



Diane and Her Friends

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I

THE DEFENSE OF DIANE

I am a soldier's wife and a soldier's daughter. It is necessary you should know this in order to answer the question which I shall propose to you. Perhaps I ought also to say at the outset that I am a Frenchwoman. But that will soon be evident.

I do not think I am at all what is called "a new woman." Certainly I love to do what I please, which has always been the prerogative of all women. And I approve of many things which other women appear to wish to do, without in the least wishing to do them myself. If a woman wishes to be a lawyer, that is her affair. I recognize obvious reasons why she should wish to "exercise the suffrage," as they say in the Chamber. But I see reasons quite as obvious why I should not claim that privilege myself. I have a very sweet bone in my mouth which I prefer to any other. It is quite enough to work out my own salvation, and if I love to have my own way, it is not through pure selfishness, for I admit that I should never have discovered how absurd a way mine often was if I had not insisted upon having it. All this logical tournament about our rights bores me. When I was a little girl my tutor once wished to compel me to prove that an equation of the first degree had but one root. It was so ridiculously evident, how could any one be expected to prove it? I went to my father in a passion of tears, and he quite approved of me. "Why torment the child with proving what is evident to her?" he said. That remark of my dear simple-hearted father has since saved me many worries.

I have a cousin, Celimene, who married M. de Caraman. She criticizes me unmercifully--behind my back. But I know it just the same. Things done behind your back invariably turn up in front of you sooner or later. Celimene was made for M. de Caraman. It is impossible to believe that she married him in pure luck, for they are the hand and the glove which must always be fitted. They do everything correctly, and nothing which is not correct escapes them. They dress exquisitely--as, for that matter, I do. But they never quarrel--as Raoul and I sometimes do, amicably. I am quite sure they do not adore each other, as Raoul and I do. They simply adore the same things,--not most things, but everything,--which is something impossible for me to conceive of. For example, Raoul has a kind of shaving-soap which is detestable to me. It is true that I like nearly

everything which Celimene likes,--society, dress, gayety, all that is meant by that one word *Paris*,--but not so much as she does, and an enormity of things which she does not care for at all. My responsive scale covers several octaves not on her register. She sits unconscious as the statue of Memnon when I am shivering with disgust or quivering with ecstasy. That is one reason why Celimene disapproves of me. I am continually sounding notes not on her instrument. It is laughable to hear her freezing, "I do not understand how you," etc. How can she understand what she does not hear, or see, or feel! I am telling you about Celimene because she has taken sides against me, and I wish you to understand why.

It came about in this way. We were staying a week at the Milons' in the Vosges. It is absolutely necessary that I should tell you something about the Milons and their guests, because they are my judges, and I think it is quite as important to know something about the character of the judges as the facts in the case before them. All the trees on the lawn remain the same, but where the shadows fall depends upon the humor of the sun, doesn't it? Well, my judges are of various humors.

First, there was M. de Sade. I mention him first because I hate him so. Every one fears him, but he is indispensable. Imagine the most deliciously piquant sauce ever invented by Savarin, biting, but appetizing. No dinner, no house-party, no yachting excursion is complete without M. de Sade. Amiable wits soon bore you. M. de Sade never bores. He bites, he stings, he irritates, he makes you furious, he brings tears to your eyes like paprika, and, worst of all, he fascinates. I always wish to sit near him. He produces a kind of pain that is positively agreeable. Among common people--I mean those accustomed to speak plainly--he would not perhaps appear so clever, so witty, so entertaining, for I suspect that it is because he tells the truth so nakedly that he is so amusing or so hateful to me. But I never feared him, and that I suspect, too, is the reason why he once forgot himself and went too far. There is nothing like the anger of mortification to make one forget one's self.

Then there was General Texier, an old comrade of my father's, who still calls me *ma petite*,--one of those simple brave men who will die as he has lived, a gentleman. It is not necessary to describe such people, they are so upright. Nor is it necessary to speak of Madame Texier. She has grown so enormous that it incommodes her to move or to think. Besides, she always agrees with "my General." It grieved me to have him take sides against me, to hear him appeal to

my father's memory with real tears in those great eyes of his, which look so honestly from under his big white eyebrows. But I am not so sure my father would agree with him. It is one of those things I am dying to ask him.

We were all in the library after dinner. Madame Texier was asleep in the largest fauteuil by the fire. M. de Sade was drinking his coffee, his cup in his hand, on the other side of the mantel. The general was playing whist with M. de Milon, Madame de Milon, and Celimene. There were some young people also, whom I did not know, playing billiards in the farther end of the room, or talking with other guests from the neighborhood. None of these people counted, so I pass them over. I only remember that they all seemed stupefied with amazement, as all commonplace people are when anything out of the common happens.

That Jacques took my part did not surprise me. He is my husband's best friend, one of those friends I expected to find at my side, whether he approved of me or not, out of sheer loyalty, just because I am his friend's wife. That is what Monsieur Shakespeare calls "a woman's reason." You shall judge whether Jacques had a better one.

M. de Sade had taken me out to dinner. I was feeling very depressed, because M. de Milon, who is a great friend of the Minister of War, had just told me that it would be impossible to have Raoul recalled from Tonkin before spring. All the time while dressing I was planning how to get to that dismal place which has cost France so many lives and millions. My thoughts were full of this project. I was making my calculations while eating my soup, and was halfway to Hainan before the turbot. Then I realized that M. de Sade had made one or two unsuccessful attempts to converse with me, and had finally turned in despair to Jacques's sister, who sat on his left. Agathe is not at all like Jacques. She is one of those women who become extraordinarily affected at the sound of their own voices. Every subject she introduces immediately begins to bloat up out of all proportion to its importance or interest. You know those people. They step on every sprig of conversation. Finally one ceases to make an effort and thinks of other things. With M. de Sade, on the contrary, conversation flows. One is either immensely amused or choking with indignation. He sets going in me machinery of which I was ignorant. If you think, for example, that you have no malice in your nature, wait till you have found your M. de Sade. Agathe has written a book on psychology which became famous after M. de Sade had remarked of it, "O Psyche, what crimes are committed in thy name!" I think she must have been speaking of it, for after the turbot M. de Sade whispered to me,--

"Why do you go to Africa to look for lions, when in Paris they lie in wait for you?"

Now this requires that I should speak a little of myself. You will not be able to judge fairly if you do not understand me. I have always thought judges erred in taking no account of personality. They make no distinction between A and B, as if by any possibility A could conduct himself like B under the same circumstances. If the circumstances are the same, both heads fall into the basket! I wish you to know at once, therefore, that it is true that I shot a lion in Africa, though I was bred in a convent. It is not my fault that my mother died in giving me birth, though I reproach myself on that account, as one cannot help doing for many things of which one is the most innocent cause. It is not my fault that my father loved me the better because I was all that he had to worship, or that he scandalized my Aunt Julie by taking me with him to Africa. You see, at the very beginning I was the cause of scandal.

When I was sixteen I made with him the campaign against the Kabyles. Please realize what that means. For one thing it means that in the mountains of Africa one cannot ride as in the Bois de Boulogne, and that my Aunt Julie was shocked that I adapted myself to circumstances by preferring safety and ease on a man's saddle to danger and discomfort on a woman's. It goes without saying that I have a good seat on either, and that I do not behave in Paris as in Kabyle. But people like Aunt Julie, when they have worked themselves into a state of receptivity for shocks, are shocked at anything. Do not think I am going to tell you how I shot that lion. I only wish you to know how it happens that I am not like Celimene, who is obliged to rouge and who carries *crème de la reine* and salts and Heaven knows what in her *porte-mouchoir*. What would any young girl do in my place? She would drink health and strength in the air of the desert and the mountains. She would learn to keep cool, to be mistress of herself, and to shoot straight. She would have comrades instead of acquaintances. She would learn to dress a wound without shrinking, and to overcome the weakness natural to one who has never seen blood or suffering, without forfeiting the respect due to womanhood. Never among all these men with whom I lived so many years was I made to blush for shame or anger; no, never--till that evening in the library at the Milons.

But before I speak of that there is one thing more you must know--that I fence--I might as well say it, for it is true--admirably. The sword or the foil, it makes no difference which. It is quite important that you should understand this, therefore I speak plainly, without any wish to boast. Moreover, you may ask Raoul. He

will tell you, a little ruefully, that my wrist is more supple than his. I think it is also as strong. Almost invariably in our bouts together I have the advantage in hits. I even know a trick which I have not dared to practice upon him, because it is not rigorously correct. It is not disloyal, but it is not in the manuals. You see, I began in mere fun with my father. He was so proud of me that he used to laugh when I touched him. At his age, naturally, he was a little stiff, so I began to tease some of the young officers. I confess I took great satisfaction in worsting them, for that happened sometimes. Then I begged of my father to permit me to take lessons--that is the way I put it--with an old maitre d'armes who was reputed to be the best sword in the army. It was he who taught me that trick, of which I will tell you more presently.

Naturally, when I married Raoul we kept in practice together. Raoul never disapproved of anything which I wished to do. He has only one serious fault which sometimes annoys me--he wishes to prove every thing, like the tutor of whom I told you. It is a positive mania. We quarrel occasionally, but only about things or other people, never about each other. No one except my father and Jacques begins to understand me like Raoul. When I recollect that, I do not much care about what has happened. When I have talked to him he will entirely approve of what I have done.

Well, all this is what the lawyers call the extenuating circumstances. Now I come to the piece de conviction.

As I said before, we were in the library after dinner. There had been introduced in the Chamber some bill about the rights of women. I do not know what it was exactly. M. de Sade was relating the incident. He is a Deputy. I only recall that I was thinking about Raoul and how I should get to Tonkin. We had been separated nearly a year, and my head was so full of my project to go to him at all hazards that I had taken Jacques from his partner on the plea that I must consult him about something of great importance. We sat down in the embrasure of the window looking on the terrace. At first he had his cue in his hand, but when he found I was so serious he gave his cue to M. de Caraman and begged him to continue his game. Then he returned to me. I told him that Raoul was not coming back and that I simply must go to Tonkin. I was very earnest, and I suppose I became excited. I knew he would oppose me at first, so I waited patiently while he said all that I knew beforehand he would say--that I ought to consult Raoul, that it was a long journey, one a woman ought not to take alone, that Raoul might be ordered somewhere else before I reached there, and that

Tonkin was not a fit place for a woman anyway. As if I had not thought of all these things, or that they amounted to anything after I had made up my mind! I only said, "What is fit for Raoul is fit for me." Please remember that remark, because it is the key to my character and to what followed.

Well, Jacques took my hands in both of his, and then I became tranquil, for I knew he would help me.

"My dear Diane," he said, "you are disappointed and excited. This is a serious undertaking. Promise me you will do nothing without consulting me. Promise me to think of it overnight."

As I had already consulted him and was sure to think of nothing else, I almost laughed at his dear simplicity.

"I am going to Paris to-morrow," he continued. "I will go to the Ministry and make inquiries."

Jacques and I, you know, are like brother and sister. He was on my father's staff in Africa. I love him next to Raoul--if one can use the same word about such different things. His emotion touched me.

"Dear Jacques," I replied, "I promise you solemnly."

Then he kissed me, laughing, evidently quite relieved, and said,--

"You are a good girl."

Then we rose.

M. de Sade was finishing his account of the sitting, and, as usual when M. de Sade is en veine, everybody was listening. You can imagine how entrancing he is when even General Texier forgets the trump.

"It is quite simple," he was saying. "With privileges go duties; with rights, responsibilities. Madame Celimene wishes the suffrage. Let her serve, then, in Africa like Madame Diane. Of what account is her complexion when the State is in danger? Place aux dames! They wish to earn their own living, to drive cabs, to study anatomy on the benches of the ficole de Medecine, to descend with the latest hat a la mode into the pit where men struggle -"

"Really, M. de Sade," I interrupted, "do you, then, struggle so hard? I had not observed it."

"Ah, madame," he replied, with that malicious urbanity of which he is master, "when that day comes when in defiance of nature you have possessed yourself of that phantom equality which you are in pursuit of, on that day I should ask you to do me the honor to explain a remark which women who have not descended to equality are privileged to make with impunity."

"And if I refused?"

"I should be privileged then to throw my glove in your charming face and await your seconds."

There was a storm of protestations.

"I have no wish to drive cabs," I remarked dryly, "but I agree with you, and if occasion arises I shall hold you to your theory."

"I shall be at your service, madame."

"Are you sure, M. de Sade?" I could not resist pushing him over the precipice.

"Absolutely," he said, bowing.

"Bravo!" cried M. de Milon, patting my shoulder.

"Qu'il est bete!" muttered the general, under his breath.

"Un vrai fou," said his wife, whose nap had been disturbed.

And then Jacques put an end to it all by saying it was too silly for discussion.

No one paid any further attention to what had been said. The boutades of M. de Sade were never taken seriously. But I could not rid my mind of it. I felt that something momentous had taken place and that something more momentous was inevitable. If I were not resolved to be quite truthful, I should pretend that my disappointment about Raoul accounted for my agitation--I mean my inward agitation, for outwardly I was growing frigid. But I will bare my whole heart. Besides, you have foreseen already that M. de Sade had seen Jacques kiss me. I

cannot tell you how that thought irritated me. Not because he had seen,--all the world might have seen,--but because in his eyes there was such a wicked smile. When such an atmosphere exists as that I was breathing, it is impossible to avoid an explosion. The only way to peace is through a storm.

The storm came in this way. The general, having heard from M. de Milon that Raoul was not to be ordered home for another year, came over beside me and in his fatherly manner endeavored to cheer me. Indeed, I had a great desire to cry. One must cry sometimes whether one has been educated in Africa or a convent. They all became interested and gathered about me. "At our age," said Celimene, "a year is not so long. Do not think of it and it will pass quickly."

Imagine! She is five years older than I, and has M. de Caraman for a husband!

"I do not think of it," I said resolutely, "because I have decided to go to Raoul."

Before any one could express astonishment, M. de Sade spoke.

"Excellent idea," he said.

My tears were dry in an instant. I stood up and confronted him.

"Why do you say that?" I flashed, looking him in the eyes. If I am to blame in any respect, it was at that moment, for I felt the challenge in my voice and that he could not resist it.

"Because," he replied, slowly, returning my gaze,--"because since the days of King David it is dangerous to separate wives and husbands."

No one at first fully comprehended what was transpiring, except Jacques. He sprang to his feet.

"Wait," I said, pushing him aside; "this is my affair."

Then I turned to M. de Sade.

"Monsieur," I said, "I have not, to employ your words, descended to equality with you, but I do not for that reason claim the immunity you offer me. On the contrary, I accept full responsibility for what I shall say to you. You have insulted me, and it is to me, not to another, that you shall make reparation. You

will apologize for what you have said, now, in the presence of those who heard you, or--"

"Or?" he interrupted, with that wicked smile of his, lighting a cigarette as if it were only a pleasantry.

I tore off my long white glove and struck him across the face with all my strength.

For a moment no one moved. Every one was stupefied. I saw distinctly the red mark of my glove, and I heard Celimene cry, "Oh!" Then I gathered up my dress and left the room.

As was to be expected, they all came to expostulate with me. First, M. de Milon and the general. They said M. de Sade's conduct was infamous, that I had behaved with spirit under great provocation, but that of course it was impossible for a gentleman to cross swords with a woman.

"Why?" I said, "if it is possible for him to insult one."

"Old as I am," said the general, "he shall answer for this to me. Be reasonable." And then he began to walk up and down, gesticulating and saying, "It is impossible, my child, impossible."

I will not repeat all they said because you know it already. But please try to keep my point of view.

Afterwards came Celimene, poor Celimene! with her tears and salts and her "No one ever heard of such a thing."

"Well, they will hear of it now," I said.

"You were most imprudent, my dear," she continued. "That does not excuse M. de Sade. He was abominable. But do not add to the scandal. A woman in your position cannot conduct herself like a common scold. Thank Heaven, we have not yet come to that! Instead of becoming a hero"--what a nasty insinuation!--"you will make M. de Sade one."

None of these arguments moved me. Moreover, I had not failed to observe that Jacques had not come to me. I was sure that he would not. Being married, I

know the habits of men tolerably well. For that reason, after the house became quiet, I went to bed as usual, resolved to be awake early. There was no need to tell my maid to call me, for I have the habit of waking when I wish to. To prove to you that I had a good conscience, I slept soundly and woke with the sun. My maid was still sleeping. I dressed myself quickly, pulling on the short skirt and jacket I wear when there is a battue in the forest--but without corsets. Then I sat down by the window. It looked out upon the terrace, over the gardens and pond to the wood. I was not mistaken, for presently Jacques, with M. de Caraman and the general, came out from the library, crossed the terrace, and disappeared in the shrubbery. When I reached the spot they were talking, the general, M. de Caraman, M. de Milon, and two others whom I did not know. M. de Sade and Jacques were in their shirt-sleeves. It was an open space, across which the morning sun threw long shadows, and I waited on the edge till they took their places. Then I went forward. M. de Sade was facing me. He smiled when he saw me, and shrugged his shoulders as if much amused. I admit that when one has no protection, no mask, and no button on one's foil, one feels quite differently. But that shrug of the shoulders was all I needed. I was beside Jacques before he saw me.

"Give it me," I said--I *ordered*, grasping the guard. At first he held back.

"Jacques!" I said.

For just a second he hesitated, our eyes together. Then he let go.

M. de Sade had thrown down his weapon and stood with his arms folded, still smiling.

"Stand back!" I cried to those who were advancing. "Messieurs, you will pardon my ignorance of etiquette. We have passed beyond the need of it." Then I turned to M. de Sade and saluted him.

"En garde!" I said.

"There is a coat which is not precisely a coat of mail," he sneered, "but which is quite the equivalent of one. Will madame assure me--"

Viper to the last!

"M. de Sade," I said, advancing a step, "if you do not resume your sword, you

will compel me to do with mine what last night I did with my glove."

He stooped, white with rage, and took up his sword.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "will you permit me to defend myself?"

Without losing a precious second I attacked him. I heard the two strangers protest. The others seemed paralyzed, it was all so unexpected and so sudden. I think the general was about to part us, when I heard dear Jacques's voice saying, "I will answer for her."

As for myself I was too busy to pay attention to them. I perceived at once that M. de Sade was only defending himself. Then I thought of the lesson of the old maitre d'armes. With every resource at my command I attacked, obliging him to use all his own to parry, forcing him back at every thrust--for he would not reply--till he began to get worried, and then--well, this time it was not he who threw down his sword.

He was astounded. I was tempted to laugh at him, it was so comical. I am not vindictive. When I have had my way I am satisfied. But I had not quite finished.

"Resume your sword, monsieur," I said. "I have not done with you."

"Enough, enough!" cried the general, running forward.

But M. de Sade held up his hand. I had not observed before the little red stream trickling from his wrist.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I admit freely that madame is my superior with the sword and"--bowing to me very sweetly--"in manners." It was a little late; but, you see, after all, at heart he was a gentleman.

Well, I ask you, did I not do right?

No one but Jacques will admit it. M. de Milon is quite obstinate about it. The general shakes his head at me from time to time, on principle, you know, and madame sighs without speaking. Celimene had hysterics, at breakfast. She cannot understand, she keeps repeating, how M. de Caraman permitted it. I tell her it was because I was there. But you should hear Agathe. She says it is a case of atavism!

Jacques has kissed me again,--with both arms, too,--only this time in private.

To-morrow I start for Tonkin, to prove to Celimene that I have no wish to pose as a hero--and to see my husband.

II

THE CONFESSION OF THE COUNTESS ANNE

An object dropped from certain windows of the Chateau de Freyr fell into the Meuse, and from that side, indeed, but for these windows its gray walls were hardly to be distinguished from the cliff which they prolonged. To the south, where the river escaped from the shadow of the cliff into the sunlight of the meadows, the approaches were less abrupt, the lower slopes being covered with vineyards. Still farther around, to the west, a noble wood of chestnut and oak rose in steps to the great wall of the terrace, their top-most branches almost reaching to the terrace level. Even on this side, however, the pathway, which first skirted the vineyards and then disappeared in the wood, was so steep that when the Countess Anne returned from an excursion to the town a donkey was always in waiting for her at the Sign of the White Fawn, where the path left the main road. There is a legend that when the King of France passed a night in the chateau on his way to Flanders, four stout Flemish draught horses had dragged His Majesty's coach up the hill into the courtyard whose stones had never before, as certainly they never have since, felt the wheel of a carriage. But this legend is of doubtful authenticity, and was repeated to the few travelers who stopped for a glass of wine at the Sign of the White Fawn only as one repeats similar doubtful tales of what happened in the days when there were giants in the land -- with a "they say" and a shrug of the shoulders.

"Evidently," said the Countess Anne one day to Dr. Leroux as they climbed the path to the chateau, "evidently my ancestors were in the habit of paying visits which they did not wish returned."

The cluster of houses at the foot of the chateau was also known as Freyr. A few of its narrower streets straggled a little way up the hill, but the greater number, including the great square with its fountain by Girardon, stretched out into the meadows along the river, bordered by a wide allee of plane trees, in whose shade gossips knitted, and children played, when the weather was fine.

These gossips would have told you that it was now thirty-five years or more since the Countess Anne came to Freyr, an event of great importance at the time, inasmuch as the chateau had not been inhabited for more than a century. An

event, too, which gave rise to much speculation, for in those days, of course, the countess was young, barely twenty, and according to rumor, marvelously beautiful. According to rumor, too, she had lived in a brilliant world with which Freyr and its lonely chateau had nothing in common. Would she bring gallants and ladies in her train? Would the cor de chasse sound once more in the park, and candle-lights dance again in the mirrors of the salle de bal? Then, little by little, other rumors, from God knows where, filtered through the town--that there was a count who had eaten the countess's dowry in less than a year, some said in less time even; that the young wife had fled from her husband as from the plague, or, according to others, had been deserted as soon as the dowry was gone. Possibly the Abbe D'Arlot or Dr. Leroux could tell you whether the count was still alive. But as he had never been seen by any of the inhabitants of Freyr, and as there were no children to remind one that he had ever existed, he was gradually forgotten even by the gossips who knitted in the allee by the Meuse. Even his name had perished from the land, for every one in Freyr had come to say "the Countess Anne."

"I think," said the countess one day to Dr. Leroux as he walked beside her donkey up the path, "that I must purchase another donkey. Balafre is beginning to stumble, and when he stumbles badly he gives me such a shock that I have a pain in my heart."

"That is not the fault of Balafre," said Dr. Leroux.

"No, so you have told me before. It is the fault of my heart."

"Undoubtedly. What could I say to my conscience if I did not warn you against those exertions which ... for example, I saw you to-day lift that big baby of Mere Bigot"

"The dear child! so I did," said the countess. And then, after a little silence, "So you think it will stop some day, without warning?"

"It is possible, certainly."

"Provided I have time for confession and the sacraments," said the countess as if to herself, "I should not object so much to that way."

"You know I do not attach any"--he emphasized the word gently--"importance to the sacraments. As for confession, that is another matter. A good confession has

often been of great assistance to me. But for you," he said, laying his hand on Balafre's back, for the path was steep at this point, "what can you possibly ... ah, well," for the gesture of the countess arrested him, "if that is so, why not make your confession now?"

"There are confessions one does not make till one is sure one is about to die," replied the Countess Anne.

Dr. Leroux walked on beside Balafre in silence. There was sometimes such a mingling of seriousness and playfulness in the countess's answers that silence was the best refuge for uncertainty. Often, however, as now, the doctor's silence was the silence of irritation. It irritated him to think that she, whom he held to be no whit lower than the angels, should be tormented by the need of confession. For what could such a woman possibly have to confess! And his irritation found vent when, on his way home, he encountered the Abbe D'Arlot, who always dined at the chateau on Thursdays, slowly ascending the path.

"Why do you seek to govern by fear!" he exclaimed, shaking his cane. "That the law should inspire fear, that is natural; but for religion, it is folly. The criminal does not commit murder for fear of the gallows. That is well--for the victim! that is well for society, which protects itself. But what good does this fear accomplish for the criminal himself? Absolutely none. It stays his hand, it does not change his heart. Is it to wash the hand or to cleanse the heart that the Church exists? Ah, that the law should govern by fear, that I admit. But the Church! when the Church inspires fear it is because it wishes to usurp the place of law, to govern as well as to pardon." And turning on his heel, the doctor went grumbling down the path.

