was, in George's eyes, the coloration. The skin had an indescribable color, very rare, very different from the ordinary color of brunettes. The comparison of an alabaster gilded by an inner flame but scarcely conveyed the idea of this divine fineness. It seemed that a diffusion of gold and impalpable amber enriched the tissues, variegating them with a variety of harmonious pallors, like music, darker in the depressions of the loins and where the loins join the sides, lighter on the breast and on the groins, where the epidermis makes its most exquisite suavity.

George thought of Othello's words: "I had rather be a toad, and live upon the vapour of a dungeon, than keep a corner in the thing I love for others' uses."

In her slumber, Hippolyte made a movement, with a vague air of suffering, which disappeared immediately. She threw back her head on the pillow, exposing her extended breast, on which was defined the light network of the veins. Her lower jaws were rather powerful, the chin rather long in profile, the nostrils broad. In the

abstract, the defects of her head were accentuated; but they did not displease George, because it would have been impossible for him to imagine that they could be corrected without removing from the physiognomy an element of living expression. The expression, that immaterial thing which irradiates all matter, that changing and immeasurable force which invades the corporeal face and transfigures it, that significative external which superposes a symbolic beauty of an order far more elevated and complex on the precise reality of the lines—that was Hippolyte Sanzio's great charm, because it offered to the passionate thinker a continual motive of emotions and dreams.

"Such a woman," he thought, "has belonged to others before being mine. She has shared the couch of another man; she has slept with another man in the same bed, on the same pillow. In all women there exists a sort of extraordinarily active physical memory, the memory of sensations. Does she remember the sensations which she received from that man? Can she have forgotten him who was the first, and who violated her? What were her feelings beneath her husband's caress?" At these questions, which he repeated to himself for the thousandth time, a well-known anguish oppressed his heart. "Oh! why can we not put to death the creature we love, and resuscitate her afterwards with a virgin body, with a new soul?"

He recalled certain words which Hippolyte had said in an hour of supreme intoxication: "You are embracing a virgin; I have never known any voluptuousness in love."

Hippolyte was married the spring preceding that of their love. A few weeks after the wedding, she had begun to suffer from a slow and cruel malady which had confined her to bed, and kept her for a long time between life and death. But, happily, this malady had spared her all new contact with the odious man who had seized her like an inert prey. When she emerged from her long convalescence, she gave herself up to passion as in a dream: suddenly, blindly, passionately, she abandoned herself to

the young stranger whose soft and curious voice had addressed to her words she had never heard before. And she had not lied when saying to him: "You are embracing a virgin; I have never known any voluptuousness."

Since then, what a profound change in this woman! Something new, indefinable yet real, had entered into her voice, into her gestures, into her eyes, into her slightest tones, into her slightest movements, into the slightest external signs. George had been present at the most intoxicating spectacle of which an intellectual lover can dream. He had seen the loved woman become metamorphosed after his own image, borrow his thoughts, his judgments, his tastes, his disdains, his predilections, his melancholies, all that which gives a special imprint and character to the mind. In speaking, Hippolyte used the forms of speech he preferred, pronounced certain words with the inflexion peculiar to him. In writing, she imitated even his hand. Never had the influence of one being on another been so rapid and so strong. Hippolyte had merited the device which George had given her: Gravis dum suavis. But this grave and suave creature, she in whom he had succeeded in inculcating, with so much art, the disdain for a commonplace existence, among what humiliating contacts had she spent the distant hours?

George thought again of his anguish of long ago, when he saw her go away, return beneath the conjugal roof, into the house of a man of whom he knew nothing, into a world of which he knew nothing, into the platitudes and the pettiness of the middle-class life in which she was born, and in which she had grown like a rare plant in a common flower-pot. Had she, at that time, never hidden anything from him? Had she never lied to him? Had she always been able to withdraw from her husband's importunities on the pretext that her cure was not yet complete? Always?

George remembered the horrible pang he felt one day when she came late, panting, her cheeks more colored and warmer than usual, with a persistent odor of tobacco in her hair, that bad odor which impregnates him who remains a long time in a room

where there are many smokers. "Pardon me, if I am late," she had said to him; "but I had several of my husband's friends to dinner, and they kept me until now." And these words had suggested to him the vision of a vulgar-looking dining-table around which the boors exhibited their brutality.

George recalled a thousand similar little details, and an infinity of other cruel sufferings, and also recent sufferings, caused by Hippolyte's new condition—her stay at her mother's, in a house not less unknown and not less free from suspicion. "At last, here she is now with me! Every day, every minute, continually, I shall see her, I shall enjoy her; I will see that her thoughts are occupied continually with me, my thoughts, my dreams, my sorrows. I will consecrate to her every instant, uninterruptedly; I will invent a thousand new ways of pleasing her, of agitating her, of making her sad, of exalting her; I will so penetrate her with my being that she will end by believing me to be an essential element of her own life."

He bent over her softly; he kissed her softly on the shoulder near the arm, on that little rounded eminence of exquisite form and color, whose skin had the softness of velvet fine enough as to seem almost impalpable. He respired the perfume of this woman, so subtle and sweet, that cutaneous perfume which, during the instant of pleasure, became as intoxicating as that of tuberoses and gave a terrible lash to desire. Watching thus closely the sleep of this delicate and complicated creature, whom slumber enveloped in a mystery, that strange creature who from every pore seemed to irradiate towards him some occult fascination of unbelievable intensity, he remarked once more in his inner self a vague movement of instinctive terror.

Again Hippolyte changed her position, without awakening, but with a faint moan. She turned on her back. A light perspiration imparted a dampness to her temples; through her half-closed mouth the breathing respired came more rapidly, rather irregularly; at moments, her eyebrows contracted. She was dreaming. Of what was she dreaming?

George, seized by an inquietude which soon increased to an insane anxiety, set himself to detect upon her face the slightest indications, in the hope of surprising there some revealing sign. Revealing what? He was incapable of reflecting, incapable of repressing the furious tumults of fears, doubts, and suspicions.

In her slumber Hippolyte started; her entire body was convulsed as if racked by nightmare; she turned over on her side towards George; she groaned, and cried:

"No, no!"

Then she drew two or three breaths, almost like sobs, and started again.

A prey to insane fear, George watched her fixedly, his ear strained—fearing to hear other words, another's name, the name of a man! He waited, in horrible uncertainty, as if under the menace of a thunderbolt which could destroy him in a second.

Hippolyte awoke; she saw him confusedly, without thinking, still sleeping; she nestled close up to him, with an almost unconscious movement.

"Of what were you dreaming?" he asked her, in a changed voice which seemed to reverberate his heart-beats.

"I do not know," she answered, languid, still drowsy, leaning her cheek on her lover's breast. "I don't remember."

She fell asleep again.

Under the soft pressure of her cheek, George remained motionless, with a dull rancor at the bottom of his soul. He felt himself a stranger to her, isolated from her, uselessly curious. All his bitter recollections came back to him in a tumult. He lived over again, in a single instant, his miseries of two years. He could oppose nothing to the immense doubts which crushed his soul and made the head of his loved one seem as heavy as a rock.

Suddenly Hippolyte started a second time, moaned, twisted, cried again. And she opened her eyes, frightened, groaning.

"Oh! my God!"

"What ails you? Of what were you dreaming?"

"I do not know."

Her face was contracted convulsively.

She added:

"You must have been leaning on me. I thought you were pushing me, hurting me."

She suffered visibly.

"Oh! my God! My pains have come back."

Since her illness, she sometimes had short attacks, spasms that quickly passed, but whose passage forced from her a groan or cry.

She turned towards George, looked fixedly into his eyes, and found there the traces of the tempest. And in a coaxing, reproachful tone she repeated:

"You did so hurt me!"

All at once George seized her in his arms, clasped her passionately to his breast, and smothered her under his kisses.

CHAPTER IX.

As the air was of an almost summer-like warmth, George proposed:

"Shall we dine outside?"

Hippolyte consented. They went down.

On the stairway they held each other's hand; and went down step by step slowly, stopping to look at the crushed flowers, turning round towards each other simultaneously, as if they saw each other for the first time. Each saw in the other eyes larger, more profound, as if more distant, and circled by an almost supernatural shadow. They smiled at each other without speaking, both dominated by the charm of that indefinable sensation which seemed to disperse into the uncertainty of space

the substance of their being, transformed into a fluid like a vapor. They walked towards the parapet; they stopped to look around, to listen to the sea.

What they saw was unusual, extraordinarily great, yet illumined by an inner light and as if by an irradiation of their hearts. What they heard was unusual, extraordinarily high, yet contemplated as if a secret revealed to them alone.

A second, as quickly passed! They were recalled to themselves, not by a gust of the wind nor by the noise of a wave, nor by a bellowing, nor by a bark, nor by a human voice, but by the very anxiety which arose from their too intense joy. A second, as quickly passed, irrevocable! And both recommenced to feel that life was slipping by, that time was flying; that everything was becoming once more foreign to their being, that their souls were becoming anxious again and their love imperfect. This second of supreme oblivion, this unique second, was gone forever.

Hippolyte, moved by the solemnity of the solitude, oppressed by a vague fright in the presence of those vast waters, beneath that desert sky, which, from the zenith to the horizon, paled by slow gradations, murmured:

"What endless space!"

It seemed now to both that the point of space in which they breathed was infinitely distant from the frequented spots, out of the way, isolated, unknown, inaccessible, almost outside of the world. Now they saw the wish of their hearts realized, they both felt the same inward terror, as if they foresaw their impotence to sustain the plenitude of the new life. For a few instants longer, silent, standing side by side, but apart, they continued to contemplate the melancholy and icy Adriatic, whose great white-capped waves sported in endless playfulness. From time to time a stiff breeze swept through the tufts of the acacias, bearing off their perfume.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked George, drawing himself up, as if to rebel against the importunate sadness which was about to conquer him.

He was there, alone with his mistress, living and free; and, nevertheless, his heart

was not satisfied. Did he, then, bear in himself an inconsolable hopelessness?

Feeling anew a separation between the silent creature and himself, he took her again by the hand, and gazed into the pupils of her eyes.

"Of what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking of Rimini," answered Hippolyte, with a smile.

Always the past! She remembers bygone days at such a moment! Was it the same sea which lay extended before their eyes, veiled in the same illusion? His first motion was one of hostility against the unconscious evocatrice. Then, as if in a lightning flash, with sudden uneasiness, he saw all the summits of his love light up, and scintillate in the past, prodigiously. Far-distant things came back to his memory, accompanied by waves of music which exalted and transfigured them. He lived again, in one second, the most lyric hours of his passion, and he lived them again in propitious places, among the sumptuous scenery of nature and art which had rendered his joy nobler and more profound. Why then, now, in comparison with that past, had the moment just previous lost part of its charm? In his eyes, dazzled by the rapid gleam of his recollections, everything now seemed colorless. And he perceived that the progressive diminution of the light caused him a kind of indefinable corporeal uneasiness, as if this external phenomenon were in immediate correspondence with some element of his own life.

He sought some phrase that would bring Hippolyte closer to him, to attach her to him by some sensitive tie, to restore to himself of the present reality the exact feeling which he had just lost. But this search was painful to him; the ideas escaped him, dispersed, left him void.

As he had heard a rattle of plates, he asked:

"Are you hungry?"

This question, suggested by a slight material fact, and propounded unexpectedly, with puerile vivacity, made Hippolyte smile.

"Yes, a little," she answered, smiling.

And they turned round to look at the table spread beneath the oak. In a few minutes the dinner would be ready.

"You must be satisfied with what there is," said George. "Very countrified cooking."

"Oh! I should be very well satisfied with grass."

And, gayly, she approached the table, examined with curiosity the cloth, the knives and forks, the glassware, the plates, found everything pretty; rejoiced like a child at the sight of the large flowers which decorated the white and fine porcelain.

"Everything here pleases me," she said.

She bent over a large round loaf of bread, yet warm beneath its beautiful browned and rounded crust. She breathed in the odor with delight.

"Oh! what a delightful odor!"

And, with childish greediness, she broke off the crusty edge of the loaf.

"What fine bread!"

Her white and strong teeth shone in the bitten bread; the play of her sinuous mouth expressed vigorously the pleasure enjoyed. In this act, her whole person shed a pure and simple grace which seduced and surprised George as if it were an unexpected novelty.

"Here! taste how good it is."

And she handed him the piece of bread on which was imprinted the humid trace of her bite; and she pushed it between his lips, laughing, imparting the sensual contagion of her hilarity.

"Just see!"

He found the taste delicious; and he abandoned himself to this fugitive enchantment, permitted himself to be enveloped by this seduction which seemed a novelty. A mad longing suddenly seized him to embrace the temptress, to lift her in his arms, to

carry her off like a prey. His heart swelled with a confused aspiration towards physical force, towards robust health, towards an almost savage life of joy, towards simple and primitive love, towards the great primordial liberty. He felt a sudden desire to rend the mortal frame which oppressed him, to leave it and be entirely renewed, indemnified for all the woes he had suffered, for all the deformity which had hindered his flight.

He had the hallucination of a future existence which would be his, and in which, freed from every harmful habit, from every foreign tyranny, from every bad error, he would look at things as if he saw them for the first time and had before him all the surface of the World, exposed like a human visage.

"Was it then impossible that the miracle should come from this young woman, who, at the stone table, beneath the protecting oak, had broken the new bread and shared it with him? Could not the New Life really commence from to-day?"

IV.

THE NEW LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

Over the Adriatic swept the humid and oppressive heat of the east wind. The sky was cloudy, nebulous, white as milk. The sea, having lost all motion and all materiality, seemed mingled with the diffused vapors in the distance—very white, without respiration. A white sail, a single white sail—so rare a thing in the Adriatic—was visible yonder, near the Diomede Islands, motionless, indefinitely lengthened by the reflection of the water, the visible centre of this inert world, which gradually seemed to evaporate.

Seated in a tired attitude, on the parapet of the loggia, Hippolyte fixed her gaze on the sail, her eyes magnetized by its whiteness. A little bent, her whole figure relaxed, she had an air of stupor, almost of hebetude, which revealed the momentary eclipse of her inner life. And this absence of expressive energy accentuated all that there

was commonplace and irregular in her features, rendered heavier the lower part of her face. Even the mouth—that elastic and sinuous mouth—whose contact had so often communicated to George a sort of instinctive and indefinable terror, seemed now despoiled of its bewitching charm, and reduced to the physical appearance of a vulgar organ which only recalled kisses as a mechanical art deprived of all beauty.

George considered with attention and clear-sightedness the naked reality of this unconscious woman, with whose life he had, up to now, so furiously joined his own life. And he thought: "In an instant, all has ended. The flame is extinguished. I love her no longer! ... How has that happened so quickly?" What he felt was not only the disgust following abuse, that carnal aversion which follows prolonged pleasures, but a more profound detachment which seemed to him definite and irremediable. "How could anyone still love, after having seen what I see?" The usual phenomenon took place in him; with its first perceptions, real, isolated and exaggerated, he composed by association an inner phantom which gave to his nerves a much stronger impulse than the present object. Henceforth, what he saw in Hippolyte's person with inconceivable intensity was the sexual being exclusively, the inferior being deprived of all spiritual value, a simple instrument of pleasure and of luxury, the instrument of ruin and of death. And he had a horror of his father! But, after all, was he not doing the same thing? And the recollection of the concubine crossed his mind; he found in his memory certain details of the horrible altercation with that odious man, in the country house, in front of the open window through which he had heard the cries of the little bastards, in front of the large table littered with papers on which he had perceived the disk of glass and the obscene vignette.

"How heavy the air is!" murmured Hippolyte, removing her gaze from the white sail, which still remained motionless in the infinite. "Does it not oppress you, too?"

She rose, took a few listless steps towards a willow seat, provided with cushions, and sank down as if dead with fatigue, sighing deeply, throwing back her head,

half-closing her eyes, the curved lids of which trembled. She had suddenly become very beautiful again. Her beauty was rekindled, unexpectedly, like a torch.

"When will the mistral blow? Look at that sail. It is always in the same place. It's the first white sail since my arrival. It seems as if I dream it is there."

As George remained silent, she added:

"Have you seen any others?"

"No; it's the first I have seen, too!"

"From where did it come?"

"From Gargano, perhaps."

"And where is it going?"

"Perhaps to Ortona."

"What is her cargo?"

"Perhaps oranges."

She began to laugh; and even her laugh, enveloping her as if in a live wave of freshness, transfigured her anew.

"Look, look!" she cried, raising herself on one elbow and pointing to the horizon of the sea, where it appeared as if a curtain had fallen. "Five other sails, over there in file. Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see them."

"There are five?"

"Yes, five."

"More, more! Over there! Look, another file! What a number there are!"

The sails appeared at the extreme limit of the sea, red like little flames, motionless.

"The wind is changing. I feel that the wind is changing. Look there, how the water is beginning to ripple."

A sudden breeze assailed the tufts of the acacias, which, bending on their stems, shed several blossoms like dead butterflies. Then, before those light remains could touch the earth, all was at peace again. During the interval of silence, the low murmur of the water as it was dashed against the beach could be heard; and this murmur died away with the flight of the wave as it passed along the shore, and then ceased.

"Did you hear it?"

She had risen and leaned on the parapet, listening intently, in the attitude of a musician who is tuning his instrument.

"Here is the wave coming back," she cried again, pointing to the mobile rippling of the water, upon which the shower was advancing; and she waited, animated by impatience, ready to fill her lungs with the wind.

After a few seconds the acacias, assailed, once more bent on their stems, causing a shower of other flowers. And the strong gust bore as far as the loggia the saline odor mingled with the perfume of the withered bunches. A silvery sound, of singular harmony, filled with its kettledrum vibrations the concavity of the little bay between the two promontories.

"Do you hear?" said Hippolyte, in a low but exulting voice as if this music had penetrated as far as her soul, and that all her life were participating in the vicissitudes of the things around her.

George followed all her actions, all her gestures, all her movements, every word, with such intense attention that the rest was for him as if it had never existed. The preceding image no longer coincided with the actual appearance, though it still dominated his mind to the extent of maintaining the profound sensation of the moral detachment, and of preventing him from replacing this woman in her first frame, of not reëstablishing her in her original state of being, of not reintegrating her. But from every one of these actions, from every one of these gestures, from every one of

these movements, from every one of these words, emanated an inevitable power. All these physical manifestations seemed to compose a web which trapped him, and held him prisoner. It seemed that between this woman and himself there was formed a sort of corporeal bond, a sort of organic dependence, a correspondence by virtue of which the slightest gesture provoked in him an involuntary sensual modification, and that henceforth he would no longer be capable of living and feeling independently. How could he reconcile this evident affinity with the occult hate which he had just discovered at the bottom of his heart?

Hippolyte, through a spontaneous curiosity, through an instinctive desire to multiply her sensations and to make the surrounding neighborhood part of herself, was still absorbed in the spectacle. The facility she exhibited in entering into communication with every form of natural life and of finding a world of analogies between human expressions and the appearances of the most diverse things; this rapid and diffuse sympathy, which attached her not only to objects with which she was in daily contact, but also to foreign objects; that sort of imitative virtue which often permitted her to express by a single sign the distinctive character of an animate or inanimate being, of talking to the domestic animals and understanding their language—all these mimic faculties properly concurred in rendering more visible, in George's eyes, the predominance in her of the inferior life.

"What's that?" she said, surprised at noticing a sudden, mysterious rumbling. "Didn't you hear it?"

It was like a dull blow, which other blows followed in rapid succession—blows so strange that it could not be discerned if they came from near or far, in the air that became more and more limpid.

"Didn't you hear that?"

"It may be distant thunder."

"Oh, no!"

"What, then?"

They looked around them, perplexed. Every moment the sea was changing color in proportion as the sky became clearer; here and there it took on that shade of indefinable green, like unripe flax, as when the sun's oblique rays pass through the diaphanous stems in an April twilight.

"Ah! it's the sail flapping—that white sail, yonder," cried Hippolyte, happy at being the first to discover the mystery. "Look. She's caught the wind. She's off."

CHAPTER II.

With a few intervals of drowsy indolence, she felt a mad desire to wander off, to venture out in the heat of the sun, to scour the beach and surrounding country, to explore unfamiliar paths. She stimulated her companion; at times she carried him off almost by force; at times, too, she started off alone, and he joined her unexpectedly.

In order to climb a hill, they followed a small pathway bordered by thick hedges of violet flowers, among which blossomed the large and delicate calices of other snowy fragrant flowers with fine petals. On the other side of the hedges, ears of corn waved to and fro on their stems, yellowish-green in color, more or less ready to change into gold; and in other places the corn was so thick and high that it towered over the tops of the hedges, suggesting a beautiful, overflowing cup.

Nothing escaped Hippolyte's vigilant eye. Every minute she stooped to blow away certain spheres of down, very fragile, at the tips of their long, slender peduncles. Every minute she stopped to observe the small spiders climbing by an invisible thread from a flower situated low down to a branch above.

On the hill, in a narrow, sunny circle, there was a small field of flax already dry. The yellowish stems bore at their summits a ball of gold, and here and there the gold seemed tarnished by an ironlike rust. The highest stems were waving almost imperceptibly. And, because of this extreme lightness, the whole gave the idea of some delicate piece of gold-work.

"Look, it is just like filigree!" said Hippolyte.

The furze was commencing to shed its flowers. A few feet away hung a sort of white foam in flakes; on others crawled large black and brown caterpillars, soft to the touch as velvet. Hippolyte took up one whose delicate down was streaked with vermilion, and she kept it calmly on the palm of her hand.

"It is more beautiful than a flower," she said.

George remarked, and it was not the first time, that she was almost totally devoid of instinctive repugnance towards insects, and that, in general, she did not feel that keen and invincible repulsion which he himself felt for a host of things considered unclean.

"Throw it away, I beg of you!"

She began to laugh, and stretched out her hand as if to put the caterpillar on his neck. He gave a cry and sprang back, which made her laugh all the more.

"Oh, what a brave man!"

In a spirit of mischief, she started to pursue him between the trunks of the young oaks, through the narrow paths that formed a sort of mountainous labyrinth. Her peals of laughter started from between the gray stones flocks of wild sparrows.

"Stop! Stop! You frighten the sheep."

A small flock of frightened sheep dispersed, dragging behind them up the rocky incline a bundle of bluish rags.

"Stop. I have it no longer. See."

And she showed the runaway her empty hands.

"Let us help the Mute."

And she ran towards the woman in rags, who was making ineffectual efforts to hold back the sheep attached to the long cords of twisted osier. Hippolyte seized the bunch of cords, and braced her feet against a stone in order to have more resisting

power. She panted, her face purple; and in this violent attitude she was very beautiful. Her beauty lighted up, unexpectedly, like a torch.

"Come, George, come you too!" she cried to George, communicating to him her frank and childish joy.

The sheep stopped in a clump of furze. There were six of them, three black and three white, and bore the osier cords around their woolly necks. The woman who looked after them, emaciated, poorly covered by her bluish rags, gesticulated while giving vent, from her toothless mouth, to an incomprehensible grumbling. Her little greenish eyes, without eyelashes, bleary, tearful and congested, had a malignant look.

When Hippolyte gave her alms, she kissed the pieces of money. Then, letting go the cords, she removed from her head a rag which no longer had either form or color, stooped to the ground, and slowly, with greatest care, tied up the pieces of money in a multiplicity of knots.

"I am tired," said Hippolyte. "Let us sit down here for a moment."

They sat down. George then perceived that the spot was near the great furze field where, on that May morning, the five virgins had plucked the flowers to strew the path of the beautiful Roman. That morning already seemed very far off, lost in dreamy haze. He said:

"Do you see, over yonder, those bushes which are now almost flowerless? Well, it was there that we filled the baskets to strew flowers on your path when you arrived. Oh, what a day! Do you remember?"

She smiled, and in a transport of sudden tenderness took one of his hands, which she kept pressed in her own; and she leaned her cheek on the shoulder of the loved one, burying herself in the sweetness of that memory, of that solitude, of that peace, of that poesy.

From time to time a breath of wind passed through the tops of the oaks; and below,

farther on, in the gray of the olive-trees, passed, from time to time, a clear wave of silver. The Mute moved away slowly behind the feeding sheep; and she seemed to leave something fantastic in her traces, as if a reflect of the legends in which malignant fairies transform themselves into toads at every turn of the path.

"Aren't you happy now?" murmured Hippolyte.

George thought: "It is already two weeks, and there has been no change in me. Still the same anxiety, the same inquietude, the same discontent! We are hardly at the beginning, and I already foresee the end. What shall we do to enjoy the passing hour?" Certain phrases of a letter from Hippolyte recurred to him: "Oh! when will it be given me to be near you during entire days, to live your life? You will see, I shall no longer be the same woman. I will be your mistress, your friend, your sister; and if you think me worthy, I will be also your adviser.... In me you should find nothing but sweetness and repose.... It will be a life of love such as has never before been seen." ...

He thought: "For the past two weeks our whole existence has been composed of petty, material incidents, like those of to-day. It is true; I have already seen in her another woman! She is commencing to change, even in appearance. It is unbelievable how rapidly she is gaining in health. One would say that every breath is a gain; that, for her, every fruit turns into blood; that the healthfulness of the air penetrates her every pore. She was made for this life of idleness, of liberty, of physical enjoyment, of carelessness. Up to now, she has not uttered a single thoughtful word which revealed preoccupation of the soul. Her intervals of silence and immobility are caused only by muscular fatigue, just as at the present moment."

"Of what are you thinking?" she demanded.

"Of nothing. I am happy."

After a pause, she added:

"We'll go on now, shall we?"

They rose. She bestowed upon his mouth a sonorous kiss. She was gay and restless. Every few minutes she darted away from him to run down an incline free from rocks; and when she wished to check her speed, she grasped the trunk of a young oak, which groaned and bent beneath the shock.

She gathered a violet flower and sucked it.

"It's honey."

She gathered another, and placed it on her lover's lips.

"Taste it!"

And it seemed as if she enjoyed the savor for the second time, at seeing the motions of his mouth.

"With all these flowers, and all these bees, there must certainly be a hive near by," she went on. "One of these mornings, while you are asleep, I must come here and search for it.... I'll bring you a honeycomb."

She prattled at a great rate about this adventure, which tickled her fancy; and in her words appeared, with the vivacity of an actual sensation, the freshness of the morning, the mystery of the woods, the impatience of the search, the joy of the discovery, the pale color and wild fragrance of honey.

They halted half-way up the hill, at the border of the woody region, charmed by the melancholy which ascended from the sea.

The sea was delicately colored, between a blue and a green, in which the green had a progressive tendency to dominate; but the sky, of a leaden azure at the zenith, and streaked here and there by clouds, was rose-colored in the curve toward Ortono. This light was reflected in pale tints on the surface of the water, and recalled deflowered roses floating. Against the maritime background were arranged in steps, in harmonious degrees, first the two large oaks with their dark foliage, then the silvery olive-trees, then the fig-trees with their bright foliage and violet branches.

The moon, orange-colored, enormous, almost at its full, rose up above the ring of the horizon, like a globe of crystal through whose transparency could be seen a chimerical country figured in bas-relief on a massive disk of gold.

One heard the warbling of birds, near and far. One heard the lowing of an ox; then a bleating; then the wailing of a child. There was a pause during which all these voices were silent, and only this single wail was heard.

It was a wail, not violent or interrupted, but shrill, continuous, almost feeble. And it attracted the soul, detached it from all the rest, snatched it from the seduction of the twilight, to oppress it with a veritable anguish which responded to the suffering of the unknown creature, of the little, invisible being.

"Do you hear?" said Hippolyte, whose voice, already changed by compassion, became involuntarily lower. "I know who the child is that's crying."

"You know?" asked George, to whom his mistress's voice and appearance had given a strange shock.

"Yes."

She was again listening intently to the lamentable moaning, which now seemed to fill the whole place. She added: "It's the infant that the Ghouls are sucking."

She had pronounced these words without the shadow of a smile, as if she herself were beneath the empire of the superstition.

"It lives over there, in that tumble-down cottage. Candia told me."

After a slight hesitation, during which they listened to the wails and had a fantastic vision of the dying child, Hippolyte suggested:

"Shall we go and see it? It's not far."

George was perplexed, dreading the sadness of the spectacle, and the contact of the distressed and coarse people.

"Shall we?" repeated Hippolyte, whose curiosity became irresistible. "It is over

there, in that old cottage, beneath the pine. I know the way."

"Let's go!"

She went straight ahead, hastening her steps, across a sloping field. Both were silent; both heard only the infantile wail which served them as a guide. And, step by step, their anguish became more poignant and in proportion as the wailing became more distinct and indicated better the poor, bloodless body from which pain forced it.

They traversed a copse of odorous orange-trees, treading on the flowers scattered on the ground. On the threshold of a cottage close to the one they sought an enormously stout woman was seated; and on her monstrous body was a small round head, with soft eyes, white teeth, a placid smile.

"Where are you going, signora?" asked the woman, without rising.

"We are going to see the child whom the Ghouls are sucking."

"What's the use? You'd better stay here, and take a rest. I do not lack children, either. Look!"

Three or four naked children, who had also such large stomachs that one would have believed them to be dropsical, dragged themselves along on the ground, grunting and tumbling over, putting in their mouths everything that fell into their hands. And the woman held in her arms a fifth child, all covered with brownish scabs, from the midst of which shone out a pair of large clear blue eyes, like miraculous flowers.

"You see that I have plenty of them too, and that this one, here, is sick. Stay here a bit."

She smiled, soliciting with her eyes the strangers' generosity. And, with an expression in which one guessed the desire to dissuade the curiosity of the woman by the vague presentiment of a peril:

"What's the good of going there?" she repeated. "See how ill this one is."

And again she showed the afflicted child, but without simulating any sorrow, as if

she simply offered to the passer-by a nearer object of compassion in exchange for a more distant one—as if she wished to say: "Since you desire to be compassionate, have compassion for the one before you." George examined, with deep pain, the poor, spotted face, whose large, bright, and clear eyes seemed to drink in all the light shed on this June evening.

"What is he suffering from?" he asked.

"Ah! signor, who ever knows?" answered the fat woman, always with the same placidity. "He has what God wishes."

Hippolyte gave her some money; and they resumed their way towards the other cottage, bearing with them the nauseous odor emanating from that door full of shadow.

They did not speak. They felt a contraction of their hearts, a disgust in their mouths, a weakness in their limbs. They heard the shrill wailing, mingled with other voices, other sounds; and they were stupefied at having been able to hear this single sound so far away, and so distinctly. But what attracted their eyes was the tall and straight pine whose robust trunk stood out black against the diffused light of the twilight, sustaining a melodious summit filled with sparrows.

At their approach, a whisper passed among the women gathered around the victim.

"Here are the gentlefolk—Candia's strangers."

"Come, come!"

And the women opened their circle to permit the arrivals to draw nearer. One of them, an old woman, with wrinkled skin, of the color of parched earth, expressionless eyes, whitish and as if vitrified in the depths of their hollow orbits, said, addressing Hippolyte, and touching her arm:

"Look, signora! Look! The Ghouls are sucking it, poor creature! Look at the state they've reduced it to! May God protect your children!"

Her voice was so dry that it appeared artificial, and resembled the sounds articulated by an automaton.

"Cross yourself, signora!" she added again.

The advice seemed lugubrious in that lifeless mouth, in which the voice lost its human character and became a dead thing. Hippolyte made the sign of the cross, and looked at her companion.

In the space before the door of the hut the women ere in a circle as around a spectacle, making; from time to time some mechanical sign of condolence. And the circle was unceasingly renewed; some, already tired of looking, went away; others arrived from neighboring houses. And almost all, at the sight of this slow death, repeated the same gesture, repeated the same words.

The child reposed in a little cradle, of rough pine boards, like a small, lidless coffin. The poor creature, naked, sickly, emaciated, greenish, was wailing continuously and waving its debilitated arms and legs, which had nothing more than skin and bone, as if asking for help. And the mother, seated at the foot of the cradle, bent in two, her head so low that it almost touched her knees, seemed to hear nothing. It seemed as if some terrible weight rested on her neck and prevented her from rising. At times, mechanically, she placed on the edge of the cradle a coarse, callous hand, burnt by the sun; and she made the gesture of rocking without altering her attitude or breaking the silence. Then the holy images, the talismans, and the relics, with which the pine cradle was almost entirely covered, undulated and tinkled, during a momentary pause in the wail.

"Liberata! Liberata!" cried one of the women, shaking her. "Look, Liberata! The lady has come—the lady is in your house! Look!"

The mother slowly raised her head and looked around her, with a bewildered air; then she fixed on her visitor her dry and mournful eyes, in whose depths there was less of fatigued sorrow than inert and shadowy terror—the terror of nocturnal

witchcraft against which no exorcism prevailed, the terror of those insatiable beings who now had the house in their power, and who would not abandon it perhaps but with the last corpse.

"Speak! Speak!" insisted one of the women, shaking her again by the arm. "Speak! Ask the lady to send you to the Madonna of the Miracles."

The others surrounded Hippolyte with supplications.

"Yes, signora. Be charitable to her! Send her to the Madonna. Send her to the Madonna!"

The child cried louder. In the tops of the pine-tree the sparrows were emitting heart-rending cries. In the neighborhood, between the deformed trunks of the olive-trees, a dog barked. The moon was beginning to cast its shadows. "Yes," stammered Hippolyte, incapable of sustaining longer the fixed gaze of the silent mother. "Yes, yes, we will send her—to-morrow."

"No, not to-morrow; Saturday, signora."

"Saturday is the Vigil."

"Let her buy him a candle."

"A fine candle."

"A ten-pound candle."

"Do you hear, Liberata? Do you hear?"

"The lady will send you to the Madonna!"

"The Madonna will pity you."

"Speak! Speak!"

"She's become dumb, signora."

"She hasn't spoken for three days."

In the midst of the confused cries of the women, the child cried still louder.

"Do you hear how he cries?"

"He always cries loudest, signora, at nightfall."

"Perhaps it's coming soon."

"Perhaps the child has seen——"

"Make the sign of the cross, signora."

"It's getting dark."

"Do you hear how he cries?"

"Isn't that the bell tolling?"

"No; one can't hear it here."

"Silence!"

"One can't hear it here."

"But I hear it."

"I hear it, too."

"Ave Maria!"

All were silent, made the sign of the cross, and bowed. It seemed as if several sonorous waves, scarcely perceptible, arrived from the distant market-town; but the child's wail filled every listener's ear. Once more, only this single wail could be heard. The mother had fallen on her knees at the foot of the cradle, prostrated to the earth. Hippolyte, her head bowed, was praying with fervor.

"Look, there, in the doorway!" whispered one of the women to her neighbor.

George, watchful and uneasy, turned his head. The doorway was full of shadow.

"Look, there, in the doorway! Don't you see something?"

"Yes, I see," replied the other, uncertain, a little frightened.

"What is it? What do you see?" asked a third.

"What is it?" demanded a fourth.

"What is it?"

Suddenly curiosity and fright seized them all. They looked toward the door. The child cried. The mother rose, and she, too, began to fix her dilated eyes on the door which the shadows rendered mysterious. The dog barked among the olive-trees.

"What is it?" said George, in a low voice, but not without requiring some effort to shake off the increasing uneasiness of his imagination. "What do you see?"

None of the women dared to answer. All, in the shadow, saw the outlines of a vague form.

Then he advanced toward the door. When he crossed the threshold, a furnace-like heat and a repugnant stench cut short his breath. He turned round, went out.

"It's a scythe," he said.

In fact, it was a scythe hanging on the wall.

"Ah! a scythe."

And the voices recommenced.

"Liberata! Liberata!"

"Are you mad?"

"She is mad."

"It's getting dark. Let us go."

"He's not crying any more."

"Poor creature! Is he asleep?"

"He has stopped crying."

"Take in the cradle; the evening is damp. We will help you, Liberata."

"Poor creature! Is he asleep?"

"One would think he were dead. He no longer moves."

"Take in the cradle, won't you? Don't you hear us, Liberata?"

"She is mad."

"Where is the lamp? Joseph will soon return. Have you no lamp? Joseph will soon return from the lime-kiln."

"She is mad. She doesn't speak any more."

"We are going. God be with you!"

"Poor tormented flesh! Is he sleeping?"

"He's sleeping, he's sleeping.... He's not in pain now."

"Oh, Lord Jesus, save him!"

"Protect us, O Lord!"

