Une Vie, a Piece of String and Other Stories

by Guy de Maupassant

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GUY DE MAUPASSANT

UNE VIE

A Piece of String

And Other Stories

Translated by Albert M. C. McMaster, B.A. A. E. Henderson, B.A. Mme. Quesada and Others

VOLUME I.

[Illustration: "Jeanne"]

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[Illustration: Guy de Maupassant]

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

A Study by Pol. Neveux

"I entered literary life as a meteor, and I shall leave it like a thunderbolt." These words of Maupassant to José Maria de Heredia on the occasion of a memorable meeting are, in spite of their morbid solemnity, not an inexact summing up of the brief career during which, for ten years, the writer, by turns undaunted and sorrowful, with the fertility of a master hand produced poetry, novels, romances and

travels, only to sink prematurely into the abyss of madness and death....

In the month of April, 1880, an article appeared in the "Le Gaulois" announcing the publication of the Soirées de Médan. It was signed by a name as yet unknown: Guy de Maupassant. After a juvenile diatribe against romanticism and a passionate attack on languorous literature, the writer extolled the study of real life, and announced the publication of the new work. It was picturesque and charming. In the quiet of evening, on an island in the Seine, beneath poplars instead of the Neapolitan cypresses dear to the friends of Boccaccio, amid the continuous murmur of the valley, and no longer to the sound of the Pyrennean streams that murmured a faint accompaniment to the tales of Marguerite's cavaliers, the master and his disciples took turns in narrating some striking or pathetic episode of the war. And the issue, in collaboration, of these tales in one volume, in which the master jostled elbows with his pupils, took on the appearance of a manifesto, the tone of a challenge, or the utterance of a creed.

In fact, however, the beginnings had been much more simple, and they had confined themselves, beneath the trees of Médan, to deciding on a general title for the work. Zola had contributed the manuscript of the "Attaque du Moulin," and it was at Maupassant's house that the five young men gave in their contributions. Each one read his story, Maupassant being the last. When he had finished Boule de Suif, with a spontaneous impulse, with an emotion they never forgot, filled with enthusiasm at this revelation, they all rose and, without superfluous words, acclaimed him as a master.

He undertook to write the article for the Gaulois and, in coöperation with his friends, he worded it in the terms with which we are familiar, amplifying and embellishing it, yielding to an inborn taste for mystification which his youth rendered excusable. The essential point, he said, is to "unmoor" criticism.

It was unmoored. The following day Wolff wrote a polemical dissertation in the

Figaro and carried away his colleagues. The volume was a brilliant success, thanks to Boule de Suif. Despite the novelty, the honesty of effort, on the part of all, no mention was made of the other stories. Relegated to the second rank, they passed without notice. From his first battle, Maupassant was master of the field in literature.

At once the entire press took him up and said what was appropriate regarding the budding celebrity. Biographers and reporters sought information concerning his life. As it was very simple and perfectly straightforward, they resorted to invention. And thus it is that at the present day Maupassant appears to us like one of those ancient heroes whose origin and death are veiled in mystery.

I will not dwell on Guy de Maupassant's younger days. His relatives, his old friends, he himself, here and there in his works, have furnished us in their letters enough valuable revelations and touching remembrances of the years preceding his literary début. His worthy biographer, H. Édouard Maynial, after collecting intelligently all the writings, condensing and comparing them, has been able to give us some definite information regarding that early period.

I will simply recall that he was born on the 5th of August, 1850, near Dieppe, in the castle of Miromesnil which he describes in Une Vie....

Maupassant, like Flaubert, was a Norman, through his mother, and through his place of birth he belonged to that strange and adventurous race, whose heroic and long voyages on tramp trading ships he liked to recall. And just as the author of "Éducation sentimentale" seems to have inherited in the paternal line the shrewd realism of Champagne, so de Maupassant appears to have inherited from his Lorraine ancestors their indestructible discipline and cold lucidity.

His childhood was passed at Étretat, his beautiful childhood; it was there that his instincts were awakened in the unfoldment of his prehistoric soul. Years went by in an ecstasy of physical happiness. The delight of running at full speed through fields of gorse, the charm of voyages of discovery in hollows and ravines, games beneath

the dark hedges, a passion for going to sea with the fishermen and, on nights when there was no moon, for dreaming on their boats of imaginary voyages.

Mme. de Maupassant, who had guided her son's early reading, and had gazed with him at the sublime spectacle of nature, put off as long as possible the hour of separation. One day, however, she had to take the child to the little seminary at Yvetot. Later, he became a student at the college at Rouen, and became a literary correspondent of Louis Bouilhet. It was at the latter's house on those Sundays in winter when the Norman rain drowned the sound of the bells and dashed against the window panes that the school boy learned to write poetry.

Vacation took the rhetorician back to the north of Normandy. Now it was shooting at Saint Julien-l'Hospitalier, across fields, bogs, and through the woods. From that time on he sealed his pact with the earth, and those "deep and delicate roots" which attached him to his native soil began to grow. It was of Normandy, broad, fresh and virile, that he would presently demand his inspiration, fervent and eager as a boy's love; it was in her that he would take refuge when, weary of life, he would implore a truce, or when he simply wished to work and revive his energies in old-time joys. It was at this time that was born in him that voluptuous love of the sea, which in later days could alone withdraw him from the world, calm him, console him.

In 1870 he lived in the country, then he came to Paris to live; for, the family fortunes having dwindled, he had to look for a position. For several years he was a clerk in the Ministry of Marine, where he turned over musty papers, in the uninteresting company of the clerks of the admiralty.

Then he went into the department of Public Instruction, where bureaucratic servility is less intolerable. The daily duties are certainly scarcely more onerous and he had as chiefs, or colleagues, Xavier Charmes and Leon Dierx, Henry Roujon and René Billotte, but his office looked out on a beautiful melancholy garden with immense plane trees around which black circles of crows gathered in winter.

Maupassant made two divisions of his spare hours, one for boating, and the other for literature. Every evening in spring, every free day, he ran down to the river whose mysterious current veiled in fog or sparkling in the sun called to him and bewitched him. In the islands in the Seine between Chatou and Port-Marly, on the banks of Sartrouville and Triel he was long noted among the population of boatmen, who have now vanished, for his unwearying biceps, his cynical gaiety of goodfellowship, his unfailing practical jokes, his broad witticisms. Sometimes he would row with frantic speed, free and joyous, through the glowing sunlight on the stream; sometimes, he would wander along the coast, questioning the sailors, chatting with the ravageurs, or junk gatherers, or stretched at full length amid the irises and tansy he would lie for hours watching the frail insects that play on the surface of the stream, water spiders, or white butterflies, dragon flies, chasing each other amid the willow leaves, or frogs asleep on the lily-pads.

The rest of his life was taken up by his work. Without ever becoming despondent, silent and persistent, he accumulated manuscripts, poetry, criticisms, plays, romances and novels. Every week he docilely submitted his work to the great Flaubert, the childhood friend of his mother and his uncle Alfred Le Poittevin. The master had consented to assist the young man, to reveal to him the secrets that make chefs-d'oeuvre immortal. It was he who compelled him to make copious research and to use direct observation and who inculcated in him a horror of vulgarity and a contempt for facility.

Maupassant himself tells us of those severe initiations in the Rue Murillo, or in the tent at Croisset; he has recalled the implacable didactics of his old master, his tender brutality, the paternal advice of his generous and candid heart. For seven years Flaubert slashed, pulverized, the awkward attempts of his pupil whose success remained uncertain.

Suddenly, in a flight of spontaneous perfection, he wrote Boule de Suif. His master's

joy was great and overwhelming. He died two months later.

Until the end Maupassant remained illuminated by the reflection of the good, vanished giant, by that touching reflection that comes from the dead to those souls they have so profoundly stirred. The worship of Flaubert was a religion from which nothing could distract him, neither work, nor glory, nor slow moving waves, nor balmy nights.

At the end of his short life, while his mind was still clear, he wrote to a friend: "I am always thinking of my poor Flaubert, and I say to myself that I should like to die if I were sure that anyone would think of me in the same manner."

During these long years of his novitiate Maupassant had entered the social literary circles. He would remain silent, preoccupied; and if anyone, astonished at his silence, asked him about his plans he answered simply: "I am learning my trade." However, under the pseudonym of Guy de Valmont, he had sent some articles to the newspapers, and, later, with the approval and by the advice of Flaubert, he published, in the "République des Lettres," poems signed by his name.

These poems, overflowing with sensuality, where the hymn to the Earth describes the transports of physical possession, where the impatience of love expresses itself in loud melancholy appeals like the calls of animals in the spring nights, are valuable chiefly inasmuch as they reveal the creature of instinct, the fawn escaped from his native forests, that Maupassant was in his early youth. But they add nothing to his glory. They are the "rhymes of a prose writer" as Jules Lemaitre said. To mould the expression of his thought according to the strictest laws, and to "narrow it down" to some extent, such was his aim. Following the example of one of his comrades of Médan, being readily carried away by precision of style and the rhythm of sentences, by the imperious rule of the ballad, of the pantoum or the chant royal, Maupassant also desired to write in metrical lines. However, he never liked this collection that he often regretted having published. His encounters with prosody had

left him with that monotonous weariness that the horseman and the fencer feel after a period in the riding school, or a bout with the foils.

Such, in very broad lines, is the story of Maupassant's literary apprenticeship.

The day following the publication of "Boule de Suif," his reputation began to grow rapidly. The quality of his story was unrivalled, but at the same time it must be acknowledged that there were some who, for the sake of discussion, desired to place a young reputation in opposition to the triumphant brutality of Zola.

From this time on, Maupassant, at the solicitation of the entire press, set to work and wrote story after story. His talent, free from all influences, his individuality, are not disputed for a moment. With a quick step, steady and alert, he advanced to fame, a fame of which he himself was not aware, but which was so universal, that no contemporary author during his life ever experienced the same. The "meteor" sent out its light and its rays were prolonged without limit, in article after article, volume on volume.

He was now rich and famous.... He is esteemed all the more as they believe him to be rich and happy. But they do not know that this young fellow with the sunburnt face, thick neck and salient muscles whom they invariably compare to a young bull at liberty, and whose love affairs they whisper, is ill, very ill. At the very moment that success came to him, the malady that never afterwards left him came also, and, seated motionless at his side, gazed at him with its threatening countenance. He suffered from terrible headaches, followed by nights of insomnia. He had nervous attacks, which he soothed with narcotics and anesthetics, which he used freely. His sight, which had troubled him at intervals, became affected, and a celebrated oculist spoke of abnormality, asymetry of the pupils. The famous young man trembled in secret and was haunted by all kinds of terrors.

The reader is charmed at the saneness of this revived art and yet, here and there, he is surprised to discover, amid descriptions of nature that are full of humanity,

disquieting flights towards the supernatural, distressing conjurations, veiled at first, of the most commonplace, the most vertiginous shuddering fits of fear, as old as the world and as eternal as the unknown. But, instead of being alarmed, he thinks that the author must be gifted with infallible intuition to follow out thus the taints in his characters, even through their most dangerous mazes. The reader does not know that these hallucinations which he describes so minutely were experienced by Maupassant himself; he does not know that the fear is in himself, the anguish of fear "which is not caused by the presence of danger, or of inevitable death, but by certain abnormal conditions, by certain mysterious influences in presence of vague dangers," the "fear of fear, the dread of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible terror."

How can one explain these physical sufferings and this morbid distress that were known for some time to his intimates alone? Alas! the explanation is only too simple. All his life, consciously or unconsciously, Maupassant fought this malady, hidden as yet, which was latent in him.

Those who first saw Maupassant when the Contes de la Bécasse and Bel Ami were published were somewhat astonished at his appearance. He was solidly built, rather short and had a resolute, determined air, rather unpolished and without those distinguishing marks of intellect and social position. But his hands were delicate and supple, and beautiful shadows encircled his eyes.

He received visitors with the graciousness of the courteous head of a department, who resigns himself to listen to demands, allowing them to talk as he smiled faintly, and nonplussing them by his calmness.

How chilling was this first interview to young enthusiasts who had listened to Zola unfolding in lyric formula audacious methods, or to the soothing words of Daudet, who scattered with prodigality striking, thrilling ideas, picturesque outlines and brilliant synopses. Maupassant's remarks, in têtes-à-têtes, as in general conversation,

were usually current commonplaces and on ordinary time-worn topics. Convinced of the superfluousness of words, perhaps he confounded them all in the same category, placing the same estimate on a thought nobly expressed as on a sally of coarse wit. One would have thought so, to see the indifference with which he treated alike the chatter of the most decided mediocrities and the conversation of the noblest minds of the day. Not an avowal, not a confidence, that shed light on his life work. Parsimonious of all he observed, he never related a typical anecdote, or offered a suggestive remark. Praise, even, did not move him, and if by chance he became animated it was to tell some practical joke, some atelier hoaxes, as if he had given himself up to the pleasure of hoaxing and mystifying people.

He appeared besides to look upon art as a pastime, literature as an occupation useless at best, while he willingly relegated love to the performance of a function, and suspected the motives of the most meritorious actions.

Some say that this was the inborn basis of his personal psychology. I do not believe it. That he may have had a low estimate of humanity, that he may have mistrusted its disinterestedness, contested the quality of its virtue, is possible, even certain. But that he was not personally superior to his heroes I am unwilling to admit. And if I see in his attitude, as in his language, an evidence of his inveterate pessimism, I see in it also a method of protecting his secret thoughts from the curiosity of the vulgar.

Perhaps he overshot the mark. By dint of hearing morality, art and literature depreciated, and seeing him preoccupied with boating, and listening to his own accounts of love affairs which he did not always carry on in the highest class, many ended by seeing in him one of those terrible Normans who, all through his novels and stories, carouse and commit social crimes with such commanding assurance and such calm unmorality.

He was undoubtedly a Norman, and, according to those who knew him best, many of his traits of character show that atavism is not always an idle word....

To identify Maupassant with his characters is a gross error, but is not without precedent. We always like to trace the author in the hero of a romance, and to seek the actor beneath the disguise. No doubt, as Taine has said, "the works of an intelligence have not the intelligence alone for father and mother, but the whole personality of the man helps to produce them...."

That is why Maupassant himself says to us, "No, I have not the soul of a decadent, I cannot look within myself, and the effort I make to understand unknown souls is incessant, involuntary and dominant. It is not an effort; I experience a sort of overpowering sense of insight into all that surrounds me. I am impregnated with it, I yield to it, I submerge myself in these surrounding influences."

That is, properly speaking, the peculiarity of all great novelists. Who experiences this insight, this influence more than Balzac, or Flaubert, in Madame Bovary? And so with Maupassant, who, pen in hand, is the character he describes, with his passions, his hatreds, his vices and his virtues. He so incorporates himself in him that the author disappears, and we ask ourselves in vain what his own opinion is of what he has just told us. He has none possibly, or if he has he does not tell it.

This agrees admirably with the theory of impassivity in literature, so much in vogue when Maupassant became known. But despite that theory he is, if one understands him, quite other than

"A being without pity who contemplated suffering."

He has the deepest sympathy for the weak, for the victims of the deceptions of society, for the sufferings of the obscure. If the successful adventurer, Lesable, and the handsome Maze are the objects of his veiled irony, he maintains, or feels a sorrowful, though somewhat disdainful tenderness, for poor old Savon, the old copying clerk of the Ministry of Marine, who is the drudge of the office and whose colleagues laugh at him because his wife deceived him, sans espoir d'"heritage."

Why did Maupassant at the start win universal favor? It is because he had direct

genius, the clear vision of a "primitive" (an artist of the pre-Renaissance). His materials were just those of a graduate who, having left college, has satisfied his curiosity. Grasping the simple and ingenious, but strong and appropriate tools that he himself has forged, he starts out in the forest of romance, and instead of being overcome by the enchantment of its mystery, he walks through it unfalteringly with a joyful step....

He was a minstrel. Offspring of a race, and not the inheritor of a formula, he narrated to his contemporaries, bewildered by the lyrical deformities of romanticism, stories of human beings, simple and logical, like those which formerly delighted our parents.

The French reader who wished to be amused was at once at home, on the same footing with him.... More spontaneous than the first troubadours, he banished from his writings abstract and general types, "romanticized" life itself, and not myths, those eternal legends that stray through the highways of the world.

Study closely these minstrels in recent works; read M. Joseph Bédier's beautiful work, Les Fabliaux, and you will see how, in Maupassant's prose, ancestors, whom he doubtless never knew, are brought to life.

The Minstrel feels neither anger nor sympathy; he neither censures, nor moralizes; for the self-satisfied Middle Ages cannot conceive the possibility of a different world. Brief, quick, he despises aims and methods, his only object is to entertain his auditors. Amusing and witty, he cares only for laughter and ridicule....

But Maupassant's stories are singularly different in character. In the nineteenth century the Gallic intellect had long since foundered amid vileness and debauchery. In the provinces the ancient humor had disappeared; one chattered still about nothing, but without point, without wit; "trifling" was over, as they call it in Champagne. The nauseating pabulum of the newspapers and low political intrigue had withered the French intellect, that delicate, rare intellect, the last traces of which

fade away in the Alsatian stories of Erckman-Chatrian, in the Provençal tales of Alphonse Daudet, in the novels of Emile Pouvillon. Maupassant is not one of them. He knows nothing about humor, for he never found it in Life....

His ambition was not to make one laugh; he writes for the pleasure of recalling, without bias, what, to him, seems a halfway and dangerous truth.... In his pessimism, Maupassant despises the race, society, civilization and the world....

If Maupassant draws from anyone it is Schopenhauer and Herbert Spencer, of whom he often speaks, although one does not know if he studied them very deeply. In all his books, excepting, of course, in the case of lines from the great tragic poets, one finds only one credited reference, which in to Sir John Lubbock's work on ants, an extract from which is introduced into Yvette.

No one was less bookish than himself. He was a designer, and one of the greatest in literature. His heroes, little folk, artisans or rustics, bureaucrats or shopkeepers, prostitutes or rakes, he places them in faintly colored, but well-defined surroundings. And, immediately, the simplified landscape gives the keynote of the story.

In his descriptions he resists the temptation of asserting his personal view. He will not allow himself to see more of his landscape than his characters themselves see. He is also careful to avoid all refined terms and expressions, to introduce no element superior to the characters of his heroes.

He never makes inanimate nature intervene directly in human tribulations; she laughs at our joys and our sorrows.... Once, only, in one of his works, the trees join in the universal mourning--the great, sad beeches weep in autumn for the soul, the little soul, of la petite Roque.

And yet Maupassant adores this nature, the one thing that moves him.... But, in spite of this, he can control himself; the artist is aware of the danger to his narration should he indulge in the transports of a lover.

With an inborn perception, Maupassant at once seizes on the principal detail, the

essential peculiarity that distinguishes a character and builds round it. He also, in the presentation of his character, assumes an authority that no writer, not even Balzac, ever equalled....

He traces what he sees with rapid strokes. His work is a vast collection of powerful sketches, synthetic draftings. Like all great artists, he was a simplifier; he knew how to "sacrifice" like the Egyptians and Greeks....

Thanks to his rapid methods the master "cinematographed," if I may use the word, inexhaustible stories. Among them, each person may find himself represented, the artist, the clerk, the thinker, and the non-commissioned officer.

Maupassant was always impatient to "realize" his observations. He might forget, and above all, the flower of the sensation might lose its perfume. In Une Vie he hastens to sum up his childhood's recollections. As for Bel Ami, he wrote it from day to day as he haunted the offices of Editors.

As for his style, it is limpid, accurate, easy and strongly marked, with a sound framework and having the suppleness of a living organism.

Very industrious and very careful at first, Maupassant, in the fever of production, became less careful. He early accustomed himself to composing in his mind. "Composition amuses me," he said, "when I am thinking it out, and not when I am writing it." ... Once he had thought out his novels or romances, he transcribed them hurriedly, almost mechanically. In his manuscripts, long pages follow each other without an erasure.

His language appears natural, easy, and at first sight seems spontaneous. But at the price of what effort was it not acquired! ...

In reality, in the writer, his sense of sight and smell were perfected, to the detriment of the sense of hearing which is not very musical. Repetitions, assonances, do not always shock Maupassant, who is sometimes insensible to quantity as he is to harmony. He does not "orchestrate," he has not inherited the "organ pipes" of

Flaubert.

In his vocabulary there is no research; he never even requires a rare word....

Those whom Flaubert's great organ tones delighted, those whom Theophile Gautier's frescoes enchanted, were not satisfied, and accused Maupassant, somewhat harshly, of not being a "writer" in the highest sense of the term. The reproach is unmerited, for there is but one style.

But, on the other hand, it is difficult to admit, with an eminent academician that Maupassant must be a great writer, a classical writer, in fact, simply because he "had no style," a condition of perfection "in that form of literary art in which the personality of the author should not appear, in the romance, the story, and the drama."

A classic, Maupassant undoubtedly is, as the critic to whom I alluded has said, "through the simple aptness of his terms and his contempt for frivolous ornamentation."

He remains a great writer because, like Molière, La Bruyère, and La Fontaine, he is always close to nature, disdaining all studied rhetorical effect and all literary verbosity.

For applause and fame Maupassant cared nothing, and his proud contempt for Orders and Academies is well known.

In a letter to Marie Bashkirtseff he writes as follows:

"Everything in life is almost alike to me, men, women, events. This is my true confession of faith, and I may add what you may not believe, which is that I do not care any more for myself than I do for the rest. All is divided into ennui, comedy and misery. I am indifferent to everything. I pass two-thirds of my time in being terribly bored. I pass the third portion in writing sentences which I sell as dear as I can, regretting that I have to ply this abominable trade."

And in a later letter:

"I have no taste that I cannot get rid of at my pleasure, not a desire that I do not scoff at, not a hope that does not make me smile or laugh. I ask myself why I stir, why I go hither or thither, why I give myself the odious trouble of earning money, since it does not amuse me to spend it."

And again:

"As for me, I am incapable of really loving my art. I am too critical, I analyze it too much. I feel strongly how relative is the value of ideas, words, and even of the loftiest intelligences. I cannot help despising thought, it is so weak; and form, it is so imperfect. I really have, in an acute, incurable form, the sense of human impotence, and of effort which results in wretched approximations."

For nature, Maupassant had an ardent passion.... His whole being quivered when she bathed his forehead with her light ocean breeze. She, alone, knew how to rock and soothe him with her waves.

Never satisfied, he wished to see her under all aspects, and travelled incessantly, first in his native province, amid the meadows and waters of Normandy, then on the banks of the Seine along which he coasted, bending to the oar. Then Brittany with its beaches, where high waves rolled in beneath low and dreary skies, then Auvergne, with its scattered huts amid the sour grass, beneath rocks of basalt; and, finally, Corsica, Italy, Sicily, not with artistic enthusiasm, but simply to enjoy the delight of grand, pure outlines. Africa, the country of Salammbô, the desert, finally call him, and he breathes those distant odors borne on the slow winds; the sunlight inundates his body, "laves the dark corners of his soul." And he retains a troubled memory of the evenings in those warm climes, where the fragrance of plants and trees seems to take the place of air.

Maupassant's philosophy is as little complicated as his vision of humanity. His pessimism exceeds in its simplicity and depth that of all other realistic writers.

Still there are contradictions and not unimportant ones in him. The most striking is certainly his fear of Death. He sees it everywhere, it haunts him. He sees it on the horizon of landscapes, and it crosses his path on lonely roads. When it is not hovering over his head, it is circling round him as around Gustave Moreau's pale youth.... Can he, the determined materialist, really fear the stupor of eternal sleep, or the dispersion of the transient individuality? ...

Another contradiction. He who says that contact with the crowd "tortures his nerves," and who professes such contempt for mankind, yet considers solitude as one of the bitterest torments of existence. And he bewails the fact that he cannot live just for himself, "keep within himself that secret place of the ego, where none can enter."

"Alas!" said his master, "we are all in a desert." Nobody understands anyone else and "whatever we attempt, whatever be the impulse of our heart and the appeal of our lips, we shall always be alone!"

In this gehenna of death, in these nostalgias of the past, in these trances of eternal isolation, may we not find some relinquishing of his philosophy? Certainly not, for these contradictions accentuate all the more the pain of existence and become a new source of suffering.

In any case, Maupassant's pessimism becomes logical in terminating in pity, like that of Schopenhauer. I know that I am running foul of certain admirers of the author who do not see any pity in his work, and it is understood that he is pitiless. But examine his stories more closely and you will find it revealed in every page, provided you go to the very bottom of the subject. That is where it exists naturally, almost against the desire of the writer, who does not arouse pity, nor teach it.

And, again, if it remains concealed from so many readers, it is because it has nothing to do with the humanitarian pity retailed by rhetoricians. It is philosophical and haughty, detached from any "anthropocentric" characteristics. It is universal

suffering that it covers. And to tell the truth, it is man, the hypocritical and cunning biped who has the least share in it. Maupassant is helpful to all those of his fellows who are tortured by physical suffering, social cruelty and the criminal dangers of life, but he pities them without caring for them, and his kindness makes distinctions.

On the other hand, the pessimist has all the tenderness of a Buddhist for animals, whom the gospels despise. When he pities the animals, who are worth more than ourselves, their executioners, when he pities the elementary existences, the plants and trees, those exquisite creations, he unbends and pours out his heart. The humbler the victim, the more generously does he espouse its suffering. His compassion is unbounded for all that lives in misery, that is buffeted about without understanding why, that "suffers and dies without a word." And if he mourned Miss Harriet, in this unaccustomed outburst of enthusiasm, it is because, like himself, the poor outcast cherished a similar love for "all things, all living beings."

Such appears to me to be Maupassant, the novelist, a story-teller, a writer, and a philosopher by turns. I will add one more trait; he was devoid of all spirit of criticism. When he essays to demolish a theory, one is amazed to find in this great, clear writer such lack of precision of thought, and such weak argument. He wrote the least eloquent and the most diffuse study of Flaubert, of "that old, dead master who had won his heart in a manner he could not explain." And, later, he shows the same weakness in setting forth, as in proving his theory, in his essay on the "Evolution of the Novel," in the introduction to Pierre et Jean.

On the other hand, he possesses, above many others, a power of creating, hidden and inborn, which he exercises almost unconsciously. Living, spontaneous and yet impassive he is the glorious agent of a mysterious function, through which he dominated literature and will continue to dominate it until the day when he desires to become literary.

He is as big as a tree. The author of "Contemporains" has written that Maupassant

produced novels as an apple-tree yields apples. Never was a criticism more irrefutable.

On various occasions he was pleased with himself at the fertility that had developed in him amid those rich soils where a frenzy mounts to your brain through the senses of smell and sight. He even feels the influence of the seasons, and writes from Provence: "The sap is rising in me, it is true. The spring that I find just awakening here stirs all my plant nature, and causes me to produce those literary fruits that ripen in me, I know not how."

The "meteor" is at its apogee. All admire and glorify him. It is the period when Alexandre Dumas, fils, wrote to him thrice: "You are the only author whose books I await with impatience."

The day came, however, when this dominant impassivity became stirred, when the marble became flesh by contact with life and suffering. And the work of the romancer, begun by the novelist, became warm with a tenderness that is found for the first time in Mont Oriol....

But this sentimental outburst that astonished his admirers quickly dies down, for the following year, there appeared the sober Pierre et Jean, that admirable masterpiece of typical reality constructed with "human leaven," without any admixture of literary seasoning, or romantic combinations. The reader finds once more in his splendid integrity the master of yore.

But his heart has been touched, nevertheless. In the books that follow, his impassivity gives way like an edifice that has been slowly undermined. With an ever-growing emotion he relates under slight disguises all his physical distress, all the terrors of his mind and heart.

What is the secret of this evolution? The perusal of his works gives us a sufficient insight into it.

The Minstrel has been received in country houses; has been admitted to "the ladies'

apartments." He has given up composing those hurried tales which made his fame, in order to construct beautiful romances of love and death.... The story teller has forsaken rustics and peasants, the comrades of the "Repues franches," for the nobility and the wealthy. He who formerly frequented Mme. Tellier's establishment now praises Michèle de Burne.

Ysolde replaces Macette. In "l'Ostel de Courtoisie," Maupassant cultivates the usual abstractions of the modern Round Table: Distinction and Moderation; Fervor and Delicacy. We see him inditing love sonnets and becoming a knight of chivalry. The apologist of brutal pleasures has become a devotee of the "culte de la Dame."

Everywhere he was sought after, fêted, petted.... But Maupassant never let himself be carried away by the tinsel of his prestige, nor the puerility of his enchantment. He despised at heart the puppets that moved about him as he had formerly despised his short stories and his petit bourgeois. "Ah," he cries, "I see them, their heads, their types, their hearts and their souls! What a clinic for a maker of books! The disgust with which this humanity inspires me makes me regret still more that I could not become what I should most have preferred--an Aristophanes, or a Rabelais." And he adds: "The world makes failures of all scientists, all artists, all intelligences that it monopolizes. It aborts all sincere sentiment by its manner of scattering our taste, our curiosity, our desire, the little spark of genius that burns in us."

Maupassant had to bend to the conditions of his new life. Being well bred, he respected, outwardly at least, the laws of artificiality and conventionality, and bowed before the idols of the cave he had entered....

If Maupassant never became the slave of worldly ideas, the creature of instinct that was part of his being acquired the refined tastes of the salons, and the manners of the highest civilization.

The novelist lived for some time in these enchanted and artificial surroundings, when, suddenly, his malady became aggravated. He was tortured by neuralgia, and

by new mysterious darting pains. His suffering was so great that he longed to scream. At the same time, his unhappy heart became softened and he became singularly emotional. His early faculties were intensified and refined, and in the overtension of his nerves through suffering his perceptions broadened, and he gained new ideas of things. This nobler personality Maupassant owes to those sufferings dear to great souls of whom Daudet speaks. This is what he says:

"If I could ever tell all, I should utter all the unexplored, repressed and sad thoughts that I feel in the depths of my being. I feel them swelling and poisoning me as bile does some people. But if I could one day give them utterance they would perhaps evaporate, and I might no longer have anything but a light, joyful heart. Who can say? Thinking becomes an abominable torture when the brain is an open wound. I have so many wounds in my head that my ideas cannot stir without making me long to cry out. Why is it? Why is it? Dumas would say that my stomach is out of order. I believe, rather, that I have a poor, proud, shameful heart, that old human heart that people laugh at, but which is touched, and causes me suffering, and in my head as well; I have the mind of the Latin race, which is very worn out. And, again, there are days when I do not think thus, but when I suffer just the same; for I belong to the family of the thin-skinned. But then I do not tell it, I do not show it; I conceal it very well, I think. Without any doubt, I am thought to be one of the most indifferent men in the world. I am sceptical, which is not the same thing, sceptical because I am clear-sighted. And my eyes say to my heart, Hide yourself, old fellow, you are grotesque, and it hides itself."

This describes, in spite of reservation, the struggle between two conflicting minds, that of yesterday, and that of to-day. But this sensitiveness that Maupassant seeks to hide, is plain to all clear-seeing people.

He soon begins to be filled with regrets and forebodings. He has a desire to look into the unknown, and to search for the inexplicable. He feels in himself that something

is undergoing destruction; he is at times haunted by the idea of a double. He divines that his malady is on guard, ready to pounce on him. He seeks to escape it, but on the mountains, as beside the sea, nature, formerly his refuge, now terrifies him.

Then his heart expands. All the sentiments that he once reviled, he now desires to experience. He now exalts in his books the passion of love, the passion of sacrifice, the passion of suffering; he extols self-sacrifice, devotion, the irresistible joy of ever giving oneself up more and more. The hour is late, the night is at hand; weary of suffering any longer, he hurriedly begs for tenderness and remembrance.

Occasionally, the Maupassant of former days protests against the bondage of his new personality; he complains that he no longer feels absolutely as formerly that he has no contact with anything in the world, that sweet, strong sensation that gives one strength. "How sensible I was," he says, "to wall myself round with indifference! If one did not feel, but only understand, without giving fragments of oneself to other beings! ... It is strange to suffer from the emptiness, the nothingness, of this life, when one is resigned, as I am, to nothingness. But, there, I cannot live without recollections, and recollections sadden me. I can have no hope, I know, but I feel obscurely and unceasingly the harm of this statement, and the regret that it should be so. And the attachments that I have in life act on my sensibility, which is too human, and not literary enough."

Maupassant's pity now takes a pathetic turn. He no longer despises, but holds out his hand to those unfortunates who, like himself, are tormented on the pathway without hope. The tears that he sees flow make him sad, and his heart bleeds at all the wounds he discovers. He does not inquire into the quality or origin of the misfortune. He sympathizes with all suffering; physical suffering, moral suffering, the suffering caused by treachery, the bitter twilight of wasted lives....

His mind has also become active. He desires to dabble in science. One day he studies the Arab mystics, Oriental legends, and the next, he studies the marine fauna,

etc. His perceptions have never been so clear. His brain is in continual activity. "It is strange," he acknowledges, "what a different man I am becoming mentally from what I was formerly. I can see it as I watch myself thinking, discovering, and developing stories, weighing and analyzing the imaginary beings that float through my imagination. I take the same enjoyment in certain dreams, certain exaltations of mind, as I formerly took in rowing like mad in the sunlight."

For the first time, his assurance as a writer wavers. As his last volumes show, he is endeavoring to transform, to renew himself. He acquires a desire to learn the secrets of obscure and precious hearts, to visit unknown races. He has lost his magnificent serenity....

As his malady began to take a more definite form, he turned his steps towards the south, only visiting Paris to see his physicians and publishers. In the old port of Antibes beyond the causeway of Cannes, his yacht, Bel Ami, which he cherished as a brother, lay at anchor and awaited him. He took it to the white cities of the Genoese Gulf, towards the palm trees of Hyères, or the red bay trees of Anthéor.

It was during one of these idle cruises on the open sea, outside of Agay and Saint-Raphael that he wrote "Sur l'Eau."

It was on the sacred sea of the old poets and philosophers, on the sea whose voice has rocked the thought of the world, that he cast into the shadow that long lament, so heartrending and sublime, that posterity will long shudder at the remembrance of it. The bitter strophes of this lament seem to be cadenced by the Mediterranean itself and to be in rhythm, like its melopoeia.

"Sur l'Eau" is the last Will and Testament, the general confession of Maupassant. To those who come after him he leaves the legacy of his highest thought; then he says farewell to all that he loved, to dreams, to starlit nights, and to the breath of roses. "Sur l'Eau" is the book of modern disenchantment, the faithful mirror of the latest pessimism. The journal written on board ship, disconnected and hasty, but so noble

in its disorder, has taken a place forever beside Werther and René, Manfred and Oberman.

He had for a long time, to his sorrow, seen his health failing under the attacks of an obscure malady which left him with a sense of the diminution of his powers and a gradual clouding of his intellect. Symptoms of general paralysis set in, at first mistaken for neurotic disturbances. He changed greatly. Those who met him as I did, thin and shivering, on that rainy Sunday when they were celebrating the inauguration of Flaubert's monument at Rouen would scarcely have recognized him. I shall never forget, as long as I live, his face wasted by suffering, his large eyes with a distressed expression, which emitted dying gleams of protest against a cruel fate....

Maupassant retired to Cannes not far from his mother. He read medical books and, in spite of what they taught, persisted in attributing his sufferings to "rheumatism localized in the brain," contracted amid the fogs on the Seine....

Vainly he endeavored to work, he became gloomy and the idea of suicide impressed him more and more...

The months passed, however, and in June he was able to go to Divonne to take a cure. After a very characteristic attack of optimism, he suddenly appeared at Champel and astonished everyone by his frightful eccentricities. One evening, however, he felt better, and read to the poet Dorchain the beginning of his novel "The Angelus," which he declared would be his masterpiece. When he had finished, he wept. "And we wept also," writes Dorchain, "at seeing all that now remained of genius, of tenderness and pity in this soul that would never again be capable of expressing itself so as to impress other minds.... In his accent, in his language, in his tears, Maupassant had, I know not what, of a religious character, which exceeded his horror of life, and his sombre terror of annihilation."

At the end of September he again visited Cannes, but the fatal day predicted by the

physician was at hand.

After several tragic weeks in which, from instinct, he made a desperate fight, on the 1st of January, 1892, he felt he was hopelessly vanquished, and in a moment of supreme clearness of intellect, like Gerard de Nerval, he attempted suicide. Less fortunate than the author of Sylvia, he was unsuccessful. But his mind, henceforth "indifferent to all unhappiness," had entered into eternal darkness.

He was taken back to Paris and placed in Dr. Meuriot's sanatorium, where, after eighteen months of mechanical existence, the "meteor" quietly passed away.

UNE VIE

OR, THE HISTORY OF A HEART

CHAPTER I

THE HOME BY THE SEA

The weather was most distressing. It had rained all night. The roaring of the overflowing gutters filled the deserted streets, in which the houses, like sponges, absorbed the humidity, which penetrating to the interior, made the walls sweat from cellar to garret. Jeanne had left the convent the day before, free for all time, ready to seize all the joys of life, of which she had dreamed so long. She was afraid her father would not set out for the new home in bad weather, and for the hundredth time since daybreak she examined the horizon. Then she noticed that she had omitted to put her calendar in her travelling bag. She took from the wall the little card which bore in golden figures the date of the current year, 1819. Then she marked with a pencil the first four columns, drawing a line through the name of each saint up to the 2d of May, the day that she left the convent. A voice outside the door called "Jeannette." Jeanne replied, "Come in, papa." And her father entered. Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a gentleman of the last century, eccentric and good. An enthusiastic disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, he had the tenderness of a lover for

nature, in the fields, in the woods and in the animals. Of aristocratic birth, he hated instinctively the year 1793, but being a philosopher by temperament and liberal by education, he execrated tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred. His great strength and his great weakness was his kind-heartedness, which had not arms enough to caress, to give, to embrace; the benevolence of a god, that gave freely, without questioning; in a word, a kindness of inertia that became almost a vice. A man of theory, he thought out a plan of education for his daughter, to the end that she might become happy, good, upright and gentle. She had lived at home until the age of twelve, when, despite the tears of her mother, she was placed in the Convent of the Sacred Heart. He had kept her severely secluded, cloistered, in ignorance of the secrets of life. He wished the Sisters to restore her to him pure at seventeen years of age, so that he might imbue her mind with a sort of rational poetry, and by means of the fields, in the midst of the fruitful earth, unfold her soul, enlighten her ignorance through the aspect of love in nature, through the simple tenderness of the animals, through the placid laws of existence. She was leaving the convent radiant, full of the joy of life, ready for all the happiness, all the charming incidents which her mind had pictured in her idle hours and in the long, quiet nights. She was like a portrait by Veronese with her fair, glossy hair, which seemed to cast a radiance on her skin, a skin with the faintest tinge of pink, softened by a light velvety down which could be perceived when the sun kissed her cheek. Her eyes were an opaque blue, like those of Dutch porcelain figures. She had a tiny mole on her left nostril and another on the right of her chin. She was tall, well developed, with willowy figure. Her clear voice sounded at times a little too sharp, but her frank, sincere laugh spread joy around her. Often, with a familiar gesture, she would raise her hands to her temples as if to arrange her hair.

She ran to her father and embraced him warmly. "Well, are we going to start?" she said. He smiled, shook his head and said, pointing toward the window, "How can we travel in such weather?" But she implored in a cajoling and tender manner, "Oh,

papa, do let us start. It will clear up in the afternoon." "But your mother will never consent to it." "Yes, I promise you that she will, I will arrange that." "If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am perfectly willing." In a few moments she returned from her mother's room, shouting in a voice that could be heard all through the house, "Papa, papa, mamma is willing. Have the horses harnessed." The rain was not abating; one might almost have said that it was raining harder when the carriage drove up to the door. Jeanne was ready to step in when the baroness came downstairs, supported on one side by her husband and on the other by a tall housemaid, strong and strapping as a boy. She was a Norman woman of the country of Caux, who looked at least twenty, although she was but eighteen at the most. She was treated by the family as a second daughter, for she was Jeanne's foster sister. Her name was Rosalie, and her chief duty lay in guiding the steps of her mistress, who had grown enormous in the last few years and also had an affection of the heart, which kept her complaining continually. The baroness, gasping from over-exertion, finally reached the doorstep of the old residence, looked at the court where the water was streaming and remarked: "It really is not wise." Her husband, always pleasant, replied: "It was you who desired it, Madame Adelaide." He always preceded her pompous name of Adelaide with the title madame with an air of half respectful mockery. Madame mounted with difficulty into the carriage, causing all the springs to bend. The baron sat beside her, while Jeanne and Rosalie were seated opposite, with their backs to the horses. Ludivine, the cook, brought a heap of wraps to put over their knees and two baskets, which were placed under the seats; then she climbed on the box beside Father Simon, wrapping herself in a great rug which covered her completely. The porter and his wife came to bid them good-by as they closed the carriage door, taking the last orders about the trunks, which were to follow in a wagon. So they started. Father Simon, the coachman, with head bowed and back bent in the pouring rain, was completely covered by his box coat with its triple cape. The howling storm beat upon the carriage windows and inundated the

highway.

They drove rapidly to the wharf and continued alongside the line of tall-masted vessels until they reached the boulevard of Mont Riboudet. Then they crossed the meadows, where from time to time a drowned willow, its branches drooping limply, could be faintly distinguished through the mist of rain. No one spoke. Their minds themselves seemed to be saturated with moisture like the earth.

The baroness leaned her head against the cushions and closed her eyes. The baron looked out with mournful eyes at the monotonous and drenched landscape. Rosalie, with a parcel on her knee, was dreaming in the dull reverie of a peasant. But Jeanne, under this downpour, felt herself revive like a plant that has been shut up and has just been restored to the air, and so great was her joy that, like foliage, it sheltered her heart from sadness. Although she did not speak, she longed to burst out singing, to reach out her hands to catch the rain that she might drink it. She enjoyed to the full being carried along rapidly by the horses, enjoyed gazing at the desolate landscape and feeling herself under shelter amid this general inundation. Beneath the pelting rain the gleaming backs of the two horses emitted a warm steam.

Little by little the baroness fell asleep, and presently began to snore sonorously. Her husband leaned over and placed in her hands a little leather pocketbook.

This awakened her, and she looked at the pocket-book with the stupid, sleepy look of one suddenly aroused. It fell off her lap and sprang open and gold and bank bills were scattered on the floor of the carriage. This roused her completely, and Jeanne gave vent to her mirth in a merry peal of girlish laughter.

The baron picked up the money and placed it on her knees. "This, my dear," he said, "is all that is left of my farm at Eletot. I have sold it--so as to be able to repair the 'Poplars,' where we shall often live in the future."

She counted six thousand four hundred francs and quietly put them in her pocket. This was the ninth of thirty-one farms that they had inherited which they had sold in

this way. Nevertheless they still possessed about twenty thousand livres income annually in land rentals, which, with proper care, would have yielded about thirty thousand francs a year.

Living simply as they did, this income would have sufficed had there not been a bottomless hole always open in their house--kind-hearted generosity. It dried up the money in their hands as the sun dries the water in marshes. It flowed, fled, disappeared. How? No one knew. Frequently one would say to the other, "I don't know how it happens, but I have spent one hundred francs to-day, and I have bought nothing of any consequence." This faculty of giving was, however, one of the greatest pleasures of their life, and they all agreed on this point in a superb and touching manner.

Jeanne asked her father, "Is it beautiful now, my castle?" The baron replied, "You shall see, my little girl."

The storm began to abate. The vault of clouds seemed to rise and heighten and suddenly, through a rift, a long ray of sunshine fell upon the fields, and presently the clouds separated, showing the blue firmament, and then, like the tearing of a veil, the opening grew larger and the beautiful azure sky, clear and fathomless, spread over the world. A fresh and gentle breeze passed over the earth like a happy sigh, and as they passed beside gardens or woods they heard occasionally the bright chirp of a bird as he dried his wings.

Evening was approaching. Everyone in the carriage was asleep except Jeanne. They stopped to rest and feed the horses. The sun had set. In the distance bells were heard. They passed a little village as the inhabitants were lighting their lamps, and the sky became also illuminated by myriads of stars. Suddenly they saw behind a hill, through the branches of the fir trees, the moon rising, red and full as if it were torpid with sleep.

The air was so soft that the windows were not closed. Jeanne, exhausted with

dreams and happy visions, was now asleep. Finally they stopped. Some men and women were standing before the carriage door with lanterns in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, was the first to jump out. Her father and Rosalie had practically to carry the baroness, who was groaning and continually repeating in a weak little voice, "Oh, my God, my poor children!" She refused all offers of refreshment, but went to bed and immediately fell asleep.