Accustomed to these outbursts, the abbe smiled. None knew better than he that his friend possessed the kindest of hearts. But it took fire easily. As Pere Bigot said: "C'est comme les allumettes--faut pas les gratter!" for Pere Bigot had often experienced the doctor's wrath, being accustomed to descant to the habits of the White Fawn on the art of government, a proceeding which excited the doctor's bitter scorn. "There is one branch of knowledge," he said one day to the mayor, "which it is not necessary to teach in the schools."

"What is that?" inquired the mayor unsuspectingly.

"How to govern one's neighbor."

Yet Pere Bigot was never tired of telling how, when he broke his leg drawing logs from the forest, Monsieur le Docteur had cared for him "as if he had been the Countess Anne."

The truth is that while tolerant of every form of weakness and suffering, the doctor despised every form of pretension. With politics he would have nothing to do, and on all social questions was as conservative as on religious ones he was radical. His speech was often hot and his silence chilling, and with many ideas of the day which, like other ephemeral fashions, penetrated even to Freyr, he was sadly out of joint. "But," said Madame Leroux, "he has the heart of a little lamb"--and Madame Leroux, while adoring her husband, understood him well.

As for the baby of Mere Bigot it was true, as the doctor had pointed out, that it was enormously heavy for a baby of its age. But then, it had such an enticing way of stretching out its hands that it was impossible to resist their appeal. Not that it enjoyed any special prerogatives. To the Countess Anne all babies were appealing. No mother in Freyr had any cause for jealousy in this respect. "Ah, what a pity she is not a mother," they used to say.

But this had not always been so. Time was when the peasant on the straight white road which divided the meadows, doffing his hat as she went by, slender and erect on her black gelding, received but scant acknowledgment. Tradesmen who had counted on better times with her coming were sorely disappointed in those days, for there were neither revels nor feasting to quicken trade, nor any change in the usual life of Freyr. A few lights shone at night in the chateau windows, and now and then a solitary figure walked in the chateau wood--that was all.

How or why the transformation came to pass, no one in Freyr could have told you. You know how marvelously the dead leaves of the dead year disappear, how little by little the naked branches take on those faint colors which herald the spring; and then, after days of alternate sun and cold, and delays without number, how, in spite of all these warnings, we are suddenly astonished to find every bud and leaf in its place, and to hear the strife of chattering birds seeking nests. No less wonderful was the miracle wrought in the Countess Anne. When first she came to Freyr the signs of a winter lately passed were in her face, as if something had frozen the sources of life as winter freezes the wood springs; and in her manner a hauteur and aloofness such as one feels when one attempts to penetrate in winter the snow-bound wood. And now the littlest child sitting on

the doorstep in the sun stretched out its tiny hands confidently as she passed by, and Madame Leroux, watching her retreating form as she went out the gateway of the Hotel Dieu, turned to her husband saying:--

"It is not the same woman that came to Freyr years ago."

"The very same," he replied. "Go get that stone, my dear, which you keep in the depths of your chest, and see how it will shine when it sees the light of the sun."

Madame Leroux knew very well that he was chiding her for so rarely wearing the one jewel she possessed--a souvenir of such happy days that she locked it securely in her chest lest it should be lost--and smiled. Then she began to think, to wonder what sun had shone upon the heart of the Countess Anne.

She remembered the day her husband had first gone to the chateau, and how, when he had returned and had talked for a whole hour on every subject but the one which was consuming her heart, unable to refrain any longer she had asked at last if the countess was really as beautiful as rumor had said. They were at table, and she remembered well how her husband, looking up from his plate, replied:--

"My dear, what do you say of this ragout?"

"Of this ragout?" she had stammered, taken aback, "why, it is delicious."

"So? and what do you say of a morning of May, one of those mornings, for example, when the buds are turning silver and rose, when the leaves are preparing to unfold and birds are calling in the wood?"

"That it is beautiful, certainly."

"O words, words! why not delicious--not like this ragout" he added maliciously, smiling over the rim of his spectacles, "but like the Countess Anne."

She remembered that day was the first day of spring, for the windows were open and the bees came in and out seeking what was not yet to be found in the fields, and that her husband, finishing his coffee by the garden window, had added:

"Something, perhaps, not yet beautiful, but which promises to be so, which charms because it suggests, which stirs the imagination and calls out to the

things in the heart which are dying, saying 'do not die, do not die.'"

Ah, Madame Leroux had thought, she must be beautiful, indeed.

Above all she remembered her disappointment when in her turn she also first saw the Countess Anne--a black figure, its face as white as its white hands, taking scarcely more notice of her curtsy than did the hound by its side. And now the countess was an old woman, with white hair and a figure no longer slim, but with eternal spring in her eyes. Yes, it was true, as her husband had said--some one, something, had taken the jewel out of the dark into the sun. And Madame Leroux, who endeavored to atone for her husband's delinquencies, crossed herself, saying, "God only was capable of such a miracle."

Of the two men most people would have selected the abbe rather than the doctor for the friendship of the Countess Anne. For the abbe, though poor, was of noble family, having in his face and manners those signs of race which circumstances can never wholly efface or disguise, and which often contrasted strongly with the brusque, even bourgeois ways of the doctor. Yet whereas the abbe dined at the chateau only once a week, Dr. Leroux was a frequent visitor. This did not trouble the peace of Madame Leroux. She knew that she was his wife, the mother of his children, the woman who in certain respects was his inferior, but whom he tenderly loved. She knew, also, that the other was the woman who in certain other respects was his superior, who, in the dull monotony of Freyr, was the stimulus to his intellectual nature as she, Madame Leroux, was its rest.

Notwithstanding their different natures and beliefs, there were no better friends in Freyr than the abbe and the doctor. Often in the dusk of the allee under the limes they were to be seen walking leisurely to and fro of summer evenings, the abbe, his hands crossed behind his back, listening, defending, explaining, the doctor always attacking something, pounding the gravel with his cane. On one subject above all others the doctor loved to talk,--the Countess Anne,--and it was strange that the abbe, who certainly shared his friend's opinion on this subject if on no other, was so reticent whenever her name was spoken. For example, the doctor would say:

"What is adorable is that she gives without ostentation, without playing that odious part of the Lady Bountiful who cannot forget the gulf over which she steps."

"Do you think she is even aware of it?" The abbe would reply gently.

"But no discretion," the doctor would pursue, waving his stick aloft, "no discretion. Only yesterday I said to her, 'Please, please discriminate a little. That piece of a hundred sous which you gave to that old rascal Gervais will certainly find its way into the till of the White Fawn.'"

And then the abbe would remain silent, or perhaps, on the way home, just before parting, would say in an impersonal way:

"Charity does not discriminate. Organize charity, ask of it judgment, reason, and it is no longer charity. Such only creates what it seeks to relieve. There is only one charity, the charity that reaches the heart because it proceeds from the heart, and that charity never hesitates, never reasons--it gives, at the first touch of the hand on the hem of the garment. The mistakes it makes are only the price it pays for the immense privilege of doing good."

It was a day of early autumn--the grapes still hung between the yellowing leaves of the vines--when Dr. Leroux, his black felt hat pulled down to his shaggy eyebrows, came through the gate of the chateau path, past the creaking sign of the White Fawn and along the narrow street which led to his own door. If there had been nothing else to mark that day Madame Leroux would have remembered it as one on which her husband had no greeting for her when she looked up at the sound of the opening door. For without even taking off his coat or hat, he disappeared into the laboratory, a small yellow phial in his hand.

She was just reaching to the nail where hung the little green bag of woven grass she always carried when she went to town--for the maid had forgotten the black beans for the master's soup--when something stayed her hand. She was not alarmed, but, as she afterward said, she "felt something." So laying aside her black shawl and taking her knitting from her pocket, she sat down by the window. And then, while waiting, recollecting that her husband had been called to the chateau, she began to feel fear, that fear which is just fear, and which, because it is fear of one knows not what, is the worst fear of all. How long she sat there, listening for her husband's step, she did not know, though the clock ticked in full sight above the chimney mantel. At last the door opened and her husband came in, sitting down beside her heavily, with a great sigh, like a man whose strength is spent. She laid her hand over his as it rested on the arm of his chair, looking into his face but not venturing to speak.

"I give her three days p--erhaps not even that," he groaned.

She stood up at his first words, leaning, dazed, against the wall.

"What will Freyr do without the Countess Anne?" she gasped with a little choking sob.

Of all the tributes the Countess Anne had ever received, this first thought of Madame Leroux, selfish as it might seem, was perhaps the greatest and best.

"And to think that I foresaw nothing," he moaned pitifully; "that while I stood at the door death should come in the window--that I can do nothing--that I am helpless!"

The needles trembled in Madame Leroux's hand.

"There is God, my dear," she murmured.

"Please do not speak to me of God," he said with a gesture of weariness. Then silence fell upon them both.

There was a little path in the garden, covered with a trellis from which grapes hung in yellow and purple clusters. Here, up and down, for a long hour the doctor walked that day, struggling with thoughts which had never troubled him before.

Should he tell the Countess Anne?

Surely it was his duty always to prolong life to the last possible moment, to fight Death with every ally at his command, even when the battle was lost. And no ally was stronger than Hope. To say "Courage! we two will conquer," that was what he had always said to every patient. By what right could he say, "It is useless, dismiss the physician and send for the priest"? To soften pain was one thing, to shorten life another. Was it less criminal to shorten it by taking away hope than by administering an opiate? Besides, what could she have to confess, such a woman, whose life had been open to his eye for nearly forty years? Nothing. It was monstrous, absurd. Why should he attach so much importance to a chance word? Yet what if it were true, that something lay on that white heart? By what right should he deprive it of its desire? For the end was sure, the fight was hopeless. Why then should he say there is hope, when hope there was none?

What if, after all, there was God waiting, ready to listen, a God of Judgment, a God of Wrath as well as of Mercy, who would say, "Inasmuch as ye did not cast your burden upon Me, depart from Me into everlasting darkness." That too, was monstrous, absurd. That such a God should one day hold him responsible for the peace of a soul troubled him less than that that soul should one day look at him with reproachful eyes. For the first time in his life he almost wished for such a God, some final Judge to whom he could turn in his doubt, upon whom he could cast the burden of his perplexity.

A wooden gate opened from the garden. He lifted the latch mechanically, following the winding street, heedless of greetings, and turned up the path by the Sign of the White Fawn.

"How good of you to come! I believe there must be some truth in these newfangled notions of telepathy. I was really about to send for you."

He pressed the white hand in his for reply, his throat too rebellious for speech. Then, abruptly, without further waiting, a little timidly, almost as it were like a novice speaking of things in which she was not proficient:--

"Do you know, my friend, I think I am about to die."

He started, involuntarily, experiencing an immense relief that his task was made so easy. She looked into his face searchingly. He did not exclaim, "Nonsense!" brusquely, as perhaps she expected.

"Do you believe, then, in presentiments?" she asked, her voice trembling, but very sweet and clear.

"They are sometimes not to be disregarded," he said hoarsely.

Her eyes did not fall, and she understood.

"Thank you," she replied steadily. And then, after a pause, "You are always the good friend."

He walked away to hide his face and was standing at the window when she spoke again.

"Please come and sit here, beside me, I am not afraid."

The strength in her voice astonished and steadied him. Not afraid! For a moment the world became fairer and brighter. What a fool he had been! Then the reality came back, and as he took the seat beside her again he covered his eyes with his hand. She took the free hand and drew him down, smiling.

"You came to comfort me, and now--now it is I who have to comfort you."

He straightened up, smiling too, something like his old self, and laid his other hand over hers. Her eyes wandered a while over the room and then came back to his.

"Tell me, will there be pain? You know what a coward I am."

Ah, what scenes, what suffering he had witnessed, dry-eyed. Now the tears rolled down his cheeks.

He shook his head.

"Precious tears, I love them, every one," thought the Countess Anne. "Just drowsiness, such as I felt before you came?" He nodded. "Sometimes God is good," she murmured, closing her eyes. Then she roused herself and taking a key from under her pillow put it in his hand. "We have had much business together," she earnestly. "That must not stop. You will find in my desk everything I wish done. You will do it--just the same--just the same as if--hush! better, perhaps. And now, my friend, you must go, for a while--but not far."

"Never far," he whispered. The big tears fell on the white sheet as he bent over her.

She kept his hand a moment, then released it reluctantly and turned her face to the wall, repeating under her breath, "Not far--not far."

As he moved softly toward the door she called to him.

"Will you send, please, for the Abbe d'Arlot?"

He nodded silently.

"Remember, I am not afraid," she smiled.

Then he left the room.

Although it was only mid-afternoon when Dr. Leroux knocked at the abbe's door, the day being Thursday, the abbe already wore his best soutane--for Thursday was the day on which he dined at the chateau. Few and blunt words suffice for men. When, therefore, in his usual courtly manner the abbe had offered him a chair, the doctor began at once, without preamble. After his visit at the chateau it was a relief to speak freely again.

"The Countess Anne is dying."

The abbe's face became pale as death.

"Dying!" he exclaimed with a quick indrawn breath, brushing with a gesture of bewilderment the thin hair from his forehead with his thin white hand.

"She has sent for you--you had better go at once--she wishes to make confession." The words came with an effort.

"She wishes me? But I am not her confessor," gasped the abbe, sinking into his chair.

His breast rose and fell so violently under his robe that Dr. Leroux strode to the sideboard. "Have you no brandy? Here, take this." He filled a glass from the decanter of wine and carried it to the abbe's lips.

"It is nothing. I will go," he said, refusing the proffered glass. "Dying! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" he moaned.

"You are not her confessor?" said Dr. Leroux. "I thought--I always supposed--at all events," he faltered, "she desires you." He put on his hat and went to the door. "I am going to her also. This is a time when she needs us both."

As the door closed he heard the sound of sobbing within.

Through the wicker gate, between the high vineyard walls, and then into the cool spaces of the wood the abbe climbed the chateau path. The loiterers at the tables under the trellis of the White Fawn rose and touched their hats at his approach. But he took no heed of them.

"The abbe is growing old," said one.

Halfway through the wood he paused to rest on a wooden bench, just where an opening in the trees disclosed the meadows and the curve of the winding Meuse. Every Thursday for twenty years he had climbed this path. Every Thursday evening for twenty years he had sat in the same chair at the same table in the great dining-room of the chateau. In summer, after dinner, they sat on the terrace, and in winter in the two high damask-covered chairs before the fire. And every Thursday evening for twenty years there had been three games of draughts before he took his leave. Now that was all over, forever.

Dying? He had not even observed that she was growing old.

In the courtyard the Great Dane welcomed him as always. There was no commotion. Nothing was changed. For a moment he said to himself, "I dream." Then he rang the bell at the small side door.

Dr. Leroux was in the anteroom. "You have no time to lose," he said. "No, not yet," he replied to the abbe's eyes, "but unconsciousness--that may come soon."

The abbe had become quite calm now. His pale, refined face had become still and his step firm.

When the door closed behind him he lifted his eyes. It was not the face of the dying that they saw, but a face transfigured, radiant, the face of one whose waiting was at an end. He went forward fascinated, bewildered, by that radiance, like a man who does not know what is to come.

"Sit down--here," she said, indicating the chair by her bed. He took the chair. "Nearer," said the Countess Anne. He felt that he was beginning to tremble, that self-control was slipping away. "Nearer," she repeated.

He bent his white head till it rested on the sheet close to her arm.

"Look up"--her voice was almost a whisper; "did you think you could love me for twenty years and give no sign?" she smiled.

A strange groan escaped his lips, and his head fell upon the pillow beside hers.

"Do you hear?" she whispered. "I love you--I--love--you."

"And you are dying--dying," he cried aloud.

"That makes no difference," said the Countess Anne.

If any one would know what was passing in the abbe's heart, let him go to the marshes when the tide is full. He had forgotten his calling, the long weary years. God and the world were swept away. Strength had forsaken him. He lay like a little child, weak, powerless, before that tide that came so resistlessly filling every empty chamber, stilling every ache, satisfying every thirsty root, till the heart, like the marsh, was full--and then, suddenly, mercifully, came night.

Dr. Leroux had hastened in at the first faint cry. They bore him away gently, but every effort was unavailing. He had climbed the chateau path for the last time.

"At last," thought Dr. Leroux bitterly, "peace with God is made--and it has cost a life."

When he reentered the room the countess's eyes were still shining. They looked up to his in mute appeal, and before he knew what words he was uttering, under their insistent spell he had spoken:

"Grief killed him."

The lips quivered, but the strange, triumphant smile remained. A feeble hand plucked at his sleeve and drew his head down till his ear touched her lips.

"It was not grief--it was joy," she whispered.

The next day there was a great stillness in Freyr. Every shop was closed. For the bells of Our Lady of Mercy were tolling in the great square.

Dr. Leroux walked rarely now in the allee by the Meuse. When his work was done he loved rather to sit with Madame Leroux under the garden trellis or before the fire, his hand in hers. But she never knew what sun had shone upon the heart of the Countess Anne.

III

THE WAY OF DIANE

In August there was no place in Freyr so cool as the terrace of the Hotel d'Italie et d'Angleterre. Only when the breeze lifted the leaves of its closely woven roof of vines could a few flecks of sunshine find their way to the gravel below. At the dinner hour the tables in the arbors next the railing along the river wall were always in demand, for there one could see the lights on the bridge dancing in the water-mirror and the fainter reflections from the windows of the chateau in the background. Even at midday, when the morning breeze had died away and the river had settled into sleep, one often had to wait for some old habitue lingering persistently over his coffee and cognac. Something in the lapping of the little waves against the foot of the wall and the shimmer under the willows that fringed the meadows rendered the busiest indifferent to the flight of time.

Under such circumstances it was no wonder that M. Achille, the proprietor, pictured to himself with satisfaction the deserted tables of the Cafe de la Regence in the hot, dusty square. In winter, however, the Hotel d'Italie et d'Angleterre retreated into itself like a snail, and the Cafe de la Regence had its revenge.

On this particular morning the garden was almost deserted. In one of the arbors an officer and his wife were finishing their early breakfast. Beyond, quite hidden by the screen of leaves, a priest was sitting, sipping a glass of sugared water.

It was the hour when M. Achille made his rounds inspecting the arrangement of the tables, moving here a napkin, there a menu, on the white cloths, making sure, like a good general, that all was ready for the assault of noon.

Only in this quiet morning hour did the Abbe d'Arlot permit himself the luxury of the terrace at the price of his glass of sugared water. From his own little garden, inclosed as it was by high walls, he loved to escape from time to time to sit beside this river flowing out from the stillness of Freyr to great cities and the sea. Perhaps in some measure it symbolized for him the life of the race, or even his own. For time was when it ran joyous and free, forcing its way through the hill barriers as in olden days the northern hordes had forced their way through its

valley to southern lands. Tamed now, it ran, obedient, between the stone quays of the sleepy town, by the prim rows of clipped willows as little free to bud at will as the river to change its course. Only in the eddies under the black rock of the chateau was there any sign of revolt or discontent. If these existed in the abbe's heart, they were not visible on his placid face as he sat this August morning, forgetting in the call of the river the open book on his knee. Now and then a voice from the adjoining arbor roused him from his reverie, and he lifted his head, listening for a moment, as if recalling vaguely something once familiar.

"He is abominable, your Minister!" The clear, insistent voice seemed to quicken his memory, for a bright smile illuminated his thin face. Then, lest he should become an unwilling listener, he changed his seat.

Crumbling M. Achille's bread to the minnows at the foot of the wall, her face reflected in the water, her shoes projecting through the railing, the author of this explosion had clearly reached the limit of self-restraint. From time to time she threw a crust at the minnows with an energy which scattered them in a flurry of fear. She had come with her husband to spend his month's leave of absence in the quiet of Freyr, and he had just received a telegram from the War Office summoning him to Paris. What for? Were they going to send him away again? Such a procedure, after three years of separation, filled her with indignation. Would they never allow her little girl to become acquainted with her father? And in an hour he would be gone!

"Abominable!" she repeated, "and unjust."

At this reiterated denunciation her companion, who, having finished the feuilleton of the "cho de Paris," was endeavoring to extract a last crumb of interest from the advertisements, laid down his paper.

"Be a little reasonable, Diane. How can you say a thing is unjust of which you know nothing?" The blue eyes, following the retreating minnows, smiled. Raoul was so logical! "After I have seen the Minister we shall know, and I will telegraph you to-morrow."

"To-morrow, to-morrow! I am tired of tomorrow. Three years of it is quite enough. I want to-day."

"Well, we shall have had half of it at all events," said the captain, who was apt to be literal as well as logical.

"And I want to-day to-morrow, too. Please tell that to your Minister."

At that instant a young girl, her face framed in a long veil, appeared in the terrace doorway. Something in her carriage and gray eyes suggested qualities and privileges which M. Achille had hitherto associated only with the married state. It was, however, to her and not to the elderly persons accompanying her that he was rendering the things that are Caesar's.

"Would mademoiselle sit here, by the fish-pond, or here, behind the box trees?"

As the gray eyes wandered from table to table they met the blue ones at the railing.

"Take this one, I beg of you," said Diane, rising and gathering up her gloves. "From here one can see the river--we have finished."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite, I assure you. Raoul, you are forgetting your paper."

"Diane," said her husband, as they passed out between the box trees, "what possessed you to speak to those people! The English do not like to be addressed in that way."

"English! She is American."

"You think so?"

"I do not think, I know--by ten thousand signs I know. First, no Englishwoman can tie a veil like that. Second, she did not wear an assortment of bracelets--nor furs, though it is August. Third, she spoke French without an accent. Fourth, she paid us the compliment of acknowledging that we were human beings. Fifth--shall I go on?"

"Diane, you are incorrigible. Nothing escapes you, even that which does not exist."

She laughed--her laugh of pure pleasure--and took his hand. "Come, we have barely an hour left." And they went up the stairs hand in hand.

An hour later, when Diane returned to wave a good-bye to her husband as he crossed the bridge in the yellow omnibus, except for the abbe and a solitary waiter laying the covers on the table just abandoned, the terrace was deserted.

"You will reserve this table for me," she said. "I shall be alone."

"Yes, madame."

The yellow omnibus was returning now, and a white trail of smoke marked the vanishing train.

"Does any one live in the chateau?"

"Oh, yes, madame, the Countess Anne."

"Who?"

"The Countess Anne, madame."

"Yes, but--she has a name, I suppose."

"I will ask, madame."

What an ignoramus! she thought.

Presently came M. Achille.

"What does madame desire?" he asked.

"Really, it was not worth the trouble. I asked who lives in the chateau."

"The Countess Anne, madame."

"Yes, I know. But afterward? Not Anne Boleyn, for example, nor Anne of Austria."

M. Achille was visibly perplexed. Every one in Freyr had always said "the Countess Anne."

"Madame is quite right," he stammered, rubbing his hands together, "only--I had not thought of it. You see, being always accustomed--"

"She has lived here long?" interrupted Diane.

"Oh, many years, madame."

"And you mean to say--How extraordinary!"

"Perhaps Monsieur Baudoche, the notary, or the Abbe d'Arlot"--turning to the priest. "I will ask him."

"Oh, by no means. I am not so curious as that," said Diane quickly, becoming aware of her neighbor.

At the mention of his name the abbe had risen. He looked for a moment inquiringly into the blue eyes, then his face brightened, and he came forward with extended hands.

The next evening, Captain Wimpffen, dining at the Cercle Militaire, received the following letter:--

"Imagine whom I have found here! An old friend, the Abbe d'Arlot, who knew me when a little girl in the Convent of the Rue Maure--before you did! He has interceded for me with the Countess Anne, who lives in the chateau we saw on the big rock. Who is the Countess Anne? I do not know. When I asked the abbe he replied, 'She was a Motte-Salignac.' What a singular answer! Never mind. The essential is that she has invited a poor widow and fatherless child to visit her till you return, and that she is charming. As I write, your telegram arrives: 'A mere matter of routine. Will be back in a week.' Mere! And how nonchalantly you erase a week from your calendar! Nevertheless, give my compliments to your Minister. He is also charming. Your - oh, how carelessly we write that word! Therefore I repeat it - do you hear? - Your

"Diane"

And two days later:--

"I am happy. Mind, I say happy--not absolutely happy. It seems the countess is an old friend of General Texier, and that she often heard him speak of my father. She inspires me with the feeling that I have known her for years. The abbe dines here once a week, but in my honor is now permitted to come every night. Last evening there was also a Dr. Leroux. I like him. He speaks his mind bluntly. The

abbe told me an amusing story about him; that a traveler, taken suddenly ill here, telegraphed to Paris for some celebrity, and received the reply: 'What do you want of me, since you have Leroux!' Yet he is content to remain here--one, at least, whom that monster, Paris, cannot devour! Little Diane plays all day in the garden and adores the gardener, who is a murderer. It seems the countess rescued him in some manner from the police. Every one adores him, he is so good. You remember what my father used to say: to be good one must have a chance. How many have I given you!