"Farewell, farewell! Good night!"

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

CHAPTER III.

The dog continued to bark in the olive-groves, while George and Hippolyte came back by the path towards Candia's house. When the animal recognized the guests of the house, he stopped barking, and came to meet them joyfully.

"Why, it's Giardino!" cried Hippolyte. And she stooped to caress the poor beast, with whom she had already become friends. "He was calling us. It's getting late."

The moon rose in the silence of the sky, slowly, preceded by a luminous wave which gradually covered the azure. All the sounds of the surrounding fields died away beneath this pacific light. And the unexpected cessation of every noise seemed almost supernatural to George, whom an inexplicable fright kept alert.

"Stop a moment," he said, holding Hippolyte back.

And he listened intently.

"What are you listening to?"

"It seemed to me——"

And both looked back in the direction of the barn, which the olive-trees concealed from view. But they heard nothing except the even and rocking rhythm of the sea in the curve of the little gulf. Over their heads a cricket clove the air in its flight with a grating sound like that of a diamond on a pane of glass.

"Don't you think the child is dead?" asked George, without dissimulating his emotion. "He stopped crying."

"That's true!" said Hippolyte. "And you believe he's dead?"

George did not reply. And they resumed their way back beneath the silvery olive-groves.

"Did you notice the mother well?" he asked at last, after a silence, possessed internally by the sombre image.

"My God! My God!"

"And that old woman who touched your elbow! What a voice! What eyes!"

His words betrayed the strange fright which dominated him, as if the recent spectacle had been a frightful revelation to him, as if life had suddenly been made manifest to him under a mysterious and savage aspect, bruising and stamping him with an indelible sign.

"You know, when I entered the house, on the ground behind the door there was the corpse of some beast—already half-decomposed. The smell was simply choking."

"What do you mean?"

"It was either a cat or a dog. I could not distinguish very well. It was difficult to see well inside."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes. Without any doubt there was a dead animal. The stench——"

A shudder of disgust ran through him as he thought of it.

"What could it be?" said Hippolyte, who felt herself becoming infected by the contagion of fear and disgust.

"How can I know?"

The dog gave a bark to announce their coming. They had arrived. Candia was waiting for them, and the table was already spread beneath the oak.

"How late you are, signora!" cried the affable hostess, with a smile. "Where have you been? What will you give me if I guess? Well, you have been to see the child of Liberata Maunella. May Jesus guard us from the Cunning One!"

When the lovers were at table, she approached, curious, to speak and question.

"Did you see him, signora? He gets no better; he's just as bad. Yet his father and mother have done everything to save him."

What had they not done! Candia related all the remedies attempted, all the exorcisms. The priest had been there, and, after having covered the child's head with the edge of his stole, had read verses from the Bible. The mother had suspended from the lintel of the door a waxen cross, blessed on Ascension Day; she had sprinkled with holy water the hinges of the imposts, and recited aloud the Credo, thrice in succession; she had put a handful of salt in a piece of linen, which afterwards she had knotted and hung around the neck of her dying son. The father had done the seven nights; for seven consecutive nights he had watched in the dark, before a lighted lantern covered with a pot, attentive to the slightest sound, ready to assail and seize the Ghoul. A single pin-prick would have sufficed to render it visible to human eyes. But the seven vigils had gone by without result. The child wasted away, and was consumed hour by hour, hopelessly. Finally, on the advice of a witch, the despairing father had killed a dog and put the body behind the door. This prevented the Ghoul entering before having counted all the hairs of the dead beast.

"Do you hear?" said George to Hippolyte.

They did not eat, their hearts oppressed with pity, struck with terror at the sudden apparition of these phantoms of an obscure and atrocious life, which environed the leisures of their useless love.

"May Jesus protect us from the Cunning One!" repeated Candia; and piously, with her open hand, she indicated the place where lay the living fruit. "May God protect your children, signora!"

Then she added:

"You're not eating this evening! You've no appetite. That innocent soul distresses your hearts. And your husband isn't eating, either. Look!"

Hippolyte said:

"Do many die—like that?"

"Oh!" went on Candia, "this is a bad district. The cursed brood swarms hereabouts. One is never safe. May Jesus protect us from the Cunning One!"

She repeated the conjuration, then added, pointing to a plate on the table:

"Do you see those fish? They are from the Trabocco; they were brought by Turchin."

And she lowered her voice.

"Do you want to know? For nearly a year, Turcum and all his family have been in the power of some witchcraft from which he has not yet been able to free himself."

"Who is Turchin?" asked George, listening breathlessly to the woman's words, fascinated by the mystery of these things. "The man from the Trabocco?"

And he recalled that earthy visage, almost chinless scarcely larger than a fist, with a long nose, prominent and pointed like the snout of a pike, between two small, glittering eyes.

"Yes, signor. Look over there. If your sight is good you can see him. To-night he is fishing by moonlight."

And Candia pointed out on the rocks the great fishing machine—that collection of trunks freed from their bark, planks and cables, whose strange whiteness resembled the colossal skeleton of some antediluvian amphibian. In the calm air was heard the creaking of the capstan. As the tide was low and the rocks were uncovered, the odor of the algæ came up victorious from the beach, stronger and fresher than the effluvia from the fertile hill.

Hippolyte breathed in the intoxicating odor, already entirely occupied by that intense sensation which made her nostrils quiver and her eyes half-close. She murmured:

"Oh, how delicious! Don't you smell it, George?"

He, on his part, was very attentive to Candia's words, and saw in imagination the silent drama suspended over the sea. To the phantoms evoked by this simple woman in the serene night his soul, inclined to mystery and naturally superstitious, gave limitless life and tragic horror. For the first time he had a vast and confused vision of that race unknown to him, of all that miserable flesh, full of animal instincts and of bestial afflictions, bent and sweating on the glebe or buried in the depths of the cottages, beneath the perpetual menace of those dark powers. Amidst the sweet richness of the country which he had selected as the theatre of his love, he discovered a violent human agitation; and it was as if he had discovered a swarm of insects in the masses of magnificent hair impregnated with aroma. He felt the same shudder, already felt before this, at the contact with brutally revealed life: "recently, at the sight of his relatives, of his father, of his brother, of the poor, bigoted glutton." All at once, he felt as if he were no longer alone with his mistress amidst the benign growths, under the bark of which he had one day believed he had surprised a new emotion. He felt himself, on the contrary, environed and almost jostled by an unknown crowd, which, bearing in itself the same vitality which the trunks of trees possess, blind, tenacious, and unconquerable, adhered to him by the bond of the species and could immediately communicate to him its suffering, by a look, a

gesture, a sigh, a sob, a groan, a cry.

"Ah! this district is bad," repeated Candia, shaking her head. "But the Messiah of Chapelles will come to purify the earth."[*]

{*} The episode of the Messiah of Chapelles is historical. Oreste de Amicis born in 1824 at Chapelles, played precisely the rôle assigned to him here by the novelist. He died in 1889. Antonio de Nino has collected and published curious documents concerning this personage.

"The Messiah?"

"Father," cried Candia, in the direction of the house, "when is the Messiah to be here?"

The old man appeared upon the threshold.

"One of these days," he replied.

And, turning toward the beach, which in the dim light cast by the half-moon disappeared to view in the direction of Ortona, he signified with a vague gesture the mystery of that new deliverer in whom the country people had placed their hope and faith.

"One of these days—very soon."

And the old man, who wanted to talk, approached the table, looked at his guests with an uncertain smile, and asked:

"Don't you know who it is?"

"Perhaps it is Semplice," said George in whose memory revived a distant and indistinct recollection of that Semplice di Sulmone who fell into an ecstasy, his eyes fixed on the sun.

"No, signor; Sembri is dead. The new Messiah is Oreste of Chapelles."

And the old man, in fervent and vividly colored language, related the new legend, such as it had been conceived by the rural population.

Oreste, being a capuchin monk, had known Semplice at Sulmone, and had learned from him the art of reading the future on the face of the rising sun. Then he began to travel all over the world: he had gone to Rome, and had spoken with the Pope; in another place he had spoken with the king. On his return to Chapelles, his birthplace, he had passed seven years in the cemetery in the company of skeletons, wearing a hair shirt, flagellating himself night and day, according to discipline. He had preached in the parish church, and had drawn tears and cries from the fishers. Then he had started once more on a pilgrimage to all the sanctuaries; he had remained thirty days on the mountain of Ancona; he had remained twelve days on Mount St. Bernard; he had climbed the highest peaks, struggling through the snow, his head bared. Returned again to Chapelles, he had recommenced to preach in his church. But, shortly afterwards, persecuted and driven away by his enemies, he had sought refuge in the Island of Corsica; and there he had made himself an apostle, resolved to traverse all Italy and to write the name of the Virgin in his blood on the gate of every city. As an apostle, he had returned to his native place, announcing that he had seen a star in the midst of a thicket of trees, and that from it he had received the Word. And, finally, by the inspiration of the Eternal Father, he had taken the great name of the New Messiah.

He was now making his pilgrimage through the rural districts dressed in a red tunic and a blue mantle, with long hair down to his shoulders, and his beard trimmed like Christ's. His apostles accompanied him—men who had abandoned the spade and plough to devote themselves to the triumph of the new faith. In Pantaleoni Donadio revived the spirit of Saint Matthew; in Antonio Secamiglio revived the spirit of Saint Peter; in Giuseppe Scurti, that of Maximin; in Maria Clara, that of Saint Elizabeth; and Vincent di Giambattista, who represented the archangel Saint Michael, was the messenger of the Messiah.

All these men had tilled the soil, mown the wheat, pruned the vines, pressed the olives; they had led the cattle to the fair and disputed over the prices; they had led a

woman to the altar, and procreated children, and seen these children grow, flourish, die; in short, they had lived the ordinary life of country people amidst their equals. And now they passed, followers of the Messiah, considered as divine personages by the same people with whom, the previous week, they had argued concerning a measure of wheat. They passed transfigured, participating in the divinity of Oreste, invested with his grace. Whether in the fields or in the house, they had heard a voice, they had all at once felt pure souls enter into their sinful flesh. The spirit of Saint John was in Giuseppe Coppa; that of Saint Zacharias, in Pascal Basilico. The women, also, had received the sign. A woman of Senegallia, married to a certain Augustinone, a tailor at Chapelles, in order to demonstrate to the Messiah the ardor of her faith, had wanted to renew the sacrifice of Abraham, by setting fire to a mattress on which slept her children. Other women had given other proofs.

And the Elect now wandered through the country with his escort of Apostles and of Marys. From the most distant places of the coast and mountain, multitudes flocked to see him pass. At daybreak, when he appeared at the door of the house in which he had lodged, he always saw a great crowd kneeling in expectation. Erect on the threshold, he delivered the Word, received confessions, administered communion with pieces of bread. For his nourishment, he preferred eggs prepared with elder flowers, or with the tips of wild asparagus; he also ate a mixture of honey, nuts, and almonds, which he called manna, to recall the manna of the desert.

His miracles could no longer be counted. By the simple virtue of the thumb, index and middle fingers, raised in the air, he delivered the possessed, cured the infirm, resurrected the dead. If anyone went to consult him, he did not even give him time to open his mouth, and immediately told him the names of his parents, explained his family affairs, and revealed to him the most obscure secrets. He also gave news of the souls of the dead; he indicated places where treasures were hidden; with certain scapularies in the form of a triangle, he delivered hearts from melancholies.

"It's Jesus come back to earth," concluded Colas di Sciampagne, with a voice fervent with faith. "He will pass near here, too. Didn't you see how high the wheat is? Have you not noticed how the olive-trees are flourishing? Didn't you notice how the vines are laden with grapes?"

Respectful of the old man's beliefs, George asked gravely:

"And where is he now?"

"He is at Piomba," replied the old man.

And he pointed to the distant shores on the other side of Ortono, evoking in his guest's mind the vision of that corner of the province of Teramo bathed by the sea—an almost mystic vision of fertile lands watered by little, sinuous rivers, where, beneath the endless shivering of the poplars, a stream of water ran over a bed of polished sand.

After an interval of silence, Colas added:

"At Piomba, one word from him sufficed to stop the train on the railroad! My son saw it. Didn't Vito tell us that, Candia?"

Candia confirmed the old man's words, and gave the details of the wonderful event. The Messiah, attired in his red tunic, had advanced to meet the train, walking calmly between the two rails.

While speaking, Candia and the old man incessantly directed their gaze, as well as their gestures, towards the distance, as if the sacred person of the expected arrival were already visible to them.

"Listen!" interrupted Hippolyte, pulling the arm of George, who was absorbed in an inner view more and more vast and distinct. "Don't you hear something?"

She rose, crossed the court, went close to the parapet under the acacias. He followed her. They listened.

"It's a procession going on a pilgrimage to the Madonna of Casalbordino," said

Candia.

In the peaceful moonlight a religious chant swelled its slow and monotonous rhythm, with an alternation of masculine and feminine voices at equal intervals. One of these half-choirs chanted a strophe in a low tone; the other half-choir chanted a refrain in a higher key, indefinitely prolonging the cadence. It was like the approach of a wave continuously rising and falling.

The procession approached with a rapidity which contrasted with the slowness of the rhythm. Already the first pilgrims appeared at the turn of the path, near the bridge of the Trabocco.

"Here they are," exclaimed Hippolyte, moved by the novelty of the scene and sounds. "Here they are. What a number of them!"

They advanced in a compact mass. And the opposition of the measure between their march and their chant was so strange that it gave them an almost fantastic appearance. It seemed as if a supernatural force impelled them on, unconscious, towards the goal, while the words emitted from their mouths remained suspended in the luminous air and continued to vibrate after their passage.

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

They passed with a heavy trampling, exhaling a sour, herdlike odor, so jammed one to the other that nothing emerged from their mass except the long sticks fashioned like a cross. The men marched in front, and the women, more numerous, behind, with the glittering of golden ornaments underneath their white bandelets.

Viva Maria!

Viva her Creator!

Near by, at every repetition, their chant had the vehemence of a cry; then it diminished in vigor, betraying fatigue, surmounted by a continual and unanimous

effort, the initiative of which, in the two half-choirs, almost always started in a single and more powerful voice. And this voice dominated not only the others when it intoned the measure; but often, in the midst of the musical wave, it was maintained high and recognizable during the entire duration of the strophe or refrain, denoting a more imperious faith, a singular and dominating soul among that indistinct crowd.

George remarked it, and, very attentive, followed it as it waned in the distance, as long as his ear could recognize it. And that gave rise in him to an extraordinary sentiment of the mystic power which lay at the roots of the great indigenous race from which he himself had sprung.

The procession disappeared in the curve of the coast; then reappeared on the summit of the promontory, in the light; then disappeared again. And the chant, through the distant night, became veiled, softened; became so light that the slow and uniform modulation of the calm sea almost drowned it.

Seated on the parapet, her shoulders leaning against the trunk of an acacia, Hippolyte remained silent, motionless, not daring to disturb the religious meditations in which her lover seemed plunged.

What could the beams of the brightest sunlight reveal to George, that this simple chant in the night had not already revealed to him? All the scattered images, recent and ancient, those still vibrating with the keen sensation which had given birth to them and those buried in the deepest recesses of his memory, all these were bound together internally, and composed for him an ideal spectacle which carried him over the most vast and most august reality. His land and his race appeared to him transfigured, uplifted from time, with a legendary and formidable aspect, weighty with mysterious, eternal, and nameless things. A mountain, like unto an enormous primeval stump, reared up in the centre in the form of a breast, perpetually covered with snows; and the sloping sides, the promontories devoted to the olive-trees, were

bathed there by an inconstant and sad sea, on which the sails bore the colors of mourning and flame. Roads wide as rivers, green with grass, and sown with bare rocks, with gigantic vestiges scattered here and there, descended from the heights to conduct to the plains the migrations of the herds. The rites of dead and forgotten religions survived; incomprehensible symbols of powers fallen since centuries subsisted there intact; the usages of primitive peoples, gone forever, persisted there, transmitted without change from generation to generation; the rich fashions, strange and useless, were retained there as witnesses of the nobility and the beauty of an anterior life. Long strings of horses laden with wheat-corn passed there; and the devotees rode on the loads, their heads crowned with ears of corn, with belts of paste, and deposited at the foot of a statue the cereal offerings. The young girls, with baskets of wheat on their heads, led along the roads a she-ass bearing a still larger basket on its crupper, and, with their offering, they went towards the altar, singing. The men and boys, crowned with roses and with dewy berries, climbed in their pilgrimage on a rock on which was impressed a footprint of Sampson. A white bullock, fattened for a year on a rich pasturage, covered by a vermilion gualdrape and ridden by a child, advanced with pomp among the standards and candles; it knelt on the threshold of the temple, in the midst of the applause of the people; then, arrived at the centre of the nave, it voided its excrements, and the devotees drew from this steaming matter presages as to their agriculture. On feast days the fluvial populations bound their heads with bryony and, at night, they crossed the water with songs and music, bearing in their hands branches full of leaves. At daybreak, in the fields, the virgins washed their hands, feet, and faces in the fresh dew, to accomplish a vow. On the mountains, on the plains, the first sun of the spring was saluted by ancient hymns, by the clash of crashing metals, by cries and dances. Throughout the entire district the men, women, and children sought the first serpents emerged from their lethargy, seized them alive, and wound them around their necks and arms, so as to present themselves thus ornamented before their Saint, who would render them

proof against venomous bites. On the inclines of the sun-bathed hills the young toilers, with their yoked oxen, in presence of their old men, rivalled one another as to who should trace the straightest furrow from the hill-top to the plain; and the judges awarded the prize to the conqueror, while the father, in tears, opened his arms to his well-deserving son. And so, in all the ceremonies, in all the pomps, in all the labors, in all the games, in the births, in the loves, in the marriages, funerals, everywhere was present and visible a georgic symbol, everywhere was represented and venerated the great producer Earth, from whose womb gushed forth the sources of all that was good and joyful. The women of the family gathered at the house of the newly married, bearing on their heads a basket of wheat-corn, on the wheat a loaf of bread, and on the loaf a flower; they entered one by one, and sprinkled a handful of that augural grain on the head of the happy wife. At the foot of a dying man's bed, when the death-agony was prolonged, two kinsmen deposited a ploughshare, which had the virtue of interrupting the horrors and of hastening death. The tool and the fruit thus assumed superior significance and power. A profound sentiment and continual desire for mystery gave to all these environing things an active soul, benign or malignant, of good or evil augury, that participated in every vicissitude of fortune, by a manifest or occult action. A vesicating leaf pressed on the bared arm revealed love or indifference; the hearth-chain; thrown in the road exorcised the menacing hurricane; a mortar placed on the edge of the window recalled the lost pigeons; the swallowed heart of a sparrow communicated wisdom. Mystery intervened in every event, envelopes and bound every existence; and the supernatural life dominated, concealed, and absorbed the ordinary life by creating innumerable and indestructible phantoms, which peopled the fields, inhabited the houses, encumbered the heavens, troubled the eyes.

Mystery and rhythm, those two essential elements of every cult were scattered everywhere. Men and women continually expressed their soul in song, accompanied by song all their labors under roof and heaven, celebrated by song both life and

death. Around the cradles and around the biers, music was shed, slow and persistent, very ancient, as ancient, perhaps, as the race whose profound sorrows they manifested. Sad, grave, fixed in immutable rhythm, they seemed the fragments of hymns that had belonged to the immemorial liturgies which had survived the destruction of some great primordial myth. They were few in number, but so dominating that the new songs could not displace them or diminish their hold. They were transmitted from generation to generation like an inner heritage, inherent in the corporeal substance; and each one, on awaking in this life, heard them resound in himself like an innate language to which the voice gave a visible form. Just as well as the mountains, the valleys, and the rivers; just as well as the customs, the vices, the virtues and beliefs, they termed a part of the structure of the country and of the race. They were as immortal as the glebe and as the blood.

Such was the country, such was the race, visited by this New Messiah, of whom the old peasant had related the life and miracles. Who was this man? An ascetic, ingenuous and innocent as Semplice, the worshipper of the sun? A cunning and covetous charlatan, who was trying to play upon the credulity of his devotees for his own profit? Who, really, was this man who, from the border of a small river, could gather, by his name alone, multitudes from both near and far, induce mothers to desert their children, awaken in the souls of the most ignorant the visions and the voices of another world?

And, once more, George evoked the figure of Oreste, attired in his red tunic, going up the little, sinuous river, where, beneath the endless shivering of the poplars, a stream of water ran over a bed of polished sand.

"Who knows," he thought, "if this unexpected revelation will not be my salvation? In order that I should be myself again, in order that I should recognize my true essence, do I not need to put myself in immediate contact with the race from which I have sprung? In burying again the roots of my being in the natal soil, shall I not suck

up a pure and revivifying sap, which will have the power to expel all that is false and heterogeneous in me, all that I have consciously and unconsciously received by a thousand contagions? Just now, I do not seek the truth; I seek only to recuperate my own substance, to replace in myself the characters of my race, so as to strengthen them and render them as intense as possible. In thus harmonizing my soul with the diffused soul, I shall recover that equilibrium which I lack. For the intellectual man, the secret of equilibrium is to know how to transport the instincts, the wants, the tendencies, and the fundamental sentiments of his race to a superior order."

Mystery and rhythm were scattered everywhere. Near by, on the foaming beach, the sea breathed at equal intervals; but during the pauses one heard, more and more feebly, the cadences of the waves, which touched the shore at constantly increasing periods. Reverberated, doubtless by the echo of some sonorous hollow, the chant of the pilgrims was heard once more, then died away. Over the Vasto d' Aimone the sky was lit up by frequent flashes of lightning, and in the calm moonlight the flashes appeared red. Hippolyte was dreaming, leaning against the trunk of a tree, her eyes watching the silent flashes.

She had not made a single movement. Her prolonged immobility in the same attitude was frequent enough; and, at times, it took on a cataleptic appearance which was almost alarming. She had then no longer the young and kind aspect which the plants and beasts knew so well, but the appearance of a taciturn and indomptable creature in whom were concentrated all the isolated, exclusive, and destructive virtues of the passion of love. The three divine elements of her beauty—her brow, her eyes, her mouth—had perhaps never attained such a degree of symbolic intensity to illustrate the principle of the eternal feminine fascination. It seemed that the serene night favored this sublimation of her form, that it liberated the true, ideal essence of her being, that it permitted her lover to know her entirely, not by the acuteness of view but by that of thought. The summer night, full of lunary brilliancy and of dreams, and of pale or invisible stars, and of the most melodious marine voices, seemed the

natural field of that sovereign image. The same as the shadow grew at times out of entire proportion to the body that caused it, the same as against the infinity of that background, the fatality of love rendered the person of Hippolyte higher and more tragic for the spectators whose prescience became every instant more lucid and more terrible.

Was it not, in the same immobility, the same woman who, from the height of the loggia, had contemplated the single white sail on the dead waters? It was she; and now again, in spite of the night which despoiled her person of all brutal reality, the same hatred moved under the sentiment excited by her—that mortal hatred of the sexes which is at the bottom of love, and which, occult or openly, subsists at the bottom of every effect, from the first glance up to extreme disgust.

"So," he thought, "she is the Enemy. As long as she lives, as long as she can exercise her empire over me, she will prevent me from putting foot on the threshold I perceive. And how can I recover my substance, if a great portion of myself is in the hands of this woman? Vain is the aspiration towards the new world, towards a new life. As long as love endures, the axis of the world rests on a single being, and life is shut in by a narrow circle. To revive and conquer, I must free myself from love; I must deliver myself from the Enemy."

Once more he imagined her dead.

"Dead, she would become an object for thought, a pure ideality. From a precarious and imperfect existence, she would enter into an integral and definite one, freed forever from her weak flesh, so frail and sensual. Destroy to possess! He who seeks the absolute in love has no other means."

Suddenly, Hippolyte started violently, as if an extraordinary shudder had shaken her. She said, alluding to the common superstition:

"Death has just passed."

And she smiled. But her lover, struck by the strange coincidence, could not repress

an instinctive movement of stupor and fright.

"Could she have felt my thought?"

The dog began to bark with sudden fury, and they both rose at the same time.

"Who is it?" said Hippolyte, uneasy.

The dog barked with renewed energy, still turned in the direction of the olive-groves. Candia and the old man came out of the house.

"What is it?" repeated Hippolyte, uneasy.

"Who can it be?" said the old man, gazing into the darkness.

The sound of a human voice came from the olive-trees, an imploring, sobbing voice. Then appeared an indistinct form, which Candia immediately recognized.

"Liberata!"

The mother carried on her head the cradle, covered with a dark cloth. She walked erect, almost rigid, without turning, without deviating from her path, absorbed in herself, mute like a sinister somnambulist, blindly impelled towards an unknown goal. And a man followed her bareheaded, beside himself, sobbing, imploring, calling her by her name, bending, beating his sides or burying his hands in his hair with gestures of atrocious despair. Grotesque and miserable, following the steps of the deaf woman, he howled, amidst his sobs:

"Liberata! Liberata! Listen! Listen! Come back to the house! Oh, my God, my God! where are you going? What are you going to do? Liberata! Listen! Listen! Oh, my God, my God!"

He implored to retain her, to stop her; but he did not touch her. He held his hands out to her with gestures frantic with pain; but he did not touch her, as if some mysterious cause prevented him, as if a charm had rendered that person intangible.

Candia neither went to meet her, nor did she bar her way. She simply asked the man:

"What's the matter? What's happened?"

The man, with a gesture, signified her dementia. And that recalled to the memory of George and Hippolyte the words of the gossips: "She is mad. She has become mute, signora. She has not spoken for three days."

"She is mad. She is mad."

Candia pointed to the covered cradle, asking again in a low voice:

"Is he dead?"

The man sobbed louder. And that recalled to the memory of George and Hippolyte the words of the gossips: "He's stopped crying. Poor creature! Is he asleep? He looks like a little corpse. He doesn't move. He's asleep, he's asleep.... He's not in pain now."

"Liberata!" cried Candia, with all the strength of her lungs, as if to rouse the impassive creature. "Liberata! Where are you going?"

But she did not move her, did not prevent her from going her way.

Then, all were silent, and watched.

The mother continued to advance, tall and erect, almost rigid, without turning, fixing before her her dilated and dry eyes, her mouth tightly closed, a mouth which seemed closed as by a seal, as if already vowed to perpetual silence and deprived of breath. On her head she balanced the cradle, changed into a coffin; and the lamentation of the man assumed the continuous rhythm of a monody.

The tragic couple crossed the court in this way, descended the path recently beaten by the steps of the pilgrims, and on which still floated the religious soul that the hymn had left there.

And the lovers, their hearts oppressed by pity and horror, followed with their eyes the figure of the funereal mother, who disappeared in the night, in the direction of the flashing lightning.

CHAPTER IV.

Now it was no longer Hippolyte, but George, who proposed long excursions, long explorations. Condemned to "be always waiting for life," he believed in going to meet it, to find and gather it in the visible realities.

His factitious curiosity was attracted now to those things which, scarcely capable of effectively moving the surface of the soul, could not penetrate it and stir it to its depth. He tried to discover, between his soul and certain things, connections which did not exist; he tried to shake the indifference of his inmost being, that inert indifference that had rendered him so long a stranger to all external agitation. Collecting all the perspicuous faculties he possessed, he applied himself to find some living resemblance between himself and the surrounding nature that he might reconcile himself in a filial way with that nature, and vow to it eternal fidelity.

But there was not awakened in him the extraordinary emotion which had several times exalted and astounded him in the first days of his stay at the Hermitage, before the arrival of the loved one. He could resuscitate neither the panicky intoxication of the first day, when he had believed he truly felt the sun in his heart, nor the melancholy charm of the first solitary walk, nor the unexpected and divine joy which had been communicated to him on that May morning by the song of Favetta and the perfume of the furze, freshened by the dew. On the earth and on the sea, men cast a tragic shadow. Poverty, disease, dementia, terror, and death lay in wait, or were exhibited everywhere on his path. A wave of fierce fanaticism was sweeping from one end of the country to the other. Night and day, far and near, religious hymns resounded, monotonous and interminable. The Messiah was expected, and the poppies in the wheat recalled the image of his red tunic.

Around him, faith consecrated every vegetable form. The Christian legend twined itself around the trunks of the trees, blossomed amid the branches. On the knees of the Madonna, a fugitive, and pursued by the Pharisees, the Infant Jesus was changed into wheat that overflowed. Hidden in the bin, he made the dough rise and rendered

it inexhaustible. Over the dry and thorny lupines which had wounded the Virgin's gentle feet was suspended a curse; but the flax was blessed, because their hulls had dazzled the Pharisees. Blessed also the olive-tree for having given shelter to the Holy Family in its open trunk, in the form of a cabin, and for having lighted it with its pure oil; blessed the juniper for having held the Infant enclosed in its tufts; and blessed the holly for the same courteous service; and blessed the laurel because it springs from the soil sprinkled by the water in which had been washed the Son of God.

How could he escape the fascination of the mystery which spread over all created things and transfigured them into signs and emblems of another life?

George, troubled by these suggestions, which provoked in him the confused rising of all his mystic tendencies, said to himself: "Oh! if I possessed the true faith, that faith which enabled Saint Theresa to actually see God in the host." And this was not a vague or passing desire: it was a profound and fervent aspiration of his entire soul, and it was also an extraordinary anguish, which distressed all the elements of his substance; because he felt that this was the secret of his unhappiness and weakness. Like Demetrius Aurispa, George was an ascetic without a God.

And he reappeared to his mind, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile melancholy, and a single white curl in the centre of his forehead, among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

Demetrius was his real father. By a singular coincidence of names, that spiritual paternity seemed consecrated in the legend inscribed around the marvellous ostensory given by the ancestors, and preserved in the cathedral at Guardiagrele.

[Double dagger symbol] EGO DEMETRIUS AURISPA ET UNICUS GEORGIUS FILIUS MEUS DONAMUS ISTUD TABERNACULUM ECCLESIAE S. M. DE GUARDIA, QUOD FACTUM EST PER MANUS ABBATIS JOANNIS CASTORII DE GUARDIA, ARCHIPRESBYTERI, AD USUM EUCHARISTIAE.

[Double dagger symbol] NICOLAUS ANDRAE DE GUARDIA ME FECIT A.D. MCCCCXIII.

Both, in fact, beings of intelligence and sentiment, bore the mystic heredity of the house of Aurispa; both had the religious soul, inclined to mystery, apt to live in a forest of symbols or in a heaven of pure abstractions; both loved the ceremonies of the Latin Church, sacred music, the perfume of incense, all the sensualities of worship, the most violent and the most delicate. But they had lost faith. They knelt before an altar deserted by God. Their misery arose therefore from a metaphysical need, which implacable doubt prohibited to blossom, to satisfy, to repose on the divine lap. As they had not conformed themselves in such a manner that they could accept and sustain the battle for vulgar existence, they had learned the necessity of seclusion. But how could the man exiled from life rest in a cell which lacked the sign of the Eternal? Solitude is the supreme proof of the humility or the sovereignty of a soul; because it is only borne on the condition of having renounced all for God, or on the condition of having a soul so strong that it might serve as an immovable foundation for a world.

All at once, one of them, feeling perhaps that the violence of his pain began to exceed the resistance of his organs, had wished to transform himself by death into a higher being; and he launched into the mystery, from which he contemplated the survivor with undimmed eyes.—Ego Demetrius Aurispa et unicus Georgius filius meus.

Now, in his lucid moments, the survivor comprehended that he would in no way succeed in realizing the type of exuberant life, the "Dionysiac" ideal seen as in a lightning flash beneath the great oak, when he had tasted the bread freshly broken by the young and joyous woman. He realized that his intellectual and moral faculties, too disproportioned, would never succeed in finding their equilibrium and their model. He realized, finally, that, instead of striving to reconquer himself for himself,

it was himself he should renounce, and that two ways only could lead him to it: either to follow the example of Demetrius, or to give himself to heaven.

The second alternative fascinated him. In considering it, he made an abstraction of the unfavorable circumstances and immediate obstacles, impelled by his irresistible desire to completely construct all his illusions and to inhabit them for a few hours. On this natal earth, did he not feel himself enveloped by the ardor of faith much more than by the fire of the sun? Had he not in his veins the purest Christian blood? Did not the ascetic ideal circulate in the branches of his race, from the noble donor Demetrius down to the pitiful creature named Joconda? Was it, therefore, impossible that this ideal should be regenerated in him, should be elevated to its supreme heights, should attain the limit of human ecstasy in God? In him, all was ready to magnify the event. He possessed every quality of the ascetic; the contemplative mind, the taste for symbols and allegories, the faculty of abstraction, an extreme sensibility for visual and aural suggestions, an organic tendency towards dominating images and hallucinations. He lacked but one thing, a great thing, but which perhaps was not dead in him, and only slumbered: the faith, the ancient faith of the donor, the ancient faith of his race, that which came down from the mountain and chanted praises on the seashore.

How to awaken it? How to resuscitate it? No artifice would be efficacious. He must wait for a sudden spark, an unexpected shock. He must, perhaps, like the followers of Oreste, see the lightning flash and hear the Word in the midst of a field, at the turn of a road.

And, once more, he recalled the figure of Oreste, attired in his red tunic, advancing along the side of a little, sinuous river, where, beneath the shivering of the poplars, a stream of water coursed over a bed of polished sand. He imagined a meeting, a conversation with Oreste. It was at noon, on the coast, close to a field of wheat. The Messiah spoke like a simple, humble man, smiling with virginal candor; and his

teeth were as white as jasmine. In the great silence of the sea, the continuous murmur of the breakers at the foot of the promontory imitated the distant chords of an organ. But, behind this mild person, in the gold of the ripe harvest, waved the poppies, violent symbols of desire.

"Desire!" thought George, thus recalling his mistress and the corporeal sorrow of his love. "Who will kill desire?" The admonitions of Ecclesiastes recurred to him. Non des mulieri potestatem animae tuae. A muliere initium factum est peccati, et per illam omnes morimur. He saw, at the sacred dawn of the ages, in a delicious garden, the first man, solitary and sad, attracted by the first companion; and he saw this companion become the scourge of the world, spread everywhere pain and death. But voluptuousness, contemplated as a sin, appeared to him prouder, more disturbing; it seemed to him that no other intoxication equalled the frantic intoxication of the embraces to which the martyrs of the early church surrendered themselves, in the prisons where they awaited punishment. He evoked pictures of women who, mad with terror and love, presented for kisses their faces bathed in silent tears.

In aspiring to faith and redemption, what did he, therefore, but aspire to new thrills and spasms, to unknown voluptuous sensations? Infringe on duty and obtain pardon; commit a fault and confess it tearfully; confess the slightest miseries while exaggerating them, and accuse oneself of mediocre vices while magnifying them almost to enormity; incessantly place one's sick soul and ailing flesh in the hands of a merciful physician—had not these things an entirely sensual fascination?

From the beginning, his passion had been impregnated with a pious odor of incense and violets. He recalled the Epiphany of Love, in the deserted oratory of the Via Belsiana: the little, mysterious chapel was plunged in a bluish penumbra; a choir of young girls garlanded the rostrum, curved like a balcony; below, an orchestra of string instruments stood up before the music stands of white pine; roundabout, in the oaken stalls, were seated the few auditors, almost all gray or bald; the chapel-master

beat time; a religious odor of evaporated incense and of violets mingled with the music of Sebastian Bach.

He recalled also the dream of Orvieto, conjured up once more the vision of the silent city of the Guelphs: windows closed; grayish alleys in which the grasses grew; a capuchin monk crossing a square; a bishop all in black, descending from a carriage which has stopped in front of a hospital, with a decrepit servant at the carriage door; a tower rising against a white and rainy sky; a clock slowly chiming the hour; and all of a sudden, at the bottom of a street, a miracle—the Duomo.

Had he not dreamt of taking refuge at the summit of that rock of tufa, crowned by monasteries? Had he not, more than once, sincerely aspired to that silence, that peace? And now this dream also returned to his soul, suggested by an effeminate languor on this warm and ashy April day. To have a mistress, or, to express it better, a sister-lover, who would be very devoted; to go away yonder and stay there.... To spend hours and hours in the cathedral, in front of it, around it; to go and gather roses in the gardens of the convents; to visit the sisters and eat preserves.... To love a great deal and sleep a great deal, in a soft bed, all veiled in virginal white, between two praying-stools....