Jeanne and her father, the baron, took supper together. They were in perfect sympathy with each other. Later, seized with a childish joy, they started on a tour of inspection through the restored manor. It was one of those high and vast Norman residences that comprise both farmhouse and castle, built of white stone which had turned gray, large enough to contain a whole race of people.

An immense hall divided the house from front to rear and a staircase went up at either side of the entrance, meeting in a bridge on the first floor. The huge drawing-room was on the ground floor to the right and was hung with tapestries representing birds and foliage. All the furniture was covered with fine needlework tapestry illustrating La Fontaine's fables, and Jeanne was delighted at finding a chair she had loved as a child, which pictured the story of "The Fox and the Stork."

Beside the drawing-room were the library, full of old books, and two unused rooms; at the left was the dining-room, the laundry, the kitchen, etc.

A corridor divided the whole first floor, the doors of ten rooms opening into it. At the end, on the right, was Jeanne's room. She and her father went in. He had had it all newly done over, using the furniture and draperies that had been in the storeroom.

There were some very old Flemish tapestries, with their peculiar looking figures. At sight of her bed, the young girl uttered a scream of joy. Four large birds carved in oak, black from age and highly polished, bore up the bed and seemed to be its protectors. On the sides were carved two wide garlands of flowers and fruit, and four

finely fluted columns, terminating in Corinthian capitals, supported a cornice of cupids with roses intertwined. The tester and the coverlet were of antique blue silk, embroidered in gold fleur de lys. When Jeanne had sufficiently admired it, she lifted up the candle to examine the tapestries and the allegories they represented. They were mostly conventional subjects, but the last hanging represented a drama. Near a rabbit, which was still nibbling, a young man lay stretched out, apparently dead. A young girl, gazing at him, was plunging a sword into her bosom, and the fruit of the tree had turned black. Jeanne gave up trying to divine the meaning underlying this picture, when she saw in the corner a tiny little animal which the rabbit, had he lived, could have swallowed like a blade of grass; and yet it was a lion. Then she recognized the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe," and though she smiled at the simplicity of the design, she felt happy to have in her room this love adventure which would continually speak to her of her cherished hopes, and every night this legendary love would hover about her dreams.

It struck eleven and the baron kissed Jeanne goodnight and retired to his room. Before retiring, Jeanne cast a last glance round her room and then regretfully extinguished the candle. Through her window she could see the bright moonlight bathing the trees and the wonderful landscape. Presently she arose, opened a window and looked out. The night was so clear that one could see as plainly as by daylight. She looked across the park with its two long avenues of very tall poplars that gave its name to the château and separated it from the two farms that belonged to it, one occupied by the Couillard family, the other by the Martins. Beyond the enclosure stretched a long, uncultivated plain, thickly overgrown with rushes, where the breeze whistled day and night. The land ended abruptly in a steep white cliff three hundred feet high, with its base in the ocean waves.

Jeanne looked out over the long, undulating surface that seemed to slumber beneath the heavens. All the fragrance of the earth was in the night air. The odor of jasmine rose from the lower windows, and light whiffs of briny air and of seaweed were

wafted from the ocean.

Merely to breathe was enough for Jeanne, and the restful calm of the country was like a soothing bath. She felt as though her heart was expanding and she began dreaming of love. What was it? She did not know. She only knew that she would adore him with all her soul and that he would cherish her with all his strength. They would walk hand in hand on nights like this, hearing the beating of their hearts, mingling their love with the sweet simplicity of the summer nights in such close communion of thought that by the sole power of their tenderness they would easily penetrate each other's most secret thoughts. This would continue forever in the calm of an enduring affection. It seemed to her that she felt him there beside her. And an unusual sensation came over her. She remained long musing thus, when suddenly she thought she heard a footstep behind the house. "If it were he." But it passed on and she felt as if she had been deceived. The air became cooler. The day broke. Slowly bursting aside the gleaming clouds, touching with fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, all the horizon, the great flaming orb of the sun appeared.

Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness at the splendor of nature overcame her fluttering heart. It was her sun, her dawn! The beginning of her life! Thoroughly fatigued at last, she flung herself down and slept till her father called her at eight o'clock. He walked into the room and proposed to show her the improvements of the castle, of her castle. The road, called the parish road, connecting the farms, joined the high road between Havre and Fécamp, a mile and a half further on.

Jeanne and the baron inspected everything and returned home for breakfast. When the meal was over, as the baroness had decided that she would rest, the baron proposed to Jeanne that they should go down to Yport. They started, and passing through the hamlet of Etouvent, where the poplars were, and going through the wooded slope by a winding valley leading down to the sea, they presently perceived

the village of Yport. Women sat in their doorways mending linen; brown fish-nets were hanging against the doors of the huts, where an entire family lived in one room. It was a typical little French fishing village, with all its concomitant odors. To Jeanne it was all like a scene in a play. On turning a corner they saw before them the limitless blue ocean. They bought a brill from a fisherman and another sailor offered to take them out sailing, repeating his name, "Lastique, Joséphin Lastique," several times, that they might not forget it, and the baron promised to remember. They walked home, chattering like two children, carrying the big fish between them, Jeanne having pushed her father's walking cane through its gills.

CHAPTER II

HAPPY DAYS

A delightful life commenced for Jeanne, a life in the open air. She wandered along the roads, or into the little winding valleys, their sides covered with a fleece of gorse blossoms, the strong sweet odor of which intoxicated her like the bouquet of wine, while the distant sound of the waves rolling on the beach seemed like a billow rocking her spirit.

A love of solitude came upon her in the sweet freshness of this landscape and in the calm of the rounded horizon, and she would remain sitting so long on the hill tops that the wild rabbits would bound by her feet.

She planted memories everywhere, as seeds are cast upon the earth, memories whose roots hold till death. It seemed to Jeanne that she was casting a little of her heart into every fold of these valleys. She became infatuated with sea bathing. When she was well out from shore, she would float on her back, her arms crossed, her eyes lost in the profound blue of the sky which was cleft by the flight of a swallow, or the white silhouette of a seabird.

After these excursions she invariably came back to the castle pale with hunger, but light, alert, a smile on her lips and her eyes sparkling with happiness.

The baron on his part was planning great agricultural enterprises. Occasionally, also, he went out to sea with the sailors of Yport. On several occasions he went fishing for mackerel and, again, by moonlight, he would haul in the nets laid the night before. He loved to hear the masts creak, to breathe in the fresh and whistling gusts of wind that arose during the night; and after having tacked a long time to find the buoys, guiding himself by a peak of rocks, the roof of a belfry or the Fécamp lighthouse, he delighted to remain motionless beneath the first gleams of the rising sun which made the slimy backs of the large fan-shaped rays and the fat bellies of the turbots glisten on the deck of the boat.

At each meal he gave an enthusiastic account of his expeditions, and the baroness in her turn told how many times she had walked down the main avenue of poplars.

As she had been advised to take exercise she made a business of walking, beginning as soon as the air grew warm. Leaning upon Rosalie's arm and dragging her left foot, which was rather heavier than the right, she wandered interminably up and down from the house to the edge of the wood, sitting down for five minutes at either end. The walking was resumed in the afternoon. A physician, consulted ten years before, had spoken of hypertrophy because she had suffered from suffocation. Ever since, this word had been used to describe the ailment of the baroness. The baron would say "my wife's hypertrophy" and Jeanne "mamma's hypertrophy" as they would have spoken of her hat, her dress, or her umbrella. She had been very pretty in her youth and slim as a reed. Now she had grown older, stouter, but she still remained poetical, having always retained the impression of "Corinne," which she had read as a girl. She read all the sentimental love stories it was possible to collect, and her thoughts wandered among tender adventures in which she always figured as the heroine. Her new home was infinitely pleasing to her because it formed such a beautiful framework for the romance of her soul, the surrounding woods, the waste land, and the proximity of the ocean recalling to her mind the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which she had been devouring for some months. On rainy days she remained shut up

in her room, sending Rosalie in a special manner for the drawer containing her "souvenirs," which meant to the baroness all her old private and family letters.

Occasionally, Jeanne replaced Rosalie in the walks with her mother, and she listened eagerly to the tales of the latter's childhood. The young girl saw herself in all these romantic stories, and was astonished at the similarity of ideas and desires; each heart imagines itself to have been the first to tremble at those very sensations that awakened the hearts of the first beings, and that will awaken the hearts of the last.

One afternoon as the baroness and Jeanne were resting on the beach at the end of the walk, a stout priest who was moving in their direction greeted them with a bow, while still at a distance. He bowed when within three feet and, assuming a smiling air, cried: "Well, Madame la Baronne, how are you?" It was the village priest. The baroness seldom went to church, though she liked priests, from a sort of religious instinct peculiar to women. She had, in fact, entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her priest, and blushed as she saw him. She made apologies for not having prepared for his visit, but the good man was not at all embarrassed. He looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her appearance and sat down, placing his three-cornered hat on his knees. He was very stout, very red, and perspired profusely. He drew from his pocket every moment an enormous checked handkerchief and passed it over his face and neck, but hardly was the task completed when necessity forced him to repeat the process. He was a typical country priest, talkative and kindly.

Presently the baron appeared. He was very friendly to the abbé and invited him to dinner. The priest was well versed in the art of being pleasant, thanks to the unconscious astuteness which the guiding of souls gives to the most mediocre of men who are called by the chance of events to exercise a power over their fellows. Toward dessert he became quite merry, with the gaiety that follows a pleasant meal, and as if struck by an idea he said: "I have a new parishioner whom I must present to you, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare." The baroness, who was at home in heraldry,

inquired if he was of the family of Lamares of Eure. The priest answered, "Yes, madame, he is the son of Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year." After this, the baroness, who loved the nobility above all other things, inquired the history of the young vicomte. He had paid his father's debts, sold the family castle, made his home on one of the three farms which he owned in the town of Etouvent. These estates brought him in an income of five or six thousand livres. The vicomte was economical and lived in this modest manner for two or three years, so that he might save enough to cut a figure in society, and to marry advantageously, without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms. The priest added, "He is a very charming young man, so steady and quiet, though there is very little to amuse him in the country." The baron said, "Bring him in to see us, Monsieur l'Abbé, it will be a distraction for him occasionally." After the coffee the baron and the priest took a turn about the grounds and then returned to say good-night to the ladies.

CHAPTER III

M. DE LAMARE

The following Sunday the baroness and Jeanne went to mass, prompted by a feeling of respect for their pastor, and after service waited to see the priest and invite him to luncheon the following Thursday. He came out of the sacristy leaning familiarly on the arm of a tall young man. As soon as he perceived the ladies, he exclaimed:

"How fortunate! Allow me, baroness and Mlle. Jeanne, to present to you your neighbor, M. le Vicomte de Lamare."

The vicomte said he had long desired to make their acquaintance, and began to converse in a well-bred manner. He had a face of which women dream and that men dislike. His black, wavy hair shaded a smooth, sunburnt forehead, and two large straight eyebrows, that looked almost artificial, cast a deep and tender shadow over his dark eyes, the whites of which had a bluish tinge.

His long, thick eyelashes accentuated the passionate eloquence of his expression

which wrought havoc in the drawing-rooms of society, and made peasant girls carrying baskets turn round to look at him. The languorous fascination of his glance impressed one with the depth of his thoughts and lent weight to his slightest words. His beard, fine and glossy, concealed a somewhat heavy jaw.

Two days later, M. de Lamare made his first call, just as they were discussing the best place for a new rustic bench. The vicomte was consulted and agreed with the baroness, who differed from her husband.

M. de Lamare expatiated on the picturesqueness of the country and from time to time, as if by chance, his eyes met those of Jeanne, and she felt a strange sensation at the quickly averted glance which betrayed tender admiration and an awakened sympathy.

M. de Lamare's father, who had died the preceding year, had known an intimate friend of the baroness's father, M. Cultaux, and this fact led to an endless conversation about family, relations, dates, etc., and names heard in her childhood were recalled, and led to reminiscences.

The baron, whose nature was rather uncultivated, and whose beliefs and prejudices were not those of his class, knew little about the neighboring families, and inquired about them from the vicomte, who responded:

"Oh, there are very few of the nobility in the district," just as he might have said, "there are very few rabbits on the hills," and he began to particularize: There was the Marquis de Coutelier, a sort of leader of Norman aristocracy, Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, people of excellent stock, but living to themselves, and the Comte de Fourville, a kind of ogre, who was said to have made his wife die of sorrow, and who lived as a huntsman in his château of La Vrillette, built on a pond. There were a few parvenus among them who had bought properties here and there, but the vicomte did not know them.

As he left, his last glance was for Jeanne, as if it were a special tender and cordial

farewell. The baroness was delighted with him, and the baron said: "Yes, indeed, he is a gentleman." And he was invited to dinner the following week, and from that time came regularly.

He generally arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon, went to join the baroness in "her avenue," and offered her his arm while she took her "exercise," as she called her daily walks. When Jeanne was at home she would walk on the other side of her mother, supporting her, and all three would walk slowly back and forth from one end of the avenue to the other. He seldom addressed Jeanne directly, but his eye frequently met hers.

He went to Yport several times with Jeanne and the baron. One evening, when they were on the beach, Père Lastique accosted him, and without removing his pipe, the absence of which would possibly have been more remarkable than the loss of his nose, he said:

"With this wind, m'sieu le baron, we could easily go to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands imploringly:

"Oh, papa, let us do it!"

The baron turned to M. de Lamare:

"Will you join us, vicomte? We can take breakfast down there."

And the matter was decided at once. From daybreak Jeanne was up and waiting for her father, who dressed more slowly. They walked in the dew across the level and then through the wood vibrant with the singing of birds. The vicomte and Père Lastique were seated on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped to shove off the boat from shore, which was not easy on the shingly beach. Once the boat was afloat, they all took their seats, and the two sailors who remained on shore shoved it off. A light, steady breeze was blowing from the ocean and they hoisted the sail, veered a little, and then sailed along

smoothly with scarcely any motion. To landward the high cliff at the right cast a shadow on the water at its base, and patches of sunlit grass here and there varied its monotonous whiteness. Yonder, behind them, brown sails were coming out of the white harbor of Fécamp, and ahead of them they saw a rock of curious shape, rounded, with gaps in it looking something like an immense elephant with its trunk in the water; it was the little port of Étretat.

Jeanne, a little dizzy from the motion of the waves, held the side of the boat with one hand as she looked out into the distance. It seemed to her as if only three things in the world were really beautiful: light, space, water.

No one spoke. Père Lastique, who was at the tiller, took a pull every now and then from a bottle hidden under the seat; and he smoked a short pipe which seemed inextinguishable, although he never seemed to relight it or refill it.

The baron, seated in the bow looked after the sail. Jeanne and the vicomte seemed a little embarrassed at being seated side by side. Some unknown power seemed to make their glances meet whenever they raised their eyes; between them there existed already that subtle and vague sympathy which arises so rapidly between two young people when the young man is good looking and the girl is pretty. They were happy in each other's society, perhaps because they were thinking of each other. The rising sun was beginning to pierce through the slight mist, and as its beams grew stronger, they were reflected on the smooth surface of the sea as in a mirror.

"How beautiful!" murmured Jeanne, with emotion.

"Beautiful indeed!" answered the vicomte. The serene beauty of the morning awakened an echo in their hearts.

And all at once they saw the great arches of Étretat, like two supports of a cliff standing in the sea high enough for vessels to pass under them; while a sharp-pointed white rock rose in front of the first arch. They reached shore, and the baron got out first to make fast the boat, while the vicomte lifted Jeanne ashore so

that she should not wet her feet. Then they walked up the shingly beach side by side, and they overheard Père Lastique say to the baron, "My! but they would make a pretty couple!"

They took breakfast in a little inn near the beach, and while the ocean had lulled their thoughts and made them silent, the breakfast table had the opposite effect, and they chattered like children on a vacation. The slightest thing gave rise to laughter.

Père Lastique, on taking his place at table, carefully hid his lighted pipe in his cap. That made them laugh. A fly, attracted no doubt by his red nose, persistently alighted on it, and each time it did so they burst into laughter. Finally the old man could stand it no longer, and murmured: "It is devilishly persistent!" whereupon Jeanne and the vicomte laughed till they cried.

After breakfast Jeanne suggested that they should take a walk. The vicomte rose, but the baron preferred to bask in the sun on the beach.

"Go on, my children, you will find me here in an hour."

They walked straight ahead of them, passing by several cottages and finally by a small château resembling a large farm, and found themselves in an open valley that extended for some distance. They now had a wild longing to run at large in the fields. Jeanne seemed to have a humming in her ears from all the new and rapidly changing sensations she had experienced. The burning rays of the sun fell on them. On both sides of the road the crops were bending over from the heat. The grasshoppers, as numerous as the blades of grass, were uttering their thin, shrill cry.

Perceiving a wood a little further on to the right, they walked over to it. They saw a narrow path between two hedges shaded by tall trees which shut out the sun. A sort of moist freshness in the air was perceptible, giving them a sensation of chilliness. There was no grass, owing to the lack of sunlight, but the ground was covered with a carpet of moss.

"See, we can sit down there a little while," she said.

They sat down and looked about them at the numerous forms of life that were in the air and on the ground at their feet, for a ray of sunlight penetrating the dense foliage brought them into its light.

"How beautiful it is here! How lovely it is in the country! There are moments when I should like to be a fly or a butterfly and hide in the flowers," said Jeanne with emotion.

They spoke in low tones as one does in exchanging confidences, telling of their daily lives and of their tastes, and declaring that they were already disgusted with the world, tired of its useless monotony; it was always the same thing; there was no truth, no sincerity in it.

The world! She would gladly have made its acquaintance; but she felt convinced beforehand that it was not equal to a country life, and the more their hearts seemed to be in sympathy, the more ceremonious they became, the more frequently their glances met and blended smiling; and it seemed that a new feeling of benevolence was awakened in them, a wider affection, an interest in a thousand things of which they had never hitherto thought.

They wended their way back, but the baron had already set off on foot for the Chambre aux Demoiselles, a grotto in a cleft at the summit of one of the cliffs, and they waited for him at the inn. He did not return until five in the evening after a long walk along the cliffs.

They got into the boat, started off smoothly with the wind at their backs, scarcely seeming to make any headway. The breeze was irregular, at one moment filling the sail and then letting it flap idly along the mast. The sea seemed opaque and lifeless, and the sun was slowly approaching the horizon. The lulling motion of the sea had made them silent again. Presently Jeanne said, "How I should love to travel!"

"Yes, but it is tiresome to travel alone; there should be at least two, to exchange ideas," answered the vicomte. She reflected a moment.

"That is true--I like to walk alone, however--how pleasant it is to dream all alone----"

He gazed at her intently.

"Two can dream as well as one."

She lowered her eyes. Was it a hint? Possibly. She looked out at the horizon as if to discover something beyond it, and then said slowly:

"I should like to go to Italy--and Greece--ah, yes, Greece--and to Corsica--it must be so wild and so beautiful!"

He preferred Switzerland on account of its chalets and its lakes.

"No," said she, "I like new countries like Corsica, or very old countries full of souvenirs, like Greece. It must be delightful to find the traces of those peoples whose history we have known since childhood, to see places where great deeds were accomplished."

The vicomte, less enthusiastic, exclaimed: "As for me, England attracts me very much; there is so much to be learned there."

Then they talked about the world in general, discussing the attractions of each country from the poles to the equator, enthusing over imaginary scenes and the peculiar manners of certain peoples like the Chinese and the Lapps; but they arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, cool in summer, mild in winter, its rich soil, its green forests, its worship of the fine arts which existed nowhere else since the glorious centuries of Athens. Then they were silent. The setting sun left a wide dazzling train of light which extended from the horizon to the edge of their boat. The wind subsided, the ripples disappeared, and the motionless sail was red in the light of the dying day. A limitless calm seemed to settle down on space and make a silence amid this conjunction of elements; and by degrees the sun slowly sank into the ocean.

Then a fresh breeze seemed to arise, a little shiver went over the surface of the water, as if the engulfed orb cast a sigh of satisfaction across the world. The twilight was short, night fell with its myriad stars. Père Lastique took the oars, and they saw that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne and the vicomte, side by side, watched the fitful gleams in the wake of the boat. They were hardly thinking, but simply gazing vaguely, breathing in the beauty of the evening in a state of delicious contentment; Jeanne had one hand on the seat and her neighbor's finger touched it as if by accident; she did not move; she was surprised, happy, though embarrassed at this slight contact.

When she reached home that evening and went to her room, she felt strangely disturbed, and so affected that the slightest thing impelled her to weep. She looked at her clock, imagining that the little bee on the pendulum was beating like a heart, the heart of a friend; that it was aware of her whole life, that with its quick, regular tickings it would accompany her whole life; and she stopped the golden fly to press a kiss on its wings. She would have kissed anything, no matter what. She remembered having hidden one of her old dolls of former days at the bottom of a drawer; she looked for it, took it out, and was delighted to see it again, as people are to see loved friends; and pressing it to her heart, she covered its painted cheeks and curly wig with kisses. And as she held it in her arms, she thought:

Can he be the husband promised through a thousand secret voices, whom a superlatively good Providence had thus thrown across her path? Was he, indeed, the being created for her--the being to whom she would devote her existence? Were they the two predestined beings whose affection, blending in one, would beget love?

She did not as yet feel that tumultuous emotion, that mad enchantment, those deep stirrings which she thought were essential to the tender passion; but it seemed to her she was beginning to fall in love, for she sometimes felt a sudden faintness when she thought of him, and she thought of him incessantly. His presence stirred her heart;

she blushed and grew pale when their eyes met, and trembled at the sound of his voice.

From day to day the longing for love increased. She consulted the marguerites, the clouds, and coins which she tossed in the air.

One day her father said to her:

"Make yourself look pretty to-morrow morning."

"Why, papa?"

"That is a secret," he replied.

And when she came downstairs the following morning, looking fresh and sweet in a pretty light dress, she found the drawing-room table covered with boxes of bonbons, and on a chair an immense bouquet.

A covered wagon drove into the courtyard bearing the inscription, "Lerat, Confectioner, Fécamp; Wedding Breakfasts," and from the back of the wagon Ludivine and a kitchen helper were taking out large flat baskets which emitted an appetizing odor.

The Vicomte de Lamare appeared on the scene, his trousers were strapped down under his dainty boots of patent leather, which made his feet appear smaller. His long frock coat, tight at the waist line, was open at the bosom showing the lace of his ruffle, and a fine neckcloth wound several times round his neck obliged him to hold erect his handsome brown head, with its air of serious distinction. Jeanne, in astonishment, looked at him as though she had never seen him before. She thought he looked the grand seigneur from his head to his feet.

He bowed and said, smiling:

"Well, comrade, are you ready?"

"But what is it? What is going on?" she stammered.

"You will know presently," said the baron.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Madame Adelaide, in festal array, descended the staircase, leaning on the arm of Rosalie, who was so much affected at the sight of M. de Lamare's elegant appearance that the baron whispered:

"I say, vicomte, I think our maid admires you."

The vicomte blushed up to his ears, pretended not to have heard and, taking up the enormous bouquet, handed it to Jeanne. She accepted it, more astonished than ever. They all four got into the carriage, and Ludivine, who brought a cup of bouillon to the baroness to sustain her strength, said: "Truly, madame, one would say it was a wedding!"

They alighted as soon as they entered Yport, and as they walked through the village the sailors, in their new clothes, still showing the creases, came out of their homes, and shaking hands with the baron, followed the party as if it were a procession. The vicomte, who had offered his arm to Jeanne, walked with her at the head.

When they reached the church they stopped, and an acolyte appeared holding upright the large silver crucifix, followed by another boy in red and white, who bore a chalice containing holy water.

Then came three old cantors, one of them limping; then the trumpet ("serpent"), and last, the curé with his gold embroidered stole. He smiled and nodded a greeting; then, with his eyes half closed, his lips moving in prayer, his beretta well over his forehead, he followed his surpliced bodyguard, walking in the direction of the sea.

On the beach a crowd was standing around a new boat wreathed with flowers. Its mast, sail and ropes were covered with long streamers of ribbon that floated in the breeze, and the name, "Jeanne," was painted in gold letters on the stern.

Père Lastique, the proprietor of this boat, built with the baron's money, advanced to meet the procession. All the men, simultaneously, took off their hats, and a row of pious persons wearing long black cloaks falling in large folds from their shoulders, knelt down in a circle at sight of the crucifix.

The curé walked, with an acolyte on either side of him, to one end of the boat, while at the other end, the three old cantors, in their white surplices, with a serious air and their eyes fixed on the psalter, sang at the top of their voices in the clear morning air. Each time they stopped to take breath, the "serpent" continued its bellowing alone, and as he puffed out his cheeks the musician's little gray eyes disappeared, and the skin of his forehead and neck seemed to distend.

The motionless, transparent sea seemed to be taking part meditatively in the baptism of this boat, rolling its tiny waves, no higher than a finger, with the faint sound of a rake on the shingle. And the big white gulls, with their wings unfurled, circled about in the blue heavens, flying off and then coming back in a curve above the heads of the kneeling crowd, as if to see what they were doing.

The singing ceased after an Amen that lasted five minutes; and the priest, in an unctuous voice, murmured some Latin words, of which one could hear only the sonorous endings. He then walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, and next began to murmur the "Oremus," standing alongside the boat opposite the sponsors, who remained motionless, hand in hand.

The vicomte had the usual grave expression on his handsome face, but Jeanne, choking with a sudden emotion, and on the verge of fainting, began to tremble so violently that her teeth chattered. The dream that had haunted her for some time was suddenly beginning, as if in a kind of hallucination, to take the appearance of reality. They had spoken of a wedding, a priest was present, blessing them; men in surplices were singing psalms; was it not she whom they were giving in marriage?

Did her fingers send out an electric shock, did the emotion of her heart follow the course of her veins until it reached the heart of her companion? Did he understand, did he guess, was he, like herself, pervaded by a sort of intoxication of love? Or else, did he know by experience, alone, that no woman could resist him? She suddenly noticed that he was squeezing her hand, gently at first, and then tighter, tighter, till

he almost crushed it. And without moving a muscle of his face, without anyone perceiving it, he said--yes, he certainly said:

"Oh, Jeanne, if you would consent, this would be our betrothal."

She lowered her head very slowly, perhaps meaning it for "yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling the holy water, sprinkled some on their fingers.

The ceremony was over. The women rose. The return was unceremonious. The crucifix had lost its dignity in the hands of the acolyte, who walked rapidly, the crucifix swaying to right and left, or bending forward as though it would fall. The priest, who was not praying now, walked hurriedly behind them; the cantors and the musician with the "serpent" had disappeared by a narrow street, so as to get off their surplices without delay; and the sailors hurried along in groups. One thought prompted their haste, and made their mouths water.

A good breakfast was awaiting them at "The Poplars."

The large table was set in the courtyard, under the apple trees.

Sixty people sat down to table, sailors and peasants. The baroness in the middle, with a priest at either side of her, one from Yport, and the other belonging to "The Poplars." The baron seated opposite her on the other side of the table, the mayor on one side of him, and his wife, a thin peasant woman, already aging, who kept smiling and bowing to all around her, on the other.

Jeanne, seated beside her co-sponsor, was in a sea of happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and remained silent, her mind bewildered with joy. Presently she said:

"What is your Christian name?"

"Julien," he replied. "Did you not know?"

But she made no reply, thinking to herself:

"How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the feast was over, the courtyard was given up to the sailors, and the others went over to the other side of the château. The baroness began to take her exercise, leaning on the arm of the baron and accompanied by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went toward the wood and walked along one of the mossy paths. Suddenly seizing her hands, the vicomte said:

"Tell me, will you be my wife?"

She lowered her head, and as he stammered: "Answer me, I implore you!" she raised her eyes to his timidly, and he read his answer there.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE AND DISILLUSION

The baron, one morning, entered Jeanne's room before she was up, and sitting down at the foot of her bed, said:

"M. le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand in marriage."

She wanted to hide her face under the sheets.

Her father continued:

"We have postponed our answer for the present."

She gasped, choking with emotion. At the end of a minute the baron, smiling, added:

"We did not wish to do anything without consulting you. Your mother and I are not opposed to this marriage, but we would not seek to influence you. You are much richer than he is; but, when it is a question of the happiness of a life, one should not think too much about money. He has no relations left. If you marry him, then, it would be as if a son should come into our family; if it were anyone else, it would be you, our daughter, who would go among strangers. The young fellow pleases us. Would he please you?"

She stammered, blushing up to the roots of her hair:

"I am willing, papa."

And the father, looking into her eyes and still smiling, murmured:

"I half suspected it, young lady."

She lived till evening in a condition of exhilaration, not knowing what she was doing, mechanically thinking of one thing by mistake for another, and with a feeling of weariness, although she had not walked at all.

Toward six o'clock, as she was sitting with her mother under the plane tree, the vicomte appeared.

Jeanne's heart began to throb wildly. The young man approached them apparently without any emotion. When he was close beside them, he took the baroness' hand and kissed her fingers, then raising to his lips the trembling hand of the young girl, he imprinted upon it a long, tender and grateful kiss.

And the radiant season of betrothal commenced. They would chat together alone in the corner of the parlor, or else seated on the moss at the end of the wood overlooking the plain. Sometimes they walked in Little Mother's Avenue; he, talking of the future, she, with her eyes cast down, looking at the dusty footprints of the baroness.

Once the matter was decided, they desired to waste no time in preliminaries. It was, therefore, decided that the ceremony should take place in six weeks, on the fifteenth of August; and that the bride and groom should set out immediately on their wedding journey. Jeanne, on being consulted as to which country she would like to visit, decided on Corsica where they could be more alone than in the cities of Italy.

They awaited the moment appointed for their marriage without too great impatience, but enfolded, lost in a delicious affection, expressed in the exquisite charm of insignificant caresses, pressure of hands, long passionate glances in which their souls seemed to blend; and, vaguely tortured by an uncertain longing for they knew not what.

They decided to invite no one to the wedding except Aunt Lison, the baron's sister,

who boarded in a convent at Versailles. After the death of their father, the baroness wished to keep her sister with her. But the old maid, possessed by the idea that she was in every one's way, was useless, and a nuisance, retired into one of those religious houses that rent apartments to people that live a sad and lonely existence. She came from time to time to pass a month or two with her family.

She was a little woman of few words, who always kept in the background, appeared only at mealtimes, and then retired to her room where she remained shut in.

She looked like a kind old lady, though she was only forty-two, and had a sad, gentle expression. She was never made much of by her family as a child, being neither pretty nor boisterous, she was never petted, and she would stay quietly and gently in a corner. She had been neglected ever since. As a young girl nobody paid any attention to her. She was something like a shadow, or a familiar object, a living piece of furniture that one is accustomed to see every day, but about which one does not trouble oneself.

Her sister, from long habit, looked upon her as a failure, an altogether insignificant being. They treated her with careless familiarity which concealed a sort of contemptuous kindness. She called herself Lise, and seemed embarrassed at this frivolous youthful name. When they saw that she probably would not marry, they changed it from Lise to Lison, and since Jeanne's birth, she had become "Aunt Lison," a poor relation, very neat, frightfully timid, even with her sister and her brother-in-law, who loved her, but with an uncertain affection verging on indifference, with an unconscious compassion and a natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the baroness talked of far away things that happened in her youth, she would say, in order to fix a date: "It was the time that Lison had that attack."

They never said more than that; and this "attack" remained shrouded, as in a mist.

One evening, Lise, who was then twenty, had thrown herself into the water, no one knew why. Nothing in her life, her manner, gave any intimation of this seizure. They

fished her out half dead, and her parents, raising their hands in horror, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of this action, had contented themselves with calling it "that attack," as if they were talking of the accident that happened to the horse "Coco," who had broken his leg a short time before in a ditch, and whom they had been obliged to kill.

From that time Lise, presently Lison, was considered feeble-minded. The gentle contempt which she inspired in her relations gradually made its way into the minds of all those who surrounded her. Little Jeanne herself, with the natural instinct of children, took no notice of her, never went up to kiss her good-night, never went into her room. Good Rosalie, alone, who gave the room all the necessary attention, seemed to know where it was situated.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for breakfast, the little one would go up to her from habit and hold up her forehead to be kissed; that was all.

If anyone wished to speak to her, they sent a servant to call her, and if she was not there, they did not bother about her, never thought of her, never thought of troubling themselves so much as to say: "Why, I have not seen Aunt Lison this morning!"

When they said "Aunt Lison," these two words awakened no feeling of affection in anyone's mind. It was as if one had said: "The coffee pot, or the sugar bowl."

She always walked with little, quick, silent steps, never made a noise, never knocking up against anything; and seemed to communicate to surrounding objects the faculty of not making any sound. Her hands seemed to be made of a kind of wadding, she handled everything so lightly and delicately.

She arrived about the middle of July, all upset at the idea of this marriage. She brought a quantity of presents which, as they came from her, remained almost unnoticed. On the following day they had forgotten she was there at all.

But an unusual emotion was seething in her mind, and she never took her eyes off the engaged couple. She interested herself in Jeanne's trousseau with a singular

eagerness, a feverish activity, working like a simple seamstress in her room, where no one came to visit her.

She was continually presenting the baroness with handkerchiefs she had hemmed herself, towels on which she had embroidered a monogram, saying as she did so: "Is that all right, Adelaide?" And little mother, as she carelessly examined the objects, would reply: "Do not give yourself so much trouble, my poor Lison."

One evening, toward the end of the month, after an oppressively warm day, the moon rose on one of those clear, mild nights which seem to move, stir and affect one, apparently awakening all the secret poetry of one's soul. The gentle breath of the fields was wafted into the quiet drawing-room. The baroness and her husband were playing cards by the light of a lamp, and Aunt Lison was sitting beside them knitting; while the young people, leaning on the window sill, were gazing out at the moonlit garden.

The linden and the plane tree cast their shadows on the lawn which extended beyond it in the moonlight, as far as the dark wood. Attracted by the tender charm of the night, and by this misty illumination that lighted up the trees and the bushes, Jeanne turned toward her parents and said: "Little father, we are going to take a short stroll on the grass in front of the house."

The baron replied, without looking up: "Go, my children," and continued his game.

They went out and began to walk slowly along the moonlit lawn as far as the little wood at the end. The hour grew late and they did not think of going in. The baroness grew tired, and wishing to retire, she said:

"We must call the lovers in."

The baron cast a glance across the spacious garden where the two forms were wandering slowly.

"Let them alone," he said; "it is so delicious outside! Lison will wait for them, will you not, Lison?"

The old maid raised her troubled eyes and replied in her timid voice:

"Certainly, I will wait for them."

Little father gave his hand to the baroness, weary himself from the heat of the day.

"I am going to bed, too," he said, and went up with his wife.

Then Aunt Lison rose in her turn, and leaving on the arm of the chair her canvas with the wool and the knitting needles, she went over and leaned on the window sill and gazed out at the night.

The two lovers kept on walking back and forth between the house and the wood. They squeezed each other's fingers without speaking, as though they had left their bodies and formed part of this visible poetry that exhaled from the earth.

All at once Jeanne perceived, framed in the window, the silhouette of the aunt, outlined by the light of the lamp behind her.

"See," she said, "there is Aunt Lison looking at us."

The vicomte raised his head, and said in an indifferent tone without thinking:

"Yes, Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they continued to dream, to walk slowly, and to love each other. But the dew was falling fast, and the dampness made them shiver a little.

"Let us go in now," said Jeanne. And they went into the house.

When they entered the drawing-room, Aunt Lison had gone back to her work. Her head was bent over her work, and her fingers were trembling as if she were very tired.

"It is time to go to bed, aunt," said Jeanne, approaching her.

Her aunt turned her head, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. The young people did not notice it; but suddenly M. de Lamare perceived that Jeanne's thin shoes were covered with dew. He was worried, and asked tenderly:

"Are not your dear little feet cold?"

All at once the old lady's hands shook so violently that she let fall her knitting, and hiding her face in her hands, she began to sob convulsively.

The engaged couple looked at her in amazement, without moving. Suddenly Jeanne fell on her knees, and taking her aunt's hands away from her face, said in perplexity:

"Why, what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, her voice full of tears, and her whole body shaking with sorrow, replied:

"It was when he asked you--are not your--your--dear little feet cold?--no one ever said such things to me--to me--never--never----"

Jeanne, surprised and compassionate, could still hardly help laughing at the idea of an admirer showing tender solicitude for Lison; and the vicomte had turned away to conceal his mirth.

But the aunt suddenly rose, laying her ball of wool on the floor and her knitting in the chair, and fled to her room, feeling her way up the dark staircase.

Left alone, the young people looked at one another, amused and saddened. Jeanne murmured:

"Poor aunt!" Julien replied. "She must be a little crazy this evening."

They held each other's hands and presently, gently, very gently, they exchanged their first kiss, and by the following day had forgotten all about Aunt Lison's tears.

The two weeks preceding the wedding found Jeanne very calm, as though she were weary of tender emotions. She had no time for reflection on the morning of the eventful day. She was only conscious of a feeling as if her flesh, her bones and her blood had all melted beneath her skin, and on taking hold of anything, she noticed that her fingers trembled.

She did not regain her self-possession until she was in the chancel of the church

during the marriage ceremony.

Married! So she was married! All that had occurred since daybreak seemed to her a dream, a waking dream. There are such moments, when all appears changed around us; even our motions seem to have a new meaning; even the hours of the day, which seem to be out of their usual time. She felt bewildered, above all else, bewildered. Last evening nothing had as yet been changed in her life; the constant hope of her life seemed only nearer, almost within reach. She had gone to rest a young girl; she was now a married woman. She had crossed that boundary that seems to conceal the future with all its joys, its dreams of happiness. She felt as though a door had opened in front of her; she was about to enter into the fulfillment of her expectations.

When they appeared on the threshold of the church after the ceremony, a terrific noise caused the bride to start in terror, and the baroness to scream; it was a rifle salute given by the peasants, and the firing did not cease until they reached "The Poplars."

After a collation served for the family, the family chaplain, and the priest from Yport, the mayor and the witnesses, who were some of the large farmers of the district, they all walked in the garden. On the other side of the château one could hear the boisterous mirth of the peasants, who were drinking cider beneath the apple trees. The whole countryside, dressed in their best, filled the courtyard.

Jeanne and Julien walked through the copse and then up the slope and, without speaking, gazed out at the sea. The air was cool, although it was the middle of August; the wind was from the north, and the sun blazed down unpityingly from the blue sky. The young people sought a more sheltered spot, and crossing the plain, they turned to the right, toward the rolling and wooded valley that leads to Yport. As soon as they reached the trees the air was still, and they left the road and took a narrow path beneath the trees, where they could scarcely walk abreast.

Jeanne felt an arm passed gently round her waist. She said nothing, her breath came

quick, her heart beat fast. Some low branches caressed their hair, as they bent to pass under them. She picked a leaf; two ladybirds were concealed beneath it, like two delicate red shells.

"Look, a little family," she said innocently, and feeling a little more confidence.

Julien placed his mouth to her ear, and whispered: "This evening you will be my wife."

Although she had learned many things during her sojourn in the country, she dreamed of nothing as yet but the poetry of love, and was surprised. His wife? Was she not that already?

Then he began to kiss her temples and neck, little light kisses. Startled each time afresh by these masculine kisses to which she was not accustomed, she instinctively turned away her head to avoid them, though they delighted her. But they had come to the edge of the wood. She stopped, embarrassed at being so far from home. What would they think?

"Let us go home," she said.

He withdrew his arm from her waist, and as they turned round they stood face to face, so close that they could feel each other's breath on their faces. They gazed deep into one another's eyes with that gaze in which two souls seem to blend. They sought the impenetrable unknown of each other's being. They sought to fathom one another, mutely and persistently. What would they be to one another? What would this life be that they were about to begin together? What joys, what happiness, or what disillusions were they preparing in this long, indissoluble tête-à-tête of marriage? And it seemed to them as if they had never yet seen each other.

Suddenly, Julien, placing his two hands on his wife's shoulders, kissed her full on the lips as she had never before been kissed. The kiss, penetrating as it did her very blood and marrow, gave her such a mysterious shock that she pushed Julien wildly away with her two arms, almost falling backward as she did so.

"Let us go away, let us go away," she faltered.

He did not reply, but took both her hands and held them in his. They walked home in silence, and the rest of the afternoon seemed long. The dinner was simple and did not last long, contrary to the usual Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment seemed to paralyze the guests. The two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers invited, alone betrayed a little of that broad mirth that is supposed to accompany weddings.

They had apparently forgotten how to laugh, when a remark of the mayor's woke them up. It was about nine o'clock; coffee was about to be served. Outside, under the apple-trees of the first court, the bal champêtre was beginning, and through the open window one could see all that was going on. Lanterns, hung from the branches, gave the leaves a grayish green tint. Rustics and their partners danced in a circle shouting a wild dance tune to the feeble accompaniment of two violins and a clarinet, the players seated on a large table as a platform. The boisterous singing of the peasants at times completely drowned the instruments, and the feeble strains torn to tatters by the unrestrained voices seemed to fall from the air in shreds, in little fragments of scattered notes.

Two large barrels surrounded by flaming torches were tapped, and two servant maids were kept busy rinsing glasses and bowls in order to refill them at the tap whence flowed the red wine, or at the tap of the cider barrel. On the table were bread, sausages and cheese. Every one swallowed a mouthful from time to time, and beneath the roof of illuminated foliage this wholesome and boisterous fête made the melancholy watchers in the dining-room long to dance also, and to drink from one of those large barrels, while they munched a slice of bread and butter and a raw onion.

The mayor, who was beating time with his knife, cried: "By Jove, that is all right; it is like the wedding of Ganache."

A suppressed giggle was heard, but Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority,

cried: "You mean of Cana." The other did not accept the correction. "No, monsieur le curé, I know what I am talking about; when I say Ganache, I mean Ganache."

They rose from table and went into the drawing-room, and then outside to mix with the merrymakers. The guests soon left.

They went into the house. They were surprised to see Madame Adelaide sobbing on Julien's shoulder. Her tears, noisy tears, as if blown out by a pair of bellows, seemed to come from her nose, her mouth and her eyes at the same time; and the young man, dumfounded, awkward, was supporting the heavy woman who had sunk into his arms to commend to his care her darling, her little one, her adored daughter.

The baron rushed toward them, saying: "Oh, no scenes, no tears, I beg of you," and, taking his wife to a chair, he made her sit down, while she wiped away her tears. Then, turning to Jeanne: "Come, little one, kiss your mother and go to bed."

What happened then? She could hardly have told, for she seemed to have lost her head, but she felt a shower of little grateful kisses on her lips.

Day dawned. Julien awoke, yawned, stretched, looked at his wife, smiled and asked: "Did you sleep well, darling?"

She noticed that he now said "thou," and she replied, bewildered, "Why, yes. And you?" "Oh, very well," he answered. And turning toward her, he kissed her and then began to chat quietly. He set before her plans of living, with the idea of economy, and this word occurring several times, astonished Jeanne. She listened without grasping the meaning of his words, looked at him, but was thinking of a thousand things that passed rapidly through her mind hardly leaving a trace.

The clock struck eight. "Come, we must get up," he said. "It would look ridiculous for us to be late." When he was dressed he assisted his wife with all the little details of her toilet, not allowing her to call Rosalie. As they left the room he stopped. "You know, when we are alone, we can now use 'thou,' but before your parents it is better to wait a while. It will be quite natural when we come back from our wedding

journey."

She did not go down till luncheon was ready. The day passed like any ordinary day, as if nothing new had occurred. There was one man more in the house, that was all.

CHAPTER V

CORSICA AND A NEW LIFE

Four days later the travelling carriage arrived that was to take them to Marseilles.

After the first night Jeanne had become accustomed to Julien's kisses and caresses, although her repugnance to a closer intimacy had not diminished. She thought him handsome, she loved him. She again felt happy and cheerful.

The farewells were short and without sadness. The baroness alone seemed tearful. As the carriage was just starting she placed a purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand, saying, "That is for your little expenses as a bride."

Jeanne thrust the purse in her pocket and the carriage started.

Toward evening Julien said: "How much money did your mother give you in that purse?"

She had not given it a thought, and she poured out the contents on her knees. A golden shower filled her lap: two thousand francs. She clapped her hands. "I shall commit all kinds of extravagance," she said as she replaced it in the purse.