"There is a portrait of the countess at eighteen, the year of her marriage, in a room which is not used, as if one wished to put the self of that day out of mind. I see no great resemblance between the two women. The one on the wall would make every woman envy her; the one sitting near me makes every one love her. But why should the one wish to forget the other?

"This morning I went to see Madame Leroux. You know I am not curious. But between women there is a sort of freemasonry. I spoke of the portrait. She had never seen it! But, I said, in those days you saw the original--was she so beautiful? For answer she raised her eyes and both hands. And the count? I asked; I do not see any portrait of him. She shook her head. Ah, what manner of wretch must a man be that a wife should flee from him on her marriage day as from the pestilence! But all this is a kind of myth, without substance. One wishes to ask, to know more, but does not dare to. Who was this man whose very name is forbidden? Ask M. de Sade. He knows everything. No, on second thought, do not ask him. I look up from this page into the face of the woman beside me, and I wish to know nothing."

"How industrious you are!"

Seated in the big chintz chair beside the desk where Diane was writing, the countess had taken out the knitting which lay in her pocket, always ready for an idle moment like that of any bourgeoisie of Freyr.

"One would say you were writing a book."

Diane laid down her pen. "No, only a letter, to my husband. But, indeed, once I did begin a book--a journal," she said, sealing her letter.

"Ah!"

The monosyllable was so charged with interest and encouragement that Diane settled herself in her chair." It happened in this way," she began. "Before I went to my father in Africa I read books under compulsion, at appointed times, as one eats." Looking up over her knitting, the countess smiled. "They did not interest me, those books of counsel and meditation, those lives of saints like wooden dolls. I used to say to myself: 'Of what use is a saint in a cell?'"

"It is easier to be a saint in a cell than in life, my dear. Did you not learn that with the army in Africa?"

"Oh, but I saw saints there," cried Diane, sitting up erect,--"the real ones. The nuns used to say war was the making of demons, but I am of my father's opinion."

"What was your father's opinion?"

"That war made men, that all great qualities were born in conflict." She paused. The window where she sat was open. Not a leaf was stirring, not a shadow moved. From the little town whose lights would soon begin to twinkle through the trees not a sound arose. And the peace on the face into which, unobserved, she was gazing seemed a part of the peace of Freyr. It was not possible for such peace, she thought, to be the child of conflict or pain.

"There is some truth in what you say. But tell me about this book, this journal--it must be interesting. Not every woman makes a campaign in Africa."

"At all events, it is not like Raoul's," said Diane, with her flashing smile.

"Imagine, the day we were married he wrote: 'Left Bordeaux at 3 P. M. Arrived Biarritz 7.'"

The countess looked up again. "The important thing is that he loved you at seven as he did at five."

"That is true," replied Diane, in quick assent, "and now, as then."

The countess's eyes turned back from the fresh young face to her knitting. The audacious confidence and happiness of youth! How poor in contrast seemed any other, how artificial and unreal the substitute offered by resignation! "What sort of a journal, then, is yours?" she asked, needles and hands moving again regularly.

"Shall I tell you? You see, when I first went to Africa I found in my father's chest books very different from those in the convent. One of them was the cause of my beginning my journal. It was called 'The Literary Remains of'--some one whose name I have forgotten. But that does not matter, for the book itself did not interest me. It was the title which captivated me. 'Literary Remains'! I said to myself: 'Diane, you, too, will some day die. It may be you will never marry. You will have no children, and there will be absolutely nothing left unless you also have literary remains.' So I began my journal, and I assure you," observing the amusement on the countess's face, "there are some interesting things in it. Do not imagine it is like Raoul's. I reserve it for great events only."

"Such as?"

"Well, for example, once I fought a duel with M. de Sade. If you knew, if I could explain--"

"You need not explain. General Texier told me the story. If I had the courage, perhaps, under like circumstances, I should have done as you did--at your age. And you still write in your journal?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Sometimes it happens, after marriage, when children come, that one thinks less of literary remains."

"Oh," cried Diane, "I do not permit that to make any difference. Raoul has added to my life, but he has taken nothing away." She stopped abruptly, conscious that she had said something she would recall. She was glad when the silence was broken.

"You are fond of your husband, I perceive. You must bring him to me when he returns. He, too, was in Africa?"

"On my father's staff, yes."

"And he fell in love with you there?"

Diane laughed joyously. "I helped him a little. I believe I fell in love with him first. It was in the campaign of Kabylia. He was to command the battalion designated for the assault of a village. All those Kabyle villages, you know, are

on the crests of the hills. There was a council in the evening. Some favored the attack; others thought it impossible, a waste of life, a folly. My father asked the opinion of each in turn. Last of all he asked Raoul. There were no doors in that house, and I heard everything. In that moment before Raoul spoke my heart was torn in two. I thought: If he says 'yes' he will be killed; if he says 'no' I shall be humiliated. In either case I shall be miserable. Why? Then I knew. There came to me a saying of our surgeon, that a man may be a dead man without knowing it. I said to myself: 'Diane, you were in love without knowing it'--and suddenly I found myself in the presence of all those men." She paused unconsciously, as if waiting again for the answer she had waited for in the mud hut in Kabylia.

"And his answer," said the countess's voice beside her, "was it yes or no?"

"Neither. He said it was not for him to pass judgment on orders which he was to execute."

"And that satisfied you."

"Absolutely," replied Diane, with decision.

"And then?"

"Then"--the firm little mouth broke into a smile--"then he knew also. I am sure," she added presently, "you will like Raoul, he is so straight--even when he blunders. He usually begins his letters: 'As I have nothing else to do.' How that exasperated my Cousin Celimene! When he was in Tonkin I used sometimes to read her parts of his letters. 'What a stupid brute!' she would say. 'My dear Celimene,' I said to her, 'if you only knew how easy it is for men to find something else to do.'" She shot a swift glance at her listener's face. Whatever she saw there instantly sobered her. For a reason she only vaguely divined she found herself again on the boundary of a zone of danger.

"I heard Dr. Leroux invite you last night to visit his hospital. Did you go this morning?"

"No. I hope he was not offended. I cannot bear them. The very odor of one makes me faint."

"But in the army -"

"Oh, that was quite different. Then I had to. We were always short of nurses, and our surgeon preferred me to all the others."

The countess's knitting fell into her lap. "I should not have the courage," she murmured, leaning back in the deep chair and looking into Diane's face, "no--never."

"You would have the courage whenever you could be of assistance," said Diane quietly. "It becomes a passion to save life. Courage fails when one can do nothing. To stand beside some poor fellow over whom the surgeon is bending, to see the surgeon rise oh, how well I know the gesture! --and hear him say, 'Nothing to be done,'--and pass on,--pass on to one for whom there was hope and forget the one for whom there was none--that broke my heart. And those last messages -"

"Yes, that must be terrible."

"I used to put them all down, word for word, in my journal. Whenever possible I delivered them."

"That part I could do," said the Countess Anne.

"Yes--but sometimes--I remember one man, in the Foreign Legion,--it would require courage to deliver his message,--to a woman,--they were all to women. We stumbled on him at night, in the field -"

There was a knock at the door, and a servant announced the Abbe d'Arlot.

"Go down, my child; I will join you presently."

Diane rose, obedient. Was she, indeed, a child? Had she always lived in this house? The illusion was so strong that for a moment she almost believed it.

"You say 'my child' as my father used to," she said, touching her lips to the white hair.

The countess took the hand at Diane's side in hers. "It may be that only those who have no child can say it as I do," she smiled. "But run; you keep the abbe waiting."

At eleven o'clock that evening, just as Diane was about to extinguish the candles on her dressing-table, there was a knock at her door.

"What, at this hour!" she exclaimed, as the maid handed her a letter.

"Madame said you were expecting a letter from monsieur this evening, and sent into town. Usually the mail is brought in the morning. Good-night, madame."

How thoughtful! Yes, there was no doubt about it--Raoul's handwriting, and, to judge by the weight, a long letter, too. She wheeled the high-backed chair close to the candles, curled herself up in its deep recess, pulled the hem of her nightdress over her slippered feet, and broke the seal.

"My DIANE [for one brief moment the hand which held the page fell into her lap and the eyes closed],--It is terribly hot here. As it is Sunday and I have nothing to do, I will write you. I saw De Sade last night at the Club. Though he was winning, he left the table at once to inquire for you. The admiration he has for you is inconceivable [a smile crept into the blue eyes]. Most men certainly, especially a man who prides himself on being one of the first swords in France, would sulk after being disarmed by a woman. On the contrary, he boasts of it. He says illusions are dangerous, and that you destroyed the last one he cherished. Have I told you it is atrociously hot here? In spite of all I could do I fell asleep in my chair on the terrace after dinner. De Sade wished to drag me to the opera. As you well know, there is but one person who can do that. When I woke he was at my elbow again. He proposed a ride in the Bois. We returned at two in the morning. By the way, I forgot to say I received your first letter. It is extraordinary, that habit of yours of finding friends everywhere--or shall I say making them? And in Freyr! De Sade asked what the devil you were doing in that hole. He is an amusing fellow, and kept me from falling, out of sheer weariness, from my saddle with gossip of what has occurred during my absence. Your abbe is quite right--she was Anne de la Motte-Salignac, and married that Count de Lussac who was obliged to leave the country. I cannot remember the half of what De Sade told me. There are times when, to speak plainly, he bores me. But he has a curious story about this Lussac--that, after dragging one of the first names of France through all the gutters of Europe, he turned up with the army in Africa. Do you remember that man who defended the priest's house in Palestro? whom we found shot through the lungs when our relieving force came up from Alma? Was not his name Lussac, or Brissac, or something of that sort? What a coincidence if he should be the husband of your chatelaine! De Sade says

as a child he remembers her well--that when he wore curls he was in love with her. He had an idea she was dead. Paris forgets quickly. I expect to finish tomorrow. If possible I shall take the noon train. This place is given over to Americans, whom I am learning to distinguish after your method. Every one has left town except, as De Sade says, a few old bachelors who cannot live beyond the odor of the asphalt. Kiss little Diane.

"RAOUL."

Her eyes had followed down the page mechanically, because it was there before her. But her mind had stopped at the words, "Do you remember that man--" Indeed, yes, she remembered him well. His name was Lussac, not Brissac. He had confided it to her just before the blood bubbled up from the lungs in that awful moment after the surgeon had said, "Nothing to be done,"--and had passed on to his work of rescue, leaving to her the woman's work of consolation. For a long time she sat motionless, the letter in her hand, her eyes staring through the open window, without seeing the stars twinkling above the trees or the vines swaying to and fro in the warm night. "What a coincidence if he should be--" A little shiver finished the thought. She rose quickly, closed the window with an instinctive desire for privacy, and went to the small morocco case on her dressing-table. While unlocking it and lifting the tray her mind went on working. A common soldier--oh, a brave one, a hero, but a common soldier. She had never connected him with the De Lussacs. She took out the red leather volume at the bottom of the case and went back to her chair, turning the leaves rapidly. It was easy to find the page, for the torn fragment fastened to it bore a red stain. It had lain next his heart, and the hand in its failing strength had groped for it in the night as he lay alone under the stars of Africa. The handwriting was firm and clear, with a character of irrevocableness:--

"Some day you will ask for forgiveness--take it now--I give it freely, if only because to carry this weight of hate is more than I can bear. But ask no more--for on that day, if it should come to you, when you will ask for love, though you ask it in tears, it will not be mine to give -"

And then the red stain and ragged edge, as if the bullet had purposely blotted out forever the name of the writer.

She gulped down a little sob and read on, though she had no need to. Could she ever forget it? --that last message, written by the light of a lantern, after covering

the dead face.

"Write it down," he had said; "don't forget it--write it down, as I say it. Tell her that that day is come--and the tears--tell her forgiveness is not enough - that -" That what? She had written it as he had wished, word for word, to the last one the soul had uttered on the brink of the precipice.

Her head slipped back in the curve of the chair, the mind still working on. Raoul had always been astonished at the rapidity of its action and the clearness of its vision. Even when they had disagreed he had been forced to admit, after time had given him the truer perspective, that her quickly reached conclusion had been just. What she saw now was Raoul, tearing the blood-stained page from its place, twisting it in his fingers, and holding it to the flame of the candle till its last shred was ash. In his every motion she followed the train of his thought: This woman had banished the past and was at peace. By what right would she, the stranger, at the whim of chance, roll the stone of oblivion from the closed tomb? To whom did she owe loyalty, mercy,--the living or the dead? for the peace of the dead nothing now could disturb forever. That was unquestionably what Raoul would do. Let the dead bury the dead.

She sat up quickly, tore the page from its fastenings, opened the door, and started down the corridor, a candle in one hand, Raoul's letter and the stained page in the other. No, she did not argue with Raoul. She did not deny that he was right, always tender of woman, and incapable of a cruel word. What is more lawful, more charitable, than to deceive happiness! God Himself withholds the truth. But she also was right, and Raoul, he would have the truth at no matter what cost of pain. With that eclipse of every justifying reason which characterizes the decisions of instinct, she knocked at the door under which she saw with relief a thin line of light. At the same time her hand trembled. Her courage came in crossing the threshold.

The Countess Anne was reading. She looked up, to see a pale little figure advancing resolutely, with a letter in its hand. Instantly, in a flash of thought, she knew that some great trouble had come--not to herself, but to Diane.

"I have a letter from my husband," said Diane. "I wish you to read it"--unconsciously she had crushed the torn page out of sight within its folds--"he is coming to-morrow--to take me away -"

"My dear child -"

"Don't, please don't; but to-morrow, if you will only say that to-morrow--please let me go; you don't understand -" and the little white figure released itself and vanished like a vision in a dream.

Herself white and startled, the Countess Anne sprang to follow it, when a ragged, blood-stained page fluttered to the floor, and she recognized, as in another stranger dream, her own handwriting.

The yellow omnibus of the Hotel d'Italie et d'Angleterre rumbled over the bridge under the clock-tower of Freyr. When in its deepest shadow Raoul lifted the hand in his to his lips.

"Diane, I haven't told you. It was lucky Texier was in Paris. But for him I might be on the way to Senegal."

"It doesn't matter--you're here, Raoul." He thought she would be more surprised. Calm little woman!

The omnibus clattered into the great square.

"By the way, that Lussac -"

"It wasn't Lussac; it was Brissac," she said quickly.

"Oh, was it? It would have been a coincidence, though, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Diane.

"You like her--the countess?"

"I adore her."

"You 're as mad as de Sade. He raved over her."

Silence.

"You must, too, Raoul."

He laughed. "I will if she adores you."

"She does," said Diane simply. "This morning she called me her dear child."

Raoul laughed again, a little proudly, as men will.

IV

THE THREE EXPERIENCES OF LE VIEUX

There frequently exists in a community some individual who, justly or unjustly, is the object of suspicion and aversion, of whom children are instinctively afraid, and about whose life gathers a legend of mystery and evil. Souls being governed by the same inexorable laws of action and reaction which reign in the world of atoms, such an individual usually repays suspicion with suspicion and aversion with aversion, until mutual distrust becomes a fear on the one hand and is returned with hatred on the other. One evening of early summer such a man shuffled into the glare of the Cafe de la Regence, disappearing as quickly into the darkness which encircled this one brilliant spot of the great square of Freyr. At one of the tables which crowded the passer-by into the street, this black shadow, traversing the lighted space like a night-bird, provided a subject for discussion. A young lieutenant of the garrison declared him a harmless fool. The lieutenant had a frank, open face, admirably matching the light blue of his cavalry jacket. His neighbor, the linen-draper, who willingly sipped a glass of absinthe every evening at the lieutenant's expense, and whose closely buttoned coat suggested the shutters which every night guarded his little shop, was of another opinion. He pronounced the man a dangerous character.

"Gentlemen," said M. Surbeck, the commissary of police, as he laid down a double-six on the adjoining table, "you are equally mistaken. He is both."

Meanwhile Le Vieux, as he was commonly designated by mothers in Freyr, who utilized him for disciplinary purposes when children were refractory, indifferent to the interest he had excited, having placed his sou on the counter of the bakery in the Rue de la Cite and possessed himself of the black loaf for which he had come, was shuffling back through the deserted streets to the lane which wound between the vineyard walls to the river.

A man without human attachments is an enigma. To be comprehended, one must have a past, either respectable or disreputable. To descend upon a community without social passports, from nowhere, to have no sponsor, no visible means of existence, to possess nothing, even a name, is to set curiosity in motion and justify suspicion. A man must have had a father, a mother. Who were they?

There must be a beginning to everything. What was the beginning of this existence which, like a comet without antecedents, had silently installed itself in the orderly system of Freyr? The social astronomers of the basse-ville had in vain calculated its orbit. Some fault even had been found with the Countess Anne for permitting the intruder to occupy the ruined hut which vaguely recalled to the oldest inhabitant the ferry existing before the stone bridge connected Freyr with the opposite shore. Originally a mere shelter for passengers awaiting transfer across the river, its present master had converted it into a home. With complete disregard for the necessity of any legal forms of acquisition, when occasion arose to mention it, he referred to it as *chez moi*. Close under the cliff, at the end of the now disused ferry lane, hidden by a wild growth of overhanging trees and vines, it formed an excellent retreat for one in whom the consciousness that he was avoided had fostered a corresponding repugnance to society.

Except for his daily visit to the bakery in the Rue de la Cite, and an occasional detour to the red lantern which marked the spot where Madame Euphrasie dispensed tobacco, his presence in Freyr itself was rare. These visits, however, being always made after nightfall, added to his sinister reputation. During the day he might be discerned from the parapet of the bridge, a black spot under the chateau rock, in a curious boat of his own construction; and, later in the day, Dr. Leroux or the Abbe d'Arlot, descending the path through the chateau wood, occasionally encountered him with the basket of fish destined for the countess's table. These fish were the only known source of the *sous* which found their way across the counter of Madame Euphrasie. Sometimes the countess herself, sitting under the oaks on the terrace, wished to examine the contents of his basket. Certainly some ancestor in his mysterious past had entertained faint conceptions of the distinction which society had established between thine and mine, for frequently on these occasions a well-nigh uncontrollable desire seized him to wrench from its fragile chain the glittering thing which hung just below the countess's throat. Perhaps it was that same ancestor who also implanted in his soul the deadly fear which restrained his hand--a fear, instinctive as that of the wild animal for fire, of something incomprehensible but real, a ubiquitous power which, like an inveterate enemy, dogged his footsteps, and which was visibly imaged in his mind under the form of the commissary of police.

It would have surprised the Countess Anne to know that the fires in the jewel, the mere weight of which on her bosom brought happy recollections, had kindled another fire which belied the opinion of the young lieutenant of chasseurs. Solitude and imagination, which nearly proved the ruin of St.

Anthony, also conspired with the countess's diamond. In the long hours devoted to watching the cork floating from his line on the surface of the river, Le Vieux saw this diamond shining in the blue depths below. Doubtless within those vast stone walls frowning from the rock above were countless such, as well as bits of blue-tinted paper like the thousand-franc notes in the banker's window in Freyr. At a distance the attraction of these things was insignificant. Their propinquity obsessed him. Once in his dreams a whole shower of these notes fluttered down on the thatch of his hut from the windows above the tree-tops, like autumn leaves. What wore into his brain, as the dripping water from the cliff into the rocks at its base, was the damnable iteration of these thoughts. Obviously either a diamond or a thousand-franc note would be of dubious value to him. To hold them in his hand for his own, to know them hidden under his roof, was the sum of his desire. The difficulty of converting them into any pleasure greater than their possession was so enormous that he did not even think of it. Moreover, in the background loomed the shadow of that dread power called the Law, invoked by the inhabitants of Freyr as a blessing, but known to him only as the commissary of police. A plan, at first vague, began slowly to shape itself in his thoughts.

It was while evolving this plan one late afternoon, as he sat smoking in the doorway of his cabin, that an extraordinary incident occurred. A piercing cry, followed by a heavy splash in the water at the foot of the cliff, brought him to his feet. In an instant he had loosened the moorings of his boat and was sweeping under the gray wall of rock in the boiling waters of the eddy known as the "Cauldron of the Devil." A dark object before him disappeared and reappeared again. A few powerful strokes of the oar brought him within its reach. With a decision not to be suspected of a mind whose action was ordinarily so sluggish, he plunged overboard. Below, the river widened, curving along a low reach of meadow. Here, in the quiet backwater, he appeared presently, swimming strongly and evenly, and, on gaining footing in the shallows, the dark object was clearly in his arms. Two small white hands were locked so tightly about his neck that he loosened their hold with difficulty. Stripping off the wet outer garment, he wrapped what he now observed was a little girl in his blouse and began to pick his way along the shore.

On account of the cliff he was obliged to make the circuit of the chateau through the forest. As he proceeded he felt with satisfaction the beating of a heart beneath the blouse--with satisfaction, because it would be difficult to explain what he was doing with a dead child in his arms. No one is more suspicious or

more difficult to convince than the commissary of police. It was with increased satisfaction that, after reaching his hut, he saw in the bundle gently deposited on his bed renewed evidences of life. Stimulated by a few drops from a black bottle, by the warmth of a ragged covering heated before a quickly improvised fire, the child's eyes opened. It did not occur to him that the image of sudden death, so recently present, was the cause of their terror. Had he not himself always been a cause of terror to every child in Freyr? It was necessary to efface himself, to divert attention, to assume his best manner. He began to talk rapidly, incoherently, spreading the wet garments with nervous unconcern before the fire.

"The river is cold--naturally--even in summer--but a drop of brandy--that feels good in the stomach, eh? When I have dried this frock--what a pretty blue color it has! --and these shoes--ah, there is nothing so bad as shoes--they fill with water and that pulls one down like a weight--it is true I am good for nothing--but have no fear -"

The terror had gone out of the child's eyes. "I am not afraid," she said.

He looked up, his blinking eyes filled with a dull surprise and wonder.

"You are not afraid!"

"Why should I be afraid? But for you I should have remained down there."

His face lighted up slowly. "Norn de Dieu! That is true. But for me"--he laughed aloud--"you would have remained down there. And you thought of that!"

"Why should I not think of that, monsieur?"

The question plunged him in still deeper bewilderment. Holding the soaked clothing to the blaze, he gazed into the fire as if slowly digesting some incredible statement.

"Monsieur, now will you please take me home?"

Since when had any one called him monsieur? He roused himself instantly.

"This moment--of what am I thinking? Your mother--"

"I have no mother, monsieur."

"Ah!" He paused. He had committed an error. "No--naturally--that is--but your father--"

"Oh, yes, I have a father."

"So much the better. There!" wrapping her in his warm blouse and taking her in his arms. "Forward! Where does he live--this good father?"

"In the Place de la Republique."

"The Place de la Republique? That is easy to find."

"Yes, at the prefecture."

"The prefecture?" He repeated the word as one who is in doubt whether he has heard aright.

"Yes, monieur. My father"--this a little proudly--"is Monsieur Surbeck."

He stood still as if stunned by a blow.

"You are the child of Monsieur Surbeck?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Closing the door mechanically behind him, he stumbled along the uneven path between the inclosing walls of the vineyards. The commissary of police! The full import of this revelation did not at first disclose itself. It began to grow like a distant and approaching light. Suddenly he muttered aloud, "What luck!" He did not reason this out clearly--perhaps the logic was faulty--he felt it that he held his enemy in the hollow of his hand.

Thereafter he did not speak. It was now late. Lamps were lighted in Freyr. The prefecture was quite dark. The child pointed out a little door in the moss-grown court. Unwrapping his blouse from about her, he stood her gently on the door-step, reaching for the long wire dangling beside the door. It was at this instant that the child, lifting up her face, said, "Monsieur, I would like to kiss you."

A servant answered the summons. M. Surbeck was not at home. Then arose exclamations, cries, the clatter of hurrying footsteps. In the confusion he

escaped.

Bareheaded, his blouse over his arm, the imprint of a kiss still on his forehead, he came before realizing it into the glare of the Cafe de la Regence. His clothes were still drenched with the slime and water of the river. A woman's voice was heard from one of the tables, saying, "It is an outrage to public morality to permit such things." He drew back quickly, but not before a heavy hand rested on his shoulder.