He was seized once more by the languid nostalgia of the darkness, of the silence, of the closed and isolated retreat in which could blossom the most frail flowers, the most subtle thoughts, the most disturbing sensualities. All that dazzling sunlight on those lines, too distinct and too strong, appeared almost offensive to him. And the same as the image of the murmuring spring fascinates the brain of him who is thirsty, so he was haunted by the cool and meditative shadow of a Roman nave.

The summons of the bells did not reach as far as the Hermitage, or, at least, it only arrived at rare intervals on the swells of a light breeze. The church of the market town was too far away, commonplace perhaps, certainly without any reputation for beauty or ancient tradition. George wanted a retreat nearer at hand, and one worthy

of him, where his mysticism might flower æsthetically as in that deep marble urn which enclosed the Dantesque visions of Luca Signorelli.

He recalled the abbey of Saint Clement at Casauria, seen in one of the distant days of his adolescence, and he remembered that he had visited it in the company of Demetrius. The recollection, like all recollections connected with his kinsman, was as distinct and precise as if it had dated only from the day before.

He and Demetrius were descending the highroad towards the abbey, still hidden by the trees. An infinite calm reigned in the neighborhood of the solitary and magnificent spot, over the wide road of grasses and stones, deserted, uneven, as if marked with gigantic and silent vestiges, and the beginning of which was lost in the mystery of the distant and sacred mountains. One felt still floating there a primordial holiness, as if the grasses and stones had just been trodden by a long migration of biblical bands in search of a maritime horizon. Below, on the plain, the basilica appeared—almost a ruin. All around, the ground was encumbered with débris and brambles; fragments of sculptured stone were heaped against the pillars; wild grasses hung from every crevice; recent constructions, of brick and lime, closed up large openings in the lateral arcades; the doors were off their hinges. A band of pilgrims were taking a siesta in the court, brutishly, under the very noble portal erected by Leonato the Magnificent. But the three intact arched windows, above the several capitals, looked so graceful and proud, and the September sun gave to the light and soft stone such a precious appearance, that both of them, Demetrius and himself, had felt they were in the presence of a sovereign beauty.

Fascinated by the remembrance, the survivor had only one wish, a chimerical one—to return to the spot, to see the basilica again, to take up his dwelling there so as to protect it from ruin, to restore it to its primitive beauty, to reëstablish there the great worship, and, after so long a period of desertion and oblivion, renew the Chronicon Casaurienne.

He said to Hippolyte:

"Perhaps we'll change our quarters. Do you remember the dream of Orvieto?"

"Oh, yes," she cried; "the city of convents, where you wanted to take me!"

"I want to take you to a deserted abbey, more lonely than our Hermitage, beautiful as a cathedral, full of very old memories, where there is a great candelabra of white marble, a marvellous work of art by some unknown artist. Erect on the candelabra, in the silence, you will illuminate with your face the meditations of my soul."

He smiled at this lyric phrase, while contemplating at the same time the beautiful image evoked. And she, in the ingenuousness of her egotism, with that tenacious animalism which is the basis of the feminine being, was intoxicated by nothing more than by this passing poesy. Her happiness was to appear in her lover's eyes idealized, like the first evening in the bluish street, or again in the secret oratory amid the religious music and the faded perfumes, or like on the wild path strewn with furze.

In her most chaste voice, she asked:

"When do we go?"

"Will you go to-morrow?"

"Very well—to-morrow."

"Take care! If you rise, you won't be able to come down."

"What does it matter? I'll watch you."

"You will burn, you'll be consumed like a candle."

"I will light you."

"You will also light my funeral."

He spoke lightly; but at heart, with his ordinary intensity for imaginary life, he composed a mystic fable. After long years of error on the abyss of sensuality, repentance had come to him. Initiated by this woman in all the mysteries which his concupiscence excited, he now implored from the All Merciful the grace which

would dissipate the unbearable sadness of this carnal love. "Pity for my pleasures in the past, and for my suffering in the present! Grant, O God! that I may have the strength to accomplish the Sacrifice in your name!" And he fled, followed by his mistress in search of the refuge. And, finally, on the threshold of the refuge the miracle was accomplished; for the impure, the corrupt, the implacable Enemy, the Rose of Hell, was now suddenly cleansed of all sin, and stood, chaste and immaculate, ready to follow her loved one to the altar. On the summit of the high marble candelabra, which had not heard the voice of the light for centuries, she burned in the inextinguishable and silent flame of her love. "Erect on the candelabra, in the silence, you will illuminate the meditations of my soul, until death." She was burning with an inner fire, without ever claiming any food for the flames, without ever asking anything from the loved one in return. She renounced forever all possession: higher in her purity than God himself, since God loves his creatures but exacts from them a reciprocity of love, and becomes terrible against those who refuse to love him. Her love was Stylite love, sublime and solitary, nourishing itself with one blood and one soul. She had felt fall around her that part of her substance which was opposed to an entire offering. Nothing disquieting or impure remained in her. Her body had been metamorphosed into a subtle, agile, diaphanous, incorruptible element; her senses had dissolved into one supreme and only voluptuousness. Set up on the summit of the marvellous stela, she burned up from and enjoyed her ardor and her splendor like a flame conscious of its own enflamed existence.

Hippolyte listened intently, and said:

"Don't you hear? Another procession! To-morrow is the Vigil."

The dawns, the noons, the twilights and the nights rang with the religious chants. One procession followed the other, in the hot glare of the sun, in the silvery rays of the moon. All were emigrating to the same land and were celebrating the same

name, animated by the vehemence of a similar passion, terrible and wretched in appearance, deserting on the highroads the sick and the dying, without stopping, prompt to throw down no matter what obstacle to reach the place where awaited them the balm for all their ills, the promise of all their hopes. They marched, marched ceaselessly, obliterating with their own sweat their footprints in the endless dust.

What an immense irradiation of strength that simple image must possess, to move and allure all these masses of heavy flesh! Almost four centuries before, an old septuagenarian, in a plain devastated by the hail, thought he perceived the Virgin of Mercy in the tops of a tree; and since then, each year, on the anniversary of the apparition, all the peoples of the mountains and the coast have gone on a pilgrimage to the holy place to beseech mercy for its sufferings.

Hippolyte had already heard the legend from Candie; and for the past few days she had nourished a secret desire to visit the Sanctuary. The predominance of love and the habit of sensual pleasure had banished all religious sentiment in her; but, a Roman of good family, and, what is more, born in the Trastevere, brought up in one of those bourgeois families in which, according to immemorial tradition, the key of the conscience is always in the hands of a priest, she was a strict Catholic, devoted to all the external practices of the Church, subject to periodical returns of exalted fervor.

"Meanwhile, why should we not go to Casalbordino, too? To-morrow is the Vigil. Let us go there—shall we? It will be a great sight for you. We'll take the old man with us."

George consented. Hippolyte's desire corresponded with his own. He thought it necessary to him to follow this deep current, to form part of this wild conglomeration of men, to experience material contact with the inferior classes of his race, those dense and immutable layers on which the primitive impressions had

perhaps been preserved intact.

"We'll start to-morrow," he added, seized by a kind of anxiety as he heard the chant approaching.

Hippolyte told him, as related by Candie, some of the atrocious tests to which the pilgrims had vowed to submit. She shuddered with horror. And, while the chant grew louder, both felt a tragic breath pass over their souls.

They were on the hill, at night. The moon was high in the sky. A cool humidity extended over the vast vegetable masses, still vibrating from the storm of the afternoon.

All the leaves were weeping, and these myriads of tears, scintillating like diamonds in the moonlight, transfigured the forest. As George had accidentally stumbled over the trunk of a tree, the luminous drops of the shaken branches fell on Hippolyte, covering her with constellations. She gave a little cry, and began to laugh.

"Ah, traitor!" she murmured, convinced that George had done it intentionally.

And she took measures for reprisals.

Thus shaken, the trees and bushes threw off their liquid gems with a lively crepitation, while Hippolyte's laughs resounded at intervals, on the slope of the hill. George also laughed, suddenly forgetful of his nightmare, permitting himself to be won by the seduction of youth, permitting himself to be penetrated by this bracing nocturnal coolness in which was distilled all the fragrance of the earth. He tried to reach first the tree whose foliage seemed most heavily laden with water; and she tried to reach it before him, running courageously on the slippery declivity. They almost always reached the tree at the same time, and they shook it together, both remaining under the shower. In the unsteady shadow of the foliage the whiteness of Hippolyte's eyes and teeth assumed extraordinary lustre; and the tiny drops, like diamond dust, glittered on the pretty curls on her temples, on her cheeks, on her lips, even on her eyelashes, trembling from her laughter.

"Ah, you magician!" cried George, letting go of the tree and seizing the woman, who once more appeared to him in a mysterious flash of nocturnal beauty.

He began to kiss her all over her face; and to his lips she was cool and wet with dew, like fruit just plucked from the tree.

"There! there! there!"

He imprinted hearty, resounding kisses on her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, her temples, her neck, as insatiable as if the flesh were a novelty to him. And, as she felt the kisses, Hippolyte took that almost ecstatic attitude usual with her when she felt that her lover was in one of his moments of true intoxication. At those times, she seemed anxious to release from the depths of her own substance the sweetest and most powerful perfume of love, to excite George's intoxication to the point of anguish.

"There!"

He stopped, seized by anguish. He had reached the extreme limit of sensation, and could not go beyond.

They said no more; they took each other's hand; they continued on their way to the Hermitage, cutting across the fields because, in their thoughtless frolic, they had wandered from the road. They felt now indefinable lassitude and melancholy. George seemed astonished. So Life, unexpectedly, like a furtive gesture in the shadow, had offered him a new savour—a new sensation, real and profound, at the close of a day full of anxiety, spent in a cloister of flitting phantoms! But was that Life? Was it not rather Dreamland? "The one is always the shadow of the other," he thought. There where is Life, there is Dreamland; there where is Dreamland, there is Life.

"Look!" interrupted Hippolyte, with a start of admiration.

It was as if she illustrated with a picture the thought he had not revealed.

In the moonlight, a vine was there, silent. The upright vine-stocks were twined around the reeds like around agile thyrses; and the streaming branches, diaphanous against the luminous horizon with a thousand intertwinings of their subtle ribs, in the perfect immobility of mineral things, and with an appearance of indescribably fragile and ephemeral crystal, had neither terrestrial reality nor any communion with the environing forms, but seemed to be the last visible fragment of an allegorical world conceived by a theurgy and about to fade away.

Spontaneously arose in George's memory the verse of the hymn: "Vinea mea coram me est."

CHAPTER V.[*]

[*] It should, perhaps, be mentioned here that the publication of "The Triumph of Death" began in the Mattino, of Naples, on February 12, 1893, while the publication of Émile Zola's work "Lourdes" only began in the Gil Blas, of Paris, on April 15, 1894.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

Since dawn, train after train had vomited immense waves of humanity on the platforms of the Casalbordino Station. People from the villages and market towns mingled with fraternities from the most distant hamlets who had not wished, or been able, to make the pilgrimage on foot. They precipitated themselves in a tumult from the carriages, shouting, gesticulating, and pushing each other to storm the wagons and coaches, amid the cracking of whips and the tinkling of bells; or, again, they fell into line, in long files, behind a crucifix, and, when their procession started on the dusty road, they struck up the hymn.

Already frightened by the size of the crowd, George and Hippolyte turned instinctively toward the sea close by, to wait until the crowd dispersed. A field of hemp undulated peacefully before the blue background of the waters. The sails shone like flames on the clear horizon.

George said to his companion:

"Aren't you afraid? I fear the fatigue will hurt you."

She replied:

"Do not be alarmed; I am strong. Besides, to deserve a favor, must one not suffer a little?"

He replied, smiling:

"Are you going to ask a favor?"

"Yes, only one."

"But are we not in the state of mortal sin?"

"That is true."

"Well, then?"

"I shall ask, just the same."

They had brought with them old Colas, who, acquainted with the localities and usages, served them as a guide. As soon as the door of their compartment was disencumbered they descended, and got into a coach which started off at a gallop, with a great tinkling of bells. The horses were decorated and plumed like barberi. The drivers wore peacocks' feathers in their hats, and did not cease flourishing their whips, accompanying the deafening cracks with hoarse cries.

Hippolyte, tormented by impatience and extraordinary uneasiness, as if this day were to realize some great event for her, asked the old man:

"How long will it take to get there?"

"Half an hour at the most."

"Is the church very old?"

"No, signora. I can still remember the time when it didn't exist. Fifty years ago, there was only a small chapel."

He drew from his pocket a sheet of paper folded in four, unfolded it, and showed it

to George.

"You can read it. It's the history of the church."

It was a picture, with the legend at the bottom. The Virgin, in a cloud of angels, was seated on an olive-tree, and an old man was adoring her, prostrated at the foot of the trunk. This old man was named Alexander Muzio: and this is the story as told by the legend:

"In the year of Our Lord 1527, during the evening of the 10th of June, the Sunday of the Pentecost, a storm broke over the district of Casalbordino and devastated the vines, the corn, and the olive-groves. The following morning, an old septuagenarian of Pollutro, Alexander Muzio, proprietor of a wheat field at Pinno del Lago, started on his way to visit it. His heart sank at the sight of the damaged crops; but, in his profound humility, he praised the justice of God. Very devoted to the Holy Virgin, he was telling his beads while walking, when, at the end of the valley, he heard the bell ringing at the elevation of the Mass. He immediately kneeled down and concentrated all his fervor for the prayer. But while he prayed he saw himself surrounded by a brilliancy which eclipsed that of the sun, and in this brilliancy appeared to him the Mother of Mercy, robed in azure; and she spoke to him sweetly: 'Go and carry the news. Let a temple be raised on this spot, and I will distribute my favors here. Go to thy field, and thou wilt find thy wheat intact.' She disappeared with her crown of angels. And the old man rose, went as far as his field, found his wheat intact. Then he hastened to Pollutro, saw the curate Mariano d' Iddone, related to him the prodigy. In a few seconds the news had spread all over the Casalbordino district. The entire population ran to the holy spot, saw the dry soil around the tree, saw undulate the prosperous harvest, recognized the miracle, and shed tears of penitence and feeling. Soon afterwards the Vicar of Arabona laid the first stone of a chapel, and the proxies for the edification were Geronimo di Geronimo and Giovanni Fatalone, Casalesians. On the altar they painted the Virgin, with the old

Alexander prostrated in the act of adoration."

The legend was simple, commonplace, similar to a hundred others founded on miracle. Since that first act of mercy, it was in the name of the Virgin that ships were saved from the tempest, lands from the hail, travellers from robbers, sick people from death. Placed amidst an unfortunate people, the Image was an inexhaustible source of salvation.

"Of all the Madonnas in the world, ours is the one who does most good," said Colas di Sciampagne, kissing the sacred sheet before replacing it in his bosom. "They say that another vision has been seen in the kingdom. But ours is the best. Don't be afraid. She's worth all the others——"

His tone and his attitude displayed that sectarian fanaticism which fires the blood of all idolaters, and which, at times, in the region of the Abruzzi, impels populations to ferocious wars for the supremacy of an idol. The old man, like all his brothers in belief, did not conceive the Divine Being outside of the painted image; it was in the image that he saw and adored the real presence of the celestial personage. The Image upon the altar, for him, was a creature of flesh and bones; she breathed, smiled, winked, bowed her head, made gestures with her hand. And everywhere it was the same thing: all the sacred statues, in wood, wax, bronze, or silver, lived a real life in their vile substance or precious metal. When they became old, when they broke, or were destroyed in the course of the years, they did not give way to new statues without giving savage signs of their anger. One day a fragment of a bust, become unrecognizable and confounded with firewood, had splurted blood under the axe and uttered threatening words. Another fragment, planed and arranged among the staves of a vat, had manifested its supernatural character by causing the apparition in the water of its primitive and integral form.

"Hey, there!" cried the old man to a pedestrian, who was painfully walking in the suffocating dust along the curbstone. "Hey, there, Aligi!"

He turned towards his guests, adding with commiseration:

"He's a good Christian, a man of hereabouts. He's going to carry his vow. He is convalescent. Do you see, signora, how winded he is? Will you let him ride on the front seat?"

"Yes, yes. Stop, stop!" said Hippolyte, affected.

The carriage stopped.

"Run, Aligi! The gentlefolk are kind to you. Come, get up!"

The good Christian approached. He was gasping, bent over his stick, covered with dust, bathed in perspiration, dazed by the sun. A collar of reddish beard surrounded his chin from one ear to the other, and framed his face dotted with freckles; locks of reddish hair emerged from under his hat, sticking to the forehead and temples; his hollow eyes, converging towards the base of the nose, of no precise color, recalled those of epileptics. Gasping and hoarsely, he said:

"Thanks! God will reward you. May the Madonna protect you! But I can't ride."

He held in his right hand an object wrapped in a white handkerchief.

"Is that your offering?" asked Colas. "Let us see."

The man opened the corners of the handkerchief, and showed a waxen leg as livid as the leg of a cadaver and on it was painted a festering sore. The heat had softened it and made it shiny, as if moist with sweat.

"Don't you see it's melting?"

And Colas stretched out his hand to feel it.

"It's soft. If you go on walking, it'll drip on to the road."

Aligi repeated:

"I can't ride. I made a vow to go on foot."

And, not without anxiety, he examined the leg by raising it to the level of his oblique

eyes.

On this scorching road, amid this dust, under this great strong light, nothing sadder could be imagined than this emaciated man and that livid thing, repugnant as an amputated limb, which was to perpetuate the memory of a sore on walls already covered by silent and motionless effigies of so many infirmities visited upon human flesh through all the centuries.

"Hey, there!"

And the horses resumed their trot.

After the small hills were left behind, the road crossed a plain rich in harvests, almost ripe. The old man, with his senile loquaciousness, related the episodes of Aligi's malady, spoke of the gangrenous sore cured by the Virgin's finger. To the right and left of the road the sweet ears of corn surpassed the hedges, suggesting a beautiful overflowing cup.

"There's the Sanctuary!" exclaimed Hippolyte.

And she pointed to a red brick edifice which rose in the centre of a great, encumbered plain.

A few moments later, the carriage rejoined the crowd.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a marvellous and terrible spectacle, unheard of, without resemblance to any conglomeration ever seen before, whether of men or things; a pell-mell so strange, so violent and incongruous, that it exceeded the most troubled dreams of nightmare. All the ugliness of the eternal islet, all the shameful vices, all the stupors; all the spasms and all the deformities of the baptized flesh, all the tears of repentance, all the mockery of the debauchee; insanity, cupidity, cunning, lewdness, stupidity, fear, mortal fatigue, stony indifference, silent despair; sacred choirs, demoniacal shrieks, acrobatic performances, the chiming of bells, the blasts of trumpets, discordant cries,

roars, sighs; the crackling of fires beneath cauldrons, heaps of fruits and sugared delicacies, shop windows full of utensils, draperies, arms, jewels, rosaries; the obscene contortions of dancing girls, the convulsions of epileptics, the blows exchanged in angry brawls, the flight of the hunted thief through the surging mob; the scum of the worst corruptions vomited from out the filthy alleys of distant towns and cast upon an ignorant and amazed multitude; clouds of parasites, like gadflies about cattle, falling upon the compact crowd, incapable of self-defence; every base temptation for the brutal appetite, every fraud, every immodesty was exhibited in broad daylight—a pell-mell of everything was there, seething and fermenting around the House of the Virgin.

This House was a massive red brick structure, of vulgar architecture, devoid of ornamentation. Against the exterior walls, against the pillars of the portal, peddlers of sacred objects had established their tents, arranged their stalls, and sold their wares. Close by were erected canvas booths, conical in shape, ornamented with large pictures representing bloody battles and cannibal feasts. At the entrance, sinister-looking men, of ignoble and equivocal appearance, trumpeted and vociferated. Shameless women, with enormous legs, swollen abdomens, flabby breasts, clad in dirty tights and bespangled rags, glorified, in extravagant jargon, the marvels hidden by the red curtain behind them. One of these tattered ribalds, who looked like a monster engendered by a dwarf and a sow, gave kisses from her sticky lips to a lascivious monkey, while near her a clown, covered with powder and carmine, struck an ear-splitting bell with frantic fury.

The processions arrived in long files, preceded by their cross-bearers, chanting the hymn. The women held each other by a corner of their dresses and walked like ecstatics, stupefied, their eyes wide open and fixed. Those of Trigno wore robes of scarlet plush with a thousand folds, caught up in the middle of the back, almost under the shoulders, and crossed at the hips by a multicolored scarf which raised the dress, tightened it, and formed a swelling like a hump. And as, broken by fatigue,

they wended their way—bent, their limbs staggering, dragging shoes heavy as lead, they had the appearance of strange, gibbous animals. Many had goitres; and their golden necklaces glistened beneath the sunburnt swellings.

Viva Maria!

Above the crowd appeared the soothsayers, seated in front, opposite each other, on a small, raised platform. Their head-bandage permitted a view only of the loquacious mouth, tireless, full of saliva. They spoke in a sing-song tone, raising and lowering their voices, their nodding heads keeping time with the music. At intervals they reswallowed the superabundant saliva, with a light, whistling sound. One of them displayed a greasy playing-card, crying, "This is the anchor of good hope!" Another, from whose enormous mouth darted in and out, between decayed teeth, a tongue covered with a yellowish ecuma, leaned her whole person towards the auditors, having on her knees her large varicose hands and in the hollow of her lap a heap of copper coins. The auditors, very attentive, did not lose a word, did not wink, did not make a single gesture. But, from time to time, they moistened their parched lips with their tongues.

Viva Maria!

New bands of pilgrims arrived, passed, disappeared. Here and there, in the shadow of the booths, under big blue parasols, or even in the sun, old women, broken by fatigue, lay on the dry grass, sleeping, their bodies bent forward, their faces between their hands. Others, seated in a ring, their legs wide apart, painfully and silently chewing carrots and bread, caring for naught, indifferent to the surrounding tumult; and one saw the too large mouthfuls pass with effort down their gullets as yellow and wrinkled as the membrane of a tortoise. Several were covered with sores, scabs or scars, without teeth, without eyelashes, without hair; they did not sleep, did not eat; they lay motionless and resigned, as if they awaited death; and upon their poor carcasses whirled a cloud of thick and eager flies as over carrion in a ditch.

But in the booths, beneath the tents heated by the mid-day sun, around the posts driven in the earth and ornamented with branches, was exercised the voracity of those who had laboriously scraped together until this day a few savings so as to accomplish the sacred vow, and also to satisfy an enormous desire to indulge in the feast, long anticipated during the meagre meals and rude toil. One saw their faces bent over their porringers, the movements of their grinding jaws, the gestures of their hands which rend, all their brutish actions in a desperate struggle with the unaccustomed aliments. Large saucepans full of a violet-colored mass were smoking in circular holes in the ground, transformed into furnaces; and the appetizing vapors spread all around. One young girl, lank and greenish as a locust, offered long rows of cheese, shaped like little horses, birds, or flowers. A man who had a face as smooth and soft as a woman's, with gold rings in his ears, with hands and arms colored by aniline like dyers', offered for sale sorbets which looked like poison.

Viva Maria!

New bands arrived, passed by. The mob surged about the portal, unable to penetrate into the church, already invaded and jammed. Jugglers, sharpers, sharks, gamesters, thieves, charlatans of all kinds, called them, misled them, cajoled them. This brotherhood of plunder scented its prey from afar, struck it like a thunderbolt, never missed its aim. They allured the simpleton in a thousand ways, raising in him the hope of rapid and sure gains; with infinite artifice, they persuaded him to take chances—they excited in him an almost feverish cupidity. Then, when he had lost all prudence and all clearsightedness, they robbed him of his last penny, merciless, by the easiest and quickest frauds; and they left him stupefied and miserable, laughing in his face and sneaking away. But the example did not prevent the others from falling into the trap. Each, deeming himself more clever and less gullible, offered to avenge his ridiculed comrade, and plunged furiously to his ruin. Incalculable privations, supported without respite in order to make a little money, amounting to the savings of an entire year scraped together penny by penny from the

vital necessities—those inexpressible privations which make the avarice of the countryman as sordid and as greedy as that of mendicants—were all revealed in the trembling, callous hand which drew the money from the bottom of the pocket to expose it to chance.

Viva Maria!

New bands arrived, passed by. A constantly renewed torrent persisted in cleaving the confused and surging mob; a cadence, always the same, rose above the medley of all the acclamations. Gradually, against this rumbling background of discordant sounds, the ear no longer discerned anything but the distinct name of Mary. The hymn triumphed over the uproar. The continuous and unchained tide battered the walls of the Sanctuary heated by the sun.

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

For a few minutes longer George and Hippolyte, dismayed, afflicted, contemplated this formidable crowd, from which arose a nauseating stench, from which emerged here and there the painted faces of mimes and the hooded faces of the fortune-tellers. Disgust arose in their throats, impelled them to flee; and yet the attraction of this human spectacle was stronger, retained them in this heaped-up horde, led them to the spots where the worst misery was exhibited, where the worst excesses of cruelty, ignorance, and fraud were revealed, where voices howled or tears streamed.

"Let us get nearer the church," said Hippolyte, who, forgetting herself, seemed to be invaded by the flame of insanity diffused by the passing bands, whose wild fanaticism seemed to increase in fury as the sun beat down more furiously on their heads.

"Are you not tired?" asked George, taking her hands. "If you like, we'll go away. We'll look for some place where we can rest. I'm afraid it may hurt you. We will go

if you like."

"No, no; I am strong. I can stand it. Let us get nearer. Let us enter the church. You see, everybody is going there. Do you hear how they are shouting?" She was visibly suffering. Her mouth was convulsed, the muscles of her face contracted; and her hand constantly tormented George's arm. But her gaze never left the door of the Sanctuary, nor that veil of bluish smoke through which, by turns, scintillated and disappeared the little flames of the wax tapers.

"Do you hear how they are shouting?"

She staggered. The cries resembled those of a massacre, as if men and women were cutting each other's throats, were struggling in oceans of blood.

Colas said:

"They are asking favors."

The old man had not left his guests for an instant; he had taken a thousand pains to open a passage for them in the crowd, to make a little space about them.

"Do you want to go there?" he asked.

Hippolyte made up her mind.

"Yes, let us go."

Colas preceded them, pushing right and left with his elbows in order to get near the portals. Hippolyte no longer touched the ground, almost carried in the arms of George, who summoned all his strength in order to support her and himself. A female beggar pursued them, kept at their heels, pleading for charity in a lamentable tone, stretching out her hand, at times advancing it so far as to touch them. And they saw nothing but this senile hand, deformed by large knots at the joints, of a bluish yellow, with long violet-hued nails, with the skin peeling between the fingers—such a hand as might belong to a sick and decrepit monkey.

Finally they arrived at the portal; and they leaned back against one of the pillars,

near the stand of a vender of rosaries.

The processions, while waiting their turn to enter, marched around the church; they turned, turned without cease—heads uncovered, behind the cross-bearers, without ever interrupting their chant. Men and women carried a stick surmounted either with a cross or a bunch of flowers, and leaned upon it with all the weight of their fatigue. Their brows dripped with perspiration; streams of perspiration rolled down their cheeks, soaked their clothes. The men had their shirts open at their breasts, the neck bare, the arms bare; and on their hands, on their wrists, on the backs of their arms, on their breasts, the skin was checkered with marks tattooed in indigo, in commemoration of sanctuaries visited, of favors received, of vows accomplished. Every deformity of muscle or bone, every variety of physical ugliness, every indelible imprint left by manual toil, intemperateness, and disease: heads pointed and flat, bald or woolly, covered with scars or excrescences; eyes white and opaque as globes of butter-milk, eyes glaucous and sad like those of large, lonely frogs; flat noses as if crushed by the blow of a fist, or hooked like the beaks of vultures, or long and fat like trunks, or almost destroyed by eating ulcers; cheeks red-veined like the bunches of the vine in Autumn, or yellowish and wrinkled like the belly of a ruminant, or bristling with reddish hairs like the spears of maize; mouths as thin as the gash of a razor, or wide open and flabby like over-ripe figs, or shrunken and shrivelled like dry leaves, or furnished with teeth as formidable as those of a wild boar; hare-lips, goitres, erysipelas, scrofulas, pustules—all the horrors of the human flesh passed, in the light of the sun, before the House of the Virgin.

Viva Maria!

Each band had its cross-bearer and its chief. The leader was a strong-limbed, violent man, who incessantly stimulated the faithful by the yells and actions of a maniac, sinking the laggards on their backs, dragging the exhausted old men, swearing at the women who interrupted the hymn to take breath. An olive-colored giant, whose eyes

glittered beneath a great shock of black hair, dragged along three women by the three cords of three halters. Another woman marched in front, naked in a sack from which only her head and arms appeared. Another, long and emaciated, with a livid face and whitish eyes, marched along like a somnambulist, without chanting, without ever turning, displaying on her breast a red sash resembling the bloody bandage of a mortal wound; and every moment she tottered, as if her limbs had no longer sufficient strength to support her, and she were about to fall to rise no more. Another, wild as a beast of prey, a true rustic Fury, with a blood-colored mantle wound around her bony shanks, with glittering embroideries on her bosom, like scales on a fish, brandished a black crucifix to guide and excite her detachment. Another wore on her head a cradle covered with a sombre cloth, like Liberata on the funereal night.

Viva Maria!

They turned, turned without cease; hastening their steps, raising their voices, exciting themselves more and more to yell and gesticulate like demons. Virgins, almost bald at the top of their heads, their scant hair flowing loose and almost impregnated with olive-oil, stupid as sheep, advanced in files, each holding her hand on the shoulder of her companion, her eyes fixed on the ground, and full of repentance: miserable creatures whose wombs were destined to perpetuate in the baptized flesh, without enjoyment, the instincts and sadness of the primeval beast. In a sort of deep coffin carried by four men lay a paralytic, suffocating from obesity, with dangling hands, twisted and knotted like roots by a frightful case of gout. A continual trembling shook his hands; an abundant sweat dropped from his brow and bald head, streaming down his big face, colored like a faded rose, covered with fine network like the spleen of an ox. And he wore a number of scapularies suspended from his neck, with the picture of the Image spread over his abdomen. He wheezed and lamented as if already seized by the terrors of the impending death-agony; round about him was an unbearable stench, as of putrefying flesh; he exhaled from every

pore the atrocious torments which the last palpitations of life caused him. And yet he did not wish to die, and so as not to die he had himself carried in a coffin to the feet of the Mother. Not far from him, other vigorous men, experienced in carrying massive statues on high standards at holy festivals, dragged a lunatic by the arms; and the lunatic struggled in their grasp, shrieking, his clothes in tatters, foaming at the mouth, his eyes starting from their sockets, the veins of his neck swollen, his hair dishevelled, as black in the face as a hanged man. Aligi also passed, the man elect by grace, paler now than his waxen limb. And once more they all went by again in their endless turning: the three women led by halters passed; the Fury with the black crucifix passed; and passed also the taciturn woman with the bloody scarf; and she carrying the cradle on her head; and she dressed in a sack, imprisoned in her mortification, bathed in silent tears which gushed from beneath her lowered eyelids, a figure of the distant ages, isolated in the crowd, as if enveloped in a breath of ancient penitential rigor, and resurrecting in George's soul the great and spotless Clementine basilica, whose rude, primitive crypt reminded him of the Christians of the ninth century, the time of Ludovic II.

Viva Maria!

They turned and turned, without ever stopping, hastening their steps, raising their voices, almost crazed by the sun which beat upon their heads, excited by the yells of the fanatics and by the acclamations heard within the church as they passed before the door, carried away by a terrific frenzy which impelled them to sanguinary sacrifices, to the tortures of the flesh, to the most inhuman tests. They turned, turned, impatient to enter, impatient to prostrate themselves on the sacred stone, to fill with their tears the furrows worn there by thousands upon thousands of knees. They turned, turned, increasing in number, pushing, jostling, with such an accordance of fury that they appeared no longer a conglomeration of individuals, but a compact mass, some kind of blind matter projected by a vertiginous power.

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

In the mass, a young man suddenly fell down, struck by an attack of epilepsy. His neighbors surrounded him, carried him away from the whirlpool. Others, numerous, left the mob which occupied the esplanade, and ran to see the sight.

"What has happened?" asked Hippolyte, growing paler, with an extraordinary change in her face and voice.

"Nothing, nothing—a sunstroke," replied George, taking her by the arm, and trying to lead her away.

But Hippolyte had understood. She had seen two men forcibly open the jaws of the epileptic, and insert a key in his mouth, doubtless to prevent his biting his tongue. And, at the thought, she felt in her own teeth that horrible grating, and an instinctive shudder shook her to the inner-most depths of her being, there where the "sacred evil" slept with a possibility of awakening.

Colas di Sciampagne said:

"It is someone who has the Saint Donat malady. Don't be afraid."

"Let us go—let us go away!" insisted George, uneasy, dismayed, trying to lead his companion elsewhere.

"What if she were similarly taken, all at once," he thought. "What if the disease attacked her here, in the midst of this crowd?"

A chill ran through him. He recalled the letters dated from Caronno, those letters in which she had made the frightful revelation in hopeless terms. And again, as then, he imagined: "Her hands, pallid and shrivelled, and between the fingers the torn-out curl of hair."

"Let us go away! Do you want to enter the church?"

She remained silent, stupefied, as if by a blow on the head.

"Shall we enter?" repeated George, shaking her, and attempting to dissimulate his own anxiety.

He would have liked to ask, also: "Of what are you thinking?" But he did not dare. He saw in Hippolyte's eyes such profound sadness that he felt his heart oppressed and a choking sensation in his throat. Then, the suspicion that this silence and stupor might be the precursors of an imminent attack filled him with a sort of panicky terror.

Without reflection, he stammered:

"Are you ill?"

These anxious words, which were a confession of his suspicion, which revealed his secret fear, increased still more the trouble of the two lovers.

"No, no," she said, with a visible shudder, benumbed with horror, and pressed close to George, that he might defend her from the peril.

Hemmed in by the mob, dismayed, disgusted, miserable like the others, as needful of pity and help as the rest, crushed like the others beneath the weight of their mortal flesh, both, for a moment, felt in veritable communion with the multitude in the midst of which they trembled and suffered; both, for a moment, forgot in the immensity of human sorrow the limits of their souls.

It was Hippolyte who was the first to turn towards the church, towards the great portal, towards that veil of bluish smoke through which, by turns, scintillated and disappeared the little flames of the wax tapers.

"Let us go in," she said, in a choking voice, without leaving George's side.

Colas remarked that it was impossible to enter by the main entrance.

"But," he added, "I know another door—follow me."

With great difficulty they forced a passage. And yet, a false energy sustained them; a blind obstinacy impelled them on, almost like that displayed by the fanatics in their

endless turning. They had caught the contagion. From now on George no longer felt he was master of himself. His nerves dominated him, imposed on him the disorder and excess of their sensations.

"Follow me!" repeated the old man, stemming the torrent by sheer strength of his elbows, and struggling fiercely to protect his guests against the crush.