After travelling eight days in terribly hot weather they reached Marseilles. The following day the Roi-Louis, a little mail steamer which went to Naples by way of Ajaccio, took them to Corsica.

Corsica! Its "maquis," its bandits, its mountains! The birthplace of Napoleon! It seemed to Jeanne that she was leaving real life to enter into a dream, although wide awake. Standing side by side on the bridge of the steamer, they looked at the cliffs of Provence as they passed swiftly by them. The calm sea of deep blue seemed petrified beneath the ardent rays of the sun.

"Do you remember our excursion in Père Lastique's boat?" said Jeanne.

Instead of replying, he gave her a hasty kiss on the ear.

The paddle-wheels struck the water, disturbing its torpor, and a long track of foam like the froth of champagne remained in the wake of the boat, reaching as far as the eye could see. Jeanne drank in with delight the odor of the salt mist that seemed to go to the very tips of her fingers. Everywhere the sea. But ahead of them there was something gray, not clearly defined in the early dawn; a sort of massing of strange-looking clouds, pointed, jagged, seemed to rest on the waters.

Presently it became clearer, its outline more distinct on the brightening sky; a large chain of mountains, peaked and weird, appeared. It was Corsica, covered with a light veil of mist. The sun rose behind it, outlining the jagged crests like black shadows. Then all the summits were bathed in light, while the rest of the island remained covered with mist.

The captain, a little sun-browned man, dried up, stunted, toughened and shrivelled by the harsh salt winds, appeared on the bridge and in a voice hoarse after twenty years of command and worn from shouting amid the storms, said to Jeanne:

"Do you perceive it, that odor?"

She certainly noticed a strong and peculiar odor of plants, a wild aromatic odor.

"That is Corsica that sends out that fragrance, madame," said the captain. "It is her peculiar odor of a pretty woman. After being away for twenty years, I should recognize it five miles out at sea. I belong to it. He, down there, at Saint Helena, he speaks of it always, it seems, of the odor of his native country. He belongs to my family."

And the captain, taking off his hat, saluted Corsica, saluted down yonder, across the ocean, the great captive emperor who belonged to his family.

Jeanne was so affected that she almost cried.

Then, pointing toward the horizon, the captain said: "Les Sanguinaires."

Julien was standing beside his wife, with his arm round her waist, and they both looked out into the distance to see what he was alluding to. They at length perceived some pyramidal rocks which the vessel rounded presently to enter an immense peaceful gulf surrounded by lofty summits, the base of which was covered with what looked like moss.

Pointing to this verdant growth, the captain said: "Le maquis."

As they proceeded on their course the circle of mountains appeared to close in behind the steamer, which moved along slowly in such a lake of transparent azure that one could sometimes see to the bottom.

The town suddenly appeared perfectly white at the end of the gulf, on the edge of the water, at the base of the mountains. Some little Italian boats were anchored in the dock. Four or five rowboats came up beside the Roi-Louis to get passengers.

Julien, who was collecting the baggage, asked his wife in a low tone: "Twenty sous is enough, is it not, to give to the porter?" For a week he had constantly asked the same question, which annoyed her each time. She replied somewhat impatiently: "When one is not sure of giving enough, one gives too much."

He was always disputing with the hotel proprietors, with the servants, the drivers, the vendors of all kinds, and when, by dint of bargaining, he had obtained a reduction in price, he would say to Jeanne as he rubbed his hands: "I do not like to be cheated."

She trembled whenever a bill came in, certain beforehand of the remarks that he would make about each item, humiliated at this bargaining, blushing up to the roots of her hair beneath the contemptuous glances of the servants as they looked after her husband, while they held in their hand the meagre tip.

He had a dispute with the boatmen who landed him.

The first tree Jeanne saw was a palm. They went to a great, empty hotel at the corner of an immense square and ordered breakfast.

After an hour's rest they arranged an itinerary for their trip, and at the end of three days spent in this little town, hidden at the end of the blue gulf, and hot as a furnace enclosed in its curtain of mountains, which keep every breath of air from it, they decided to hire some saddle horses, so as to be able to cross any difficult pass, and selected two little Corsican stallions with fiery eyes, thin and unwearying, and set out one morning at daybreak. A guide, mounted on a mule, accompanied them and carried the provisions, for inns are unknown in this wild country.

The road ran along the gulf and soon turned into a kind of valley, and on toward the high mountains. They frequently crossed the dry beds of torrents with only a tiny stream of water trickling under the stones, gurgling faintly like a wild animal in hiding.

The uncultivated country seemed perfectly barren. The sides of the hills were covered with tall weeds, yellow from the blazing sun. Sometimes they met a mountaineer, either on foot or mounted on a little horse, or astride a donkey about as big as a dog. They all carried a loaded rifle slung across their backs, old rusty weapons, but redoubtable in their hands.

The pungent odor of the aromatic herbs with which the island is overgrown seemed to make the air heavy. The road ascended gradually amid the long curves of the mountains. The red or blue granite peaks gave an appearance of fairyland to the wild landscape, and on the foothills immense forests of chestnut trees looked like green brush, compared with the elevations above them.

Sometimes the guide, reaching out his hand toward some of these heights, would repeat a name. Jeanne and Julien would look where he pointed, but see nothing, until at last they discovered something gray, like a mass of stones fallen from the summit. It was a little village, a hamlet of granite hanging there, fastened on like a veritable

bird's nest and almost invisible on the huge mountain.

Walking their horses like this made Jeanne nervous. "Let us go faster," she said. And she whipped up her horse. Then, as she did not hear her husband following her, she turned round and laughed heartily as she saw him coming along, pale, and holding on to his horse's mane as it bounced him up and down. His very appearance of a "beau cavalier" made his awkwardness and timidity all the more comical.

They trotted along quietly. The road now ran between two interminable forests of brush, which covered the whole side of the mountain like a garment. This was the "Maquis," composed of scrub oak, juniper, arbutus, mastic, privet, gorse, laurel, myrtle and boxwood, intertwined with clematis, huge ferns, honeysuckle, cytisus, rosemary, lavender and brambles, which covered the sides of the mountain with an impenetrable fleece.

They were hungry. The guide rejoined them and led them to one of those charming springs so frequent in rocky countries, a tiny thread of iced water issuing from a little hole in the rock and flowing into a chestnut leaf that some passerby had placed there to guide the water into one's mouth.

Jeanne felt so happy that she could hardly restrain herself from screaming for joy.

They continued their journey and began to descend the slope winding round the Bay of Sagone. Toward evening they passed through Cargese, the Greek village founded by a colony of refugees who were driven from their country. Tall, beautiful girls, with rounded hips, long hands and slender waists, and singularly graceful, were grouped beside a fountain. Julien called out, "Good evening," and they replied in musical tones in the harmonious language of their own land.

When they reached Piana they had to beg for hospitality, as in ancient times and in desert lands. Jeanne trembled with joy as they waited for the door to be opened after Julien knocked. Oh, this was a journey worth while, with all the unexpected of unexplored paths.

It happened to be the home of a young couple. They received the travellers as the patriarchs must have received the guest sent by God. They had to sleep on a corn husk mattress in an old moldy house. The woodwork, all eaten by worms, overrun with long boring-worms, seemed to emit sounds, to be alive and to sigh.

They set off again at daybreak, and presently stopped before a forest, a veritable forest of purple granite. There were peaks, pillars, bell-towers, wondrous forms molded by age, the ravaging wind and the sea mist. As much as three hundred metres in height, slender, round, twisted, hooked, deformed, unexpected and fantastic, these amazing rocks looked like trees, plants, animals, monuments, men, monks in their garb, horned devils, gigantic birds, a whole population of monsters, a menagerie of nightmares petrified by the will of some eccentric divinity.

Jeanne had ceased talking, her heart was full. She took Julien's hand and squeezed it, overcome with a longing for love in presence of the beauty of nature.

Suddenly, as they emerged from this chaos, they saw before them another gulf, encircled by a wall of blood-red granite. And these red rocks were reflected in the blue waters.

"Oh, Julien!" faltered Jeanne, unable to speak for wonder and choking with her emotion. Two tears fell from her eyes. Julien gazed at her in astonishment and said:

"What is the matter, my pet?"

She wiped away her tears, smiled and replied in a rather shaky voice:

"Nothing--I am nervous--I do not know--it just came over me. I am so happy that the least thing affects me."

He could not understand these feminine attacks of "nerves," the shocks of these vibrant beings, excited at nothing, whom enthusiasm stirs as might a catastrophe, whom an imperceptible sensation completely upsets, driving them wild with joy or despair.

These tears seemed absurd to him, and thinking only of the bad road, he said:

"You would do better to watch your horse."

They descended an almost impassable path to the shore of the gulf, then turned to the right to ascend the gloomy Val d'Ota.

But the road was so bad that Julien proposed that they should go on foot. Jeanne was delighted. She was enchanted at the idea of walking, of being alone with him after her late emotion.

The guide went ahead with the mule and the horses and they walked slowly.

The mountain, cleft from top to bottom, spreads apart. The path lies in this breach, between two gigantic walls. A roaring torrent flows through the gorge. The air is icy, the granite looks black, and high above one the glimpse of blue sky astonishes and bewilders one.

A sudden noise made Jeanne start. She raised her eyes. An immense bird flew away from a hollow; it was an eagle. His spread wings seemed to brush the two walls of the gorge and he soared into the blue and disappeared.

Farther on there was a double gorge and the path lay between the two in abrupt zigzags. Jeanne, careless and happy, took the lead, the pebbles rolling away beneath her feet, fearlessly leaning over the abysses. Julien followed her, somewhat out of breath, his eyes on the ground for fear of becoming dizzy.

All at once the sun shone down on them, and it seemed as if they were leaving the infernal regions. They were thirsty, and following a track of moisture, they crossed a wilderness of stones and found a little spring conducted into a channel made of a piece of hollowed-out wood for the benefit of the goatherds. A carpet of moss covered the ground all round it, and Jeanne and Julien knelt down to drink.

As they were enjoying the fresh cold water, Julien tried to draw Jeanne away to tease her. She resisted and their lips met and parted, and the stream of cold water

splashed their faces, their necks, their clothes and their hands, and their kisses mingled in the stream.

They were a long time reaching the summit of the declivity, as the road was so winding and uneven, and they did not reach Evisa until evening and the house of Paoli Palabretti, a relative of their guide.

He was a tall man, somewhat bent, with the mournful air of a consumptive. He took them to their room, a cheerless room of bare stone, but handsome for this country, where all elegance is ignored. He expressed in his language--the Corsican patois, a jumble of French and Italian--his pleasure at welcoming them, when a shrill voice interrupted him. A little swarthy woman, with large black eyes, a skin warmed by the sun, a slender waist, teeth always showing in a perpetual smile, darted forward, kissed Jeanne, shook Julien's hand and said: "Good-day, madame; good-day, monsieur; I hope you are well."

She took their hats, shawls, carrying all on one arm, for the other was in a sling, and then she made them all go outside, saying to her husband: "Go and take them for a walk until dinner time."

M. Palabretti obeyed at once and walked between the two young people as he showed them the village. He dragged his feet and his words, coughing frequently, and repeating at each attack of coughing:

"It is the air of the Val, which is cool, and has struck my chest."

He led them on a by-path beneath enormous chestnut trees. Suddenly he stopped and said in his monotonous voice: "It is here that my cousin, Jean Rinaldi, was killed by Mathieu Lori. See, I was there, close to Jean, when Mathieu appeared at ten paces from us. 'Jean,' he cried, 'do not go to Albertacce; do not go, Jean, or I will kill you. I warn you!'

"I took Jean's arm: 'Do not go there, Jean; he will do it.'

"It was about a girl whom they were both after, Paulina Sinacoupi.

"But Jean cried out: 'I am going, Mathieu; you will not be the one to prevent me.'

"Then Mathieu unslung his gun, and before I could adjust mine, he fired.

"Jean leaped two feet in the air, like a child skipping, yes, monsieur, and he fell back full on me, so that my gun went off and rolled as far as the big chestnut tree over yonder.

"Jean's mouth was wide open, but he did not utter a word; he was dead."

The young people gazed in amazement at the calm witness of this crime. Jeanne asked:

"And what became of the assassin?"

Paoli Palabretti had a long fit of coughing and then said:

"He escaped to the mountain. It was my brother who killed him the following year. You know, my brother, Philippi Palabretti, the bandit."

Jeanne shuddered.

"Your brother a bandit?"

With a gleam of pride in his eye, the calm Corsican replied:

"Yes, madame. He was celebrated, that one. He laid low six gendarmes. He died at the same time as Nicolas Morali, when they were trapped in the Niolo, after six days of fighting, and were about to die of hunger.

"The country is worth it," he added with a resigned air in the same tone in which he said: "It is the air of the Val, which is cool."

Then they went home to dinner, and the little Corsican woman behaved as if she had known them for twenty years.

But Jeanne was worried. When Julien again held her in his arms, would she experience the same strange and intense sensation that she had felt on the moss beside the spring? And when they were alone together that evening she trembled lest she should still be insensible to his kisses. But she was reassured, and this was her

first night of love.

The next day, as they were about to set out, she decided that she would not leave this humble cottage, where it seemed as though a fresh happiness had begun for her.

She called her host's little wife into her room and, while making clear that she did not mean it as a present, she insisted, even with some annoyance, on sending her from Paris, as soon as she arrived, a remembrance, a remembrance to which she attached an almost superstitious significance.

The little Corsican refused for some time, not wishing to accept it. But at last she consented, saying:

"Well, then, send me a little pistol, a very small one."

Jeanne opened her eyes in astonishment. The other added in her ear, as one confides a sweet and intimate secret: "It is to kill my brother-in-law." And smiling, she hastily unwound the bandages around the helpless arm, and showing her firm, white skin with the scratch of a stiletto across it, now almost healed, she said: "If I had not been almost as strong as he is, he would have killed me. My husband is not jealous, he knows me; and, besides, he is ill, you know, and that quiets your blood. And, besides, madame, I am an honest woman; but my brother-in-law believes all that he hears. He is jealous for my husband and he will surely try it again. Then I shall have my little pistol; I shall be easy, and sure of my revenge."

Jeanne promised to send the weapon, kissed her new friend tenderly and they set out on their journey.

The rest of the trip was nothing but a dream, a continual series of embraces, an intoxication of caresses. She saw nothing, neither the landscape, nor the people, nor the places where they stopped. She saw nothing but Julien.

On arriving at Bastia, they had to pay the guide. Julien fumbled in his pockets. Not finding what he wanted, he said to Jeanne: "As you are not using your mother's two thousand francs, give them to me to carry. They will be safer in my belt, and it will

avoid my having to make change."

She handed him her purse.

They went to Leghorn, visited Florence, Genoa and all the Cornici. They reached Marseilles on a morning when the north wind was blowing. Two months had elapsed since they left the "Poplars." It was now the 15th of October.

Jeanne, affected by the cold wind that seemed to come from yonder, from far-off Normandy, felt sad. Julien had, for some time, appeared changed, tired, indifferent, and she feared she knew not what.

They delayed their return home four days longer, not being able to make up their minds to leave this pleasant land of the sun. It seemed to her that she had come to an end of her happiness.

At length they left. They were to make all their purchases in Paris, prior to settling down for good at the "Poplars," and Jeanne looked forward to bringing back some treasures, thanks to her mother's present. But the first thing she thought of was the pistol promised to the little Corsican woman of Evisa.

The day after they arrived she said to Julien: "Dear, will you give me that money of mamma's? I want to make my purchases."

He turned toward her with a look of annoyance.

"How much do you want?"

"Why--whatever you please."

"I will give you a hundred francs," he replied, "but do not squander it."

She did not know what to say, amazed and confused. At length she faltered: "But--I--handed you the money to----"

He did not give her time to finish.

"Yes, of course. Whether it is in my pocket or yours makes no difference from the moment that we have the same purse. I do not refuse you, do I, since I am giving

you a hundred francs?"

She took the five gold pieces without saying a word, but she did not venture to ask for any more, and she bought nothing but the pistol.

Eight days later they set out for the "Poplars."

CHAPTER VI

DISENCHANTMENT

The family and servants were awaiting them outside the white gate with brick supports. The post-chaise drew up and there were long and affectionate greetings. Little mother wept; Jeanne, affected, wiped away some tears; father nervously walked up and down.

Then, as the baggage was being unloaded, they told of their travels beside the parlor fire. Jeanne's words flowed freely, and everything was told, everything, in a half hour, except, perhaps, a few little details forgotten in this rapid account.

The young wife then went to undo her parcels. Rosalie, also greatly affected, assisted her. When this was finished and everything had been put away, the little maid left her mistress, and Jeanne, somewhat fatigued, sat down.

She asked herself what she was now going to do, seeking some occupation for her mind, some work for her hands. She did not care to go down again into the drawing-room, where her mother was asleep, and she thought she would take a walk. But the country seemed so sad that she felt a weight at her heart on only looking out of the window.

Then it came to her that she had no longer anything to do, never again anything to do. All her young life at the convent had been preoccupied with the future, busied with dreams. The constant excitement of hope filled her hours at that time, so that she was not aware of their flight. Then hardly had she left those austere walls, where her illusions had unfolded, than her expectations of love were at once realized. The

longed-for lover, met, loved and married within a few weeks, as one marries on these sudden resolves, had carried her off in his arms, without giving her time for reflection.

But now the sweet reality of the first days was to become the everyday reality, which closed the door on vague hopes, on the enchanting worries of the unknown. Yes, there was nothing more to look forward to. And there was nothing more to do, today, to-morrow, never. She felt all this vaguely as a certain disillusion, a certain crumbling of her dreams.

She rose and leaned her forehead against the cold window panes.

Then, after gazing for some time at the sky across which dark clouds were passing, she decided to go out.

Was this the same country, the same grass, the same trees as in May? What had become of the sunlit cheerfulness of the leaves and the poetry of the green grass, where dandelions, poppies and moon daisies bloomed and where yellow butterflies fluttered as though held by invisible wires? And this intoxication of the air teeming with life, with fragrance, with fertilizing pollen, existed no longer!

The avenues, soaked by the constant autumnal downpours, were covered with a thick carpet of fallen leaves which extended beneath the shivering bareness of the almost leafless poplars. She went as far as the shrubbery. It was as sad as the chamber of a dying person. A green hedge which separated the little winding walks was bare of leaves. Little birds flew from place to place with a little chilly cry, seeking a shelter.

The thick curtain of elm trees that formed a protection against the sea wind, the lime tree and the plane tree with their crimson and yellow tints seemed clothed, the one in red velvet and the other in yellow silk.

Jeanne walked slowly up and down petite mère's avenue, alongside the Couillards' farm. Something weighed on her spirit like a presentiment of the long boredom of

the monotonous life about to begin.

She seated herself on the bank where Julien had first told her of his love and remained there, dreaming, scarcely thinking, depressed to the very soul, longing to lie down, to sleep, in order to escape the dreariness of the day.

All at once she perceived a gull crossing the sky, carried away in a gust of wind, and she recalled the eagle she had seen down there in Corsica, in the gloomy vale of Ota. She felt a spasm at her heart as at the remembrance of something pleasant that is gone by, and she had a sudden vision of the beautiful island with its wild perfume, its sun that ripens oranges and lemons, its mountains with their rosy summits, its azure gulfs and its ravines through which the torrents flowed.

And the moist, severe landscape that surrounded her, with the falling leaves and the gray clouds blown along by the wind, enfolded her in such a heavy mantle of misery that she went back to the house to keep from sobbing.

Her mother was dozing in a torpid condition in front of the fire, accustomed to the melancholy of the long days, and not noticing it any longer. Her father and Julien had gone for a walk to talk about business matters. Night was coming on, filling the large drawing-room with gloom lighted by reflections of light from the fire.

The baron presently appeared, followed by Julien. As soon as the vicomte entered the room he rang the bell, saying: "Quick, quick, let us have some light! It is gloomy in here."

And he sat down before the fire. While his wet shoes were steaming in the warmth and the mud was drying on his soles, he rubbed his hands cheerfully as he said: "I think it is going to freeze; the sky is clearing in the north, and it is full moon to-night; we shall have a stinger to-night."

Then turning to his daughter: "Well, little one, are you glad to be back again in your own country, in your own home, with the old folks?"

This simple question upset Jeanne. She threw herself into her father's arms, her eyes

full of tears, and kissed him nervously, as though asking pardon, for in spite of her honest attempt to be cheerful, she felt sad enough to give up altogether. She recalled the joy she had promised herself at seeing her parents again, and she was surprised at the coldness that seemed to numb her affection, just as if, after constantly thinking of those one loves, when at a distance and unable to see them at any moment, one should feel, on seeing them again, a sort of check of affection, until the bonds of their life in common had been renewed.

Dinner lasted a long time. No one spoke much. Julien appeared to have forgotten his wife.

In the drawing-room Jeanne sat before the fire in a drowsy condition, opposite little mother, who was sound asleep. Aroused by the voices of the men, Jeanne asked herself, as she tried to rouse herself, if she, too, was going to become a slave to this dreary lethargy of habit that nothing varies.

The baron approached the fire, and holding out his hands to the glowing flame, he said, smiling: "Ah, that burns finely this evening. It is freezing, children; it is freezing." Then, placing his hand on Jeanne's shoulder and pointing to the fire, he said: "See here, little daughter, that is the best thing in life, the hearth, the hearth, with one's own around one. Nothing else counts. But supposing we retire. You children must be tired out."

When she was in her room, Jeanne asked herself how she could feel so differently on returning a second time to the place that she thought she loved. Why did she feel as though she were wounded? Why did this house, this beloved country, all that hitherto had thrilled her with happiness, now appear so distressing?

Her eyes suddenly fell on her clock. The little bee was still swinging from left to right and from right to left with the same quick, continuous motion above the scarlet blossoms. All at once an impulse of tenderness moved her to tears at sight of this little piece of mechanism that seemed to be alive. She had not been so affected on

kissing her father and mother. The heart has mysteries that no arguments can solve.

For the first time since her marriage she was alone, Julien, under pretext of fatigue, having taken another room.

She lay awake a long time, unaccustomed to being alone and disturbed by the bleak north wind which beat against the roof.

She was awakened the next morning by a bright light that flooded her room. She put on a dressing gown and ran to the window and opened it.

An icy breeze, sharp and bracing, streamed into the room, making her skin tingle and her eyes water. The sun appeared behind the trees on a crimson sky, and the earth, covered with frost and dry and hard, rang out beneath one's footsteps. In one night all the leaves had blown off the trees, and in the distance beyond the level ground was seen the long green line of water, covered with trails of white foam.

Jeanne dressed herself and went out, and for the sake of an object she went to call on the farmers.

The Martins held up their hands in surprise, and Mrs. Martin kissed her on both cheeks, and then they made her drink a glass of noyau. She then went to the other farm. The Couillards also were surprised. Mrs. Couillard pecked her on the ears and she had to drink a glass of cassis. Then she went home to breakfast.

The day went by like the previous day, cold instead of damp. And the other days of the week resembled these two days, and all the weeks of the month were like the first week.

Little by little, however, she ceased to regret far-off lands. The force of habit was covering her life with a layer of resignation similar to the lime-stone formation deposited on objects by certain springs. And a kind of interest for the thousand-and-one little insignificant things of daily life, a care for the simple, ordinary everyday occupations, awakened in her heart. A sort of pensive melancholy, a vague disenchantment with life was growing up in her mind. What

did she lack? What did she want? She did not know. She had no worldly desires, no thirst for amusement, no longing for permissible pleasures. What then? Just as old furniture tarnishes in time, so everything was slowly becoming faded to her eyes, everything seemed to be fading, to be taking on pale, dreary shades.

Her relations with Julien had completely changed. He seemed to be quite different since they came back from their honeymoon, like an actor who has played his part and resumes his ordinary manner. He scarcely paid any attention to her or even spoke to her. All trace of love had suddenly disappeared, and he seldom came into her room at night.

He had taken charge of the money and of the house, changed the leases, worried the peasants, cut down expenses, and having adopted the costume of a gentleman farmer, he had lost his polish and elegance as a fiancé.

He always wore the same suit, although it was covered with spots. It was an old velveteen shooting jacket with brass buttons, that he had found among his former wardrobe, and with the carelessness that is frequent with those who no longer seek to please, he had given up shaving, and his long beard, badly cut, made an incredible change for the worse in his appearance. His hands were never cared for, and after each meal he drank four or five glasses of brandy.

Jeanne tried to remonstrate with him gently, but he had answered her so abruptly: "Won't you let me alone!" that she never ventured to give him any more advice.

She had adapted herself to these changes in a manner that surprised herself. He had become a stranger to her, a stranger whose mind and heart were closed to her. She constantly thought about it, asking herself how it was that after having met, loved, married in an impulse of affection, they should all at once find themselves almost as much strangers as though they had never shared the same room.

And how was it that she did not feel this neglect more deeply? Was this life? Had they deceived themselves? Did the future hold nothing further for her?

If Julien had remained handsome, carefully dressed, elegant, she might possibly have suffered more deeply.

It had been agreed that after the new year the young couple should remain alone and that the father and mother should go back to spend a few months at their house in Rouen. The young people were not to leave the "Poplars" that winter, so as to get thoroughly settled and to become accustomed to each other and to the place where all their life would be passed. They had a few neighbors to whom Julien would introduce his wife. These were the Brisevilles, the Colteliers and the Fourvilles.

But the young people could not begin to pay calls because they had not as yet been able to get a painter to alter the armorial bearings on the carriage.

The old family coach had been given up to his son-in-law by the baron, and nothing would have induced him to show himself at the neighboring châteaux if the coat-of-arms of the De Lamares were not quartered with those of the Le Perthuis des Vauds.

There was only one man in the district who made a specialty of heraldic designs, a painter of Bolbec, called Bataille, who was in demand at all the Norman castles in turn to make these precious designs on the doors of carriages.

At length one morning in December, just as they were finishing breakfast, they saw an individual open the gate and walk toward the house. He was carrying a box on his back. This was Bataille.

They offered him some breakfast, and, while he was eating, the baron and Julien made sketches of quarterings. The baroness, all upset as soon as these things were discussed, gave her opinion. And even Jeanne took part in the discussion, as though some mysterious interest had suddenly awakened in her.

Bataille, while eating, gave his ideas, at times taking the pencil and tracing a design, citing examples, describing all the aristocratic carriages in the countryside, and seemed to have brought with him in his ideas, even in his voice, a sort of atmosphere

of aristocracy.

As soon as he had finished his coffee, they all went to the coach house. They took off the cover of the carriage and Bataille examined it. He then gravely gave his views as to the size he considered suitable for the design, and after an exchange of ideas, he set to work.

Notwithstanding the cold, the baroness had her chair brought out so as to watch him working, and then her foot-stove, for her feet were freezing. She then began to chat with the painter, on all the recent births, deaths and marriages of which she had not heard, thus adding to the genealogical tree which she carried in her memory.

Julien sat beside her, astride on a chair. He was smoking, spitting on the ground, listening and following with his glances the emblazoning of his rank.

Presently old Simon, who was on his way to the vegetable garden, his spade on his shoulder, stopped to look at the work; and as Bataille's arrival had become known at the two farms, the farmers' wives soon put in an appearance. They went into raptures, standing one at either side of the baroness, exclaiming: "My! it requires some cleverness all the same to fix up those things."

The two doors could not be finished before the next day about eleven o'clock. Every one was on hand; and they dragged the carriage outside so as to get a better view of it.

It was perfect. Bataille was complimented, and went off with his box on his back. They all agreed that the painter had great ability, and if circumstances had been favorable would doubtless have been a great artist.

Julien, by way of economy, had introduced great reforms which necessitated making some changes. The old coachman had been made gardener, Julien undertaking to drive himself, having sold the carriage horses to avoid buying feed for them. But as it was necessary to have some one to hold the horses when he and his wife got out of the carriage, he had made a little cow tender named Marius into a groom. Then in

order to get some horses, he introduced a special clause into the Couillards' and Martins' leases, by which they were bound to supply a horse each, on a certain day every month, the date to be fixed by him; and this would exempt them from their tribute of poultry.

So the Couillards brought a big yellow horse, and the Martins a small white animal with long, unclipped coat, and the two were harnessed up together. Marius, buried in an old livery belonging to old Simon, led the carriage up to the front door.

Julien, looking clean and brushed up, looked a little like his former self; but his long beard gave him a common look in spite of all. He looked over the horses, the carriage, and the little groom, and seemed satisfied, the only really important thing to him being the newly painted escutcheon.

The baroness came down leaning on her husband's arm and got into the carriage. Then Jeanne appeared. She began to laugh at the horses, saying that the white one was the son of the yellow horse; then, perceiving Marius, his face buried under his hat with its cockade, his nose alone preventing it from covering his face altogether, his hands hidden in his long sleeves, and the tail of his coat forming a skirt round his legs, his feet encased in immense shoes showing in a comical manner beneath it, and then when he threw his head back so as to see, and lifted up his leg to walk as if he were crossing a river, she burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

The baron turned round, glanced at the little bewildered groom and he, too, burst out laughing, calling to his wife: "Look at Ma-Ma-Marius! Is he not comical? Heavens, how funny he looks!"

The baroness, looking out of the carriage window, was also convulsed, so that the carriage shook on its springs.

But Julien, pale with anger, asked: "What makes you laugh like that? Are you crazy?"

Jeanne, quite convulsed and unable to stop laughing, sat down on the doorstep; the

baron did the same, while, in the carriage, spasmodic sneezes, a sort of constant chuckling, told that the baroness was choking. Presently there was a motion beneath Marius' livery. He had, doubtless, understood the joke, for he was shaking with laughter beneath his hat.

Julien darted forward in exasperation. With a box on the ear he sent the boy's hat flying across the lawn; then, turning toward his father-in-law, he stammered in a voice trembling with rage: "It seems to me that you should be the last to laugh. We should not be where we are now if you had not wasted your money and ruined your property. Whose fault is it if you are ruined?"

The laughter ceased at once, and no one spoke. Jeanne, now ready to cry, got into the carriage and sat beside her mother. The baron, silent and astonished, took his place opposite the two ladies, and Julien sat on the box after lifting to the seat beside him the weeping boy, whose face was beginning to swell.

The road was dreary and appeared long. The occupants of the carriage were silent. All three sad and embarrassed, they would not acknowledge to one another what was occupying their thoughts. They felt that they could not talk on indifferent subjects while these thoughts had possession of them, and preferred to remain silent than to allude to this painful subject.

They drove past farmyards, the carriage jogging along unevenly with the ill-matched animals, putting to flight terrified black hens who plunged into the bushes and disappeared, occasionally followed by a barking wolf-hound.

At length they entered a wide avenue of pine trees, at the end of which was a white, closed gate. Marius ran to open it, and they drove in round an immense grass plot, and drew up before a high, spacious, sad-looking building with closed shutters.

The hall door opened abruptly, and an old, paralyzed servant wearing a black waistcoat with red stripes partially covered by his working apron slowly descended the slanting steps. He took the visitors' names and led them into an immense

reception room, and opened with difficulty the Venetian blinds which were always kept closed. The furniture had covers on it, and the clock and candelabra were wrapped in white muslin. An atmosphere of mildew, an atmosphere of former days, damp and icy, seemed to permeate one's lungs, heart and skin with melancholy.

They all sat down and waited. They heard steps in the hall above them that betokened unaccustomed haste. The hosts were hurriedly dressing. The baroness, who was chilled, sneezed constantly. Julien paced up and down. Jeanne, despondent, sat beside her mother. The baron leaned against the marble mantelpiece with his head bent down.

Finally, one of the tall doors opened, and the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville appeared. They were both small, thin, vivacious, of no age in particular, ceremonious and embarrassed.

After the first greetings, there seemed to be nothing to say. So they began to congratulate each other for no special reason, and hoped that these friendly relations would be kept up. It was a treat to see people when one lived in the country the year round.

The icy atmosphere pierced to their bones and made their voices hoarse. The baroness was coughing now and had stopped sneezing. The baron thought it was time to leave. The Brisevilles said: "What, so soon? Stay a little longer." But Jeanne had risen in spite of Julien's signals, for he thought the visit too short.

They attempted to ring for the servant to order the carriage to the door, but the bell would not ring. The host started out himself to attend to it, but found that the horses had been put in the stable.

They had to wait. Every one tried to think of something to say. Jeanne, involuntarily shivering with cold, inquired what their hosts did to occupy themselves all the year round. The Brisevilles were much astonished; for they were always busy, either writing letters to their aristocratic relations, of whom they had a number scattered all

over France, or attending to microscopic duties, as ceremonious to one another as though they were strangers, and talking grandiloquently of the most insignificant matters.

At last the carriage passed the windows with its ill-matched team. But Marius had disappeared. Thinking he was off duty until evening, he had doubtless gone for a walk.

Julien, perfectly furious, begged them to send him home on foot, and after a great many farewells on both sides, they set out for the "Poplars."

As soon as they were inside the carriage, Jeanne and her father, in spite of Julien's brutal behavior of the morning which still weighed on their minds, began to laugh at the gestures and intonations of the Brisevilles. The baron imitated the husband, and Jeanne the wife. But the baroness, a little touchy in these particulars, said: "You are wrong to ridicule them thus; they are people of excellent family." They were silent out of respect for little mother, but nevertheless, from time to time, Jeanne and her father began again. The baroness could not forbear smiling in her turn, but she repeated: "It is not nice to laugh at people who belong to our class."

Suddenly the carriage stopped, and Julien called out to someone behind it. Then Jeanne and the baron, leaning out, saw a singular creature that appeared to be rolling along toward them. His legs entangled in his flowing coattails, and blinded by his hat which kept falling over his face, shaking his sleeves like the sails of a windmill, and splashing into puddles of water, and stumbling against stones in the road, running and bounding, Marius was following the carriage as fast as his legs could carry him.

As soon as he caught up with it, Julien, leaning over, seized him by the collar of his coat, sat him down beside him, and letting go the reins, began to shower blows on the boy's hat, which sank down to his shoulders with the reverberations of a drum. The boy screamed, tried to get away, to jump from the carriage, while his master,

holding him with one hand, continued beating him with the other.

Jeanne, dumfounded, stammered: "Father--oh, father!" And the baroness, wild with indignation, squeezed her husband's arm. "Stop him, Jack!" she exclaimed. The baron quickly lowered the front window, and seizing hold of his son-in-law's sleeve, he sputtered out in a voice trembling with rage: "Have you almost finished beating that child?"

Julien turned round in astonishment: "Don't you see what a condition his livery is in?"

But the baron, placing his head between them, said: "Well, what do I care? There is no need to be brutal like that!"

Julien got angry again: "Let me alone, please; this is not your affair!" And he was raising his hand again when his father-in-law caught hold of it and dragged it down so roughly that he knocked it against the wood of the seat, and he roared at him so loud: "If you do not stop, I shall get out, and I will see that you stop it, myself," that Julien calmed down at once, and shrugging his shoulders without replying, he whipped up the horses, who set out at a quick trot.

The two women, pale as death, did not stir, and one could hear distinctly the thumping of the baroness' heart.

At dinner Julien was more charming than usual, as though nothing had occurred. Jeanne, her father, and Madame Adelaide, pleased to see him so amiable, fell in with his mood, and when Jeanne mentioned the Brisevilles, he laughed at them himself, adding, however: "All the same, they have the grand air."

They made no more visits, each one fearing to revive the Marius episode. They decided, to send New Year's cards, and to wait until the first warm days of spring before paying any more calls.

At Christmas they invited the curé, the mayor and his wife to dinner, and again on New Year's Day. These were the only events that varied the monotony of their life.

The baron and his wife were to leave "The Poplars" on the ninth of January. Jeanne wanted to keep them, but Julien did not acquiesce, and the baron sent for a post-chaise from Rouen, seeing his son-in-law's coolness.

The day before their departure, as it was a clear frost, Jeanne and her father decided to go to Yport, which they had not visited since her return from Corsica. They crossed the wood where she had strolled on her wedding-day, all wrapped up in the one whose lifelong companion she had become; the wood where she had received her first kiss, trembled at the first breath of love, had a presentiment of that sensual love of which she did not become aware until she was in the wild vale of Ota beside the spring where they mingled their kisses as they drank of its waters. The trees were now leafless, the climbing vines dead.

They entered the little village. The empty, silent streets smelled of the sea, of wrack, of fish. Huge brown nets were still hanging up to dry outside the houses, or stretched out on the shingle. The gray, cold sea, with its eternal roaring foam, was going out, uncovering the green rocks at the foot of the cliff toward Fécamp.

Jeanne and her father, motionless, watched the fishermen setting out in their boats in the dusk, as they did every night, risking their lives to keep from starving, and so poor, nevertheless, that they never tasted meat.

The baron, inspired at the sight of the ocean, murmured: "It is terrible, but it is beautiful. How magnificent this sea is on which the darkness is falling, and on which so many lives are in peril, is it not, Jeannette?"

She replied with a cold smile: "It is nothing to the Mediterranean."

Her father, indignant, exclaimed: "The Mediterranean! It is oil, sugar water, bluing water in a washtub. Look at this sea, how terrible it is with its crests of foam! And think of all those men who have set out on it, and who are already out of sight."

Jeanne assented with a sigh: "Yes, if you think so." But this name, "Mediterranean," had wrung her heart afresh, sending her thoughts back to those distant lands where

her dreams lay buried.

Instead of returning home by the woods, they walked along the road, mounting the ascent slowly. They were silent, sad at the thought of the approaching separation. As they passed along beside the farmyards an odor of crushed apples, that smell of new cider which seems to pervade the atmosphere in this season all through Normandy, rose to their nostrils, or else a strong smell of the cow stables. A small lighted window at the end of the yard indicated the farmhouse.

It seemed to Jeanne that her mind was expanding, was beginning to understand the psychic meaning of things; and these little scattered gleams in the landscape gave her, all at once, a keen sense of the isolation of all human lives, a feeling that everything detaches, separates, draws one far away from the things they love.

She said, in a resigned tone: "Life is not always cheerful."

The baron sighed: "How can it be helped, daughter? We can do nothing."

The following day the baron and his wife went away, and Jeanne and Julien were left alone.

CHAPTER VII

JEANNE'S DISCOVERY

Cards now became a distraction in the life of the young people. Every morning after breakfast, Julien would play several games of bezique with his wife, smoking and sipping brandy as he played. She would then go up to her room and sit down beside the window, and as the rain beat against the panes, or the wind shook the windows, she would embroider away steadily. Occasionally she would raise her eyes and look out at the gray sea which had white-caps on it. Then, after gazing listlessly for some time, she would resume her work.

She had nothing else to do, Julien having taken the entire management of the house, to satisfy his craving for authority and his craze for economy. He was parsimonious

in the extreme, never gave any tips, cut down the food to the merest necessaries; and as Jeanne since her return had ordered the baker to make her a little Norman "galette" for breakfast, he had cut down this extra expense, and condemned her to eat toast.

She said nothing in order to avoid recriminations, arguments and quarrels; but she suffered keenly at each fresh manifestation of avarice on the part of her husband. It appeared to her low and odious, brought up as she had been in a family where money was never considered. How often had she not heard her mother say: "Why, money is made to be spent." Julien would now say: "Will you never become accustomed to not throwing money away?" And each time he deducted a few sous from some one's salary or on a note, he would say with a smile, as he slipped the change into his pocket: "Little streams make big rivers."

On certain days Jeanne would sit and dream. She would gradually cease sewing and, with her hands idle, and forgetting her surroundings, she would weave one of those romances of her girlhood and be lost in some enchanting adventure. But suddenly Julien's voice giving some orders to old Simon would snatch her abruptly from her dreams, and she would take up her work again, saying: "That is all over," and a tear would fall on her hands as she plied the needle.

Rosalie, formerly so cheerful and always singing, had changed. Her rounded cheeks had lost their color, and were now almost hollow, and sometimes had an earthy hue. Jeanne would frequently ask her: "Are you ill, my girl?" The little maid would reply: "No, madame," while her cheeks would redden slightly and she would retire hastily.

At the end of January the snow came. In one night the whole plain was covered and the trees next morning were white with icy foam.

On one of these mornings, Jeanne was sitting warming her feet before the fire in her room, while Rosalie, who had changed from day to day, was making the bed. Suddenly hearing behind her a kind of moan, Jeanne asked, without turning her

head: "What is the matter?"

The maid replied as usual: "Nothing, madame"; but her voice was weak and trembling.

Jeanne's thoughts were on something else, when she noticed that the girl was not moving about the room. She called: "Rosalie!" Still no sound. Then, thinking she might have left the room, she cried in a louder tone: "Rosalie!" and she was reaching out her arm to ring the bell, when a deep moan close beside her made her start up with a shudder.

The little servant, her face livid, her eyes haggard, was seated on the floor, her legs stretched out, and her back leaning against the bed. Jeanne sprang toward her. "What is the matter with you--what is the matter?" she asked.

The girl did not reply, did not move. She stared vacantly at her mistress and gasped as though she were in terrible pain. Then, suddenly, she slid down on her back at full length, clenching her teeth to smother a cry of anguish.

Jeanne suddenly understood, and almost distracted, she ran to the head of the stairs, crying: "Julien, Julien!"

"What do you want?" he replied from below.

She hardly knew how to tell him. "It is Rosalie, who----"

Julien rushed upstairs two steps at a time, and going abruptly into the room, he found the poor girl had just been delivered of a child. He looked round with a wicked look on his face, and pushing his terrified wife out of the room, exclaimed: "This is none of your affair. Go away. Send me Ludivine and old Simon."

Jeanne, trembling, descended to the kitchen, and then, not daring to go upstairs again, she went into the drawing-room, in which there had been no fire since her parents left, and anxiously awaited news.

She presently saw the man-servant running out of the house. Five minutes later he

returned with Widow Dentu, the nurse of the district.

Then there was a great commotion on the stairs as though they were carrying a wounded person, and Julien came in and told Jeanne that she might go back to her room.

She trembled as if she had witnessed some terrible accident. She sat down again before the fire, and asked: "How is she?"

Julien, preoccupied and nervous, was pacing up and down the room. He seemed to be getting angry, and did not reply at first. Then he stopped and said: "What do you intend to do with this girl?"

She did not understand, and looked at her husband. "Why, what do you mean? I do not know."

Then suddenly flying into a rage, he exclaimed: "We cannot keep a bastard in the house."

Jeanne was very much bewildered, and said at the end of a long silence: "But, my friend, perhaps we could put it out to nurse?"

He cut her short: "And who will pay the bill? You will, no doubt."

She reflected for some time, trying to find some way out of the difficulty; at length she said: "Why, the father will take care of it, of the child; and if he marries Rosalie, there will be no more difficulty."

Julien, as though his patience were exhausted, replied furiously: "The father!--the father!--do you know him--the father? No, is it not so? Well then----?"

Jeanne, much affected, became excited: "But you certainly would not let the girl go away like that. It would be cowardly! We will inquire the name of the man, and we will go and find him, and he will have to explain matters."

Julien had calmed down and resumed his pacing up and down. "My dear," he said, "she will not tell the name of the man; she will not tell you any more than she will

tell me--and, if he does not want her? ... We cannot, however, keep a woman and her illegitimate child under our roof, don't you understand?"

Jeanne, persistent, replied: "Then he must be a wretch, this man. But we must certainly find out who it is, and then he will have us to deal with."

Julien colored, became annoyed again, and said: "But--meanwhile----?"

She did not know what course to take, and asked: "What do you propose?"

"Oh, I? That's very simple. I would give her some money and send her to the devil with her brat."

The young wife, indignant, was disgusted with him. "That shall never be," she said. "She is my foster-sister, that girl; we grew up together. She has made a mistake, so much the worse; but I will not cast her out of doors on that account; and, if it is necessary, I will bring up the child."

Then Julien's wrath exploded: "And we should earn a fine reputation, we, with our name and our position! And they would say of us everywhere that we were protecting vice, harboring beggars; and decent people would never set their foot inside our doors. What are you thinking of? You must be crazy!"

She had remained quite calm. "I shall never cast off Rosalie; and if you do not wish her to stay, my mother will take her; and we shall surely succeed in finding out the name of the father of the child."

He left the room in exasperation, banging the door after him and exclaiming: "What stupid ideas women have!"

In the afternoon Jeanne went up to see the patient. The little maid, watched over by Widow Dentu, was lying still in her bed, her eyes wide open, while the nurse held the new-born babe in her arms.

As soon as Rosalie perceived her mistress, she began to sob, hiding her face in the covers and shaking with her sorrow. Jeanne wanted to kiss her, but she avoided it by

keeping her face covered. But the nurse interfered, and drawing away the sheet, uncovered her face, and she let Jeanne kiss her, weeping still, but more quietly.