"In what hole have you been digging, you sewer-rat?"

"Monsieur le commissaire," he said humbly, "I have just pulled your child out of the Devil's Cauldron. You will find her on your doorstep."

The rescue of "the little Surbeck" provided Freyr with ample material for gossip. The child herself was made to repeat every detail for the hundredth time. It was admitted that a good-for-nothing had for once been good for something. But what a fool, to reject the good money which M. Surbeck had pressed upon him; to refuse even the new boat ordered by the mayor! The verdict of the basse-ville was unanimous: Le Vieux was "an original." The Abbe d'Arlot, on the other hand, saw in this conduct a proof of his contention that in every soul there existed a seed planted by God. In all Freyr M. Surbeck was the only person who was not astonished. Enemies do not accept favors from each other. To be under obligations to such a man annoyed him. Should occasion arise, the occasion always present to his mind, he would no longer be free. That a personal obligation should interfere with an official duty was inconceivable.

Hardly a week elapsed, however, before the inconceivable confronted him. It arrived in the mail from Paris. Every employee in the prefecture observed that morning that the commissary, always so methodical, so impassive, appeared agitated. At ten o'clock he closed his desk and left the prefecture without explanation--an unheard-of proceeding. The bonne of the Abbe d'Arlot was no less surprised, on answering the bell at the garden gate, to see the commissary before her. Never before had he called upon the abbe. As for that matter, he had never even been seen within the doors of Our Lady of Mercy. The truth was that, while a good friend and neighbor, he had never personally felt the need for the restraints or consolations of Religion, which, in his opinion, like the Law, existed for the benefit of that portion of society which came also under his supervision. For the abbe he entertained the respect due to the servant and administrator of a

coordinate branch of the public service. It was in that capacity that he announced himself as the abbe offered him a seat under the linden of his garden. So far into the morning was the interview prolonged that the abbe's bonne began to be concerned for the soup simmering on the fire. She had almost made up her mind to interfere, and had ventured to the fountain on the pretense of washing the lettuce. From this point of observation she saw with amazement that neither her master nor his visitor was speaking. Upon both these servants of society a silence had fallen. Then she heard the abbe say:--

"Let us consult the Countess Anne."

Curiosity now banished anxiety for the soup, and while still under its influence the two men rose.

"After you, monsieur," said the abbe. And the creaking gate closed behind them.

If the commissary assented at once to the abbe's proposal, it was not solely because of his desire to share with some one his responsibility. The Countess Anne occupied a peculiar position in the social organism of Freyr. Her ministry possessed the authority neither of the Law nor of the Church, yet was scarcely less honored; for, as Dr. Leroux once sarcastically observed to the abbe, her justice was finer than that of the one and her charity wider than that of the other. In certain perplexities, moreover, a man turns instinctively to that other court of appeal, whose procedures are of a different order, since they are presided over by a woman.

Seated in the high-backed chair in the little room which the countess called her bureau, the abbe stated the case.

"M. le Commissaire," he began, "was confronted with a painful necessity" the abbe pronounced the word with great gentleness. "In the discharge of his duty to society he had investigated the civil status of the man known as Le Vieux. This man was now identified. He had committed a crime--the abbe omitted to mention its nature--for which he had been sentenced to a term of years. He had escaped. A complete dossier had been received from the Prefecture of Paris."

The commissary nodded affirmation. "I have the documents here," he said, tapping his breast-pocket.

"Give them to me," said the countess. Evidently she wished to examine them.

The abbe had not been very explicit. "I accept full responsibility for them," she continued, opening the desk before which she was seated and depositing them carefully in one of its numerous pigeonholes.

"But, madame," exclaimed the astonished commissary, "I have my report to make. There are also my instructions."

"Make it, my friend, make it--in strict conformity with the truth. As for your instructions, that is another matter. I also will make a report to the prefect. Consider your duty ended."

"Madame la Comtesse is right," interjected the abbe.

"I promise also," she added, "to restore you these papers whenever in the discharge of your duty you require them of me."

In fulfillment of her promise the Countess wrote to Paris. The reply of the prefect was a model of politeness. He presented his compliments to the Comtesse de Salignac. Her kindness of heart had been imposed upon. The criminal in question was a most dangerous character. He also appreciated fully the feelings of the local functionary. They were most creditable. To arrest a man who had risked life to save an only child was a delicate mission which he would on no account impose upon a public servant whose record was irreproachable. An inspector was therefore leaving Paris that very day to take charge of the affair. And again he had the honor to beg Madame la Comtesse to accept the assurance of his most distinguished consideration.

On reading this letter the countess went at once to her desk and wrote another. It was addressed to General Texier, Paris. After relating the details of the case, she continued:--

"Of what clay, my dear general, is your Prefect of Paris made that he imagines that our friend the commissary can hide his head like an ostrich in the sand while another is doing the work which he shrinks from himself? You or I certainly warn our protégé, and when the agent arrived the bird would have flown. This is what I am resolved to do if I do not receive from you the telegram you will send me. In that case, if I ever have the pleasure of seeing you again it will be from behind the bars of the prison which I see now from my window--for I believe there is a provision in the penal code for those who have the effrontery to thwart the majesty of Justice. But I count upon your influence at the Elysee.

"Do you remember that autumn in the Vosges which I passed so happily with you? We were young in those days; you were thinking of the advancement which you have won and I of the happiness which I have lost. For the sake of those dear hours under your roof and of an old woman who remembers them, hurry, my dear friend, that petit-bleu which to-morrow afternoon I shall be hourly expecting.

"ANNE DE LA MOTTE-SALIGNAC."

Having dispatched this letter, the countess's thoughts reverted to the inspector who doubtless was already on his way to Freyr. What could she do to divert him in the interval? The bells of Our Lady of Mercy were striking four. It was the hour at which she usually visited the hospital. Her donkey Balafre, in charge of the gardener, was already picking his way down the steep path with his panniers of sweets and flowers. Well, to-day she would not go. She would examine those documents of M. Surbeck. They were not pleasant reading. Crime has its sorrowful as well as its sordid aspects. No, they were not pleasant reading. Lost in reflection, the sinister seals of these incriminating witnesses spread before her on her knees, on her desk, the sound of a gently opened door startled her. There is a way of opening a door which sends a shudder through one who hears it. Looking up, she saw a man with a knotted stick in his hand.

Had the abbe been able to look into that soul in which he thought to find the seed of the good God, his optimism would have been sorely disconcerted. A bitter anger against self reigned there. At every step Le Vieux had taken that night, on his way home, this rage had increased. Why had he answered so humbly? Why had he cringed? Because habit had been too strong for him. Because, hatless, besmirched with mud, in the glare of those lights, in the presence of those people, courage had deserted him. And now this man thought to be quits with him for a few bits of blue-tinted paper! Ah, non! Nom de Dieu, non!

The hand on his shoulder had effaced the kiss on his forehead.

Slowly the plan which for a time had lain dormant began to take shape again. Nothing certainly could be more foolish than to reject the freely offered francs of the commissary and to risk liberty for those locked in the strong-box of the countess. One bird in the cage is worth two in the air. Was it a sullen rage against society which prompted him? The desire to defy at all hazards, in a kind of despair, that which crushed him? To explain the complex motives which lie

behind certain human actions is impossible, reason so often reasons irrationally. In all the confusion of this sodden brain one conviction, however, stood out boldly. The hands of the commissary were tied. It was inconceivable that the man who had seized him so roughly before the Cafe de la Regence should ever again lay his hand on the shoulder of the savior of his child. This also was illogical. But it proved that the sewer-rat of M. Surbeck had a heart, since of the stoicism of Brutus he had no conception.

He had not chosen the hour of four o'clock without due premeditation. It was the hour when the countess, accompanied by the gardener, was in town. He chose the daytime because the great Danes on the terrace knew him well. After nightfall they were less respectful. From his place of concealment he had heard the voice of the gardener expostulating with Balafre, who was wont to pause at the angles of the steep descent. The way was clear. He had also noted the little stairway which led from the service corridor. He had seen the countess herself sometimes make use of this stairway when he came with his basket of fish. Evidently, then, it led to her apartments. At its head several doorways confronted him. He chose the first one. One must trust something to luck. But first he listened. He heard no sound but his own breathing. On opening the door, therefore, he was astounded to meet the eyes of the countess fixed upon him. His hand tightened on his stick and a scowl gathered on his face the scowl of a man trapped, who finds more work cut out for him than he contemplated.

"Come in," said the countess; "you are the man I wished to see."

There was no terror in the voice that addressed him. The same astonishment he had experienced at the fearlessness of the little Surbeck possessed him again. He stood irresolute.

"Come in, Monsieur Garat; I have something to say to you."

Garat! His name. He felt the clutch of the commissary on his shoulder.

"You were born at Rheims on the 5th of February, 1847,--here is your birth certificate. On the 24th of December, 1876, in the village of Vigny, you murdered the agent of M. de Seze, who came to collect the rent. There were extenuating circumstances. It seems that you were a good workman, that your wife--but we will pass over these details, whose recital will afflict you. You were sentenced to twenty years of hard labor--here is the sentence of the Tribunal of

Rheims--and you escaped."

A spasm of anger shook the man from head to foot. "Give me those papers," he commanded, advancing threateningly upon her.

"But, my good man," said the countess, "you are mistaken--these are only copies--take them--I give them to you willingly. They are of no consequence. It is with me, not with them, that you have to deal. And, I assure you, I am your friend."

"Ah," said the countess, relating this incident afterward to the abbe, "how terrified I was at that instant!"

But in Le Vieux this quiet, even voice had worked a transformation. His aspect, before terrible, became pitiable. He was again the accused, standing at the bar before his judges, awaiting sentence. And this woman had said, "I am your friend."

"We will arrange all this to-morrow," pursued the countess, seizing her advantage and reaching at the same time for the silken tassel hanging beside her desk." See no one, do nothing above all things, do not fly. If you trust me I will protect you. Therese," she said to the maid who had answered her summons, "give Monsieur Garat a glass of sherry--and bring me one also--I feel a little indisposed."

The following morning Inspector Joly, arriving from Paris by the night express, drove over the bridge from the neighboring station, and at precisely eight o'clock, having finished his coffee at the Cafe de la Regence, strolled leisurely across the square to the prefecture. Clean-shaven, with round, rosy cheeks, he was taken by the solitary waiter, who pocketed the three sous left on the table, for a commercial traveler awaiting the hour when the shopkeepers removed their shutters. After pausing to admire the fountain by Girardon, M. Joly entered the archway of the prefecture. There he found a note to the effect that it was absolutely essential to the success of his mission that he should first consult the Comtesse de Salignac. The word "consult" annoyed him. It implied something derogatory to him in his professional capacity. Furthermore, interference of any kind was distasteful to him. But from long experience he knew the danger of neglecting anything. Having, then, made what he termed his "little dispositions," he set out for the chateau plainly visible from the door of the prefecture.

It was one of his cardinal principles not to form an opinion prematurely. But from the manner in which he said to himself, "Let us now see this countess," it was clear that he did not attach any particular importance to his visit. His reception agreeably surprised him. A little assumption of authority on the part of one belonging to the Old Regime might have been expected. But there was nothing officious in this interference. He was prepared also for possible flattery, a weapon he had frequently encountered in women having ends to gain. The recital to which he listened was so frank, so direct and natural, that before it was finished he experienced the pleasure of flattery without knowing it. For this woman took him into her confidence, the confidence of her loving heart, without tears, without pleadings, as though he were of the same nobility. He admitted that he saw no objection to awaiting the reply of General Texier.

"Nor I," said the countess. "This man will not think of escaping -"

"That would be useless," remarked M. Joly, a little dryly; "I have taken my precautions."

"He is under surveillance, then?"

"It is better in such cases, madame."

"But it was not necessary, I assure you. I myself told him on no account to attempt flight."

The inspector restrained a gesture with difficulty.

"You see, he came last night in this room to rob me. He stood there, at that door behind you, with a villainous stick in his hand. Fortunately, I was armed with the documents of M. Surbeck. 'Monsieur Garat,' I said, 'I know you. You murdered the agent of M. de Seze in Vigny on the 24th of December, 1876. Go back to your home and remain there; I will protect you.'"

"And you imagine that he is still there?"

Between admiration for such courage and astonishment at such credulity M. Joly was nearly speechless.

"I think so. Naturally you are not inclined to agree with me. But I believe I can convince you. Every morning I observe the smoke which rises from his chimney.

I observed it to-day."

The inspector smiled. She would make an excellent agent, he thought.

"You see, monsieur, I am not thinking of this man's body. I wish, if possible, to save his soul. No one in Freyr but Monsieur Surbeck and the Abbe d'Arlot knows what we know. What will a pardon avail him if all Freyr knows that he has committed a murder? Nothing. That is why I ask you to wait a few hours."

"I see," said the inspector.

"There is another request I would make of you," she pursued. "When walking in the forest I observe how, at the rustle of a branch, all its inhabitants take alarm. What will he do, this man to whom I have said, 'Remain; I will protect you,' if he should hear the branch of a tree broken by your agent? Remove this agent at once, I beg of you; and since, in fact, it is I who guarantee you your - " the countess was about to say prey--"I will take his place."

"It shall be as you desire, madame," said the inspector, rising; and as he crossed the terrace he remarked to himself, "Either I have been altogether a fool or very nearly an angel."

A few minutes later the Countess Anne herself followed him down the path. Seeing that she wore her hat, the big Danes began barking joyfully.

"Not to-day," she said, as they tugged at their chains. "To-day I have need of another sort of protector."

After stopping for a moment at the Bureau des Postes et Telegraphes, she rang the bell which dangled in the inner court of the prefecture.

"Would you like to spend the day with me in the woods?" was the proposal she made to the little Surbeck.

"I would dearly," replied the child.

"And would you like to take something to that poor man who saved your life?" she asked, as they passed before the shops of the Grande Rue.

The child's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"Come, then," said the countess, entering the Maison Duval, above whose door were the imposing words "Produits Coloniales."

A man without work, whose wife is awaiting motherhood, whose cupboard is empty, in a fit of despair and anger seizes a knife from the table and buries it in the body of his tormentor. The learned doctor who performed the autopsy testified that the blade penetrated the heart. "He had no heart!" cried out the accused. This outburst, promptly repressed, emphasized in a dramatic manner the extenuating circumstances. Returning at the peril of his life after fifteen years of captivity, this man discovers no trace of child or mother. The only footprints left behind him are those on the pages of the criminal records. To interrogate too closely is dangerous. He therefore disappears beneath the surface of society as a drowning man disappears. Thereafter he is a dead man, alive only to his own consciousness. For him there is no To-morrow--only a Yesterday. And now that Yesterday rose up, menacing. And in the face of this specter a woman had said, "Above all, do not fly; I will protect you."

Through the long hours of the night the waters of the Meuse at the base of the cliff repeated these words incessantly. When morning came he heated a little coffee mechanically, as a man eats in the presence of death. As the hours wore on, the reassuring words which from time to time he repeated began to lose their power. He began to reason, and with reason came terror. "Your name is Garat. On the 24th of December, 1876, you murdered the agent of M. de Seze at Vigny." That was true. And since everything was known, everything was decided. He would be arrested.

As yet he had not opened the door. At every sound he trembled. Yes, it was surely better to fly, while there was yet time--to escape suspense if not justice. Having reached this resolution, he lifted the stone under which his hoardings were hidden, concealed them in the lining of his trousers, and opened the door. Should he trust himself to the Meuse or make the circuit through the forest? Either course was perilous. Or was it better to wait for nightfall?

Just then a little girl appeared, running from between the high walls of the lane.

"Monsieur, monsieur," she cried, "we have come to pass the day with you."

"I cannot tell you how those hours passed," said the countess to the Abbe d'Arlot, as they sat one evening on the terrace. "What diversions I invented, what

terrible silences occurred, what glances were avoided. But for that child it would have been impossible--impossible. But in the afternoon they brought me my petit-bleu from the Minister of Justice. It contained only two words: 'Garat--pardoned.' 'Can you read?' I said to him. 'A little, madame.' 'Take this to monsieur, my child,' I said; 'it is your present to your savior.' After that well, truly, I remember nothing. It was a kind of delirium."

"And you are not afraid to have a murderer for your head gardener?" smiled the abbe.

"Really, my friend," said the countess, "I think more of him than of my two Danes."

V

THE TWELVE GREEN RUSSIAN GARNETS

It was called the "Hotel d'Italie et d'Angleterre." Why? Neither Italians nor Englishmen frequented it. Nor had M. Achille, its proprietor, ever visited these countries except in imagination. Why not "Peking and Timbuctoo?"

It possessed a terrace extending to the river, where it was a delight to dine on summer evenings, especially if one selected a table by the railing, from which one could see the reflections of the lights on the bridge and hear the lapping of little waves against the wall. Its front was overwhelmed by vines, which almost entirely obscured the letters of its Anglo-Italian appellation, and dropped their leaves and blossoms on the awning sheltering the tables on either side of the entrance.

Seated at one of these tables behind the protecting row of box trees, his hands clasped over his white waistcoat, Inspector Joly could observe people walking in the shade of the allee or gossiping on the stone seats. M. Joly preferred society to solitude. He loved movement and the sun. Under ordinary circumstances he would certainly have been amused at the little army of school-children, their knapsacks bulging with books, gathered in awe about the yellow omnibus, which, after so many fruitless journeys to the station beyond the bridge, had returned groaning under such a load of baggage that its passage beneath the low arch of the clock-tower had been accomplished only by a miracle of skill.

M. Achille was beside himself with importance. His entire first floor had been taken. When not adding to the confusion by the multiplicity of his orders, he stood in an attitude of silent contemplation which reminded one of the colored print in the *salle-a-manger*--Napoleon watching the preparations for the embarkation of the army at Boulogne.

All this tumult, however, failed to interest M. Joly. He was reflecting. He had come to Freyr to make an important arrest, and as his hand closed upon the criminal an order from Paris had set this criminal free. M. Joly respected authority, but he was annoyed. He did not approve of pardons. Society was of more importance than the individual. According to his theory, when one has

once definitely entered the criminal class one remains there. To open the cage door is to let loose the hawk. For the woman who had set the machinery of mercy in motion, however, he had conceived a profound respect, having fallen in twenty-four hours under the spell of that public sentiment of Freyr which took it for granted that whatever the Countess Anne did was right. Sitting alone behind the box trees, M. Joly shrugged his shoulders with the air of Pilate washing his hands of all responsibility.

Meanwhile a valet de chambre in a green apron, having dismantled the pyramid of baggage of the lesser objects which decorated its sides, assisted by the driver of the yellow omnibus, was attacking the enormous trunks which formed its core.

"Yes," M. Achille was saying in answer to a question from the sergent de mile, "an American family--monsieur, his secretary, madame, mademoiselle, the valet of monsieur, and two maids."

"Sapristi! It is a caravan," commented the sergent. "From America! From Brazil probably, or Chile!"

"No, from North America, from New York."

"Ah, what a people! To incommode themselves, to cross the sea -"

"Nowadays it is nothing," interrupted M. Achille loftily.

"There is always the danger of shipwreck, to say nothing of seasickness. I prefer travel by land," persisted the sergent, whose journeying, to and fro, under the lindens of the allee, resembled those of the pendulum.

If M. Joly observed and heard all this, it was from force of habit, for he gave no sign. Mechanically he looked at his watch--two o'clock; there was still an hour before the train. Rising, he took a few turns back and forth under the awning, still preoccupied, his hands crossed behind him. On the terrace a young officer was reading the feuilleton of the "Echo de Paris." At his feet a little girl with a wooden shovel was excavating for hidden treasure, regardless of the consequences to her white frock. Leaning against his chair was a red parasol, whose owner was crumbling M. Achille's bread to the minnows at the foot of the wall, her pointed shoes projecting through the railing. The picture was a pretty one and M. Joly adored the picturesque. When off duty, as it were, he found

infinite relief in idealizing. Seeing him contemplating this scene, one expected to hear him exclaim, "Que c' est beau, l'amour et la paix!" But he only shrugged his shoulders again, crossed the terrace to the bureau, and demanded his bill.

"Monsieur does not wait for the omnibus?"

"No, I prefer to walk."

Just beyond the box trees, leaning amicably against the side wall of M. Achille's establishment, was a little shop of one story bearing the sign "Perrin--Antiquaire." M. Joly stopped before its one dingy window, not because he was interested in antiquities, but because he had time to spare, when suddenly his round eyes, wandering over the motley collection of bric-a-brac, became fixed, riveted, upon an object suspended by a string from one of the shelves. It was a Japanese gold coin, rectangular in shape, surrounded by twelve green Russian garnets.

M. Joly had an astonishing memory, which stored up automatically impressions of no apparent importance. This lumber-house of unforgotten things, so invaluable to one of his profession, had not infrequently afforded him precious assistance. At this moment he had precisely the air of a man searching for something in a heap of rubbish. Yes! Now he remembered. The recollections evoked by this object dangling from its string had arranged themselves in their proper places. Madame Raymonde, living in the Impasse Bertrand, one of those pieces of wreckage, the press had said, which storms leave stranded in obscure places,--found dead one morning in her room. The medical examiner had reported death from natural causes, the autopsy having revealed a weak heart. The dead woman had no known enemies, no visitors, no acquaintances even. Robbery was impossible, for she possessed nothing. So the affair was forgotten.

But M. Joly had not forgotten. Standing before this window, his eyes half closed, he had succeeded in dragging out from his storehouse a fact to which these green garnets gave a new significance. Contrary to all the evidence, a neighbor occupying an adjoining room had insisted that Madame Raymonde's death was not a natural one. Why? Had she seen any one? No. Had she heard anything? No. But Madame Raymonde possessed a jewel and this jewel had disappeared. She had seen it once only, by accident, when madame was dressing, concealed in her bosom beneath her dress, and could therefore give but the vaguest description of it; but on one point she was persistent--it was of gold, with a

border of stones like green flames. This theory, contributed by an outsider, the police treated with scant courtesy. The story was pronounced incredible and the jewel a myth. Jewels were invented for display, not concealment. There was nothing to prove that madame possessed any such ornament at the time of her death. No one else had seen it, and it was impossible to possess what never had been seen.

M. Joly smiled as he recalled this conclusion. Professional pride did not prevent him from smiling in secret at the mistakes of his colleagues. Was it, indeed, a mistake? One circumstance certainly had given body to suspicion. According to the version in the press, just before her death Madame Raymonde had engaged a *bonne* and this *bonne* had disappeared as completely as the jewel. It was not possible to pronounce the *bonne* also a myth, yet every effort to discover her had proved fruitless, and M. Joly knew from experience that when the police do not succeed they forget. He admitted that to connect this bit of jewelry with the events of the Impasse Bertrand was a pure speculation; but, methodical as he was, he believed in irresistible impulses--and opened M. Perrin's door.

For a quarter of an hour he examined in turn a Zaghwan embroidery, a Louis XV snuffbox, a decanter of La Granja glass, learning in the meanwhile that M. Perrin had an establishment in Paris, 117 Rue Lafayette. About to take his leave, he paused a moment at the window.

"It is curious, this," he said, detaching the garnet pin from its string.

"It is nothing, it is modern," remarked the shopkeeper, reaching for a chain of seed-pearls spaced with Indian amethysts.

"But it amuses me. At what do you value it?"

"Two hundred francs."

"Come, now, these are garnets, not emeralds." M. Joly was an expert in precious stones.

"That is true," admitted M. Perrin, with increased respect, "but -"

"You have a record of your purchases," interrupted M. Joly curtly.

"Certainly."

"That is prudent. Let us see it. Here is my card."

Having adjusted his spectacles and examined the card, the hesitation of M. Perrin disappeared.

No. 1798. Bought of Jean Dufresnes, concierge, 5 Impasse Bertrand.

Then followed the date and a character in cipher indicating the price.

"Good," said M. Joly, taking a hundred-franc note from the folds of his pocketbook and putting in its place the garnet pin. "You have your professional secrets and I have mine. Good-day, Monsieur Perrin."

"Good-day, Monsieur l'Inspecteur."