They entered by a side door into a sort of sacristy, from which could be seen, through a bluish smoke, the walls entirely covered by votive offerings of wax suspended there in proof of the miracles accomplished by the Virgin. Limbs, arms, hands, feet, breasts, shapeless pieces representing tumors, gangrenes, and ulcers, horrid representations of monstrous maladies, pictures of violet and crimson sores which cried out from the pallor of the wax—all these objects, motionless on the four high walls, had a mortuary appearance, horrifying and frightful, evoking the image of a charnel-house where are piled up all the limbs amputated in a hospital. Heaps of human bodies encumbered the pavement, inert; and in the heap appeared livid faces, bleeding mouths, dusty faces, bald heads, white hair. They were nearly all old people, prostrated by a spasm in front of the altar, carried in arms, and heaped in piles like cadavers in time of a pest. Another old man arrived from the church, carried in the arms of two men who were sobbing: the motion caused his head to hang now on his chest, now on his shoulder; drops of blood rained on his shirt front from lacerations of his nose, lips, and chin. Behind him continued the hopeless cries of anguish, imploring the favor which this old man had not obtained.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

It was an unheard-of clamor, more atrocious than the yells of a man burnt alive without hope of salvation; more terrible than the cry of shipwrecked sailors condemned to a certain death upon the nocturnal sea.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

A thousand arms were stretched towards the altar with savage frenzy. The women

dragged themselves along on their knees, sobbing, tearing out their hair, striking their hips, bruising their foreheads on the stones, twisting as if in convulsions or possessed. Many, on all fours, sustaining the entire weight of their horizontal bodies on their elbows and naked toes, advanced gradually towards the altar. They crawled along like reptiles, they gathered themselves together, springing on their toes, with progressive propulsions, and beneath their petticoats could be seen their callous yellow soles, the projecting and pointed ankle-bones of their feet. At times the hands seconded the efforts of the elbows, trembling around the mouth which kissed the dust, near the tongue which traced in this dust the sign of the cross, with a saliva mixed with blood. And the crawling bodies passed over these bloody tracings without effacing them, whilst, before each head, a man erect struck the pavement with the tip of a stick in order to indicate the right way to the altar.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

Kinswomen, dragging themselves along on their knees on each side of the furrow, superintended the votive agony. From time to time they leaned forward to encourage their unfortunate sisters. When the latter seemed about to faint, they went to their relief, supported them under the arms, or fanned their heads with a cloth. While doing this they shed hot tears; and wept even more copiously when they assisted the old men or adolescents, acquitting themselves of the same vows. For there were not only women, but also old men, adults, adolescents, who, to approach the altar, to be worthy to lift their eyes towards the Image, subjected themselves to this torment. Each placed his tongue on the spot where another had already left a wet trace; each struck his forehead or his chin on the spot where another had already left a shred of his skin, a drop of his blood, of his sweat, and of his tears. Suddenly a long ray of sunlight penetrated the large portal into the interstices of the crowd, illuminating the soles of the shrunken feet, calloused by the arid soil or mountainous rocks, so deformed that they appeared less the feet of human beings than the feet of beasts; illuminating bald and hairy heads, white with old age, or light brown or black,

supported by bull-like necks which swelled in the effort, or shaking and weak like the greenish head of an old turtle, out of his shell, or like a disinterred skull still bearing a few grayish locks and a few shreds of reddish skin.

Now and then, over this swarm of reptiles, a blue wave of incense spread slowly, veiling for a moment this humility, this hope, and this bodily pain, as if in compassion. New patients forced a passage, presented themselves at the altar to solicit the miracle; and their shadows and their voices covered the prostrate bodies that seemed as if they would never be able to rise.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

The mothers exposed their dried-up breasts, which they showed to the Virgin, imploring the blessing of milk, while behind them their kinswomen carried the emaciated children, almost dying, who uttered wailing cries. Wives prayed for the fecundity of their sterile womb, and gave as offerings their clothes and marriage jewels.

"Holy Virgin, have mercy on me, in the name of the Son whom thou dost bear in thine arms!"

They prayed at first in low tones, tearfully reciting their woes, as if they were having a secret conversation with the Image, as if the Image were bending forward from above to listen to their lamentations. Then, gradually, they exalted themselves almost to the point of fury, insanity, as if they wished, by their acclamations and insane gestures, to compel consent to the prodigy. They summoned all their energy to utter a superhuman shriek capable of reaching the very bottom of the Virgin's heart.

"Have mercy on us! Have mercy on us!"

And they stopped, staring anxiously, with their dilated and fixed eyes, in the hope of surprising, finally, a sign upon the visage of the celestial person who scintillated in a reflection of jewels between the columns of the inaccessible altar.

Another wave of fanatics arrived, took their places, spread out along the entire length of the railing. Tumultuous cries and violent gestures alternated with their offerings. Inside the railing which intercepted the access to the large altar, priests received in their fat and white hands the moneys and trinkets. In the act of tendering the right or left hand, on either side, they balanced themselves like caged beasts in a menagerie. Behind them, the clerks held large metal plates on which the offerings jinglingly accumulated. On one side, near the door of the sacristy, other priests were stooping over a table: they were counting the money and examining the jewels, while one of them, bony and brownish, made entries with a quill pen in a large ledger. They each performed this task in turn, and then left it to officiate. From time to time the bell sounded, and the censer was elevated amidst a cloud of smoke. Long, bluish waves rolled around the tonsured heads and dispersed on the other side of the railing. The sacred perfume mingled with the human stench.

"Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix ...

Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi."

At times, during unexpected and terrible pauses like those of a hurricane, when the crowd was oppressed by the anguish of expectation, one could distinctly hear the Latin words:

"Concede nos famulos tuos."

Beneath the large portal advanced with pomp a married couple, escorted by all their relatives in a blaze of gold, in a rustling of silk. The spouse, young and vigorous, had a head like a barbarian queen, with thick and joining eyebrows, wavy and shining black hair, a fleshy and blood-red mouth, in which the incisive, irregular teeth raised the upper lip, shaded with a virile shadow. A necklace of large gold beads was wound thrice around her neck; large gold hoops embellished with filigree work hung from her ears, on her cheeks; a corsage scintillating like a coat of mail confined her bosom. She marched gravely, entirely absorbed in her thoughts,

scarcely winking her eyelids, holding her ringed hand on her husband's shoulder. The husband was also young, of medium stature, almost beardless, very pale and with an expression of profound sadness, as if devoured by a sad secret. The appearance of both seemed to indicate the fatality of a primitive mystery.

Whispers spread around their passage. They themselves neither spoke nor turned their heads, followed by their parents, men and women, entwined in a chain by their arms, as if about to perform an ancient dance. "What vow were they accomplishing? What favors were they asking?"

The news spread in a low tone from mouth to mouth: they asked for the young man a return of genital virility, of which some evil influence doubtless had deprived him. The virginity of his spouse still remained intact; the conjugal couch was still immaculate.

When they were near to the railing they both raised their eyes toward the Image silently; and they remained a few moments motionless, absorbed in the same mute supplication. But, behind them, the two mothers extended their arms, agitated their dried and wrinkled hands, which on the marriage day had distributed in vain the augural grain. They stretched out their arms and cried:

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

With slow gestures, the wife removed the rings from her fingers and offered them. Then she took out the heavy golden hoops. Then she took off her hereditary necklace. All this wealth she offered at the altar.

"Take it, blessed Virgin! Take it, most Holy Mary of Miracles!" cried the mothers, with voices already rendered hoarse by their cries, with demonstrations redoubled by fervor, each glancing at the other sidewise to see that her neighbor was not surpassing her in ardor in the eyes of the attentive crowd.

"Take it! Take it!"

They saw the gold fall, fall into the hands of the impassive priest; then they heard

the precious metal jingle on the clerk's plate, coin acquired by dint of the persistent toil of several generations, preserved for years and years at the bottom of the strong box, and brought to light again at every new wedding-day. They beheld fall the family wealth, fall, disappear forever. The immensity of the sacrifice plunged them into despair, and their distress extended to their kinsmen. The relatives ended by uttering piercing shrieks altogether. The young man alone remained silent, keeping constantly fixed on the Image his eyes, from which gushed two streams of silent tears.

Then there was a pause, during which one could hear the Latin words of the service and the cadence chanted by the processions which were still turning around the church. Then the couple resumed their first position, and, their eyes still fixed on the Image, slowly fell back.

A new band, yelling furiously, now interposed between them and the railing. For a few seconds the young woman towered a head above the tumult, despoiled now of all her bridal jewelry, but more beautiful and more vigorous, enveloped in a sort of Dionysiac mystery, exhaling over this barbaric multitude a breath as of very ancient life; and she disappeared, never to be forgotten. Exalted far beyond the time and the reality, George's gaze followed her until she disappeared. His soul lived in the horror of an unknown world; in the presence of a nameless people, associated with rites of very obscure origin. The faces of men and women appeared to him as if in a delirious vision, marked with the stamp of a humanity other than his own, and formed of a different substance; and the looks, the motions, and the voices, and all the perceptible signs, struck him with stupor, as if they had had no analogy with the habitual human expressions which he had known up to then. Certain figures exercised over him a sudden magnetic attraction. He followed them in the crowd, dragging Hippolyte with him; he gazed after them on tiptoe; he watched all their actions; he felt their cries reverberate in his own heart; he felt himself invaded by the same madness; he himself felt a brutal desire to shout and gesticulate.

From time to time Hippolyte and he glanced at each other; they saw each other pale, convulsed, aghast, exhausted. But neither one proposed to leave the terrible place, as if they lacked the strength to do so. Jostled by the mob, almost carried away at times, they wandered here and there in the midst of the uproar, holding hands or arms, while the old man made continuous efforts to help and protect them. A procession, coming up, forced them against the railing. During several minutes they remained there, prisoners, closed in on all sides, enveloped by the smoke of the incense, deafened by the cries, suffocated by the heat, in the thickest part of the gesticulating and insanity.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

It was the reptile women, who, arrived at last, rose to their feet. One among them was carried by her relatives, rigid as a corpse. They stood her on her feet; they shook her. She seemed dead. Her face was all dusty, the skin flayed from her nose and forehead, her mouth full of blood. Those who helped her blew in her face to bring her back to consciousness, wiped her mouth with a cloth which became crimson, shook her again and called her by name. All at once her head fell back; then she threw herself against the railing, grasped the iron bars, stiffened her whole body, and began to scream like a woman in delivery.

She yelled and struggled, drowning every other clamor. A torrent of tears inundated her face, washing off the dust and blood.

"Madonna! Madonna! Madonna!"

And behind her, by her sides, other women surged, tottered, reanimated themselves, implored:

"Mercy! Mercy!"

They lost their voices, grew pale, broke down heavily, and were carried away inert masses, while others again seemed to surge up from below ground.

"Mercy! Mercy!"

These shrieks, which rent the breasts that emitted them; these syllables repeated without cease, with the persistence of the same unconquerable faith; this thick smoke, which overhung like the cloud of a tempest; this contact of bodies, this mixture of breaths, the sight of this blood and these tears—all this made that at one moment the entire multitude found itself possessed by a single soul, became a single being, miserable and terrible, having but one gesture, but one voice, but one convulsion, but one frenzy. All the evils melted into one single evil, which the Virgin should destroy; all the hopes melted into one single hope, which the Virgin should grant.

"Mercy! Mercy!"

And, beneath the scintillating Image, the little flames of the waxen tapers trembled before this wind of passion.

CHAPTER VII.

George and Hippolyte were now seated in the open air, away from the turmoil, beneath the trees, stupefied and faint, like two shipwrecked people escaped from peril, mute, almost without power of thought, although, from time to time, a shudder at the recent horror again ran through them. Hippolyte's eyes were red from crying. Both, in the Sanctuary, at the tragic moment, had been seized by a common delirium; and, from fear of madness, they had taken flight.

They were now seated away from the turmoil, at the extreme end of the esplanade, beneath the trees. This corner was almost deserted. One only saw there, around several twisted olive-tree trunks, groups of beasts of burden with empty pack-saddles, in an immobility of lifeless forms; and they cast a sad aspect over the shade of the trees. In the distance could be heard the murmur of the swarming multitude; one heard the cadences of the sacred chants, the blasts of the trumpets, the ringing of the bells; one perceived the pilgrimages developing into long files, turning around the church, entering it and leaving it.

"Do you want to sleep?" asked George, who noticed that Hippolyte was closing her eyes.

"No; but I have no longer the courage to look——"

George felt the same repugnance. The continuity and acuteness of the sensations had overcome the resistance of his organs. The spectacle had become intolerable. He arose.

"Come, get up," he said. "Let us go and sit down farther off."

They descended into a cultivated valley, seeking a little shade. The sun was very ardent. Both thought of their house at San Vito, of the beautiful, airy rooms, opening on the sea.

"Are you suffering much?" asked George, discovering on his friend's face the manifest signs of pain, and, in her eyes, the sombre sadness that lately, in the midst of the crowd, near the pillar of the portal, had already frightened him.

"No. I am very tired."

"Do you want to sleep? Why not sleep a little? Lean against me. Afterwards you will feel better. Will you?"

"No, no."

"Lean against me. We will wait until Colas returns before we go to Casalbordino. Meanwhile, rest a little."

She removed her hat, bent towards him, and leaned her head. He looked at her in this attitude.

"How beautiful you are," he said.

She smiled. Once more the suffering transfigured her, gave her greater seductive charm.

He said again:

"How long it is since you gave me a kiss!"

They embraced.

"Now, sleep a little," he begged, tenderly.

His sentiment of love seemed renewed in him, after so many horrible and strange things that had oppressed them. He began once more to isolate himself, to recoil within himself, to repulse all communion that was not with the elect of his heart. His mind freed itself with an inconceivable rapidity from all the phantoms created during the period of the mystic illusion, the ascetic ideal; he threw off the yoke of that "divine" which he had tried to substitute for his inert will, from the very hopelessness of arousing it. He now felt for "faith" the same disgust that he had felt in the church for the unclean beasts that crawled in the sacred dust. He saw again the fat and pale hands of the priests who received the offerings, the continual balancing of the black figures behind the closed railing. All that was ignoble, denied the presence of that Lord whom he had hoped to know in an annihilating revelation. But, finally, the great proof had been accomplished. He had experienced the material contact with the inferior classes of his race, and nothing had resulted from it for him but a sentiment of invincible horror. His being had no roots in that ground, could have nothing in common with that multitude which, like most species of animals, had attained its definite type, had definitely incarnated in its brutish flesh permanency of habit. For how many centuries, during how many generations, had this immutable type been perpetuated? So the human species had an absolutely inert basis which persisted beneath the undulations of moving superior elements.

So the ideal type of humanity was not in a distant future, at the unknown end of a progressive evolution; it could only manifest itself on the crest of the waves, in the most elevated beings. He perceived now that, in trying to find himself entirely and to recognize his veritable essence by means of an immediate contact with the race from which he had sprung, he deceived himself like a man who attempts to determine the form, dimension, direction, speed, and power of a sea wave by the action of the

subjacent volume of water. The experiment had not succeeded. He was as much a stranger to this multitude as to a tribe of Oceanians; he was as much a stranger to his country, to the land of his birth, to his fatherland, as he was to his family and to his hearth. He should forever renounce that vain search for the fixed state, the stable support, the assured help. "The sensation I have of my being resembles that which a man would have, who, condemned to hold himself upright on a ceaselessly oscillating and unbalanced surface, would feel his support ceaselessly fail him, no matter where he placed his foot." He had used this vision once to paint his perpetual anxiety. But why, since he wished to preserve life, did he not become, by dint of method, sufficiently strong and agile to become habituated to preserving his equilibrium amid the diverse impulsions, and to dance even on the edge of the precipice, freely and boldly? In truth, he wished to preserve life. What proved that, as far as evidence could, was his successive experiments themselves. In him a deep instinct, resting intact up to then, arose with ever new artifices against mortal languor. That ascetic dream which he had constructed with such richness, trimmed with such elegance, was it anything else than an expedient for combating death? He himself, since the beginning, had set himself the dilemma: either to follow the example of Demetrius, or to give himself to Heaven. He had chosen Heaven, to preserve his life. "Apply henceforth your mind to acquire the disgust of truth and certitude, if you wish to live. Renounce searching experience. Respect the veils. Believe in the visible line and in the proffered Word. Do not seek beyond the world any of the appearances that your marvellous senses have created. Adore the illusion."

And he already found a charm in this fleeting hour. The profundity of his conscience and the infinite extension of his sensibility filled him with pride. The innumerable phenomena that, instant by instant, succeeded one another in his inner world made the comprehensive power of his soul appear to be illimitable. And that fleeting hour during which he believed he could discover hidden connections and secret analogies

between the representations of Chance and his own sentiment possessed, in reality, a singular charm for him.

In the distance could be heard the confused murmur of the wild crowd from which he had just extricated himself; and that confused murmur aroused in him, in flashes, the vision of a great, sinister furnace in which demons were struggling in a tragic combat. And above this incessant murmur he distinguished also, at every breath of the breeze, the delicious rustling of the branches that shielded his meditation and Hippolyte's repose. Hippolyte was resting in a doze, her mouth half-open, scarcely breathing; and a light moisture dampened her brow. Her hands were folded in her lap, ungloved, pale; and in imagination George saw between the fingers the "plucked-out tuft of hair." Just as this tuft of hair appeared and disappeared in the strong light, on the burning soil, appeared also the phantom of the epileptic, he who had unexpectedly fallen at the doorway writhing beneath the grasp of two men who were trying to force open and place a key in his mouth. This phantom appeared and disappeared, as if it were the dream of the sleeping woman, and rendered visible. "What if she awoke and the epilepsy returned?" thought George, with an inner shudder. "The image that forms in my brain is perhaps transmitted to me from her. I see perhaps her dream. And her dream is perhaps caused by an organic disturbance that commences and will increase as far as an attack. Is not a dream sometimes the presage of a malady that is breeding?" He dwelt for a long time in the meditation of these mysteries of the animal substance, vaguely perceived. Against the diffuse depths of this physical sensibility, already enlightened by the five superior senses, gradually appeared other intermediary senses, whose very subtle perceptions disclosed to him a world up to then unknown. Was it impossible that Hippolyte's latent malady furnished him with a condition favorable for communicating with her in some extraordinary manner?

He regarded her attentively, as he had done in bed on that first day, already so distant. He saw the light shadows of the hanging branches tremble on her face. He

heard the continual tumult that spread out from the Sanctuary in the infinite light. Sadness again fell on his heart; lassitude crushed him to earth again. He leaned his head against the trunk of the tree and closed his eyes, without thinking of anything.

Slumber was about to seize him, when a start of Hippolyte awoke him.

"George!"

She awoke frightened, agitated, no longer recognizing the surrounding spot; the strong light annoyed her, and she covered her eyes with her hands, groaning.

"My God, how I'm suffering!"

She complained of a pain in her temples.

"Where are we? Oh! what an awful dream it was."

"I should not have brought you," said George, uneasy. "How sorry I am!"

"I have not strength enough to rise. Help me."

He raised her up by the arms. She tottered, and, seized by vertigo, clung to him.

"What's the matter? Where do you suffer?" he cried in a changed voice, seized by a panicky terror, believing that she was about to be taken with a fit, there, in the open country, far from all help. "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

He clasped her closely to him, pressing her to his heart, which beat with horrible violence.

"No, no, it is nothing," stammered Hippolyte, who had all at once understood his terror, and who had grown pale. "It is nothing. My head is giddy. The sun has made me dizzy. It is nothing."

Her lips were almost white, and she avoided looking her lover in the eyes. He could not yet succeed in dominating his anguish, and poignantly regretted having awakened in her the fearful and shameful preoccupation. His memory recalled this passage in a letter: "What if the malady should seize me while in your arms? No, no, I will never see you again; I do not wish to see you any more!"

She said, in a feeble voice:

"It's over. I'm better. But I'm thirsty. Where can I get a drink?"

"Over there, near the church, where the tents are," said George.

She refused vigorously, with a motion of her head.

"I will go. Wait for me here!"

She was obstinate in her refusal.

"Let us send Colas. He must be near by; I'll call him."

"Yes, call him, so we may return to Casalbordino. I will drink there. I can wait. Let us go."

She leaned on George's arm. They remounted the hill. Arrived at the top, they saw once more the plain swarming with people, the white huts, the reddish edifice. Around the twisted trunks of the olive-trees still stood, ever motionless, the melancholy forms of the beasts of burden. Near them, in the same shade where they had previously sought a refuge, an old woman was seated, who, to all appearances, seemed to be a centenarian; she, also, was motionless, her hands placed on her knees, the fleshless limbs only partly covered by her petticoat. Her white hair hung down the sides of her waxen cheeks; the mouth, without lips, resembled a deep furrow; her eyes were sealed forever beneath the corroded eyelids; her entire air expressed a reminiscence of innumerable pains.

"Is she dead?" asked Hippolyte in a whisper, stopping, seized by fear and respect.

The multitude was pushing about the Sanctuary. The processions whirled around chanting, beneath the cruel sun. One of these processions came from under the great portal and turned towards the open space, preceded by its cross-bearer. Arrived at the edge of the esplanade, men and women stopped and turned towards the church in a half-circle, the women squatting, the men upright, the cross-bearer in the centre. They prayed and crossed themselves. Then they sent towards the church a great,

simultaneous cry—the last salutation. And they resumed then way, intoning the hymn:

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

The old woman did not change her attitude. Something great, terrible, and indefinitely supernatural emanated from her solitary old age in the shadow of the arid and almost petrified olive-tree whose cleft trunk seemed marked by a bolt from heaven. If she still lived, her eyes at least did not see, her ears no longer heard, all her senses were obliterated. Yet she had the appearance of a Witness who was looking towards the invisible region of eternity. "Death is not as mysterious as this remnant of life in this human ruin," thought George. And at the same time there arose in his mind, accompanied by an extraordinary emotion, the vague image of a very ancient myth. "Why dost thou not awaken the Mother secular who sleeps on the threshold of Death? In her slumber resides the first Science. Why dost thou not interrogate the wise earthly Mother?" Vague words, the obscure fragments of ancient epics, awoke in his memory; indefinite lines and symbols swayed and enveloped him.

"Let us go, George," said Hippolyte, shaking him lightly, after an interval of pensive silence. "How sad everything is here!"

Her voice was weak, and in her eyes was that sad shadow in which her lover read an inexpressible horror and disgust. He dared not encourage her, for fear she would feel in his encouragements the preoccupation of the horrible menace that seemed to hang over her, since the moment that she had seen the epileptic fall in the crowd.

But, a few steps farther on, she stopped again, choked by incoercible anguish, strangled by a knot of sobs that she could not untie. She looked at her lover, then gazed about her, distracted.

"My God, my God! What sorrow!"

It was a sorrow entirely corporeal, a brutal sorrow that arose from the depths of her being like a compact and heavy thing, crushing her with an insupportable weight. She would have liked to sink to the ground as if beneath an enormous burden, never to arise again; she would have liked to lose consciousness, to become an inert mass, to expire.

"Tell me, tell me, what can I do? What can I do to ease you?" stammered George, pressing her hand, prey to a mad terror.

Was not this sadness perhaps the chrysalis of the illness?

For a few seconds, she remained with her eyes fixed and rather haggard. She shivered beneath the shock caused by the clamor raised in the vicinity by a procession which saluted the church on leaving.

"Take me away somewhere. Perhaps there is a hotel at Casalbordino. Where can Colas be?"

George looked anxiously around, in the hope of discovering the old man. He said:

"Perhaps he is looking for us in the crowd; or perhaps he has gone to Casalbordino, thinking he will find us there."

"Let us go alone, then. Down below, yonder, I see some carriages."

"Let us go, if you like. But lean on me."

They directed their steps towards the highroad, which lay like a long white ribbon on the other side of the esplanade. It seemed as if the tumult followed them. The trumpet of a mountebank sent after them its piercing notes. The always even cadence of the hymn, persistently dominated all other sounds by its exasperating continuity.

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

A beggar unexpectedly appeared, as if he had sprung from below ground; and he

stretched out his hand.

"Charity, for the love of the Madonna!"

It was a young man, with his head bound in a red handkerchief, one corner of which covered his eye. He raised this corner and showed an enormous eye, swollen like a pocket, purulent, on which the winking of the upper eyelids forced a shudder horrible to see.

"Charity, for the love of the Madonna!"

George gave him money; and the beggar again hid his deformity. But, a little farther on, a man of gigantic stature, with an empty sleeve, half-raised his shirt in order to show the red and furrowed cicatrice of the amputation.

"A bite—a horse's bite! Look!"

And he threw himself on the ground, thus uncovered, and he kissed the ground several times, crying each time, in a harsh voice:

"For pity's sake!"

Under a tree was another beggar, a bandy-legged fellow, on a kind of seat composed of a pack-saddle, a goat-skin, an empty petroleum can and large stones. Wrapped in a sordid covering from which protruded two hairy legs, soiled with dry mud, he wildly shook his hand, twisted like a root, to chase away the flies that assailed him in clouds.

"Charity! Charity! Have pity on a poor man! The Madonna will pardon you. Have pity on a poor man!"

At the sight of other beggars who came running up, Hippolyte hastened her steps. George made a sign to the nearest coachman. When they were in the carriage, Hippolyte uttered a cry of relief:

"At last!"

George questioned the coachman:

"Is there a hotel at Casalbordino?"

"Yes, signor, there is one."

"How long will it take to get there?"

"A short half-hour."

"Let us go on, then!"

He took Hippolyte's hands, tried to cheer her up.

"Courage, courage! We will take a room; we can rest. We will see nothing, hear nothing more. I, too, am exhausted with fatigue and my head feels tired."

He added, smiling:

"Aren't you a little hungry?"

She responded to his smile. He added again, evoking the remembrance of the old hotel of Ludovic Togni:

"It will be as it was at Albano. Do you remember?"

It seemed to him that she was becoming a little calmer. He wanted to bring her to a state of light and joyous thoughts. He said:

"What has become of Pancrace? Ah! if we had one of his oranges. Do you remember? I do not know what I would give for an orange. Are you very thirsty? Are you suffering?"

"No.... I feel better.... I can hardly believe that the torture is over.... My God! I shall never forget this day, never—never!"

"Poor soul!"

He tenderly kissed her hands. Then, pointing to the vegetation that bordered the road:

"Look!" he exclaimed, "see how beautiful the corn is. Let us purify our eyes."

To right and left the harvest stretched immaculate, already ripe for the sickle, high

and vigorous, breathing in the light by the slender points of their innumerable ears, that, at certain moments, seemed to wave and become converted into a volatile gold. Alone beneath the limpid arch of heaven, they exhaled a spirit of purity by which both their hearts, sad and tired, were refreshed.

"How strong the reflection is?" said Hippolyte, half lowering her long lashes.

"You have your curtains."

She smiled. It seemed that the shadow of her sadness was about to be dissipated.

Many carriages came in a long line from the opposite direction, descending towards the Sanctuary. For a few minutes the road, the bushes, the fields, all disappeared from around them in the dust.

"Charity, for the love of the Madonna! Charity! Charity!"

"Charity! In the name of the Virgin of Miracles!"

"Have pity on a poor, unfortunate man!"

"Charity! Charity!"

"Give me a piece of bread!"

"Charity!"

One, two, three, four, five voices, more and still more voices, the voices of beings still invisible, burst forth in the midst of the cloud, hoarse, penetrating, sharp, cavernous, humble, angry, plaintive, all different and discordant.

"Charity!"

"Charity!"

"Stop! Stop!"

"Charity, in the name of the most holy Mary of Miracles!"

"Charity! Charity!"

"Stop!"

And through the dust appeared confusedly a growling mob of monsters. One shook the stumps of his amputated hands, bleeding as if the mutilation were fresh or badly cicatrized. Another had on his palms disks of leather, that he used painfully to drag along the weight of his inert body. Another had an enormous goitre, wrinkled and violet-hued, that dangled like a pendant. Another, on account of an excrescence on his lip, seemed to hold between his teeth the remains of a raw liver. Another displayed a face devastated by a deep erosion that showed his nasal cavities and upper jaw. Others exhibited similar horrors, freely, with violent gestures, with almost menacing attitudes, as though to enforce a right.

"Stop! Stop!"

"Charity!"

"Look! Look! Look!"

"Help me! Help me!"

"Charity!"

"Charity!"

"Help me!"

It was an assault—almost an extortion. They all seemed resolved to demand a mite, even if they had to seize the wheels and hang on the limbs of the horses.

"Stop! Stop!"

While George sought for some money in his pockets in order to throw it among the horde, Hippolyte pressed close to him, seized at the throat by a feeling of disgust, powerless henceforth to master the fantastic terror which invaded her in this powerful white light in this unknown land where swarmed so lugubrious a life.

"Stop! Stop!"

"Charity!"

"Pity! Pity!"

But the coachman, becoming angry, rose suddenly on his seat, shook his whip vigorously, and began to beat the beggars with all his might; and he accompanied every blow with invectives. The lash whistled. Beneath his blows the beggars howled maledictions, but did not retreat. Each wished his share.

"Give me some! Give me some!"

Then George threw a handful of coins in the dust; and the dust covered the scuffle of the monsters, choked their blasphemies. The man with the amputated hands and the fellow with the inert limbs still essayed to follow the carriage for a moment; but, menaced by the whip, they stopped.

"Don't be afraid, signora," said the coachman. "Nobody will get near us now, I promise you."

New voices arose, groaning, yelling, invoking the Virgin and Jesus, announcing the nature of their deformities and sores, recounting the malady or misfortune. On the other side of the ambush prepared by the first bandits, a second army in tatters stretched along in a double chain on the borders of the road as far as the houses of the distant market town.

"My God, my God! What a cursed country!" murmured Hippolyte, exhausted, feeling herself fainting. "Let us get away from here. Let us go away! Please, George, let us go back."

Nothing—not the whirlwind of madness that drove the fanatic bands around the temple, nor the hopeless cries that seemed to issue from a place on fire, from a shipwreck or a massacre, nor the inanimate and bloody old men who lay in heaps along the court of the votive hall, nor the convulsed women who crawled towards the altar tearing their tongues against the stone, nor the supreme clamor that issued from the entrails of the multitude confounded in an unique anguish and in an unique hope—nothing, nothing, was as terrible as the spectacle of that great dusty hillside blinding in the glare of the sun, where all these monsters of human misery, all this

débris of a ruined race, these bodies vilified to the level of the unclean beast and excremental matter, opened their rags to expose their impurities and proclaim them. The innumerable horde occupied the slope and the ditches; they had with them their family, their progeniture, their relatives, their household goods. One saw women half-naked and as lean as bitches who have just littered, children green as lizards, emaciated, with rapacious eyes, their mouths already withered, taciturn, breeding in the blood the hereditary disease. Each tribe possessed its monster: one-armed, bandy-legged, subject to goitre, blindness, leprosy, epilepsy. Each had as a patrimony his ulcer to cultivate, from which to derive an income. Urged on by his own people, the monster left the group, advanced in the dust, gesticulated and implored, for the common benefit:

"Charity, charity, if you hope for mercy! Charity! Take pity on me! Take pity on me!"

A monomere, black and flat-nosed as a mulatto, with a long leonine mane, picked up the dust in the curls of his hair, then shook his head, enveloping himself in a cloud. A woman afflicted with hernia, of no age, having no longer a human face, squatted on a post, raised her apron to show her hernia, enormous and yellowish like a bladder full of suet. Seated on the ground, a man afflicted with elephantiasis pointed with his finger to his leg, massive as the trunk of an oak, covered with warts and yellow crusts, dotted with black or hardened spots, so voluminous that one would have said it did not belong to him. A blind man, on his knees, his hands stretched towards heaven in the attitude of an ecstatic, had under his high and bald brow two little blood-stained holes. Others and still others showed themselves in the dazzling glare of the sun, as far as the view could carry. All the great hillside was infested by them without an interval. Their supplications continued uninterruptedly, rising and falling in chorus, in discord, with a thousand accents. The vast extent of the solitary country, the deserted and silent sky, the hallucinating reverberation of the fiery road, the immobility of the vegetable forms—all these environments rendered the hour

tragic, evoked the biblical image of a road of desolation conducting to the gates of a cursed city.

"Let's go! Let's go back! Please, George, let's go back!" repeated Hippolyte, with a shudder of horror, dominated by the superstitious idea of a divine punishment, fearing other spectacles and more atrocious ones, under this burning and empty sky in which there began to be heard a metallic rumbling.

"But where can we go? Where shall we go?"

"No matter where. No matter where. Let us go back over there, near the sea. We'll wait there until it's time to leave. Please!"

The fast, the torture of thirst, the hot, oppressive atmosphere, had increased in both their uneasiness of mind.

"Do you see? Do you see?" she cried, as if in front of a supernatural apparition. "Do you see? Will it then never end?"

In the light, the glaring and implacable light, advanced towards them a band of tattered men and women, and in front of the band marched a sort of crier who vociferated while agitating a copper tray. These men and women bore upon their shoulders a trestle covered with a mattress on which lay an invalid of cadaverous appearance, a yellowish-looking creature, thin as a skeleton, tightly wrapped in bands of cloth like a mummy, the feet bare. And the crier—an olive-colored and serpentine man with the eyes of a madman—pointed to the dying woman, and related in a high key that this woman, who had been ill from hemorrhage for years, had obtained the miracle from the Virgin at the very dawn of that day, and he begged for alms so that, cured of her disease, she could gain fresh blood. And he shook the copper tray, on which tinkled a few coins.

"The Madonna has performed the miracle! The miracle! The miracle! Charity! In the name of the Very Holy and the Very Merciful Mary, charity!"

The men, the women, all together, contracted their faces as if about to weep. And

the invalid, with a vague gesture, slightly raised her bony hands, the fingers of which moved as if to seize something in the air; while her bare feet, as yellow as her hands and face, shiny at the ankles, had the rigidity of death. And all that was exposed in the glaring and implacable light—near, near, always nearer.

"Turn back! Turn back!" cried George to the driver. "Turn back, and whip up your horses."

"We're there, signor. What alarms you?"

"Turn back!"

The injunction was so imperative that the driver turned round his horses amidst the deafening cries.

"Whip them up! Whip them up!"

From the top to the bottom of the hill the carriage seemed, among the clouds of thick dust, pierced every now and then by a hoarse yell.

"Where are we going?" asked the driver, bending down.

"Over there, over there, near the sea! Whip them up!"

George was supporting Hippolyte, who had almost fainted, without trying to revive her. He had but a confused sensation of all that was going on. Real images, and fantastic images, whirled around his brain and gave him hallucinations. A continual buzzing filled his ears, and prevented him from hearing any other sound distinctly. His heart was oppressed with a keen anguish, as in the nightmare—the anguish to emerge from the zone of this horrible dream, the anguish to recover his first lucidity, to feel the loved creature palpitate on his breast, and to see once more the tender smile.

Viva Maria!

Once more the undulation of the hymn reached him; once more the House of the Virgin appeared to him on the left amid the immense human swarm, reddish in the

solar conflagration, throned on the summits of the profane tents, irradiating a formidable power.

Viva Maria!

Viva Maria!

The undulation faded away; and at a bend of the hill the Sanctuary disappeared. And, suddenly, a cool breath glided over the vast, waving harvests. And a long blue band cut the horizon.

"The sea! There's the sea!" cried George, as if he had just attained salvation.

And his heart dilated.

"Courage, my soul! Contemplate the sea!"

V.

TEMPUS DESTRUENDI.

CHAPTER I.

The table, laid in the loggia, presented a gay appearance, with its transparent porcelain, its bluish glassware, its crimson pinks, under the golden light of a fixed, large lamp, which attracted the nocturnal moths scattered in the twilight.

"Look, George, look! A devil moth! It has the eyes of a demon. Do you see them shine?"

Hippolyte pointed to a moth larger than the others, strange in appearance, covered with a thick red flush, with projecting eyes which, under the light, glittered like two carbuncles.

"It's coming on you! It's coming on you! Take care!"

She laughed heartily, making fun of the instinctive alarm that George exhibited, in spite of himself, when one of these insects threatened to alight on him. "I must have it!" she cried, with the rapture of a childish caprice.

And she tried to capture the diabolical moth, which, without settling, flew around the lamp. Her attempts, abrupt and violent, were unsuccessful. She upset a glass, knocked over a pyramid of fruit, almost smashed the lamp-shade.

"What fury!" said George, who wanted to excite her. "But you won't succeed."

"I shall succeed," replied Hippolyte obstinately, and looking fixedly at him. "Will you make a bet?"

"What shall we bet?"

"Anything you like."

"Well, then, a love game."

"Very well, a love game."

In the warm light her face was colored with its softest and richest tints, that ideal coloring, "a compound of pale amber and dull gold in which were mingled, perhaps, a few tints of faded roses," in which formerly George had thought he had found all the mystery and all the beauty of the antique Venetian soul emigrated to the kingdom of Cyprus. She wore in her hair a pink, ardent as desire. And her eyes, shaded by the lashes, shone like lakes between the willows in the twilight.

At that instant she appeared the woman of delights, the strong and delicate instrument of pleasure, the voluptuous and magnificent animal destined to ornament a banquet, to enliven a bed, to provoke equivocal phantasies of an æsthetic sensuality. She appeared in the supreme splendor of her animalism—joyous, active, supple, lascivious, cruel.

George observed her with attentive curiosity, and he thought: "What different appearances she assumes in my eyes! Her form is sketched by my desire; her shadows are produced by my thought. Such as she appears to me each instant, she is only the effect of my continual inner creation. She exists only in me. Her appearances change like the dreams of an invalid. Gravis dum suavis! When was

that?" He retained but a very confused recollection of the time when he had kissed her brow and decorated her with this title of ideal nobility. Now, this glorification of the loved one had become almost inconceivable to him. He remembered vaguely certain words that she had uttered and that seemed to reveal a depth of soul. "What spoke in her then? Was it not my own soul? It was one of my ambitions to offer to my sad soul those sinuous lips, so she might exhale her sorrow from an instrument of signal beauty."