A meagre fire was burning in the grate; the room was cold; the child was crying. Jeanne did not dare to speak of the little one, for fear of another attack, and she took her maid's hand as she said mechanically: "It will not matter, it will not matter." The poor girl glanced furtively at the nurse, and trembled as the infant cried, and the remembrance of her sorrow came to her mind occasionally in a convulsive sob, while suppressed tears choked her.

Jeanne kissed her again, and murmured softly in her ear: "We will take good care of it, never fear, my girl." Then as she was beginning to cry again, Jeanne made her escape.

She came to see her every day, and each time Rosalie burst into tears at the sight of her mistress.

The child was put out to nurse at a neighbor's.

Julien, however, hardly spoke to his wife, as though he had nourished anger against her ever since she refused to send away the maid. He referred to the subject one day, but Jeanne took from her pocket a letter from the baroness asking them to send the girl to them at once if they would not keep her at the "Poplars." Julien, furious, cried: "Your mother is as foolish as you are!" but he did not insist any more.

Two weeks later the patient was able to get up and take up her work again.

One morning, Jeanne made her sit down and, taking her hands and looking steadfastly at her, she said:

"See here, my girl, tell me everything."

Rosalie began to tremble, and faltered:

"What, madame?"

"Whose is it, this child?"

The little maid was overcome with confusion, and she sought wildly to withdraw her hands so as to hide her face. But Jeanne kissed her in spite of herself, and consoled her, saying: "It is a misfortune, but cannot be helped, my girl. You were weak, but that happens to many others. If the father marries you, no one will think of it again."

Rosalie sighed as if she were suffering, and from time to time made an effort to disengage herself and run away.

Jeanne resumed: "I understand perfectly that you are ashamed; but you see that I am not angry, that I speak kindly to you. If I ask you the name of the man it is for your own good, for I feel from your grief that he has deserted you, and because I wish to prevent that. Julien will go and look for him, you see, and we will oblige him to marry you; and as we will employ you both, we will oblige him also to make you happy."

This time Rosalie gave such a jerk that she snatched her hands away from her mistress and ran off as if she were mad.

That evening at dinner Jeanne said to Julien: "I tried to persuade Rosalie to tell me the name of her betrayer. I did not succeed. You try to find out so that we can compel this miserable man to marry her."

But Julien became angry: "Oh! you know I do not wish to hear anything about it. You wish to keep this girl. Keep her, but do not bother me about her."

Since the girl's illness he appeared to be more irritable than ever; and he had got into the way of never speaking to his wife without shouting as if he were in a rage, while she, on the contrary, would lower her voice, be gentle and conciliating, to avoid all argument; but she often wept at night after she went to bed.

In spite of his constant irritability, her husband had become more affectionate than customary since their return.

Rosalie was soon quite well and less sad, although she appeared terrified, pursued by some unknown fear, and she ran away twice when Jeanne tried to question her

again.

Julien all at once became more amiable, and the young wife, clinging to vain hopes, also became more cheerful. The thaw had not yet set in and a hard, smooth, glittering covering of snow extended over the landscape. Neither men nor animals were to be seen; only the chimneys of the cottages gave evidence of life in the smoke that ascended from them into the icy air.

One evening the thermometer fell still lower, and Julien, shivering as he left the table--for the dining-room was never properly heated, he was so economical with the wood--rubbed his hands, murmuring: "It will be warmer to-night, won't it, my dear?" He laughed with his jolly laugh of former days, and Jeanne threw her arms around his neck: "I do not feel well, dear; perhaps I shall be better to-morrow."

"As you wish, my dear. If you are ill you must take care of yourself." And they began to talk of other things.

She retired early. Julien, for a wonder, had a fire lighted in her room. As soon as he saw that it was burning brightly, he kissed his wife on the forehead and left the room.

The whole house seemed to be penetrated by the cold; the very walls seemed to be shivering, and Jeanne shivered in her bed. Twice she got up to put fresh logs on the fire and to look for dresses, skirts, and other garments which she piled on the bed. Nothing seemed to warm her; her feet were numbed and her lower limbs seemed to tingle, making her excessively nervous and restless.

Then her teeth began to chatter, her hands shook, there was a tightness in her chest, her heart began to beat with hard, dull pulsations, and at times seemed to stop beating, and she gasped for breath. A terrible apprehension seized her, while the cold seemed to penetrate to her marrow. She never had felt such a sensation, she had never seemed to lose her hold on life like this before, never been so near her last breath.

"I am going to die," she thought, "I am dying----"

And filled with terror, she jumped out of bed, rang for Rosalie, waited, rang again, waited again, shivering and frozen.

The little maid did not come. She was doubtless asleep, that first, sound sleep that nothing can disturb. Jeanne, in despair, darted toward the stairs in her bare feet, and groping her way, she ascended the staircase quietly, found the door, opened it, and called, "Rosalie!" She went forward, stumbled against the bed, felt all over it with her hands and found that it was empty. It was empty and cold, and as if no one had slept there. Much surprised, she said: "What! Has she gone out in weather like this?"

But as her heart began to beat tumultuously till she seemed to be suffocating, she went downstairs again with trembling limbs in order to wake Julien. She rushed into his room filled with the idea that she was going to die, and longing to see him before she lost consciousness.

By the light of the dying embers she perceived Rosalie's head leaning on her husband's shoulder.

At the cry she gave they both started to their feet; she stood motionless for a second, horrified at this discovery, and then fled to her room; and when Julien, at his wit's end, called "Jeanne!" she was seized with an overmastering terror of seeing him, of hearing his voice, of listening to him explaining, lying, of meeting his gaze; and she darted toward the stairs again and went down.

She now ran along in the darkness, at the risk of falling downstairs, at the risk of breaking her neck on the stone floor of the hall. She rushed along, impelled by an imperious desire to flee, to know nothing about it, to see no one.

When she was at the bottom of the stairs she sat down on one of the steps, still in her nightdress, and in bare feet, and remained in a dazed condition. She heard Julien moving and walking about. She started to her feet in order to escape him. He was starting to come downstairs and called: "Listen, Jeanne!"

No, she would not listen nor let him touch her with the tips of his fingers; and she darted into the dining-room as if she were fleeing from an assassin. She looked for a door of escape, a hiding place, a dark corner, some way of avoiding him. She hid under the table. But he was already at the door, a candle in his hand, still calling: "Jeanne!" She started off again like a hare, darted into the kitchen, ran round it twice like a trapped animal, and as he came near her, she suddenly opened the door into the garden and darted out into the night.

The contact with the snow, into which she occasionally sank up to her knees, seemed to give her the energy of despair. She did not feel cold, although she had little on. She felt nothing, her body was so numbed from the emotion of her mind, and she ran along as white as the snow.

She followed the large avenue, crossed the wood, crossed the ditch, and started off across the plain.

There was no moon, the stars were shining like sparks of fire in the black sky; but the plain was light with a dull whiteness, and lay in infinite silence.

Jeanne walked quickly, hardly breathing, not knowing, not thinking of anything. She suddenly stopped on the edge of the cliff. She stopped short, instinctively, and crouched down, bereft of thought and of will power.

In the abyss before her the silent, invisible sea exhaled the salt odor of its wrack at low tide.

She remained thus some time, her mind as inert as her body; then, all at once, she began to tremble, to tremble violently, like a sail shaken by the wind. Her arms, her hands, her feet, impelled by an invisible force, throbbed, pulsated wildly, and her consciousness awakened abruptly, sharp and poignant.

Old memories passed before her mental vision: the sail with him in Père Lastique's boat, their conversation, his nascent love, the christening of the boat; then she went back, further back, to that night of dreams when she first came to the "Poplars." And

now! And now! Oh, her life was shipwrecked, all joy was ended, all expectation at an end; and the frightful future full of torture, of deception, and of despair appeared before her. Better to die, it would all be over at once.

But a voice cried in the distance: "Here it is, here are her steps; quick, quick, this way!" It was Julien who was looking for her.

Oh! she did not wish to see him again. In the abyss down yonder before her she now heard a slight sound, the indistinct ripple of the waves over the rocks. She rose to her feet with the idea of throwing herself over the cliff and bidding life farewell. Like one in despair, she uttered the last word of the dying, the last word of the young soldier slain in battle: "Mother!"

All at once the thought of little mother came to her mind, she saw her sobbing, she saw her father on his knees before her mangled remains, and in a second she felt all the pain of their sorrow.

She sank down again into the snow; and when Julien and old Simon, followed by Marius, carrying a lantern, seized her arm to pull her back as she was so close to the brink, she made no attempt to escape.

She let them do as they would, for she could not stir. She felt that they were carrying her, and then that she was being put to bed and rubbed with hot cloths; then she became unconscious.

Then she had a nightmare, or was it a nightmare? She was in bed. It was broad daylight, but she could not get up. Why? She did not know. Then she heard a little noise on the floor, a sort of scratching, a rustling, and suddenly a mouse, a little gray mouse, ran quickly across the sheet. Another followed it, then a third, who ran toward her chest with his little, quick scamper. Jeanne was not afraid, and she reached out her hand to catch the animal, but could not catch it. Then other mice, ten, twenty, hundreds, thousands, rose up on all sides of her. They climbed the bedposts, ran up the tapestries, covered the bed completely. And soon they got

beneath the covers; Jeanne felt them gliding over her skin, tickling her limbs, running up and down her body. She saw them running from the bottom of the bed to get into her neck under the sheets; and she tried to fight them off, throwing her hands out to try and catch them, but always finding them empty.

She was frantic, wanted to escape, screamed, and it seemed as if she were being held down, as if strong arms enfolded her and rendered her helpless; but she saw no one.

She had no idea of time. It must have been long, a very long time.

Then she awoke, weary, aching, but quiet. She felt weak, very weak. She opened her eyes and was not surprised to see little mother seated in her room with a man whom she did not know.

How old was she? She did not know, and thought she was a very little girl. She had no recollection of anything.

The big man said: "Why, she has regained consciousness." Little mother began to weep. Then the big man resumed: "Come, be calm, baroness; I can ensure her recovery now. But do not talk to her at all. Let her sleep, let her sleep."

Then it seemed to Jeanne that she remained in a state of exhaustion for a long time, overcome by a heavy sleep as soon as she tried to think; and she tried not to remember anything whatever, as though she had a vague fear that the reality might come back to her.

Once when she awoke she saw Julien, alone, standing beside her; and suddenly it all came back to her, as if the curtain which hid her past life had been raised.

She felt a horrible pain in her heart, and wanted to escape once more. She threw back the coverlets, jumped to the floor and fell down, her limbs being too weak to support her.

Julien sprang toward her, and she began to scream for him not to touch her. She writhed and rolled on the floor. The door opened. Aunt Lison came running in with

Widow Dentu, then the baron, and finally little mother, puffing and distracted.

They put her back into bed, and she immediately closed her eyes, so as to escape talking and be able to think quietly.

Her mother and aunt watched over her anxiously, saying: "Do you hear us now, Jeanne, my little Jeanne?"

She pretended to be deaf, not to hear them, and did not answer. Night came on and the nurse took up her position beside the bed. She did not sleep; she kept trying to think of things that had escaped her memory as though there were holes in it, great white empty places where events had not been noted down.

Little by little she began to recall the facts, and she pondered over them steadily.

Little mother, Aunt Lison, the baron had come, so she must have been very ill. But Julien? What had he said? Did her parents know? And Rosalie, where was she? And what should she do? What should she do? An idea came to her--she would return to Rouen and live with father and little mother as in old days. She would be a widow; that's all.

Then she waited, listening to what was being said around her, understanding everything without letting them see it, rejoiced at her returning reason, patient and crafty.

That evening, at last, she found herself alone with the baroness and called to her in a low tone: "Little Mother!" Her own voice astonished her, it seemed strange. The baroness seized her hands: "My daughter, my darling Jeanne! My child, do you recognize me?"

"Yes, little mother, but you must not weep; we have a great deal to talk about. Did Julien tell you why I ran away in the snow?"

"Yes, my darling, you had a very dangerous fever."

"It was not that, mamma. I had the fever afterward; but did he tell you what gave me

the fever and why I ran away?"

"No, my dearie."

"It was because I found Rosalie in his room."

Her mother thought she was delirious again and soothed her, saying: "Go to sleep, darling, calm yourself, try to sleep."

But Jeanne, persistent, continued: "I am quite sensible now, little mother. I am not talking wildly as I must have done these last days. I felt ill one night and I went to look for Julien. Rosalie was with him in his room. I did not know what I was doing, for sorrow, and I ran out into the snow to throw myself off the cliff."

But the baroness reiterated, "Yes, darling, you have been very ill, very ill."

"It is not that, mamma. I found Rosalie in with Julien, and I will not live with him any longer. You will take me back with you to Rouen to live as we used to do."

The baroness, whom the doctor had warned not to thwart Jeanne in any way, replied: "Yes, my darling."

But the invalid grew impatient: "I see that you do not believe me. Go and fetch little father, he will soon understand."

The baroness left the room and presently returned, leaning on her husband's arm. They sat down beside the bed and Jeanne began to talk. She told them all, quietly, in a weak voice, but clearly; all about Julien's peculiar character, his harshness, his avarice, and, finally, his infidelity.

When she had finished, the baron saw that she was not delirious, but he did not know what to think, what to determine, or what to answer. He took her hand, tenderly, as he used to do when he put her to sleep with stories, and said: "Listen, dearie, we must act with prudence. We must do nothing rash. Try to put up with your husband until we can come to some decision--promise me this?"

"I will try, but I will not stay here after I get well," she replied.

Then she added in a lower tone: "Where is Rosalie now?"

"You will not see her any more," replied the baron. But she persisted: "Where is she? I wish to know." Then he confessed that she had not left the house, but declared that she was going to leave.

On leaving the room the baron, filled with indignation and wounded in his feelings as a father, went to look for Julien, and said to him abruptly: "Sir, I have come to ask you for an explanation of your conduct toward my daughter. You have been unfaithful to her with your maid, which is a double insult."

Julien pretended to be innocent, denied everything positively, swore, took God as his witness. What proof had they? he asked. Was not Jeanne delirious? Had she not had brain fever? Had she not run out in the snow, in an attack of delirium, at the very beginning of her illness? And it was just at this time, when she was running about the house almost naked, that she pretends that she saw her maid in her husband's room!

And he grew angry, threatened a lawsuit, became furious. The baron, bewildered, made excuses, begged his pardon, and held out his loyal hand to Julien, who refused to take it.

When Jeanne heard what her husband had said, she did not show any annoyance, but replied: "He is lying, papa, but we shall end by convicting him."

For some days she remained taciturn and reserved, thinking over matters. The third morning she asked to see Rosalie. The baron refused to send her up, saying she had left. Jeanne persisted, saying: "Well, let some one go and fetch her."

She was beginning to get excited when the doctor came. They told him everything, so that he could form an opinion. But Jeanne suddenly burst into tears, her nerves all unstrung, and almost screamed: "I want Rosalie; I wish to see her!"

The doctor took hold of her hand and said in a low tone: "Calm yourself, madame; any emotion may lead to serious consequences, for you are enceinte."

She was dumfounded, as though she had received a blow; and it seemed to her that she felt the first stirrings of life within her. Then she was silent, not even listening to what was being said, absorbed in her own thoughts. She could not sleep that night for thinking of the new life that was developing in her, and was sad at the thought that it was Julien's child, and might resemble him. The following morning she sent for the baron. "Little father," she said, "my resolution is formed; I wish to know everything, and especially just now; you understand, I insist, and you know that you must not thwart me in my present condition. Listen! You must go and get M. le Curé. I need him here to keep Rosalie from telling a lie. Then, as soon as he comes, send him up to me, and you stay downstairs with little mother. And, above all things, see that Julien does not suspect anything."

An hour later the priest came, looking fatter than ever, and puffing like the baroness. He sat down in an arm-chair and began to joke, wiping his forehead as usual with his plaid handkerchief. "Well, baroness, I do not think we grow any thinner; I think we make a good pair." Then, turning toward the patient, he said: "Eh, what is this I hear, young lady, that we are soon to have a fresh baptism? Aha, it will not be a boat this time." And in a graver tone he added: "It will be a defender of the country; unless"--after a moment's reflection--it "should be the prospective mother of a family, like you, madame," bowing to the baroness.

The door at the end of the room opened and Rosalie appeared, beside herself, weeping, refusing to enter the room, clinging to the door frame, and being pushed forward by the baron. Quite out of patience, he thrust her into the room. She covered her face with her hands and remained standing there, sobbing.

Jeanne, as soon as she saw her, rose to a sitting posture, whiter than the sheets, and with her heart beating wildly. She could not speak, could hardly breathe. At length she said, in a voice broken with emotion: "I--I--will not--need--to question you. It--it is enough for me to see you thus--to--to see your--your shame in my presence."

After a pause, for she was out of breath, she continued: "I had M. le Curé come, so that it might be like a confession, you understand."

Rosalie, motionless, uttered little cries that were almost screams behind her hands.

The baron, whose anger was gaining ground, seized her arms, and snatching her hands from her face, he threw her on her knees beside the bed, saying: "Speak! Answer!"

She remained on the ground, in the position assigned to Magdalens, her cap awry, her apron on the floor, and her face again covered by her hands.

Then the priest said: "Come, my girl, listen to what is said to you, and reply. We do not want to harm you, but we want to know what occurred."

Jeanne, leaning over, looked at her and said: "Is it true that you were with Julien when I surprised you?"

Rosalie moaned through her fingers, "Yes, madame."

Then the baroness suddenly began to cry in a choking fashion, and her convulsive sobs accompanied those of Rosalie.

Jeanne, with her eyes fixed on the maid, said: "How long had this been going on?"

"Ever since he came here," faltered Rosalie.

Jeanne could not understand. "Ever since he came--then--ever since--ever since the spring?"

"Yes, madame."

"Ever since he came into this house?"

"Yes, madame."

And Jeanne, as if overflowing with questions, asked, speaking precipitately:

"But how did it happen? How did he approach you? How did he persuade you? What did he say? When, how did you ever yield to him? How could you ever have

done it?"

Rosalie, removing her hands from her face, and overwhelmed also with a feverish desire to speak, said:

"How do I know, myself? It was the day he dined here for the first time, and he came up to my room. He had hidden himself in the loft. I did not dare to scream for fear of making a scandal. I no longer knew what I was doing. Then I said nothing because I liked him."

Then Jeanne exclaimed with almost a scream:

"But--your--your child--is his child?"

Rosalie sobbed.

"Yes, madame."

Then they were both silent. The only sound to be heard was the sobs of Rosalie and of the baroness.

Jeanne, quite overcome, felt her tears also beginning to flow; and they fell silently down her cheeks.

The maid's child had the same father, as her child! Her anger was at an end; she now was filled with a dreary, slow, profound and infinite despair. She presently resumed in a changed, tearful voice, the voice of a woman who has been crying:

"When we returned from--from down there--from our journey--when did he begin again?"

The little maid, who had sunk down on the floor, faltered: "The first evening."

Each word wrung Jeanne's heart. So on the very first night of their return to the "Poplars" he left her for this girl. That was why he wanted to sleep alone!

She now knew all she wanted to know, and exclaimed: "Go away, go away!" And as Rosalie, perfectly crushed, did not stir, Jeanne called to her father: "Take her away, carry her away!" The priest, who had said nothing as yet, thought that the moment

had arrived for him to preach a little sermon.

"What you have done is very wrong, my daughter, very wrong, and God will not pardon you so easily. Consider the hell that awaits you if you do not always act right. Now that you have a child you must behave yourself. No doubt madame la baronne will do something for you, and we will find you a husband."

He would have continued speaking, but the baron, having again seized Rosalie by the shoulders, raised her from the floor and dragged her to the door, and threw her like a package into the corridor. As he turned back into the room, looking paler than his daughter, the priest resumed: "What can one do? They are all like that in the district. It is shocking, but cannot be helped, and then one must be a little indulgent toward the weaknesses of our nature. They never get married until they have become enceinte, never, madame." He added, smiling: "One might call it a local custom. So, you see, monsieur, your maid did as all the rest do."

But the baron, who was trembling with nervousness, interrupted him, saying, "She! what do I care about her! It is Julien with whom I am indignant. It is infamous, the way he has behaved, and I shall take my daughter away."

He walked up and down excitedly, becoming more and more exasperated: "It is infamous to have betrayed my child, infamous! He is a wretch, this man, a cad, a wretch! and I will tell him so. I will slap his face. I will give him a horsewhipping!"

The priest, who was slowly taking a pinch of snuff, seated beside the baroness still in tears, and endeavoring to fulfill his office of a peacemaker, said: "Come, monsieur le baron, between ourselves, he has done what every one else does. Do you know many husbands who are faithful?" And he added with a sly good humor: "Come now, I wager that you have had your turn. Your hand on your heart, am I right?" The baron had stopped in astonishment before the priest, who continued: "Why, yes, you did just as others did. Who knows if you did not make love to a little sugar plum like that? I tell you that every one does. Your wife was none the less

happy, or less loved; am I not right?"

The baron had not stirred, he was much disturbed. What the priest said was true, and he had sinned as much as any one and had not hesitated when his wife's maids were in question. Was he a wretch on that account? Why should he judge Julien's conduct so severely when his own had not been above blame?

The baroness, still struggling with her sobs, smiled faintly at the recollection of her husband's escapades, for she belonged to the sentimental class for whom love adventures are a part of existence.

Jeanne, exhausted, lay with wide-open eyes, absorbed in painful reflection. Something Rosalie had said had wounded her as though an arrow had pierced her heart: "As for me, I said nothing, because I liked him."

She had liked him also, and that was the only reason why she had given herself, bound herself for life to him, why she had renounced everything else, all her cherished plans, all the unknown future. She had fallen into this marriage, into this hole without any edges by which one could climb out, into this wretchedness, this sadness, this despair, because, like Rosalie, she had liked him!

The door was pushed violently open and Julien appeared, with a furious expression on his face. He had caught sight of Rosalie moaning on the stairs, and suspected that something was up, that the maid had probably told all. The sight of the priest riveted him to the spot.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked in a trembling but quiet tone.

The baron, so violent a short while ago, did not venture to speak, afraid of the priest's remarks, and of what his son-in-law might say in the same strain. Little mother was weeping more copiously than ever; but Jeanne had raised herself with her hands and looked, breathing quickly, at the one who had caused her such cruel sorrow. She stammered out: "The fact is, we know all, all your rascality since--since the day you first entered this house--we know that the child of this maid is your

child, just as--as--mine is--they will be brothers." Overcome with sorrow at this thought, she buried herself in the sheets and wept bitterly.

Julien stood there gaping, not knowing what to say or do. The priest came to the rescue.

"Come, come, do not give way like that, my dear young lady, be sensible." He rose, approached the bed and placed his warm hand on the despairing girl's forehead. This seemed to soothe her strangely. She felt quieted, as if this strong peasant's hand, accustomed to the gesture of absolution, to kindly consolations, had conveyed by its touch some mysterious solace.

The good man, still standing, continued: "Madame, we must always forgive. A great sorrow has come to you; but God in His mercy has balanced it by a great happiness, since you will become a mother. This child will be your comfort. In his name I implore you, I adjure you to forgive M. Julien's error. It will be a new bond between you, a pledge of his future fidelity. Can you remain apart in your heart from him whose child you bear?"

She did not reply, crushed, mortified, exhausted as she was, without even strength for anger or resentment. Her nerves seemed relaxed, almost severed, she seemed to be scarcely alive.

The baroness, who seemed incapable of resentment, and whose mind was unequal to prolonged effort, murmured: "Come, come, Jeanne."

Then the priest took the hand of the young man and leading him up to the bed, he placed his hand in that of his wife, and gave it a little tap as though to unite them more closely. Then laying aside his professional tone and manner, he said with a satisfied air: "Well, now, that's done. Believe me, that is the best thing to do." The two hands, joined for a moment, separated immediately. Julien, not daring to kiss Jeanne, kissed his mother-in-law on the forehead, turned on his heel, took the arm of the baron, who acquiesced, happy at heart that the thing had been settled thus, and

they went out together to smoke a cigar.

The patient, overcome, dozed off, while the priest and little mother talked in a low tone.

The priest explained and propounded his ideas, to which the baroness assented by nodding her head. He said in conclusion: "Well, then, that is understood; you will give this girl the Barville farm, and I will undertake to find her a husband, a good, steady fellow. Oh! with a property worth twenty thousand francs we shall have no lack of suitors. There will be more than enough to choose from."

The baroness was smiling now, quite happy, with the remains of two tears that had dried on her cheeks.

She repeated: "That is settled. Barville is worth at least twenty thousand francs, but it will be settled on the child, the parents having the use of it during their lifetime."

The curé rose, shook little mother's hand, saying: "Do not disturb yourself, Madame la Baronne, do not disturb yourself; I know what an effort it is."

As he went out he met Aunt Lison coming to see her patient. She noticed nothing; they told her nothing; and she knew nothing, as usual.

CHAPTER VIII

MATERNITY

Rosalie had left the house. Jeanne felt no joy at the thought of being a mother, she had had so much sorrow. She awaited the advent of her child without curiosity, still filled with the apprehension of unknown misfortunes.

A big woman, big as a house, had taken Rosalie's place and supported the baroness in her monotonous walks along her avenue. The baron gave his arm to Jeanne, who was now always ailing, while Aunt Lison, uneasy, and busied about the approaching event, held her other hand, bewildered at this mystery which she would never know.

They all walked along like this almost in silence for hours at a time, while Julien

was riding about the country on horseback, having suddenly acquired this taste. Nothing ever came to disturb their dreary life. The baron, his wife, and the vicomte paid a visit to the Fourvilles, whom Julien seemed to be already well acquainted with, without one knowing just how. Another ceremonious visit was exchanged with the Brisevilles, who were still hidden in their manor house.

One afternoon, about four o'clock, two persons, a lady and gentleman on horseback, rode up into the courtyard of the château. Julien, greatly excited, ran up to Jeanne's room. "Quick, quick, come downstairs; here are the Fourvilles. They have just come as neighbors, knowing your condition. Tell them that I have gone out, but that I will be back. I will just go and make myself presentable."

Jeanne, much surprised, went downstairs. A pale, pretty young woman with a sad face, dreamy eyes, and lustreless, fair hair, looking as though the sunlight had never kissed it, quietly introduced her husband, a kind of giant, or ogre with a large red mustache. She added: "We have several times had the pleasure of meeting M. de Lamare. We heard from him how you were suffering, and we would not put off coming to see you as neighbors, without any ceremony. You see that we came on horseback. I also had the pleasure the other day of a visit from madame, your mother, and the baron."

She spoke with perfect ease, familiar but refined. Jeanne was charmed, and fell in love with her at once. "This is a friend," she thought.

The Comte de Fourville, on the contrary, seemed like a bear in the drawing-room. As soon as he was seated, he placed his hat on the chair next him, did not know what to do with his hands, placed them on his knees, then on the arms of the chair, and finally crossed his fingers as if in prayer.

Suddenly Julien entered the room. Jeanne was amazed and did not recognize him. He was shaved. He looked handsome, elegant, and attractive as on the day of their betrothal. He shook the comte's hairy paw, kissed the hand of the comtesse, whose

ivory cheeks colored up slightly while her eyelids quivered.

He began to speak; he was charming as in former days. His large eyes, the mirrors of love, had become tender again. And his hair, lately so dull and unkempt, had regained its soft, glossy wave, with the use of a hairbrush and perfumed oil.

At the moment that the Fourvilles were taking their leave the comtesse, turning toward him, said: "Would you like to take a ride on Thursday, dear vicomte?"

As he bowed and murmured, "Why, certainly, madame," she took Jeanne's hand and said in a sympathetic and affectionate tone, with a cordial smile: "Oh! when you are well, we will all three gallop about the country. It will be delightful. What do you say?"

With an easy gesture she held up her riding skirt and then jumped into the saddle with the lightness of a bird, while her husband, after bowing awkwardly, mounted his big Norman steed. As they disappeared outside the gate, Julien, who seemed charmed, exclaimed: "What delightful people! those are friends who may be useful to us."

Jeanne, pleased also without knowing why, replied: "The little comtesse is charming, I feel that I shall love her, but the husband looks like a brute. Where did you meet them?"

He rubbed his hands together good humoredly. "I met them by chance at the Brisevilles'. The husband seems a little rough. He cares for nothing but hunting, but he is a real noble for all that."

The dinner was almost cheerful, as though some secret happiness had come into the house.

Nothing new happened until the latter days of July, when Jeanne was taken ill. As she seemed to grow worse, the doctor was sent for and at the first glance recognized the symptoms of a premature confinement.

Her sufferings presently abated a little, but she was filled with a terrible anguish, a despairing sinking, something like a presentiment, the mysterious touch of death. It is in these moments when it comes so near to us that its breath chills our hearts.

The room was full of people. Little mother, buried in an armchair, was choking with grief. The baron, his hands trembling, ran hither and thither, carrying things, consulting the doctor and losing his head. Julien paced up and down, looking concerned, but perfectly calm, and Widow Dentu stood at the foot of the bed with an appropriate expression, the expression of a woman of experience whom nothing astonishes. The cook, Ludivine, and Aunt Lison remained discreetly concealed behind the door of the lobby.

Toward morning Jeanne became worse, and as her involuntary screams escaped from between her closed teeth, she thought incessantly of Rosalie, who had not suffered, who had hardly moaned, who had borne her child without suffering and without difficulty, and in her wretched and troubled mind she continually compared their conditions and cursed God, whom she had formerly thought to be just. She rebelled at the wicked partiality of fate and at the wicked lies of those who preach justice and goodness.

At times her sufferings were so great that her mind was a blank. She had neither strength, life nor knowledge for anything but suffering.

All at once her sufferings ceased. The nurse and the doctor leaned over her and gave her all attention. Presently she heard a little cry and, in spite of her weakness, she unconsciously held out her arms. She was suddenly filled with joy, with a glimpse of a new-found happiness which had just unfolded. Her child was born, she was soothed, happy, happy as she never yet had been. Her heart and her body revived; she was now a mother. She felt that she was saved, secure from all despair, for she had here something to love.

From now on she had but one thought--her child. She was a fanatical mother, all the

more intense because she had been deceived in her love, deceived in her hopes. She would sit whole days beside the window, rocking the little cradle.

The baron and little mother smiled at this excess of tenderness, but Julien, whose habitual routine had been interfered with and his overweening importance diminished by the arrival of this noisy and all-powerful tyrant, unconsciously jealous of this mite of a man who had usurped his place in the house, kept on saying angrily and impatiently: "How wearisome she is with her brat!"

She became so obsessed by this affection that she would pass the entire night beside the cradle, watching the child asleep. As she was becoming exhausted by this morbid life, taking no rest, growing weaker and thinner and beginning to cough, the doctor ordered the child to be taken from her. She got angry, wept, implored, but they were deaf to her entreaties. His nurse took him every evening, and each night his mother would rise, and in her bare feet go to the door, listen at the keyhole to see if he was sleeping quietly, did not wake up and wanted nothing.

Julien found her here one night when he came home late, after dining with the Fourvilles. After that they locked her in her room to oblige her to stay in bed.

The baptism took place at the end of August. The baron was godfather and Aunt Lison godmother. The child was named Pierre-Simon-Paul and called Paul for short.

At the beginning of September Aunt Lison left without any commotion. Her absence was as little felt as her presence.

One evening after dinner the priest appeared. He seemed embarrassed as if he were burdened by some mystery, and after some idle remarks, he asked the baroness and her husband to grant him a short interview in private.

They all three walked slowly down the long avenue, talking with animation, while Julien, who was alone with Jeanne, was astonished, disturbed and annoyed at this secret.

He accompanied the priest when he took his leave, and they went off together

toward the church where the Angelus was ringing.

As it was cool, almost cold, the others went into the drawing-room. They were all dozing when Julien came in abruptly, his face red, looking very indignant.

From the door he called out to his parents-in-law, without remembering that Jeanne was there: "Are you crazy, for God's sake! to go and throw away twenty thousand francs on that girl?"

No one replied, they were so astonished. He continued, bellowing with rage: "How can one be so stupid as that? Do you wish to leave us without a sou?"

The baron, who had recovered his composure, attempted to stop him: "Keep still! Remember that you are speaking before your wife."

But Julien was trembling with excitement: "As if I cared; she knows all about it, anyway. It is robbing her."

Jeanne, bewildered, looked at him without understanding. She faltered: "What in the world is the matter?"

Julien then turned toward her, to try and get her on his side as a partner who has been cheated out of an unexpected fortune. He hurriedly told her about the conspiracy to marry off Rosalie and about the gift of the Barville property, which was worth at least twenty thousand francs. He said: "Your parents are crazy, my dear, crazy enough to be shut up! Twenty thousand francs! twenty thousand francs! Why, they have lost their heads! Twenty thousand francs for a bastard!"

Jeanne listened without emotion and without anger, astonished at her own calmness, indifferent now to everything but her own child.

The baron was raging, but could find nothing to say. He finally burst forth and, stamping his foot, exclaimed: "Think of what you are saying; it is disgusting. Whose fault was it if we had to give this girl-mother a dowry? Whose child is it? You would like to abandon it now!"

Julien, amazed at the baron's violence, looked at him fixedly. He then resumed in a calmer tone: "But fifteen hundred francs would be quite enough. They all have children before they are legally married. It makes no difference whose child it is, in any case. Instead of giving one of your farms, to the value of twenty thousand francs, in addition to making the world aware of what has happened, you should, to say the least, have had some regard for our name and our position."

He spoke in a severe tone like a man who stood on his rights and was convinced of the logic of his argument. The baron, disturbed at this unexpected discussion, stood there gaping at him. Julien then, seeing his advantage, concluded: "Happily, nothing has yet been settled. I know the young fellow who is going to marry her. He is an honest chap and we can make a satisfactory arrangement with him. I will take charge of the matter."

And he went out immediately, fearing no doubt to continue the discussion, and pleased that he had had the last word, a proof, he thought, that they acquiesced in his views.

As soon as he had left the room, however, the baron exclaimed: "Oh, that is going too far, much too far!"

But Jeanne, happening to look up at her father's bewildered face, began to laugh with her clear, ringing laugh of former days, when anything amused her. She said: "Father, father, did you hear the tone in which he said: 'Twenty thousand francs?'"

Little mother, whose mirth was as ready as her tears, as she recalled her son-in-law's angry expression, his indignant exclamations and his refusal to allow the girl whom he had led astray to be given money that did not belong to him, delighted also at Jeanne's mirth, gave way to little bursts of laughter till the tears came to her eyes. The baron caught the contagion, and all three laughed to kill themselves as they used to do in the good old days.

As soon as they quieted down a little Jeanne said: "How strange it is that all this

does not affect me. I look upon him now as a stranger. I cannot believe that I am his wife. You see how I can laugh at his--his--want of delicacy."

And without knowing why they all three embraced each other, smiling and happy.

Two days later, after breakfast, just as Julien had started away from the house on horseback, a strapping young fellow from twenty-one to twenty-five years old, clad in a brand-new blue blouse with wide sleeves buttoning at the wrist, slyly jumped over the gate, as though he had been there awaiting his opportunity all the morning, crept along the Couillards' ditch, came round the château, and cautiously approached the baron and his wife, who were still sitting under the plane-tree.

He took off his cap and advanced, bowing in an awkward manner. As soon as he was close to them he said: "Your servant, Monsieur le Baron, madame and the company." Then, as no one replied, he said: "It is I, I am Desiré Lecocq."

As the name conveyed nothing to them, the baron asked, "What do you want?"

Then, altogether upset at the necessity of explaining himself, the young fellow stuttered out as he gazed alternately at his cap, which he held in his hands, and at the roof of the château: "It was M'sieu le Curé who said something to me about this matter----" And then he stopped, fearing he might say too much and compromise his own interests.

The other, lowering his voice, blurted out: "That matter of your maid--Rosalie----"

Jeanne, who had guessed what was coming, had risen and moved away with her infant in her arms.

"Come nearer," said the baron, pointing to the chair his daughter had just left. The peasant sat down, murmuring: "You are very good." Then he waited as though he had no more to say. After a long silence, he screwed up courage, and looking up at the sky, remarked: "There's fine weather for the time of year. But the earth will be none the better for it, as the seed is already sown." And then he was silent again.

The baron was growing impatient. He plunged right into the subject and said drily: "Then it is you who are going to marry Rosalie?"

The man at once became uneasy, his Norman caution being on the alert. He replied with more animation, but with a tinge of defiance: "That depends; perhaps yes, perhaps no; it depends."

The baron, annoyed at this hedging, exclaimed angrily: "Answer frankly, damn it! Was this what you came here for? Yes or no! Will you marry her? Yes or no!"

The bewildered man looked steadfastly at his feet: "If it is as M'sieu le Curé said, I will take her, but if it is as M'sieu Julien said, I will not take her."

"What did M. Julien tell you?"

"M'sieu Julien told me fifteen hundred francs and M'sieu le Curé told me that I should have twenty thousand. I will do it for twenty thousand, but I will not do it for fifteen hundred."

The baroness, who was buried in her easy chair, began to giggle at the anxious expression of the peasant, who, not understanding this frivolity, glanced at her angrily out of the corner of his eye and waited in silence.

The baron, who was embarrassed at this bargaining, cut it short by saying: "I told M. le Curé that you should have the Barville farm during your lifetime and that then it would revert to the child. It is worth twenty thousand francs. I do not go back on my word. Is it settled? Yes or no!"

The man smiled with a humble and satisfied expression, and suddenly becoming loquacious, said: "Oh, in that case, I will not say no. That was all that stood in my way. When M'sieu le Curé spoke to me, I was ready at once, by gosh! and I was very pleased to accommodate the baron who was giving me that. I said to myself, 'Is it not true that when people are willing to do each other favors, they can always find a way and can make it worth while?' But M'sieu Julien came to see me, and it was only fifteen hundred francs. I said to myself: 'I must see about that,' and so I came

here. That is not to say that I did not trust you, but I wanted to know. Short accounts make long friends. Is not that true, M'sieu le Baron?"

The baron interrupted him by asking, "When do you wish to get married?"

The man became timid again, very much embarrassed, and finally said, hesitatingly: "I will not do it until I get a little paper."

This time the baron got angry: "Doggone it! you will have the marriage contract. That is the best kind of paper."

But the peasant was stubborn: "Meanwhile I might take a little turn; it will not be dark for a while."

The baron rose to make an end of the matter: "Answer yes or no at once. If you do not wish her, say so; I have another suitor."

The fear of a rival terrified the crafty Norman. He suddenly made up his mind and held out his hand, as after buying a cow, saying: "Put it there, M'sieu le Baron; it is a bargain. Whoever draws back is a skunk!"

The baron shook his hand, then called out: "Ludivine!" The cook appeared at the window. "Bring us a bottle of wine." They clinked glasses to seal the matter and the young peasant went off with a light tread.

Nothing was said to Julien about this visit. The contract was drawn up with all secrecy and as soon as the banns were published the wedding took place one Monday morning.

A neighbor carried the child to church, walking behind the bride and groom, as a sure sign of good luck. And no one in all the district was surprised; they simply envied Desiré Lecocq. "He was born with a caul," they said, with a sly smile into which there entered no resentment.

Julien was terribly angry and made such a scene that his parents-in-law cut short their visit to the "Poplars." Jeanne was only moderately sad at their departure, for

little Paul had become for her an inexhaustible source of happiness.

CHAPTER IX

DEATH OF LA BARONNE

As Jeanne's health was quite restored, they determined to go and return the Fourvilles' visit and also to call on the Marquis de Coutelier.

Julien had bought at a sale a new one-horse phaeton, so that they could go out twice a month. They set out one fine December morning, and after driving for two hours across the plains of Normandy, they began to descend a little slope into a little valley, the sides of which were wooded, while the valley itself was cultivated. After an abrupt turn in the valley they saw the Château of Vrillette, a wooded slope on one side of it and a large pond on the other, out of which rose one of its walls and which was bounded by a wood of tall pine trees that formed the other side of the valley.

Julien explained all the portions of the building to Jeanne, like one who knows his subject thoroughly, and went into raptures over its beauty, adding; "It is full of game, this country. The comte loves to hunt here. This is a true seignorial residence."

The hall door was opened and the pale comtesse appeared, coming forward to meet the visitors, all smiles, and wearing a long-trained dress, like a chatelaine of olden times. She looked a fitting lady of the lake, born to inhabit this fairy castle.

The comtesse took both Jeanne's hands, as if she had known her all her life, and made her sit down beside her in a low chair, while Julien, all of whose forgotten elegance seemed to have revived within the past five months, chatted and smiled quietly and familiarly.

The comtesse and he talked of their horseback rides. She was laughing at his manner of mounting a horse and called him "Le Chevalier Trébuche," and he smiled also, having nicknamed her "The Amazon Queen." A gun fired beneath the windows caused Jeanne to give a little scream. It was the comte, who had killed a teal.

His wife called to him. A sound of oars was heard, a boat grinding against the stones, and he appeared, enormous, booted, followed by two drenched dogs of a ruddy color like himself, who lay down on the mat outside the door.

He seemed more at his ease in his own home, and was delighted to see his visitors. He put some wood on the fire, sent for madeira and biscuits and then exclaimed suddenly: "Why, you will take dinner with us, of course."

Jeanne, whose child was never out of her thoughts, declined. He insisted, and as she could not be persuaded, Julien made a gesture of annoyance. She feared to arouse his ugly, quarrelsome temper, and although she was very unhappy at the thought that she should not see Paul until the next day, she consented to stay.

The afternoon was delightful. They first visited the springs which bubbled up at the foot of a mossy rock and then took a row on the pond. At one end of the boat Julien and the comtesse, wrapped in shawls, were smiling happily like those who have nothing left to wish for.

A huge fire was blazing in the spacious reception room, which imparted a sense of warmth and contentment. The comte seized his wife in his arms and lifted her from the floor as though she had been a child and gave her a hearty kiss on each cheek, like a man satisfied with the world.

Jeanne, smiling, looked at this good giant whom one would have thought was an ogre at the very sight of his mustaches, and she thought: "How one may be deceived each day about everybody." Then, almost involuntarily, she glanced at Julien standing in the doorway, looking horribly pale and with his eyes fixed on the comte. She approached him and said in a low tone: "Are you ill? What is the matter with you?" He answered her angrily: "Nothing. Let me alone! I was cold."

When they went into the dining-room the count asked if he might let his dogs come in, and they settled themselves one on either side of their master.

After dinner, as Jeanne and Julien were preparing to leave, M. de Fourville kept

them a little longer to look at some fishing by torchlight. When they finally set out, wrapped up in their cloaks and some rugs they had borrowed, Jeanne said almost involuntarily: "What a fine man that giant is!" Julien, who was driving, replied: "Yes, but he does not always restrain himself before company."

A week later they called on the Couteliers, who were supposed to be the chief noble family in the province. Their property of Remenil adjoined the large town of Cany. The new château built in the reign of Louis XIV. was hidden in a magnificent park enclosed by walls. The ruins of the old château could be seen on an eminence. They were ushered into a stately reception room by men servants in livery. In the middle of the room a sort of column held an immense bowl of Sèvres ware and on the pedestal of the column an autograph letter from the king, under glass, requested the Marquis Leopold-Hervé-Joseph-Germer de Varneville de Rollebosc de Coutelier to receive this present from his sovereign.

Jeanne and Julien were looking at this royal gift when the marquis and marquise entered the room.

They were very ceremonious people whose minds, sentiments and words seemed always to be on stilts. They spoke without waiting for an answer, smiling complacently, appearing always to be fulfilling the duty imposed on them by their position, of showing civilities to the inferior nobility of the region.

Jeanne and Julien, somewhat taken aback, endeavored to be agreeable, but although they felt too embarrassed to remain any longer, they did not know exactly how to take their leave. The marquise herself put an end to the visit naturally and simply by bringing the conversation to a close like a queen giving a dismissal.

On the way home Julien said: "If you like, we will make this our first and last call; the Fourvilles are good enough for me." Jeanne was of the same opinion. December passed slowly and the shut-in life began again as in the previous year. But Jeanne did not find it wearisome, as she was always taken up with Paul, whom Julien

looked at askance, uneasy and annoyed. Often when the mother held the child in her arms, kissing it frantically as women do their children, she would hold it up to its father, saying: "Give him a kiss; one would suppose you did not love him." He would hardly touch with his lips the child's smooth forehead, walking all round it, as though he did not wish to touch the restless little fists. Then he would walk away abruptly as though from something distasteful.