Alone in the compartment of a second-class carriage M. Joly smiled again. He stood for a while at the window watching the receding meadows of Freyr, then ensconcing himself in a corner opened his pocketbook. It was most certainly a curious thing--this Japanese coin, with its strange characters and green garnets ranged along its sides. No jeweler would invent a combination so unconventional, so meaningless. And precisely because so unconventional, it must have a meaning--a meaning due to some exceptional circumstance, some personal experience, which it was perhaps designed as a gift to commemorate and keep in perpetual remembrance. Why else should this strange ornament lie concealed in a woman's bosom? M. Joly did not share with some of his colleagues their scorn for speculation. For the very reason that certain facts were missing he found speculation a necessity. He maintained that the role of the imagination was as important for him as for the scientist, whose hypothesis is a fire-ball thrown out into the outlying dark--to illuminate that darkness, not to attract attention to itself by its own brilliancy. His preliminary inspection completed, he took out his microscope. Ah! By turning slightly one of the garnets a spring was released and the back slid gently in its grooves. Inside? Nothing. His curiosity satisfied, he composed himself in his corner, folded his hands, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

When M. Joly inquired for the concierge at No. 5 Impasse Bertrand an old man sitting before the doorway in the sun rose and took off his hat.

"You are Monsieur Dufresnes?"

"At your service, monsieur."

The man leaned heavily upon a stick, his hat trembling in his hand. Beneath his thin white hair a pair of faded blue eyes produced in M. Joly a kind of shock, for this benevolent face assuredly did not conform to the criminal type. In abandoning one theory M. Joly said to himself, "Come, come, now you are forming another." Then aloud, "You have been here a long time?"

"A long time, monsieur."

"Perhaps, then, you can tell me something about one of your former lodgers."

"It is possible."

"Madame Raymonde."

"Ah."

"Why do you say 'ah'?"

"Your pardon, but--you knew Madame Raymonde?"

"Let us say I am a relation," said M. Joly.

M. Dufresnes made no reply. He seemed dazed, looking toward the door of the lodge as if appealing for help.

"Shall we go in?" said M. Joly, leading the way.

A woman was standing before the charcoal fire, a spoon in her hand. "My wife," said M. Dufresnes. She was much younger than he. Her face retained a certain freshness. It was a pleasant face, even a happy one. "Marie, monsieur is a relation of Madame Raymonde. He has come to make some inquiries."

"Ah." The woman laid down her spoon, wiping her hand on her apron.

"Why do you say 'ah'?" repeated. M. Joly.

"I did not know that Madame Raymonde had any relations."

"One always has relations," smiled Monsieur Joly.

"That is true," observed M. Dufresnes.

His wife gave him a quick glance of impatience. In the pause which followed, a clock ticking conscientiously on the mantel seemed to be saying, "What next! What next!"

"She died very suddenly," remarked M. Joly, taking a chair.

"What is it you wish to know?" exclaimed the woman, almost fiercely, approaching her visitor, her hands on her hips.

"It is so dark here. Shall we have a little light?" M. Joly spoke in his most affable manner. There was but one small window and he abhorred shadows. The woman obeyed sullenly, placing the lamp on the table among the vegetables laid out for the evening soup.

"What do I wish to know?" repeated M. Joly, taking from his pocketbook the green garnet pin and laying it softly beside the lamp on the table.

"I wish to know what price Monsieur Perrin paid you for this."

M. Dufresnes's eyes were glued upon the garnets, shining in the dull light of the lamp; his wife's, fixed upon M. Joly, asked, "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I am Inspector Joly," he said.

The woman's eyes filled with anxiety. Even to the innocent the presence of the police is disturbing. One begins to imagine vaguely some unsuspected danger, some forgotten incident, some terrible mistake. Suspicion affrights innocence as accusation terrifies guilt.

"Your husband is ill."

The woman turned quickly, leading the trembling man to the recess, where he sank into a chair. "It is nothing," she said reassuringly; "I will talk with monsieur."

M. Joly was perplexed by the collapse of the man, by the calmness of the woman, standing between him and the alcove in the attitude of an animal

defending its young.

"Sit down," he said politely.

She took the chair indicated, waiting, her hands folded in her lap, as if to say: "Interrogate me."

"Well, proceed," said M. Joly. There was in his tone none of the authority with which he had addressed the shopman. "Tell me all that you know about Madame Raymonde. You have nothing to fear."

She began without reserve, in a low voice and an accent of sincerity. The first shock of alarm gone, the words came freely, as from one who, long troubled by some secret burden, had expected the hour of deliverance.

"Madame came alone, in May. She lived very quietly, doing her own work, going out always at nightfall to make her purchases."

"The evening is not a favorable time to visit the markets," observed M. Joly.

"That is true. I also remarked that. But madame was not communicative. If I questioned her she became silent. Regularly every week she paid the rent. At other times, in passing, she would say, 'Good-evening, Madame Dufresnes,' and I, 'Good-evening, Madame Raymonde,' that was all. The only person in whom she showed interest was my little Rosalie, whom she would send for whenever possible. Often I asked, 'What does Madame Raymonde say to you up there, Rosalie?' 'She sews, and kisses me and tells me stories.' 'What stories?' 'Of great plains and forests where are wolves and much snow.'"

"She was a Russian?"

"I do not know, monsieur. She spoke French as I do. At first she was not cheerful. She had always the same anxious expression. Afterward she became more tranquil and smiled at me in passing. 'Madame is better,' I said to her one day. 'I shall leave you this week; I am going home,' she replied gayly. That evening when she returned she was much agitated. It was the 11th of June. I remember the day well because on Sunday of that week my Rosalie went to her first communion. It was not her habit to come into the lodge. I thought she had received some bad news. 'What has happened?' I said to her, seeing her look about like an animal that is hunted. She took my hands in hers, which were cold.

'Dear madame,' she said, 'I beg of you to listen to me'; then she took this"-- Madame Dufresnes touched the garnet pin--"from beneath her dress, opened it, and showed me a paper within. 'If anything should happen to me--' 'What should happen to you, madame?' I said. Her manner terrified me. 'No one can tell what may happen. Is it so uncommon a thing to die? See, this is how it opens,' showing me and pressing the pin into my hand; 'promise me, if anything should happen, to deliver this paper tomorrow to the person whose address is written on the back.' What could I do! At such moments one promises everything. I thought her mad. Well, I promised; she embraced me and was gone. Afterward I regretted. I said to myself: 'If, indeed, something should happen, something terrible! It is better not to be mixed up in such matters. 'Scarcely had she gone when a woman came asking for Madame Raymonde. 'The fourth floor, the door to the right,' I said. It was so sudden, so unexpected, I answered from habit. The jewel was still in my hand. But I collected myself. 'I think she is ill,' I said; 'I will go and see.' 'Certainly she is ill,' replied the woman; 'I am the bonne she has sent for,' and she went up the stairs. I told my husband it was strange madame had not informed me that this bonne should come. 'Why do you always worry about the affairs of other people?' he said. Nevertheless, all the night I reproached myself for allowing that woman to enter. But you know how it is, monsieur, when one is concierge. Some one comes, asks for some one, and one answers. Early in the morning I said to Rosalie, 'Go and see if anything is wrong with Madame Raymonde; there is a bonne there; ask if madame is ill.' When the child came back she said she had knocked, that there was no sound within. Ah, then I was truly alarmed. I called my husband. It was quite true, as Rosalie had said, there was no sound. The door was not locked; we went in together. The bonne was not there. Madame was alone in bed. I touched her; she was dead. My husband ran into the street. I called for help. Then the police came, the doctor--the whole house was in an uproar."

The woman paused, as though she expected to be questioned.

"Go on," said M. Joly.

"The next day I went, as I had promised, to the Rue Saint-Denis, No. 219--the address on the paper. It was the 12th of June. I asked for Monsieur Meller. 'Yes,' said the concierge, 'he arrived last night.' His room was under the roof. 'Monsieur,' I said, 'I have come from Madame Raymonde.' 'Madame Raymonde?' he replied; 'I do not know her.' 'But I have a message from her,' I said, opening my hand in which was the pin. On seeing it, instantly his manner changed. 'It is

well,' he said. Then I took out the paper, as madame had shown me, and gave it to him--but he did not look at it. 'Go,' he said; 'it is not good for you to be seen here.' I was so agitated I could not speak, even to say Madame Raymonde was dead. I was astonished also that he did not take the jewel."

She stopped abruptly.

"And you did not see what was written on this paper?"

"No, monsieur."

"That is all?"

"That is all, monsieur."

"And you said nothing to any one?"

"Why should I say anything? Did I know anything? All these events terrified me."

"You were not afraid to dispose of this?" asked M. Joly, replacing the garnet pin in his pocketbook.

"My husband said: 'Why not? No one knows of it. We will add the money to the dot of Rosalie.' It is the truth, monsieur."

M. Joly was buttoning up his coat. "I believe you," he said, simply.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, on the way home, "I forgot to ask how much Monsieur Perrin contributed to the dot of Rosalie."

Madame Joly generally shared her husband's professional perplexities. In this instance he had kept silent, all because of the hundred francs paid M. Perrin. It would, he knew, be impossible to explain how the green garnets came to occupy a place in his pocketbook without mentioning that sum. It must not be supposed that these two were not of one mind. On the contrary, the same ambition animated them both, this ambition being a sort of castle in Spain to be realized when, at a certain indefinite age, M. Joly should retire from active work. Having no children, all their economies had this castle in Spain in view--a little villa, in a garden, inclosed by a high wall. Every night, after pulling his nightcap well

over his ears and closing his eyes, M. Joly took a key from his pocket, and having paused just long enough to read the word "Monrepos" in white letters on a blue ground beside the gate, opened the latter cautiously and closed it proudly behind him. Straight before him was a gravel path, with a basin midway between the gate and the house. Other paths meandered between parterres--to each one of which he had assigned its particular arrangement of flowers--on one side to an arbor where he would pause again to sip an imaginary syrup or smoke an imaginary cigar; on the other to a well, destined to furnish the water necessary for the plants. Having finished his cigar and listened to the music of the fountain, M Joly began his duties as gardener, and all this required so much time that he invariably fell asleep before reaching the perron of the house--which thus remained a veritable castle in Spain.

But, on the night of his return from the Impasse Bertrand, he was not thinking of "Monrepos." Who was this woman without resources who paid her rent regularly and whose death, originally the sole object of his inquiries, opened the door to a greater mystery? What was the message, so jealously guarded, delivered to the lodger of the Rue Saint-Denis? Long after Madame Joly had fallen asleep he groped alone in the obscurity of conjectures. He knew that he was not dealing with the amateur who blunders into the clutches of the police as a young partridge flutters into the jaws of the fox; nor with the ordinary criminal who, destitute of originality, commits over and over the same crimes from the same motives by the same methods, and whose capture is only an incident of professional routine.

M. Joly sometimes obeyed impulses, but he did not wait for them; nor did he trust to chance. He began, therefore, a careful investigation of No. 219 Rue Saint-Denis. Within a week the name, age, occupation, associates, habits of its every occupant were in his possession. Among these names was that of M. Meller. The information concerning the latter was incomplete. Was he a commercial traveler? For he was to be seen only for a few days, usually about the middle of the month, and in the interim disappeared completely from sight. M. Joly contended that his best thoughts came, not logically from established facts, but from God knows where--motherless and fatherless offspring. It was thus that the idea came to him to call upon M. Meller on the 12th of the month. He treated this idea at first with contempt, then with incredulity, and finally, seeing that it refused to depart, he adopted and justified it. Madame Dufresnes had delivered the message on that date--M. Meller was in the habit of returning the middle of the month--and about the Japanese coin were twelve Russian

garnets. His ordinary procedure would have been to examine M. Meller's room in his absence. One often obtains interesting information from a room whose tenant is absent. But he resisted this temptation, and on the morning of the 12th descended the slope of the Boulevard and turned into the Rue Saint-Denis. Believing with Napoleon that Providence is on the side of the stronger battalions, he took with him two agents of the secret service.

Yes, M. Meller occupied a room on the court, the fourth floor. Yes, M. Meller was in. "Shall I accompany monsieur?" added the concierge.

"I don't need you," said M. Joly.

"Very well--the second door from the landing, on the left."

At the head of the stairs, M. Joly said to the agents: "You will remain in the corridor. Should I need you, I will call."

At the door he knocked gently.

"Come in," said a voice.

He turned the knob, went in, and closed the door behind him. A man was sitting at a table, reading. M. Joly observed him attentively--a slight figure, narrow-chested, with stooping shoulders, reassuringly insignificant. On the pale face, however, was written tenacity and resolution.

"Monsieur Meller?"

"That is my name."

M. Joly took out his pocketbook. He had quite the manner of a lawyer announcing to some poor devil an unexpected legacy.

"Permit me to sit down," he said, drawing a chair to the opposite side of the table. "I have a message for you." At the sight of the garnet pin the man started, but said nothing. "Here it is." M. Joly released the spring carefully and took out a small roll of paper.

"Very well," said the man, without moving.

"But, monsieur, I beg you to examine it. Such were my instructions."

The man hesitated, then opened the roll. As he proceeded his face assumed a deadly pallor--the paper was a blank. He sprang trembling to his feet.

"Sit down, monsieur," said M. Joly, taking a pistol from his pocket and laying it on the table before him. The man uttered a groan that was terrible. He was not looking at M. Joly. He appeared to be invoking an invisible presence.

"Sit down," thundered M. Joly. "Do you wish me to put a hole through you?"

"If you wish, fire." The voice was that of a man indifferent to consequences, because hopelessly trapped. At the same instant he carried his hand quickly to his waistcoat pocket.

"Ah, wretch!" shouted M. Joly, dashing aside the table and seizing the man's wrist. "Help! Help!"

At his cry the agents burst open the door. To their amazement they saw a man, his arms pinioned to his sides, in the strong grasp of their chief. The next moment this man lay panting on the floor, helpless, handcuffed, his feet bound. Beside him was a broken vial from which exhaled the bitter odor of almonds.

"Dame!" muttered M. Joly, wiping the perspiration from his brow, "here is another who came near having a weak heart."

"You are hurt, Monsieur l'Inspecteur?"

He shook them off roughly. "Ah, rascal!" apostrophizing the figure on the floor, "we nearly made a mess of it." He examined the room feverishly--the closet, in which hung only an overcoat, a wooden box studded with nails, containing a few insignificant articles of wearing apparel. The drawer of the table was empty, the book, a second-hand copy of "Monte Cristo." Watching these proceedings, the man on the floor smiled. In his pockets--nothing. Beside the broken vial lay the garnet pin and near by the pistol. M. Joly replaced these in the deep pocket of his overcoat. Then he sat down, in his customary attitude, his hands clasped over his waistcoat. His little plan had miscarried. He had expected to discover something, and he had discovered nothing. Often perplexed, for the first time in his career he was bewildered. But he understood now the sudden death of Madame Raymonde. What people! To bar with their own bodies, like desperate defenders

of a fortress, the approach of the enemy. And this fortress which they defended, what did it contain?

The man's eyes were closed now. M. Joly, who had put on his hat, took it off, gazing at the pale face with involuntary respect.

A timid knock interrupted his reflections. Opening the door, he saw his own servant.

"Monsieur, madame wishes me to tell you that Monsieur le Prefet has sent for you, and that it is urgent."

"Good," replied M. Joly gruffly, shutting the door in the girl's face.

Although her husband had never received that thrust of the knife in the back, the fear of which often kept Madame Joly awake while her consort was watering the flowers of "Monrepos," yet she had never permitted him to leave his apartment without extracting from him the secret of his destination. While she was brushing his coat and straightening his cravat, there invariably occurred the following colloquy: "At what time will you return?" "Really, now, how should I know?" "You are going--?" "How can I tell! You know very well--" "But if any one should inquire for you." "True," and here M. Joly would confess his destination; after which madame would say, "Be prudent," and he would answer, "Assuredly." It was thus that the message from the prefect came to be delivered in the Rue Saint-Denis.

"Remain here, touch nothing," he said to the agents, "and"--pointing to the body on the floor--"pay attention; he is capable of something. I will go for the authorities."

On the way to the prefecture he was alternately elated and depressed. He held the end of a thread, that was certain; but he did not know where it led. What did M. Levigne want of him? Usually a summons of this kind meant some delicate mission. It was impossible that it should have any connection with the events which had just transpired, and to be interrupted in this manner, at a critical moment, annoyed him. He knew that the prefect thought well of him. He was not surprised, then, when his name was announced, to hear the familiar words: "Ah, it is Monsieur Joly. Let him enter."

M. Levigne was writing. He did not look up, nor did he cease writing. In the far

corner of the room sat a woman, to whom, as etiquette required, M. Joly paid no attention. The silence, broken only by the scratching of the quill pen, was disconcerting. It was a reception to which he was not accustomed.

"It seems," said M. Levigne, at length, "that you are interested in the affair of the Impasse Bertrand."

"The devil!" thought M. Joly, "the place was watched."

"That in your leisure moments"--M. Joly winced at the fine note of irony in the prefect's voice--"you are making inquiries for a woman who disappeared there. Well"--with a wave of the pen to the figure behind him--"here she is."

M. Joly began to understand why the disappearance of this woman had failed to excite zeal of the police. He began also to realize the excess of his own. It was an excellent opportunity, however, to display his mastery of surprise, therefore he remained immobile and silent.

"We are not so stupid here." For the first time M. Levigne laid down his pen and, leaning back in his chair, fixed his eyes upon the inspector. "I repeat, we are not so stupid here as some appear to believe. We do not run after our own agents. Furthermore, we have better employment for your leisure." He paused, as if to allow these words to sink the deeper into M. Joly's consciousness. A vision of "Monrepos" receding into the distance passed before the latter's eyes. "These preliminaries being settled," resumed M. Levigne, taking up a memorandum from his desk, "let us pass to certain facts of which you are ignorant. On the 2d of May it came to our knowledge that the Paris representative of the Russian police was selected for assassination; that a member of the Central Committee in St. Petersburg, with instructions for its agent here, would arrive by the express of the 5th. Unfortunately this person--"

"Madame Raymonde!" muttered M. Joly, under his breath.

"What do you say?"

"I said, 'I understand,' Monsieur le Prefet."

"Unfortunately this person left the train beyond the frontier and for a time eluded us--madame will explain to you in what manner. We had counseled our Russian colleague to go and amuse himself elsewhere for a time. But he has returned, and

it seems the farce is about to recommence. It would be mortifying to invite this gentleman to take so soon another vacation. What you have to do is to discover and apprehend this agent. I say apprehend, for these people have an inconvenient way of eluding the interrogations of justice. Madame, here, has given us a body-- what we want is a man."

"I have both," said M. Joly.

"You have both! What do you mean?"

"I mean, Monsieur le Prefet, that the agent you seek is called Meller; that at this moment he lies on the floor of a room in the Rue Saint-Denis, No. 219, bound hand and foot and is at your service."

"Not possible!" exclaimed the prefect, less skillful than his subordinate in mastering surprise." Explain yourself."

Concisely, modestly, as if making a commonplace report, M. Joly related the story of the green garnets from the hour when he first saw them dangling from the shelf in M. Perrin's window till, having finished his recital, he laid them respectfully on the prefect's desk.

M. Levigne examined them attentively, released the spring, and closed it again, with a deep sigh of mingled relief and astonishment.

"You have done a good piece of work, Monsieur Joly. For the present this belongs to the State. But we shall not forget you."

"Monsieur le Prefet," said M. Joly, twisting his hat in his hand, "if I might repeat a remark you have just deigned to make -"

"Repeat it."

"That we are not so stupid here as some would appear to believe."

VI

AURELIE

Some months before her death the Countess Anne gave to Antoine, the child of Pere Bigot, chief of the wood-cutters of Freyr, a wooden soldier. Antoine was far too young at that time to play with so brave a toy, and later, after the countess's death, it became far too sacred a relic of that lady of blessed memory to be put to any common use. And thus it happened that it stood year after year on the black shelf above Antoine's bed, beside the blue-robed image of the Virgin, and in Antoine's eyes, being thus enshrined within the halo of forbidden things, acquired a sanctity equal to that of the Holy Virgin herself.

It was a very martial soldier, erect and resolute of mien, its musket, the butt of which rested beside one gaitered foot, pressed firmly against the right shoulder, and having to Antoine the appearance of being loaded and ready for action.

Now one morning when Pere Bigot, having finished his breakfast, was lighting his pipe preparatory to going to the wood, and Antoine was being dressed, something very remarkable occurred. Mere Bigot was buttoning his blue blouse, and Antoine, standing on the bed, his eyes fixed on the wooden soldier, his lips close to his mother's ear, whispered:--

"Mother, it talks."

"Eh?" said Mere Bigot, struggling with an obstinate button which refused to enter its hole.

"It talks," repeated Antoine.

"What talks, my child?"

"The soldier of the Countess Anne."

Madame Bigot first looked at Antoine in alarm, then she laughed.

"What does the child say?" asked Pere Bigot, taking his axe from its nail.

"He says the soldier of the countess talks."

"What an idea!" said the wood-cutter, and he went out the door chuckling to himself at so droll a thought.

"It is at night, is it not?" said Mere Bigot.

Antoine nodded.

"It is one of the dreams the good Virgin sends to well-behaved children," said his mother; and reassured by this inspiration she went about her morning's work.

Antoine was silent. He knew better, but being wise of his years, knew better also than to argue the question.

When he was eight years old misfortune came. His mother died, and within a month Pere Bigot was killed by a falling tree in the great forest of Freyr, and Aunt Pelagic reigned in their stead. Perhaps it was because Mademoiselle Pelagic had never known the pangs of motherhood that she had so little of a mother's sympathy. Be that as it may, Antoine gave little love where little was asked, and became more passionately attached to the one companion left him. Every day he looked forward to the coming night; for when the house was still, the little wooden soldier laid down his musket, unslung his heavy goatskin knapsack, and after carefully placing his big black shako beside it, drew his pipe from his pocket and sat down on the edge of the mantel, his red-trouserred legs dangling in space.

"Be careful not to fall," Antoine would sometimes say.

"Be tranquil; I am accustomed to precipices," the wooden soldier would answer.

When his pipe was well lighted, he usually began by saying:

"Antoine, are you asleep?"

"No, Monsieur Nicolas," Antoine would whisper under his breath, for Aunt Pelagic slept in the bed the other side of the Virgin. Why he called the wooden soldier Nicolas came about in this way: He had often heard his father speak of an uncle of that name who was killed at Sedan, and having mentioned this fact one night, and finding it inconvenient to converse with a soldier who had no name,

he said:--

"I would like to call you Nicolas, monsieur."

"Very well," said the wooden soldier; "when a man is dead a name is a matter of no import."

"Are you really dead?" asked Antoine.

"Most certainly," replied Nicolas. "I was killed at Marengo. That is to be regretted," he added, sighing. "I should like to have seen Austerlitz."

"Did it hurt you very much?" inquired Antoine.

"There are worse things, my child."

"Will you tell me about one of them, Monsieur Nicolas?"

"Willingly."

Thereupon Antoine folded his hands above the counterpane and composed himself to listen.

"I was born on the 14th of July, the day of the taking of the Bastille, but fifteen years before, in the year 1774. My mother was a very pious woman, who kept a statue of the Virgin above her bed, as you do. That is why I am content to stand so many years on this shelf beside this image--not because I have any particular affection for the Virgin, but because I am reminded of many things which no longer exist except in memory."

"But do you not love the Virgin?" interrupted Antoine.

"I am a practical man," replied the wooden soldier; "therefore I concern myself only with what is to be seen."

"But," interrupted Antoine again, "the Virgin is sometimes to be seen. I have heard my mother say so often."

"That is possible," said Nicolas, shifting one leg over the other and pressing the tobacco down into the bowl of his pipe. "I will not deny that of which I know

nothing. On that point you must consult Mademoiselle Pelagic. I have noticed that women are more versed in such matters, and very probably she has some experience. Without experience it is impossible to affirm or even to invent anything worth listening to."

"It must be Aunt Pelagic has no experience," replied Antoine, after a moment of reflection, "for she never tells me any stories."

The epaulettes of the wooden soldier trembled with laughter.

"I would not address her on that subject," he said. "The lack of experience is something of which ladies of her condition do not like to be reminded. Well, as I was saying, when I was nineteen years of age I fell in love. You have not yet fallen in love, Antoine?"

"I think not, monsieur. Should I do so?"

"As to that matter there are various opinions. It is certain that without that experience you will remain in ignorance of many things, like Mademoiselle Pelagic. However, should you do so, have a care. It is a serious business."

"I will recollect what you say," replied Antoine submissively.