He looked at those lips. They were slightly contracted, not ungracefully, participating in the intense attention with which Hippolyte waited for an opportunity to seize the night-moth.

She watched for it with sly prudence; she wanted, with one killing blow, to shut up in the palm of her hand the winged prey that was whirling restlessly around the light. She contracted her eyebrows and seemed to be prepared for a spring, ready to jump. She leaped forward two or three times, but without success. The moth was unseizable.

"Confess that you've lost," said George. "I won't abuse my privilege."

"No."

"Confess that you've lost."

"No! Woe to him and to you, if I catch him."

And she resumed her hunt with trembling impatience.

"Oh, he's gone," cried George, who had lost the agile flame-worshipper from sight. "He's flown away!"

Hippolyte was really vexed; the wager had excited her.

She rose and cast a keen glance around the room, to discover the fugitive.

"Here it is!" she cried, triumphant. "There, on the wall! Do you see?"

And she made a sign that she regretted she had cried out.

"Don't stir," she went on in a low tone, turning towards her friend.

The moth had alighted on the luminous wall and stayed there motionless, similar to a little brown spot. With infinite precaution, Hippolyte approached, and her beautiful body, slender and flexible, cast a shadow on the white wall. Quickly her hand was raised, descended, closed.

"I have it! I have it!"

And she exulted with childish joy.

"What forfeit shall I impose? I'll put it down your neck. You are in my power, too."

And she pretended she was about to execute her threat, as on the day she ran after him on the hill.

George laughed, conquered by the spontaneity of that joy, which awoke in him all that still remained to him of his youth. He said:

"Come! now sit down and eat your fruit, quietly."

"Wait, wait!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait!"

She drew out the pin which held the pink in her hair, and put it between her lips. Then, gently, she opened her fist, took the moth by the wings, got ready to transfix it.

"How cruel you are!" said George. "How cruel you are!"

She smiled, attentive to her work, while the little victim beat its wings, already despoiled.

"How cruel you are!" repeated George, in a lower but graver voice, noticing on Hippolyte's physiognomy an ambiguous expression, mingled with complacency and repugnance, which seemed to signify that she found a special pleasure in artificially exciting and tormenting her own feelings.

He recalled that in several circumstances she had already shown a morbid taste for this kind of excitation. No pure sentiment of pity had entered her heart, either in presence of the tears and blood of the pilgrims at the Sanctuary or in the presence of the child in its death agony. And he saw her again quickening her step towards the group of curious passers-by leaning against the parapet of the Pincio to distinguish the traces left on the pavement by the suicide.

"Cruelty is latent at the bottom of her love," he thought. "There is something destructive in her, and this shows itself all the stronger as the ardor of her caresses becomes more intense."

And he saw once more the frightful and almost Gorgonian image of this woman, just as she had often appeared to his half-closed eyes in the spasm of voluptuousness or in the inertia of the supreme exhaustion.

"Look!" she said, showing him the moth squirming on the pin. "Look how its eyes shine!"

She presented it in different ways to the light, as when one wishes to cause the scintillation of a gem. She added:

"What a beautiful jewel!"

And, with an easy gesture, she stuck it in her hair. Then, fixing George with her gray eyes:

"You do nothing but think, think, think! What are you thinking of? At least, you used to talk—more perhaps than was necessary. Now you have grown taciturn, you have an air of mystery and conspiracy.... Are you angry with me? Speak, even if it will grieve me."

The tone of her voice, which had suddenly changed, expressed impatience and reproach. Once more she perceived that her lover had been only a meditative and solitary spectator, a vigilant and maybe hostile witness.

"Do speak! I prefer the cruel words of the old days to this mysterious silence. What's the matter? Doesn't it please you to be here? Are you unhappy? Are you tired of me? Are you disappointed in me?"

To be thus suddenly and unexpectedly taken to task exasperated George, but he repressed his anger—he even tried to smile.

"Why these strange questions?" he said calmly. "Does it worry you? I am always thinking of you and the things that concern you."

And quickly, with an amiable smile, fearing that she might suspect a shade of irony in his words, he added:

"You fecundate my brain. When I am in your presence my inner life is so full that the sound of my own voice displeases me."

She was pleased with this affected phrase, which seemed to elevate her to a spiritual function, to proclaim her the creator of a superior life. The expression of her face became serious, while, in her hair, the nocturnal moth squirmed continuously.

"Permit me to remain silent without being suspected," he continued, appreciating the change produced by his artifice in this feminine soul, which the idealities of love fascinated and exalted. "Permit me to remain silent. Do you ask me to speak when you see me dying under your kisses? Well, it is not your mouth alone which has the power to give me sensations surpassing all known limits. Every moment you give me an excess of sentiment and an excess of thought. You will never imagine what agitations are aroused in my mind by a single one of your gestures. When you stir, when you speak, I see a series of prodigies. At times you give me, as it were, a reminiscence of a life I have never lived. Immensities of darkness are suddenly illumined and live in my memory like unlooked-for conquests. What, then, are the bread, the viands, the fruit—all those material things that make an impression on my senses? What are the very operations of my organs, the external manifestations of my corporeal existence? When my mouth speaks, it seems almost as if the sound of

my voice cannot reach the depths in which I live. It seems to me that, not to disturb my vision, I should rest motionless and mute, while you pass, perpetually transformed, across the worlds which you have revealed."

He spoke slowly, his eyes fixed on Hippolyte, fascinated by this extraordinarily luminous face crowned by hair dark and deep as the night and in which a living and dying thing caused a continual palpitation. This face, so near and yet which seemed to him intangible, and these scattered objects on the table, and these high, purple flowers, and this whirl of light-winged forms around the source of the light, and the pure serenity which descended from the stars, and the musical breath which rose from the sea, and all the images reflected by his feelings—all seemed to him as in a dream. His very person, his very voice, seemed fictitious to him. Her thoughts and words were associated in an easy and vague manner. As on the moonlit night in front of the marvellous vine, the substance of his life and of the universal life was dissolved in the mists of the dream.

CHAPTER II.

Under the tent erected on the sand, after the bath, still half-nude, he watched Hippolyte lingering in the sun by the water-side, wrapped in her white peignoir. He had almost painful scintillations in his eyes, and the strong noonday sun caused him a novel sensation of physical trouble, mingled with a sort of vague fear. It was the terrible hour, the supreme hour of light and silence, hovering over the chasm of life. He comprehended the pagan superstition, the holy horror of canicular noon-times on the shore inhabited by a cruel and occult god. At the bottom of his vague fright stirred something like the anxiety of the man who expects a sudden and formidable apparition. He appeared to himself puerilely weak and cowardly, as diminished in courage and strength as after a trial that has not succeeded. In plunging his body into the sea, in presenting his brow to the glare of the sun, in swimming a short distance, in indulging his favorite exercise, in measuring his respiration by the breath of the

endless space, he had felt by indubitable indications the impoverishment of his youth, the destructive work of the enemy; he had felt once more the iron band tighten around his vital activity, and so reduce a new zone to inertia and impotency. The sensation of this muscular lassitude became all the deeper in proportion as he regarded more attentively the figure of that woman standing in the splendor of the day.

To dry her hair, she had unfastened it; and the curls, made heavy by the water, fell over her shoulders, so dark that they almost appeared violet. Her erect and slender form, enveloped as in the folds of a dress, stood out half against the glaucous surface of the sea and half against the luminous transparency of the sky. Scarcely could one see, underneath the hair, the profile of her bent and pensive face. She was wholly absorbed in the alternate pleasures of putting her bare feet in the torrid sand and keeping them there as long as she could endure the heat, then in plunging them, all burning, into the caressing waves that licked the sand. This double sensation seemed to afford her infinite enjoyment, in which she lost herself. She tempered and fortified her soul by the contact with free and healthy things, by the complacent absorption of the salt water and the sunbeams. How, at the same time, could she be so ill and so well? How could she conciliate in her being so many contradictions, assume so many aspects in a single day, in a single hour? The taciturn and sad woman in whom epilepsy was breeding, the mistress, eager and convulsed, whose ardor was at times alarming, whose sensuality had at times the lugubrious appearance of agony—this same creature, standing at the edge of the sea, had senses capable of gathering and savoring all the natural delights shed over the surrounding things, of appearing similar to the images of the ancient Beauty leaning over the harmonious crystal of a Hellespont.

She had an evidently superior power of resistance. George viewed her with a vexation which, becoming gradually concentrated, ended by assuming the seriousness of rancor. The sentiment of his own weakness was disturbed by hatred in

proportion as his perspicacity became more lucid and almost vindictive.

Those bare feet, which by turns she burnt in the sand and cooled in the water, were not beautiful; the toes were even deformed, plebeian, not at all delicate—they bore the impress of a lowly origin. George looked at them attentively, saw only them, with an extraordinary clearness of perception, as if the details of their shape had revealed a secret to him. And he thought:

"How many impure things are fermenting in that blood! All the hereditary instincts of her race persist in her, indestructible, ready to develop and arise against any restraint whatsoever. I shall never succeed in making her pure. I shall be able only to superpose her real individuality above the changing images of my dreams; and she will be able only to offer to my solitary intoxication the indispensable instrument of her organs."

But, while his intelligence reduced this woman to be but a simple motif for his imagination and despoiled of all value the palpable form, the very acuteness of the present perception made him feel that what attached him to her the most was precisely the real quality of that flesh; not only what there was most beautiful in her, but, above all, what was least beautiful in her. The discovery of defect did not loosen the tie, did not diminish the fascination. The most vulgar features had an irritating attraction for him. He knew well this phenomenon, which had often asserted itself. Often, with perfect clearness of vision, his eyes had seen the slightest defects of Hippolyte's person accentuated; and they had been for a long time subject to the attraction, they had been compelled to establish them, to examine them, to exaggerate them. And by his senses, in his mind, he had felt an indefinable disquietude, almost always followed by the sudden ardor of desire. That, certainly, was the most terrible indication of the great carnal obsession which a human creature exercises over another human creature. Such was the spell which was obeyed by the nameless lover who, in his mistress, loved above all the marks traced

by the years on her white neck, the parting of the hair every day wider, the faded mouth on which the salty tears made the savor of the kisses more lasting.

He thought of the flight of years, of the chain riveted forever by custom, of the infinite sadness of the love become a weary vice. He saw himself, in the future, tied to this flesh like the slave to his iron collar, deprived of will and thought, stupefied and vacuous; he saw the concubine fade, grow old, abandon herself without resistance to the slow work of time, let fall from her inert hands the lacerated veil of illusions, but preserve, nevertheless, her fatal power; he saw the deserted house, desolate, silent, awaiting the supreme visitor, Death!

He recalled the shouts of the little bastards, heard on that distant afternoon in the paternal house. He thought:

"She is barren; her entrails have been visited by a curse. In it the germs perish as in a fiery furnace. She thus thwarts and betrays the most profound instinct of life."

The uselessness of his love appeared to him like a monstrous transgression of the supreme law. But since his love was an uneasy sensuality only, why had he, then, this character of ineluctable fatality? Was not the instinct of the perpetuation of the race the unique and true motive of all sexual love? Was not this blind and eternal instinct the source of desire, and should not desire have as its object, occult or manifest, the generation prescribed by Nature? How was it, then, that so strong a tie attached him to the barren woman? Why was the terrible "will" of the Species so obstinate in demanding, in exacting, the vital tribute of that organism ravaged by disease and incapable of generating? What was lacking in his love was the first reason of love—the affirmation and the development of life beyond the limits of individual existence. What was lacking in the woman he loved was the highest mystery of her sex—the suffering of her who gives birth. And what caused the misery of both was precisely that persistent monstrosity.

"Aren't you coming in the sun?" asked Hippolyte, suddenly turning towards him.

"Look how I am standing it! I want to become really what you say—like an olive. Shall I?"

She approached the tent, raising with her two hands the edge of her long tunic, putting in her gestures an almost lascivious grace, as though suddenly invaded by languor.

"Shall I?"

She stooped a little to enter the tent. Under the abundance of snowy folds, her thin and flexible body had movements of feline grace, exhaled a heat and odor which spurred strangely the disturbed sensibility of the young man. And, while she stretched herself out on the mat beside him, there fell all around his flaming face a shower of hair, still wet with salt water, and through which shone the white of her eyes and the red of her lips, like fruits among foliage.

In her voice, as on her face, as in her smile, there was a shadow, an infinitely mysterious and fascinating shadow. It seemed as if she divined her lover's secret hostility, and was getting ready to triumph over it.

"What are you looking at?" she asked with a sudden start. "No, no; don't look at them! They are ugly."

She withdrew her feet, hid them under the folds of her peignoir.

"No, no. I forbid you."

She was vexed and ashamed for a moment; she frowned, as if she had surprised in George's eyes a spark of the cruel truth.

"Unkind man!" she said again, in an ambiguous tone of pleasantry and rancor.

He replied, rather enervated:

"You know that, in my eyes, you are beautiful all over."

And he made the gesture as if to draw her to him and kiss her.

"No; wait. Don't look."

She arose and glided to a corner of the tent. Rapidly, with furtive gestures, she drew on her long black-silk stockings; then she turned round, immodestly, an indefinable smile hovering on her lips. And, before George's eyes, holding up, one after the other, her perfect legs in their shining sheath, she fastened her garters above each knee. In her action there was something wilfully lascivious, and in her smile there was a touch of subtle irony. And that mute and terrible eloquence assumed in the young man's eyes this precise signification: "I am always the unconquered. You have known with me all the enjoyments for which your endless desire was thirsty, and I will clothe myself in lies that will endlessly provoke your desire. What matters to me your perspicacity? The veil that you tear I can repair in an instant, the bandage that you pluck off I can fasten in an instant. I am stronger than your thought. I know the secret of my transfigurations in your soul. I know the gestures and the words that have the virtue of metamorphosing me in your eyes. The odor of my skin has the power to dissolve a world in you."

In him a world was being dissolved while she drew near, serpentine and insidious, to fling herself at his side on the coarse rush mat. Once more, the reality was converted into a confused fiction full of hallucinating images. The reverberation of the sea filled the tent with a reflection of gold, mingled a thousand golden spangles in the threads of the tissue. Through the opening was a glimpse of the immensity of the calm sea, the vast immobility of the waters under an almost lugubrious blaze. And, gradually, these very appearances faded away.

In the silence, he heard nothing more but the rhythm of his own blood; in the shade, he saw nothing but two large eyes fixed on him with a kind of fury. She enshrouded him completely, as if she possessed the nature of a cloud. And through all the pores of this ardent skin he inhaled the marine fragrance like a salt volatilized through a flame. And in the thickness of her still humid hair he beheld the mystery of the deepest forests of sea-weed. And, in the final bewilderment of his conscience, he imagined he touched the bottom of an abyss falling to his death.

Then he heard, as if at a distance, amid the rustling of skirts, Hippolyte's voice, which was saying:

"Do you want to stay a little longer? Are you asleep?"

He opened his eyes; he murmured, all dazed:

"No, I'm not asleep."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm expiring."

He tried to smile. He caught a glance of Hippolyte's white teeth. She said, smiling:

"Do you want me to help you to dress?"

"No. I'll get dressed presently. Go on; I'll join you," he murmured, with a sleepy tone.

"Then I'll go back. I'm too hungry. Dress quickly, and come."

"Yes, immediately."

He started when he felt unexpectedly Hippolyte's lips on his lips. He opened his eyes; he tried to smile.

"Have pity!"

He heard the crunching of the sand under her receding footsteps. A heavy silence again took possession of the beach. At intervals, a light splashing came from the edge of the sea and the neighboring rocks, a feeble noise like that made by animals drinking in a trough.

A few minutes passed, during which he struggled against an exhaustion that threatened to turn into lethargy. Finally, he sat up, not without effort; he shook his head to dissipate his clouded thoughts; he looked all around him with bewilderment. He felt in his whole being a strange sensation of emptiness; he was no longer able to coördinate his ideas; he was almost incapable of thought, and to accomplish any act he needed an enormous effort. He threw a glance outside the tent, and was again

invaded by the horror of the light.

"Oh! if, on lying down again, I could never rise again. To die! Never to see her again!" He felt overwhelmed by the certainty that in a few instants he must see this woman again, he must stay near her, he must receive more of her kisses, he must hear her speak.

Before beginning to dress, he hesitated. Several mad ideas passed through his brain. Then he dressed mechanically. He went out of the tent, and the glare of the light made him close his eyes. Through the tissue of his eyelids he saw a great red light. He had a slight vertigo.

When he reopened his eyes, the spectacle of the external things gave him an inexpressible sensation. It seemed to him as if he saw everything again after an indefinite time, during a different existence.

The sandy beach, beaten by the sun, had the whiteness of chalk. On the immense and lugubrious mirror of the sea the incandescent sky seemed to subside, every second more under the weight of one of those gloomy silences that accompany the expectation of an unknown catastrophe. The sandy promontories, with their large, deserted creeks, rose in the form of towers above the black rocks, their crests wooded with olive-trees that stood out against the torrid sky in the attitudes of anger or madness. Stretched out on the rocks, like some monster ready to spring on its prey, the Trabocco, with its numerous machines, had a formidable aspect. In the entanglement of the beams and ropes, one could distinguish the fishermen stooping towards the waters, steady, motionless, like bronzes, and over their tragic lives hung the mortal spell.

All at once, amid the silence, a voice struck the young man's ears. It was the woman calling him from the height of the Hermitage.

He started; he turned round with an impressive palpitation. The voice repeated its call, limpid and strong, as if it wished to affirm its power.

"Come!"

While he climbed up the hill, the smoky mouth of one of the tunnels cast in the air a rumbling reverberation which resounded throughout the gulf. He stopped at the edge of the railroad, taken anew with a slight dizziness; and the flash of an insane idea crossed his wearied brain: "To lie down across the rails.... The end of all in a second!"

Deafening, rapid, and sinister, the train which passed swept in his face the wind it displaced; then, whistling and rumbling, it disappeared in the mouth of the opposite tunnel, the black smoke curling up in the sky.

CHAPTER III.

From dawn until twilight, the songs of the reapers—men and women—alternated on the slopes of the fecund hill. Masculine choruses, with a bacchic vehemence, were celebrating their joy at the abundant feast and the richness of the old wine. For the men of the scythe, the time of the harvest was a time of abundancy. Hour after hour, from dawn to twilight, according to the old-time custom, they interrupted their work to eat and drink on the field of stubble, among the newly made sheaves, in honor of the generous master. And each took from his porringer the share of nourishment sufficient to satiate one of the women. Thus, at the hour of the repast, Boaz had said to Ruth the Moabite: "Come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thou thy morsel in the vinegar. And Ruth came and sat down beside the reapers, and was sufficed."

But the feminine choruses were prolonged in almost religious cadences, with a slow and solemn sweetness, revealing the original holiness of the alimentary work, the primitive nobility of this task, where, on the ancestral soil, the sweat of man consecrated the nativity of the bread.

George heard them and followed them, his soul attentive; and gradually a beneficent and unhoped-for influence penetrated him. His soul seemed to gradually dilate, by

an aspiration always broader and more serene in proportion as the wave of the chant, propagated in the still torrid noons, became purer, but in it the hope of the pacifying night began to spread a species of ecstatic calm. It was a renewed aspiration towards the sources of life, towards the Origins. It was, perhaps, the supreme trembling of his youth attacked in the deepest part of its substantial energy, the supreme panting towards the regaining of happiness lost, henceforth, forever.

The harvest-time was drawing to its close. Passing along the mown fields, he caught a glimpse of the nice customs that seemed to be the rites of a georgic liturgy. One day he stopped close to a field already despoiled, where the haymakers had just constructed the last haystack, and he was a witness to the ceremony.

On the things exhausted by the heat hovered the limpid and sweet hour that was about to gather in its crystalline sphere the impalpable ashes of the consumed day.

The field was laid out in a parallelogram, on a tableland girt with gigantic olive-trees, through the branches of which were glimpses of the blue band of the Adriatic, mysterious as the velum perceived in the temple behind the silver palms. The high haystacks were erected at intervals in the form of cones, massive, and opulent with the richness heaped up by the arms of men, celebrated by the songs of women. When the toil was ended, the band of haymakers made a circle around its chief in the centre of the field. They were robust, sunburnt men, dressed in linen. On their arms, on their legs, on their bare feet, they had deformities which the long and slow endurance of manual labor imprints on limbs that toil. In the fist of each man shone a scythe, curved and thin as the moon in its first quarter. From time to time, with a simple gesture of their disengaged hand, they wiped the sweat from their brows, and with it sprinkled the ground where the straw was shining under the oblique rays of the setting sun.

In his turn, the chief made the same gesture; then, raising his hand as if to bless, he cried, in his sonorous voice, rich in rhythm and assonance:

"Let's leave the field, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!"

In chorus, the men of the scythe replied, with a great cry:

"Amen!"

And the chief went on:

"Blessed be our master, and blessed be our mistress!"

The men replied:

"Amen!"

And the chief, in a voice that gradually gathered strength and fire:

"Blessed be he who brought us good food to eat."

"Amen!"

"Blessed be he who says: 'Don't put water in the wine of the haymaker!'"

"Amen!"

"Blessed be the employer who says to his lady: 'Give without measuring, and put sapor in the wine of the haymaker!'"

"Amen!"

The benedictions extended from one to another: to him who had killed the sheep, to him who had washed the herbs and vegetables, to him who had polished the copper saucepan, to him who had seasoned the meats with spices. And the chief, in the fire of enthusiasm, in the sudden transport of a sort of poetic fury, expressed himself, all at once, in couplets. The band replied to him by immense clamors that reverberated through all the creeks, while on the iron of the scythes the flashes of the twilight, and the sheaves arranged on the top of the stacks, had the appearance of flames.

"Blessed be the woman who sings beautiful songs while bringing pitchers of old wine!"

"Amen!"

There was a thunderclap of joy. Then all were silent, and watched approach the chorus of the women, bearers of the last gifts of the mown field.

The women, in double file, were singing, carrying in their arms the large painted jars. And the uninitiated spectator, seeing them advance between the olive-trees, as through a colonnade, against the maritime background, might imagine he saw one of those votive images that develop harmoniously in bas-relief on the friezes of the temples or around the sarcophagi.

As he went back to the house this image of beauty accompanied him along the road, while he slowly wended his way amid the illusions of the evening, in which were still floating the waves of the choruses. At a bend in the road, he stopped to listen to a melodious voice that was approaching and that he seemed to recognize. As soon as he recognized it he started joyfully: it was the voice of Favetta, the young singer with the falconlike eyes, with the vibrating voice that always awoke in him the memory of that delicious May morning, resplendent on the labyrinth of the blossoming furze, on the solitude of the garden of gold in which, to his surprise, he thought he had discovered the secret of joy.

Without suspecting the presence of the stranger, hidden by a hedge, Favetta advanced, leading a cow by the tether. And she sang, her head high, her mouth open towards the sky, the full light on her face; and from her throat the song gushed forth, fluid, limpid, crystal as a stream. Behind her the fine, snowy beast ambled gently, and at each step its fetlock undulated, and its massive udder, swollen with milk by the pasture, dangled between its legs.

When she perceived the stranger, the singer stopped singing, and seemed about to halt; but he went to meet her with a joyous air, as if he had met a friend of the happy days.

"Where are you going, Favetta?" he cried.

Hearing herself addressed by her name, she blushed and smiled with embarrassment. "I'm taking the cow to the shed," she replied.

As she had suddenly slowed down her step, the snout of the beast grazed her hips, and her bold bust stood out between the large horns as in the crescent of a lyre.

"You're always singing," said George, admiring her in this attitude.

"Ah! signor," she said with a smile, "if we couldn't sing, what could we do?"

"Do you remember that morning when you plucked the furze flowers?"

"The first flowers for your lady?"

"Yes; do you remember?"

"I remember."

"Sing again for me the song you sang that day!"

"I can't sing it alone."

"Well, sing another."

"Like that, all at once, in your presence? I'm ashamed. I'll sing on the road. Addio, signor."

"Addio, Favetta."

And she resumed her way along the path, dragging the peaceable beast after her. When she had gone a little way, she struck up the song with all the strength of her voice that invaded the surrounding luminous country.

The sun had just set, and an extraordinarily vivid light was shed over the coasts and over the sea; an immense wave of impalpable gold mounted from the occidental sky to the zenith and redescended to the opposite side, the glassy transparency of which it penetrated with infinite slowness. Gradually the Adriatic became more clear and more gentle, approaching the green hue of the first leaves of the new shoots of willows. Alone, the red sails, as superb as if they were of purple, broke the diffused light.

"It's a holiday," thought George, dazzled by the splendid sunset, feeling palpitate around him the joy of life. Where does the human creature breathe for whom the whole day, from dawn to twilight, should not be a Holiday consecrated by some new conquest?

On the hill, the songs in honor of the nativity of the bread continued and alternated. The long feminine files appeared on the slopes and disappeared. Here and there, in the still air, columns of smoke rose slowly from invisible fires. The spectacle grew solemn and seemed to sink back into the mystery of the primitive centuries, in the holiness of a celebration of rural Dionysiacs.

CHAPTER IV.

Since the tragic night on which Candia, lowering her voice, had spoken of the witchcraft that hung over the men of the Trabocco, that great, whitish framework, stretched along on the rocks, had more than once attracted the strangers' attention and excited their curiosity. In the crescent of the little musical bay, that bristling and treacherous form, continually lying in ambush, seemed to deny the benignity of the solitude. At the burning and motionless noon-times, at the misty twilights, it often took on formidable aspects. At times, when all was still, one could hear the grinding of the capstan and the creaking of the timber. During the moonless nights, the red light of the torches was seen reflected by the water.

On an afternoon of oppressive idleness, George proposed to Hippolyte:

"Shall we go and visit the Trabocco?"

She answered:

"We'll go, if you like. But how can I cross the bridge? I have already tried it once."

"I will lead you by the hand."

"The plank is too narrow."

"We'll try."

They went there. They descended by the path. At the turn they found a sort of stairway hewn in the granite, hardly practicable, and the irregular steps of which stretched out as far as the reefs, at the end of the shaky bridge.

"You see! How can I manage?" said Hippolyte regretfully. "Even looking at it makes my head swim."

The first portion of the bridge was composed of a single plank, very narrow, upheld by stanchions fixed on the rock; the other part, broader, was formed of transverse thin deal boards, of an almost silvery whiteness, worm-eaten, brittle, badly joined, so thin that they seemed likely to break under the slightest pressure of the foot.

"Don't you want to try it?" asked George, with an inner sense of strange relief on finding that Hippolyte would never succeed in accomplishing the perilous passage. "Look; someone is coming to lend us a hand."

A half-naked child ran toward them from the platform, agile as a cat, brown as a rich golden bronze. Beneath his unfaltering foot the deal boards creaked, the rafters bent. Arrived at the end of the bridge, near the strangers, he encouraged them by energetic gestures to confide in him, looking up at them with his piercing eyes like the bird at its prey.

"Don't you want to try?" repeated George, smiling.

Irresolute, she advanced one foot on the shaking plank, looked at the rocks and water, then drew back, incapable of conquering her agitation.

"I fear vertigo," she said. "I am sure I should fall."

She added, with manifest regret:

"Go, go alone. You're not afraid?"

"No. But what will you do?"

"I will sit down in the shade and wait for you."

She added again, with hesitation, as if to try and retain him:

"But why do you go there?"

"I'm going. I'm curious to see."

She seemed sorry not to be able to follow him, vexed at letting him go to a place which she could not reach herself; and what seemed to chagrin and vex her was, not only having to renounce a curiosity and pleasure, but also some other cause, not distinct. What made her suffer, also, was the temporary obstacle that was about to be interposed between her lover and herself, that obstacle over which she was powerless to climb.

So essential had become the necessity of holding her lover always attached to her by a sensible bond, to be with him in uninterrupted contact, to dominate him, to possess him!

She said, a scarcely perceptible note of anger in her voice:

"Go, go along."

George became cognizant of a sentiment in himself that contrasted with the instinctive sentiment of Hippolyte; it was a sort of relief to establish beyond doubt that there was a place where Hippolyte could not follow him, a refuge completely inaccessible to the Enemy, a retreat defended by the rocks and by the sea where he could at last find a few hours of real repose. And these two impressions of their souls, although indistinct and even somewhat puerile, but certainly opposed, demonstrated the actual position of the lovers toward one another: the one, a conscious victim destined to perish; the other, an unconscious and caressing executioner.

"I'll go," said George, with a shade of provocation in his voice and attitude. "Good-by."

Although he did not feel sure of himself, he refused the child's assistance, and was very careful to take bold and sure steps, not to hesitate, not to vacillate on the shaking plank. As soon as he had put foot on the wider part, he hastened his steps,

still preoccupied by Hippolyte's look, instinctively giving to his efforts the heat of a hostile reaction. When he trod the planks of the platform, he felt the illusory sensation of finding himself on the bridge of a ship. In one second, the freshness of the short, splashing sea that broke on the rocks revived in his memory certain fragments of the life that he had lived on the Don Juan; and he felt through all his being a sudden thrill at the chimerical idea of raising the anchor.

Immediately after, his gaze was attracted to the surrounding objects, the slightest details of which he remarked with his usual lucidity.

Turchino had saluted him abruptly, with a gesture that neither word nor smile softened, as if no event whatever, however unusual and extraordinary it might be, would have the power to interrupt even for a second the terrible preoccupation that appeared on his terrene face, almost chinless, scarcely larger than a fist, with a long, prominent nose, pointed like the snout of a pike, between two small, glittering eyes.

The same preoccupation was legible in the faces of his two sons, who also saluted in silence, and resumed their work without laying aside their immutable sadness. They were boys of over twenty, fleshless, sunburnt, agitated by a continual muscular restlessness, like demoniacs. All their movements had an air of convulsive contraction, of starts; and beneath the skin of their chinless faces the muscles could be seen, at moments, trembling.

"Is the fishing good?" asked George, pointing to the large, immerged net, whose corners could be seen at the surface of the water.

"Nothing to-day, signor," murmured Turchino, in a tone of suppressed anger.

After a pause, he added:

"Who knows? Perhaps you've brought us good luck."

"Draw up the net. Let's see."

His sons began to manoeuvre the capstan.

Through the interstices of the planks could be seen the reflecting and foaming waves. In a corner of the platform stood a low cabin with a straw roof, the summit of which had a layer of red tiles, and decorated with a piece of sculptured oak in the form of a bull's head with two large, connecting horns—a charm against witchcraft. Other amulets were suspended from the roof, mingled with wooden disks, on which were glued with pitch pieces of mirror, round as eyes; and a bunch of four-pronged rusty forks lay before the low door. To right and left, two large vertical masts were erected, fixed on the rock, fastened at their bases by stakes of all dimensions, that intercrossed and mingled, riveted to one another by enormous nails, bound by iron wire and cordage, strengthened in a thousand ways against the rage of the sea. Two other horizontal masts crossed the first two and stretched out like bowsprits beyond the rocks, over the deep water teeming with fish. At the forked extremities of the four masts hung pulleys provided with cords corresponding to the corners of the square net. Other cords passed through other pulleys, at the end of smaller spars; as far a the most distant rocks, the stakes driven in sustained the re-enforced cables; innumerable planks, nailed on the beams, strengthened the weakest points. The long and obstinate struggle against the fury and treacherousness of the waves was as if written on this enormous carcass by means of these knots, these nails, this machinery. The machine seemed to have a life of its own, to have the air and figure of an animated body. The wood, exposed for years to sun, rain, and tempest, showed all its fibres, exhibited all its rugosities and knottiness, revealed every part of its resistant structure, was denuded, was consumed, was white like a tibia, or shining like silver, or grayish like silex, acquired a special character and significance, an imprint just as distinct as that of a person on whom old age and suffering have achieved their cruel work.

The capstan creaked as it turned by the impulsion of the four bars, and the whole machine trembled and creaked under the effort, while the vast net gradually emerged with golden reflections from the green depth.

"Nothing!" grumbled the father, on seeing the empty bottom of the net rise to the surface of the water.

The sons released the bars together, and with still louder creakings the capstan began to turn, beating the air with its four brutish arms, that could have cut a man in twain. The net replunged into the water. All were silent. In the silence was heard only the breaking of the sea against the rocks.

The weight of witchcraft crushed these miserable lives. George had lost all curiosity to question them, to discover, to know; but he felt that this taciturn and tragic company would soon possess for him the attraction of dolorous affinity. Was he not, too, the victim of a malefice? And he looked instinctively toward the beach, where appeared the figure of the woman outlined against a rock.

CHAPTER V.

He returned to the Trabocco almost every day, at different hours. It became the favorite place for his dreams and his meditations. The fishermen had become accustomed to his visits; they received him respectfully, prepared in the shade of the hut a couch for him, made from an old sail smelling of tar. On his part, he was not illiberal toward them.

In listening to the murmur of the waters, in watching the top of the mast, immovable in the azure, he evoked his nautical recollections, relived his wandering life of long-distant summers, that life of limitless liberty that to-day seemed to him singularly beautiful and almost chimerical. He recalled his last voyage on the Adriatic, several months after the Epiphany of Love, during a period of sorrows and poetic enthusiasms, under the influence of Percy Shelley, of that divine Ariel whom the sea had transfigured "into something rich and strange." And he recalled the debarkation at Rimini, the entry into Malamocco, the anchorage before the Schiavoni quays, all gilded by the September sun. Where, now, was his old travelling companion, Adolpho Astorgi? Where was the Don Juan? The preceding

week he had received news of it from Chios, in a letter that seemed still impregnated with the odor of mastic, and which announced the coming shipment of a quantity of Oriental confections.

Adolpho Astorgi was truly a fraternal spirit, the only one with whom he had been able to live a little time in complete communion, without feeling the embarrassment, uneasiness, and repugnance that prolonged familiarity with his other friends almost always caused him. How unfortunate he should be so far away now! And at times he represented him to himself as an unexpected deliverer who would appear with his vessel in the waters of San Vito to propose escape to him.

In his incurable weakness, in this total abolition of active will, he lingered at times in dreams of this kind; he implored the arrival of a strong and imperious man who would roughly rouse him, and who, breaking his chains, with an abrupt and definite blow, forever, would enliven him, carry him off, confine him in some lost region, where he would be unknown to everybody, where he would know no one, and where he could either begin life over again or die a less hopeless death.

Die he must. He knew to what he was condemned, knew it to be irrevocable; and he was convinced that the final act would be accomplished during the week preceding the fifth anniversary, between the last days of July and the first days of August. Since the temptation that, in the horror of the torrid noon, before the bright rails, had traversed his soul like a flash, it even seemed to him that the means were already found. He had listened intently, ceaselessly, to the rumbling of the train, and he felt a strange unrest when the time of its passage approached. As one of the runnels crossed the point of the Trabocco, he could, from his pallet, hear the dull noise that made the entire eminence tremble; and at times, when he was distracted by other thoughts, he experienced a start of fear, as if he had suddenly heard the rumbling of his destiny.

Was it not the same thought that reigned in him and in these taciturn men? Did not

both they and he feel a similar chill in their hearts, even in the most burning heat of the dog-days? It was perhaps this affinity that made him love this place and this company. On the musical waters, he let himself be lulled in the arms of the phantom created by himself, while the will to live grew gradually less, as the heat abandons a corpse.

The great calms of July had come. The sea extended before the view all white, milky, greenish here and there in the vicinity of the shore. A mist, slightly tinted with violet, paled the distant coasts: Cape Moro, the Nicchiola, Cape Ortona, the Vasto Point. The scarcely perceptible undulations of the smooth sea produced between the rocks a deep-toned harmony, measured by equal pauses. Holding himself at the extremity of one of the long, horizontal masts, the child acted as a lookout; with watchful eye he scrutinized beneath him the mirror of the wave, and, from time to time, to entice the frightened fish into entering the net, he threw a stone, the light splash of which increased the surrounding melancholy.

At times, the visitor dozed beneath the caress of the slow rhythms. These brief slumbers were the only compensation for his sleepless nights. And he had the habit of pretending this need of repose, so that Hippolyte might permit him to rest on the Trabocco as long as he pleased. George assured her that he could not sleep elsewhere than on those planks, amid the exhalations of the rocks, amid the music of the sea.