The mayor, the doctor and the curé came to dinner occasionally, and sometimes it was the Fourvilles, with whom they were becoming more and more intimate. The comte appeared to worship Paul. He held him on his knees during the whole visit and sometimes during the whole afternoon, playing with him and amusing him and then kissing him tenderly as mothers do. He always lamented that he had no children of his own.

Comtesse Gilberte again mentioned the rides they all four were going to take together. Jeanne, a little weary of the monotonous days and nights, was quite happy in anticipation of these plans, and for a week amused herself making a riding habit.

They always set out two and two, the comtesse and Julien ahead, the count and Jeanne a hundred feet behind them, talking quietly, like good friends, for such they had become through the sympathy of their straightforward minds and simple hearts. The others often spoke in a low tone, sometimes bursting into laughter and looking quickly at each other, as though their eyes were expressing what they dared not utter. And they would suddenly set off at a gallop, impelled by a desire to flee, to get away, far away.

Then Gilberte would seem to be growing irritable. Her sharp voice, borne on the breeze, occasionally reached the ears of the loitering couple. The comte would smile and say to Jeanne: "She does not always get out of bed the right side, that wife of mine."

One evening as they were coming home the comtesse was teasing her mount,

spurring it and then checking it abruptly. They heard Julien say several time: "Take care, take care; you will be thrown." "So much the worse," she replied; "it is none of your business," in a hard clear tone that resounded across the fields as though the words hung in the air.

The animal reared, plunged and champed the bit. The comte, uneasy, shouted: "Be careful, Gilberte!" Then, as if in defiance, with one of those impulses of a woman whom nothing can stop, she struck her horse brutally between the ears. The animal reared in anger, pawed the air with his front feet and, landing again on his feet, gave a bound and darted across the plain at full speed.

First it crossed the meadow, then plunging into a ploughed field kicked up the damp rich earth behind it, going so fast that one could hardly distinguish its rider. Julien remained transfixed with astonishment, calling out in despair: "Madame, madame!" but the comte was rather annoyed, and, bending forward on his heavy mount, he urged it forward and started out at such a pace, spurring it on with his voice, his gestures and the spur, that the huge horseman seemed to be carrying the heavy beast between his legs and to be lifting it up as if to fly. They went at incredible speed, straight ahead, and Jeanne saw the outline of the wife and of the husband fleeing getting smaller and disappearing in the distance, as if they were two birds pursuing each other to the verge of the horizon.

Julien, approaching Jeanne slowly, murmured angrily: "I think she is crazy to-day." And they set out together to follow their friends, who were now hidden by the rising ground.

At the end of about a quarter of an hour they saw them returning and presently joined them. The comte, perspiring, his face red, but smiling, happy and triumphant, was holding his wife's trembling horse in his iron grasp. Gilberte was pale, her face sad and drawn, and she was leaning one hand on her husband's shoulder as if she were going to faint. Jeanne understood now that the comte loved her madly.

After this the comtesse for some months seemed happier than she had ever been. She came to the "Poplars" more frequently, laughed continually and kissed Jeanne impulsively. One might have said that some mysterious charm had come into her life. Her husband was also quite happy and never took his eyes off her. He said to Jeanne one evening: "We are very happy just now. Gilberte has never been so nice as this. She never is out of humor, never gets angry. I feel that she loves me; until now I was not sure of it."

Julien also seemed changed, no longer impatient, as though the friendship between the two families had brought peace and happiness to both. The spring was singularly early and mild. Everything seemed to be coming to life beneath the quickening rays of the sun. Jeanne was vaguely troubled at this awakening of nature. Memories came to her of the early days of her love. Not that her love for Julien was renewed; that was over, over forever. But all her being, caressed by the breeze, filled with the fragrance of spring, was disturbed as though in response to some invisible and tender appeal. She loved to be alone, to give herself up in the sunlight to all kinds of vague and calm enjoyment which did not necessitate thinking.

One morning as she was in a reverie a vision came to her, a swift vision of the sunlit nook amid the dark foliage in the little wood near Étretat. It was there that she had for the first time trembled, when beside the young man who loved her then. It was there that he had uttered for the first time the timid desire of his heart. It was there that she thought that she had all at once reached the radiant future of her hopes. She wished to see this wood again, to make a sort of sentimental and superstitious pilgrimage, as though a return to this spot might somehow change the current of her life. Julien had been gone since daybreak, she knew not whither. She had the little white horse, which she sometimes rode, saddled, and she set out. It was one of those days when nothing seemed stirring, not a blade of grass, not a leaf. All seemed wrapped in a golden mist beneath the blazing sun. Jeanne walked her horse, soothed and happy.

She descended into the valley which leads to the sea, between the great arches in the cliff that are called the "Gates" of Étretat, and slowly reached the wood. The sunlight was streaming through the still scanty foliage. She wandered about the little paths, looking for the spot.

All at once, as she was going along one of the lower paths, she perceived at the farther end of it two horses tied to a tree and recognized them at once; they belonged to Gilberte and Julien. The loneliness of the place was beginning to be irksome to her, and she was pleased at this chance meeting, and whipped up her horse.

When she reached the two patient animals, who were probably accustomed to these long halts, she called. There was no reply. A woman's glove and two riding whips lay on the beaten-down grass. So they had no doubt sat down there awhile and then walked away leaving their horses tied.

She waited a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, surprised, not understanding what could be keeping them. She had dismounted. She sat there, leaning against a tree trunk. Suddenly a thought came to her as she glanced again at the glove, the whips and the two horses left tied there, and she sprang to her saddle with an irresistible desire to make her escape.

She started off at a gallop for the "Poplars." She was turning things over in her mind, trying to reason, to put two and two together, to compare facts. How was it that she had not suspected this sooner? How was it that she had not noticed anything? How was it she had not guessed the reason of Julien's frequent absences, the renewal of his former attention to his appearance and the improvement in his temper? She now recalled Gilberte's nervous abruptness, her exaggerated affection and the kind of beaming happiness in which she seemed to exist latterly and that so pleased the comte.

She reined in her horse, as she wanted to think, and the quick pace disturbed her ideas.

As soon as the first emotion was over she became almost calm, without jealousy or hatred, but filled with contempt. She hardly gave Julien a thought; nothing he might do could astonish her. But the double treachery of the comtesse, her friend, disgusted her. Everyone, then, was treacherous, untruthful and false. And tears came to her eyes. One sometimes mourns lost illusions as deeply as one does the death of a friend.

She resolved, however, to act as though she knew nothing, to close the doors of her heart to all ordinary affection and to love no one but Paul and her parents and to endure other people with an undisturbed countenance.

As soon as she got home she ran to her son, carried him up to her room and kissed him passionately for an hour.

Julien came home to dinner, smiling and attentive, and appeared interested as he asked: "Are not father and little mother coming this year?"

She was so grateful to him for this little attention that she almost forgave him for the discovery she had made in the wood, and she was filled all of a sudden with an intense desire to see without delay the two beings in the world whom she loved next to Paul, and passed the whole evening writing to them to hasten their journey.

They promised to be there on the 20th of May and it was now the 7th.

She awaited their arrival with a growing impatience, as though she felt, in addition to her filial affection, the need of opening her heart to honest hearts, to talk with frankness to pure-minded people, devoid of all infamy, all of whose life, actions and thoughts had been upright at all times.

What she now felt was a sort of moral isolation, amid all this immorality, and, although she had learned suddenly to disseminate, although she received the comtesse with outstretched hand and smiling lips, she felt this consciousness of hollowness, this contempt for humanity increasing and enveloping her, and the petty gossip of the district gave her a still greater disgust, a still lower opinion of her

fellow creatures.

The immorality of the peasants shocked her, and this warm spring seemed to stir the sap in human beings as well as in plants. Jeanne did not belong to the race of peasants who are dominated by their lower instincts. Julien one day awakened her aversion anew by telling her a coarse story that had been told to him and that he considered very amusing.

When the travelling carriage stopped at the door and the happy face of the baron appeared at the window Jeanne was stirred with so deep an emotion, such a tumultuous feeling of affection as she had never before experienced. But when she saw her mother she was shocked and almost fainted. The baroness, in six months, had aged ten years. Her heavy cheeks had grown flabby and purple, as though the blood were congested; her eyes were dim and she could no longer move about unless supported under each arm. Her breathing was difficult and wheezing and affected those near her with a painful sensation.

When Jeanne had taken them to their room, she retired to her own in order to have a good cry, as she was so upset. Then she went to look for her father, and throwing herself into his arms, she exclaimed, her eyes still full of tears: "Oh, how mother is changed! What is the matter with her? Tell me, what is the matter?" He was much surprised and replied: "Do you think so? What an idea! Why, no. I have never been away from her. I assure you that I do not think she looks ill. She always looks like that."

That evening Julien said to his wife: "Your mother is in a pretty bad way. I think she will not last long." And as Jeanne burst out sobbing, he became annoyed. "Come, I did not say there was no hope for her. You always exaggerate everything. She is changed, that's all. She is no longer young."

The baroness was not able to walk any distance and only went out for half an hour each day to take one turn in her avenue and then she would sit on the bench. And

when she felt unequal to walking to the end of her avenue, she would say: "Let us stop; my hypertrophy is breaking my legs today." She hardly ever laughed now as she did the previous year at anything that amused her, but only smiled. As she could see to read excellently, she passed hours reading "Corinne" or Lamartine's "Meditations." Then she would ask for her drawer of "souvenirs," and emptying her cherished letters on her lap, she would place the drawer on a chair beside her and put back, one by one, her "relics," after she had slowly gone over them. And when she was alone, quite alone, she would kiss some of them, as one kisses in secret a lock of hair of a loved one passed away.

Sometimes Jeanne, coming in abruptly, would find her weeping and would exclaim: "What is the matter, little mother?" And the baroness, sighing deeply, would reply: "It is my 'relics' that make me cry. They stir remembrances that were so delightful and that are now past forever, and one is reminded of persons whom one had forgotten and recalls once more. You seem to see them, to hear them and it affects you strangely. You will feel this later."

When the baron happened to come in at such times he would say gently: "Jeanne, dearie, take my advice and burn your letters, all of them--your mother's, mine, everyone's. There is nothing more dreadful, when one is growing old, than to look back to one's youth." But Jeanne also kept her letters, was preparing a chest of "relics" in obedience to a sort of hereditary instinct of dreamy sentimentality, although she differed from her mother in every other way.

The baron was obliged to leave them some days later, as he had some business that called him away.

One afternoon Jeanne took Paul in her arms and went out for a walk. She was sitting on a bank, gazing at the infant, whom she seemed to be looking at for the first time. She could hardly imagine him grown up, walking with a steady step, with a beard on his face and talking in a big voice. She heard someone calling and raised her head.

Marius came running toward her.

"Madame, Madame la Baronne is very bad!"

A cold chill seemed to run down her back as she started up and walked hurriedly toward the house.

As she approached she saw a number of persons grouped around the plane tree. She darted forward and saw her mother lying on the ground with two pillows under her head. Her face was black, her eyes closed and her breathing, which had been difficult for twenty years, now quite hushed. The nurse took the child out of Jeanne's arms and carried it off.

Jeanne, with drawn, anxious face, asked: "What happened? How did she come to fall? Go for the doctor, somebody." Turning round, she saw the old curé, who had heard of it in some way. He offered his services and began rolling up the sleeves of his cassock. But vinegar, eau de cologne and rubbing the invalid proved ineffectual.

"She should be undressed and put to bed," said the priest.

Joseph Couillard, the farmer, was there and old Simon and Ludivine. With the assistance of Abbé Picot, they tried to lift the baroness, but after an attempt were obliged to bring a large easy chair from the drawing-room and place her in it. In this way they managed to get her into the house and then upstairs, where they laid her on her bed.

Joseph Couillard set out in hot haste for the doctor. As the priest was going to get the holy oil, the nurse, who had "scented a death," as the servants say, and was on the spot, whispered to him: "Do not put yourself out, monsieur; she is dead. I know all about these things."

Jeanne, beside herself, entreated them to do something. The priest thought it best to pronounce the absolution.

They watched for two hours beside this lifeless, discolored body. Jeanne, on her

knees, was sobbing in an agony of grief.

When the door opened and the doctor appeared, Jeanne darted toward him, stammering out what she knew of the accident, but seeing the nurse exchange a meaning glance with the doctor, she stopped to ask him: "Is it serious? Do you think it is serious?"

He said presently: "I am afraid--I am afraid--it is all over. Be brave, be brave."

Jeanne, extending her arms, threw herself on her mother's body. Julien just then came in. He stood there amazed, visibly annoyed, without any exclamation of sorrow, any appearance of grief, taken so unawares that he had not time to prepare a suitable expression of countenance. He muttered: "I was expecting it, I felt that the end was near." Then he took out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, knelt down, crossed himself, and then rising to his feet, attempted to raise his wife. But she was clasping the dead body and kissing it, and it became necessary to carry her away. She appeared to be out of her mind.

At the end of an hour she was allowed to come back. There was no longer any hope. The room was arranged as a death chamber. Julien and the priest were talking in a low tone near the window. It was growing dark. The priest came over to Jeanne and took her hands, trying to console her. He spoke of the defunct, praised her in pious phrases and offered to pass the night in prayer beside the body.

But Jeanne refused, amid convulsive sobs. She wished to be alone, quite alone on this last night of farewell. Julien came forward: "But you must not do it; we will stay together." She shook her head, unable to speak. At last she said: "It is my mother, my mother. I wish to watch beside her alone." The doctor murmured: "Let her do as she pleases; the nurse can stay in the adjoining room."

The priest and Julien consented, more interested in their own rest. Then Abbé Picot knelt down in his turn, and as he rose and left the room, he said: "She was a saint" in the same tone as he said "Dominus vobiscum."

The vicomte in his ordinary tone then asked: "Are you not going to eat something?" Jeanne did not reply, not knowing he was speaking to her, and he repeated: "You had better eat something to keep up your stomach." She replied in a bewildered manner: "Send at once for papa." And he went out of the room to send someone on horseback to Rouen.

She remained plunged in a sort of motionless grief, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, understanding nothing. She only wanted to be alone. Julien came back. He had dined and he asked her again: "Won't you take something?" She shook her head. He sat down with an air of resignation rather than sadness, without speaking, and they both sat there silent, till at length Julien arose, and approaching Jeanne, said: "Would you like to stay alone now?" She took his hand impulsively and replied: "Oh, yes! leave me!"

He kissed her forehead, murmuring: "I will come in and see you from time to time." He went out with Widow Dentu, who rolled her easy chair into the next room.

Jeanne shut the door and opened the windows wide. She felt the soft breath from the mown hay that lay in the moonlight on the lawn. It seemed to harrow her feelings like an ironical remark.

She went back to the bed, took one of the cold, inert hands and looked at her mother earnestly. She seemed to be sleeping more peacefully than she had ever done, and the pale flame of the tapers which flickered at every breath made her face appear to be alive, as if she had stirred. Jeanne remembered all the little incidents of her childhood, the visits of little mother to the "parloir" of the convent, the manner in which she handed her a little paper bag of cakes, a multitude of little details, little acts, little caresses, words, intonations, familiar gestures, the creases at the corner of her eyes when she laughed, the big sigh she gave when she sat down.

And she stood there looking at her, repeating half mechanically: "She is dead," and all the horror of the word became real to her. It was mamma lying there--little

mother--Mamma Adelaide who was dead. She would never move about again, nor speak, nor laugh, nor sit at dinner opposite little father. She would never again say: "Good-morning, Jeannette." She was dead!

And she fell on her knees in a paroxysm of despair, her hands clutching the sheet, her face buried in the covers as she cried in a heartrending tone: "Oh, mamma, my poor mamma!" Then feeling that she was losing her reason as she had done on the night when she fled across the snow, she rose and ran to the window to drink in the fresh air. The soothing calmness of the night entered her soul and she began to weep quietly.

Presently she turned back into the room and sat down again beside her mother. Other remembrances came to her: those of her own life--Rosalie, Gilberte, the bitter disillusions of her heart. Everything, then, was only misery, grief, unhappiness and death. Everyone tried to deceive, everyone lied, everyone made you suffer and weep. Where could one find a little rest and happiness? In another existence no doubt, when the soul is freed from the trials of earth. And she began to ponder on this insoluble mystery.

A tender and curious thought came to her mind. It was to read over in this last watch, as though they were a litany, the old letters that her mother loved. It seemed to her that she was about to perform a delicate and sacred duty which would give pleasure to little mother in the other world.

She rose, opened the writing desk and took from the lower drawer ten little packages of yellow letters, tied and arranged in order, side by side. She placed them all on the bed over her mother's heart from a sort of sentiment and began to read them. They were old letters that savored of a former century. The first began, "My dear little granddaughter," then again "My dear little girl," "My darling," "My dearest daughter," then "My dear child," "My dear Adelaide," "My dear daughter," according to the periods--childhood, youth or young womanhood. They were all full

of little insignificant details and tender words, about a thousand little matters, those simple but important events of home life, so petty to outsiders: "Father has the grip; poor Hortense burnt her finger; the cat, 'Croquerat,' is dead; they have cut down the pine tree to the right of the gate; mother lost her prayerbook on the way home from church, she thinks it was stolen."

All these details affected her. They seemed like revelations, as though she had suddenly entered the past secret heart life of little mother. She looked at her lying there and suddenly began to read aloud, to read to the dead, as though to distract, to console her.

And the dead woman appeared to be pleased.

Jeanne tossed the letters as she read them to the foot of the bed. She untied another package. It was a new handwriting. She read: "I cannot do without your caresses. I love you so that I am almost crazy."

That was all; no signature.

She put back the letter without understanding its meaning. The address was certainly "Madame la Baronne Le Perthuis des Vauds."

Then she opened another: "Come this evening as soon as he goes out; we shall have an hour together. I worship you." In another: "I passed the night longing in vain for you, longing to look into your eyes, to press my lips to yours, and I am insane enough to throw myself from the window at the thought that you are another's...."

Jeanne was perfectly bewildered. What did that mean? To whom, for whom, from whom were these words of love?

She went on reading, coming across fresh impassioned declarations, appointments with warnings as to prudence, and always at the end the six words: "Be sure to burn this letter!"

At last she opened an ordinary note, accepting an invitation to dinner, but in the

same handwriting and signed: "Paul d'Ennemare," whom the baron called, whenever he spoke of him, "My poor old Paul," and whose wife had been the baroness' dearest friend.

Then a suspicion, which immediately became a certainty, flashed across Jeanne's mind: He had been her mother's lover.

And, almost beside herself, she suddenly threw aside these infamous letters as she would have thrown off some venomous reptile and ran to the window and began to cry piteously. Then, collapsing, she sank down beside the wall, and hiding her face in the curtain so that no one should hear her, she sobbed bitterly as if in hopeless despair.

She would have remained thus probably all night, if she had not heard a noise in the adjoining room that made her start to her feet. It might be her father. And all the letters were lying on the floor! He would have to open only one of them to know all! Her father!

She darted into the other room and seizing the letters in handfuls, she threw them all into the fireplace, those of her grandparents as well as those of the lover; some that she had not looked at and some that had remained tied up in the drawers of the desk. She then took one of the tapers that burned beside the bed and set fire to this pile of letters. When they were reduced to ashes she went back to the open window, as though she no longer dared to sit beside the dead, and began to cry again with her face in her hands: "Oh, my poor mamma! oh, my poor mamma!"

The stars were paling. It was the cool hour that precedes the dawn. The moon was sinking on the horizon and turning the sea to mother of pearl. The recollection of the night she passed at the window when she first came to the "Poplars" came to Jeanne's mind. How far away it seemed, how everything was changed, how different the future now seemed!

The sky was becoming pink, a joyous, love-inspiring, enchanting pink. She looked

at it in surprise, as at some phenomenon, this radiant break of day, and asked herself if it were possible that, on a planet where such dawns were found, there should be neither joy nor happiness.

A noise at the door made her start. It was Julien. "Well," he said, "are you not very tired?"

She murmured, "No," happy at being no longer alone. "Go and rest now," he said. She kissed her mother a long, sad kiss; then she went to her room.

The next day passed in the usual attentions to the dead. The baron arrived toward evening. He wept for some time.

The funeral took place the following day. After pressing a last kiss on her mother's icy forehead and seeing the coffin nailed down, Jeanne left the room. The invited guests would soon arrive.

Gilberte was the first to come, and she threw herself sobbing on her friend's shoulder. Women in black presently entered the room one after another, people whom Jeanne did not know. The Marquise de Coutelier and the Vicomtesse de Briseville embraced her. She suddenly saw Aunt Lison gliding in behind her. She turned round and kissed her tenderly.

Julien came in, dressed all in black, elegant, very important, pleased at seeing so many people. He asked his wife some question in a low tone and added confidentially: "All the nobility are here; it will be a fine affair." And he walked away, gravely bowing to the ladies. Aunt Lison and Comtesse Gilberte alone remained with Jeanne during the service for the dead. The comtesse kissed her repeatedly, exclaiming: "My poor dear, my poor dear!"

When Comte de Fourville came to fetch his wife he was also crying as though it were for his own mother.

CHAPTER X

RETRIBUTION

The following days were very sad and dreary, as they always are when there has been a death in the house. And, in addition, Jeanne was crushed at the thought of what she had discovered; her last shred of confidence had been destroyed with the destruction of her faith. Little father, after a short stay, went away to try and distract his thoughts from his grief, and the large house, whose former masters were leaving it from time to time, resumed its usual calm and monotonous course.

Then Paul fell ill, and Jeanne was almost beside herself, not sleeping for ten days, and scarcely tasting food. He recovered, but she was haunted by the idea that he might die. Then what should she do? What would become of her? And there gradually stole into her heart the hope that she might have another child. She dreamed of it, became obsessed with the idea. She longed to realize her old dream of seeing two little children around her; a boy and a girl.

But since the affair of Rosalie she and Julien had lived apart. A reconciliation seemed impossible in their present situation. Julien loved some one else, she knew it; and the very thought of suffering his approach filled her with repugnance. She had no one left whom she could consult. She resolved to go and see Abbé Picot and tell him, under the seal of confession, all that weighed upon her mind in this matter.

He was reading from his breviary in his little garden planted with fruit trees when she arrived.

After a few minutes' conversation on indifferent matters, she faltered, her color rising: "I want to confess, Monsieur l'Abbé."

He looked at her in astonishment, as he pushed his spectacles back on his forehead; then he began to laugh. "You surely have no great sins on your conscience." This embarrassed her greatly, and she replied: "No, but I want to ask your advice on a subject that is so--so--so painful that I dare not mention it casually."

He at once laid aside his jovial manner and assumed his priestly attitude. "Well, my

child, I will listen to you in the confessional; come along."

But she held back, undecided, restrained by a kind of scruple at speaking of these matters, of which she was half ashamed, in the seclusion of an empty church.

"Or else, no--Monsieur le Curé--I might--I might--if you wish, tell you now what brings me here. Let us go and sit over there, in your little arbor."

They walked toward it, and Jeanne tried to think how she could begin. They sat down in the arbor, and then, as if she were confessing herself, she said: "Father----" then hesitated, and repeated: "Father----" and was silent from emotion.

He waited, his hands crossed over his paunch. Seeing her embarrassment, he sought to encourage her: "Why, my daughter, one would suppose you were afraid; come, take courage."

She plucked up courage, like a coward who plunges headlong into danger. "Father, I should like to have another child." He did not reply, as he did not understand her. Then she explained, timid and unable to express herself clearly:

"I am all alone in life now; my father and my husband do not get along together; my mother is dead; and--and----" she added with a shudder, "the other day I nearly lost my son! What would have become of me then?"

She was silent. The priest, bewildered, was gazing at her. "Come, get to the point of your subject."

"I want to have another child," she said. Then he smiled, accustomed to the coarse jokes of the peasants, who were not embarrassed in his presence, and he replied, with a sly motion of his head:

"Well, it seems to me that it depends only on yourself."

She raised her candid eyes to his face, and said, hesitating with confusion: "But--but--you understand that since--since--what you know about--about that maid--my husband and I have lived--have lived quite apart."

Accustomed to the promiscuity and undignified relations of the peasants, he was astonished at the revelation. All at once he thought he guessed at the young woman's real desire, and looking at her out of the corner of his eye, with a heart full of benevolence and of sympathy for her distress, he said: "Oh, I understand perfectly. I know that your widowhood must be irksome to you. You are young and in good health. It is natural, quite natural."

He smiled, bearing out his easy-going character of a country priest, and tapping Jeanne lightly on the hand, he said: "That is permissible, very permissible indeed, according to the commandments. You are married, are you not? Well, then, what is the harm?"

She, in her turn, had not understood his hidden meaning; but as soon as she saw through it, she blushed scarlet, shocked, and with tears in her eyes exclaimed: "Oh, Monsieur le Curé, what are you saying? What are you thinking of? I swear to you--I swear to you----" And sobs choked her words.

He was surprised and sought to console her: "Come, I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I was only joking a little; there is no harm in that when one is decent. But you may rely on me, you may rely on me. I will see M. Julien."

She did not know what to say. She now wished to decline this intervention, which she thought clumsy and dangerous, but she did not dare to do so, and she went away hurriedly, faltering: "I am grateful to you, Monsieur le Curé."

A week passed. One day at dinner Julien looked at her with a peculiar expression, a certain smiling curve of the lips that she had noticed when he was teasing her. He was even almost ironically gallant toward her, and as they were walking after dinner in little mother's avenue, he said in a low tone: "We seem to have made up again."

She did not reply, but continued to look on the ground at a sort of track that was almost effaced now that the grass was sprouting anew. They were the footprints of the baroness, which were vanishing as does a memory. And Jeanne was plunged in

sadness; she felt herself lost in life, far away from everyone.

"As for me, I ask nothing better. I was afraid of displeasing you," continued Julien.

The sun was going down, the air was mild. A longing to weep came over Jeanne, one of those needs of unbosoming oneself to a kindred spirit, of unbending and telling one's griefs. A sob rose in her throat; she opened her arms and fell on Julien's breast, and wept. He glanced down in surprise at her head, for he could not see her face which was hidden on his shoulder. He supposed that she still loved him, and placed a condescending kiss on the back of her head.

They entered the house and he followed her to her room. And thus they resumed their former relations, he, as a not unpleasant duty, and she, merely tolerating him.

She soon noticed, however, that his manner had changed, and one day with her lips to his, she murmured: "Why are you not the same as you used to be?"

"Because I do not want any more children," he said jokingly.

She started. "Why not?"

He appeared greatly surprised. "Eh, what's that you say? Are you crazy? No, indeed! One is enough, always crying and bothering everyone. Another baby! No, thank you!"

At the end of a month she told the news to everyone, far and wide, with the exception of Comtesse Gilberte, from reasons of modesty and delicacy.

What the priest had foreseen finally came to pass. She became enceinte. Then, filled with an unspeakable happiness, she locked her door every night when she retired, vowing herself from henceforth to eternal chastity, in gratitude to the vague divinity she adored.

She was now almost quite happy again. Her children would grow up and love her; she would grow old quietly, happy and contented, without troubling herself about her husband.

Toward the end of September, Abbé Picot called on a visit of ceremony to introduce his successor, a young priest, very thin, very short, with an emphatic way of talking, and with dark circles round his sunken eyes.

The old abbé had been appointed Dean of Goderville.

Jeanne was really sorry to lose the old man, who had been associated with all her recollections as a young woman. He had married her, baptized Paul, and buried the baroness. She could not imagine Étouvent without Abbé Picot and his paunch passing along by the farms, and she loved him because he was cheerful and natural.

But he did not seem very cheerful at the thought of his promotion. "It is a wrench, it is a wrench, madame la comtesse. I have been here for eighteen years. Oh, the place does not bring in much, and is not wealthy. The men have no more religion than they need, and the women, look you, the women have no morals. But nevertheless, I loved it."

The new curé appeared impatient, and said abruptly: "When I am here all that will have to be changed." He looked like an angry boy, thin and frail in his somewhat worn, though clean cassock.

Abbé Picot looked at him sideways, as he did when he was in a joking mood, and said: "You see, abbé, in order to prevent those happenings, you will have to chain up your parishioners; and even that would not be of much use." The little priest replied sharply: "We shall see." And the older man smiled as he took a pinch of snuff, and said: "Age will calm you down, abbé, and experience also. You will drive away from the church the remaining faithful ones, and that is all the good it will do. In this district they are religious, but pig-headed; be careful. Faith, when I see a girl come to confess who looks rather stout, I say to myself: 'She is bringing me a new parishioner,' and I try to get her married. You cannot prevent them from making mistakes; but you can go and look for the man, and prevent him from deserting the mother. Get them married, abbé, get them married, and do not trouble yourself about

anything else."

"We think differently," said the young priest rudely; "it is useless to insist." And Abbé Picot once more began to regret his village, the sea which he saw from his parsonage, the little valleys where he walked while repeating his breviary, glancing up at the boats as they passed.

As the two priests took their leave, the old man kissed Jeanne, who was on the verge of tears.

A week later Abbé Tolbiac called again. He spoke of reforms which he intended to accomplish, as a prince might have done on taking possession of a kingdom. Then he requested the vicomtesse not to miss the service on Sunday, and to communicate a all the festivals. "You and I," he said, "we are at the head of the district; we must rule it and always set them an example to follow. We must be of one accord so that we may be powerful and respected. The church and the château in joining forces will make the peasants obey and fear us."

Jeanne's religion was all sentiment; she had all a woman's dream faith, and if she attended at all to her religious duties, it was from a habit acquired at the convent, the baron's advanced ideas having long since overthrown her convictions. Abbé Picot contented himself with what observances she gave him, and never blamed her. But his successor, not seeing her at mass the preceding Sunday, had come to call, uneasy and stern.

She did not wish to break with the parsonage, and promised, making up her mind to be assiduous in attendance the first few weeks, out of politeness.

Little by little, however, she got into the habit of going to church, and came under the influence of this delicate, upright and dictatorial abbé. A mystic, he appealed to her in his enthusiasm and zeal. He set in vibration in her soul the chord of religious poetry that all women possess. His unyielding austerity, his disgust for ordinary human interests, his love of God, his youthful and untutored inexperience, his harsh

words, and his inflexible will, gave Jeanne an idea of the stuff martyrs were made of; and she let herself be carried away, all disillusioned as she was, by the fanaticism of this child, the minister of God.

He led her to Christ, the consoler, showing her how the joy of religion will calm all sorrow; and she knelt at the confessional, humbling herself, feeling herself small and weak in presence of this priest, who appeared to be about fifteen.

He was, however, very soon detested in all the countryside. Inflexibly severe toward himself, he was implacably intolerant toward others, and the one thing that especially roused his wrath and indignation was love. The young men and girls looked at each other slyly across the church, and the old peasants who liked to joke about such things disapproved his severity. All the parish was in a ferment. Soon the young men all stopped going to church.

The curé dined at the château every Thursday, and often came during the week to chat with his penitent. She became enthusiastic like himself, talked about spiritual matters, handling all the antique and complicated arsenal of religious controversy.

They walked together along the baroness' avenue, talking of Christ and the apostles, the Virgin Mary and the Fathers of the Church as though they were personally acquainted with them.

Julien treated the new priest with great respect, saying constantly: "That priest suits me, he does not back down." And he went to confession and communion, setting a fine example. He now went to the Fourvilles' nearly every day, gunning with the husband, who was never happy without him, and riding with the comtesse, in spite of rain and storm. The comte said: "They are crazy about riding, but it does my wife good."

The baron returned to the château about the middle of November. He was changed, aged, faded, filled with a deep sadness. And his love for his daughter seemed to have gained in strength, as if these few months of dreary solitude had aggravated his need

of affection, confidence and tenderness. Jeanne did not tell him about her new ideas, and her friendship for the Abbé Tolbiac. The first time he saw the priest he conceived a great aversion to him. And when Jeanne asked him that evening how he liked him, he replied: "That man is an inquisitor! He must be very dangerous."

When he learned from the peasants, whose friend he was, of the harshness and violence of the young priest, of the kind of persecution which he carried on against all human and natural instincts, he developed a hatred toward him. He, himself, was one of the old race of natural philosophers who bowed the knee to a sort of pantheistic Divinity, and shrank from the catholic conception of a God with bourgeois instincts, Jesuitical wrath, and tyrannical revenge. To him reproduction was the great law of nature, and he began from farm to farm an ardent campaign against this intolerant priest, the persecutor of life.

Jeanne, very much worried, prayed to the Lord, entreated her father; but he always replied: "We must fight such men as that, it is our duty and our right. They are not human."

And he repeated, shaking his long white locks: "They are not human; they understand nothing, nothing, nothing. They are moving in a morbid dream; they are anti-physical." And he pronounced the word "anti-physical" as though it were a malediction.

The priest knew who his enemy was, but as he wished to remain ruler of the château and of Jeanne, he temporized, sure of final victory. He was also haunted by a fixed idea. He had discovered by chance the amours of Julien and Gilberte, and he desired to put a stop to them at all costs.

He came to see Jeanne one day and, after a long conversation on spiritual matters, he asked her to give her aid in helping him to fight, to put an end to the evil in her own family, in order to save two souls that were in danger.

She did not understand, and did not wish to know. He replied: "The hour has not

arrived. I shall see you some other time." And he left abruptly.

The winter was coming to a close, a rotten winter, as they say in the country, damp and mild. The abbé called again some days later and hinted mysteriously at one of those shameless intrigues between persons whose conduct should be irreproachable. It was the duty, he said, of those who were aware of the facts to use every means to bring it to an end. He took Jeanne's hand and adjured her to open her eyes and understand and lend him her aid.

This time she understood, but she was silent, terrified at the thought of all that might result in the house that was now peaceful, and she pretended not to understand. Then he spoke out clearly.

She faltered: "What do you wish me to do, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Anything, rather than permit this infamy. Anything, I say. Leave him. Flee from this impure house!"

"But I have no money; and then I have no longer any courage; and, besides, how can I go without any proof? I have not the right to do so."

The priest arose trembling: "That is cowardice, madame; I am mistaken in you. You are unworthy of God's mercy!"

She fell on her knees: "Oh, I pray you not to leave me, tell me what to do!"

"Open M. de Fourville's eyes," he said abruptly. "It is his place to break up this intrigue."

This idea filled her with terror. "Why, he would kill them, Monsieur l'Abbé! And I should be guilty of denouncing them! Oh, never that, never!"

He raised his hand as if to curse her in his fury: "Remain in your shame and your crime; for you are more guilty than they are. You are the complaisant wife! There is nothing more for me to do here." And he went off so furious that he trembled all over.

She followed him, distracted and ready to do as he suggested. But he strode along rapidly, shaking his large blue umbrella in his rage. He perceived Julien standing outside the gate superintending the lopping of the trees, so he turned to the left to go across the Couillard farm, and he said: "Leave me alone, madame, I have nothing further to say to you."

Jeanne was entreating him to give her a few days for reflection, and then if he came back to the château she would tell him what she had done, and they could take counsel together.

Right in his road, in the middle of the farmyard, a group of children, those of the house and some neighbor's children, were standing around the kennel of Mirza, the dog, looking curiously at something with silent and concentrated attention. In the midst of them stood the baron, his hands behind his back, also looking on with curiosity. One would have taken him for a schoolmaster. When he saw the priest approaching, he moved away so as not to have to meet him and speak to him.

The priest did not call again; but the following Sunday from the pulpit he hurled imprecations, curses and threats against the château, anathematizing the baron, and making veiled allusions, but timidly, to Julien's latest intrigue. The vicomte was furious, but the dread of a shocking scandal kept him silent. At each service thereafter the priest declared his indignation, predicting the approach of the hour when God would smite all his enemies.

Julien wrote a firm, but respectful letter to the archbishop; the abbé was threatened with suspension. He was silent thereafter.

Gilberte and Julien now frequently met him during their rides reading his breviary, but they turned aside so as not to pass him by. Spring had come and reawakened their love. As the foliage was still sparse and the grass damp, they used to meet in a shepherd's movable hut that had been deserted since autumn. But one day when they were leaving it, they saw the Abbé Tolbiac, almost hidden in the sea rushes on the

slope.

"We must leave our horses in the ravine," said Julien, "as they can be seen from a distance and would betray us." One evening as they were coming home together to La Vrillette, where they were to dine with the comte, they met the curé of Étouvent coming out of the château. He stepped to the side of the road to let them pass, and bowed without their eyes meeting. They were uneasy for a few moments, but soon forgot it.

One afternoon, Jeanne was reading beside the fire while a storm of wind was raging outside, when she suddenly perceived Comte Fourville coming on foot at such a pace that she thought some misfortune had happened.

She ran downstairs to meet him, and when she saw him she thought he must be crazy. He wore a large quilted cap that he wore only at home, his hunting jacket, and looked so pale that his red mustache, usually the color of his skin, now seemed like a flame. His eyes were haggard, rolling as though his mind were vacant.

He stammered: "My wife is here, is she not?" Jeanne, losing her presence of mind, replied: "Why, no, I have not seen her to-day."

He sat down as if his legs had given way. He then took off his cap and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief mechanically several times. Then starting up suddenly, he approached Jeanne, his hands stretched out, his mouth open, as if to speak, to confide some great sorrow to her. Then he stopped, looked at her fixedly and said as though he were wandering: "But it is your husband--you also----" And he fled, going toward the sea.

Jeanne ran after him, calling him, imploring him to stop, her heart beating with apprehension as she thought: "He knows all! What will he do? Oh, if he only does not find them!"

But she could not come up to him, and he disregarded her appeals. He went straight ahead without hesitation, straight to his goal. He crossed the ditch, then, stalking

through the sea rushes like a giant, he reached the cliff.

Jeanne, standing on the mound covered with trees, followed him with her eyes until he was out of sight. Then she went into the house, distracted with grief.

He had turned to the right and started to run. Threatening waves overspread the sea, big black clouds were scudding along madly, passing on and followed by others, each of them coming down in a furious downpour. The wind whistled, moaned, laid the grass and the young crops low and carried away big white birds that looked like specks of foam and bore them far into the land.

The hail which followed beat in the comte's face, filling his ears with noise and his heart with tumult.

Down yonder before him was the deep gorge of the Val de Vaucotte. There was nothing before him but a shepherd's hut beside a deserted sheep pasture. Two horses were tied to the shafts of the hut on wheels. What might not happen to one in such a tempest as this?

As soon as he saw them the comte crouched on the ground and crawled along on his hands and knees as far as the lonely hut and hid himself beneath the hut that he might not be seen through the cracks. The horses on seeing him became restive. He slowly cut their reins with the knife which he held open in his hand, and a sudden squall coming up, the animals fled, frightened at the hail which rattled on the sloping roof of the wooden hut and made it shake on its wheels.

The comte then kneeling upright, put his eye to the bottom of the door and looked inside. He did not stir; he seemed to be waiting.

A little time elapsed and then he suddenly rose to his feet, covered with mud from head to foot. He frantically pushed back the bolt which closed the hut on the outside, and seizing the shafts, he began to shake the hut as though he would break it to pieces. Then all at once he got between the shafts, bending his huge frame, and with a desperate effort dragged it along like an ox, panting as he went. He dragged it,

with whoever was in it, toward the steep incline.

Those inside screamed and banged with their fists on the door, not understanding what was going on.

When he reached the top of the cliff he let go the fragile dwelling, which began to roll down the incline, going ever faster and faster, plunging, stumbling like an animal and striking the ground with its shafts.

An old beggar hidden in a ditch saw it flying over his head and heard frightful screams coming from the wooden box.

All at once a wheel was wrenched off and it fell on its side and began to roll like a ball, as a house torn from its foundations might roll from the summit of a mountain. Then, reaching the ledge of the last ravine, it described a circle, and, falling to the bottom, burst open as an egg might do. It was no sooner smashed on the stones than the old beggar, who had seen it going past, went down toward it slowly amid the rushes, and with the customary caution of a peasant, not daring to go directly to the shattered hut, he went to the nearest farm to tell of the accident.

They all ran to look at it and raised the wreck of the hut. They found two bodies, bruised, crushed and bleeding. The man's forehead was split open and his whole face crushed; the woman's jaw was hanging, dislocated in one of the jolts, and their shattered limbs were soft as pulp.

"What were they doing in that shanty?" said a woman.

The old beggar then said that they had apparently taken refuge in it to get out of the storm and that a furious squall must have blown the hut over the cliff. He said he had intended to take shelter there himself, when he saw the horses tied to it, and understood that some one else must be inside. "But for that," he added in a satisfied tone, "I might have rolled down in it." Some one remarked: "Would not that have been a good thing?"

The old man, in a furious rage, said: "Why would it have been a good thing?

Because I am poor and they are rich! Look at them now." And trembling, ragged and dripping with rain, he pointed to the two dead bodies with his hooked stick and exclaimed: "We are all alike when we get to this."

The comte, as soon as he saw the hut rolling down the steep slope, ran off at full speed through the blinding storm. He ran in this way for several hours, taking short cuts, leaping across ditches, breaking through the hedges, and thus got back home at dusk, not knowing how himself.

The frightened servants were awaiting his return and told him that the two horses had returned riderless some little time before, that of Julien following the other one.

Then M. de Fourville reeled and in a choked voice said: "Something must have happened to them in this dreadful weather. Let every one help to look for them."

He started off himself, but he was no sooner out of sight than he concealed himself in a clump of bushes, watching the road along which she whom he even still loved with an almost savage passion was to return dead, dying or maybe crippled and disfigured forever.

And soon a carriole passed by carrying a strange burden.

It stopped at the château and passed through the gate. It was that, it was she. But a fearful anguish nailed him to the spot, a fear to know the worst, a dread of the truth, and he did not stir, hiding as a hare, starting at the least sound.

He waited thus an hour, two hours perhaps. The buggy did not come out. He concluded that his wife was expiring, and the thought of seeing her, of meeting her gaze filled him with so much horror that he suddenly feared to be discovered in his hiding place and of being compelled to return and be present at this agony, and he then fled into the thick of the wood. Then all of a sudden it occurred to him that she perhaps might be needing his care, that no one probably could properly attend to her. Then he returned on his tracks, running breathlessly.

On entering the château he met the gardener and called out to him, "Well?" The man

did not dare answer him. Then M. de Fourville almost roared at him: "Is she dead?" and the servant stammered: "Yes, M. le Comte."

He experienced a feeling of immense relief. His blood seemed to cool and his nerves relax somewhat of their extreme tension, and he walked firmly up the steps of his great hallway.

The other wagon had reached "The Poplars." Jeanne saw it from afar. She descried the mattress; she guessed that a human form was lying upon it, and understood all. Her emotion was so vivid that she swooned and fell prostrate.

When she regained consciousness her father was holding her head and bathing her temples with vinegar. He said hesitatingly: "Do you know?" She murmured: "Yes, father." But when she attempted to rise she found herself unable to do so, so intense was her agony.

That very night she gave birth to a stillborn infant, a girl.

Jeanne saw nothing of the funeral of Julien; she knew nothing of it. She merely noticed at the end of a day or two that Aunt Lison was back, and in her feverish dreams which haunted her she persistently sought to recall when the old maiden lady had left "The Poplars," at what period and under what circumstances. She could not make this out, even in her lucid moments, but she was certain of having seen her subsequent to the death of "little mother."

CHAPTER XI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL

Jeanne did not leave her room for three months and was so wan and pale that no one thought she would recover. But she picked up by degrees. Little father and Aunt Lison never left her; they had both taken up their abode at "The Poplars." The shock of Julien's death had left her with a nervous malady. The slightest sound made her faint and she had long swoons from the most insignificant causes.

She had never asked the details of Julien's death. What did it matter to her? Did she not know enough already? Every one thought it was an accident, but she knew better, and she kept to herself this secret which tortured her: the knowledge of his infidelity and the remembrance of the abrupt and terrible visit of the comte on the day of the catastrophe.

And now she was filled with tender, sweet and melancholy recollections of the brief evidences of love shown her by her husband. She constantly thrilled at unexpected memories of him, and she seemed to see him as he was when they were betrothed and as she had known him in the hours passed beneath the sunlight in Corsica. All his faults diminished, all his harshness vanished, his very infidelities appeared less glaring in the widening separation of the closed tomb. And Jeanne, pervaded by a sort of posthumous gratitude for this man who had held her in his arms, forgave all the suffering he had caused her, to remember only moments of happiness they had passed together. Then, as time went on and month followed month, covering all her grief and reminiscences with forgetfulness, she devoted herself entirely to her son.