"When that malady attacks you, you will know it. Yet it is the easiest thing in the world to fall in love. It seems only yesterday," pursued the wooden soldier, laying down his pipe, "that I was walking down Rue de Petit Savoyard. There was a pastry-shop on the corner of Rue de la Tourelle--so called because of a little turret which ornamented one of its houses. I was looking at the big gingerbread cakes, made with honey and stuffed with nuts, when Aurelie stopped also before the same window. I knew her name, because presently the old servant who accompanied her said, 'Mademoiselle Aurelie, we shall be late.' I turned to see whom she was addressing, and at that moment Aurelie turned also. We gazed into each other's eyes the time it would take to discharge my musket, not more--and instantly I was in love. So was Aurelie. She told me such was the case afterward. There are moments in one's life so charged with wonderful revelations that we return to them again and again in the vain endeavor to understand their full meaning. I swear to you, Antoine, that if I had never seen those blue eyes again, the look which they lodged in my heart would have remained to this day, like the bullet which I have carried in my leg since Rivoli. Some day I will relate to you how I received that bullet."

"To-night I prefer to hear about Mademoiselle Aurelie, Monsieur Nicolas," said Antoine softly.

"It is very difficult to describe her to you," continued the wooden soldier. "I have here"--he tapped his tightly buttoned coat--"her miniature, which I would gladly show you if it were possible to light a candle without waking Mademoiselle Pelagie. But to know Aurelie a miniature is not sufficient. One must know her soul, as I know it." And in the darkness Antoine heard a deep sigh.

"But, monsieur," he ventured, "you said you concerned yourself only with what is to be seen."

"Are we to converse on that subject, or shall I continue my story?" said the wooden soldier severely.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Nicolas," said Antoine.

"You foresee, doubtless, that I followed Aurelie, at a respectful distance. She did not turn her head; nevertheless it seems she knew of my presence. Of all these things we talked in confidence afterward. To my surprise I discovered she lived within a stone's throw of my father's. It happens often that one's joy or one's woe is a near neighbor when one does not suspect it.

"The course of our love ran very smoothly. Aurelie had no mother, and her father, being a savant, lived very retired, immersed in his researches. These circumstances aided us greatly. The house in which she lived was situated on the outskirts of the city. Behind it was a garden, through which a straight walk, bordered with acacias, led to a small pavilion on the edge of a stream which was shadowed by willows, and beyond which stretched meadows where cattle were pastured. It was a spot made for lovers. A wooden bench, sheltered by climbing vines, rested against the wall of the pavilion, which was of two stories, and I soon ascertained that it was the habit of Aurelie to sit on this bench while her father was occupied in the room above with his studies. I also contracted the habit of coming to this spot in my skiff, and of passing the evening with Aurelie. In those days I was called Louis. The first time when, on approaching the spot, I said 'Mademoiselle,' very softly, she replied, 'Is it you, Monsieur Louis?'

"You are not asleep, Antoine?"

"No, monsieur," replied Antoine.

"Well, then, I wish to observe to you that probably when Mademoiselle Pelagic gives you advice on the subject of love, she will have much to say upon the propriety which a young lady should maintain on such occasions. But do not give too much weight to what she will say. When love is innocent, like Aurelie's, everything is permitted. I remember, for example, on that first evening she said, 'Be careful, Monsieur Louis, the step is covered with moss and is very slippery.' Do you think I reproached her because she thus naively invited me? Not at all. The thought ravished me. We sat a long time in silence-- a silence in which nevertheless we said many things to each other. I think we did not speak at all until she said, 'It is time to retire, Monsieur Louis.'

"After a certain number of nights I dared to touch her hand--a little hand, very soft and warm, whose touch was heaven to me. Sometimes Monsieur Lebrun, her father, would open the window above and say: 'Aurelie, I shall remain late this evening. You had best go to bed.' Sometimes the old servant would appear at the door at the end of the path with a lighted candle and say: 'Mademoiselle Aurelie, you will take a cold. It is more prudent to come indoors.' Ah, those moments of parting, how sweet they were!"

The wooden soldier took so long a breath at this point that Antoine feared he was about to resume his shako and musket.

"Love like ours, my child, proceeds rapidly. It is impossible to resist it. Having once possessed myself of Aurelie's hand, I wished to possess myself of everything that was hers; and in the darkness of those summer nights we sat clasped in each other's embrace, forgetting that there was any other world but ours, or any other heaven than that of our lips and the pressure of our arms.

"One evening, as I heard the stream gliding by so swiftly and so silently, I thought that life, too, was passing in the same inexorable manner.

"'Aurelie,' I said, 'I am going to ask my father to demand your hand in marriage.'

"Until that moment the thought of marriage had not occurred to us, and I was astonished at the change which my observation wrought in her. She slipped from my arms without a word and vanished so quickly that I scarce heard her footsteps on the gravel of the path. The next evening she did not come, nor the next. I was desperate, and my despair gave me courage to speak to my father.

"I seized upon an occasion when my mother was present, for I had already

confided to her my secret and counted upon her support.

"My father,' I said, 'I beg of you to request of Monsieur Lebrun the hand of his daughter.'

"After what seemed to me an eternity, and after exchanging a glance with my mother which implied some previous understanding, he replied:--

"Mademoiselle Aurelie is a respectable girl. I will speak to Monsieur Lebrun on the subject, and if she is favorably disposed and he is inclined to make suitable provision, we have no objection. You are of an age to establish yourself.'

"I should be quite pleased to have for a daughter a person so modest and well behaved,' said my mother.

"I pressed her to my breast for joy. 'Do not take this too much to heart, ' she said, seeing my emotion; 'between wishing and having many things are possible.'"

The wooden soldier had risen to his feet and was walking to and fro before the image of the Virgin.

"Ah, my dear mother," he exclaimed, "what sinister foreboding possessed your soul at moment! Antoine," he continued, stopping just above the bed at the end of the shelf, "when no cloud obscures the sky, when your heart is bursting with happiness, and evil seems incredible, have a care! Fortune is about to play you a trick."

Antoine made no answer, but he shivered under the bedclothes.

"You will not be surprised when I tell you that Aurelie had had other suitors. Rivals are not generally included among those things to which love is blind. But they did not trouble me. Absorbed in my own happiness and the certainty of Aurelie, the rest of the world was as if it did not exist. As I have told you, I was born in 1774. At the time of which I speak I was nineteen years of age. When you have mastered the science of numbers," said the wooden soldier, counting his fingers, "you will find it was therefore the year 1793. In that year every man's hand was turned against his neighbor in the name of fraternity, and tyrants preached the equality of man. It is fortunate for you that you live in days of peace and tranquillity. When you are older you will study that uprising of a nation and lament all those follies which stained the purity of its ambition and

divided with the sublimest deeds the energy which so astonished the world. Our city of Lyons had revolted against the sanguinary policy of the Jacobins, but had at last been forced to open its gates to the armies of the Convention. And then came that monster of modern times, Couthon, to carry into execution the decree of the Convention, Lyons is no more!

"Both Monsieur Lebrun and my father were in too modest circumstances to fear the rage of parties, but so great was the injustice of those times and so insecure the life of the humblest citizen that we thought it more prudent to retire to a small vineyard which we possessed in a remote suburb of the city. I had begged permission of my mother for Aurelie to take refuge with us, and it was arranged that after accompanying my parents to the country I should return for her. We had no difficulty in reaching the small farmhouse situated among my father's vines, for we had been in the habit of making frequent journeys to and fro, and this custom was well known to the authorities. So, the morning after our arrival, leaving my father as a protection for my mother should that need arise, I set out for Lyons in our high two-wheeled cart with the peasant who cultivated the vineyard. You can imagine with what happiness I snapped my long whip as we jogged along the white road, and with what joy I anticipated the presence of Aurelie under our own roof, as if already the priest had united us and I were bringing my bride to my fireside. Monsieur Lebrun, although my father reminded him that he had once dedicated, by royal permission, a treatise to the late king, had refused to abandon his investigations and was to remain in the city.

"You might suppose that, in times such as those through which we were passing, all the ordinary avocations of life would be suspended; that men and women, terrified by so much slaughter, would hide themselves. But it was not so. Women chatted in the doorways when heads were falling on the scaffold, and only on certain days of exceptional madness did the shopkeepers lower their shutters, waiting behind closed doors for the storm to pass. It was on one of those days that I returned to Lyons for Aurelie. Couthon had already begun his work of extermination, and as we drew near the city gate we met long files of wretches, chained together, whose clamor the grapeshot of his cannon was soon to silence—for the guillotine was too slow for his vengeance. We passed, however, through this tumult in safety and came at last to my father's house, on whose walls I observed with amazement were written the words, 'This house to let.' 'What is the meaning of these inscriptions?' I asked of a citizen standing near, for I saw that other houses also bore the same words. 'It is the new method of announcing that the owners of these houses have no further use for them,' laughed the

wretch. I leaped from the cart and ran with all speed to Aurelie's door. The same dread words were written on its portal. A frenzy of fear and rage seized me. I hurled myself against the door. It was bolted. I beat upon it with both hands--"

A loud crash, which almost stopped the beating of Antoine's heart, followed. Had the wooden soldier fallen from the mantel? Was he killed for the second time? Mademoiselle Pelagic, startled from her sleep, had sprung from her bed, and in her long nightdress and blue cotton nightcap was tremblingly lighting a candle.

Antoine, scarcely daring to look, gazed with the fascination of fear through the shadows at the mantel, and when the flame of the candle had become steady, there stood the wooden soldier, his shako on his head, his musket pressed firmly against his shoulder, his coat tightly buttoned over the miniature of Aurelie.

"God preserve us!" cried Mademoiselle Pelagic. "The Blessed Virgin has fallen and is dashed into a thousand pieces."

By one of those coincidences which give rise to the idea of fate, on the very morning of the fall of the Virgin a wandering vender of images stopped before Mademoiselle Pelagic's door. Antoine, on his way to school, had met this erect figure, bearing aloft its tray of images, under the arcade of the Hotel de Ville, and to his vivid imagination it seemed as if one of the caryatides sculptured by Jean Goujon for the chimney of the great hall in the Mairie had eluded the vigilance of the concierge and had stepped out into the street with its frieze of dancing figures for a morning's walk. All the heroes of history and legend elbowed one another on the carefully poised shelf; but most wonderful of all was a Virgin wearing a mantle studded with stars and having a golden aureole about her head. Mademoiselle Pelagic had just removed the last traces of the night's tragedy when the shadow of this image fell upon her threshold. Certainly it was nothing less than providential that almost at the very moment she was consigning the shattered fragments of one Virgin to the dust-heap another should appear at the open door. Skilled in reading the eyes of his customers, the peddler carefully disengaged the Holy Mother from her dangerous position between a Cupid and a Satyr and, glancing about the room, observed with an air of apparent surprise:

"Madame has no image of the Blessed Mary?"

"How much is it?" asked Mademoiselle Pelagie, who was of a practical turn of mind.

"A mere nothing--a hundred sous," replied the peddler.

Mademoiselle Pelagie's countenance fell, and she straightway began to busy herself at her oven as if the matter possessed no further interest for her.

"Very cheap--hundred sous--very fine image," persisted the tempter.

Mademoiselle Pelagic made no answer.

"Look very nice here," he continued, enthroning the statue on the now empty pedestal beside the wooden soldier, "very nice. You look here," he exclaimed, with sudden interest, "you no want soldier-- soldier no good--you give me soldier and three francs--I give you Our Lady."

Mademoiselle Pelagic closed the oven door and went over to the mantel.

"I no like wooden image--wooden image no good--I only wish please you."

Mademoiselle Pelagic was reflecting. Antoine was certainly too old now to care for such a toy. For a long time, it is true, he had been too young to appreciate it. That this reasoning left no time at all for him to possess the gift of his benefactor did not occur to her. The sole question now was to make a good bargain. "For two francs, yes," she said, crisply. And the wily son of the South, who was also a good bargainer, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Very good--to please madame."

Thus it happened that the wooden soldier took the vacant place between the Satyr of Praxiteles and the Cupid of Lysippus, marched down the winding street, and, after a glass of wine at the Sign of the White Fawn, disappeared with the miniature of Aurelie on the road through the meadows.

Never before had Antoine so studied the clock as on that morning at school. On his way thither he heard the drum of the town-crier in the great square and saw the army of Couthon defiling through the streets of Lyons. He had lingered for a moment before the gingerbread cakes in the window of the grocer, with an occasional wistful glance behind him, as if at any instant Aurelie might suddenly

appear at his elbow. More than half of the Departments of France, which he usually enumerated so glibly, refused that morning to answer the roll-call, and the figures on his slate assumed strange, ungainly shapes. Never had the wooden soldier interrupted a narrative in so agonizing a manner, and in spite of the respect he felt for the Virgin he could not forgive her for taking so inopportune a moment to precipitate herself from the mantel. Or had Monsieur Nicolas himself been the cause of the catastrophe?

"Antoine," exclaimed his teacher, "pay attention. You are dipping your pencil in the inkwell."

All the way home he sang happily, for half the day was gone, and though he feared what he should see behind that door on which Couthon had inscribed those terrible words, "To Let," as with many older and wiser than he the desire to know the worst was irresistible. His first glance on his return was for Monsieur Nicolas. He was gone! For an instant Antoine remained stupefied. Except at night the wooden soldier had never before moved from his place. Faithful and vigilant, like a sentry at his post, without this silent figure the room no longer seemed familiar. There was, moreover, a strange Virgin on the shelf. He turned a bewildered face to Mademoiselle Pelagie.

"Where is Monsieur Nicolas?" he stammered.

"Monsieur who?" said his aunt, not comprehending.

"The soldier of the Countess Anne."

"He has gone to take a promenade," replied Mademoiselle Pelagie evasively.

Antoine was dumbfounded. The real and the unreal danced wildly together in his little brain. A vague fear began to take possession of him, for Mademoiselle Pelagie's manner inspired no confidence.

"Come, come," she said, at the sight of two gathering tears in his eyes, "be a man! Of what use is a wooden soldier?"

To be a man! He desired nothing better. All the teaching of Monsieur Nicolas was an inspiration to manhood. Anger began to swell in his heart. His little fists were clenched. Be a man! Rage made him one.

"What have you done with Monsieur Nicolas?" he demanded, choking back the sob rising in his throat.

"I know nothing of your Monsieur Nicolas," replied Mademoiselle Pelagic tranquilly, for she much preferred anger to tears; "but if you mean that ugly little soldier of the Countess Anne, I have exchanged it for the Virgin you see on the shelf. Perhaps you will cease now to destroy things in your sleep."

Antoine did not even notice so unjust an accusation. The one friend of his life was gone. Anguish struggled with anger, but a fixed determination began to take shape in his mind. He remembered now the Italian peddler seen on his way to school. He recalled even the figure of the Virgin whose shining aureole had towered above the head of Cupid. The whole nefarious transaction was revealed with a startling lucidity.

You who are now a man, accustomed to sorrow, to whom disappointment is no stranger, who can now sigh when formerly you cried out, and who have tamed the rebellious crew that once threatened your reason, recall one of those bitter griefs of childhood when the very structure of the world seemed tottering to its fall with the loss of a wooden soldier. Yes, he would be a man! He would follow that brigand peddler to the ends of the universe.

"He will have a good cry," thought Mademoiselle Pelagic, as he disappeared through the door, "then all will be over."

But the soup grew cold and Antoine did not return. In the afternoon it began to rain. As evening approached, alarm rather than affection prompted frequent excursions to the doorstep, where Mademoiselle Pelagic's gaunt figure was to be seen peering into the gathering darkness. "Have you seen my Antoine?" she asked of a neighbor. And again, of a farmer returning from the country, "You have not perchance seen a little boy with a brown velvet cap?" No, they had seen nothing. While eating her supper in silence a kind of panic seized her. After all, she was responsible for the little imp. Where was he? She resolved to consult Madame Berger, and throwing her skirt over her head, she made her way down the deserted street to the narrow line of light shining between her neighbor's closed shutters. She made no mention of the wooden soldier, and Madame Berger, the mother of so large a family that the temporary disappearance of one of its members was not a matter for great concern, comforted her somewhat.

Meanwhile a little bedraggled figure was stumbling homeward along the uneven pavement. Stained with mud, his blue blouse discolored by the rain, Antoine was scarcely recognizable. So furious was the wind that only by pushing with all his strength could he close the door behind him. Out of breath, surprised and pleased at finding himself alone, he stood for a moment rubbing away the drops which trickled into his eyes from the visor of his cap, two little pools of water forming on the floor from his dripping clothes. Exhausted as he was, it was evident that his mind still struggled with a purpose not yet accomplished; for as soon as breath was recovered he pushed a chair under the mantel and climbed upon the seat. Tired, cold, soaked to the skin, triumph shone in his eyes, for beneath his blouse, close to his heart, was the wooden soldier. Carefully uncovering his precious treasure, he set it in its accustomed place, and then, at last satisfied, sitting down before the shelf, he contemplated his friend with a smile of supreme contentment. It was in this attitude Mademoiselle Pelagic found him. To her inquiries and reproaches he made no answer. He submitted without resistance to the removal of his drenched clothes, to the hot tisane prepared for him, in spite of which even in his warm bed a cold chill shook him at times from head to foot. But that did not matter. Monsieur Nicolas was safe.

Poor Antoine! It was so much easier to be a man in spirit than in strength.

Although wanting in affection, Mademoiselle Pelagic was not without a conscience. Under its goadings she sat far into the night by Antoine's bedside, holding his feverish hand in hers. From time to time she looked up at the wooden soldier. Had pleadings softened the peddler's heart, or had the little rascal stolen it from some dark corner where it reposed while its owner was finishing a glass of wine? At all events, there on the shelf were both images--for two francs!

She had just fallen into a doze when a piercing cry brought her to her feet. Antoine, standing upright on the bed, was beating the wall with his clenched fists, crying, "Open! It is I. It is Louis!" With much persuasion she induced him to lie down again, and now thoroughly frightened, having carefully secured the covering under his chin, she ran for Madame Berger.

"Watch with him, dear madame," she begged, "while I go for Dr. Leroux. The child is gone clean out of his head."

Day was breaking before Dr. Leroux arrived. It was not necessary to explain to him that the child had "taken cold."

"You will explain all this to me," he said gruffly, "after you have done what I tell you."

When his instructions had been carried out, he turned angrily to Mademoiselle Pelagic. "On what miserable errand did you send this child in such a storm?"

"Monsieur," she whimpered, "I did not send him. He went without my consent. He has caused me great anxiety."

"Well, he will cause you no more," was the stern reply.

Mademoiselle Pelagic sank trembling into a chair. The oppressive silence was broken only by Antoine's labored breathing.

"Monsieur le Docteur," began Madame Berger, "when my Ambrose had pneumonia we rubbed his chest with tallow--"

"Hush!" Antoine was raising himself on one elbow. "What do you wish, my little man?" said Dr. Leroux, forcing him back gently on the pillow.

"I wish--I wish--to speak to Monsieur Nicolas."

"Who is Monsieur Nicolas?" asked Dr. Leroux, looking up at Mademoiselle Pelagic.

"The soldier of the Countess Anne," she whispered.

"Give it to him."

She took the wooden soldier from the shelf and gave it into Antoine's outstretched hand. He nestled it in the pillow beside his cheek with a deep sigh of content.

Dr. Leroux was thinking of the Countess Anne, of the day when she had lifted her little protégé in her arms, lavishing love on what was not her own, as now he saw it lavished on a wooden toy. He looked at Mademoiselle Pelagic and frowned. "Love that might have been yours," he thought.

Three times again, the next day, he stood at Antoine's bedside. It was the old story--a little success here and there, but in the end Death always victorious. The

lesson was as bitter to him now as when he first learned it. The soldier of the Countess Anne stared at him from the pillow.

For the sake of his old friend he stooped and kissed gently the hot brow. A faint smile spread over the little face and the lips parted--"Aurelie," they murmured.

But Dr. Leroux did not understand. The next time he came the brow was cold. Beside the tangled hair the black shako of the wooden soldier lay quietly, the tightly buttoned coat, under which the miniature of Aurelie was to remain forever concealed, pressed against the still, white cheek.

VII

CELIMENE'S DIAMONDS

For Inspector Joly a fisherman on the parapet of the Seine constituted an almost invincible fascination. It was quite impossible for him, when near the quays, to resist the impulse to join the stragglers watching the issue of the duel going on beneath the surface of the water. For he, too, was a fisherman, though of a different kind. To bait the hook and wait patiently was a part of his professional duty. Any one so occupied excited his interest and elicited his sympathy.

But it was curious to observe how completely these disappeared when the bait was taken. Success produced a sort of mental collapse. In his own operations, it is true, to succeed was to discharge a duty to society, to experience a satisfaction of a moral order. Yet when he asked himself how far this moral satisfaction accounted for his zeal, he was obliged to admit that the discharge of duty was not the source of his keenest pleasure. Observing one day the favorite cat of Madame Joly sitting patiently before the hole in the wainscoting of the pantry, he said:--

"After all, the real pleasure is there."

"What did you say?" asked Madame Joly.

"I said that if I were not an inspector of police I should be a gambler."

"I think," she remarked, dryly, "if you gambled you would be on the side of the bank."

M. Joly always smiled, therefore, when his fellow fishermen were credited with patience--a virtue required when waiting compromises success, not when it contributes to it.

It was this virtue he was endeavoring to exercise one November morning as he sat in the salon of Madame de Caraman in Bourg-la-Reine. Of the reason for his excursion to the country he knew nothing beyond the bare fact that Madame de Caraman had lost a collar of diamonds, which it was his mission to restore.

Being an early riser, he had taken the first train from Paris and had evidently intruded upon a household unaccustomed to early hours, for it was now eleven o'clock, and the solemnly uttered phrase "Madame la Vicomtesse will receive monsieur presently" had borne no fruit. It vexed him to find that Madame de Caraman entertained so poor an opinion of official activity and appreciated so little the value of time. But he had taken matters into his own hands and made certain preliminary inquiries. From Paul, the butler, a little man prodigal of smiles and bows, he learned that Madame de Caraman and her cousin, Madame de Wimpffen, having dined in Paris at General Texier's, had returned at midnight; that on their return they had retired at once, while Captain de Wimpffen and M. de Sade had passed an hour at billiards before going to their rooms at one o'clock; that he, Paul, had thereupon closed the house as usual, and on the following morning, when making his customary round, had found the windows and doors securely fastened as he had left them the previous evening; that during the afternoon the rumor that Madame de Caraman's diamonds had disappeared filtered down through her maid, Jacqueline, to the lower servants; and at this point of his narrative Paul wrung his hands, his small round eyes blinking in unison.

"Alas, Monsieur l'Inspecteur, what a misfortune," he wailed, "that after being in the service of Madame la Vicomtesse for twenty years--"

"We are not speaking of the last century," said M. Joly curtly, "but of night before last, when Madame de Caraman wore her diamonds at General Texier's dinner."

"Certainly, certainly, Monsieur l'Inspecteur; I myself observed them. For it was I who removed madame's cloak and hung it with my own hands in the cabinet in the vestibule. Monsieur," he added confidentially, "how, I ask you, came this cloak on the floor of the salon, where I found it when opening the windows in the morning? How the devil, I said to myself--"

"Never mind what you said to yourself," interrupted M. Joly impatiently. "Bring me this cloak."

All his life he had been looking for one of those insignificant signs which escape the eye of the professional detective and set the amateur on the trail of the criminal. He had found them so much more frequently in his reading than in his practice, the traces left by the criminal had so invariably been of the vulgar,

commonplace order, that he had begun to despair of ever displaying the finesse of which he felt himself capable. But now, at last, he observed on the hem of Madame de Caraman's cloak two pine-needles, caught in the frayed silk of the lining; and as pine-needles were not to be gathered from the rugs of General Texier's apartment, he made a mental note of this fact and put after it the sign of interrogation.

While examining the butler in the salon he made also another discovery--a bit of blue glass.

"Monsieur Paul," he remarked, "the servants in this house do their work badly. There is a bit of broken glass on the floor under the piano."

"It is true," admitted Paul, making haste to pick up the indicated fragment. "I thought we had found every piece of it."

"One should be more careful. A sharp edge like this might easily penetrate the thin sole of a lady's shoe," observed M. Joly, taking the fragment from Paul's fat hand. "It appears to belong to a globe that has been broken."

"Monsieur is quite right. Madame has on her table de nuit a night-lamp with a globe of blue glass. Jacqueline was arranging the flowers brought by the gardener when I was putting the salon in order yesterday morning.