To this music he lent an ear more and more attentive and subtle. From now on he knew all its mysteries, understood all its significations. The feeble splash of the surf, like the lingual sound of a flock quenching its thirst; the great, sudden roar of a giant wave, which, arriving from the offing, meets and breaks the wave refracted from the shore; the most humble note, the most superb note, and the innumerable intermediate scales, and the diverse measures of the intervals, and the most simple chords, and the most complex chords, and all the powers of this profound marine

orchestra in the sonorous gulf—he knew all, he understood all.

Mysterious, the twilight symphony developed and swelled, very slowly, very slowly, beneath a sky of chaste violets, and between the ethereal clusters of which shone the first timid glances of the constellations still covered by a veil. Here and there, errant breezes raised and pushed the billows, rare at first, then more frequent, then weaker; they raised and pushed the waves whose delicate crests blossomed, stole a glint from the twilight, foamed a moment, and fell back languidly. Now like the dull sound of cymbals, now like the sound of silver disks clashed against one another, such was the sound produced in the silence by those falling and expiring waves. New billows arose, engendered by a stronger gust, curved limpidly, bore in their curvature the grace of the closing day, broke with a sort of indolence, like restless white rose-trees shedding their eaves, and leaving durable foam, like petals, on the mirror that stretched out where they disappeared forever. Still others arose, increased in velocity and strength, approached the shore, reached it with a triumphant roar followed by a diffused murmur similar to the rustling of dry leaves. And, while this illusionary rustling of the unreal forest lasted, other waves, over there, over there, on the crescent of the gulf, unfurled at constantly diminishing distances, to be followed by the same murmur, so that the sonorous zone seemed to extend to the infinite by the perpetual vibrations of a myriad of dry leaves.

The water rushed on the unshakable rocks with the impetuous warmth of love or anger; it dashed over them roaring, washed over them foaming, invaded with its liquidity the most secret crevices. It seemed that an ultra-sovereign natural soul was filling with its frantic perturbation an instrument as vast and multiple as an organ, guilty of every discordance, touching all the notes of joy and pain.

The water laughed, moaned, prayed, sang, caressed, sobbed, threatened—by turns joyous, plaintive, humble, ironical, coaxing, dejected, cruel. It dashed to the summit of the highest rock, to fill the little cavity round as a votive cup; it crept into the

oblique crevice where swarmed the mollusks; it sank into the soft carpets of coralline, tearing them and creeping as lightly as a serpent on a bed of moss. The regular dripping of the waters which ooze in the occult cave, the rhythmic overflow of the springs similar to the pulsation of a vast heart, the harsh splashing of the streams on the steep declivity, the dull rumbling of the torrent imprisoned between two walls of granite, the reiterated thunder of the river precipitated from the heights of the cataract—all these sounds produced by running waters on the inert stone and all the sports of their echoes, the sea imitated. The tender word that one murmurs apart in the shade, the sigh exhaled by a mortal anguish, the clamor of a multitude buried in the depths of a catacomb, the sob of a titanic bosom, arrogant and cruel derision—all these sounds produced by the human mouth when sad or gay, the sea imitated. The nocturnal choruses of the spirits with the aërial tongues, the whispering of the phantoms put to flight by the dawn, the suppressed grins of fluid and malevolent creatures in ambush on the threshold of their lairs, the calls of vocal flowers in sensual paradises, the magic dance in the moonlight—all these sounds that the ears of the poets listen to in secret, all the enchantments of the antique siren, the sea imitated. One and multiple, elusive and imperishable, it enclosed in itself all the languages of Life and Dreamland.

In the attentive mind of the auditor it seemed like the resurrection of a world. The grandeur of the marine symphony revived in him faith in the unlimited power of music. He was stupefied at having been able to deprive his soul so long of this daily nourishment, of having renounced the only means conceded to man to free himself from the deception of appearances and to discover in the inner universe of the soul the real essence of things. He was stupefied at having been able to neglect so long this religious cult, which, after Demetrius's example, he had practised with so much fervor since the first years of his infancy. For Demetrius and for himself, had not music been a religion? Had it not revealed to both the mystery of the supreme life? To both it had repeated, but with a different sense, the words of Christ: "My

kingdom is not of this world."

And he reappeared to his mind, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile melancholy, and a single white curl in the centre of his forehead, among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

Once more George felt himself penetrated by the supernatural fascination which that man, existing outside of life, exercised upon him from the bottom of the tomb. Distant things came back to his memory similar to indistinct waves of harmony; elements of thought received from that teacher seemed to take vague forms of rhythm; the ideal sceptre of the defunct appeared to be transfigured musically, to lose its visible outlines, to reënter into the profound unity of the being, into that being which the solitary musician, in the light of his inspiration, had discovered under the diversity of the Appearances.

"Without doubt," he thought, "it is music that initiated him into the mystery of Death, that showed him, beyond this life, a nocturnal empire of marvels. Harmony, an element superior to time and space, had given him, like a beatitude, a glimpse of the possibility of freeing himself from space and time, of detaching himself from the individual will that confined him in the prison of a personality enclosed in a restricted place, that kept him perpetually subject to the brutish matter of corporeal substance. How he had a thousand times felt in himself, in the moments of inspiration, the awakening of the universal will; what extraordinary joy he had tasted on recognizing the supreme unity that is at the bottom of things; he believed that death would be a means for prolonging his existence in the infinite, that he would become dissolved in the continuous harmony of the Great All and would participate in the endless voluptuousness of the Eternal. Why should I, too, not have the same initiator into the same mystery?"

Elevated images arose in his mind, at the same time as the stars appeared one by one in the silence of the heavens. Some of his most poetic dreams came back to him. He

recalled the immense sentiment of joy and liberty that he had felt one day in identifying himself in imagination with an unknown man who was lying in a bier at the summit of a majestic catafalque, surrounded by torches, while at the back of the sacred shadow, in the organ, in the orchestra, and in the human voices, the soul of Beethoven, the divine teacher, spoke with the Invisible. He saw once more the chimerical vessel laden with a gigantic organ that, between the sky and the sea, in infinite distances, poured over the calm wave torrents of harmony from its forests of tubes, while twilight pyres blazed on the extreme horizon, or the serenity of the moon spread all over the ecstatic sky, or in the circle of the darkness the constellations shone from the heights of their crystal chariots. He reconstructed that marvellous Temple of Death, all of white marble, where remarkable musicians, stationed between the columns of the propylon, fascinated with their strains the young men as they passed, and put so much art in initiating them that never did one initiated, when placing his foot on the funereal threshold, look back to salute the light in which, up to then, he had found joy.

"Give me a noble manner of dying. Let Beauty spread one of her wings out under my last step! It is all I implore from my Destiny."

A lyric breath expanded his thought. The end of Percy Shelley, so often envied and dreamed of by him under the shadow and flapping of the sail, reappeared to him in an immense flash of poetry. That destiny had superhuman grandeur and sadness. "His death is mysterious and solemn as that of the ancient heroes of Greece which an invisible power removed unexpectedly from the earth and carried off transfigured into the Jovian sphere. As in the song of Ariel, nothing of him is destroyed; but the sea has transfigured him into something rich and strange. His youthful body is burning on a pyre, at the foot of the Apennine, before the solitude of the Tyrrhenian Sea, under the blue arch of heaven. He is burning with aromas, with incense, with oil, with wine, with salt. The sonorous flames are rising in the still air, vibrating and chanting towards the sun, a looker-on that makes the marbles scintillate on the tops

of the mountains. As long as the body is not consumed, a seagull circles the pyre with its flights. And then, when the body, in ashes, falls apart, the heart appears, bare and intact."

Had not he, too, perhaps, like the poet of Epipsychidion, loved Antigone during an anterior existence?

Beneath him, around him, the symphony of the sea swelled, swelled in the shade; and over him, the silence of the starry sky grew deeper. But from the shore came a rumbling without resemblance to any other sound, very familiar. And, when he turned his gaze on that side, he saw the two headlights of the train, like the fulguration of two eyes of fire.

Deafening, rapid, and sinister, the train that passed shook the promontory; in a second it had dashed across the open space; then, whistling and roaring, it disappeared in the mouth of the tunnel opposite.

George started to his feet. He perceived that he was alone on the Trabocco.

"George, George, where are you?" It was the uneasy cry of Hippolyte, who had come to look for him—it was a cry of anguish and fear.

"George! Where are you?"

CHAPTER VI.

Hippolyte exulted from joy when George told her of the near arrival of the piano and pieces of music. How grateful she was to him for that kind surprise! At last, they would have something to break the monotony of the long days and to keep them from temptation.

She laughed as she alluded to that species of erotic fever with which she maintained continual ardor in her lover; she laughed as she alluded to their carnalism, interrupted only by the silences of lassitude or by some caprice of the loved one.

"In that way," she said, laughing, with a touch of irony yet without bitterness, "in

that way you won't have to take refuge on your horrid Trabocco. Will you?"

She drew close to him, laid her hands on his head, pressed his temples between her palms, and gazed into the depths of his pupils.

"Confess that you took refuge there because of that," she murmured, in a coaxing voice, as if to induce him to confess.

"Because of what?" he demanded, feeling under the contact of her hands the sensation one feels when one grows pale.

"Because you are afraid of my kisses."

She pronounced the words slowly, almost scanning the syllables, and in a voice which had all at once assumed singular limpidity. She had in her look an indefinable mixture of passion, irony, cruelty, and pride.

"Is it true, is it true?" she insisted.

She continued to press his temples between her palms; but, gradually, her fingers crept into his hair, slightly tickled his ears, descended to his neck with one of those multiple kisses in the science of which she was an accomplished artist.

"Is it true?" she repeated in a subtle, coaxing tone that she knew well, by experience, was most efficacious in arousing her lover. "Is it true?"

He did not reply; he closed his eyes; he abandoned himself; he felt life slipping by—the world fading away.

Once more he was succumbing at the mere contact of those thin hands; once more the Enemy was triumphantly essaying its power. It seemed as if she were saying: "You cannot escape me. I know you fear me, but the desire I arouse in you is stronger than your terror. And nothing intoxicates me so much as to read that terror in your eyes, to surprise it in the shudder of your fibres."

In the ingenuousness of her egotism, she did not appear to have the least consciousness of the evil she was doing, of the work of destruction that she was

carrying on without truce or mercy. Accustomed as she was to her lover's peculiarities—his melancholies, his intense and mute contemplations, his sudden uneasiness, his sombre and almost insane ardor, his bitter and ambiguous words—she did not comprehend all the gravity of the actual situation, that she was aggravating more every hour. Gradually, excluded from all participation in George's inner existence, she had, at first by instinct, and afterwards deliberately, made it her study to fortify her sensual dominion over him. Their new way of life, in the open air, in the country, on the seashore, favored the development of her animalism, aroused in her nature a factitious strength and the need of exercising that strength to excess. Complete idleness, the absence of commonplace cares, the continual presence of the loved one, the common possession of the couch, the scantiness of their Summer attire, the daily bath—all those new habits concurred to subtilize and multiply her voluptuous artifices, at the same time offering her numerous opportunities to repeat them. And it really seemed as if she were making ample amends for her coldness in the early days and her inexperience of the early months, and that she was now corrupting him who had corrupted her.

She had become so expert, so certain of her effects, she was so quick at unexpected inventions, so graceful in her gestures and attitudes, she showed at times in the offer of herself such violent frenzy, that George could no longer see in her the bloodless and wounded creature who used to submit with profound astonishment, the ignorant and frightened creature who had given him that fierce and divine spectacle—the agony of modesty felled by victorious passion.

A short time ago, as he had watched her sleeping, he had thought: "True sensual communion is also a chimera. The senses of my mistress are not less obscure than her soul. I shall never succeed in surprising in her fibres a secret disgust, an appetite unsatisfied, an irritation unappeased. I shall never succeed in knowing the different sensations produced in her by the same kiss repeated at different times." Yet Hippolyte had acquired that science over him, she possessed that infallible science;

she knew her lover's most secret and subtle sensibilities and knew how to move them with a marvellous intuition of the physical conditions that depend on them, and their corresponding sensations and their associations, and their alternatives.

But the inextinguishable desire that she had enflamed in George burned her, too. A sorceress, she herself felt the effects of her own spell. The consciousness of her power, essayed a thousand times without failure, intoxicated her, and this ravishment blinded her, prevented her from perceiving the great shadow that was thickening every day behind the head of her slave. The terror that she had surprised in George's eyes, his attempts at flight, the thinly disguised hostilities, excited her instead of restraining her. Her artificial taste for transcendent life, for extraordinary things, for mystery, tastes that George had educated in her, took pleasure in these symptoms significant of a deep change. Formerly her lover, separated from her, tortured by the anguish of desire and jealousy, had written her: "Is that love? Oh, no! It is a sort of monstrous infirmity that can blossom only in me, for my joy and my martyrdom. I love to think that no other human creature has experienced that feeling." She was proud at having aroused such a sentiment in a man so different from the commonplace men she had known; she became exalted as she recognized, hour by hour, the strange effects of her exclusive domination on this morbid-minded man. And she had no other object than to exercise her tyranny, with a mixture of levity and seriousness, passing by turns from playfulness to wilful abuse.

CHAPTER VII.

Sometimes, when at the edge of the sea, contemplating the unconscious woman standing near the calm and perilous waves, George thought: "I could easily cause her death. She often tries to swim leaning on me. I could easily smother her under the water, let her drown. No suspicion would attach to me; the crime would appear like an accident. Only then, in front of the corpse of the Enemy, should I have an opportunity to find the solution of my problem. Since she is now the centre of all my

existence, what change would take place in me after her disappearance? Have I not more than once experienced a feeling of peace and liberty in thinking of her as dead, enclosed forever in the tomb? Perhaps I should succeed in saving myself and reconquering life, if I made the Enemy perish, if I removed the Obstacle." He dwelt on this thought; he tried to construct a representation of his being freed and appeased in a future without love; he took pleasure in enveloping his mistress's sensual body in a fantastic shroud.

Hippolyte was timid in the water. During her swimming lessons she never ventured beyond her depth. A sudden terror seized her when, on resuming the vertical position, she did not at once feel ground under her feet. George urged her to venture, with his help, as far as a rock situated a short distance from the shore, about twenty strokes from her depth. Very slight effort was necessary to swim there.

"Be brave!" he kept repeating, to convince her. "You'll never learn unless you are courageous. I'll stay near you."

Thus he enveloped her with his homicidal thought; and he had a long inner thrill each time, during the incidents of the bath, that he became convinced of the extreme facility with which he could carry his thoughts into effect. But the necessary energy failed him, and he confined himself to proposing the swim to the rock and leaving the rest to chance. In his present, weak condition, he himself would be in peril if Hippolyte, seized by fright, took violent hold of him. But such a probability did not dissuade him from making the attempt; on the contrary, it made him more determined to do so.

"Be brave! Cannot you see that the rock is so near that we can almost touch it with our hands? Swim slowly, by my side. You can rest when you're there. We'll sit down; we'll gather some coral. Come, be brave!"

He dissimulated his own anxiety with difficulty. She resisted, undecided, wavering between fear and caprice.

"Suppose my strength gives out?"

"I'll be there to help you."

"And if your strength isn't sufficient?"

"It will be. You see how close the rock is."

Smiling, she touched her lips with her wet fingers.

"The water is so salt!" she said, pouting.

Then, her last repugnance overcome, she suddenly made up her mind.

"Come! I'm ready."

Her heart did not beat so fast as the heart of her companion. As the water was very calm, almost motionless, the first strokes were easy. But suddenly, through lack of experience, she began to hurry and blow herself. A false movement filled her mouth with water; panic seized her; she cried, struggled, drank in more.

"Help, George! Help!"

Instinctively, he dashed to her aid and caught hold of the shrivelled fingers that clutched him. Under the clutch, and weight, he weakened; and he had a sudden vision of the foreseen end.

"Don't hold me like that!" he cried. "Don't hold me like that! Leave me an arm free!"

The brutal instinct of self-preservation restored his strength. He made an extraordinary effort, swam the short distance with his burden; and he touched the rock, his strength exhausted.

"Cling hold!" he said to Hippolyte, unable to raise her himself.

Finding herself safe, she had recovered her promptness of action; but, barely seated on the rocks, gasping and dripping, she burst into sobs.

She cried violently, like a child; and her sobs exasperated George instead of touching him. He had never seen her cry such a torrent of tears, with such swollen

and burning eyes, making such a grimace. He thought her ugly and pusillanimous. He felt an angry rancor toward her, and at heart almost a regret for having given himself that trouble and taken her from the water. He imagined her drowned, disappeared in the sea; he imagined his own emotion on seeing her disappear, and then the signs of grief that he would give in public, his attitude in front of the cadaver cast up by the waves.

Stupefied at seeing herself left to her tears without a consoling word, she turned toward him. She had stopped crying.

"What shall I do to get back?" she asked.

"Make another attempt," he answered, with a touch of mockery.

"No, no; never!"

"What, then?"

"I'll stay here."

"Very well. Addio!"

And he made a gesture as if to dive in the sea.

"Addio! I'll shout. They'll come and rescue me."

She passed from sobbing to laughter, her eyes still full of tears.

"What's that on your arm?" she asked.

"The marks of your nails."

He showed her the bleeding scratches.

"Do they hurt?"

She felt sorry, and stroked the arm with her hand.

"It was your fault—only yours, wasn't it?" she continued. "You made me come. I didn't want to——"

Then, smiling:

"It was perhaps a way to get rid of me?"

A shudder ran through her:

"What a horrible death! The water is so bitter!"

She bent her head down to one side, and felt the water run from her ear, warm as the blood.

The sun-beaten rock was hot, brownish, and slippery, like the back of a living animal; and at its base, it swarmed with infinite life. The green vegetation undulated on the surface of the water with the suppleness of unloosened hair, with a light, splashing sound. The solitary rock, which received the heavenly heat, exercised a sort of seduction, and communicated it to its people of happy creatures.

As if allowing himself to be won by this seduction, George stretched himself out on his back. For a few seconds he applied his consciousness to perceive the vague feeling of comfort that penetrated his wet skin drying in the heat emanated from the stones and in that of the direct rays. Phantoms of distant sensations came back to his memory. The thought of the chaste baths of formerly, of the long apathies on the sand, more ardent and more suave than a female body. Oh! for solitude, liberty, love without the accessories, love for dead or inaccessible women! Hippolyte's presence prohibited forgetfulness, recalled incessantly the image of the physical relation, of the accouplement operated by ignoble organs, of the infecund and sad spasm which had since become the unique manifestation of their love.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Hippolyte, touching him. "Do you want to stay here?"

He rose. He replied:

"Let's go."

The life of the Enemy was still in his hands. He could still destroy it. He cast a rapid glance around him. A heavy silence hung over the hill and the beach; on the

Trabocco, the taciturn fishermen were watching their net.

"Come, be brave!" he repeated, smiling.

"No, no; never again!"

"Let's stay here, then."

"No. Let's call the men of the Trabocco."

"They'll laugh at us."

"Very well! I'll call them myself."

"If you didn't get frightened—if you didn't clutch me so, I should be strong enough to carry you."

"No, no. I want to go back in the fannizza."

She was so determined that George let her have her way. He stood up on the rock, and, making a speaking trumpet of his hands, he called one of Turchin's sons.

"Daniel! Daniel!"

On hearing this repeated shout, one of the fishermen left the capstan, crossed the bridge, climbed down, and began to run along the beach.

"Daniel, bring the cannizza."

The man heard, turned back, went toward the boathouse, dragged the little dingy into the water, and, pushing off with a long pole, proceeded towards the rock.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning—it was a Sunday—George, seated beneath the oak, was listening to old Colas, who was relating how, several days before, at Tocco Casauria, the new Messiah had been arrested by the police and led to the Saint Valentine prison with several of his disciples. The old man said, shaking his head:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ himself suffered from the hate of the Pharisees. Oreste came into the district to bring peace and abundance, and they put him in prison!"

"O father, don't grieve," cried Candia. "The Messiah can leave the prison when he wishes to, and we'll see him again here. Wait and see!"

She was leaning against the door-post, supporting, without fatigue, the weight of her peaceful maternity; and in her large ashen eyes shone an infinite serenity.

All at once, Albadora, the septuagenarian Sibyl, who had brought into the world twenty-two children, remounted to the court, by the path; and, pointing to the neighboring shore of the left promontory, she announced, deeply moved:

"A child has been drowned yonder!"

Candia made the sign of the cross.

George rose and ascended to the loggia, in order to observe the point indicated. On the beach, at the foot of the promontory, near the reefs and the tunnel, there was a white spot, doubtless the cloth that covered the little corpse. A group of people stood close by.

As Hippolyte had gone to mass with Helen, to the chapel of the Port, he was curious to go down, and said to his hosts:

"I'll go and see."

"Why do you want to put a pain in your heart?" asked Candia.

He turned quickly into the path, took a short cut to the beach, walked along the edge of the sea. On arriving at the place of the accident, he was panting a little. He asked:

"What has happened?"

The assembled peasants saluted him, making room for him. One of them answered, calm:

"It's the son of a mother, who's been drowned."

Another, clothed in linen, who appeared to be in charge of the corpse, stooped, and raised the cloth.

The little body appeared, inert, stretched on the hard beach. It was the body of a

child of eight or nine, a thin and frail blond. For a pillow, they had put beneath his head his poor rags rolled up in a bundle: his shirt, blue breeches, red belt, soft felt hat. His face was scarcely livid, with a snub nose, prominent forehead, very long eyelashes, a half-open mouth with large, violet-colored lips between which showed the white teeth, spaced one from another. His neck was thin, flaccid, like a withered stem, marked with tiny folds. The tendons of the arm were weak; the arms were slender, covered with a down like the fine feathers that cover a newly hatched bird. His ribs were prominent and distinct; a darker line divided the skin in the middle of the chest; the umbilicus protruded like a knot. The feet, a little swollen, had the same yellowish color as the hands; and the small hands were callous, covered with warts, with white nails that were beginning to turn livid. On the left arm, on the thighs near the groin, and lower down, on the knees, along the limbs, reddish spots appeared. All the particularities of this miserable body assumed an extraordinary significance in George's eyes, immobilized as they were, and fixed forever in the rigidity of death.

"How did he get drowned? Where?" he asked in a low voice.

The man clad in linen began, not without some signs of impatience, the story, that, doubtless, he had already repeated too often. He had a square, bestial face, hairy eyebrows, and a broad, hard, fierce mouth. The story he told was as follows:

Immediately after having taken his sheep back to the barn, the child had eaten his lunch and had gone down to bathe in company with a comrade. But scarcely had he put foot in the water than he fell and was drowned. At his comrade's cries, someone had run from the house built on the cliffs, and had drawn him out half-dead, without getting wet above the knees. He had lowered the head to cause vomiting, had shaken him, but uselessly. And, so as to illustrate just where the poor little fellow had gone down, the man picked up a stone and threw it into the sea.

"There, just there—three arms' length from the shore."

The calm sea breathed softly near the head of the little corpse. But the sun blazed on the beach; and, in presence of this pallid corpse, there seemed something implacable in that burning sky and these coarse witnesses.

George asked:

"Why don't you carry him into the shade, to a house, a bed?"

"He mustn't be moved," replied the guardian sententiously. "Until the arrival of the Authorities, he must not be moved."

"But, at least, carry him into the shade—there, under that embankment."

Obstinately, the guardian repeated:

"He must not be moved."

And nothing could be more sad than that frail, lifeless creature, stretched on the strand, and guarded by that impassive brute, who always repeated the same tale in the same words, who always made the same motion when throwing the stone into the sea.

"There, just there."

A woman came up, a hook-nosed scold, with hard eyes and a bitter tongue—the comrade's mother. One could plainly see on her features a suspicious anxiety, as if she feared an accusation against her own son. She spoke sourly, and displayed almost irritation against the victim.

"It was his fate. God told him, 'Go in the sea and die.'"

She gesticulated vehemently.

"Why did he go in when he couldn't swim?"

A child who did not belong to the district, a boatman's son, repeated disdainfully:

"Why did he go in? Yes, we fellows all know how to swim."

People came up, looked on with cold curiosity, stopped or passed on. One group

occupied the railway embankment; another group was looking from the top of the promontory, as at a spectacle. Children, seated or kneeling, played with the little pebbles that they threw in the air to catch them alternately on the backs of their hands and in their palms. Everyone displayed profound indifference at the sight of another's misfortune, and at death.

Another woman, on her way back from mass, came up, in a silk dress, decked with all her gold trinkets. To her, also, the weary guardian repeated his story, and showed the place in the water. This woman was loquacious.

"I always say to my children, 'Don't go near the sea, or I'll kill you.' The sea is the sea. You can't save yourself."

She related stories of drowned people. She recalled the case of the headless corpse that the sea had thrown up at San Vito and which a child had discovered among the rocks.

"There, between those rocks you see. The child came running up, saying, 'There's a dead man.' We thought he was joking. All the same, we went, and we found it. The body had no head. The Authorities came. They buried him in a ditch; then, at night, he was taken up again. He was all mangled and decomposed, but he still had his shoes on his feet. The magistrate said, 'Look, they are better than mine.' He must be a rich man. And he was a cattle-dealer. He had been assassinated; they had cut his head off and thrown him into the Tronto." ...

She continued in a shrill treble, swallowing the excessive saliva, from time to time, with a light, whistling sound:

"Where's the mother? When will the mother come?"

All the assembled women uttered exclamations of pity at that name.

"The mother. The mother will come."

They all turned around, thinking they saw her in the distance, on the burning sand.

Others gave information concerning her. Her name was Riccangela; she was a widow with seven children. She had placed this one with the farmers to feed the sheep and earn his bread.

One was saying, as she looked at the corpse:

"His mother had so much trouble to raise him!"

Another said:

"She has even begged alms so as to nourish her children."

A third told that, several months previously, the poor youngster had already come near drowning himself in a stable-yard pond—in three inches of water!

Everyone repeated:

"It was his destiny. He was to die so."

Waiting rendered them uneasy, anxious.

"The mother! The mother's coming!"

George, deeply affected, cried:

"Carry him into the shade, won't you? Or into a house, so that his mother will not see him naked on the sand in the broiling sun!"

The guardian objected obstinately:

"He mustn't be moved. Until the arrival of the Authorities, he mustn't be moved."

The assistants looked at Candia's stranger with surprise. Their number increased. Some occupied the embankment, planted with acacias; others crowned the arid promontory rearing up perpendicularly above the rocks. Here and there, lying on the great, monstrous blocks, clumps of reeds shone like gold, at the foot of the enormous slide of the cliffs, resembling a ruin of a cyclopean tower in front of the immense sea.

Suddenly, above the heights, a voice announced:

"Here she is."

Other voices followed:

"The mother, the mother!"

Everybody turned round; some came down from the embankment; those on the promontory leaned forward. Expectation rendered all dumb. The guardian recovered the corpse with the cloth. In the silence, the sea scarcely gasped, the acacias scarcely rustled.

And then, in the silence, one heard the cries of the new arrival.

The mother came along the shore, in the sun, crying. She was dressed in widow's weeds. Her body bent, she stumbled along on the sand, crying:

"My son! My son!"

She raised her hands to heaven, crying:

"My son!"

One of her older sons, with a red handkerchief knotted about his neck, followed her with a stupefied air, wiping away his tears with the back of his hand.

She walked along the shore, bent, striking her knees, directing her steps toward the white cloth. And while she called the dead, her mouth uttered cries that had nothing human about them, like the yelping of a savage dog. The nearer she came the lower she bent, almost stooping on all fours; when she reached the body, she threw herself on the cloth with a shriek.

She arose. With her coarse and blackened hand, a hand hardened by every toil, she uncovered the corpse. She looked at it for a few instants, motionless, as if petrified. Then, several times, in a piercing voice, with all the force of her lungs, she cried as if to awaken the dead:

"My son! My son! My son!"

The sobs choked her. On her knees, furious, she struck her sides with her fists. Her

hopeless gaze wandered around on the people present. And during a lull in that violent tempest she seemed to collect herself.

Then she began to chant.

She chanted her sorrow in a rhythm that rose and fell regularly, like the palpitation of a heart.

It was an ancient monody that, from time immemorial, in the region of the Abruzzi, the women chanted over the loss of their kin. It was the melodious eloquence of the sacred sorrow that spontaneously wells up from the depths of the being, that hereditary rhythm in which the mothers of other times had modulated their lament.

She chanted, chanted:

"Open your eyes, arise, walk, my son! How beautiful you are! How beautiful you are!"

She chanted:

"For a morsel of bread, I have drowned you, my son! For a morsel of bread, I sent you to death! It was for this, then, that I raised you!"

But the woman with the hooked nose interrupted her, snappishly:

"No, you have not drowned him. It was Destiny. No, you didn't send him to his death. You put it in the midst of the bread."

And with a gesture towards the hill on which stood the house that had given hospitality to the child, she added:

"They took care of him there like a jewel in its casket."

The mother continued:

"O my son! Who sent you here? Who sent you here, to be drowned?"

And the snappy woman:

"Who sent him? It was our Lord. He said to him, 'Go into the sea and drown.'"

As George observed in a low voice to one of the bystanders that the child, succored in time, could have been saved, and that they had killed him by putting his head low and suspending him by the feet, he felt the mother's gaze fixed on himself.

"Do something for him, signor," she implored. "Do something for him."

She prayed:

"O Madonna of Miracles, perform the miracle!"

She repeated, touching the head of the dead:

"My son! My son! My son! Arise! Walk!"

Before her, on his knees, was the brother of the dead child; and he sobbed with grief, gazing about him from time to time with a face that had suddenly become indifferent. Another brother, the eldest, remained seated near by in the shadow of a rock, and he simulated grief by hiding his face in his hands. In order to console the mother, the women bent around her with gestures of pity, and accompanied the monody with a few groans.

She chanted:

"Why did I send you away from my house? Why have I sent you to your death? I have done everything to feed my sons, everything but sold myself. And it is for a morsel of bread that I have lost you! That, that is how you were to end. They have drowned you, my son!"

Then the woman with the rapacious nose in a burst of anger raised her skirt, entered the water as far as the knees, and cried:

"Look! He went in this far. Look! The water is like oil. It is a sign that he was to die in this manner."

And she regained the shore in two long strides.

"Look, look!" she repeated, pointing out on the sand the deep imprints of the man who had drawn out the body.

The mother looked on in a stupor; but one would have said that she did not see, that she understood nothing. After the hopeless explosions of grief, there supervened in her short pauses, like the dulling of consciousness. She remained silent; she touched her foot, or leg, mechanically; she dried her tears with her black apron; she seemed to become composed. Then suddenly a new explosion shook her entire frame; she fell on the corpse.

"And I cannot take you away! I cannot take you in my arms to the church! My son! My son!"

She felt him from head to foot, with a slow caress. Her wild anguish became more gentle, more touching. Her hand, sunburnt and callous by work, became infinitely coaxing when she touched her son's eyes, mouth, and forehead.

"How beautiful you are! How beautiful you are!"

She touched his lower lip, already violet-hued; and this slight pressure caused a flow of whitish foam to flow from the mouth. She removed from between the eyelashes a bit of straw, gently, gently, as if she feared to hurt him.

"How beautiful you are, you mother's pet!"

The eyelashes of the child were very long and very blond. On the temples, on the cheeks, a light down gave a golden reflection.

"Don't you hear me? Arise! Walk!"

She took the little hat, worn, soft as a rag. She gazed on him, kissed him. She said:

"I want to keep this as a relic; I want to carry it always on my heart."

She took the red waistband, and said:

"I wish to dress you."

The rough woman who had not left her place approved:

"Yes, let us dress him."

She herself removed the clothes from beneath the head of the corpse, felt in the vest

pocket, and found there a piece of bread and a fig.

"You see! They had just given him his meal. They took care of him there like a jewel in its casket."

The mother looked at the little shirt, dirty, torn, on which her tears were falling, and she said:

"Put this shirt on him!"

Promptly the woman shouted up to one of her people on the heights above:

"Bring quickly one of Nufrillo's clean shirts."

The clean shirt was brought. When the mother raised the small body, a little water came from the mouth and rolled down the chest.

"O Madonna of Miracles, perform the miracle!" she prayed, raising her eyes to heaven in a supreme supplication.

Then she laid her sweet burden down again. She took the old shirt, the red waistband, the hat; she rolled them all up into a bundle, and said:

"It will be my pillow; at night I shall rest my head on it. I want to die on it."

She placed the poor relic on the sand near the child's head, placed her temple on it, and stretched out as if on a bed.

They both lay there, side by side, the mother and son, on the hard stones, beneath the burning sky, near the homicidal sea. And she chanted the same cantilena that had formerly shed a chaste slumber over the cradle.

"Get up, Riccangela; get up!" repeated the women around her.

She was not listening to them.

"My son is lying on the stones, and I could not rest there, too! Oh! my son, on these stones."

"Get up, Riccangela. Come!"

She rose. She gazed once more and with terrible intensity on the livid face of the corpse. She called once more, with all the force of her lungs:

"My son! My son! My son!"

Then, with her own hands, she re-covered her heavy loss with the cloth.

And the women surrounded her, drew her a little farther away under the shade of a rock, forced her to sit down, lamented with her.

Gradually the spectators disbanded, dispersed. There remained only a few consolers, and also the man clothed in linen, the impassive guardian who waited for the Authorities. The canicular sun beat down on the beach, and imparted to the funereal cloth a dazzling whiteness. The promontory, perpendicular above the jagged rocks, towered up in the conflagration with its desolate aridity. The sea, immense and green, breathed always evenly. And it seemed that the slow hour would never end.

In the shade of the rock, before the white cloth raised by the rigid form of the corpse, the mother continued her monody in the rhythm rendered sacred by so many sorrows, ancient and recent, of her race. And it seemed as if her lamentation would never cease.

CHAPTER IX.

On her return from the chapel of the Port, Hippolyte had heard of the accident. Accompanied by Helen, she had wished to rejoin George on the beach. But when near the tragic spot, at the sight of the cloth that made a white spot on the sand, she had felt her strength fail her. Seized by an outburst of sobs, she had retraced her steps, had gone back to the house, had waited for George, weeping.

She felt less compassion for the little body than she felt for herself, haunted by the recollection of the peril she had so lately incurred at the bath. And an instinctive, indomitable repulsion arose in her against that sea.

"I do not want to bathe in the sea any more. I do not want you to bathe there," she

enjoined George, almost roughly, in a tone that expressed a firm, unyielding resolution. "I will not have it. Do you hear?"

They passed the rest of that Sunday in an anxious restlessness, returning ceaselessly to the loggia, to look at the white spot, over there, on the beach. George had the image of the corpse constantly before his eyes so strongly outlined that it seemed to him almost tangible. And in his ears was constantly the cadence of the monody chanted by the mother. Was the mother still lamenting in the shade of the rock? Had she stayed there alone with the sea and the dead? He saw again in imagination another unfortunate. He relived the hour of that May morning, long ago, in the house far away, when he had felt all at once the maternal life come in contact with his own life with a sort of adherence, when he had felt the mysterious correspondences of blood, of sorrow, and of destiny suspended over the heads of both. Would he ever see her again with mortal eyes? Would he ever again see that feeble smile, which, without changing a line of the face, seemed to spread a light veil of hope, too fugitive, alas! over the indelible imprints of pain? Would it be permitted him ever to kiss that long and emaciated hand again, whose caress could be compared to no other? And he relived the distant hour of the tears when, at the window, he had received the terrible revelation from the glimmer of a smile: when he had at last heard the dear voice, the only and unforgettable voice, the voice of comfort, of counsel, of forgiveness, of infinite goodness—when he had at last recognized the tender creature of long ago, the adored one. And he relived the hour of the farewell, the farewell tearless, and yet so cruel, when he had lied for shame on reading in his deceived mother's eyes the too sad question: "For whom are you abandoning me?" And all the past sorrows arose again in his memory, with all their dolorous images: that emaciated face, those swollen eyelids, red and burning, Christine's gentle and heart-rending smile, the sickly child whose large head was always resting on a chest barren of all but sighs, the cadaveric mask of the poor idiotic gormand.... And the tired eyes of his mother repeated: "For whom are you abandoning me?"