He became the idol, the one thought of the three beings who surrounded him, and he ruled as a despot. A kind of jealousy even arose among his slaves. Jeanne watched with anxiety the great kisses he gave his grandfather after a ride on his knee, and Aunt Lison, neglected by him as she had been by every one else and treated often like a servant by this little tyrant who could scarcely speak as yet, would go to her room and weep as she compared the slight affection he showed her with the kisses he gave his mother and the baron.

Two years passed quietly, and at the beginning of the third winter it was decided that they should go to Rouen to live until spring, and the whole family set out. But on their arrival in the old damp house, that had been shut up for some time, Paul had such a severe attack of bronchitis that his three relatives in despair declared that he could not do without the air of "The Poplars." They took him back there and he got

well.

Then began a series of quiet, monotonous years. Always around the little one, they went into raptures at everything he did. His mother called him Poulet, and as he could not pronounce the word, he said "Pol," which amused them immensely, and the nickname of "Poulet" stuck to him.

The favorite occupation of his "three mothers," as the baron called his relatives, was to see how much he had grown, and for this purpose they made little notches in the casing of the drawing-room door, showing his progress from month to month. This ladder was called "Poulet's ladder," and was an important affair.

A new individual began to play a part in the affairs of the household--the dog "Massacre," who became Paul's inseparable companion.

Rare visits were exchanged with the Brisevilles and the Couteliers. The mayor and the doctor alone were regular visitors. Since the episode of the mother dog and the suspicion Jeanne had entertained of the priest on the occasion of the terrible death of the comtesse and Julien, Jeanne had not entered the church, angry with a divinity that could tolerate such ministers.

The church was deserted and the priest came to be looked on as a sorcerer because he had, so they said, driven out an evil spirit from a woman who was possessed, and although fearing him the peasants came to respect him for this occult power as well as for the unimpeachable austerity of his life.

When he met Jeanne he never spoke. This condition of affairs distressed Aunt Lison, and when she was alone, quite alone with Paul, she talked to him about God, telling him the wonderful stories of the early history of the world. But when she told him that he must love Him very much, the child would say: "Where is He, auntie?" "Up there," she would say, pointing to the sky; "up there, Poulet, but do not say so." She was afraid of the baron.

One day, however, Poulet said to her: "God is everywhere, but He is not in church."

He had told his grandfather of his aunt's wonderful revelations.

When Paul was twelve years old a great difficulty arose on the subject of his first communion.

Lison came to Jeanne one morning and told her that the little fellow should no longer be kept without religious instruction and from his religious duties. His mother, troubled and undecided, hesitated, saying that there was time enough. But a month later, as she was returning a call at the Brisevilles', the comtesse asked her casually if Paul was going to make his first communion that year. Jeanne, unprepared for this, answered, "Yes," and this simple word decided her, and without saying a word to her father, she asked Aunt Lison to take the boy to the catechism class.

All went well for a month, but one day Paul came home with a hoarseness and the following day he coughed. On inquiry his mother learned that the priest had sent him to wait till the lesson was over at the door of the church, where there was a draught, because he had misbehaved. So she kept him at home and taught him herself. But the Abbé Tobiac, despite Aunt Lison's entreaties, refused to admit him as a communicant on the ground that he was not thoroughly taught.

The same thing occurred the following year, and the baron angrily swore that the child did not need to believe all that tomfoolery, so it was decided that he should be brought up as a Christian, but not as an active Catholic, and when he came of age he could believe as he pleased.

The Brisevilles ceased to call on her and Jeanne was surprised, knowing the punctiliousness of these neighbors in returning calls, but the Marquise de Coutelier haughtily told her the reason. Considering herself, in virtue of her husband's rank and fortune, a sort of queen of the Norman nobility, the marquise ruled as a queen, said what she thought, was gracious or the reverse as occasion demanded, admonishing, restoring to favor, congratulating whenever she saw fit. So when

Jeanne came to see her, this lady, after a few chilling remarks, said drily: "Society is divided into two classes: those who believe in God and those who do not believe in Him. The former, even the humblest, are our friends, our equals; the latter are nothing to us."

Jeanne, perceiving the insinuation, replied: "But may one not believe in God without going to church?"

"No, madame," answered the marquise. "The faithful go to worship God in His church, just as one goes to see people in their homes."

Jeanne, hurt, replied: "God is everywhere, madame. As for me, who believes from the bottom of my heart in His goodness, I no longer feel His presence when certain priests come between Him and me."

The marquise rose. "The priest is the standard bearer of the Church, madame. Whoever does not follow the standard is opposed to Him and opposed to us."

Jeanne had risen in her turn and said, trembling: "You believe, madame, in a partisan God. I believe in the God of upright people." She bowed and took her leave.

The peasants also blamed her among themselves for not having let Poulet make his first communion. They themselves never attended service or took the sacrament unless it might be at Easter, according to the rule ordained by the Church; but for boys it was quite another thing, and they would have all shrunk in horror at the audacity of bringing up a child outside this recognized law, for religion is religion.

She saw how they felt and was indignant at heart at all these discriminations, all these compromises with conscience, this general fear of everything, the real cowardice of all hearts and the mask of respectability assumed in public.

The baron took charge of Paul's studies and made him study Latin, his mother merely saying: "Above all things, do not get over tired."

As soon as the boy was at liberty he went down to work in the garden with his

mother and his aunt.

He now loved to dig in the ground, and all three planted young trees in the spring, sowed seed and watched it growing with the deepest interest, pruned branches and cut flowers for bouquets.

Poulet was almost fifteen, but was a mere child in intelligence, ignorant, silly, suppressed between petticoat government and this kind old man who belonged to another century.

One evening the baron spoke of college, and Jeanne at once began to sob. Aunt Lison timidly remained in a dark corner.

"Why does he need to know so much?" asked his mother. "We will make a gentleman farmer of him. He can cultivate his land, as many of the nobility do. He will live and grow old happily in this house, where we have lived before him and where we shall die. What more can one do?"

But the baron shook his head. "What would you say to him if he should say to you when he is twenty-five: 'I amount to nothing, I know nothing, all through your fault, the fault of your maternal selfishness. I feel that I am incapable of working, of making something of myself, and yet I was not intended for a secluded, simple life, lonely enough to kill one, to which I have been condemned by your shortsighted affection.'"

She was weeping and said entreatingly: "Tell me, Poulet, you will not reproach me for having loved you too well?" And the big boy, in surprise, promised that he never would. "Swear it," she said. "Yes, mamma." "You want to stay here, don't you?" "Yes, mamma."

Then the baron spoke up loud and decidedly: "Jeanne, you have no right to make disposition of this life. What you are doing is cowardly and almost criminal; you are sacrificing your child to your own private happiness."

She hid her face in her hands, sobbing convulsively, and stammered out amid her

tears: "I have been so unhappy--so unhappy! Now, just as I am living peacefully with him, they want to take him away from me. What will become of me now--all by myself?" Her father rose and, sitting down beside her, put his arms round her. "And how about me, Jeanne?"

She put her arms suddenly round his neck, gave him a hearty kiss and with her voice full of tears, she said: "Yes, you are right perhaps, little father. I was foolish, but I have suffered so much. I am quite willing he should go to college."

And without knowing exactly what they were going to do with him, Poulet in his turn began to weep.

Then the three mothers began to kiss him and pet him and encourage him. When they retired to their rooms it was with a weight at their hearts, and they all wept, even the baron, who had restrained himself up to that.

It was decided that when the term began to put the young boy to school at Havre, and during the summer he was petted more than ever; his mother sighed often as she thought of the separation. She prepared his wardrobe as if he were going to undertake a ten years' voyage. One October morning, after a sleepless night, the two women and the baron got into the carriage with him and set out on their journey.

They had previously selected his place in the dormitory and his desk in the school room. Jeanne, aided by Aunt Lison, spent the whole day in arranging his clothes in his little wardrobe. As it did not hold a quarter of what they had brought, she went to look for the superintendent to ask for another. The treasurer was called, but he pointed out that all that amount of clothing would only be in the way and would never be needed, and he refused, on behalf of the directors, to let her have another chest of drawers. Jeanne, much annoyed, decided to hire a room in a small neighboring hotel, begging the proprietor to go himself and take Poulet whatever he required as soon as the boy asked for it.

They then took a walk on the pier to look at the ships coming and going. They went

into a restaurant to dine, but they were none of them able to eat, and looked at one another with moistened eyes as the dishes were brought on and taken away almost untouched.

They now returned slowly toward the school. Boys of all ages were arriving from all quarters, accompanied by their families or by servants. Many of them were crying.

Jeanne held Poulet in a long embrace, while Aunt Lison remained in the background, her face hidden in her handkerchief. The baron, however, who was becoming affected, cut short the adieus by dragging his daughter away. They got into the carriage and went back through the darkness to "The Poplars," the silence being broken by an occasional sob.

Jeanne wept all the following day and on the day after drove to Havre in the phaeton. Poulet seemed to have become reconciled to the separation. For the first time in his life he now had playmates, and in his anxiety to join them he could scarcely sit still on his chair when his mother called. She continued her visits to him every other day and called to take him home on Sundays. Not knowing what to do with herself while school was in session until recreation time, she would remain sitting in the reception room, not having the strength or the courage to go very far from the school. The superintendent sent to ask her to come to his office and begged her not to come so frequently. She paid no attention to his request. He therefore informed her that if she continued to prevent her son from taking his recreation at the usual hours, obliging him to work without a change of occupation, they would be forced to send him back home again, and the baron was also notified to the same effect. She was consequently watched like a prisoner at "The Poplars."

She became restless and worried and would ramble about for whole days in the country, accompanied only by Massacre, dreaming as she walked along. Sometimes she would remain seated for a whole afternoon, looking out at the sea from the top of the cliff; at other times she would go down to Yport through the wood, going over

the ground of her former walks, the memory of which haunted her. How long ago--how long ago it was--the time when she had gone over these same paths as a young girl, carried away by her dreams.

Poulet was not very industrious at school; he was kept two years in the fourth form. The third year's work was only tolerable and he had to begin the second over again, so that he was in rhetoric when he was twenty.

He was now a big, fair young man, with downy whiskers and a faint sign of a mustache. He now came home to "The Poplars" every Sunday, riding over in a couple of hours, his mother, Aunt Lison and the baron starting out early to go and meet him.

Although he was a head taller than his mother, she always treated him as though he were a child, and when he returned to school in the evening she would charge him anxiously not to go too fast and to think of his poor mother, who would break her heart if anything happened to him.

One Saturday morning she received a letter from Paul, saying that he would not be home on the following day because some friends had arranged an excursion and had invited him. She was tormented with anxiety all day Sunday, as though she dreaded some misfortune, and on Thursday, as she could endure it no longer, she set out for Havre.

He seemed to be changed, though she could not have told in what manner. He appeared excited and his voice seemed deeper. And suddenly, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, he said: "I say, mother, as long as you have come to-day, I want to tell you that I will not be at 'The Poplars' next Sunday, for we are going to have another excursion."

She was amazed, smothering, as if he had announced his departure for America. At last, recovering herself, she said: "Oh, Poulet, what is the matter with you? Tell me what is going on."

He began to laugh, and kissing her, replied: "Why, nothing, nothing, mamma. I am going to have a good time with my friends; I am just at that age."

She had nothing to say, but when she was alone in the carriage all manner of ideas came into her mind. She no longer recognized him, her Poulet, her little Poulet of former days. She felt for the first time that he was grown up, that he no longer belonged to her, that he was going to live his life without troubling himself about the old people. It seemed to her that one day had wrought this change in him. Was it possible that this was her son, her poor little boy who had helped her to replant the lettuce, this great big bearded youth who had a will of his own!

For three months Paul came home only occasionally, and always seemed impatient to get away again, trying to steal off an hour earlier each evening. Jeanne was alarmed, but the baron consoled her, saying: "Let him alone; the boy is twenty years old."

One morning, however, an old man, poorly dressed, inquired in German-French for "Madame la Vicomtesse," and after many ceremonious bows, he drew from his pocket a dilapidated pocketbook, saying: "Che un betit bapier bour fous," and unfolding as he handed it to her a piece of greasy paper. She read and reread it, looked at the Jew, read it over again and asked: "What does it mean?"

He obsequiously explained: "I will tell you. Your son needed a little money, and as I knew that you are a good mother, I lent him a trifle to help him out."

Jeanne was trembling. "But why did he not ask me?" The Jew explained at length that it was a question of a debt that must be paid before noon the following day; that Paul not being of age, no one would have lent him anything, and that his "honor would have been compromised" without this little service that he had rendered the young man.

Jeanne tried to call the baron, but had not the strength to rise, she was so overcome by emotion. At length she said to the usurer: "Would you have the kindness to ring

the bell?"

He hesitated, fearing some trap, and then stammered out: "If I am intruding, I will call again." She shook her head in the negative. He then rang, and they waited in silence, sitting opposite each other.

When the baron came in he understood the situation at once. The note was for fifteen hundred francs. He paid one thousand, saying close to the man's face: "And on no account come back." The other thanked him and went his way.

The baron and Jeanne set out at once for Havre. On reaching the college they learned that Paul had not been there for a month. The principal had received four letters signed by Jeanne saying that his pupil was not well and then to tell how he was getting along. Each letter was accompanied by a doctor's certificate. They were, of course, all forged. They were all dumbfounded, and stood there looking at each other.

The principal, very much worried, took them to the commissary of police. Jeanne and her father stayed at a hotel that night. The following day the young man was found in the apartment of a courtesan of the town. His grandfather and mother took him back to "The Poplars" and not a word was exchanged between them during the whole journey.

A week later they discovered that he had contracted fifteen thousand francs' worth of debts within the last three months. His creditors had not come forward at first, knowing that he would soon be of age.

They entered into no discussion about it, hoping to win him back by gentleness. They gave him dainty food, petted him, spoiled him. It was spring and they hired a boat for him at Yport, in spite of Jeanne's fears, so that he might amuse himself on the water.

They would not let him have a horse, for fear he should ride to Havre.

He was there with nothing to do and became irritable and occasionally brutally so.

The baron was worried at the discontinuance of his studies. Jeanne, distracted at the idea of a separation, asked herself what they could do with him.

One evening he did not come home. They learned that he had gone out in a boat with two sailors. His mother, beside herself with anxiety, went down to Yport without a hat in the dark. Some men were on the beach, waiting for the boat to come in. There was a light on board an incoming boat, but Paul was not on board. He had made them take him to Havre.

The police sought him in vain; he could not be found. The woman with whom he had been found the first time had also disappeared without leaving any trace; her furniture was sold and her rent paid. In Paul's room at "The Poplars" were found two letters from this person, who seemed to be madly in love with him. She spoke of a voyage to England, having, she said, obtained the necessary funds.

The three dwellers in the château lived silently and drearily, their minds tortured by all kinds of suppositions. Jeanne's hair, which had become gray, now turned perfectly white. She asked in her innocence why fate had thus afflicted her.

She received a letter from the Abbé Tolbiac: "Madame, the hand of God is weighing heavily on you. You refused Him your child; He took him from you in His turn to cast him into the hands of a prostitute. Will not you open your eyes at this lesson from Heaven? God's mercy is infinite. Perhaps He may pardon you if you return and fall on your knees before Him. I am His humble servant. I will open to you the door of His dwelling when you come and knock at it."

She sat a long time with this letter on her lap. Perhaps it was true what the priest said. And all her religious doubts began to torment her conscience. And in her cowardly hesitation, which drives to church the doubting, the sorrowful, she went furtively one evening at twilight to the parsonage, and kneeling at the feet of the thin abbé, begged for absolution.

He promised her a conditional pardon, as God could not pour down all His favors on

a roof that sheltered a man like the baron. "You will soon feel the effects of the divine mercy," he declared.

Two days later she did, indeed, receive a letter from her son, and in her discouragement and grief she looked upon this as the commencement of the consolation promised her by the abbé. The letter ran:

"My Dear Mamma: Do not be uneasy. I am in London, in good health, in very great need of money. We have not a sou left, and we do not have anything to eat some days. The one who is with me, and whom I love with all my heart, has spent all that she had so as not to leave me--five thousand francs--and you see that I am bound in honor to return her this sum in the first place. So I wish you would be kind enough to advance me fifteen thousand francs of papa's fortune, for I shall soon be of age. This will help me out of very serious difficulties.

"Good-by, my dear mamma. I embrace you with all my heart, and also grandfather and Aunt Lison. I hope to see you soon.

"Your son,

"Vicomte Paul de Lamare."

He had written to her! He had not forgotten her then. She did not care anything about his asking for money! She would send him some as long as he had none. What did money matter? He had written to her! And she ran, weeping for joy, to show this letter to the baron. Aunt Lison was called and read over word by word this paper that told of him. They discussed each sentence.

Jeanne, jumping from the most complete despair to a kind of intoxication of hope, took Paul's part. "He will come back, he will come back as he has written."

The baron, more calm, said: "All the same he left us for that creature, so he must love her better than us, as he did not hesitate about it."

A sudden and frightful pang struck Jeanne's heart, and immediately she was filled

with hatred of this woman who had stolen her son from her, an unappeasable, savage hate, the hatred of a jealous mother. Until now all her thoughts had been given to Paul. She scarcely took into consideration that a girl had been the cause of his vagaries. But the baron's words had suddenly brought before her this rival, had revealed her fatal power, and she felt that between herself and this woman a struggle was about to begin, and she also felt that she would rather lose her son than share his affection with another. And all her joy was at an end.

They sent him the fifteen thousand francs and heard nothing more from him for five months.

Then a business man came to settle the details of Julien's inheritance. Jeanne and the baron handed over the accounts without any discussion, even giving up the interest that should come to his mother. When Paul came back to Paris he had a hundred and twenty thousand francs. He then wrote four letters in six months, giving his news in concise terms and ending the letters with coldly affectionate expressions. "I am working," he said; "I have obtained a position on the stock exchange. I hope to go and embrace you at 'The Poplars' some day, my dear parents."

He did not mention his companion, and this silence implied more than if he had filled four pages with news of her. Jeanne, in these cold letters, felt this woman in ambush, the implacable, eternal enemy of mothers, the courtesan.

The three lonely beings discussed the best plan to follow in order to rescue Paul, but could decide on nothing. A voyage to Paris? What good would it do?

"Let his passion exhaust itself. He will come back then of his own accord," said the baron.

Some time passed without any further news. But one morning they were terrified at the receipt of a despairing letter:

"My Poor Mamma: I am lost. There is nothing left for me to do but to blow out my brains unless you come to my aid. A speculation that gave every prospect of success

has fallen through, and I am eighty-five thousand dollars in debt. I shall be dishonored if I do not pay up--ruined--and it will henceforth be impossible for me to do anything. I am lost. I repeat that I would rather blow out my brains than undergo this disgrace. I should have done so already, probably, but for the encouragement of a woman of whom I never speak to you, and who is my providence.

"I embrace you from the bottom of my heart, my dear mamma--perhaps for the last time. Good-by.

"Paul."

A package of business papers accompanying the letter gave the details of the failure.

The baron answered by return mail that they would see what could be done. Then he set out for Havre to get advice and he mortgaged some property to raise the money which was sent to Paul.

The young man wrote three letters full of the most heartfelt thanks and passionate affection, saying he was coming home at once to see his dear parents.

But he did not come.

A whole year passed. Jeanne and the baron were about to set out for Paris to try and make a last effort, when they received a line to say that he was in London again, setting an enterprise on foot in connection with steamboats under the name of "Paul de Lamare & Co." He wrote: "This will give me an assured fortune, and perhaps great wealth, and I am risking nothing. You can see at once what a splendid thing it is. When I see you again I shall have a fine position in society. There is nothing but business these days to help you out of difficulties."

Three months later the steamboat company failed and the manager was being sought for on account of certain irregularities in business methods. Jeanne had a nervous attack that lasted several hours and then she took to her bed.

The baron again went to Havre to make inquiries, saw some lawyers, some business

men, some solicitors and bailiffs and found that the liabilities of the De Lamare concern were two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, and he once more mortgaged some property. The château of "The Poplars" and the two farms and all that went with them were mortgaged for a large sum.

One evening as he was arranging the final details in the office of a business man, he fell over on the floor with a stroke of apoplexy.

A man was sent on horseback to notify Jeanne, but when she arrived he was dead.

She took his body back to "The Poplars," so overcome that her grief was numbness rather than despair.

Abbé Tolbiac refused to permit the body to be brought to the church, despite the distracted entreaties of the two women. The baron was interred at twilight without any religious ceremony.

Paul learned of the event through one of the men who was settling up his affairs. He was still in hiding in England. He wrote to make excuses for not having come home, saying that he had learned of his grandfather's death too late. "However, now that you have helped me out of my difficulties, my dear mamma, I shall go back to France and hope to embrace you soon."

Jeanne was so crushed in spirit that she appeared not to understand anything. Toward the end of the winter Aunt Lison, who was now sixty-eight, had an attack of bronchitis that developed into pneumonia, and she died quietly, murmuring with her last breath: "My poor little Jeanne, I will ask God to take pity on you."

Jeanne followed her to the grave, and as the earth fell on her coffin she sank to the ground, wishing that she might die also, so as not to suffer, to think. A strong peasant woman lifted her up and carried her away as if she had been a child.

When she reached the château Jeanne, who had spent the last five nights at Aunt Lison's bedside, allowed herself to be put to bed without resistance by this unknown peasant woman, who handled her with gentleness and firmness, and she fell asleep

from exhaustion, overcome with weariness and suffering.

She awoke about the middle of the night. A night light was burning on the mantelpiece. A woman was asleep in her easy chair. Who was this woman? She did not recognize her, and leaning over the edge of her bed, she sought to examine her features by the dim light of the wick floating in oil in a tumbler of water.

It seemed to her that she had seen this face. But when, but where? The woman was sleeping peacefully, her head to one side and her cap on the floor. She might be about forty or forty-five. She was stout, with a high color, squarely built and powerful. Her large hands hung down at either side of the chair. Her hair was turning gray. Jeanne looked at her fixedly, her mind in the disturbed condition of one awaking from a feverish sleep after a great sorrow.

She had certainly seen this face! Was it in former days? Was it of late years? She could not tell, and the idea distressed her, upset her nerves. She rose noiselessly to take another look at the sleeping woman, walking over on tiptoe. It was the woman who had lifted her up in the cemetery and then put her to bed. She remembered this confusedly.

But had she met her elsewhere at some other time of her life or did she only imagine she recognized her amid the confused recollections of the day before? And how did she come to be there in her room and why?

The woman opened her eyes and, seeing Jeanne, she rose to her feet suddenly. They stood face to face, so close that they touched one another. The stranger said crossly: "What! are you up? You will be ill, getting up at this time of night. Go back to bed!"

"Who are you?" asked Jeanne.

But the woman, opening her arms, picked her up and carried her back to her bed with the strength of a man. And as she laid her down gently and drew the covers over her, she leaned over close to Jeanne and, weeping as she did so, she kissed her passionately on the cheeks, her hair, her eyes, the tears falling on her face as she

stammered out: "My poor mistress, Mam'zelle Jeanne, my poor mistress, don't you recognize me?"

"Rosalie, my girl!" cried Jeanne, throwing her arms round her neck and hugging her as she kissed her, and they sobbed together, clasped in each other's arms.

Rosalie was the first to regain her calmness. "Come," she said, "you must be sensible and not catch cold." And she covered her up warm and straightened the pillow under her former mistress' head. The latter continued to sob, trembling all over at the recollections that were awakened in her mind. She finally inquired: "How did you come back, my poor girl?"

"Pardi! do you suppose I was going to leave you all alone like that, now?" replied Rosalie.

"Light a candle, so I may see you," said Jeanne. And when the candle was brought to the bedside they looked at each other for some time without speaking a word. Then Jeanne, holding out her hand to her former maid, murmured: "I should not have recognized you, my girl, you have changed greatly; did you know it? But not as much as I have." And Rosalie, looking at this white-haired woman, thin and faded, whom she had left a beautiful and fresh young woman, said: "That is true, you have changed, Madame Jeanne, and more than you should. But remember, however, that we have not seen each other for twenty-five years."

They were silent, thinking over the past. At length Jeanne said hesitatingly: "Have you been happy?"

Rosalie, fearful of awakening certain painful souvenirs, stammered out: "Why--yes--yes--madame. I have nothing much to complain of. I have been happier than you have--that is sure. There was only one thing that always weighed on my heart, and that was that I did not stay here--" And she stopped suddenly, sorry she had referred to that unintentionally. But Jeanne replied gently: "How could you help it, my girl? One cannot always do as they wish. You are a widow now, also, are you

not?" Then her voice trembled with emotion as she said: "Have you other--other children?"

"No, madame."

"And he--your--your boy--what has become of him? Has he turned out well?"

"Yes, madame, he is a good boy and works industriously. He has been married for six months, and he can take my farm now, since I have come back to you."

Jeanne murmured in a trembling voice: "Then you will never leave me again, my girl?"

"No, indeed, madame, I have arranged all that."

Jeanne, in spite of herself, began to compare their lives, but without any bitterness, for she was now resigned to the unjust cruelty of fate. She said: "And your husband, how did he treat you?"

"Oh, he was a good man, madame, and not lazy; he knew how to make money. He died of consumption."

Then Jeanne, sitting up in bed, filled with a longing to know more, said: "Come, tell me everything, my girl, all about your life. It will do me good just now."

Rosalie, drawing up her chair, began to tell about herself, her home, her people, entering into those minute details dear to country people, describing her yard, laughing at some old recollection that reminded her of good times she had had, and raising her voice by degrees like a farmer's wife accustomed to command. She ended by saying: "Oh, I am well off now. I don't have to worry." Then she became confused again, and said in a lower tone: "It is to you that I owe it, anyhow; and you know I do not want any wages. No, indeed! No, indeed! And if you will not have it so, I will go."

Jeanne replied: "You do not mean that you are going to serve me for nothing?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, madame. Money! You give me money! Why, I have almost as

much as you. Do you know what is left to you will all your jumble of mortgages and borrowing, and interests unpaid which are mounting up every year? Do you know? No, is it not so? Well, then, I can promise you that you have not even ten thousand francs income. Not ten thousand, do you understand? But I will settle all that for you, and very quickly."

She had begun talking loud again, carried away in her indignation at these interests left unpaid, at this threatening ruin. And as a faint, tender smile passed over the face of her mistress, she cried in a tone of annoyance: "You must not laugh, madame, for without money we are nothing but laborers."

Jeanne took hold of her hands and kept them in her own; then she said slowly, still full of the idea that haunted her: "Oh, I have had no luck. Everything has gone against me. Fate has a grudge against my life."

But Rosalie shook her head: "You must not say that, madame. You married badly, that's all. One should not marry like that, anyway, without knowing anything about one's intended."

And they went on talking about themselves just as two old friends might have done.

The sun rose while they were still talking.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW HOME

In a week's time Rosalie had taken absolute control of everything and everyone in the château. Jeanne was quite resigned and obeyed passively. Weak and dragging her feet as she walked, as little mother had formerly done, she went out walking leaning on Rosalie's arm, the latter lecturing her and consoling her with abrupt and tender words as they walked slowly along, treating her mistress as though she were a sick child.

They always talked of bygone days, Jeanne with tears in her throat, and Rosalie in

the quiet tone of a phlegmatic peasant. The servant kept referring to the subject of unpaid interests; and at last requested Jeanne to give her up all the business papers that Jeanne, in her ignorance of money matters, was hiding from her, out of consideration for her son.

After that, for a week, Rosalie went to Fécamp every day to have matters explained to her by a lawyer whom she knew.

One evening, after having put her mistress to bed, she sat down by the bedside and said abruptly: "Now that you are settled quietly, madame, we will have a chat." And she told her exactly how matters stood.

When everything was settled, there would be about seven thousand francs of income left, no more.

"We cannot help it, my girl," said Jeanne. "I feel that I shall not make old bones, and there will be quite enough for me."

But Rosalie was annoyed: "For you, madame, it might be; but M. Paul--will you leave nothing for him?"

Jeanne shuddered. "I beg you not to mention him again. It hurts me too much to think about him."

"But I wish to speak about him, because you see you are not brave, Madame Jeanne. He does foolish things. Well! what of it? He will not do so always; and then he will marry and have children. He will need money to bring them up. Pay attention to me: you must sell 'The Poplars.'"

Jeanne sprang up in a sitting posture. "Sell 'The Poplars'! Do you mean it? Oh, never, never!"

But Rosalie was not disturbed. "I tell you that you will sell the place, madame, because it must be done." And then she explained her calculations, her plans, her reasons.

Once they had sold "The Poplars" and the two farms belonging to it to a buyer whom she had found, they would keep four farms situated at St. Leonard, which, free of all mortgage, would bring in an income of eight thousand three hundred francs. They would set aside thirteen hundred francs a year for repairs and for the upkeep of the property; there would then remain seven thousand francs, five thousand of which would cover the annual expenditures and the other two thousand would be put away for a rainy day.

She added: "All the rest has been squandered; there is an end of it. And then I am to keep the key, you understand. As for M. Paul, he will have nothing left, nothing; he would take your last sou from you."

Jeanne, who was weeping silently, murmured:

"But if he has nothing to eat?"

"He can come and eat with us if he is hungry. There will always be a bed and some stew for him. Do you believe he would have acted as he has done if you had not given him a sou in the first place?"

"But he was in debt, he would have been disgraced."

"When you have nothing left, will that prevent him from making fresh debts? You have paid his debts, that is all right; but you will not pay any more; it is I who am telling you this. Now goodnight, madame."

And she left the room.

Jeanne did not sleep, she was so upset at the idea of selling "The Poplars," of going away, of leaving this house to which all her life was linked.

When Rosalie came into the room next morning she said to her: "My poor girl, I never could make up my mind to go away from here."

But the servant grew angry: "It will have to be, however, madame; the lawyer will soon be here with the man who wants to buy the château. Otherwise, in four years

you will not have a rap left."

Jeanne was crushed, and repeated: "I could not do it; I never could."

An hour later the postman brought her a letter from Paul asking for ten thousand francs. What should she do? At her wit's end, she consulted Rosalie, who threw up her hands, exclaiming: "What was I telling you, madame? Ah! You would have been in a nice fix, both of you, if I had not come back." And Jeanne, bending to her servant's will, wrote as follows to the young man:

"My Dear Son: I can do nothing more for you. You have ruined me; I am even obliged to sell 'The Poplars.' But never forget that I shall always have a home whenever you want to seek shelter with your old mother, to whom you have caused much suffering. Jeanne."

When the notary arrived with M. Jeoffrin, a retired sugar refiner, she received them herself, and invited them to look over the château.

A month later, she signed a deed of sale, and also bought herself a little cottage in the neighborhood of Goderville, on the high road to Montiviliers, in the hamlet of Batteville.

Then she walked up and down all alone until evening, in little mother's avenue, with a sore heart and troubled mind, bidding distracted and sobbing farewells to the landscape, the trees, the rustic bench under the plane tree, to all those things she knew so well and that seemed to have become part of her vision and her soul, the grove, the mound overlooking the plain, where she had so often sat, and from where she had seen the Comte de Fourville running toward the sea on that terrible day of Julian's death, to an old elm whose upper branches were missing, against which she had often leaned, and to all this familiar garden spot.

Rosalie came out and took her by the arm to make her come into the house.

A tall young peasant of twenty-five was waiting outside the door. He greeted her in a friendly manner as if he had known her for some time: "Good-morning, Madame

Jeanne. I hope you are well. Mother told me to come and help you move. I would like to know what you are going to take away, seeing that I shall do it from time to time so as not to interfere with my farm work."

It was her maid's son, Julien's son, Paul's brother.

She felt as if her heart stopped beating; and yet she would have liked to embrace this young fellow.

She looked at him, trying to find some resemblance to her husband or to her son. He was ruddy, vigorous, with fair hair and his mother's blue eyes. And yet he looked like Julien. In what way? How? She could not have told, but there was something like him in the whole makeup of his face.

The young man resumed: "If you could show me at once, I should be much obliged."

But she had not yet decided what she was going to take with her, as her new home was very small; and she begged him to come back again at the end of the week.

She was now entirely occupied with getting ready to move, which brought a little variety into her very dreary and hopeless life. She went from room to room, picking out the furniture which recalled episodes in her life, old friends, as it were, who have a share in our life and almost of our being, whom we have known since childhood, and to which are linked our happy or sad recollections, dates in our history; silent companions of our sad or sombre hours, who have grown old and become worn at our side, their covers torn in places, their joints shaky, their color faded.

She selected them, one by one, sometimes hesitating and troubled, as if she were taking some important step, changing her mind every instant, weighing the merits of two easy chairs or of some old writing-desk and an old work table.

She opened the drawers, sought to recall things; then, when she had said to herself, "Yes, I will take this," the article was taken down into the dining-room.

She wished to keep all the furniture of her room, her bed, her tapestries, her clock,

everything.

She took away some of the parlor chairs, those that she had loved as a little child; the fox and the stork, the fox and the crow, the ant and the grasshopper, and the melancholy heron.

Then, while wandering about in all the corners of this dwelling she was going to forsake, she went one day up into the loft, where she was filled with amazement; it was a chaos of articles of every kind, some broken, others tarnished only, others taken up there for no special reason probably, except that they were tired of them or that they had been replaced by others. She saw numberless knick-knacks that she remembered, and that had disappeared suddenly, trifles that she had handled, those old little insignificant articles that she had seen every day without noticing, but which now, discovered in this loft, assumed an importance as of forgotten relics, of friends that she had found again.

She went from one to the other of them with a little pang, saying: "Why, it was I who broke that china cup a few evenings before my wedding. Ah! there is mother's little lantern and a cane that little father broke in trying to open the gate when the wood was swollen with the rain."

There were also a number of things that she did not remember that had belonged to her grandparents or to their parents, dusty things that appeared to be exiled in a period that is not their own, and that looked sad at their abandonment, and whose history, whose experiences no one knows, for they never saw those who chose them, bought them, owned them, and loved them; never knew the hands that had touched them familiarly, and the eyes that looked at them with delight.

Jeanne examined carefully three-legged chairs to see if they recalled any memories, a copper warming pan, a damaged foot stove that she thought she remembered, and a number of housekeeping utensils unfit for use.

She then put together all the things she wished to take, and going downstairs, sent

Rosalie up to get them. The servant indignantly refused to bring down "that rubbish." But Jeanne, who had not much will left, held her own this time, and had to be obeyed.

One morning the young farmer, Julien's son, Denis Lecoq, came with his wagon for the first load. Rosalie went back with him in order to superintend the unloading and placing of furniture where it was to stand.

Rosalie had come back and was waiting for Jeanne, who had been out on the cliff. She was enchanted with the new house, declaring it was much more cheerful than this old box of a building, which was not even on the side of the road.

Jeanne wept all the evening.

Ever since they heard that the château was sold, the farmers were not more civil to her than necessary, calling her among themselves "the crazy woman," without knowing exactly why, but doubtless because they guessed with their animal instinct at her morbid and increasing sentimentality, at all the disturbance of her poor mind that had undergone so much sorrow.

The night before they left she chanced to go into the stable. A growl made her start. It was Massacre, whom she had hardly thought of for months. Blind and paralyzed, having reached a great age for an animal, he existed in a straw bed, taken care of by Ludivine, who never forgot him. She took him in her arms, kissed him, and carried him into the house. As big as a barrel, he could scarcely carry himself along on his stiff legs, and he barked like the wooden dogs that one gives to children.

The day of departure finally came. Jeanne had slept in Julien's old room, as hers was dismantled. She got up exhausted and short of breath as if she had been running. The carriage containing the trunks and the rest of the furniture was in the yard ready to start. Another two-wheeled vehicle was to take Jeanne and the servant. Old Simon and Ludivine were to stay until the arrival of a new proprietor, and then to go to some of their relations, Jeanne having provided a little income for them. They had

also saved up some money, and being now very old and garrulous, they were not of much use in the house. Marius had long since married and left.

About eight o'clock it began to rain, a fine icy rain, driven by a light breeze. On the kitchen table, some cups of café au lait were steaming. Jeanne sat down and sipped hers, then rising, she said, "Come along."

She put on her hat and shawl, and while Rosalie was putting on her overshoes, she said in a choking voice: "Do you remember, my girl, how it rained when we left Rouen to come here?"

As she said this, she put her two hands to her breast and fell over on her back, unconscious. She remained thus over an hour, apparently dead. Then she opened her eyes and was seized with convulsions accompanied by floods of tears.

When she was a little calmer she was so weak that she could not stand up, and Rosalie, fearing another attack if they delayed their departure, went to look for her son. They took her up and carried her to the carriage, placed her on the wooden bench covered with leather; and the old servant got in beside her, wrapped her up with a big cloak, and holding an umbrella over her head, cried: "Quick, Denis, let us be off." The young man climbed up beside his mother and whipped up the horse, whose jerky pace made the two women bounce about vigorously.

As they turned the corner to enter the village, they saw some one stalking along the road; it was Abbé Tolbiac, who seemed to be watching for them to go by. He stopped to let the carriage pass. He was holding up his cassock with one hand, to keep it out of the mud, and his thin legs, encased in black stockings, ended in a pair of enormous muddy shoes.

Jeanne lowered her eyes so as not to meet his glance, and Rosalie, who had heard all about him, flew into a rage. "Peasant! Peasant!" she murmured; and then seizing her son's hand: "Give him a good slash with the whip."

But the young man, just as they were passing the priest, made the wheel of the

wagon, which was going at full speed, sink into a rut, splashing the abbé with mud from head to foot.

Rosalie was delighted and turned round to shake her fist at him, while the priest was wiping off the mud with his big handkerchief.

All at once Jeanne exclaimed: "We have forgotten Massacre!" They stopped, and, getting down, Denis ran to fetch the dog, while Rosalie held the reins. He presently reappeared, carrying in his arms the shapeless and crippled animal, which he placed at the feet of the two women.

CHAPTER XIII

JEANNE IN PARIS

Two hours later the carriage stopped at a little brick house built in the middle of a lot planted with pear trees at the side of the high road.

Four trellised arbors covered with honeysuckle and clematis formed the four corners of the garden, which was divided into little beds of vegetables separated by narrow paths bordered with fruit trees.

A very high box hedge enclosed the whole property, which was separated by a field from the neighboring farm. There was a blacksmith's shop about a hundred feet further along the road. There were no other houses within three-quarters of a mile.

The house commanded a view of the level district of Caux, covered with farms surrounded by their four double rows of tall trees which enclosed the courtyard planted with apple trees.

As soon as they reached the house, Jeanne wanted to rest; but Rosalie would not allow her to do so for fear she would begin to think of the past.

The carpenter from Goderville was there, and they began at once to place the furniture that had already arrived while waiting for the last load. This required a good deal of thought and planning.

At the end of an hour the wagon appeared at the gate and had to be unloaded in the rain. When night fell the house was in utter disorder, with things piled up anyhow. Jeanne, tired out, fell asleep as soon as she got into bed.

She had no time to mourn for some days, as there was so much to be done. She even took a certain pleasure in making her new house look pretty, the thought that her son would come back there haunting her continually. The tapestries from her old room were hung in the dining-room, which also had to serve as a parlor; and she took special pains with one of the two rooms on the first floor, which she thought of as "Poulet's room."

She kept the other room herself, Rosalie sleeping above, next to the loft. The little house, furnished with care, was very pretty, and Jeanne was happy there at first, although she seemed to lack something, but she did not know what.

One morning the lawyer's clerk from Fécamp brought her three thousand six hundred francs, the price of the furniture left at "The Poplars," and valued by an upholsterer. She had a little thrill of pleasure at receiving this money, and as soon as the man had gone, she ran to put on her hat, so as to get to Goderville as quickly as possible to send Paul this unexpected sum.

But as she was hurrying along the high road she met Rosalie coming from market. The servant suspected something, without at once guessing the facts; and when she discovered them, for Jeanne could hide nothing from her, she placed her basket on the ground that she might get angry with more comfort.

She began to scold with her fists on her hips; then taking hold of her mistress with her right arm and taking her basket in her left, and still fuming, she continued on her way to the house.

As soon as they were in the house the servant asked to have the money handed over to her. Jeanne gave all but six hundred francs, which she held back; but Rosalie soon saw through her tricks, and she was obliged to hand it all over. However, she

consented to her sending this amount to the young man.

A few days later he wrote: "You have rendered me a great service, my dear mother, for we were in the greatest distress."

Jeanne, however, could not get accustomed to Batteville. It seemed to her as if she could not breathe as she did formerly, that she was more lonely, more deserted, more lost than ever. She went out for a walk, got as far as the hamlet of Verneuil, came back by the Trois-Mares, came home, then suddenly wanted to start out again, as if she had forgotten to go to the very place she intended.

And every day she did the same thing without knowing why. But one evening a thought came to her unconsciously which revealed to her the secret of her restlessness. She said as she was sitting down to dinner: "Oh, how I long to see the sea!"

That was what she had missed so greatly, the sea, her big neighbor for twenty-five years, the sea with its salt air, its rages, its scolding voice, its strong breezes, the sea which she sought from her window at "The Poplars" every morning, whose air she breathed day and night, the sea which she felt close to her, which she had taken to loving unconsciously as she would a person.

Winter was approaching, and Jeanne felt herself overcome by an unconquerable discouragement. It was not one of those acute griefs which seemed to wring the heart, but a dreary, mournful sadness.

Nothing roused her. No one paid any attention to her. The high road before her door stretched to right and left with hardly any passersby. Occasionally a dogcart passed rapidly, driven by a red-faced man, with his blouse puffed out by the wind, making a sort of blue balloon; sometimes a slow-moving wagon, or else two peasants, a man and a woman, who came near, passed by, and disappeared in the distance.

As soon as the grass began to grow again, a young girl in a short skirt passed by the gate every morning with two thin cows who browsed along the side of the road. She

came back every evening with the same sleepy face, making a step every ten minutes as she walked behind the animals.

Jeanne dreamed every night that she was still at "The Poplars." She seemed to be there with father and little mother, and sometimes even with Aunt Lison. She did over again things forgotten and done with, thought she was supporting Madame Adelaide in her walk along the avenue. And each awakening was attended with tears.

She thought continually of Paul, wondering what he was doing--how he was--whether he sometimes thought of her. As she walked slowly in the by-roads between the farms, she thought over all these things which tormented her, but above all else, she cherished an intense jealousy of the woman who had stolen her son from her. It was this hatred alone which prevented her from taking any steps, from going to look for him, to see him. It seemed to her that she saw that woman standing on the doorsill asking: "What do you want here, madame?" Her mother's pride revolted at the possibility of such a meeting. And her haughty pride of a good woman whose character is blameless made her all the more indignant at the cowardice of a man subjugated by an unworthy passion.

When autumn returned with its long rains, its gray sky, its dark clouds, such a weariness of this kind of life came over her that she determined to make a great effort to get her Poulet back; he must have got over his infatuation by this time.

She wrote him an imploring letter:

"My Dear Child: I am going to entreat you to come back to me. Remember that I am old and delicate, all alone the whole year round except for a servant maid. I am now living in a little house on the main road. It is very lonely, but if you were here all would be different for me. I have only you in the world, and I have not seen you for seven years! You were my life, my dream, my only hope, my one love, and you failed me, you deserted me!

"Oh, come back, my little Poulet--come and embrace me. Come back to your old mother, who holds out her despairing arms towards you.

"Jeanne."

He replied a few days later:

"My Dear Mother: I would ask nothing better than to go and see you, but I have not a penny. Send me some money and I will come. I wanted, in any case, to see you to talk to you about a plan that would make it possible for me to do as you ask.

"The disinterestedness and love of the one who has been my companion in the dark days through which I have passed can never be forgotten by me. It is not possible for me to remain any longer without publicly recognizing her love and her faithful devotion. She has very pleasing manners, which you would appreciate. She is also educated and reads a good deal. In fact, you cannot understand what she has been to me. I should be a brute if I did not show her my gratitude. I am going, therefore, to ask you to give me your permission to marry her. You will forgive all my follies and we will all live together in your new house.

"If you knew her you would at once give your consent. I can assure you that she is perfect and very distingué. You will love her, I am sure. As for me, I could not live without her.

"I shall expect your reply with impatience, my dear mother, and we both embrace you with all our heart.

"Your son,

"Vicomte Paul de Lamare."

Jeanne was crushed. She remained motionless, the letter on her lap, seeing through the cunning of this girl who had had such a hold on her son for so long, and had not let him come to see her once, biding her time until the despairing old mother could no longer resist the desire to clasp her son in her arms, and would weaken and grant

all they asked.