'Mademoiselle,' I said, 'some one has broken something. Here is glass on the floor.' She came over to assist me. 'Ah,' she said, 'that accounts for it. It is the shade of madame's night-lamp which is missing.'"

M. Joly made a second note of interrogation and added the bit of blue glass to what he termed his mental rubbish-heap. These discoveries did not prevent him, however, from taking the ordinary routine precautions. The present possessor of Madame de Caraman's diamonds either was or was not an inmate of the house. He had therefore deemed it prudent to station one of the two local agents he had requisitioned on his arrival at the main entrance, with orders to permit no one to leave without his authorization; the other he sent on a tour of inspection of the wall surrounding the grounds, and, after himself examining the doors and windows of the lower floor, he retired to the salon to await the appearance of Madame de Caraman.

For a long time he sat in silence, amusing himself by taking an inventory of his surroundings by a process of mental photography of his own devising. The

orchids in the crystal vases, the roses in the enormous bowl of Chinese porcelain, the precious trifles behind the glass doors of the gilded cabinets, the damascened clock between the amazon in bronze and the shepherdess in Dresden, the indistinct figures of the stately dance on the misty background of tapestry, and the cherubs playing among the rose-tinted clouds on the ceiling having all been duly registered, he folded his hands over his waistcoat and closed his eyes, in order to dream of Monrepos--Monrepos being a small estate as yet existing only in imagination, to which he fully intended to retire with Madame Joly and his savings at a period of life as vague as Monrepos itself. To all appearances he was asleep--the sleep of the hound on the hearthrug, who sees nothing and hears everything.

As the clock struck the half-hour he opened his eyes. Through the low, open windows came the rattle of dishes and the sound of voices. Breakfast was being served on the terrace. Then some one said:--

"What! In the salon? Show him out, by all means."

The transition from the modest garden of Monrepos to the terrace overlooking the valley of the Bievre might well have filled him with envy, had not his entire attention been given to the three persons at the breakfast table. Between an officer in uniform and a tall aristocratic person with a waxed mustache sat a little lady in white, with so elusive a charm that the machinery which registered impressions that might prove useful to him failed to work with its customary automatic precision. It was the weak side of his nature to love flowers, of which the blue eyes of the lady in white reminded him; to adore children, whose straightforward honesty he discovered in the blue depths to which his gaze was constantly reverting. So unimportant a detail as a ravishing blue bow on the little shoe beneath the edge of the white dress assumed in his register a place altogether unwarranted. In the brief moment of silence which followed his appearance he catalogued the blue eyes as those of Madame de Caraman and the waxed mustache as that of her husband, while the uniform of the big-shouldered officer tilted back in the wicker chair certainly belonged to the garrison of the neighboring fort of Chatillon. None of these people, he observed, asked him to sit down.

"You are--" began M. de Caraman.

"Inspector Joly."

"Good. The prefect is prompt. It was only yesterday at four o'clock that I telegraphed him."

M. Joly said to himself that the promptness of the prefecture was not that of Bourg-la-Reine, and that it had availed him nothing.

"Pray be seated," said Madame de Caraman.

"You have not yet seen Madame de Caraman, I suppose," said her husband.

Confused by the remark, M. Joly interrogated the blue eyes. "I have lost half a day," he replied stiffly.

"Not at all; you are in error, Monsieur Joly. No one loses any time in Bourg-la-Reine. Observe Madame de Wimpffen, for example. She grows younger every hour."

"Monsieur de Sade!"

So the lady in white was not Madame de Caraman, and the waxed mustache did not belong to her husband. M. Joly revised his catalogue.

"Oh, no, Monsieur Joly, believe me, you have lost nothing. On the contrary, let me explain to you." M. de Sade selected carefully a cigarette from a silver case and tapped it lightly on the table. "Every investigation of this nature naturally proceeds logically from a basis of facts. You expect to obtain these facts from Madame de Caraman, since it is she who has lost this precious collar of diamonds. Well, you will be disappointed. Madame de Caraman will furnish lamentations, an indefinite variety of psychical phenomena--but facts--oh, never!"

"Monsieur de Sade!" interrupted the lady in white again.

"Come now, Diane, you know I speak the truth. Shall I prove it to you? Let us suppose Madame de Caraman takes a walk in the forest"--M. de Sade waved his hand in the direction of Fontenay-- "and encounters, say, a bear. Would she be able to describe it to you? Of the emotions which the bear produced in her, oh, yes, that I grant you. They would be very entertaining to listen to, and more numerous than those microbes which Monsieur Pasteur affirms dance on the point of a needle without danger of falling. But after all was said, you would

know nothing about the bear--whether it was a grizzly from North America or a polar bear from the Arctic Circle."

A little frown of displeasure struggled loyally with the smile of amusement on the face of Madame de Wimpffen. Her companion in uniform laughed outright.

"I assure you, therefore, Monsieur Joly," continued M. de Sade, lighting the cigarette in his long white fingers, "you have lost nothing. Do not imagine I am one of those creations of the novelist who unravels a mystery from his inner consciousness; still" blowing out the wax taper with the smoke "while Madame de Caraman is finishing her toilet, it is possible, if you are so disposed, that I--"

"Have you breakfasted, Monsieur Joly?" asked Madame de Wimpffen.

M. Joly looked up gratefully from the blue bows to the blue eyes. It was true that he was hungry. He resolved to have in Monrepos a bed of flowers of that same wonderful blue color.

"Serve Monsieur Joly breakfast," said Madame de Wimpffen to the valet.

And still looking into the blue eyes, M. Joly said, "I am at your service, monsieur."

"Let us begin, then, with ourselves, for in these cases no one escapes suspicion. I present you first to Madame Diane de Wimpffen, who, with her husband and myself, is enjoying Madame de Caraman's hospitality. Madame de Wimpffen knows very well that if there were any flaw in her composition I should long ago have discovered it. There is none. Therefore she is the more to be suspected. Nothing is so abnormal as limpidity. You have only to consult the works of Monsieur Becquerel, the physicist. He will tell you the complex can be studied with profit, while the simple resists all analysis. As for Captain de Wimpffen, he is too clumsy either to commit a theft or to conceal one"--The captain laughed again good-naturedly. "Moreover, he has no need of diamonds, since he has Madame de Wimpffen."

"Monsieur de Sade, you are making yourself ridiculous."

"We come now to myself," continued M. de Sade, paying no attention to this interruption. "I confess that I make a bad showing, for I lost forty thousand francs last week at the club. Naturally, the debt is paid. But how? That is for you

to discover, monsieur. It is well known that there exist people who willingly sacrifice the diamonds of others to meet their own obligations. I pass over that point, which is a delicate one, for another even more so. For I admit that I know that beside Madame de Caraman's bed,--on the left as you face it, Monsieur Joly,--there is in the wall an iron safe? How do I know that? Because only day before yesterday Madame de Caraman showed me her treasures, of which she is very proud. There are some remarkable curios among them--one especially, a miniature of exquisite workmanship, protected by the thin slice of a diamond of the purest water and surrounded by gems of the rarest quality. Personally I much prefer this heirloom to anything so banal as a collar of diamonds--a point, you observe, in my favor. But enough of myself. Let us pass to Madame de Caraman. Obviously she is above suspicion. For why should a woman steal her own diamonds? But why does a woman do anything? Who knows, perhaps Madame de Caraman, like many worthy persons, has made the acquaintance of Shylock on the Rialto of Paris. There is another possibility. The diamonds are not stolen, but lost. I have known women to lose possessions more valuable than diamonds with less regret."

"Come, come, de Sade," grumbled the captain, "you go too far."

"Agreed. I wish only to exhaust every hypothesis. For myself, I do not for a moment believe the collar is lost. For if it were only lost, Madame de Caraman would say nothing about it, for fear of grieving her husband. For you will admit, Diane," said M. de Sade, appealing to Madame de Wimpffen, "that of all your cousin Celimene's admirable qualities, the desire to please is the most conspicuous--she even mistakes it for loving."

"You must not believe all Monsieur de Sade's nonsense," said Diane.

"Wait!" exclaimed that gentleman suddenly. "I have forgotten Monsieur de Caraman--but that is not to be wondered at, since Madame de Caraman herself forgets him so easily. There, Monsieur l'Inspecteur, so much for the dramatis persona. Now for the facts."

"They have their importance," said M. Joly caustically, taking out his watch. "I have been in Bourg-la-Reine since eight o'clock, and it is now sixteen minutes of noon. If Madame de Caraman would deign to receive me--"

"Oh," interrupted M. de Sade, "as to that you need not be concerned. With

Madame de Caraman you may rely absolutely upon the unexpected. You expected to see her--she disappoints you. You abandon hope--she appears suddenly."

"Monsieur de Sade, be serious," said Diane. "Besides, I have something to tell Monsieur Joly which may be useful to him."

"You are right, Diane," nodded the captain, approvingly. "Interrogate us, monsieur, since you are here for that purpose."

M. Joly was not slow to grasp his opportunity.

"Madame de Caraman missed her diamonds yesterday?" he began.

"Yes, at three o'clock. She wished to show me a vanity-box which Monsieur de Caraman had given her. On going to the safe beside the bed, she saw at once the diamonds were missing."

"And nothing else?"

"Nothing. The case was open, empty. Nothing else was disturbed."

"Do you happen to know when Madame de Caraman last saw these diamonds?"

"Perfectly--"

"Have a care, Diane," interrupted M. de Sade. "A too willing witness arouses suspicion."

"Perfectly, monsieur. The day before yesterday we dined with General Texier in Paris. Celimene wore her diamond collar. We returned at midnight. My room adjoins hers, and we went up together. She rang for her maid, and while waiting asked me to unfasten her collar. I distinctly remember that she herself replaced it in the case and locked the safe."

"Of what kind is this safe, madame?"

"That I cannot tell you. It has an iron door, and a key--just an ordinary key."

"And this key, do you know by any chance where madame keeps it?"

"Probably under her handkerchiefs in the drawer of her dressing-table," suggested M. de Sade.

"No, I do not know," replied Diane quietly.

"That is all you have to tell me, madame?"

"No."

"The devil! Diane," exclaimed M. de Sade, "you have a secret and you have not told it!"

"I preferred to tell monsieur when he should come." M. de Sade shrugged his shoulders. M. Joly said to himself, "You are an intelligent woman." "Raoul, tell Monsieur Joly what we have seen."

The captain leaned forward on the table of Florentine mosaic, interlocking as he spoke his stout fingers.

"Monsieur l'Inspecteur," he said, "I slept badly that night. After a long dinner I require to smoke before sleeping soundly. At two o'clock I rose and opened my wife's door. 'Diane,' I said, 'are you asleep?' There was no answer. You see, from her room a window opens on a balcony. I wished to sit in the fresh air," said the captain, inflating his powerful lungs. "I opened the window carefully, lit my cigar, and began to enjoy myself. Presently I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was my wife's. 'What are you doing?' she said. 'You see,' I replied, 'I am smoking. If you too wish to enjoy the night air, come, I will get your cloak.' I fumbled for some time in the wardrobe. In the dark, monsieur, garments resemble cats, in this respect that they are all alike. At last I found something. 'Raoul,' she said, 'you have brought me an underskirt.' 'Never mind,' I replied, 'the night is dark and St. Martin will not see you'--for you know, monsieur," explained the captain, affably, "we are now in the summer of St. Martin. Well, we sat there for some time in silence. At last I said, 'Diane, am I dreaming?' 'I am,' she replied. 'But look!' I whispered, seizing her arm. 'What is that on the terrace?' Tell monsieur, Diane; you narrate better than I do."

"What we saw was a light ascending the steps which you see lead down into the park. At the head of the steps it crossed the terrace in the direction of this door where we are sitting and passed out of sight."

"An hallucination," said M. de Sade.

The captain brought his fist down on the head of one of the centaurs in the frieze of the table. "Thunder of God!" he exclaimed, "I was wide awake."

Madame de Wimpffen laid her hand caressingly over the bronzed fist of her husband.

"Well, then, a miracle, if you prefer," laughed M. de Sade.

"De Sade," said the captain, tapping the table with one of his stout fingers, "you know very well I am not easily deceived. When a light travels through the air at a metre's height it is because some one carries it, and if I do not perceive this person it is because the night is dark. Proceed, Diane."

"We went in at once. My husband lighted a candle with the intention of going down. While he was dressing I heard sounds in my cousin's room. 'Raoul,' I said, 'some one is moving in Celimene's room. I will go in and see what is happening.' I opened the door. She was sitting on the edge of the bed. 'Celimene, dear,' I asked, 'what is the matter?' 'I am frightened,' she said. 'I have had a nightmare--but it is over--forgive me for disturbing you, and go to bed.'

I embraced her. She was trembling. 'It was very foolish in me, but it is nothing--go to bed,' she said again. I embraced her again, returned to my room, and told my husband."

"You also made an observation which you have omitted to repeat, Diane," said the captain.

Madame de Wimpffen hesitated.

"You said to me, 'Raoul, Celimene had on her face that foolish look of a child caught in a fault.'"

M. de Sade, humming to himself, walked to the terrace steps.

"Monsieur Joly," said Madame de Wimpffen, "the thoughts that one blurts out to one's husband are not to be taken into account."

Silence.

"We decided not to speak of what we had seen," resumed Diane. "Monsieur de Caraman is absent, and my cousin is easily disturbed. In the morning she made light of her adventure. She said she had had a bad dream. If the diamonds were not missing I should not speak of this now."

"There was a light in Madame de Caraman's room when you entered?" asked M. Joly.

"Certainly, else--"

"One moment, if you please. The night-lamp on Madame de Caraman's table de nuit has a blue shade, has it not? Did you observe this shade when you entered?"

A look of surprise swept over Madame de Wimpffen's face.

"No, Monsieur, I did not observe that. But now that you ask me--it seems to me-- I think there was no shade. It is not a lamp; it is one of those candles with a globe which protects the flame from the wind."

"One question more, madame. This light which you saw on the terrace, was it white? Or did it perchance have a blue color?"

Madame de Wimpffen exchanged a quick glance with her husband.

"Monsieur Joly, what you are thinking of is impossible," she said, with dignity.

"Madame," said M. Joly, smiling, "what I am thinking of you do not know, since I do not know myself. Monsieur de Sade has put so many ideas into my head that I cannot find my own."

The valet, appearing with the breakfast-tray, began to lay the table.

"If you do not wish to question us further, monsieur," said Diane, rising, "we will leave you to enjoy your breakfast. I see Madame de Caraman's shutters are open. I am sure she will receive you presently."

No, M. Joly would ask no questions. He watched the two as they crossed the gray stone flagging of the terrace and disappeared with M. de Sade down the broad steps between the huge urns with their dark-green pyramids of cypress, then turned to his breakfast.

He was entirely satisfied with his wife's cuisine, yet he enjoyed immensely that of Madame de Caraman. The November air had the crisp softness of two seasons, and the Sauterne a flavor which reminded him that the 15th of the month was approaching--an anniversary day on which he always dined with Madame Joly at a certain cafe whose cellar was excellent.

The valet placed the box of regalias on the table.

He selected one carefully, made four small incisions with the point of his penknife--then reflected. He never smoked when on duty. He closed his knife, put the cigar in his pocket, and sighed.

The rustle of a dress on the marquetry floor of the salon came faintly through the open door. He looked up and saw a maid in black, with a white collar and apron. It is Jacqueline, he thought.

"If monsieur will have the goodness to follow me--Madame la Vicomtesse will receive him."

At the door of a small boudoir hung with rose brocade M. Joly perceived one of the Bath chairs to be seen at the seaside, against whose background of rose-colored silk Madame de Caraman's morning-gown of lace made an effective contrast. A white hand marked with blue veins answered his bow by a gesture which said, be seated.

"You are the officer sent by Monsieur Levigne?"

M. Joly bowed again.

"Monsieur de Sade was good enough to telegraph for me. The prefect is very kind. I little thought when I last saw him I am greatly disturbed by this loss, Monsieur--"

"Joly, madame."

"Monsieur Joly. It was a gift from my husband on my name-day. Such remembrances possess a value which cannot be estimated. Monsieur de Caraman will feel its loss as deeply as I do." In the wistful brown eyes resided an appealing expression. The same pathetic demand for sympathy lingered in the delicate lines of the mouth, as if reluctant to abandon them. M. Joly said to

himself: "Here is a well woman who is an invalid." "There is also the knowledge that some one has penetrated into my house, or, what is still more painful to believe, that I cherish 'a thief in my household. I cannot tell you how much this thought oppresses me." The pale, oval face, animated by a sort of vivacious sadness, awakened in M. Joly's breast a sentiment of pity. "In the absence of my husband"--the white hands were smoothing out the troubled folds of lace--"I must rely wholly upon you, monsieur."

Again M. Joly bowed, depositing his hat on the floor beside his chair and folding his hands over his waistcoat.

"You will, then, permit me to ask certain questions."

"Assuredly, Monsieur Joly. I am waiting."

"I do not need to tell you," he began, "that a thief who breaks into a house leaves some sign of infraction. There is none." Madame de Caraman became attentive. "There is the hypothesis of an accomplice who admits him. But for a thief who steals a collar of diamonds, to leave behind him still greater booty, is unusual, whether this thief enters by force or is admitted by an accomplice."

"But, Monsieur Joly," interrupted Madame de Caraman, "you forget--for certainly I have read of such cases--that while engaged in a robbery one may be disturbed--some noise alarms the intruder--"

"Madame," said M. Joly, "the cure of Saint-Medard calls me a skeptic, because in seeking to account for what I do not understand I adopt always the most natural explanation. He, on the contrary, always adopts the most unnatural one. It astonishes me that of two explanations he should invariably choose the least probable. For that reason I conclude that what he really prefers is the mystery itself and not its explanation, since his explanation always involves another mystery still more mysterious. Let us recapitulate. After locking the safe in which you deposited the diamonds on the night of your return from Paris--"

"You know all this!" exclaimed Madame de Caraman, leaning forward.

"From Madame de Wimpffen."

"Ah! You have talked with Diane."

"In order not to lose time," said M. Joly politely.

"Proceed, monsieur."

"After locking the safe, you secreted the key--for I suppose you secreted it--"

"Yes, under my pillow, where I always place it on retiring."

"And in the morning?"

"In my corsage, where it is now. You see," she said, holding it out to him.

"Monsieur de Caraman also has a key, which he carries on his person. But he is absent."

"Well, then, how does it happen, madame, if, between midnight of Sunday when you locked the safe and three o'clock of Monday when you opened it, this key which you hold in your hand remained in your possession--"

"But might not some one have possessed himself of a third key?" interposed Madame de Caraman.

"I am coming to that," assented M. Joly. "There is, then, a third key, and a thief who is alarmed in the act of using it. At what hour is he thus alarmed? Was it by any chance at two o'clock, after midnight, when madame is awakened by a bad dream?"

The slight figure stiffened like a snake about to strike, and anger flamed in the pale cheeks.

"Madame de Wimpffen has told you this?"

"Why not?" pursued M. Joly quietly. "There are bad dreams and bad dreams. In one of those dreams a woman takes the night-lamp from her table, descends the stairs to the closet in the vestibule, wraps about her shoulders the cloak which she finds there, and enters the salon. She even opens the window and passes out into the park. For Monsieur de Wimpffen from his balcony sees the light of her lamp crossing the terrace, and on the hem of her cloak, which on her return she drops on the floor of the salon, are found some of those pine-needles with which the pines I see below the terrace strew the ground--"

"Monsieur!" gasped Madame de Caraman.

"Madame," said M. Joly gently, "if you have anything to fear, if it is your desire, I will take the next train to Paris, and I will say to Monsieur Levigne: 'Monsieur le Prefet, there was an error. The diamonds have been found.'"

Indignation struggled with fear. "I have nothing to fear, nothing," she cried, "but you terrify me."

"I am convinced of it. Believe me, madame, I am not so naive as to suppose that a woman goes to an assignation in her own park, every foot of which she knows by heart, with a lighted candle in her hand, and if I had conceived so absurd an idea I should not have been so indelicate as to confide it to her."

Madame de Caraman began to laugh hysterically.

"But it is true. I found myself in the salon with my cloak over my nightdress--my candle in one hand. I was so terrified, I trembled so, the shade fell. At the noise I fled to my room--but the park, never, monsieur, never."

"It is absolutely necessary that you should have gone to the park, madame. That is indispensable."

"I must have been mad," she murmured, pressing her hands to her forehead, "mad."

"Fortunately the madness which one commits in one's sleep is not provided for in the Penal Code," said M. Joly. "What interests me most is something which you have forgotten--the diamond collar. If madame would do me the honor to take a short promenade in that bosquet of pines, who knows "

"It would be incredible."

"Ah, madame," smiled M. Joly, picking up his hat and bowing in his most gallant manner, "let us leave the incredible to the cure of Saint-Medard and follow the scent of those pine-needles in the hem of your cloak."

In the letter that Madame de Wimpffen wrote that evening to the Countess Anne occurred this sentence:--

"We were feeding, Raoul and I, the carp in the pond, when we saw Celimene and the inspector--that same Monsieur Joly who came to Freyr to arrest your gardener--descending the steps of the terrace. They traversed the pines to that inclosure which Celimene calls the sub rosa, a spot carpeted with myrtles and hedged with box and ilexes. In its green niches are statues, at one extremity marble seats, and at the other a fountain from which water is constantly falling into a shell of marble.

"A few days ago we were all sitting in this retreat, when Monsieur de Sade began descanting in the manner which you know. 'It is a violation of every principle of good taste,' he said, 'to people our gardens with these naked statues. The man who originated this barbarous custom should be stripped and subjected to the same punishment. By what canon of art do we expose these charming creatures to the inclemency of the weather! I warrant you that if ever the dryads and fauns of Greece existed they clothed themselves like our ancestors, in the skins of wild animals. Observe that poor nymph whose fair skin is discolored with mould. See how the dung of the birds and the refuse of the forest have fallen on her hair, and what foul stains mar the virginity of her bosom! Can any one imagine anything more cruel?'

"'But, Monsieur de Sade,' said Celimene, 'these are creatures of the imagination.' 'A fine reason for exposing them to dirt and influenza! If I had created a being so lovely as that nymph, I would place her beside my fire in my boudoir, and not leave her to shiver in this solitude. If you should throw your mantle about those graceful shoulders she would look up into your face with a smile of gratitude. And not a single jewel! If you give a flute to Pan and a club to Hercules, why not a jewel to Venus?' 'But these beautiful forms have no need of jewels, Monsieur de Sade,' said Celimene. 'For whom are you speaking?' he replied; 'for yourself or for Madame Venus yonder? Fasten your collar of diamonds about her neck and I will wager you a thousand napoleons she will descend from her pedestal like Galatea and go to admire herself in the fountain.' 'I will try it,' said Celimene.

"And to think that she should do so!"

VIII

THE REAL BIRTHDAY OF DORANTE

It was the 15th of November. A fine rain had been falling all day, filling the hollows of the asphalt with shining pools and covering the sidewalks with a glistening surface of reflected lights. On account of this rain Inspector Joly had ordered a cab, for Madame Joly was wearing her best dress, it being the anniversary of their marriage, which they always observed by dining at the Fountain of Health. Twenty years before, on the 15th of November, the rain fell as it was falling to-night. It had not mattered then and it did not matter now, the 15th of November being still a door through which Madame Joly passed in a kind of trance, indifferent to the weather.

As it was always possible that some professional duty should interfere with this annual pilgrimage to the Fountain of Health, Madame Joly heard with relief her husband's key turning in the lock, as usual, at six o'clock. But at seven, as she was drawing on her gloves and M. Joly was about to put out the lights, the tinkle of the doorbell and a note left by a messenger filled her with alarm.

For three months M. Joly had been engaged in a relentless search for a band of counterfeiters who had given the Bank of France no small concern. Only the week before had he succeeded in locating their workshop in the cellar of the Restaurant des Tournelles, Place des Vosges; but as the chief of this band was absent from Paris, the execution of the plan formed for their capture was awaiting the information of his return. As luck would have it, this information arrived on the evening of the 15th of November, precisely as M. Joly was extinguishing the gas.

The note read as follows:--

_He has returned, and can be taken to-night at a rendezvous in the Restaurant des Tournelles--which is being watched. _

PICHON.