He felt himself penetrated by a wave of gentle feeling; he languished, dissolved; he felt a vague desire to bend his forehead, to hide his face on a bosom, to be caressed chastely, to savor slowly this secret bitterness, to doze, to perish gradually. It was as if all the effeminations of his soul had blossomed at the same time, and were floating.

A man passed by on the path, bearing on his head a little white-pine coffin.

Later in the afternoon the Authorities arrived at the beach. The little corpse, lifted up away from the stones, had been carried to the heights, disappeared. Piercing shrieks reached the Hermitage. Then all was quiet. The silence, ascending from the calm sea, regained possession of the surrounding parts.

The sea was so calm, the air was so calm, that life seemed suspended. A bluish light spread uniformly over everything.

Hippolyte had reëntered, and had thrown herself on her bed. George remained in the loggia, seated on a chair. Both suffered, and they could not speak of their pain. Time slipped by.

"Did you call me?" asked George, who thought he heard his name.

"No, I didn't call you," she answered.

"What are you doing? Are you going to sleep?"

She did not answer.

George reseated himself, and half-closed his eyes. His thoughts always went back towards the mountain. In this silence, he felt the silence of the solitary and abandoned garden in which the little cypress-trees, tall and straight, reared up motionless toward the sky, religiously, like votive wax candles; from which, through the windows of the deserted chambers, still intact like reliquaries, came a religious sweetness of recollections.

And he appeared to him, a mild, meditative man, with a face full of a virile

melancholy, and a single white curl in the centre of his forehead, among the black hair, giving him an odd appearance.

"Oh! why," said he to Demetrius, "why did I not obey your suggestion, the last time I entered the chambers inhabited by your spirit? Why did I wish to make a new trial of life, and cover myself with shame before your eyes? How could I have made the mistake of pursuing the sure possession of another soul, when I possessed yours, and when you lived in me?"

After the physical death, the soul of Demetrius had been preserved in the survivor without any diminution, and in him it had even attained, and retained, its supreme intensity. All that the living person had consumed in contact with his fellows, all the words sown in the course of time, all the diverse manifestations that had determined the special character of his being compared with other beings, all the ways, constant or variable, that had distinguished his personality among other personalities and made of him a man apart in the human multitude; in short, all that had differentiated his own life from other lives—all that was collected, concentrated, circumscribed in the unique, ideal tie that attached the defunct to the survivor. And the divine ostensory preserved in the Duomo of the natal town seemed to consecrate this high mystery: Ego Demetrius Aurispa et unicus Georgius filius meus.

The impure creature who was now lying on that unchaste bed had interposed between. The terrible corrupter was not only the obstacle to life, but also an obstacle to death—to that death. She was the Enemy of both.

And George, in thought, returned to the mountain, once more reached the old mansion, reëntered the deserted rooms. As on that May morning, he crossed the tragic threshold. And, as on that day, he felt the obscure obsession over his will. The fifth anniversary was near. In what manner should he celebrate it?

A sudden cry from Hippolyte made him start violently. He jumped up and ran.

"What's the matter?"

Seated up in bed, terrified, she was passing her hands over her brow and eyelids, as though to thrust off something that tormented her. She fixed large, haggard eyes on her lover. Then, with an abrupt gesture, she threw her arms round his neck, covered his face with kisses and tears.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" he asked, astonished, uneasy.

"Nothing, nothing——"

"Why are you crying?"

"I had a dream——"

"What did you dream? Tell me!"

Instead of replying, she clasped him close, kissed him again.

He seized her wrists, disengaged himself from her grasp, tried to look in her face.

"Tell me, what did you dream?"

"Nothing—a horrid dream——"

"What kind of dream?"

She resisted his persistence. He, on his part, grew more uneasy as his desire to know became greater.

"Tell me!"

Shaken with another shudder, she stammered:

"I dreamed—that I drew aside the shroud—and I saw—you——"

She smothered this last word in kisses.

VI.

THE INVINCIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

Chosen by a friend and hired at Ancona, sent to San Vito, transported, not without difficulty, to the Hermitage, the piano was received by Hippolyte with childish joy.

It was placed in the room that George called the library, the largest and best decorated, that in which were the divan laden with cushions, the long cane chairs, the hammock, the mats, the rugs, all the objects conducive to indolence and dreams. There arrived also from Rome a box of music.

Thereafter, for many days, there was new ecstasy. Invaded, both of them, by a quasi-delirious fever, they did nothing, forgot everything, lost themselves entirely in this new pleasure.

They were no longer embarrassed by the monotony of the long afternoons; they no longer felt the heavy, irresistible drowsiness; they could lengthen their vigils almost until daybreak; they could prolong their fasts without suffering by doing so, without noticing it, as if their corporeal life had been refined, as if they were sublimated, dispossessed of all vulgar needs. It seemed to them that their passion ascended chimerically beyond all limit, that the palpitation of their hearts attained a prodigious power. Sometimes it seemed to them that once more they had found that moment of supreme oblivion, that moment unique that they had enjoyed when their lips first met; sometimes it seemed to him that they had recovered that indefinable and confused sensation of being dispersed into space with the lightness of vapor. Sometimes it seemed to both that the spot that they had chosen was indefinably distant from other places, very distant, very isolated, inaccessible, outside of the world.

A mysterious power drew them together, joined them, blended them, melted them one in the other, similarized them in body and spirit, united them into one single being. A mysterious power separated them, disjoined them, forced them back into their solitude, dug an abyss between them, planted in the core of their being a hopeless and mortal desire.

In these alternatives both found pleasure and suffering. They reascended to the first ecstasy of their love, and they redescended to extreme and useless efforts to

repossess each other. They reascended again, remounted to the origin of the earthly illusion, inhaled the mystic shadow, where for the first time their trembling souls had exchanged the same silent sentiment; and they redescended again, redescended to the torture of unrealized expectation, entered into an atmosphere of fog, thick and suffocating, like a whirlwind of sparks and hot cinders.

Each of those musicians whom they loved weaved a different charm about their supersensitive feelings. A page of Robert Schumann evoked the phantom of a very old amour that extended over him, in the guise of an artificial firmament, the woof of his most beautiful recollections, which, with an astonished and melancholy gentleness, he saw fade gradually away. An Impromptu of Frederic Chopin was saying, as if in a dream: "At night, when you are sleeping on my heart, I hear in the silence of the night a drop falling, slowly falling, always falling, so near, so far! I hear, at night, the drop falling from my heart, the blood that, drop by drop, falls from my heart, when you are sleeping, when you are sleeping, I alone." High purple curtains, dark as a merciless passion, around a bed deep as a sepulchre—that is what is evoked by the Erotic of Edward Grieg; and also a promise of death in silent voluptuousness, and a boundless kingdom, rich in all the wealth of the earth, waiting in vain for its vanished king, its dying king, in the nuptial and funereal purple. But, in the prelude to "Tristan and Ysolde," the leap of love toward death was unchained with inconceivable violence; the insatiable desire was exalted even to the intoxication of destruction. "... To drink yonder the cup of eternal love in thy honor, I would, on the same altar, consecrate thee to death with myself."

And that immense wave of harmony irresistibly enveloped them both, closed in on them, carried them away, transported them to "the marvellous empire."

It was not by means of the miserable instrument, incapable of giving the slightest echo of that torrential plenitude, but in the eloquence, in the enthusiasm of the exegesis, that Hippolyte seized all the grandeur of that tragic Revelation. And, as the

lover's imagery had one day pictured to her the Guelph's deserted city, the city of convents and monasteries, so to-day appeared to her imagination the old, gray city town of Bayreuth, solitary among the Bavarian mountains, in a mystic landscape over which hovered the same soul that Albrecht Dürer imprisoned beneath the network of the lines at the bottom of his engravings and canvases.

George had not forgotten any episode of his first religious pilgrimage to the Ideal Theatre; he could relive every instant of his extraordinary emotion when he had discovered on the gentle hill, at the extremity of the great shady avenue, the edifice consecrated to the supreme feast of art; he could reconstitute the solemnity of the vast amphitheatre girt with columns and arcades, the mystery of the Mystic Gulf. In the religious shadow and silence of the place, in the shadow and ecstatic silence of every soul, a sigh went up from the invisible orchestra, a moan was uttered, a murmuring voice made the first mournful call of solitary desire, the first and confused anguish in presentiment of the future torture. And that sigh and that moan and that voice mounted from the vague suffering to the acuteness of an impetuous cry, telling of the pride of a dream, the anxiety of a superhuman aspiration, the terrible and implacable desire of possession. With a devouring fury, like a flame bursting from a bottomless abyss, the desire dilated, agitated, enflamed, always higher, always higher, fed by the purest essence of a double life. The intoxication of the melodious flame embraced everything; everything sovereign in the world vibrated passionately in the immense ravishment, exhaled its joy and most hidden sorrow, while it was sublimated and consumed. But, suddenly, the efforts of a resistance, the cholers of a battle, shuddered and rumbled in the flight of that stormy ascension; and that great spout of life, suddenly broken against an invisible obstacle, fell back again, died out, spouted forth no longer. In the religious shadow and silence of the place, in the shadow and thrilling silence of every soul, a sigh arose from the Mystic Gulf, a moan died away, a broken voice told of the sadness of eternal solitude, the aspiration toward the eternal night, toward the divine, the primal

oblivion.

And here another voice, a human voice, modulated by human lips, young and strong, mingled with melancholy, irony, and menace, sang a song of the sea, from the head of a mast, on the ship that carried to King Mark the blond Irish spouse. It sang: "Toward the Occident wanders the gaze; toward the Orient sails the ship. The breeze blows fresh toward the natal land. O daughter of Ireland, where dost thou linger? Is it thy sighs that swell my sail? Blow, blow, O wind! Woe, ah! woe, daughter of Ireland, my wild love!" It was the admonition of the lookout, the prophetic warning, joyous and menacing, full of caress and of raillery, indefinable. And the orchestra became silent. "Blow, blow, O wind! Woe, ah! woe, daughter of Ireland, my wild love!" The voice sang over the tranquil sea, alone in the silence, while under the tent, Ysolde, motionless, on her couch, seemed plunged in the obscure dream of her destiny.

Thus opened the drama. The tragic breath, that had already been given by the prelude, passed and repassed in the orchestra. Suddenly the power of destruction was manifested in the enchantress against the man of her choice, whom she had devoted to death. Her anger was unchained with the energy of the blind elements; she invoked all the terrible forces of earth and heaven to destroy the man whom she could not possess. "Awake at my call, indomitable power; come forth from the heart where thou art hidden! O, uncertain winds, hear my will! Awake the lethargy of this dreamy sea, resuscitate from the depths implacable covetousness, show it the prey which I offer! Crush the vessel, engulf the wreckage! Everything that palpitates and breathes, O winds, I give to thee in recompense." To the admonition of the lookout responded the sentiment of Brangane: "O, woe! what ruin I foresee, Ysolde!" And the gentle and devoted woman tried to appease that mad fury. "Oh! tell me thy sorrow, Ysolde! Tell me thy secret!" And Ysolde replied: "My heart is choking. Open, open wide the curtain!"

Tristan appeared, upright, motionless, his arms crossed, his gaze fixed on the distances of the sea. From the masthead the lookout resumed his song, on the wave mounting from the orchestra, "Woe, ah! woe—" And, while Ysolde's eyes, lit up by a sombre flame, contemplated the hero, the fatal motif arose from the Mystic Gulf: the great and terrible symbol of love and death, in which was enclosed every essence of the tragic fiction. And, with her own mouth, Ysolde predicted the end: "Chosen of mine, lost by me."

Passion aroused in her a homicidal mania, awakened in the roots of her being a hostile instinct to existence, a need of dissolution, of annihilation. She raged to find in herself and all about her a crushing power that would strike and destroy without leaving a trace. Her hate became fiercer at the sight of the calm and motionless hero, who felt the menace concentrate upon his head and who knew the uselessness of any resistance. Her mouth was filled with bitter sarcasm. "What thinkest thou of that slave?" she demanded of Brangane, with an uneasy smile. Of a hero she made a slave; she declared herself the conqueror. "Tell him that I, Ysolde, command my vassal to fear his sovereign." Such was the defiance she cast at him for a supreme struggle; such was the gauntlet that force threw down to force. A sombre solemnity accompanied the hero's march toward the threshold of the tent when the irrevocable hour had sounded, when the philter had already filled the cup, when destiny had already closed its circle around the two lives. Ysolde, leaning on her couch, pale as if the great fever had consumed all the blood in her veins, waited, silently. Tristan appeared on the threshold: both erect to their full height. But the orchestra told of the inexpressible anxiety of their souls.

From this moment recommenced the tempestuous ascension. It seemed that the Mystic Gulf had once more become inflamed like a furnace and shot higher, even higher, its sonorous flames. "Only comfort for an eternal mourning, salutary draught of oblivion, I drink thee without fear!" And Tristan placed the cup to his lips. "Half for me! I drink it for thee!" cried Ysolde, snatching the cup from his hands. The

golden cup fell, empty. Had they both drunk death? Must they die? Instant of superhuman agony. The philter of death was but a poison of love that filled them with an immortal fire. At first, astonished, motionless, they looked at each other, sought in one another's eyes the symptom of the death to which they believed they had devoted themselves. But a new life, incomparably more intense than that they had lived, agitated their very fibre, beat at their temples and at their wrists, swelled their hearts with an immense wave. "Tristan!" "Isolde!" They called one another; they were alone; nothing breathed about them; appearances were effaced; the past was wiped out; the future was a dark night that even their recent intoxication could not pierce. They lived; they called one another in hot, passionate tones; each was drawn to the other by a fatality that henceforth no power could arrest. "Tristan!" "Ysolde!"

And the melody of the passion spread out, enlarged, exalted itself, throbbed and sobbed, cried and chanted above the profound tempest of harmonies that became more and more agitated. Mournful and joyous, it took an irresistible flight toward the heights of unknown ecstasies, toward the heights of the supreme voluptuousness. "Delivered from the world, I possess thee at last, O! thou, who alone fill my soul, supreme voluptuousness of love!"

"Hail! Hail to Mark! Hail!" cried the crew amid the blasts of the trumpets, saluting the king, who drew away from the shore to go to meet his blond spouse. "Hail to Cornwall!"

It was the tumult of common life, the clamor of profane joy, the dazzling splendor of the day. The Elect, the Lost, with a look in which floated the sombre shadow of a dream, demanded: "Who comes hither?" "The King." "What king?" Ysolde, pale and convulsed beneath the royal mantle, asked: "Where am I? Do I still live? Must I still live?" Gentle and terrible, the motif of the philter ascended, enveloped them, enclosed them in its ardent spiral. The trumpets sounded. "Hail to Mark! Hail to

Cornwall! Glory to the King!"

But, in the second prelude, all the sobs of too strong a joy, all the pantings of exasperated desire, all the starts of furious expectation, alternated, mingled, were confounded. The impatience of the feminine soul communicated its thrills to the immensity of the night, to all the things that, in the pure summer night, breathed and watched. The ravished soul threw its appeals to everything, that they might remain vigilant beneath the stars, that they might be present at the festival of its love, at the nuptial banquet of its joy. Insubmergible over the restless ocean of harmony, the fatal melody floated, growing light, clouding. The wave from the Mystic Gulf, like the respiration of a superhuman bosom, swelled, rose, fell back to rise again, to fall again and slowly die away.

"Dost thou hear? It seems to me that the sound has died away in the distance." Ysolde heard nothing more but the sounds imagined by her desire. The horns of the nocturnal chase resounded in the forest, distinct, coming nearer. "It is the deceptive whispering of the leaves that the wind rustles in its sport. That gentle sound is not that of horns; it is the murmur of the mountain stream that gushes forth and falls in the silent night." She heard nothing but the enchanting sounds born in her soul by the desire left there by the old yet ever new charm. In the orchestra, as in her abused senses, the resonances of the chase were magically transformed, dissolving into the infinite murmurs of the forest, into the mysterious eloquence of the summer night. All those smothered voices, all the subtle seductions, enveloped the panting woman and suggested to her the approaching ravishment, while Brangane warned and begged in vain, in the terror of his presentiment: "Oh! let the protecting torch blaze! Let its light show thee the peril!" Nothing had the power of enlightening the blindness of desire. "Were this the torch of my life, I would extinguish it without fear. And I extinguish it without fear." With a gesture of supreme disdain, intrepid and superb, Ysolde threw the torch to the ground; she offered her life and that of the Elect to the fatal night; she entered with him into the shadow forever.

Then the most intoxicating poem of human passion was triumphantly unfolded, like a spiral, to the summits of delirium and ecstasy. It was the first frantic embrace, the mingling of voluptuousness and of anguish, in which the souls, eager to melt into one another, encountered the impenetrable obstacle of the body; it was the first rancor against the time when love did not exist, against the empty and useless past. It was the hate against hostile light, against the perfidious day, that sharpened all their sufferings, that revived all the fallacious appearances, that favored pride and oppressed tenderness. It was the hymn to the friendly night, to the beneficent shade, to the divine mystery of which the marvels and inner visions were unveiled, in which were heard the distant voices of the spheres, in which the ideal corollas flourished on inflexible stems. "Since the sun is hidden in our bosom, the stars of happiness shed their laughing light."

And, in the orchestra, spoke every eloquence, sang every joy, wept every misery, that the human voice had ever expressed. The melodies emerged from the symphonic depths, developing, interrupting, superposing, mingling, melting into one another, dissolving, disappearing to again appear. A more and more restless and poignant anxiety passed over all the instruments and expressed a continual and ever-vain effort to attain the inaccessible. In the impetuosity of the chromatic progressions there was the mad pursuit of a happiness that eluded every grasp, although it shone ever so near. In the changings of the tone, rhythm, and measure, in the succession of syncopes, there was a truceless search, there was a limitless covetousness, there was the long torture of desire ever deceived and ever extinguished. A motif, a symbol of eternal desire, eternally exasperated by a deceptive possession, returned every instant with a cruel persistence; it enlarged, it dominated, now illuminating the crests of the harmonic waves, now obscuring them with funereal darkness.

The frightful power of the philter operated on the soul and on the flesh of the two lovers already consecrated to death. Nothing could extinguish or soften that fatal

ardor; nothing, except death. They had vainly tried every caress; they had vainly summoned all their strength to unite in a supreme embrace, to finally possess one another, to become one and the same being. Their sighs of voluptuousness were transformed into agonizing sobs. An infrangible obstacle was interposed between them, separated them, rendered them strangers and solitary. The obstacle was their corporeal substance, their living personality. And a secret hate was born in both. A longing to destroy themselves, to annihilate themselves; a desire to cause death and a desire to die. Even in the caress they recognized the impossibility of crossing the material limits of their human senses. Lips met lips and stopped. "Why not succumb to death," said Tristan, "rather than separation, and what prevents Tristan from loving Ysolde forever, living hereafter eternally for her alone?" And already they entered into the infinite darkness. The outside world disappeared. "So," said Tristan, "so should we die, unwilling to live but for love, inseparable, forever united, without end, without awakening, without fear, without name in the bosom of love." The words were distinctly heard in the pianissimo of the orchestra. A new ecstasy ravished the two lovers and carried them to the threshold of the marvellous nocturnal empire. Already they tasted in advance the beatitude of dissolution, felt themselves delivered from the weight of the body, felt their substance sublimated and float, diffused in an endless joy. "Without end, without awakening, without fear, without name...."

"Take care! Take care! Behold the night giving way to the day," warned from above the invisible Brangane. "Take care!" And the shudder of the matinal frost traversed the park, awoke the flowers. The cold light of the dawn ascended slowly and covered up the stars that palpitated more strongly. "Take care!" Vain warning of the faithful watcher. They were not listening; they would not, could not, awaken themselves. Under the menace of the day, they plunged still further on into that darkness from which could never come the slightest glint of twilight. "Let the night eternally envelop us." And a whirlwind of harmonies enveloped them, clasped them

close in its vehement spirals, transformed them to the distant shore invoked by their desire, there where no anguish oppressed the flights of the loving soul, beyond all languor, beyond all pain, beyond all solitude, in the infinite serenity of their supreme dream.

"Save thyself, Tristan!" It was the cry of Kurvenal after the cry of Brangane. It was the unexpected and brutal assault that interrupted the ecstatic embrace. And, while the theme of love persisted in the orchestra, the motif of the hunt burst out with a metallic clash. The king and his courtiers appeared. Tristan hid Ysolde, stretched on the bed of flowers, beneath his ample mantle; he hid her from both gaze and light, affirming by this act his domination, signifying his undoubted right. "The sad day—for the last time!" For the last time, in the calm and resolute attitude of a hero, he accepted the battle with the unknown forces, sure henceforth that nothing could modify or suspend the course of his destiny. While the sovereign sorrow of King Mark was exhaled in a slow and deep melopee, he remained silent, immovable in his secret thought. And finally he responded to the king's questions: "Never can I reveal that mystery. Never can you know what thou dost ask." The philter motif condensed in this response the obscurity of the mystery, the gravity of the irreparable event. "Dost thou wish to follow Tristan, O, Ysolde?" he demanded of the queen, simply, in the presence of all. "In the land where I am going the sun does not shine. It is the land of shadows; it is the land of night from which my mother sent me when, conceived by her in death, in death I came to life." And Ysolde: "There where the country of Tristan is, there would Ysolde go. She wants to follow him, gentle and faithful, in the path that he will point out."

And the dying hero preceded her to that land, struck by the traitor Melot.

Meanwhile, the third prelude evoked the vision of the distant shore, the arid and desolate rocks, where, in the secret caves, the sea seemed to weep ceaselessly in inconsolable mourning. A mist of legend and of mysterious poesy enveloped the

rigid forms of the rock, perceived as in an uncertain dawn or in an almost extinguished twilight. And the sound of the pastoral pipe awoke the confused images of the past life, of the things lost in the night of time.

"What says the ancient lament?" sighed Tristan. "Where am I?"

On the fragile reed the shepherd modulated the imperishable melody transmitted by our ancestors through the ages; and, in his profound unconsciousness, he was without inquietude.

And Tristan, to whose soul these humble notes had revealed all: "I did not linger in the place of my awakening. But where have I dwelt? I could not say. There I saw neither the sun, nor the land, nor the inhabitants; but what I saw then, I could not say.... It was there where I always was, there where I will go forever; in the vast empire of the universal night. Yonder, a single and unique science is given us: the divine, the eternal, the original oblivion!" The delirium of fever agitated him; the ardor of the philter corroded his inmost fibres. "Oh! what I suffer thou canst not suffer! The terrible desire which devours me, that implacable fire which consumes me! Ah! if I could tell thee! If thou couldst understand me!"

And the unconscious shepherd breathed, breathed into his reed. It was the same air; the notes were always the same; they spoke of the life that was no more, they spoke of distant and annihilated things.

"Old and grave melody," said Tristan. "Your lamenting sounds reached me even on the evening wind, as when, in distant times, the death of the father was announced to the son. In the sinister dawn thou didst seek me, more and more uneasy, when the son learned of the departure of the mother. When my father engendered me and died, when my mother brought me to light and died, the old melody came to their ears also, languishing and sad. She interrogated me one day, and now she is speaking to me again. To what destiny was I born? To what destiny? The old melody is repeating it to me: To desire and to die! to die of desire! Oh! no, no. Such

is not your true sense. To desire, to desire, to desire, even unto death; but not to die of desire!" Stronger and stronger, more and more tenacious, the philter corroded him to the marrow. All his being writhed in the unbearable spasm. At moments, the orchestra had the crepitations of a funereal pyre. The violence of the pain traversed him at times with tempestuous impetuosity, reviving the flames. Sudden starts shook him; atrocious cries escaped from it; choking sobs were extinguished in it. "The philter! the philter! the terrible philter! with what fury I feel it mount from my heart to my brain! Henceforth no remedy, no sweet death, can deliver me from the torture of desire. In no place, in no spot, alas! shall I find repose. The night repulses me toward the day, and the eye of the sun feeds on my perpetual suffering. Ah! how the ardent sun burns me and consumes me! And not even to have, never to have, the refreshment of a shade for that devouring ardor! What balm would procure a relief to my horrible torture?" He bore in his veins and marrow the desire of all men, of every species, amassed generation after generation, aggravated by the faults of all the fathers and of all the sons, the intoxications of all, the anguishes of all. In his blood blossomed the germs of the secular concupiscence, remingled the most diverse impurities, refermented the venoms, the most subtle and violent, that, since immemorial ages, the purplish sinuous mouths of women had poured out on eager and subjugated males. He was the heir of the eternal evil. "That terrible philter which condemns me to torture, it is I, I myself, who have compounded it. With the agitations of my father, with the convulsions of my mother, with all the tears of love shed in other times, with laughter and with tears, with pleasures and with wounds, I myself have compounded the poison of that philter. And I have drunk it by deep, enjoyable draughts. A curse on thee, terrible philter! A curse on he who compounded thee!" And he fell back on his couch, exhausted, inanimate, to recover his equanimity, to feel once more the ardor of his wound, to see once more with his hallucinated eyes the sovereign image crossing the fields of the sea. "She is coming, she is coming towards land, softly rocked on the great waves of intoxicating flowers.

Her smile throws on me a divine consolation; she brings me the supreme refreshment." Thus he invoked, thus he saw, with his eyes closed henceforth to the common light, the sorceress, the mistress of balms, the healer of all wounds. "She comes, she comes! Dost thou not see her, Kurvenal; dost thou not see her?" And the agitated waves of the Mystic Gulf gathered confusedly from the depths all the melodies already heard, mingling them, raising them up, submerging them in an abyss, repulsing them again to the surface, crushing them: those that could have expressed the anguish of the decisive conflict on the bridge of the ship, those in which one heard the boiling of the draught poured into the golden cup and the buzzing in the arteries invaded by the liquid fire, those in which had been heard the mysterious breath of the summer night inviting voluptuousness without end, all the melodies, with all the images and all the recollections. And on this immense shipwreck the fatal melody passed, proud, sovereign, implacable, repeating at intervals the atrocious condemnation: "To desire, to desire, to desire even unto death: but not to die of desire!"

"The vessel drops its anchor! Ysolde! behold Ysolde! She springs to the shore!" cried Kurvenal from the top of the tower. And, in the delirium of joy, Tristan tore off the bandages of his wound, excited his own blood to flow, to inundate the earth, to empurple the world. At the approach of Ysolde and Death, he believed he heard the light. "Do I not hear the light? Do not my ears hear the light?" A great inner sun dazzled him; every atom of his substance darted rays of sunlight that, in luminous waves, expanded through the universe. The light was music; the music was light.

And then the Mystic Gulf truly became irradiated like a sky. The sonorities of the orchestra seemed to imitate those distant planetary harmonies that, long ago, the souls of vigilant contemplators believed they surprised in the nocturnal silence. Gradually, the long tremblings of restlessness, the long bursts of anguish, the pantings of vain pursuits, and the efforts of the ever-deceived desire, and all the agitations of terrestrial misery, were appeased, became dissipated. Tristan had

finally crossed the limit of the "marvellous empire"; he had finally entered into eternal night. And Ysolde, bent over the inert shell, felt at last the heavy weight that still crushed her slowly dissolve. The fatal melody, become clearer and more solemn, consecrated the great funereal hymn. Then the notes, like ethereal chords, began to weave about the lover veils of diaphanous purity. Thus commenced a sort of joyous assumption, by degrees of splendor, on the wing of a hymn. "What a sweet smile he is smiling! Dost thou not see? Dost thou not hear? Am I alone to hear that new melody, infinitely sweet and consoling, that streams from the depths of his being, and ravishes me, and penetrates me, and envelops me?" The Irish sorceress, the formidable mistress of philters, the hereditary arbitrator of obscure terrestrial powers, she who, from the tops of the ship, had invoked the whirlwinds and tempests, she whose love had chosen the strongest and most noble of heroes to intoxicate and destroy him, she who had closed the path of glory and victory to a "conqueror of the world," the poisoner, the homicide, became transfigured by the power of death into a being of light and of joy, exempt from all impure covetousness, free from all base attachment, throbbing and respiring in the breast of the diffused soul of the universe. "Are not these clearer sounds that murmur in my ear the soft waves of the air? Must I respire, drink, plunge myself, slowly drift in the vapors and perfumes?" All in her dissolved, melted, dilated, returned to the original fluidity, to the immense elementary ocean in which the forms were born, in which the forms disappeared to become renewed and to be reborn. In the Mystic Gulf the transformations and transfigurations were being accomplished, note by note, harmony by harmony, without interruption. It seemed as if all things there were decomposed, exhaling their hidden essences, changing into immaterial symbols. Colors never before seen on petals of the most delicate terrestrial flowers, perfumes of an almost imperceptible subtlety, floated there. Visions of secret paradises were revealed in a flash of light; the germs of worlds to be born blossomed there. And the panicky intoxication ascended, ascended; the chorus of the Great All covered the

unique human voice. Transfigured, Ysolde entered into the marvellous empire triumphantly. "To lose oneself, to throw oneself into the abyss, to swoon without consciousness in the infinite throbbing of the universal soul: supreme voluptuousness."

CHAPTER II.

For two entire days the two hermits lived thus amid great fiction, respired that burning atmosphere, saturated themselves with that mortal forgetfulness. They believed they had transfigured themselves, that they had attained superior heights of existence. In the vertiginous heights of their love-dream they believed they equalled the personages in the drama. Did it not seem to them that they, too, had drunk a philter? Were not they also tormented by a limitless desire? Were they not also linked together by an indissoluble bond, and did they not often feel in voluptuousness the horrors of the death-agony; did they not hear the rumbling of death? George, like Tristan when he heard the ancient melody modulated by the shepherd, found in that music the direct revelation of an anguish in which he believed he had at last surprised the true essence of his soul and the tragic secret of his destiny. No man could better penetrate the symbolic and mythical sense of the philter, and no man better than himself could better measure the depth of the inner drama, solely inner, in which the pensive hero had consumed his strength. Nor could any one better understand the despairing cry of the victim: "That terrible philter which has condemned me to torture, it is I, I myself, who compounded it."

He then undertook the funereal seduction of his mistress. He wished to slowly persuade her to die; he wished to entice her to go with him toward a mysterious and comfortable end, during that beautiful Adriatic summer, full of transparencies and perfumes. The great phrase of love—that spread out in such a wide circle of light around the transfiguration of Ysolde—had also enclosed Hippolyte in its charm. She repeated it ceaselessly in a low tone, sometimes even in a loud voice, with signs of

exuberant joy.

"Wouldn't you like to die such a death as Ysolde's?" asked George, with a smile.

"I would," she answered. "But, on earth, people don't die like that."

"And if I died?" he went on, always smiling. "Suppose you saw me dead in fact, not in fancy?"

"I believe I should die, too, but of despair."

"And suppose I proposed to you to die with me, at the same time, in the same manner?"

For a few seconds she remained thoughtful, her eyes cast down. Then, raising toward the tempter a look full of all the sweetness of life:

"Why die," she said, "if I love you, if you love me, if nothing henceforth prevents us from living for ourselves alone?"

"Is life sweet to you?" he murmured with veiled bitterness.

"Yes," she answered, with a sort of vehemence. "Life is sweet to me because I love you."

"And if I should die?" he went on, without a smile, because once more he felt arise in him the instinctive hostility against this beautiful, sensual creature who breathed in the very air as if it were happiness.

"You won't die," she affirmed, with the same assurance. "You are young; why should you die?"

In her voice, in her attitude, in all her person there was an unusual diffusion of happiness. Her appearance was such as living creatures have only at the time their lives flow harmoniously in a temporary equilibrium of all the energies in accord with favorable external conditions. As at other times, she seemed to blossom in the strong sea air, in the coolness of the summer evening; and she recalled one of those magnificent twilight flowers that open the crown of their petals at sunset.

After a long pause, during which one heard the murmur of the sea on the shore like the rustling of dry leaves, George asked:

"Do you believe in Destiny?"

"Yes, I do."

Ill disposed to the sad gravity toward which George's words seemed to tend, she had answered in a light, jesting tone. Hurt, he retorted quickly and bitterly:

"Do you know what day this is?"

Perplexed, uneasy, she asked:

"What day is it?"

He hesitated. Up to then he had avoided recalling to the forgetful woman the anniversary of Demetrius's death; a repugnance that grew every minute prevented him from uttering that holy name, from evoking outside of the sanctuary that noble image. He felt that he would have profaned his religious sorrow in admitting Hippolyte as a participant. And what further intensified this feeling was that he was then passing through one of those frequent periods of cruel lucidity in which he saw in Hippolyte only the woman of pleasure, the "flower of concupiscence," the Enemy. He contained himself; and, with a sudden and false laugh:

"Look!" he cried. "There is a festival at Ortona."

He pointed in the pale-green distance to the maritime city that was being crowned with fire.

"How strange you are to-day!" she said.

Then, looking steadily at him with that singular expression which she was in the habit of assuming when she wished to appease and soften him, she added:

"Come here; come and sit by my side."

He was standing in the shadow, on the threshold of one of the doors that opened on the loggia. She was seated outside, on the parapet, clothed in a light, white robe, in a

languorous pose, her bust outlined against the background of the sea, where still lingered the glints of twilight, and the profile of her brown head was outlined in a zone of limpid amber. He seemed as if reborn, as if he had stepped out from a close and suffocating place, from an atmosphere heavy with poisonous exhalations. In George's eyes she seemed as if she were evaporating like a vial of perfumes, were losing the ideal life accumulated in her by the power of Music, were gradually emptying herself of importunate dreams, were returning to primitive animalism.

George thought: "As always, she has done nothing but receive and obediently retain the attitudes I have given her. The inner life has always been and will always be factitious in her. Directly my suggestion is interrupted, she returns to her own nature, she becomes a woman again, an instrument of low lasciviousness. Nothing will ever change her substance, nothing will purify her. She has plebeian blood, and, in her blood, God knows what ignoble heredities! But I, too, shall never be able to free myself from the desire with which she fires me; I can never extirpate it from my flesh. Henceforth, I can neither live with her nor without her. I know I must die; but shall I leave her for a successor?" His hate against the unconscious creature had never been aroused with so much violence. He dissected her pitilessly, with acrimony that astonished even himself. It was as if he were avenging some infidelity, some disloyalty, that had surpassed all the limits of perfidy. He felt the envious rancor of the shipwrecked sailor who, at the moment of sinking, sees near him his comrade about to save himself, to cling to life again. For him that anniversary brought a new confirmation of the decree which he already knew was irrevocable. For him that day was the Epiphany of Death. He felt that he was no longer master of himself; he felt the absolute domination of the fixed idea that, from instant to instant, might suggest the supreme act to him, and, at the same time, communicate the effective impulsion to his will. And while criminal images confusedly passed through his brain, "Must I die alone?" he repeated to himself. "Must I die alone?"

He shuddered when Hippolyte touched his face and passed her arm around his neck.

"Did I frighten you?" she asked.

On seeing him disappear in the still deepening shadow of the door, a singular restlessness had seized her, and she had risen to embrace him.

"Of what are you thinking? What's the matter? Why are you like that to-day?"

She spoke in an insinuating tone, and, still with her arms about him, she caressed his head. In the obscurity he saw the mysterious pallor of that face, the light of those eyes. An irresistible trembling seized him.

"You are trembling! What ails you? What's the matter?"

She disengaged herself, found a candle on the table, and lit it. She went up to him, anxious; took both his hands.

"Are you ill?"

"Yes," he stammered. "I don't feel well. This is one of my bad days."

This was not the first time she heard him complain of vague physical suffering, of heavy and wandering pains, of painful twitchings and tinglings, of vertigos and nightmares. She believed these sufferings imaginary; she saw in them the effects of habitual melancholy, the excesses of thought, and she knew no better remedy for them than kisses, laughter, and joyousness.

"Where are you suffering?"

"I could not say."

"Oh, I know what it is. The music excites you too much. We must have no more for a week."

"No, we will have no more."

"No more."

She went to the piano, shut the cover over the keys, locked it, and hid the little key.

"To-morrow we will resume our long walks; we will spend all morning on the beach. Shall we? And now come into the loggia."

She drew him toward her with a tender gesture.

"See how beautiful the evening is! Smell how the rocks embalm the air!"

She breathed in the briny odor, trembling and clasping him close.

"We have everything to make us happy, and you—how you will regret these days when they are gone! Time flies. It will be soon three months that we are here."

"Do you already think of leaving me?" he asked, uneasy, suspicious.

She wanted to reassure him.