And grief at Paul's persistent preference for this creature wrung her heart. She said: "He does not love me. He does not love me."

Rosalie just then entered the room. Jeanne faltered: "He wants to marry her now."

The maid was startled. "Oh, madame, you will not allow that. M. Paul must not pick up that rubbish."

And Jeanne, overcome with emotion, but indignant, replied: "Never that, my girl. And as he will not come here, I am going to see him, myself, and we shall see which of us will carry the day."

She wrote at once to Paul to prepare him for her visit, and to arrange to meet him elsewhere than in the house inhabited by that baggage.

While awaiting a reply she made her preparations for departure. Rosalie began to pack her mistress' clothes in an old trunk, but as she was folding a dress, one of those she had worn in the country, she exclaimed: "Why, you have nothing to put on your back. I will not allow you to go like that. You would be a disgrace to everyone; and the Parisian ladies would take you for a servant."

Jeanne let her have her own way, and the two women went together to Goderville to choose some material, which was given a dressmaker in the village. Then they went to the lawyer, M. Roussel, who spent a fortnight in the capital every year, in order to get some information; for Jeanne had not been in Paris for twenty-eight years.

He gave them lots of advice on how to avoid being run over, on methods of protecting yourself from thieves, advising her to sew her money up inside the lining of her coat, and to keep in her pocket only what she absolutely needed. He spoke at length about moderate priced restaurants, and mentioned two or three patronized by women, and told them that they might mention his name at the Hotel Normandie.

Jeanne had never yet seen the railroad, though trains had been running between Paris

and Havre for six years, and were revolutionizing the whole country.

She received no answer from Paul, although she waited a week, then two weeks, going every morning to meet the postman, asking him hesitatingly: "Is there anything for me, Père Malandain?" And the man always replied in his hoarse voice: "Nothing again, my good lady."

It certainly must be this woman who was keeping Paul from writing.

Jeanne, therefore, determined to set out at once. She wanted to take Rosalie with her, but the maid refused for fear of increasing the expense of the journey. She did not allow her mistress to take more than three hundred francs, saying: "If you need more you can write to me and I will go to the lawyer and ask him to send it to you. If I give you any more, M. Paul will put it in his pocket."

One December morning Denis Lecoq came for them in his light wagon and took them to the station. Jeanne wept as she kissed Rosalie good-by, and got into the train. Rosalie was also affected and said: "Good-by, madame, bon voyage, and come back soon!"

"Good-by, my girl."

A whistle and the train was off, beginning slowly and gradually going with a speed that terrified Jeanne. In her compartment there were two gentlemen leaning back in the two corners of the carriage.

She looked at the country as they swept past, the trees, the farms, the villages, feeling herself carried into a new life, into a new world that was no longer the life of her tranquil youth and of her present monotonous existence.

She reached Paris that evening. A commissionaire took her trunk and she followed him in great fear, jostled by the crowd and not knowing how to make her way amid this mass of moving humanity, almost running to keep up with the man for fear of losing sight of him.

On reaching the hotel she said at the desk: "I was recommended here by M. Roussel."

The proprietress, an immense woman with a serious face, who was seated at the desk, inquired:

"Who is he--M. Roussel?"

Jeanne replied in amazement: "Why, he is the lawyer at Goderville, who stops here every year."

"That's very possible," said the big woman, "but I do not know him. Do you wish a room?"

"Yes, madame."

A boy took her satchel and led the way upstairs. She felt a pang at her heart. Sitting down at a little table she sent for some luncheon, as she had eaten nothing since daybreak. As she ate, she was thinking sadly of a thousand things, recalling her stay here on the return from her wedding journey, and the first indication of Julien's character betrayed while they were in Paris. But she was young then, and confident and brave. Now she felt old, embarrassed, even timid, weak and disturbed at trifles. When she had finished her luncheon she went over to the window and looked down on the street filled with people. She wished to go out, but was afraid to do so. She would surely get lost. She went to bed, but the noise, the feeling of being in a strange city, kept her awake. About two o'clock in the morning, just as she was dozing off, she heard a woman scream in an adjoining room; she sat up in bed and then she thought she heard a man laugh. As daylight dawned the thought of Paul came to her, and she dressed herself before it was light.

Paul lived in the Rue du Sauvage, in the old town. She wanted to go there on foot so as to carry out Rosalie's economical advice. The weather was delightful, the air cold enough to make her skin tingle. People were hurrying along the sidewalks. She walked as fast as she could, according to directions given her, along a street, at the

end of which she was to turn to the right and then to the left, when she would come to a square where she must make fresh inquiries. She did not find the square, and went into a baker's to ask her way, and he directed her differently. She started off again, went astray, inquired her way again, and finally got lost completely.

Half crazy, she now walked at random. She had made up her mind to call a cab, when she caught sight of the Seine. She then walked along the quays.

After about an hour she found the Rue Sauvage, a sort of dark alley. She stopped at a door, so overcome that she could not move.

He was there, in that house--Poulet.

She felt her knees and hands trembling; but at last she entered the door, and walking along a passage, saw the janitor's quarters. She said, as she held out a piece of money: "Would you go up and tell M. Paul de Lamare that an old lady, a friend of his mother's, is downstairs, and wishes to see him?"

"He does not live here any longer, madame," replied the janitor.

A shudder went over her. She faltered:

"Oh! Where--where is he living now?"

"I do not know."

She grew dizzy as though she were about to fall over, and stood there for some moments without being able to speak. At length, with a great effort, she collected her senses and murmured:

"How long is it since he left?"

"About two weeks ago. They went off like that, one evening, and never came back. They were in debt everywhere in the neighborhood, so you can understand that they did not care to leave their address."

Jeanne saw lights before her eyes, flashes of flame, as though a gun had been fired off in front of her eyes. But she had one fixed idea in her mind, and that sustained

her, and kept her outwardly calm and rational. She wished to find Poulet and know all about him.

"Then he said nothing when he was going away?"

"Nothing at all; they ran off to escape their debts, that's all."

"But he surely sends someone to get his mail."

"More frequently than I send it. He never got more than ten letters a year. I took one up to them, however, two days before they left."

That was probably her letter. She said abruptly: "Listen! I am his mother, his own mother, and I have come to look for him. Here are ten francs for you. If you can get any news or any particulars about him, come and see me at the Hotel Normandie, Rue du Havre, and I will pay you well."

"You may count on me, madame," he replied.

She left him and began to walk away without caring whither she went. She hurried along as though she were on some important business, knocking up against people with packages, crossing the streets without paying attention to the approaching vehicles, and being sworn at by the drivers, stumbling on the curb of the sidewalk, and tearing along straight ahead in utter despair.

All at once she found herself in a garden, and was so tired that she sat down on a bench to rest. She stayed there some time apparently, weeping without being conscious of it, for passersby stopped to look at her. Then she felt very cold, and rose to go on her way; but her legs would scarcely carry her, she was so weak and distressed.

She wanted to go into a restaurant and get a cup of bouillon, but a sort of shame, of fear, of modesty at her grief being observed held her back. She would pause at the door, look in, see all the people sitting at table eating, and would turn away, saying: "I will go into the next one." But she had not the courage.

Finally she went into a bakery and bought a crescent and ate it as she walked along. She was very thirsty, but did not know where to go to get something to drink, so did without it.

Presently she found herself in another garden surrounded by arcades. She recognized the Palais Royal. Being tired and warm, she sat down here for an hour or two.

A crowd of people came in, a well-dressed crowd, chatting, smiling, bowing to each other, that happy crowd of beautiful women and wealthy men who live only for dress and amusement. Jeanne felt bewildered in the midst of this brilliant assemblage, and got up to make her escape. But suddenly the thought came to her that she might meet Paul in this place; and she began to wander about, looking into the faces, going and coming incessantly with her quick step from one end of the garden to the other.

People turned round to look at her, others laughed as they pointed her out. She noticed it and fled, thinking that they were doubtless amused at her appearance and at her dress of green plaid, selected by Rosalie, and made according to her ideas by the dressmaker at Goderville.

She no longer dared even to ask her way of passersby, but at last she ventured to do so and found her way back to the hotel.

The following day she went to the police department to ask them to look for her child. They could promise her nothing, but said they would do all they could. She wandered about the streets hoping that she might come across him. And she felt more alone in this bustling crowd, more lost, more wretched than in the lonely country.

That evening when she came back to the hotel she was informed that a man had come to see her from M. Paul, and that he would come back again the following day. Her heart began to beat violently and she never closed her eyes that night. If it should be he! Yes, it assuredly was, although she would not have recognized him

from the description they gave her.

About nine o'clock the following morning there was a knock at the door. She cried: "Come in!" ready to throw herself into certain outstretched arms. But an unknown person appeared; and while he excused himself for disturbing her, and explained his business, which was to collect a debt of Paul's, she felt the tears beginning to overflow, and wiped them away with her finger before they fell on her cheeks.

He had learned of her arrival through the janitor of the Rue Sauvage, and as he could not find the young man, he had come to see his mother. He handed her a paper, which she took without knowing what she was doing and read the figures--ninety francs--which she paid without a word.

She did not go out that day.

The next day other creditors came. She gave them all that she had left except twenty francs and then wrote to Rosalie to explain matters to her.

She passed her days wandering about, waiting for Rosalie's answer, not knowing what to do, how to kill the melancholy, interminable hours, having no one to whom she could say an affectionate word, no one who knew her sorrow. She now longed to return home to her little house at the side of the lonely high road. A few days before she thought she could not live there, she was so overcome with grief, and now she felt that she could never live anywhere else but there where her serious character had been formed.

One evening the letter at last came, enclosing two hundred francs. Rosalie wrote:

"Madame Jeanne: Come back at once, for I shall not send you any more. As for M. Paul, it is I who will go and get him when we know where he is.

"With respect, your servant,

"Rosalie."

Jeanne set out for Batteville one very cold, snowy morning.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE

Jeanne never went out now, never stirred about. She rose at the same hour every day, looked out at the weather and then went downstairs and sat before the parlor fire.

She would remain for days motionless, gazing into the fire, thinking of nothing in particular. It would grow dark before she stirred, except to put a fresh log on the fire. Rosalie would then bring in the lamp and exclaim: "Come, Madame Jeanne, you must stir about or you will have no appetite again this evening."

She lived over the past, haunted by memories of her early life and her wedding journey down yonder in Corsica. Forgotten landscapes in that isle now rose before her in the blaze of the fire, and she recalled all the little details, all the little incidents, the faces she had seen down there. The head of the guide, Jean Ravoli, haunted her, and she sometimes seemed to hear his voice.

Then she remembered the sweet years of Paul's childhood, when they planted salad together and when she knelt in the thick grass beside Aunt Lison, each trying what they could do to please the child, and her lips murmured: "Poulet, my little Poulet," as though she were talking to him. Stopping at this word, she would try to trace it, letter by letter, in space, sometimes for hours at a time, until she became confused and mixed up the letters and formed other words, and she became so nervous that she was almost crazy.

She had all the peculiarities of those who live a solitary life. The least thing out of its usual place irritated her.

Rosalie often obliged her to walk and took her on the high road, but at the end of twenty minutes she declared she could not take another step and sat down on the side of the road.

She soon became averse to all movement and stayed in bed as late as possible. Since

her childhood she had retained one custom, that of rising the instant she had drunk her café au lait in the morning. But now she would lie down again and begin to dream, and as she was daily growing more lazy, Rosalie would come and oblige her to get up and almost force her to get dressed.

She seemed no longer to have any will power, and each time the maid asked her a question or wanted her advice or opinion she would say: "Do as you think best, my girl."

She imagined herself pursued by some persistent ill luck and was like an oriental fatalist, and having seen her dreams all fade away and her hopes crushed, she would sometimes hesitate a whole day or longer before undertaking the simplest thing, for fear she might be on the wrong road and it would turn out badly. She kept repeating: "Talk of bad luck--I have never had any luck in life."

Then Rosalie would say: "What would you do if you had to work for your living, if you were obliged to get up every morning at six o'clock to go out to your work? Many people have to do that, nevertheless, and when they grow too old they die of want."

Jeanne replied: "Remember that I am all alone; that my son has deserted me." And Rosalie would get very angry: "That's another thing! Well, how about the sons who are drafted into the army and those who go to America?"

America to her was an undefined country, where one went to make a fortune and whence one never returned. She continued: "There always comes a time when people have to part, for old people and young people are not made to live together." And she added fiercely: "Well, what would you say if he were dead?"

Jeanne had nothing more to say.

One day in spring she had gone up to the loft to look for something and by chance opened a box containing old calendars which had been preserved after the manner of some country folks.

She took them up and carried them downstairs. They were of all sizes, and she laid them out on the table in the parlor in regular order. Suddenly she spied the earliest, the one she had brought with her to "The Poplars." She gazed at it for some time, at the days crossed off by her the morning she left Rouen, the day after she left the convent, and she wept slow, sorrowful tears, the tears of an old woman at sight of her wretched life spread out before her on this table.

One morning the maid came into her room earlier than usual, and placing the bowl of café au lait on the little stand beside her bed, she said: "Come, drink it quickly. Denis is waiting for us at the door. We are going to 'The Poplars,' for I have something to attend to down there."

Jeanne dressed herself with trembling hands, almost fainting at the thought of seeing her dear home once more.

The sky was cloudless and the nag, who was inclined to be frisky, would suddenly start off at a gallop every now and then. As they entered the commune of Étouvent Jeanne's heart beat so that she could hardly breathe.

They unharnessed the horse at the Couillard place, and while Rosalie and her son were attending to their own affairs, the farmer and his wife offered to let Jeanne go over the chateau, as the proprietor was away and they had the keys.

She went off alone, and when she reached the side of the chateau from which there was a view of the sea she turned round to look. Nothing had changed on the outside. When she turned the heavy lock and went inside the first thing she did was to go up to her old room, which she did not recognize, as it had been newly papered and furnished. But the view from the window was the same, and she stood and gazed out at the landscape she had so loved.

She then wandered all over the house, walking quietly all alone in this silent abode as though it were a cemetery. All her life was buried here. She went down to the drawing-room, which was dark with its closed shutters. As her eyes became

accustomed to the dim light she recognized some of the old hangings. Two easy chairs were drawn up before the fire, as if some one had just left them, and as Jeanne stood there, full of old memories, she suddenly seemed to see her father and mother sitting there, warming their feet at the fire.

She started back in terror and knocked up against the edge of the door, against which she leaned to support herself, still staring at the armchairs.

The vision had vanished.

She remained bewildered for some minutes. Then she slowly recovered her composure and started to run away, for fear she might become insane. She chanced to look at the door against which she had been leaning and saw there "Poulet's ladder."

All the little notches were there showing the age and growth of her child. Here was the baron's writing, then hers, a little smaller, and then Aunt Lison's rather shaky characters. And she seemed to see her boy of long ago with his fair hair standing before her, leaning his little forehead against the door while they measured his height.

And she kissed the edge of the door in a frenzy of affection.

But some one was calling her outside. It was Rosalie's voice: "Madame Jeanne, Madame Jeanne, they are waiting breakfast for you." She went out in a dream and understood nothing of what they were saying to her. She ate what they gave her, heard them talking, but about what she knew not, let them kiss her on the cheeks and kissed them in return and then got into the carriage.

When they lost sight of the château behind the tall trees she felt a wrench at her heart, convinced that she had bid a last farewell to her old home.

When they reached Batteville and just as she was going into her new house, she saw something white under the door. It was a letter that the postman had slipped under the door while she was out. She recognized Paul's writing and opened it, trembling

with anxiety. He wrote:

"My Dear Mother: I have not written sooner because I did not wish you to make a useless journey to Paris when it was my place to go and see you. I am just now in great sorrow and in great straits. My wife is dying after giving birth to a little girl three days ago, and I have not one sou. I do not know what to do with the child, whom my janitor's wife is bringing up on the bottle as well as she can, but I fear I shall lose her. Could you not take charge of it? I absolutely do not know what to do, and I have no money to put her out to nurse. Answer by return mail.

"Your son, who loves you,

"Paul."

Jeanne sank into a chair and had scarcely strength to call Rosalie. When the maid came into the room they read the letter over together and then remained silent for some time, face to face.

At last Rosalie said: "I am going to fetch the little one, madame. We cannot leave it like that."

"Go, my girl," replied Jeanne.

Then they were silent until the maid said: "Put on your hat, madame, and we will go to Goderville to see the lawyer. If she is going to die, the other one, M. Paul must marry her for the little one's sake later on."

Jeanne, without replying, put on her hat. A deep, inexpressible joy filled her heart, a treacherous joy that she sought to hide at any cost, one of those things of which one is ashamed, although cherishing it in one's soul--her son's sweetheart was going to die.

The lawyer gave the servant minute instructions, making her repeat them several times. Then, sure that she could make no mistake, she said: "Do not be afraid. I will see to it now."

She set out for Paris that very night.

Jeanne passed two days in such a troubled condition that she could not think. The third morning she received merely a line from Rosalie saying she would be back on the evening train. That was all.

About three o'clock she drove in a neighbor's light wagon to the station at Beuzeville to meet Rosalie.

She stood on the platform, looking at the railroad track as it disappeared on the horizon. She looked at the clock. Ten minutes still--five minutes still--two minutes more. Then the hour of the train's arrival, but it was not in sight. Presently, however, she saw a cloud of white smoke and gradually it drew up in the station. She looked anxiously and at last perceived Rosalie carrying a sort of white bundle in her arms.

She wanted to go over toward her, but her knees seemed to grow weak and she was afraid of falling.

But the maid had seen her and came forward with her usual calm manner and said: "How do you do, madame? Here I am back again, but not without some difficulty."

"Well?" faltered Jeanne.

"Well," answered Rosalie, "she died last night. They were married and here is the little girl." And she held out the child, who could not be seen under her wraps.

Jeanne took it mechanically and they left the station and got into the carriage.

"M. Paul will come as soon as the funeral is over--to-morrow about this time, I believe," resumed Rosalie.

Jeanne murmured "Paul" and then was silent.

The wagon drove along rapidly, the peasant clacking his tongue to urge on the horse. Jeanne looked straight ahead of her into the clear sky through which the swallows darted in curves. Suddenly she felt a gentle warmth striking through to her skin; it was the warmth of the little being who was asleep on her lap.

Then she was overcome with an intense emotion, and uncovering gently the face of the sleeping infant, she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

But Rosalie, happy though grumpy, stopped her; "Come, come, Madame Jeanne, stop that; you will make it cry."

And then she added, probably in answer to her own thoughts: "Life, after all, is not as good or as bad as we believe it to be."

A VAGABOND

He was a journeyman carpenter, a good workman and a steady fellow, twenty-seven years old, but, although the eldest son, Jacques Randel had been forced to live on his family for two months, owing to the general lack of work. He had walked about seeking work for over a month and had left his native town, Ville-Avary, in La Manche, because he could find nothing to do and would no longer deprive his family of the bread they needed themselves, when he was the strongest of them all. His two sisters earned but little as charwomen. He went and inquired at the town hall, and the mayor's secretary told him that he would find work at the Labor Agency, and so he started, well provided with papers and certificates, and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers and a shirt in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

And he had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in sun and rain, without ever reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work as a carpenter, but at every carpenter's shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and, finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stonecutter; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up fagots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days'

work occasionally by offering himself at a shamefully low price, in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now for a week he had found nothing, and had no money left, and nothing to eat but a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty, and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, as the other pair had already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday, toward the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly through the sky by the gusts of wind which whistled among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that hour on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of wheat straw, like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry, with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides, so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth, he grasped his stick tightly in his hand, with a longing to strike the first passerby who might be going home to supper.

He looked at the sides of the road, imagining he saw potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch and have had a capital supper off the warm, round vegetables with which he would first of all have warmed his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot which he might pick up in a field as he had done the day before.

For the last two days he had talked to himself as he quickened his steps under the influence of his thoughts. He had never thought much hitherto, as he had given all

his mind, all his simple faculties to his mechanical work. But now fatigue and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open air lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, and that question which he was continually asked, "Why do you not remain at home?" distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of the relations he had left at home and who also had not a penny, filled him by degrees with rage, which had been accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short, growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which tripped his bare feet, he grumbled: "How wretched! how miserable! A set of hogs--to let a man die of hunger--a carpenter--a set of hogs--not two sous--not two sous--and now it is raining--a set of hogs!"

He was indignant at the injustice of fate, and cast the blame on men, on all men, because nature, that great, blind mother, is unjust, cruel and perfidious, and he repeated through his clenched teeth: "A set of hogs" as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And, without considering that there is another injustice which is human, and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants and to sit down to table in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have no right to live now, as they are letting me die of hunger, and yet I only ask for work--a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart rose to his head like terrible intoxication, and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe and because the air is the common property of everybody. So nobody has the right to leave me without bread!"

A fine, thick, icy cold rain was coming down, and he stopped and murmured: "Oh, misery! Another month of walking before I get home." He was indeed returning

home then, for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town, where he was known--and he did not mind what he did--than on the highroads, where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not prosperous, he would turn day laborer, be a mason's hodman, a ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned a franc a day, that would at any rate buy him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket handkerchief round his neck to prevent the cold rain from running down his back and chest, but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced about him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head, and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow and the cow looked at him, and then, suddenly giving her a kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udders hang down. Then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs and drank for a long time, squeezing her warm, swollen teats, which tasted of the cowstall, with both hands, and he drank as long as she gave any milk. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked at a light which was shining among the trees in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong, thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew on the workman's face, and he said: "You are not cold inside there!" He put his hands on her chest and under her stomach to find some warmth there, and then the

idea struck him that he might pass the night beside that large, warm animal. So he found a comfortable place and laid his head on her side, and then, as he was worn out with fatigue, fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other against the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and soon went soundly to sleep again.

The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining, and the sky was bright. The cow was resting with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide, moist nostrils, and said: "Good-by, my beauty, until next time. You are a nice animal. Good-by." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours walked straight before him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot, some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, driving before him a score of frightened, bleating sheep, with the help of an active dog. Randel got up, and raising his cap, said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other, giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass and looking for a kind, compassionate face before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. "I have been looking for work," he said, "for the last two months and cannot find any, and I have not a sou in my pocket." But the would-be gentleman replied: "You should have read the notice

which is stuck up at the entrance to the village: 'Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.' Let me tell you that I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly I shall have you arrested."

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: "Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for, at any rate, I should not die of hunger." And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly side by side, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accoutrements and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers, and to put them to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them, and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking heavily, with military step, and balancing themselves as if they were doing the goose step; and then, suddenly, as they passed him, appearing to have noticed him, they stopped and looked at him angrily and threateningly, and the brigadier came up to him and asked: "What are you doing here?" "I am resting," the man replied calmly. "Where do you come from?" "If I had to tell you all the places I have been to it would take me more than an hour." "Where are you going to?" "To Ville-Avary." "Where is that?" "In La Manche." "Is that where you belong?" "It is." "Why did you leave it?" "To look for work."

The brigadier turned to his gendarme and said in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by an oft-repeated trick: "They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it." And then he continued: "Have you any papers?" "Yes, I have some." "Give them to me."

Randel took his papers out of his pocket, his certificates, those poor, worn-out, dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing, and then, having seen that they were all in order, he

gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom some one cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments' further reflection, he asked him: "Have you any money on you?" "No." "None whatever?" "None." "Not even a sou?" "Not even a sou!" "How do you live then?" "On what people give me." "Then you beg?" And Randel answered resolutely: "Yes, when I can."

Then the gendarme said: "I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me." The carpenter got up and said: "Wherever you please." And, placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: "Well, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains."

And they set off toward the village, the red tiles of which could be seen through the leafless trees, a quarter of a league off. Service was about to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people, who immediately formed two lines to see the criminal pass. He was being followed by a crowd of excited children. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes, with hatred in their eyes and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-spahi, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half-franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of Widow Malet, whom the police had been looking for for six months.

In the municipal court, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor again, sitting on the magisterial bench, with the schoolmaster by his side. "Aha! aha!" the magistrate exclaimed, "so here you are again, my fine fellow. I told you I

should have you locked up. Well, brigadier, what is he charged with?"

"He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order."

"Show me his papers," the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them and then said: "Search him." So they searched him, but found nothing, and the mayor seemed perplexed, and asked the workman:

"What were you doing on the road this morning?" "I was looking for work." "Work? On the highroad?" "How do you expect me to find any if I hide in the woods?"

They looked at each other with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different hostile species, and the magistrate continued: "I am going to have you set at liberty, but do not be brought up before me again." To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country." But the magistrate replied severely: "Be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate, give me something to eat," the workman said, but the other grew indignant: "Have we nothing to do but to feed you? Ah! ah! ah! that is rather too much!" But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then, so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The mayor had risen and he repeated: "Take him away immediately or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village, the brigadier said: "Now off with you and do

not let me catch you about here again, for if I do, you will know it."

Randel went off without replying or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house, where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger, seized him and almost drove him against the walls of the house like a wild beast.

He said aloud in a grumbling voice: "In Heaven's name! they must give me some this time!" And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as no one came he knocked louder and called out: "Hey! hey! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing stirred, he went up to the window and pushed it wider open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat and cabbage, escaped into the cold outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two places were set at the table, and no doubt the proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimney-piece, between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fireplace, and, having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots and onions until his plate was full, and, having put it on the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces, and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat, besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty and took one of the bottles off the mantelpiece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass when he saw it was brandy. So

much the better; it was warming and would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He certainly enjoyed it, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful, which he drank at two gulps. And then almost immediately he felt quite merry and light-hearted from the effects of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness filled his heart.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, and dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells began to ring. Mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence, which guides all beings and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket and the brandy bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off walking again, but instead of following the highroad he ran across the fields toward a wood he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, light-hearted, glad of what he had done, and so nimble that he sprang over the enclosure of the fields at a single bound, and as soon as he was under the trees he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked, and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim, and his legs as elastic as springs, and he started singing the old popular song:

"Oh! what joy, what joy it is, To pick the sweet, wild strawberries."

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss, and that soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels as he used to do when a child, so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up and began over again. And between each time he began to sing again:

"Oh! what joy, what joy it is, To pick the sweet, wild strawberries."

Suddenly he found himself above a deep road, and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant, who was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down, and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him, raised her head and said: "Was that you singing like that?" He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was a fall of at least six feet and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her, she exclaimed: "Oh! dear, how you frightened me!"

But he did not hear her, for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been deprived of everything for two months, and who is drunk; who is young, ardent and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the vigorous flesh of men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half-open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders, and without a word, threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall, and they rolled over noisily, and all the milk was spilt, and then she screamed lustily, but it was of no avail in that lonely spot.

When she got up the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury, and, taking off one of her wooden sabots, she threw it at the man to break his head if he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason of this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered, and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could, while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever been before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused, he lost recollection of everything and could no longer think about anything, and so he sat down at the foot of a tree, and in five minutes was fast

asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake, and, on opening his eyes, he saw two cocked hats of shiny leather bending over him, and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now. He had become a jailbird, caught by those hunters of criminals who would not let him go again.

"Now, start!" the brigadier said, and they set off. It was late afternoon, and the autumn twilight was setting in over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women and girls, excited with anger, as if every man had been robbed and every woman attacked, wished to see the wretch brought back, so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the Hotel de Ville, where the mayor was waiting for him to be himself avenged on this vagabond, and as soon as he saw him approaching he cried:

"Ah! my fine fellow! here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was, and continued: "I said so. I said so, the moment I saw him in the road."

And then with increased satisfaction:

"Oh, you blackguard! Oh, you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

THE FISHING HOLE

"Cuts and wounds which caused death." Such was the charge upon which Leopold Renard, upholsterer, was summoned before the Court of Assizes.

Round him were the principal witnesses, Madame Flamèche, widow of the victim, and Louis Ladureau, cabinetmaker, and Jean Durdent, plumber.

Near the criminal was his wife, dressed in black, an ugly little woman, who looked like a monkey dressed as a lady.

This is how Renard (Leopold) recounted the drama:

"Good heavens, it is a misfortune of which I was the prime victim all the time, and with which my will has nothing to do. The facts are their own commentary, Monsieur le Président. I am an honest man, a hard-working man, an upholsterer, living in the same street for the last sixteen years, known, liked, respected and esteemed by all, as my neighbors can testify, even the porter's wife, who is not amiable every day. I am fond of work, I am fond of saving, I like honest men and respectable amusements. That is what has ruined me, so much the worse for me; but as my will had nothing to do with it, I continue to respect myself.

"Every Sunday for the last five years my wife and I have spent the day at Passy. We get fresh air, and, besides, we are fond of fishing. Oh! we are as fond of it as we are of little onions. Mélie inspired me with that enthusiasm, the jade, and she is more enthusiastic than I am, the scold, seeing that all the mischief in this business is her fault, as you will see immediately.

"I am strong and mild tempered, without a pennyworth of malice in me. But she! oh! la! la! she looks like nothing; she is short and thin. Very well, she does more mischief than a weasel. I do not deny that she has some good qualities; she has some, and very important ones for a man in business. But her character! Just ask about it in the neighborhood, and even the porter's wife, who has just sent me about my business ... she will tell you something about it.

"Every day she used to find fault with my mild temper: 'I would not put up with this! I would not put up with that.' If I had listened to her, Monsieur le Président, I should have had at least three hand-to-hand fights a month...."

Madame Renard interrupted him: "And for good reasons, too; they laugh best who laugh last."

He turned toward her frankly: "Well, I can't blame you, since you were not the cause of it."

Then, facing the President again, he said:

"I will continue. We used to go to Passy every Saturday evening, so as to begin fishing at daybreak the next morning. It is a habit which has become second nature with us, as the saying is. Three years ago this summer I discovered a place, oh! such a spot. Oh, dear, dear! In the shade, eight feet of water at least and perhaps ten, a hole with cavities under the bank, a regular nest for fish and a paradise for the fisherman. I might look upon that fishing hole as my property, Monsieur le Président, as I was its Christopher Columbus. Everybody in the neighborhood knew it, without making any opposition. They would say: 'That is Renard's place'; and nobody would have gone there, not even Monsieur Plumeau, who is well known, be it said without any offense, for poaching on other people's preserves.

"Well, I returned to this place of which I felt certain, just as if I had owned it. I had scarcely got there on Saturday, when I got into Delila, with my wife. Delila is my Norwegian boat, which I had built by Fournaire, and which is light and safe. Well, as I said, we got into the boat and we were going to set bait, and for setting bait there is none to be compared with me, and they all know it. You want to know with what I bait? I cannot answer that question; it has nothing to do with the accident. I cannot answer; that is my secret. There are more than three hundred people who have asked me; I have been offered glasses of brandy and liqueur, fried fish, matelotes, to make me tell. But just go and try whether the chub will come. Ah! they have tempted my stomach to get at my secret, my recipe. Only my wife knows, and she will not tell it any more than I will. Is not that so, Mélie?"

The president of the court interrupted him.

"Just get to the facts as soon as you can," and the accused continued: "I am getting to them, I am getting to them. Well, on Saturday, July 8, we left by the twenty-five past

five train and before dinner we went to set bait as usual. The weather promised to keep fine and I said to Mélie: 'All right for tomorrow.' And she replied: 'It looks like it.' We never talk more than that together.

"And then we returned to dinner. I was happy and thirsty, and that was the cause of everything. I said to Mélie: 'Look here, Mélie, it is fine weather, suppose I drink a bottle of Casque à mèche.' That is a weak white wine which we have christened so, because if you drink too much of it it prevents you from sleeping and takes the place of a nightcap. Do you understand me?

"She replied: 'You can do as you please, but you will be ill again and will not be able to get up tomorrow.' That was true, sensible and prudent, clearsighted, I must confess. Nevertheless I could not resist, and I drank my bottle. It all came from that.

"Well, I could not sleep. By Jove! it kept me awake till two o'clock in the morning, and then I went to sleep so soundly that I should not have heard the angel sounding his trump at the last Judgment.

"In short, my wife woke me at six o'clock and I jumped out of bed, hastily put on my trousers and jersey, washed my face and jumped on board Delila. But it was too late, for when I arrived at my hole it was already occupied! Such a thing had never happened to me in three years, and it made me feel as if I were being robbed under my own eyes. I said to myself: 'Confound it all! confound it!' And then my wife began to nag at me. 'Eh! what about your Casque à mèche? Get along, you drunkard! Are you satisfied, you great fool?' I could say nothing, because it was all true, but I landed all the same near the spot and tried to profit by what was left. Perhaps after all the fellow might catch nothing and go away.

"He was a little thin man in white linen coat and waistcoat and a large straw hat, and his wife, a fat woman, doing embroidery, sat behind him.

"When she saw us take up our position close to them she murmured: 'Are there no other places on the river?' My wife, who was furious, replied: 'People who have any

manners make inquiries about the habits of the neighborhood before occupying reserved spots.'

"As I did not want a fuss, I said to her: 'Hold your tongue, Mélie. Let them alone, let them alone; we shall see.'

"Well, we fastened Delila under the willows and had landed and were fishing side by side, Mélie and I, close to the two others. But here, monsieur, I must enter into details.

"We had only been there about five minutes when our neighbor's line began to jerk twice, thrice, and then he pulled out a chub as thick as my thigh; rather less, perhaps, but nearly as big! My heart beat, the perspiration stood on my forehead and Mélie said to me: 'Well, you sot, did you see that?'

"Just then Monsieur Bru, the grocer of Poissy, who is fond of gudgeon fishing, passed in a boat and called out to me: 'So somebody has taken your usual place, Monsieur Renard?' And I replied--: 'Yes, Monsieur Bru, there are some people in this world who do not know the rules of common politeness.'

"The little man in linen pretended not to hear, nor his fat lump of a wife, either."

Here the president interrupted him a second time: "Take care, you are insulting the widow, Madame Flamèche, who is present."

Renard made his excuses: "I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon; my anger carried me away. Well, not a quarter of an hour had passed when the little man caught another chub, and another almost immediately, and another five minutes later.

"Tears were in my eyes, and I knew that Madame Renard was boiling with rage, for she kept on nagging at me: 'Oh, how horrid! Don't you see that he is robbing you of your fish? Do you think that you will catch anything? Not even a frog, nothing whatever. Why, my hands are tingling, just to think of it.'

"But I said to myself: 'Let us wait until twelve o'clock. Then this poacher will go to

lunch and I shall get my place again. As for me, Monsieur le Président, I lunch on that spot every Sunday. We bring our provisions in Delila. But there! At noon the wretch produced a chicken in a newspaper, and while he was eating, he actually caught another chub!

"Mélie and I had a morsel also, just a bite, a mere nothing, for our heart was not in it.

"Then I took up my newspaper to aid my digestion. Every Sunday I read the Gil Blas in the shade by the side of the water. It is Columbine's day, you know; Columbine, who writes the articles in the Gil Blas. I generally put Madame Renard into a rage by pretending to know this Columbine. It is not true, for I do not know her and have never seen her, but that does not matter. She writes very well, and then she says things that are pretty plain for a woman. She suits me and there are not many of her sort.

"Well, I began to tease my wife, but she got angry immediately, and very angry, so I held my tongue. At that moment our two witnesses who are present here, Monsieur Ladureau and Monsieur Durdent, appeared on the other side of the river. We knew each other by sight The little man began to fish again and he caught so many that I trembled with vexation and his wife said: 'It is an uncommonly good spot, and we will come here always, Désiré.' As for me, a cold shiver ran down my back, and Madame Renard kept repeating: 'You are not a man; you have the blood of a chicken in your veins'; and suddenly I said to her: 'Look here, I would rather go away or I shall be doing something foolish.'

"And she whispered to me, as if she had put a red-hot iron under my nose: 'You are not a man. Now you are going to run away and surrender your place! Go, then, Bazaine!'

"I felt hurt, but yet I did not move, while the other fellow pulled out a bream. Oh, I never saw such a large one before, never! And then my wife began to talk aloud, as

if she were thinking, and you can see her tricks. She said: 'That is what one might call stolen fish, seeing that we set the bait ourselves. At any rate, they ought to give us back the money we have spent on bait.'

"Then the fat woman in the cotton dress said in her turn: 'Do you mean to call us thieves, madame?' Explanations followed and compliments began to fly. Oh, Lord! those creatures know some good ones. They shouted so loud that our two witnesses, who were on the other bank, began to call out by way of a joke: 'Less noise over there; you will interfere with your husbands' fishing.'

"The fact is that neither the little man nor I moved any more than if we had been two tree stumps. We remained there, with our eyes fixed on the water, as if we had heard nothing; but, by Jove! we heard all the same. 'You are a thief! You are nothing better than a tramp! You are a regular jade!' and so on and so on. A sailor could not have said more.

"Suddenly I heard a noise behind me and turned round. It was the other one, the fat woman, who had attacked my wife with her parasol. Whack, whack! Mélie got two of them. But she was furious, and she hits hard when she is in a rage. She caught the fat woman by the hair and then thump! thump! slaps in the face rained down like ripe plums. I should have let them fight it out: women together, men together. It does not do to mix the blows. But the little man in the linen jacket jumped up like a devil and was going to rush at my wife. Ah! no, no, not that, my friend! I caught the gentleman with the end of my fist, and crash! crash! One on the nose, the other in the stomach. He threw up his arms and legs and fell on his back into the river, just into the hole.

"I should have fished him out most certainly, Monsieur le Président, if I had had time. But, to make matters worse, the fat woman had the upper hand and was pounding Mélie for all she was worth. I know I ought not to have interfered while the man was in the water, but I never thought that he would drown and said to

myself: 'Bah, it will cool him.'

"I therefore ran up to the women to separate them and all I received was scratches and bites. Good Lord, what creatures! Well, it took me five minutes, and perhaps ten, to separate those two viragos. When I turned round there was nothing to be seen. The water was as smooth as a lake and the others yonder kept shouting: 'Fish him out! fish him out!' It was all very well to say that, but I cannot swim and still less dive.

"At last the man from the dam came and two gentlemen with boathooks, but over a quarter of an hour had passed. He was found at the bottom of the hole, in eight feet of water, as I have said. There he was, the poor little man, in his linen suit! Those are the facts such as I have sworn to. I am innocent, on my honor."

The witnesses having given testimony to the same effect, the accused was acquitted.

THE SPASM

The hotel guests slowly entered the dining-room and took their places. The waiters did not hurry themselves, in order to give the late comers a chance and thus avoid the trouble of bringing in the dishes a second time. The old bathers, the habitués, whose season was almost over, glanced, gazed toward the door whenever it opened, to see what new faces might appear.

This is the principal distraction of watering places. People look forward to the dinner hour in order to inspect each day's new arrivals, to find out who they are, what they do, and what they think. We always have a vague desire to meet pleasant people, to make agreeable acquaintances, perhaps to meet with a love adventure. In this life of elbowings, unknown strangers assume an extreme importance. Curiosity is aroused, sympathy is ready to exhibit itself, and sociability is the order of the day.

We cherish antipathies for a week and friendships for a month; we see people with different eyes, when we view them through the medium of acquaintanceship at

watering places. We discover in men suddenly, after an hour's chat, in the evening after dinner, under the trees in the park where the healing spring bubbles up, a high intelligence and astonishing merits, and a month afterward we have completely forgotten these new friends, who were so fascinating when we first met them.

Permanent and serious ties are also formed here sooner than anywhere else. People see each other every day; they become acquainted very quickly, and their affection is tinged with the sweetness and unrestraint of long-standing intimacies. We cherish in after years the dear and tender memories of those first hours of friendship, the memory of those first conversations in which a soul was unveiled, of those first glances which interrogate and respond to questions and secret thoughts which the mouth has not as yet uttered, the memory of that first cordial confidence, the memory of that delightful sensation of opening our hearts to those who seem to open theirs to us in return.

And the melancholy of watering places, the monotony of days that are all alike, proves hourly an incentive to this heart expansion.

* * * * *

Well, this evening, as on every other evening, we awaited the appearance of strange faces.

Only two appeared, but they were very remarkable, a man and a woman--father and daughter. They immediately reminded me of some of Edgar Poe's characters; and yet there was about them a charm, the charm associated with misfortune. I looked upon them as the victims of fate. The man was very tall and thin, rather stooped, with perfectly white hair, too white for his comparatively youthful physiognomy; and there was in his bearing and in his person that austerity peculiar to Protestants. The daughter, who was probably twenty-four or twenty-five, was small in stature, and was also very thin, very pale, and she had the air of one who was worn out with utter lassitude. We meet people like this from time to time, who seem too weak for

the tasks and the needs of daily life, too weak to move about, to walk, to do all that we do every day. She was rather pretty, with a transparent, spiritual beauty. And she ate with extreme slowness, as if she were almost incapable of moving her arms.

It must have been she, assuredly, who had come to take the waters.

They sat facing me, on the opposite side of the table; and I at once noticed that the father had a very singular, nervous twitching.

Every time he wanted to reach an object, his hand described a sort of zigzag before it succeeded in reaching what it was in search of, and after a little while this movement annoyed me so that I turned aside my head in order not to see it.

I noticed, too, that the young girl, during meals, wore a glove on her left hand.

After dinner I went for a stroll in the park of the bathing establishment. This led toward the little Auvergnese station of Châtel-Guyon, hidden in a gorge at the foot of the high mountain, from which flowed so many boiling springs, arising from the deep bed of extinct volcanoes. Over yonder, above our heads, the domes of extinct craters lifted their ragged peaks above the rest in the long mountain chain. For Châtel-Guyon is situated at the entrance to the land of mountain domes.

Beyond it stretches out the region of peaks, and, farther on again, the region of precipitous summits.

The "Puy de Dôme" is the highest of the domes, the Peak of Sancy is the loftiest of the peaks, and Cantal is the most precipitous of these mountain heights.

It was a very warm evening, and I was walking up and down a shady path, listening to the opening strains of the Casino band, which was playing on an elevation overlooking the park.

And I saw the father and the daughter advancing slowly in my direction. I bowed as one bows to one's hotel companions at a watering place; and the man, coming to a sudden halt, said to me:

"Could you not, monsieur, tell us of a nice walk to take, short, pretty, and not steep; and pardon my troubling you?"

I offered to show them the way toward the valley through which the little river flowed, a deep valley forming a gorge between two tall, craggy, wooded slopes.

They gladly accepted my offer.

And we talked, naturally, about the virtue of the waters.

"Oh," he said, "my daughter has a strange malady, the seat of which is unknown. She suffers from incomprehensible nervous attacks. At one time the doctors think she has an attack of heart disease, at another time they imagine it is some affection of the liver, and at another they declare it to be a disease of the spine. To-day this protean malady, that assumes a thousand forms and a thousand modes of attack, is attributed to the stomach, which is the great caldron and regulator of the body. This is why we have come here. For my part, I am rather inclined to think it is the nerves. In any case it is very sad."

Immediately the remembrance of the violent spasmodic movement of his hand came back to my mind, and I asked him:

"But is this not the result of heredity? Are not your own nerves somewhat affected?"

He replied calmly:

"Mine? Oh, no--my nerves have always been very steady."

Then, suddenly, after a pause, he went on:

"Ah! You were alluding to the jerking movement of my hand every time I try to reach for anything? This arises from a terrible experience which I had. Just imagine, this daughter of mine was actually buried alive!"

I could only utter, "Ah!" so great were my astonishment and emotion.

He continued:

"Here is the story. It is simple. Juliette had been subject for some time to serious

attacks of the heart. We believed that she had disease of that organ, and were prepared for the worst.

"One day she was carried into the house cold, lifeless, dead. She had fallen down unconscious in the garden. The doctor certified that life was extinct. I watched by her side for a day and two nights. I laid her with my own hands in the coffin, which I accompanied to the cemetery, where she was deposited in the family vault. It is situated in the very heart of Lorraine.

"I wished to have her interred with her jewels, bracelets, necklaces, rings, all presents which she had received from me, and wearing her first ball dress.

"You may easily imagine my state of mind when I re-entered our home. She was the only one I had, for my wife had been dead for many years. I found my way to my own apartment in a half-distracted condition, utterly exhausted, and sank into my easy-chair, without the capacity to think or the strength to move. I was nothing better now than a suffering, vibrating machine, a human being who had, as it were, been flayed alive; my soul was like an open wound.

"My old valet, Prosper, who had assisted me in placing Juliette in her coffin, and aided me in preparing her for her last sleep, entered the room noiselessly, and asked:

"'Does monsieur want anything?'

"I merely shook my head in reply.

"'Monsieur is wrong,' he urged. 'He will injure his health. Would monsieur like me to put him to bed?'