"No, no," she replied; "not yet. But the prolongation of my absence becomes difficult on account of my mother. I received only to-day a letter recalling me. You know she needs me. When I am not at home all goes wrong."

"Then you must soon return to Rome?"

"No. I shall have to find another pretext. You know that my mother believes I am here in company with an old girl friend of mine. My sister has helped me, and still helps me, in rendering this fiction probable; and, besides, my mother knows that I need sea-baths, and that, last year, I was ill from not having taken them. Do you remember? I spent the summer at Caronno, at my sister's. What a horrible summer!"

"Well, what to do?"

"I can certainly remain with you this whole month of August, perhaps also the first week of September."

"And after that?"

"After that you will permit me to return to Rome, and you will come and rejoin me there. There we will arrange concerning the future. I have already an idea in my head."

"What?"

"I will tell you. But just now let us dine. Aren't you hungry?"

The dinner was ready. As usual, in the loggia, the table was spread in the open air. They lit the large lamp.

"Look!" she cried, when the domestic had brought to the table the steaming soup tureen. "That is Candia's work."

She had asked Candia to make a rustic soup for him, after the manner of the country—a savory mixture, rich in ginger, colored, and odorous. She had already tasted it several times, attracted by its odor in the houses of the old people, and she had become greedy for it.

"It is delicious. You will enjoy it."

And she filled a bowl full with a gesture of childish greediness, and she swallowed the first spoonful hastily.

"I have never tasted anything more delicious!"

She called Candia to praise her work.

"Candia! Candia!"

The woman showed herself at the foot of the stairway, laughing:

"Does the soup please you, signora?"

"It is perfect."

"May it change into good blood for you!"

And the naïve laughter of the enceinte woman arose in the still air.

George took part in this gayety, and showed it. The sudden change in his humor was evident. He poured out some wine, and drank it at a gulp. He made an effort to conquer his repugnance to eat, that repugnance which, latterly, had become so serious that at times he could not bear the sight of underdone meat.

"You feel better, don't you?" asked Hippolyte, leaning toward him, and moving her

chair a little to get a little closer to him.

"Yes; I feel bettor now."

He drank again.

"Look!" she cried. "Look at Ortona in holiday attire!"

Both looked towards the distant city, crowned with fire, on the hill that stretched along by the shadowy sea. Groups of fire balloons, like constellations of flame, were rising slowly in the still air; they seemed to multiply ceaselessly; they peopled all that part of the sky.

"My sister is at Ortona now. She's staying with the Vallereggia, relatives of ours."

"Has she written to you?"

"Yes."

"How happy I should be to see her! She resembles you, doesn't she? Christine is your favorite."

For a few seconds she remained pensive. Then she went on:

"How happy I should be to see your mother! I have so often thought of her!"

And, after another pause, in a tender voice:

"How she must adore you!"

An unexpected emotion swelled George's heart, and before him reappeared the interior vision of the house he had abandoned, forgotten, and, for a moment, all the past sorrows came back to his mind, together with all the painful pictures: his mother's emaciated face, her eyelids swollen and reddened by tears; the sweet and heart-breaking remembrance of Christine; the sickly child whose large head was always bent on a breast barren of all but sighs; the cadaveric mask of the poor idiotic gormand. And the tired eyes of his mother asked him again, as when they separated: "For whom are you abandoning me?"

Again his soul stretched out toward the distant house, suddenly inclining before it

like a tree before a squall. And the secret resolution—made in the obscurity of the chamber, between Hippolyte's arms—vacillated beneath the shock of an obscure warning when he saw again, in memory, the closed door behind which was Demetrius's bed, when he saw again the mortuary chapel at the corner of the cemetery, in the bluish and solemn shadow of the protecting mountain.

But Hippolyte was speaking, becoming loquacious. As at other times, she imprudently abandoned herself to her domestic reminiscences. And he, as at other times, began to listen, observing with uneasiness certain vulgar lines that the mouth of this woman fell into, during the abundance and heat of the discourse, observing, as he had done so often before, the particular gesture that was habitual to her when she was excited, that ungraceful gesture that did not seem to belong to her. She was saying:

"You saw my mother one day in the street. Do you remember? What a difference between my mother and my father! My father was always good and affectionate to us, incapable of beating us or severely scolding us. My mother is violent, impetuous, almost cruel. Ah, if I told you of the martyrdom of my sister, poor Adriana! She always rebelled; and her rebellion exasperated my mother, who used to beat her until the blood came. I knew enough to disarm her by recognizing my fault and asking her pardon. For all that, with all her severity, she had an immense love for us. Our apartment had a window that led out on a cistern, and we, in play, often used to stand at this window and draw up the water with a little pail. One day my mother went out, and by chance we were left alone. A few minutes after, we were surprised to see her come in again, all in tears, agitated, upset. She took me in her arms and covered me with kisses, sobbing as if insane, in the street she had had a presentiment that I had fallen from that window."

George saw again, in memory, the face of that hysterical old woman in which was exaggerated all the defects of her daughter's face: the development of the lower jaw,

the length of the chin, the width of the nostrils. He saw again that forehead, like that of a Fury, over which bristled the gray hair, thick and dry, and those dark eyes, deep-set beneath the superciliary ridge, that revealed the fanatic ardor of a bigot and the obstinate avarice of an insignificant bourgeoise.

"You see that scar beneath my chin?" went on Hippolyte. "My mother did that. My sister and I went to school, and we had very nice dresses that we had to take off on our return. One evening, on going home, I found on the table a foot-warmer, that I took to rewarm my frozen hands. My mother said to me: 'Go and undress!' I replied: 'I'm going,' and I continued to warm myself. She repeated: 'Go and undress!' I repeated: 'I'm going.' She had in her hand a large brush, and was brushing a dress. I lingered in the middle of the room with the foot-warmer. My mother repeated for the third time: 'Go and undress!' And I repeated: 'I'm going.' Furious, she threw the brush at me. It struck and broke the foot-warmer. A splinter of the handle struck me here, beneath the chin, and cut a vein. The blood flowed. My aunt ran to me quickly, but my mother neither moved nor looked at me. The blood flowed. By good fortune they soon found a surgeon who ligated the vein. My mother remained obstinately silent. When my father came home and saw me bandaged he asked what was the matter. My mother, without a word, looked at me fixedly. I replied: 'I fell down the staircase.' My mother said nothing. As a consequence, I have suffered considerably from that loss of blood. But how Adriana was beaten!—particularly on account of Giulio, my brother-in-law. I shall never forget a terrible scene."

She stopped. Perhaps she had just noticed on George's face some equivocal sign.

"I bore you, don't I, with all this gossip?"

"No, no. Continue, please. Don't you see I am listening?"

"We lived then in Ripetta, in the house of a family of the name of Angelini, with whom we became very friendly. Luigi Sergi, the brother of my brother-in-law, Giulio, occupied the lower floor with his wife, Eugenia. Luigi was a well-educated

man, studious, modest. Eugenia was a woman of the worst kind. Although her husband made a good deal of money, she was always running him into debt, and no one knew in what manner she spent all the money. Gossip had it that it went to pay her lovers. She was very homely, so the story was generally believed. My sister had become attached to Eugenia, I do not know how, and she was forever going downstairs, on the pretext of taking lessons in French from Luigi. That displeased my mother, rendered suspicious by Angelina's sisters, old maids, who pretended to have friendship for the Sergis, but who, in reality, deserted them like buzzurri, and were happy to be able to slander them. 'Allowing Adriana to visit the house of an abandoned woman!' Hard words increased. But Eugenia always favored Giulio's and Adriana's amours. Giulio often came to Rome from Milan on business. And, one day, just as he was coming, my sister made great haste to go downstairs. My mother forbade her to move. My sister insisted. In the dispute my mother raised her hand. They seized each other by the hair. My sister went so far as to bite her arms, and escaped by the staircase. But as she knocked at the Sergi door my mother fell on her, and in the open landing place there was such a scene of violence as I shall never forget. Adriana was brought back home almost dead. She fell ill and had convulsions. My mother, repentant, surrounded her with care, became more gentle than she ever was before. A few days later, even before she was entirely cured, Adriana eloped with Giulio. But that, I believe, I have already told you."

And after all this innocent gossip, in which she forgot herself, without suspecting the effect produced on her lover by her commonplace recollections, she again took to her interrupted supper.

There was an interval of silence; then she added, smiling:

"You see what a terrible woman my mother is? You don't know, and you can never know, how much she has tortured me, when the struggle broke out against him. My God! What torture!"

She remained thoughtful for a few moments.

George fixed upon the imprudent woman a look charged with hate and jealousy, suffering in that moment all his sufferings of the past two years. With the fragments with which she had had the imprudence to furnish him, he reconstructed Hippolyte's life in her own circle, not without attributing to it the meanest vulgarities, not without lowering it to the most dishonorable contacts. If the marriage of the sister took place under the auspices of a nymphomaniac, under what conditions, as a consequence of what circumstances, was that of Hippolyte concluded then? In what world had her early years been passed? By what intrigues had she fallen into the hands of the odious man whose name she bore? And he represented to himself the hidden and sordid life in certain little middle-class homes of old Rome—homes that exhaled at the same time a stench of cooking and the musty smell of a sacristy, that fermented with the double corruption of the family and the church. The prediction of Alphonso Exili returned to his memory: "Do you know who your probable successor is? It is Monti, the mercante di campagna. Monti has money." It appeared probable to him that Hippolyte would end in that way, by lucrative amours, and that she would have the tacit consent of her people, gradually allured by an easier existence, disembarrassed of domestic cares, surrounded once more by comforts far greater than those which the matrimonial state of their daughter had procured for them. "Could not I myself make an offer like that, propose that position frankly to Hippolyte?" She said, the other day, that she had something in view for the winter, for the future. Very well! Could we not arrange it? I am sure that, after having seriously considered the offer, and the stability of the position, that sour old woman would not have much repugnance in accepting me as a substitute for the fugitive son-in-law. Perhaps we should even end by all becoming a happy family for the end of our days?" The sarcasm wrenched his heart with intolerable cruelty. Nervously he poured out some more wine and drank.

"Why are you drinking so much this evening?" asked Hippolyte, looking into his

eyes.

"I am thirsty. You are not drinking, are you?"

Hippolyte's glass was empty.

"Drink!" said George, making a gesture as if about to fill her glass.

"No," she answered. "I prefer water, as usual. No wine pleases me, except champagne. Do you remember, at Albano, the astonishment of that good Pancrace when the cork would not pop, and he had to use a corkscrew?"

"There must be still several bottles below, in the case. I will go and find them."

And George rose quickly.

"No, no! Not this evening!"

She wanted to retain him. But, as he was preparing to descend, "I will go, too," she said.

Gayly, lightly, she descended with him into a room on the ground floor that served as a store-room.

Candia hastened to them with a lamp. They searched at the bottom of the case and recovered two bottles with silvered necks, the last.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Hippolyte, already excited sensually. "Here they are. Two more."

She lifted them up, brilliant, toward the lamp.

"Let us go."

She ran out laughing, ascended the stairs, placed the bottles on the table. For a few seconds she sat as if bewildered, panting somewhat. Then she shook her head.

"Look at Ortona!"

She stretched out her hand toward the distant town, beautiful in its gala dress, and which seemed to be wafting its joy as far as where she sat. A crimson glare was

spread over the top of the hill as over an active crater; and from the lighted area kept rising innumerable balloons in the deep azure, drifting in vast circles, presenting a picture of an immense illuminated dome reflected by the sea.

On the table, rich in flowers, fruits, and sweetmeats, the night-moths were whirling. The froth from the generous wine splashed over the rush mats.

"I drink to our happiness!" she said, lifting her glass toward her lover.

"I drink to our peace!" he said, holding out his own.

The glasses clashed together so roughly that both were broken. The golden wine was spilled on the table, inundated a pile of fine, succulent peaches.

"A good omen! A good omen!" cried Hippolyte, more merry at this sprinkling than if she had drunk deeply.

And she placed her hand on the wet fruit piled before her. They were magnificent peaches, of a deep crimson on one side as if the rising sun had painted them on seeing them hanging ripe on the branch. That strange dew seemed to revivify them.

"What a marvel!" she said, taking the most luxurious one.

Without removing the skin, she bit it greedily. The juice ran from the corners of her mouth, yellow as liquid honey.

"You bite now!"

She held the streaming peach out to her lover, with the same gesture she had offered him the rest of the bread beneath the oak in the twilight of the first day.

That recollection awoke in George's memory; and he felt a desire to speak of it.

"Do you remember," he said, "do you remember the first evening, when you bit the bread fresh from the oven, and you gave it me all warm and humid? Do you remember? How good it seemed to me!"

"I remember everything. Can I forget the slightest incident of that day?"

She saw again, in imagination, the path all strewn with furze, the fresh and delicate

homage shed on her path. For a few moments she remained silent, absorbed by that vision of poesy.

"The furze!" she murmured, with an unexpected smile of regret.

Then she added:

"Do you remember? The entire hill was clothed in yellow, and the perfume gave one vertigo."

"Drink!" said George, pouring the sparkling wine into the new glasses.

"I drink to the coming springtime of our love!" said Hippolyte.

And she drank to the last drop.

George immediately refilled her empty glass.

She put her fingers into a box of loukoumes, asking:

"Will you have amber or pink?"

They were Oriental confections sent to them by Adolpho Astorgi—a sort of elastic paste colored amber and pink, and powdered with pistache, and so perfumed that they gave to the mouth the illusion of a fleshy flower rich in honey.

"Who knows where the Don Juan is now?" said George, on receiving the sweetmeat from Hippolyte's fingers, white with sugar.

And over his soul passed the nostalgia of the distant isles, the isles embalmed by the mastic, and which at the very moment, perhaps, were sending all their nocturnal delights on the breeze to swell the great sail.

Hippolyte detected the note of regret in George's words: "So you prefer to be on board, away over there, with your friend, rather than here alone with me?" she said.

"Neither here nor there. Somewhere else!" he replied smiling, in a bantering tone.

And he rose to offer his lips to his companion.

She gave him a long kiss, with her mouth all sticky and covered with the sugar of

the still unswallowed bon-bon, while the moths whirled round about them.

"You do not drink," he said after the kiss, his voice slightly changed.

She emptied the glass at a draught.

"It is almost warm," said she, as she laid it down. "Do you remember the iced champagne at Danieli's in Venice? Oh, how I love to see it flow slowly, slowly, in thick flakes!"

When she spoke of the things that pleased her or of the caresses that she preferred, she had in her voice a singular delicacy; to modulate the syllables, her lips moved in a manner that expressed profound sensuality. Now, in every one of these words, in each of these movements, George found a motif of the keenest suffering. That sensuality which he had himself aroused in her he believed had now come to the point where desire, untiring and tyrannical, could no longer support any bridle and claimed immediate satisfaction. Hippolyte appeared to him like a woman irresistibly addicted to pleasure in all its forms, no matter what degradation it might cost her. When he had gone away, or when she had tired of his "love," she would accept the most generous and most practical offer. Perhaps she would even succeed in raising the price very high. Where, in fact, could a rarer instrument of voluptuousness be found? She possessed at present every seduction and every science; she had that beauty which strikes men at sight, which disturbs them, which awakens in their blood implacable covetousness; she had feline elegance of person, refined taste in dress, exquisite art in colors and styles that harmonized with her grace; she had learned to modulate, in a voice suave and warm as the velvet of her eyes, the slow syllables that evoked dreams and lulled pain; she bore in the depths of her being a secret malady that seemed at times to mysteriously illumine her sensibility; she had, by turns, the languors of the malady and the vehemence of health; and, finally, she was barren. United in her, then, were the sovereign virtues that destine a woman to dominate the world by the scourge of her impure beauty. Passion had refined and

complicated these virtues. She was now at the zenith of her power. If, all at once, she found herself free and untrammelled, what road would she choose in life? George had no longer the slightest doubt; he knew what that choice would be. He was confirmed in the certitude that his influence over her was bounded by the senses and by certain factitious attitudes of her mind. The plebeian foundation had persisted, impenetrable in its thickness. He was convinced that this plebeian foundation would permit her to adapt herself without compunction to the contact of a lover who would not be distinguished by any superior qualities, physical or moral: in short, a commonplace lover. And, while he filled her empty glass again with the wine she preferred, the wine that one uses to enliven secret suppers, to animate little modern orgies behind closed doors, he attributed, in imagination, attitudes of outrageous immodesty to "the pale and voracious Roman, incomparable in the art of tiring the loins of men."

"How your hand trembles," observed Hippolyte, looking at it.

"It's true," he said, with a convulsion that simulated gayety. "I think I've already had too much. Why don't you drink? That's not fair."

She laughed, and drank for the third time, filled with a childish joy at the thought of getting tipsy, at feeling her intelligence become gradually obscured. The fumes of the wine were already operating in her. The hysterical demon began to move her.

"See how sunburnt my arms are!" she cried, drawing her large sleeves up to the elbows. "Just look at my wrists!"

Although she was a carnation brunette, of a warm, dull-gold color, the skin at her wrists was extremely transparent and of a strange pallor. The sun had burnt the parts exposed; but on the under side the wrists had remained pale. And on that fine skin, through that pallor, the veins shone through, subtle, and yet very visible, of an intense azure slightly approaching a violet. George had often repeated the words of Cleopatra to the messenger from Italy: "Here are my bluest veins to kiss."

Hippolyte held out her wrists to him and said:

"Kiss them!"

He seized one, and made a motion with his knife as if about to cut it off.

She dared him to.

"Cut, if you want to. I won't move."

During the gesture he looked fixedly at the delicate blue network on her skin, so clearly defined that it seemed to belong to another body, to the body of a blond woman. And that singularity attracted him, tempted him æsthetically by the suggestion of a tragic image of beauty.

"It is your vulnerable spot," he said with a smile. "It is a sure indication. You will die from cut veins. Give me the other hand."

He placed the two wrists together, and again made a gesture as to cut them off with a single blow. The complete image arose in his imagination. On the marble threshold of a door, full of shadow and expectation, the woman who was about to die appeared, extending her naked arms; and at the extremities of the arms, from the slashed veins, spouted and palpitated two red fountains. And, between these red fountains, the face slowly assumed a supernatural pallor, the cavities of the eyes were filled with an infinite mystery, the phantom of an inexpressible word was outlined on the closed mouth. All at once the double jet ceased to flow. The exsanguined body fell backwards like a mass, in the shadow.

"Tell me your dream!" begged Hippolyte, seeing him absorbed.

He described the image to her.

"Very beautiful," said she, with admiration, as if before an engraving.

And she lit a cigarette. She puffed a wave of smoke from between her lips against the lamp around which the night-moths were whirling. She watched for a moment the agitation of the little variegated wings between the moving veils of the cloud.

Then she turned toward Ortona, which scintillated with fire. She arose and raised her eyes to the stars.

"How warm the night is!" she said, breathing heavily. "Aren't you warm too?"

She threw away her cigarette. Again she uncovered her arms. She came close to him; she suddenly threw his head back; she enveloped him in a long caress; her mouth glided over all his face, languishing and ardent, in a multiple kiss. Feline-like, she clung to him, entwined him, and with an almost inexplicable movement, agile and furtive, she seated herself on his knees, intoxicating him with the perfume of her skin, that perfume, at once irritating and delicious, that always had the same exhilarating effect on him as the scent of the tuberose.

Every fibre of his being trembled, like a few moments before when she had clasped him ardently in the room filled with the last shadows of twilight. She noticed his emotion and it aroused desire in her. Her hands became bold.

"No, no; let me be!" he stammered, repulsing her. "We shall be seen."

She tore herself away. She tottered slightly, and appeared really influenced by the wine. It seemed as though a mist, passing over her eyes and into her brain, obscured her sight and thought. She put her hands to her forehead and burning cheeks.

"How warm it is!" she sighed. "I wish I had nothing on."

Possessed from now on by that one fixed idea, George repeated to himself: "Must I die alone?" As the fatal hour drew nearer, the deed of violence seemed more necessary. Behind him, in the shadow in the bedroom, he heard the ticktack of the clock; he heard the rhythmic blows of a flax-brake on a distant field. These two sounds, cadenced and dissimilar, intensified in him the sensation of the flight of time, gave him a sort of anxious terror.

"Look at Ortona aflame!" cried Hippolyte. "What a number of rockets!"

The festive city illuminated the sky. Innumerable sky-rockets, parting from a central

point, spread out in the sky like a broad golden fan, that slowly, from top to bottom, dissolved into a shower of scattered sparks, and, suddenly, in the midst of the golden rain, a new fan was formed, entire and splendid, to dissolve again and reform again, while the waters reflected the changing picture. One heard a low crepitation, like a distant fusilade, interspersed with deeper reports that followed the explosions of multi-colored bombs in the heights of the sky. And at every report the city, the port, the great stretched-out mole, appeared in a different light, fantastically transfigured.

Upright against the parapet, Hippolyte admired the spectacle, and saluted the brighter splendors with exclamations of delight. From time to time it spread over her person like the reflection of a fire.

"She is overexcited, a little inebriated, ready for any madness," thought George as he watched her. "I could suggest a walk, which she has often wanted to take: to go through one of the tunnels by the light of a torch. I would go down to the Trabocco to get a torch. She could wait for me at the end of the bridge. I would lead her then to the tunnel by a path that I know. I would manage that the train should come upon us while we were in the tunnel—foolhardiness, accident."

The idea seemed to him easy of realization: it had presented itself to his imagination with extraordinary clearness, as if it had formed an integral part of his consciousness since that first day when, before the shining rails, he received the first confused glimmer from them. "She must die, too." His resolution became strengthened, immutable. He heard behind him the ticking of the clock. He felt a feeling of intense anxiety he could not master. It was getting late. Perhaps there was scarcely time for them to go down. He must act without delay, assure himself immediately as to the precise time indicated by the clock. But it seemed impossible for him to rise from his chair; it seemed to him that if he spoke to her carelessly, his speech would fail him.

He started to his feet as he heard in the distance the well-known rumbling. Too late!

And his heart beat so fast that he believed he would die of anguish as he heard the rumbling and whistling draw nearer.

Hippolyte turned.

"The train!" she said. "Come and see!"

He went; and she encircled his neck with her bare arm, leaning on his shoulder.

"It is entering the tunnel," she said again, prompted by the difference in sound.

In George's ears the rumbling increased in a frightful manner. He saw, as in a hallucination, his mistress and himself beneath the dark roof, the rapid approach of the headlight in the dark, the short struggle on the rails, the simultaneous fall, the bodies crushed by the horrible violence; and, at the same time, he felt the contact of the supple woman, caressing, always triumphant. And, added to the physical horror of this barbarous destruction, he felt an exasperated rancor against her who seemed to escape his hate.

Both leaning against the parapet, they watched the deafening train, rapid and sinister, that shook the house to its very foundations, and even imparted the shock to them.

"At night," said Hippolyte, pressing still closer to him, "I'm afraid when the train shakes the house as it passes. Aren't you, too? I have often felt you tremble."

He did not hear her. An immense tumult stirred his whole being; it was the rudest and most obscure agitation that his soul had ever experienced. Incoherent thoughts and images whirled in his brain, and his heart writhed beneath a thousand cruel punctures. But one fixed image dominated all the others, invaded the centre of his soul. What was he doing at this hour five years before? He was holding vigil over a cadaver; he was contemplating a face hidden beneath a black veil, a long, pale hand——

Hippolyte's restless hands touched him, crept into his hair, tickled his neck. On his

neck, on his ear, he felt a warm mouth. With an instinctive motion that he could not repress, he drew aside, walked away. She laughed that singular laugh, ironical and immodest, which burst out and resounded from between her teeth whenever her lover refused himself to her. And under this obsession he heard once more the slow and limpid syllables: "For fear of my kisses!"

A low crepitation, mingled with the distinct reports, still came from the festive town. The fireworks were beginning again.

Hippolyte turned toward the spectacle.

"Look! One would think that Ortona were on fire."

A vast crimson glare lit up the heavens and was reflected in the waters, and in the midst of the light the profile of the flaming town was outlined. The rockets burst overhead like splendid large roses.

"Shall I live through this night? Shall I recommence to live to-morrow? And how long?" A disgust, bitter as a nausea, an almost savage hate, arose from his heart at the thought that the following night he would again have that woman near him on the same pillow, that he would again hear the breathing of the sleeping woman, that he would again smell the odor and feel the contact of that heated skin, and then that the day would break again and pass by in the usual idleness, amidst the torture of perpetual alternatives.

A burst of light struck him, attracted his gaze to the spectacle outside. A vast pink lunary light blossomed over the festive town, and yonder, on the shore, illuminated the succession of little indented bays and jutting points as far as the sight could reach. Cape Moro, the Nicchiola, the Trabocco, the rocks, near or distant, as far as the Vasto Point, appeared a few seconds in the immense irradiation.

"The promontory!" suggested a secret voice to George suddenly, while his gaze was carried to the heights crowned by the twisted olive-trees.

The white light faded away. The distant town became silent, still outlined against the

shadows by its illuminations. In the silence, George perceived again the oscillations of the pendulum and the rhythmic beats of the flax brake. But now he was master of his anguish; he felt himself stronger and his mind clearer.

"Shall we go out a little?" he asked Hippolyte, in a slightly changed voice. "We'll go to some spot in the open; we'll stretch ourselves out on the grass, and breath in the fresh air. Look! The night is almost as light as if it were full moon."

"No, no; let us stay here!" she answered nonchalantly.

"It's not late. Are you sleepy already? I cannot go to bed too early, you know: I do not sleep, I suffer. I would gladly take a little walk. Come, do not be so lazy! You could come just as you are."

"No, no; let us stay here."

And, once more, she passed her bare arms around his neck, languishing, seized by desire.

"Let us stay here. Come indoors; let us lie down a little. Come!"

She tried to coax him, to entice him, seized by desire that became all the fiercer as she noticed George's resistance. She was all ardor, and her beauty was at its best, illuminated as by a torch. Her long, serpentine body trembled through her thin wrapper. Her large dark eyes shed the fascinating charm of the supreme hours of passion. She was the sovereign Sensualism repeating: "I am forever the unconquered. I am stronger than your thought. The odor of my skin has the power to dissolve a world in you."

"No, no; I do not want to," declared George, seizing her wrists with an almost brutal violence that he could not moderate.

"Ah! you don't want to?" she echoed mockingly, amused by the struggle, sure of conquering, incapable of giving way in her caprice.

He regretted his roughness. To draw her into the snare, he must be mild and coaxing,

must simulate ardor and tenderness. After that, he would certainly induce her to take the nocturnal walk—the last walk. But, on the other hand, he also felt the absolute necessity of not losing that nervous momentary energy that was indispensable for the approaching action.

"Ah! So you don't want to?" she repeated, throwing her bare arms about him, gazing up at him, looking into the depths of his eyes with a species of repressed frenzy.

George permitted himself to be led into the room.

Then all the Enemy's feline lasciviousness broke loose over him whom she believed already vanquished. She let down her hair, loosened her dress, permitted her natural perfume to be exhaled like a shrub of odoriferous flowers. She seemed to realize that she must disarm this man, that she must enervate him, and that she must crush him to prevent him from becoming dangerous.

George felt he was lost. Once more the Enemy had asserted her superiority.

Suddenly she was seized with laughter, nervous, frantic, ungovernable, lugubrious as the laughter of the insane.

Frightened, he let her go. He looked at her with manifest horror, thinking, "Is this madness?"

She laughed, laughed, laughed, writhing, hiding her face in her hands, biting her fingers, holding her sides; she laughed, laughed in spite of herself, shaken by long, sonorous hiccoughs.

At intervals, she stopped for a second; then recommenced with renewed violence. And nothing was more lugubrious than these mad laughs in the silence of the magnificent night.

"Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid!" she said, during the pauses, at the sight of her perplexed and frightened lover. "I am calmer now. Go out, please. Please go out!"

He went back on the loggia, as if in a dream. Nevertheless, his brain retained a

strange lucidity and strange wakefulness. All his acts, all his perceptions had for him the unreality of a dream, and assumed at the same time a signification as profound as that of an allegory. He still heard behind him the ill-repressed laughter; he retained still in his fingers the sensation of the impure thing. He saw above and around him the beauty of the summer evening. He knew what was on the point of being accomplished.

The laughs ceased. Again, in the silence, he perceived the vibrations of the pendulum and the beats of the flax brake on the distant area. A groan coming from the house of the old people made him shudder: it was the pain of her who was now in childbirth.

"All must be accomplished!" he thought.

And, turning, he crossed the threshold with a firm step.

Hippolyte lay upon the sofa, recomposed, pale, her eyes half-closed. At the approach of her lover, she smiled.

"Come, sit down!" she murmured, with a vague gesture.

He bent over her, and saw tears between her eyelashes.

"Are you suffering?" he asked.

"I feel a slight suffocation. I have a weight here, as if a ball were rising and falling."

She pointed to the centre of her chest. He said: "It is suffocating in this room. Make an effort, and get up. Let us go out. The air will do you good. Come!"

He rose, and held out his hands. She gave him hers, and let him raise her. When on her feet, she shook her head to throw back her hair, which was still untied. Then she bent down to search for her lost hairpins.

"Where can they be?"

"What are you looking for?"

"My hairpins."

"Let them be! You'll find them to-morrow."

"But I need them to fasten my hair."

"Leave your hair as it is. It pleases me that way."

She smiled. They went out into the loggia. She raised her face towards the stars and breathed the perfume of the summer night.

"You see how beautiful the night is!" said George, in a hoarse yet gentle voice.

"They are beating the flax," said Hippolyte, listening attentively to the continuous rhythm.

"Let us go down," said George. "Let us walk a little. Let us go as far as the olive-trees, yonder."

He seemed to hang on Hippolyte's lips.

"No, no. Let us remain here. You see in what a state I am!"

"What does that matter? Who will see you? We shall not meet a living soul at this hour. Come as you are. I'd go without my hat. The country is almost like a garden for us. Let us go down."

She hesitated a few seconds. But she, too, felt the need of fresh air, of getting away from this house that still seemed to resound with the echo of her horrible laughs.

"Let us go down," she finally consented.

At these words, George felt as if his heart had ceased to beat.

With an instinctive movement he approached the threshold of the illuminated room. He cast toward the interior a look of anguish, a look of farewell. A hurricane of recollections arose in his distracted soul.

"Shall we leave the lamp lit?" he asked, without thinking of what he was saying.

And his own voice gave him an indefinable sensation as of some distant and strange thing.

"Yes," answered Hippolyte.

They went down.

On the staircase they took each other by the hand, slowly descending step by step. George made so violent an effort to repress his anguish that the effort caused in him a strange exaltation. He considered the immensity of the nocturnal sky, and believed it to be filled by the intensity of his own life.

They perceived on the parapet of the courtyard the shadow of a man, motionless and silent. They recognized old Colas.

"You here at this hour, Colas?" said Hippolyte. "Are you not sleepy?"

"I am keeping vigil for Candia, who is in childbirth," responded the old man.

"And is everything going well?"

"Yes, very well."

The door of the habitation was lit up.

"Wait a minute," said Hippolyte. "I want to see Candia."

"No, do not go there now," begged George. "You will see her on your return."

"That is so; I will see her on my return. Good-by, Colas."

She stumbled as she entered the path.

"Take care," cautioned the shadow of the old man.

George offered her his arm.

"Do you want to lean on me?"

She took George's arm.

They walked several steps in silence.

The night was bright, glorious in all directions. The Great Bear shone on their heads in all its sextuple mystery. Silent and pure as the heaven above, the Adriatic gave as the only indication of its existence its respiration and its perfume.

"Why do you hurry so?" asked Hippolyte.

George slowed down his step. Dominated by a single thought, pursued by the necessity of the act, he had only a confused consciousness for everything else. His inner life seemed to disintegrate, to decompose, to dissolve in a heavy fermentation that invaded even the deepest depths of his being, and brought to the surface shapeless fragments, of diverse nature, as little recognizable as if they had not belonged to the life of the same man.

All these strange, inextricable, abrupt, violent things he vaguely perceived, as if in a half-slumber, while at the same time one single point in his brain retained an extraordinary lucidity, and, in a rigid line, guided him toward the fatal act.

"How melancholy the sound of the flax brake in that field is," said Hippolyte, stopping. "All night long they beat the flax. Does that not make you feel melancholy?"

She abandoned herself on George's arm, brushed his cheek with her tresses.

"Do you recall, at Albano, the pavers who were beating the pavement from morning to night beneath our window?"

Her voice was veiled with sadness, somewhat tired.

"We became accustomed to that noise."

She stopped, restless.

"Why do you keep turning around?"

"It seems to me that I hear a man walking barefoot," responded George in a low voice. "Let us stop."

They stopped, listened.

George was under the empire of the same horror that had frozen him in front of the door of the funereal chamber. All his being trembled, fascinated by the mystery; he seemed to have already crossed the confines of an unknown world.

"It is Giardino," said Hippolyte, on perceiving the dog, which approached. "He has followed us."

And, several times, she called the faithful animal, which came running up friskily. She bent down to caress him, spoke to him in the special tone she habitually used when she petted animals she was fond of.

"You never leave your friend, do you? You never leave her?"

The grateful animal rolled in the dust.

George made a few steps. He felt a great relief on feeling himself free from Hippolyte's arm; up to now, this contact had given him an indefinable physical uneasiness. He imagined the sudden and violent act he was about to accomplish; he imagined the mortal embrace of his arms around the body of this woman, and he would have liked to touch her only at the supreme instant.

"Come, come; we'll soon be there," he said, preceding her in the direction of the olive-trees, whitened by the moonlight and stars.

He halted on the edge of the plateau, and turned around to assure himself that she was following him. Once more he gazed around him distractedly, as if to embrace the image of the night. It seemed to him that, on this plateau, the silence had become more profound. Only the rhythmic beats of the flax brake could be heard from the distant fields.

"Come!" he repeated in a clear voice, strengthened by a sudden energy.

And, passing between the twisted trunks, feeling beneath his feet the softness of the grass, he directed his steps towards the edge of the precipice.

This edge formed a circular projection, entirely free in every direction, without any kind of railing. George pressed his hands on his knees, bent his body forward on this support, and advanced his head cautiously. He examined the rocks below him; he saw a corner of the sandy beach. The little corpse stretched out on the sand

reappeared to him. There appeared to him also the blackish spot he had seen with Hippolyte from the heights of the Pincio, at the foot of the wall; and he heard again the answers of the teamster to the greenish-looking man; and, confusedly, all the phantoms of that distant afternoon repassed before his soul.

"Take care!" cried Hippolyte, as she came up to him. "Take care!"

The dog barked among the olive-trees.

"Do you hear me, George? Come away!"

The promontory fell perpendicularly down to the black and deserted rocks, around which the water scarcely moved, splashing feebly, rocking in its slow undulations the reflections of the stars.

"George! George!"

"Have no fear!" he said in a hoarse voice. "Come nearer! Come! Come and see the fishermen, fishing by torchlight among the rocks."

"No, no! I am afraid of vertigo."

"Come! I will hold you."

"No, no."

She seemed frozen by the unusual tone in George's voice, and a vague fright commenced to invade her.

"Come!"

And he approached her, his hands extended. Suddenly he seized her wrists, dragged her several steps; then he seized her in his arms, made a bound, and attempted to force her towards the abyss.

"No! no! no!"

She resisted with furious energy.

She succeeded in disengaging herself, jumped back, panting and trembling.

"Are you mad?" she cried, choked by anger. "Are you mad?"

But when she saw him come after her without speaking a word, when she felt herself seized with more brutal violence and dragged again toward the precipice, she understood all, and a great, sinister flash of light struck terror to her soul.

"No, George, no! Let me be! Let me be! Only one minute! Listen! Listen! One minute! I want to tell you——"

Insane with terror, she supplicated him, writhing. She hoped to stop him, to move him to pity.

"One minute! Listen! I love you! Forgive me! Forgive me!"

She stammered incoherent words desperately, feeling herself becoming weaker, losing her ground, seeing death before her.

"Assassin!" she then shrieked, furious.

And she defended herself with her nails, with her teeth, like a beast.

"Assassin!" she shrieked, as she was seized by the hair, thrown to the ground on the edge of the precipice, lost.

The dog barked at the tragic group.

It was a brief and fierce struggle, like the sudden outburst of supreme hate which, up to then, had been smouldering, unsuspected, in the hearts of implacable enemies.

And they both crashed down to death, clasped in each other's arms.

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