"I answered: 'No, let me alone!'

"And he left the room.

"I know not how many hours slipped away. Oh, what a night, what a night! It was cold. My fire had died out in the huge grate; and the wind, the winter wind, an icy wind, a winter hurricane, blew with a regular, sinister noise against the windows.

"How many hours slipped away? There I was without sleeping, powerless, crushed, my eyes wide open, my legs stretched out, my body limp, inanimate, and my mind torpid with despair. Suddenly the great doorbell, the great bell of the vestibule, rang out.

"I started so that my chair cracked under me. The solemn, ponderous sound vibrated through the empty country house as through a vault. I turned round to see what the hour was by the clock. It was just two in the morning. Who could be coming at such an hour?

"And, abruptly, the bell again rang twice. The servants, without doubt, were afraid to get up. I took a wax candle and descended the stairs. I was on the point of asking: 'Who is there?'

"Then I felt ashamed of my weakness, and I slowly drew back the heavy bolts. My heart was throbbing wildly. I was frightened. I opened the door brusquely, and in the darkness I distinguished a white figure, standing erect, something that resembled an apparition.

"I recoiled, petrified with horror, faltering:

"'Who--who--who are you?'

"A voice replied:

"'It is I, father.'

"It was my daughter.

"I really thought I must be mad, and I retreated backward before this advancing spectre. I kept moving away, making a sign with my hand, as if to drive the phantom away, that gesture which you have noticed--that gesture which has remained with me ever since.

"'Do not be afraid, papa,' said the apparition. 'I was not dead. Somebody tried to steal my rings and cut one of my fingers; the blood began to flow, and that restored

me to life.'

"And, in fact, I could see that her hand was covered with blood.

"I fell on my knees, choking with sobs and with a rattling in my throat.

"Then, when I had somewhat collected my thoughts, though I was still so bewildered that I scarcely realized the awesome happiness that had befallen me, I made her go up to my room and sit down in my easy-chair; then I rang excitedly for Prosper to get him to rekindle the fire and to bring some wine, and to summon assistance.

"The man entered, stared at my daughter, opened his mouth with a gasp of alarm and stupefaction, and then fell back dead.

"It was he who had opened the vault, who had mutilated and then abandoned my daughter; for he could not efface the traces of the theft. He had not even taken the trouble to put back the coffin into its place, feeling sure, besides, that he would not be suspected by me, as I trusted him absolutely.

"You see, monsieur, that we are very unfortunate people."

* * * * *

He was silent.

The night had fallen, casting its shadows over the desolate, mournful vale, and a sort of mysterious fear possessed me at finding myself by the side of those strange beings, of this young girl who had come back from the tomb, and this father with his uncanny spasm.

I found it impossible to make any comment on this dreadful story. I only murmured:

"What a horrible thing!"

Then, after a minute's silence, I added:

"Let us go indoors. I think it is growing cool."

And we made our way back to the hotel.

IN THE WOOD

As the mayor was about to sit down to breakfast, word was brought to him that the rural policeman, with two prisoners, was awaiting him at the Hotel de Ville. He went there at once and found old Hochedur standing guard before a middle-class couple whom he was regarding with a severe expression on his face.

The man, a fat old fellow with a red nose and white hair, seemed utterly dejected; while the woman, a little roundabout individual with shining cheeks, looked at the official who had arrested them, with defiant eyes.

"What is it? What is it, Hochedur?"

The rural policeman made his deposition: He had gone out that morning at his usual time, in order to patrol his beat from the forest of Champioux as far as the boundaries of Argenteuil. He had not noticed anything unusual in the country except that it was a fine day, and that the wheat was doing well, when the son of old Bredel, who was going over his vines, called out to him: "Here, Daddy Hochedur, go and have a look at the outskirts of the wood. In the first thicket you will find a pair of pigeons who must be a hundred and thirty years old between them!"

He went in the direction indicated, entered the thicket, and there he heard words which made him suspect a flagrant breach of morality. Advancing, therefore, on his hands and knees as if to surprise a poacher, he had arrested the couple whom he found there.

The mayor looked at the culprits in astonishment, for the man was certainly sixty, and the woman fifty-five at least, and he began to question them, beginning with the man, who replied in such a weak voice that he could scarcely be heard.

"What is your name?"

"Nicholas Beaurain."

"Your occupation?"

"Haberdasher, in the Rue des Martyrs, in Paris."

"What were you doing in the wood?"

The haberdasher remained silent, with his eyes on his fat paunch, and his hands hanging at his sides, and the mayor continued:

"Do you deny what the officer of the municipal authorities states?"

"No, monsieur."

"So you confess it?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"What have you to say in your defence?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

"Where did you meet the partner in your misdemeanor?"

"She is my wife, monsieur."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then--then--you do not live together--in Paris?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but we are living together!"

"But in that case--you must be mad, altogether mad, my dear sir, to get caught playing lovers in the country at ten o'clock in the morning."

The haberdasher seemed ready to cry with shame, and he muttered: "It was she who enticed me! I told her it was very stupid, but when a woman once gets a thing into her head--you know--you cannot get it out."

The mayor, who liked a joke, smiled and replied: "In your case, the contrary ought to have happened. You would not be here, if she had had the idea only in her head."

Then Monsieur Beaurain was seized with rage, and turning to his wife, he said: "Do you see to what you have brought us with your poetry? And now we shall have to go

before the courts at our age, for a breach of morals! And we shall have to shut up the shop, sell our good will, and go to some other neighborhood! That's what it has come to."

Madame Beaurain got up, and without looking at her husband, she explained herself without embarrassment, without useless modesty, and almost without hesitation.

"Of course, monsieur, I know that we have made ourselves ridiculous. Will you allow me to plead my cause like an advocate, or rather like a poor woman? And I hope that you will be kind enough to send us home, and to spare us the disgrace of a prosecution.

"Years ago, when I was young, I made Monsieur Beaurain's acquaintance one Sunday in this neighborhood. He was employed in a draper's shop, and I was a saleswoman in a ready-made clothing establishment. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I used to come and spend Sundays here occasionally with a friend of mine, Rose Levèque, with whom I lived in the Rue Pigalle, and Rose had a sweetheart, while I had none. He used to bring us here, and one Saturday he told me laughing that he should bring a friend with him the next day. I quite understood what he meant, but I replied that it would be no good; for I was virtuous, monsieur.

"The next day we met Monsieur Beaurain at the railway station, and in those days he was good-looking, but I had made up my mind not to encourage him, and I did not. Well, we arrived at Bezons. It was a lovely day, the sort of day that touches your heart. When it is fine even now, just as it used to be formerly, I grow quite foolish, and when I am in the country I utterly lose my head. The green grass, the swallows flying so swiftly, the smell of the grass, the scarlet poppies, the daisies, all that makes me crazy. It is like champagne when one is not accustomed to it!

"Well, it was lovely weather, warm and bright, and it seemed to penetrate your body through your eyes when you looked, and through your mouth when you breathed. Rose and Simon hugged and kissed each other every minute, and that gave me a

queer feeling! Monsieur Beaurain and I walked behind them, without speaking much, for when people do not know each other, they do not find anything to talk about. He looked timid, and I liked to see his embarrassment. At last we got to the little wood; it was as cool as in a bath there, and we four sat down. Rose and her lover teased me because I looked rather stern, but you will understand that I could not be otherwise. And then they began to kiss and hug again, without putting any more restraint upon themselves than if we had not been there; and then they whispered together, and got up and went off among the trees, without saying a word. You may fancy what I looked like, alone with this young fellow whom I saw for the first time. I felt so confused at seeing them go that it gave me courage, and I began to talk. I asked him what his business was, and he said he was a linen draper's assistant, as I told you just now. We talked for a few minutes, and that made him bold, and he wanted to take liberties with me, but I told him sharply to keep his place. Is not that true, Monsieur Beaurain?"

Monsieur Beaurain, who was looking at his feet in confusion, did not reply, and she continued: "Then he saw that I was virtuous, and he began to make love to me nicely, like an honorable man, and from that time he came every Sunday, for he was very much in love with me. I was very fond of him also, very fond of him! He was a good-looking fellow, formerly, and in short he married me the next September, and we started in business in the Rue des Martyrs.

"It was a hard struggle for some years, monsieur. Business did not prosper, and we could not afford many country excursions, and, besides, we had got out of the way of them. One has other things in one's head, and thinks more of the cash box than of pretty speeches, when one is in business. We were growing old by degrees without perceiving it, like quiet people who do not think much about love. One does not regret anything as long as one does not notice what one has lost.

"And then, monsieur, business became better, and we were tranquil as to the future!

Then, you see, I do not exactly know what went on in my mind, no, I really do not know, but I began to dream like a little boarding-school girl. The sight of the little carts full of flowers which are drawn about the streets made me cry; the smell of violets sought me out in my easy-chair, behind my cash box, and made my heart beat! Then I would get up and go out on the doorstep to look at the blue sky between the roofs. When one looks up at the sky from the street, it looks like a river which is descending on Paris, winding as it flows, and the swallows pass to and fro in it like fish. These ideas are very stupid at my age! But how can one help it, monsieur, when one has worked all one's life? A moment comes in which one perceives that one could have done something else, and that one regrets, oh! yes, one feels intense regret! Just think, for twenty years I might have gone and had kisses in the woods, like other women. I used to think how delightful it would be to lie under the trees and be in love with some one! And I thought of it every day and every night! I dreamed of the moonlight on the water, until I felt inclined to drown myself.

"I did not venture to speak to Monsieur Beaurain about this at first. I knew that he would make fun of me, and send me back to sell my needles and cotton! And then, to speak the truth, Monsieur Beaurain never said much to me, but when I looked in the glass, I also understood quite well that I no longer appealed to any one!

"Well, I made up my mind, and I proposed to him an excursion into the country, to the place where we had first become acquainted. He agreed without mistrusting anything, and we arrived here this morning, about nine o'clock.

"I felt quite young again when I got among the wheat, for a woman's heart never grows old! And really, I no longer saw my husband as he is at present, but just as he was formerly! That I will swear to you, monsieur. As true as I am standing here I was crazy. I began to kiss him, and he was more surprised than if I had tried to murder him. He kept saying to me: 'Why, you must be mad! You are mad this morning! What is the matter with you?' I did not listen to him, I only listened to my

own heart, and I made him come into the wood with me. That is all. I have spoken the truth, Monsieur le Maire, the whole truth."

The mayor was a sensible man. He rose from his chair, smiled, and said: "Go in peace, madame, and when you again visit our forests, be more discreet."

MARTINE

It came to him one Sunday after mass. He was walking home from church along the by-road that led to his house when he saw ahead of him Martine, who was also going home.

Her father walked beside his daughter with the important gait of a rich farmer. Discarding the smock, he wore a short coat of gray cloth and on his head a round-topped hat with wide brim.

She, laced up in a corset which she wore only once a week, walked along erect, with her squeezed-in waist, her broad shoulders and prominent hips, swinging herself a little. She wore a hat trimmed with flowers, made by a milliner at Yvetot, and displayed the back of her full, round, supple neck, reddened by the sun and air, on which fluttered little stray locks of hair.

Benoist saw only her back; but he knew well the face he loved, without, however, having ever noticed it more closely than he did now.

Suddenly he said: "Nom d'un nom, she is a fine girl, all the same, that Martine." He watched her as she walked, admiring her hastily, feeling a desire taking possession of him. He did not long to see her face again, no. He kept gazing at her figure, repeating to himself: "Nom d'un nom, she is a fine girl."

Martine turned to the right to enter "La Martinière," the farm of her father, Jean Martin, and she cast a glance behind her as she turned round. She saw Benoist, who looked to her very comical. She called out: "Good-morning, Benoist." He replied: "Good-morning, Martine; good-morning, mait' Martin," and went on his way.

When he reached home the soup was on the table. He sat down opposite his mother beside the farm hand and the hired man, while the maid servant went to draw some cider.

He ate a few spoonfuls, then pushed away his plate. His mother said:

"Don't you feel well?"

"No. I feel as if I had some pap in my stomach and that takes away my appetite."

He watched the others eating, as he cut himself a piece of bread from time to time and carried it lazily to his mouth, masticating it slowly. He thought of Martine. "She is a fine girl, all the same." And to think that he had not noticed it before, and that it came to him, just like that, all at once, and with such force that he could not eat.

He did not touch the stew. His mother said:

"Come, Benoist, try and eat a little; it is loin of mutton, it will do you good. When one has no appetite, they should force themselves to eat."

He swallowed a few morsels, then, pushing away his plate, said:

"No. I can't go that, positively."

When they rose from table he walked round the farm, telling the farm hand he might go home and that he would drive up the animals as he passed by them.

The country was deserted, as it was the day of rest. Here and there in a field of clover cows were moving along heavily, with full bellies, chewing their cud under a blazing sun. Unharnessed plows were standing at the end of a furrow; and the upturned earth ready for the seed showed broad brown patches of stubble of wheat and oats that had lately been harvested.

A rather dry autumn wind blew across the plain, promising a cool evening after the sun had set. Benoist sat down on a ditch, placed his hat on his knees as if he needed to cool off his head, and said aloud in the stillness of the country: "If you want a fine girl, she is a fine girl."

He thought of it again at night, in his bed, and in the morning when he awoke.

He was not sad, he was not discontented, he could not have told what ailed him. It was something that had hold of him, something fastened in his mind, an idea that would not leave him and that produced a sort of tickling sensation in his heart.

Sometimes a big fly is shut up in a room. You hear it flying about, buzzing, and the noise haunts you, irritates you. Suddenly it stops; you forget it; but all at once it begins again, obliging you to look up. You cannot catch it, nor drive it away, nor kill it, nor make it keep still. As soon as it settles for a second, it starts off buzzing again.

The recollection of Martine disturbed Benoist's mind like an imprisoned fly.

Then he longed to see her again and walked past the Martinière several times. He saw her, at last, hanging out some clothes on a line stretched between two apple trees.

It was a warm day. She had on only a short skirt and her chemise, showing the curves of her figure as she hung up the towels. He remained there, concealed by the hedge, for more than an hour, even after she had left. He returned home more obsessed with her image than ever.

For a month his mind was full of her, he trembled when her name was mentioned in his presence. He could not eat, he had night sweats that kept him from sleeping.

On Sunday, at mass, he never took his eyes off her. She noticed it and smiled at him, flattered at his appreciation.

One evening, he suddenly met her in the road. She stopped short when she saw him coming. Then he walked right up to her, choking with fear and emotion, but determined to speak to her. He began falteringly:

"See here, Martine, this cannot go on like this any longer."

She replied as if she wanted to tease him:

"What cannot go on any longer, Benoist?"

"My thinking of you as many hours as there are in the day," he answered.

She put her hands on her hips.

"I do not oblige you to do so."

"Yes, it is you," he stammered; "I cannot sleep, nor rest, nor eat, nor anything."

"What do you need to cure you of all that?" she asked.

He stood there in dismay, his arms swinging, his eyes staring, his mouth agape.

She hit him a punch in the stomach and ran off.

From that day they met each other along the roadside, in by-roads or else at twilight on the edge of a field, when he was going home with his horses and she was driving her cows home to the stable.

He felt himself carried, cast toward her by a strong impulse of his heart and body. He would have liked to squeeze her, strangle her, eat her, make her part of himself. And he trembled with impotence, impatience, rage, to think she did not belong to him entirely, as if they were one being.

People gossiped about it in the countryside. They said they were engaged. He had, besides, asked her if she would be his wife, and she had answered "Yes."

They were waiting for an opportunity to talk to their parents about it.

But, all at once, she stopped coming to meet him at the usual hour. He did not even see her as he wandered round the farm. He could only catch a glimpse of her at mass on Sunday. And one Sunday, after the sermon, the priest actually published the banns of marriage between Victoire-Adelaide-Martin and Joséphin-Isidore Vallin.

Benoist felt a sensation in his hands as if the blood had been drained off. He had a buzzing in the ears, and could hear nothing; and presently he perceived that his tears were falling on his prayer book.

For a month he stayed in his room. Then he went back to his work.

But he was not cured, and it was always in his mind. He avoided the roads that led

past her home, so that he might not even see the trees in the yard, and this obliged him to make a great circuit morning and evening.

She was now married to Vallin, the richest farmer in the district. Benoist and he did not speak now, though they had been comrades from childhood.

One evening, as Benoist was passing the town hall, he heard that she was enceinte. Instead of experiencing a feeling of sorrow, he experienced, on the contrary, a feeling of relief. It was over, now, all over. They were more separated by that than by her marriage. He really preferred that it should be so.

Months passed, and more months. He caught sight of her, occasionally, going to the village with a heavier step than usual. She blushed as she saw him, lowered her head and quickened her pace. And he turned out of his way so as not to pass her and meet her glance.

He dreaded the thought that he might one morning meet her face to face, and be obliged to speak to her. What could he say to her now, after all he had said formerly, when he held her hands as he kissed her hair beside her cheeks? He often thought of those meetings along the roadside. She had acted horridly after all her promises.

By degrees his grief diminished, leaving only sadness behind. And one day he took the old road that led past the farm where she now lived. He looked at the roof from a distance. It was there, in there, that she lived with another! The apple trees were in bloom, the cocks crowed on the dunghill. The whole dwelling seemed empty, the farm hands had gone to the fields to their spring toil. He stopped near the gate and looked into the yard. The dog was asleep outside his kennel, three calves were walking slowly, one behind the other, towards the pond. A big turkey was strutting before the door, parading before the turkey hens like a singer at the opera.

Benoist leaned against the gate post and was suddenly seized with a desire to weep. But suddenly, he heard a cry, a loud cry for help coming from the house. He was struck with dismay, his hands grasping the wooden bars of the gate, and listened

attentively. Another cry, a prolonged, heartrending cry, reached his ears, his soul, his flesh. It was she who was crying like that! He darted inside, crossed the grass patch, pushed open the door, and saw her lying on the floor, her body drawn up, her face livid, her eyes haggard, in the throes of childbirth.

He stood there, trembling and paler than she was, and stammered:

"Here I am, here I am, Martine!"

She replied in gasps:

"Oh, do not leave me, do not leave me, Benoist!"

He looked at her, not knowing what to say, what to do. She began to cry out again:

"Oh, oh, it is killing me. Oh, Benoist!"

She writhed frightfully.

Benoist was suddenly seized with a frantic longing to help her, to quiet her, to remove her pain. He leaned over, lifted her up and laid her on her bed; and while she kept on moaning he began to take off her clothes, her jacket, her skirt and her petticoat. She bit her fists to keep from crying out. Then he did as he was accustomed to doing for cows, ewes, and mares: he assisted in delivering her and found in his hands a large infant who was moaning.

He wiped it off and wraped it up in a towel that was drying in front of the fire, and laid it on a bundle of clothes ready for ironing that was on the table. Then he went back to the mother.

He took her up and placed her on the floor again, then he changed the bedclothes and put her back into bed. She faltered:

"Thank you, Benoist, you have a noble heart." And then she wept a little as if she felt regretful.

He did not love her any longer, not the least bit. It was all over. Why? How? He could not have said. What had happened had cured him better than ten years of

absence.

She asked, exhausted and trembling:

"What is it?"

He replied calmly:

"It is a very fine girl."

Then they were silent again. At the end of a few moments, the mother, in a weak voice, said:

"Show her to me, Benoist."

He took up the little one and was showing it to her as if he were holding the consecrated wafer, when the door opened, and Isidore Vallin appeared.

He did not understand at first, then all at once he guessed.

Benoist, in consternation, stammered out:

"I was passing, I was just passing by when I heard her crying out, and I came--there is your child, Vallin!"

Then the husband, his eyes full of tears, stepped forward, took the little mite of humanity that he held out to him, kissed it, unable to speak from emotion for a few seconds; then placing the child on the bed, he held out both hands to Benoist, saying:

"Your hand upon it, Benoist. From now on we understand each other. If you are willing, we will be a pair of friends, a pair of friends!"

And Benoist replied:

"Indeed I will, certainly, indeed I will."

ALL OVER

Comte de Lormerin had just finished dressing. He cast a parting glance at the large mirror which occupied an entire panel in his dressing-room and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, although quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no sign of a paunch, with a small mustache of doubtful shade, which might be called fair, he had a walk, a nobility, a "chic," in short, that indescribable something which establishes a greater difference between two men than would millions of money. He murmured:

"Lormerin is still alive!"

And he went into the drawing-room where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work table of the gentleman who never works, there were a dozen letters lying beside three newspapers of different opinions. With a single touch he spread out all these letters, like a gambler giving the choice of a card; and he scanned the handwriting, a thing he did each morning before opening the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry and vague anxiety. What did these sealed mysterious letters bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing the writing, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always gave him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple, nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he looked at it uneasily, with a sort of chill at his heart. He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, and yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope, without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying glass which he

used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. "Whom is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have often read its tracings, yes, very often. But this must have been a long, long time ago. Whom the deuce can it be from? Pooh! it's only somebody asking for money."

And he tore open the letter. Then he read:

My Dear Friend: You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I left Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call "my hospital." Do you remember him? He died five years ago, and now I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married, for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you have never seen. I informed you of her birth, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.

You are still the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call Lison, come and dine with her this evening, with the elderly Baronne de Vance, your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, although happy, reaches out to you a devoted hand, which you must clasp, but no longer kiss, my poor Jaquelet.

Lise de Vance.

Lormerin's heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by a poignant emotion that made the tears mount up to his eyes! If he had ever loved a woman in his life it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called "Ashflower," on account of the strange color of her hair and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a dainty, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail baronne, the wife of that gouty, pimply baron, who had abruptly carried her off to the provinces, shut her up, kept her in seclusion through jealousy, jealousy of the handsome Lormerin.

Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he, too, had been truly loved. She

familiarly gave him the name of Jaquelet, and would pronounce that word in a delicious fashion.

A thousand forgotten memories came back to him, far off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening she had called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The fragrance from her bodice embalmed the warm air--the odor of her bodice, and perhaps, too, the fragrance of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

She replied:

"I don't know. The moon and the water have affected me. Every time I see poetic things I have a tightening at the heart, and I have to cry."

He smiled, affected himself, considering her feminine emotion charming--the unaffected emotion of a poor little woman whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering:

"My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love affair, short-lived and dainty, it had been and over all too quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by this old brute of a baron, who had carried off his wife, and never let any one see her afterward.

Lormerin had forgotten, in fact, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out another so quickly in Paris, when one is a bachelor! No matter; he had kept a little altar for her in his heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose, and said aloud: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

And instinctively he turned toward the mirror to inspect himself from head to foot.

He reflected: "She must look very old, older than I look." And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those bygone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were of no importance.

The whole day he kept thinking of this ghost of other days. What was she like now? How strange it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! But would he recognize her?

He made his toilet with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better with the coat than a black one, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch with the curling iron, for he had preserved his hair, and started very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he saw on entering a pretty drawing-room newly furnished was his own portrait, an old faded photograph, dating from the days when he was a beau, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose up abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an old woman with white hair who extended both hands toward him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other several times; then, lifting up his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep.

He could not abstain from murmuring:

"Is it you, Lise?"

She replied:

"Yes, it is I; it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, would you? I have had

so much sorrow--so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now--or, rather, don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept--and young! If I had by chance met you in the street I would have exclaimed: 'Jaquelet!' Now, sit down and let us, first of all, have a chat. And then I will call my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You'll see how she resembles me--or, rather, how I resembled her--no, it is not quite that; she is just like the 'me' of former days--you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared that there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over; it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman--it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. Why had he come to this house? What could he talk about? Of the long ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything in presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer recall all the nice, tender things, so sweet, so bitter, that had come to his mind that morning when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Ashflower. What, then, had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved? That woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young girl who used to call him "Jaquelet" so prettily?

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they talked only commonplaces, awkwardly and spasmodically and slowly, she rose and pressed the button of the bell.

"I am going to call Renée," she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a dress; then a young voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, mamma!"

Lormerin remained bewildered as at the sight of an apparition.

He stammered:

"Good-day, mademoiselle."

Then, turning toward the mother:

"Oh! it is you!"

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and come back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even younger, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

"Good-morning, Lison!"

A man-servant announced:

"Dinner is ready, madame."

And they proceeded toward the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea:

"Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled, repeating over and over again:

"Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eyes of the young girl that he found again his memories of the past. Twenty times he opened his mouth to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison?" forgetting this white-haired lady who was looking at him tenderly.

And yet, there were moments when he no longer felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glances, in her entire being, something which he did not find again. And he made prodigious efforts of mind to

recall his lady love, to seize again what had escaped from her, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

The baronne said:

"You have lost your old vivacity, my poor friend."

He murmured:

"There are many other things that I have lost!"

But in his heart, touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more, like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar intonation, some expression of her mother's, a certain style of speaking and thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He got away early, and took a turn along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Apart from the two women, he now saw only one, a young one, the old one come back out of the past, and he loved her as he had loved her in bygone years. He loved her with greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think what he should do.

But, as he was passing, with a wax candle in his hand, before the glass, the large glass in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying

glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightful ravages, which he had not perceived till now.

And he sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring:

"All over, Lormerin!"

THE PARROT

I

Everybody in Fécamp knew Mother Patin's story. She had certainly been unfortunate with her husband, for in his lifetime he used to beat her, just as wheat is threshed in the barn.

He was master of a fishing bark and had married her, formerly, because she was pretty, although poor.

Patin was a good sailor, but brutal. He used to frequent Father Auban's inn, where he would usually drink four or five glasses of brandy, on lucky days eight or ten glasses and even more, according to his mood. The brandy was served to the customers by Father Auban's daughter, a pleasing brunette, who attracted people to the house only by her pretty face, for nothing had ever been gossiped about her.

Patin, when he entered the inn, would be satisfied to look at her and to compliment her politely and respectfully. After he had had his first glass of brandy he would already find her much nicer; at the second he would wink; at the third he would say: "If you were only willing, Mam'zelle Désirée----" without ever finishing his sentence; at the fourth he would try to hold her back by her skirt in order to kiss her; and when he went as high as ten it was Father Auban who brought him the remaining drinks.

The old innkeeper, who knew all the tricks of the trade, made Désirée walk about between the tables in order to increase the consumption of drinks; and Désirée, who

was a worthy daughter of Father Auban, flitted around among the benches and joked with them, her lips smiling and her eyes sparkling.

Patin got so well accustomed to Désirée's face that he thought of it even while at sea, when throwing out his nets, in storms or in calms, on moonlit or dark evenings. He thought of her while holding the tiller in the stern of his boat, while his four companions were slumbering with their heads on their arms. He always saw her, smiling, pouring out the yellow brandy with a peculiar shoulder movement and then exclaiming as she turned away: "There, now; are you satisfied?"

He saw her so much in his mind's eye that he was overcome by an irresistible desire to marry her, and, not being able to hold out any longer, he asked for her hand.

He was rich, owned his own vessel, his nets and a little house at the foot of the hill on the Retenue, whereas Father Auban had nothing. The marriage was therefore eagerly agreed upon and the wedding took place as soon as possible, as both parties were desirous for the affair to be concluded as early as convenient.

Three days after the wedding Patin could no longer understand how he had ever imagined Désirée to be different from other women. What a fool he had been to encumber himself with a penniless creature, who had undoubtedly inveigled him with some drug which she had put in his brandy!

He would curse all day long, break his pipe with his teeth and maul his crew. After he had sworn by every known term at everything that came his way he would rid himself of his remaining anger on the fish and lobsters, which he pulled from the nets and threw into the baskets amid oaths and foul language. When he returned home he would find his wife, Father Auban's daughter, within reach of his mouth and hand, and it was not long before he treated her like the lowest creature in the world. As she listened calmly, accustomed to paternal violence, he grew exasperated at her quiet, and one evening he beat her. Then life at his home became unbearable.

For ten years the principal topic of conversation on the Retenue was about the

beatings that Patin gave his wife and his manner of cursing at her for the least thing. He could, indeed, curse with a richness of vocabulary in a roundness of tone unequalled by any other man in Fécamp. As soon as his ship was sighted at the entrance of the harbor, returning from the fishing expedition, every one awaited the first volley he would hurl from the bridge as soon as he perceived his wife's white cap.

Standing at the stern, he would steer, his eye fixed on the bows and on the sail, and, notwithstanding the difficulty of the narrow passage and the height of the turbulent waves, he would search among the watching women and try to recognize his wife, Father Auban's daughter, the wretch!

Then, as soon as he saw her, notwithstanding the noise of the wind and waves, he would let loose upon her with such power and volubility that every one would laugh, although they pitied her greatly. When he arrived at the dock he would relieve his mind, while unloading the fish, in such an expressive manner that he attracted around him all the loafers of the neighborhood. The words left his mouth sometimes like shots from a cannon, short and terrible, sometimes like peals of thunder, which roll and rumble for five minutes, such a hurricane of oaths that he seemed to have in his lungs one of the storms of the Eternal Father.

When he left his ship and found himself face to face with her, surrounded by all the gossips of the neighborhood, he would bring up a new cargo of insults and bring her back to their dwelling, she in front, he behind, she weeping, he yelling at her.

At last, when alone with her behind closed doors, he would thrash her on the slightest pretext. The least thing was sufficient to make him raise his hand, and when he had once begun he did not stop, but he would throw into her face the true motive for his anger. At each blow he would roar: "There, you beggar! There, you wretch! There, you pauper! What a bright thing I did when I rinsed my mouth with your rascal of a father's apology for brandy!"

The poor woman lived in continual fear, in a ceaseless trembling of body and soul, in everlasting expectation of outrageous thrashings.

This lasted ten years. She was so timorous that she would grow pale whenever she spoke to any one, and she thought of nothing but the blows with which she was threatened; and she became thinner, more yellow and drier than a smoked fish.

II

One night, when her husband was at sea, she was suddenly awakened by the wild roaring of the wind! She sat up in her bed, trembling, but, as she heard nothing more, she lay down again; almost immediately there was a roar in the chimney which shook the entire house; it seemed to cross the heavens like a pack of furious animals snorting and roaring.

Then she arose and rushed to the harbor. Other women were arriving from all sides, carrying lanterns. The men also were gathering, and all were watching the foaming crests of the breaking waves.

The storm lasted fifteen hours. Eleven sailors never returned; Patin was among them.

In the neighborhood of Dieppe the wreck of his bark, the Jeune-Amélie, was found. The bodies of his sailors were found near Saint-Valéry, but his body was never recovered. As his vessel seemed to have been cut in two, his wife expected and feared his return for a long time, for if there had been a collision he alone might have been picked up and carried afar off.

Little by little she grew accustomed to the thought that she was rid of him, although she would start every time that a neighbor, a beggar or a peddler would enter suddenly.

One afternoon, about four years after the disappearance of her husband, while she was walking along the Rue aux Juifs, she stopped before the house of an old sea captain who had recently died and whose furniture was for sale. Just at that moment

a parrot was at auction. He had green feathers and a blue head and was watching everybody with a displeased look. "Three francs!" cried the auctioneer. "A bird that can talk like a lawyer, three francs!"

A friend of the Patin woman nudged her and said: "You ought to buy that, you who are rich. It would be good company for you. That bird is worth more than thirty francs. Anyhow, you can always sell it for twenty or twenty-five!"

Patin's widow added fifty centimes, and the bird was given her in a little cage, which she carried away. She took it home, and, as she was opening the wire door in order to give it something to drink, he bit her finger and drew blood.

"Oh, how naughty he is!" she said.

Nevertheless she gave it some hemp-seed and corn and watched it pruning its feathers as it glanced warily at its new home and its new mistress.

On the following morning, just as day was breaking, the Patin woman distinctly heard a loud, deep, roaring voice calling: "Are you going to get up, carrion?"

Her fear was so great that she hid her head under the sheets, for when Patin was with her as soon as he would open his eyes he would shout those well-known words into her ears.

Trembling, rolled into a ball, her back prepared for the thrashing which she already expected, her face buried in the pillows, she murmured: "Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he has come back!"

Minutes passed; no noise disturbed the quiet room. Then, trembling, she stuck her head out of the bed, sure that he was there, watching, ready to beat her. Except for a ray of sun shining through the window, she saw nothing, and she said to herself: "He must be hidden."

She waited a long time and then, gaining courage, she said to herself: "I must have dreamed it, seeing there is nobody here."

A little reassured, she closed her eyes, when from quite near a furious voice, the thunderous voice of the drowned man, could be heard crying: "Say! when in the name of all that's holy are you going to get up, you b----?"

She jumped out of bed, moved by obedience, by the passive obedience of a woman accustomed to blows and who still remembers and always will remember that voice! She said: "Here I am, Patin; what do you want?"

But Patin did not answer. Then, at a complete loss, she looked around her, then in the chimney and under the bed and finally sank into a chair, wild with anxiety, convinced that Patin's soul alone was there, near her, and that he had returned in order to torture her.

Suddenly she remembered the loft, in order to reach which one had to take a ladder. Surely he must have hidden there in order to surprise her. He must have been held by savages on some distant shore, unable to escape until now, and he had returned, worse that ever. There was no doubting the quality of that voice. She raised her head and asked: "Are you up there, Patin?"

Patin did not answer. Then, with a terrible fear which made her heart tremble, she climbed the ladder, opened the skylight, looked, saw nothing, entered, looked about and found nothing. Sitting on some straw, she began to cry, but while she was weeping, overcome by a poignant and supernatural terror, she heard Patin talking in the room below. He seemed less angry and he was saying: "Nasty weather! Fierce wind! Nasty weather! I haven't eaten, damn it!"

She cried through the ceiling: "Here I am, Patin; I am getting your meal ready. Don't get angry."

She ran down again. There was no one in the room. She felt herself growing weak, as if death were touching her, and she tried to run and get help from the neighbors, when a voice near her cried out: "I haven't had my breakfast, by G----!"

And the parrot in his cage watched her with his round, knowing, wicked eye. She,

too, looked at him wildly, murmuring: "Ah! so it's you!"

He shook his head and continued: "Just you wait! I'll teach you how to loaf."

What happened within her? She felt, she understood that it was he, the dead man, who had come back, who had disguised himself in the feathers of this bird in order to continue to torment her; that he would curse, as formerly, all day long, and bite her, and swear at her, in order to attract the neighbors and make them laugh. Then she rushed for the cage and seized the bird, which scratched and tore her flesh with its claws and beak. But she held it with all her strength between her hands. She threw it on the ground and rolled over it with the frenzy of one possessed. She crushed it and finally made of it nothing but a little green, flabby lump which no longer moved or spoke. Then she wrapped it in a cloth, as in a shroud, and she went out in her nightgown, barefoot; she crossed the dock, against which the choppy waves of the sea were beating, and she shook the cloth and let drop this little dead thing, which looked like so much grass. Then she returned, threw herself on her knees before the empty cage, and, overcome by what she had done, kneeled and prayed for forgiveness, as if she had committed some heinous crime.

THE PIECE OF STRING

It was market-day, and from all the country round Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the town. The men walked slowly, throwing the whole body forward at every step of their long, crooked legs. They were deformed from pushing the plough which makes the left shoulder higher, and bends their figures sideways; from reaping the grain, when they have to spread their legs so as to keep on their feet. Their starched blue blouses, glossy as though varnished, ornamented at collar and cuffs with a little embroidered design and blown out around their bony bodies, looked very much like balloons about to soar, whence issued two arms and two feet.

Some of these fellows dragged a cow or a calf at the end of a rope. And just behind

the animal followed their wives beating it over the back with a leaf-covered branch to hasten its pace, and carrying large baskets out of which protruded the heads of chickens or ducks. These women walked more quickly and energetically than the men, with their erect, dried-up figures, adorned with scanty little shawls pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads wrapped round with a white cloth, enclosing the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Now a char-à-banc passed by, jogging along behind a nag and shaking up strangely the two men on the seat, and the woman at the bottom of the cart who held fast to its sides to lessen the hard jolting.

In the market-place at Goderville was a great crowd, a mingled multitude of men and beasts. The horns of cattle, the high, long-napped hats of wealthy peasants, the headdresses of the women came to the surface of that sea. And the sharp, shrill, barking voices made a continuous, wild din, while above it occasionally rose a huge burst of laughter from the sturdy lungs of a merry peasant or a prolonged bellow from a cow tied fast to the wall of a house.

It all smelled of the stable, of milk, of hay and of perspiration giving off that half-human, half-animal odor which is peculiar to country folks.

Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, had just arrived at Goderville and was making his way toward the square when he perceived on the ground a little piece of string. Maître Hauchecorne, economical as are all true Normans, reflected that everything was worth picking up which could be of any use, and he stooped down, but painfully, because he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin string from the ground and was carefully preparing to roll it up when he saw Maître Malandain, the harness maker, on his doorstep staring at him. They had once had a quarrel about a halter, and they had borne each other malice ever since. Maître Hauchecorne was overcome with a sort of shame at being seen by his enemy picking up a bit of string in the road. He quickly hid it beneath his blouse and then slipped it into his breeches

pocket, then pretended to be still looking for something on the ground which he did not discover and finally went off toward the market-place, his head bent forward and his body almost doubled in two by rheumatic pains.

He was at once lost in the crowd, which kept moving about slowly and noisily as it chaffered and bargained. The peasants examined the cows, went off, came back, always in doubt for fear of being cheated, never quite daring to decide, looking the seller square in the eye in the effort to discover the tricks of the man and the defect in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, their legs tied together, with terrified eyes and scarlet combs.

They listened to propositions, maintaining their prices in a decided manner with an impassive face or perhaps deciding to accept the smaller price offered, suddenly calling out to the customer who was starting to go away:

"All right, I'll let you have them, Maît' Anthime."

Then, little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived at a distance poured into the inns.

At Jourdain's the great room was filled with eaters, just as the vast court was filled with vehicles of every sort--wagons, gigs, chars-à-bancs, tilburies, innumerable vehicles which have no name, yellow with mud, misshapen, pieced together, raising their shafts to heaven like two arms, or it may be with their nose, on the ground and their rear in the air.

Just opposite to where the diners were at table the huge fireplace, with its bright flame, gave out a burning heat on the backs of those who sat at the right. Three spits were turning, loaded with chickens, with pigeons and with joints of mutton, and a delectable odor of roast meat and of gravy flowing ever crisp brown skin arose from the hearth, kindled merriment, caused mouths to water.

All the aristocracy of the plough were eating there at Maît' Jourdain's, the innkeeper's, a dealer in horses also and a sharp fellow who had made a great deal of money in his day.

The dishes were passed round, were emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Every one told of his affairs, of his purchases and his sales. They exchanged news about the crops. The weather was good for greens, but too wet for grain.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the courtyard before the house. Every one, except some of the most indifferent, was on their feet at once and ran to the door, to the windows, their mouths full and napkins in their hand.

When the public crier had finished his tattoo he called forth in a jerky voice, pausing in the wrong places:

"Be it known to the inhabitants of Goderville and in general to all persons present at the market that there has been lost this morning on the Beuzeville road, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and business papers. You are requested, to return it to the mayor's office at once or to Maitre Fortuné Houlbrèque, of Manneville. There will be twenty francs reward."

Then the man went away. They heard once more at a distance the dull beating of the drum and the faint voice of the crier. Then they all began to talk of this incident, reckoning up the chances which Maître Houlbrèque had of finding or of not finding his pocketbook again.

The meal went on. They were finishing their coffee when the corporal of gendarmes appeared on the threshold.

He asked:

"Is Maître Hauchecorne, of Bréauté, here?"

Maître Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table, answered:

"Here I am, here I am."

And he followed the corporal.

The mayor was waiting for him, seated in an armchair. He was the notary of the place, a tall, grave man of pompous speech.

"Maître Hauchecorne," said he, "this morning on the Beuzeville road, you were seen to pick up the pocketbook lost by Maître Houlbrèque, of Manneville."

The countryman looked at the mayor in amazement, frightened already at this suspicion which rested on him, he knew not why.

"I--I picked up that pocketbook?"

"Yes, you."

"I swear I don't even know anything about it."

"You were seen."

"I was seen--I? Who saw me?"

"M. Malandain, the harness-maker."

Then the old man remembered, understood, and, reddening with anger, said:

"Ah! he saw me, did he, the rascal? He saw me picking up this string here, M'sieu le Maire."

And fumbling at the bottom of his pocket, he pulled out of it the little end of string.

But the mayor incredulously shook his head:

"You will not make me believe, Maitre Hauchecorne, that M. Malandain, who is a man whose word can be relied on, has mistaken this string for a pocketbook."

The peasant, furious, raised his hand and spat on the ground beside him as if to attest his good faith, repeating:

"For all that, it is God's truth, M'sieu le Maire. There! On my soul's salvation, I repeat it."

The mayor continued:

"After you picked up the object in question, you even looked about for some time in the mud to see if a piece of money had not dropped out of it."

The good man was choking with indignation and fear.

"How can they tell--how can they tell such lies as that to slander an honest man! How can they?"

His protestations were in vain; he was not believed.

He was confronted with M. Malandain, who repeated and sustained his testimony. They railed at one another for an hour. At his own request Maitre Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

At last the mayor, much perplexed, sent him away, warning him that he would inform the public prosecutor and ask for orders.

The news had spread. When he left the mayor's office the old man was surrounded, interrogated with a curiosity which was serious or mocking, as the case might be, but into which no indignation entered. And he began to tell the story of the string. They did not believe him. They laughed.

He passed on, buttonholed by every one, himself buttonholing his acquaintances, beginning over and over again his tale and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out to prove that he had nothing in them.

They said to him:

"You old rogue!"

He grew more and more angry, feverish, in despair at not being believed, and kept on telling his story.

The night came. It was time to go home. He left with three of his neighbors, to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the string, and all the way he talked of his adventure.

That evening he made the round of the village of Breauté for the purpose of telling

every one. He met only unbelievers.

He brooded over it all night long.

The next day, about one in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a farm hand of Maitre Breton, the market gardener at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maitre Holbrèque, of Manneville.

This man said, indeed, that he had found it on the road, but not knowing how to read, he had carried it home and given it to his master.

The news spread to the environs. Maître Hauchecorne was informed. He started off at once and began to relate his story with the dénoûment. He was triumphant.

"What grieved me," said he, "was not the thing itself, do you understand, but it was being accused of lying. Nothing does you so much harm as being in disgrace for lying."

All day he talked of his adventure. He told it on the roads to the people who passed, at the cabaret to the people who drank and next Sunday when they came out of church. He even stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was easy now, and yet something worried him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had a joking manner while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel their remarks behind his back.

On Tuesday of the following week he went to market at Goderville, prompted solely by the need of telling his story.

Malandain, standing on his doorstep, began to laugh as he saw him pass. Why?

He accosted a farmer of Criquetot, who did not let him finish, and giving him a punch in the pit of the stomach, cried in his face: "Oh, you great rogue!" Then he turned his heel upon him.

Maître Hauchecorne remained speechless and grew more and more uneasy. Why had they called him "great rogue"?

When seated at table in Jourdain's tavern he began again to explain the whole affair.

A horse dealer of Montivilliers shouted at him:

"Get out, get out, you old scamp! I know all about your old string."

Hauchecorne stammered:

"But since they found it again, the pocketbook!"

But the other continued:

"Hold your tongue, daddy; there's one who finds it and there's another who returns it. And no one the wiser."

The farmer was speechless. He understood at last. They accused him of having had the pocketbook brought back by an accomplice, by a confederate.

He tried to protest. The whole table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner, and went away amid a chorus of jeers.

He went home indignant, choking with rage, with confusion, the more cast down since with his Norman craftiness he was, perhaps, capable of having done what they accused him of and even of boasting of it as a good trick. He was dimly conscious that it was impossible to prove his innocence, his craftiness being so well known. He felt himself struck to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

He began anew to tell his tale, lengthening his recital every day, each day adding new proofs, more energetic declarations and more sacred oaths, which he thought of, which he prepared in his hours of solitude, for his mind was entirely occupied with the story of the string. The more he denied it, the more artful his arguments, the less he was believed.

"Those are liars' proofs," they said behind his back.

He felt this. It preyed upon him and he exhausted himself in useless efforts.

He was visibly wasting away.

Jokers would make him tell the story of "the piece of string" to amuse them, just as you make a soldier who has been on a campaign tell his story of the battle. His mind kept growing weaker and about the end of December he took to his bed.

He passed away early in January, and, in the ravings of death agony, he protested his innocence, repeating:

"A little bit of string--a little bit of string. See, here it is, M'sieu le Maire."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK UNE VIE, A PIECE OF STRING AND OTHER STORIES ***

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