They were standing in the vestibule. The cab was at the door. It had been

impossible for Madame Joly not to see the word "Urgent" written on the corner of the envelope, as it was impossible for M. Joly not to see that the unconcern with which she waited while he was breaking the seal was really the heroic determination to endure disappointment without complaint. She was looking exceedingly pretty in her new furs; a little less slender, but otherwise exactly like the woman of twenty years ago. One would as soon strike an angel from God as disappoint a woman waiting to be loved. One of the reasons for adoring this woman was her forbearance under circumstances which would have justified one of less patience and confidence in asking questions.

M. Joly folded the note, tucked it carefully in the pocket of his white waistcoat, and said:--

"Come, let us be going."

At the foot of the three long flights of winding stairs, as he was holding the umbrella over Madame Joly while she was crossing the sidewalk to the cab, a passing policeman, his short cape dripping in the rain, recognized him and touched his hat. This simple gesture was like a hand placed upon his shoulder. Instantly awoke in him the instinct of the inspector, and under the uncontrollable impulse born of this sudden apparition of the symbol of authority and duty, he said to the driver:--

"Restaurant des Tournelles, Place des Vosges."

Even before he had taken his seat this impulse, as short-lived as it had been strong, vanished, and he realized that he, Inspector Joly, the man of method and resource, had lost his head. In the vestibule he had put inclination before duty, for the sake of a woman. On the sidewalk he had put duty before inclination, at the expense of one. These two irreconcilable acts plunged him in the depths of contradiction and indecision. If the first was a crime, the second was a folly. He was too gallant to lay upon the woman beside him the blame for yielding to inclination. He was too just to hold his innocent subordinate responsible for entangling her in the meshes of duty.

"The devil!" he said to himself, "I have made a mess of it."

Before turning into Rue Saint-Jacques it became evident to Madame Joly that he was thinking profoundly of something--and again she refrained. She also was thinking of something, and it was pleasant to believe that that something which

absorbed him was that same memory which quickened the beating of her own heart. But when, after crossing the Pont d'Arcole, the cab turned along the quays to the right, she murmured:--

"He is taking the wrong direction."

M. Joly was at that instant on the verge of confession. He was saying to himself: "After all, a date has no real importance. Why be a slave to a calendar? The year has three hundred and sixty-five days, but the three-hundred-and-sixty-fifth has no value not possessed by the others. Besides, there is leap-year, which disarranges everything. We might have been married on the 20th of February! Decidedly, anniversaries should be regulated by sentiment, not by Pope Gregory XIII." He remembered also that Madame Joly was as reasonable as she was pretty.

If she had remained silent a second longer, purpose would have been converted into action, and he would have confided to her these reflections. Unfortunately her interruption, in itself so natural and so innocent, like an unexpected jolt deranged so completely his mental process that he followed mechanically the direction of the cab instead of his thought, and said:--

"We are going to another place."

Much to the dismay of the cure of Saint-Medard, M. Joly had always contended that in order thoroughly to realize the meaning of any commandment of the Decalogue one must first break it. He now perceived that this reasoning applied also to proverbs. He saw clearly why the first step is so costly; "and the second," he thought, "is still more so--to a certain extent it is also imperative. In the automatism of the brain there is a kind of blundering logic--"

The cab had stopped.

"It is here," he said.

As Madame Joly stepped out under the arcade of the Place des Vosges, above the three lighted windows she read the words Bibeault--Restaurant des Tournelles. There was no doorway on the street, the entrance being through a side corridor, where she waited for her husband, who was paying for the cab.

"Ah," said M. Joly, to a man who stepped out from the shadow of a pillar, "it is

you, Pichon."

"He is inside," whispered the agent. "We have four of ours within call."

"Four! It is a small army you have." M. Joly counted out the exact fare, added fifty centimes, and dismissed the driver. "Pichon, if I tap once on the window you will know he is coming out. But do your work quietly. I am dining with my wife. Afterward, when I tap twice, you will come in."

"The old fox!" muttered the agent, "to bring his wife with him!"

When Madame Joly, on opening the door of her apartment, saw the messenger, she said to herself, "Something has occurred--our evening is ruined." But the words, "Come, let us be going," reassured her, and her fears vanished. At the Pont d'Arcole, however, her first conviction returned. The cab was taking the wrong direction. "I was right," she thought. "Something has occurred." Standing in the corridor waiting for her husband, she was now asking herself, "Why, since for some reason he is not dining with me at the Fountain of Health, am I dining with him at the Restaurant des Tournelles?" Yet once more she refrained. Nothing in all the twenty years justified the supposition that the reason was a bad one.

"It is disgraceful," said M. Joly, rejoining her. "The moment one puts one's hand in one's pocket a beggar appears."

"He seemed to me a very well-dressed one," she replied. "You did well to give him nothing."

In the Fountain of Health there was a little cabinet, always reserved for them on the 15th of November. On entering it Madame Joly invariably experienced that same delicious sensation she had known when in this very room she found herself for the first time alone with her husband. Behind the door was a hook, on which M. Joly had hung, first, her cloak, and then his coat; and this coat, thus deposited over her own garment, had been a symbol of possession, of something strange but infinitely dear, of something immediately realized in a more definite form when, between the closing of the door and the appearance of the waiter with the menu, she had abandoned herself to two protecting arms in a manner she had never dreamed possible.

There was no cabinet in the Restaurant des Tournelles. The iron stand on which

the waiter hung the new furs was a poor substitute for the hook in the Fountain of Health. Nevertheless, the room was a pleasant one, resembling more an inn in the country than a restaurant of the capital. A fire was burning on the hearth, before which a little girl, with brown hair drawn smooth above her temples, was turning a spit. More critical than on that night when she first dined *tete-a-tete* with her husband, Madame Joly noted with satisfaction that the linen was spotless and the glasses bright. She noted also with relief the presence of several of her own sex.

M. Joly chose a table near the window and began to study the menu. Always at the Fountain of Health he ordered the dinner which inaugurated their married life--a *pate d'Italie*, *sole au vin blanc*, *capon* with water-cress, an *omelette au confiture*, and a bottle of Burgundy, followed by *biscuit*, *cream-cheese*, and *green chartreuse*, which latter Madame Joly had learned to sip with more confidence than she had exhibited on that evening when for the first time in her life she discovered the immense difference between *vin ordinaire* and *Romanee*. It was not because there was no *pate d'Italie* on the menu that M. Joly ordered a *potage Julienne*. Madame Joly accepted this substitution without surprise. It would have been a sacrilege to eat the dinner of the Fountain of Health in the *Restaurant des Tournelles*. At the same time her curiosity redoubled. But pride had now come to the assistance of confidence, and again she refrained. M. Joly saw this acquiescence, but not the curiosity. While completing his order he observed her attentively. To all appearances she was quite at ease. This tranquillity increased his admiration of her and also his irritation at himself. It would require all his skill to extricate himself from his dilemma without losing her confidence or his own self-respect. For confession of some sort, though postponed, was inevitable. He had already admitted that in ordering the *potage Julienne*. He decided, however, contrary to the practice of the cure of Saint-Medard, to eat his dinner first and make his confession afterward. It would certainly be easier after the Burgundy than before the soup. Moreover, between the soup and the Burgundy something might happen.

"My dear," he began, protecting the wide expanse of his shirt from mishap with his napkin, "we dine to-night on the spot where Henri II lost his life in a tournament, and the three favorites of Guise had an argument of swords with the minions of his brother, Henri III. In that house over there died Rachel, and in this square lived Victor Hugo."

M. Joly had two manners of speaking, which his wife had long since learned to

distinguish. One was his professional manner, in which he now addressed her, and which she loved because it differentiated so completely the outside world from their own; the other recalled the Fountain of Health, and had not changed in tenderness or deference since his coat embraced her cloak on the hook behind the door of the cabinet particulier.

"What you say is most interesting," she replied, looking out into the square through the muslin curtain.

"Few people think of the past amid whose memorials they live," pursued M. Joly. "Like Montaigne, I love this city of Paris--even to the spots and blemishes on her fair body."

His voice had fallen into its second manner, and Madame Joly suddenly afflicted with a fit of shyness, kept her eyes steadily fixed on the house of Rachel.

"One would not suppose this melancholy square, with its low arcade and red-brick houses, was once the court end of town. It is true, at that time it did not exist. Formerly there stood here that famous Palais des Tournelles, so called because of its vast assemblage of turrets, constructed under Charles V. But that palace was destroyed by Catharine de Medicis in 1565. Not till 1604 was the present square begun by Henri IV."

Madame Joly was well aware of her husband's passion for history, but never before on the 15th of November had he conversed upon so remote a past. The description of the masquerade which nearly proved fatal to Charles VI interested her but moderately. To the account of the tournament held in honor of the marriage of Elizabeth with Philip II of Spain she listened more attentively, for a marriage always excited her sympathies. The glimpse of a white dress in a carriage on its way to the Mairie always caused her to stop, and she followed its occupant in thought far beyond the point where the carriage passed from sight. But the little girl with the brown hair, who, released from her duties at the spit, was gazing wistfully at the basket of fruit on the table, interested her still more. Having no children, she had accumulated a store of affection which overflowed at the slightest provocation. She had even suggested to M. Joly the project of adopting what nature had not supplied. He also adored children, but the question which nature decides so arbitrarily had thus far proved an obstacle, the relative advantages of the sexes being still under discussion. Nevertheless, the project had not been abandoned, and in that suburban retreat of Monrepos which they

had planned for their old age, and of which they dreamed at night before falling asleep, playing in the imaginary paths between the imaginary flowerbeds was an imaginary child of undetermined sex.

In one of the pauses of her husband's narration, Madame Joly beckoned the child nearer. In the pale-blue eyes was that devouring look which the sight of the forbidden engenders in one who is hungry. Madame Joly saw this look and made a second sign. The act which for the mother becomes commonplace, even irksome, was for her a precious opportunity.

"Would you like a peach?" she said to the small figure advancing timidly with a shy air of inquiry.

A peach, in November! Equivalent, as stated on the menu, to a whole franc. Casting a quick look behind her, the child held out her hand, seized the proffered treasure, and hid it in some mysterious place under her apron.

"You love peaches?" said M. Joly, encircling the slender waist with his arm and drawing the child to his knee.

A nod for answer.

"They do not grow on the trees of Paris," he added encouragingly.

The child shook her head. Then, gaining confidence, "They grow in Cormontreuil."

"Ah, you are from Cormontreuil. I suppose, then, since peaches grow in Cormontreuil, you love Cormontreuil better than Paris?"

Another nod of assent, and after another silence, "In Paris there are no orchards."

"But," remonstrated M. Joly, "Paris is so gay, with people and lights."

The small fingers were playing with the curious pendant on his watch-chain--a Japanese gold coin set with green garnets.

"There are more lights in Paris, monsieur, but not so many stars."

"That is true," admitted M. Joly. "I had not thought of that."

"Run away, Dorante," said the host, serving the coffee in person; "you annoy monsieur."

"On the contrary, she amuses me," said M. Joly. "Have a care, Mademoiselle Dorante, I am about to strike a match."

The child retreated to the skirts of Madame Joly, from which safe retreat she watched the short puffs of smoke from M. Joly's newly lighted cigar.

"It seems you adore Moliere, since you name your daughter Dorante," he said, addressing the host.

"Pardon, monsieur, she does not belong to me, but to my wife's brother--who is dead," he added.

"Ah, that makes a difference."

It not being clear what difference was referred to, the man was silent.

"More probably, then," pursued M. Joly reflectively, "it was a whim of the mother."

"There is no mother," was the curt reply.

"So much the better," said M. Joly.

This time the man thought he understood. "You are right, monsieur," he said, turning away. "One mouth to feed is enough."

Madame Joly had lifted Dorante to her lap. Her husband's remark astonished her. To be an orphan, when there existed people who were childless, was a provision of Providence which tormented her.

"Poor little one!" she murmured, resting her cheek on the brown hair.

M. Joly moved his cup to one side and, leaning forward, crossed his arms on the table. Madame Joly in no wise resembled the Madonna of Botticelli in the Louvre, yet it was of this picture that he was thinking. Through the smoke of his cigar he saw a little girl with brown hair playing among the parterres of Monrepos.

"Marie," he said softly, for Dorante's eyes were growing heavy, "you have been wondering why we are dining in the Restaurant des Tournelles."

Madame Joly looked up and smiled.

"I knew very well there was some reason," she said.

"Ah, you knew that?"

"Certainly. That note--it was so evident."

"To be sure. I had forgotten. And so you thought--"

"That some duty interfered. It could be nothing else."

"And you were not disappointed?"

"I did not say that."

"Well, what did you say?"

"I said what I have just told you, that only some duty--"

"But," interposed M. Joly, "on this occasion might I not have set this duty aside? A woman loves the sacrifice, even of honor, for her sake."

"She forgives it, but she does not love it. Besides, you are incapable--"

"Let that pass," interrupted M. Joly quickly.

"The question is: Why are you here? Have you asked yourself that?"

Madame Joly smiled again.

"Undoubtedly. But you could not imagine. Well, I am going to tell you. There are two men at the table behind you--do not move--you will wake Dorante look in the glass above my head--the one with the monocle and the white hands. Those hands are clever ones. They have accomplished a miracle--since they have reproduced a note of the Bank of France, which experts have always declared impossible. Thanks to the amiability of the uncle of Dorante, this miracle takes place beneath our feet, perhaps on the very spot where a queen of France of

whom I was just speaking consulted the oracles of the astrologers. Well, those white hands will wear to-night an ornament not made in the Rue de la Paix. Wait; he is going."

The two men had risen and were putting on their coats.

M. Joly tapped once on the window.

On reaching the door the man with the monocle passed out first.

"Monsieur," said M. Joly, crossing the room quickly and touching his companion on the shoulder, "you have dropped your change." In his hand was a two-franc piece.

"You are mistaken," said the man. "I have lost nothing."

"Pardon me, but I saw it roll under my chair."

"Come on; what are you waiting for?" cried a voice from the hall.

"In a minute--I am coming. Thanks, but I repeat, you are mistaken."

"I insist only because I saw," said M. Joly politely.

"Really, monsieur," said the man, who was beginning to be irritated, "you insist too much. I tell you it is not mine."

In his embarrassment M. Joly blocked the passage to the door.

"But you must admit that this silver belongs to some one."

"Oh, go to the devil with your silver and let me pass. I am in haste--my friend is waiting," cried the man, brushing his tormentor aside and slamming the door behind him.

M. Joly shrugged his shoulders.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, resuming his seat, "and if that beggar, Pichon, who is outside, acts with his customary promptness, the gentleman will not overtake his friend this evening. Marie, Pichon will never get over it--to be mistaken for a beggar!"

Madame Joly, jealous of her husband's reputation for sagacity, refrained again.

"It is now the turn of M. Bibeaute. Marie,"--his voice fell again into its second manner,-- "does it not seem to you that for a man who is about to lodge at the expense of the State a child is a superfluity?"

Madame Joly's eyes opened wide. She understood, but she refused to believe. At the same time her arms tightened about Dorante.

M. Joly waited patiently.

"You do not mean--" she could not go on--it was too incredible.

"Why not?" said her husband.

Why not! Because it was so contrary to all she had imagined. Not in this manner had she thought to select the heir to Monrepos. For this selection she had prescribed certain conditions, and it was not in the Restaurant des Tournelles that one would look for their fulfillment. If Dorante had been brought to her for approval, she would assuredly have examined her critically. She would have required answers to a thousand questions. But Dorante was sleeping peacefully and wisely in her arms. A thrill akin to that which the mother knows when she first feels the touch of the morsel of humanity which the nurse lays at her side wrought in her a strange contentment and peace. Conditions, even the question of sex, were forgotten.

She made a feeble effort to protest.

"But we know nothing about her," she gasped.

"What does one ever know about a child until it is grown up?" said M. Joly.

Far beyond the need of argument or persuasion, Madame Joly was not listening. In truth she did not know of what she was thinking. Visions were succeeding one another, strange, incredible visions, and momentous problems--of what colors were becoming to brown hair, of what room Dorante was to occupy, and before the rising tide of this new life and joy, she forgot also to refrain.

"And this is why I am here--you planned this beforehand "

"Marie," said M. Joly diplomatically, "more is accomplished in this world by grasping an opportunity than by foreseeing one."

The room was empty. A solitary waiter, yawning, was leaning against the desk where Madame Bibeault was casting up her accounts.

"Monsieur Bibeault, the bill if you please."

"Instantly; I am coming."

"Monsieur Bibeault," said M. Joly, scanning the bill, "I see that you are a man of heart."

The man looked at him inquiringly.

"Since you provide for those in need," explained M. Joly, designating the sleeping Dorante.

"Dame! Monsieur," with a shrug of the shoulders, "one does what one must."

"Fortunately, you have here a good business."

"By no means, monsieur. I have on my hands a bad affair. The situation is impossible. No one frequents this square but nursery-maids and babies."

M. Joly, thoughtful, leaned back in his chair.

"Why, then, do you not find some benevolent person to whom God has denied the blessing of children?"

The man laughed. "Such customers do not come to the Restaurant des Tournelles," he said laconically.

M. Joly pulled a chair from a neighboring table.

"Sit down, Monsieur Bibeault. I wish to talk with you. I am such a person."

The man gazed at this singular customer good-naturedly. The joke was a good one.

"Naturally you are surprised. You do not know me. Here is my card and address."

You will make inquiries at your leisure. This child pleases us. She is a burden to you. We offer to relieve you of this burden."

M. Joly had a way of forcing a conclusion.

"Monsieur--" the man stammered, dumbfounded.

"But on certain conditions," continued M. Joly imperturbably. "It is necessary that Dorante should be happy. Let us suppose that she remains with us for a week. At the end of that time, if she is contented, if she continues to please us, we will see. There will be some legal formalities."

M. Bibeault had ceased smiling. It was impossible to misconceive the seriousness of this proposal.

"It is true, monsieur, I admit," he said, holding the card in his hand, "the child is a burden, but -"

"Go consult your wife," said M. Joly peremptorily.

Madame Joly listened to this business-like conversation in a kind of stupor. Its rapid march brought her back from dreams to reality. She had been living in unreality ever since the cab had turned in the wrong direction. She hovered now between the two, oppressed by a twofold anxiety--doubtful of her happiness and fearful of its loss.

The man returned with his wife.

"What is this nonsense my husband is telling me?" she said.

At the sound of her voice Dorante awoke.

M. Joly repeated his proposition. The woman listened incredulously.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur!" she said evasively, "such an affair is not to be concluded in a moment."

"Every affair has a beginning," replied M. Joly. "Moreover, I give you a week in which to reflect."

The woman looked at her husband, as if to say, "It is worth thinking of."

"Listen," she said. "As you say, there is a week. Suppose now, at the end of the week, we agree I say that merely in passing. But monsieur forgets that till now--that is, for these eight years--there have been expenses. A child is not fed and clothed for nothing--"

"At what do you estimate these expenses?" said M. Joly, taking out his pocketbook and pencil.

Madame Bibault exchanged with her husband another look, which said, "Here is a goose to be plucked."

Profiting by this look, M. Joly tapped twice gently on the window.

"Let us see," he continued. "To-day is the fifteenth of November. Sixteen - seventeen - eighteen-- nineteen--twenty--twenty-one--two on the twenty-second of November--" To her amazement Madame Joly saw her husband count out one by one ten notes of one hundred francs. "I give you one thousand francs--but on account. On the twenty- second--"

The door opened and Pichon entered.

"Ah, Pichon, it is you!" cried M. Joly joyfully. "What luck brings you here! And to think that you should arrive at the very moment! Pichon, I am concluding a bargain. You will be a witness. I am making a purchase--by installments. Here is the first, count them," thrusting the bank notes into the hands of the astonished Bibault.

But M. Bibault's eyes were riveted upon the door, where two agents were regarding the scene in silence. Fingering the notes mechanically, a pallor crept over his face.

At the same time Pichon began to smile.

"They do not please you?" asked M. Joly affably. "That is unreasonable--since they are of your own manufacture."

The man retreated step by step, like an animal, stupid with terror; then, turning suddenly, sprang toward the service door. Wrenching it open, he saw another

agent.

Madame Bibeault uttered a scream. Dorante began to cry.

"You see," said M. Joly, rising and buttoning up his coat, "it is useless. Pichon, I am going home with madame. Ask one of your men to be so good as to get me a cab--it is raining. In an hour I will be back and make my report. As this is no place for the child, I charge myself with her. Meanwhile, you will examine Monsieur Bibeault's cellar--it is said to contain some rare vintages."

"Marie," he said, as the cab rattled over the pavement of the Place des Vosges, "I owe you a thousand apologies. But it is as you said. A man does not sacrifice duty for such a woman as you. The woman for whom one sacrifices honor is not worth it."

Holding the weeping Dorante close to her heart, Madame Joly made no reply.

"You see for yourself it would have been impossible to leave this little one in such a den. As for the Fountain of Health," searching in the dark for her hand, "we will dine there just the same on the fifteenth of November--by the calendar of our ally the Czar of Russia."

IX

THE SILVER PENCIL

Inspector Joly had always maintained that conclusions were more important than stability. Not to change one's opinion under the pressure of evidence was the proof of mediocrity. Yet, after voluntarily retiring from active service and acquiring that suburban retreat which had so long been a dream, not for worlds would he have admitted to Madame Joly that any disappointment lurked in the dream's realization.

Monrepos certainly was not responsible for the disappointment. The reality coincided in all respects with the dream. In one, as in the other, on opening the gate between the high inclosing walls, one saw a straight walk, freshly graveled and bordered with box, on one side of which was the fountain with the goldfish, and on the other the arbor where he was now sitting; and at the end of the walk that house, a little naked as yet, being fresh from the hands of the architect, to which he had looked forward as a very heaven of rest.

Surveying this heaven, M. Joly said to himself: "It appears one is happy only in remembering or in anticipating. That being the case, since I have nothing more to anticipate, I am like the moon, one side of which is in perpetual darkness--and the other," he added, with a sigh, "shines only by reflected light."

Sitting opposite him, the cure of Saint-Medard, who had come to spend the day and found Monrepos to his liking, was almost asleep. No master of ceremonies would have presented these two to each other with the idea that either could afford the other a moment of pleasure. It amazed M. Joly that so superior a woman as Madame Joly should have such a confessor. It also amused him--for what could a woman like Madame Joly possibly have to confess?

"Monsieur le cure," he said, abruptly, "after Paradise, what?"

"After Paradise," stammered the cure, rousing himself, "there is nothing. Paradise is the sum of all things, the realization of every dream."

"In that case," replied M. Joly, "I advise you on going there to hold a few dreams

in reserve, lest even Paradise prove wearisome."

The cure relapsed into silence. To disturb his state of mental repose was for M. Joly an irresistible delight. He also dearly loved the cure's arguments, drawn from sources which reminded him how old was human thought. But the cure's eyes were closing again. M. Joly observed him a moment meditatively, then walked down the gravel path toward the gate.

Just within, among the vines on the wall, hung a bell. In the earlier days of his retirement, its call from the outer world had awakened in his breast emotions of curiosity and hope. But he had long since realized that the stream of life does not tarry to converse with what it has cast up on its banks. Observing this bell, hampered by encroaching vines and yellow with rust, M. Joly was muttering to himself. "A symbol of oblivion and decay!" when suddenly, as if in indignant denial, it began to ring violently.

"Come now," he said ironically, "what joke are you up to?"

For answer the bell rang again, this time with a tone of imperious impatience. At this second summons he opened the gate, to find himself looking into a pair of blue eyes.

Instantly he dived down into the depths of memory and brought up two pictures: one of a woman crumbling bread to the fishes over the railing of the garden of the Hotel d'Italie et d'Angleterre in Freyr, the other of this same woman ordering his breakfast on the terrace of Madame de Caraman's villa in Bourg-la-Reine.

"Madame de Wimpffen!" he exclaimed.

A smile of pleasure came into the blue eyes.

"I am so glad to find you, Monsieur Joly. May I come in? You have not forgotten me in all these years?"

"His thought was that no one could possibly forget her, but in his momentary embarrassment he said:

"That is not to my credit, I have such a good memory."

She answered him with her bright, understanding smile as she stepped within the

gate.

"Where may I speak with you? --here, on this seat by the wall? Shall we sit down here? Will you please tell the coachman to wait?" And when he had delivered the message and closed the gate, "Sit down, please, Monsieur Joly,"--making room for him;-- "something has occurred which made me wish to consult you. You see, I, too, deserve no credit, having also a good memory."

He took the proffered seat, a little awkwardly, crossing his hands as usual over his waistcoat, experiencing at the same time that feeling of mingled admiration and intimacy which this woman had inspired once before.

"You remember the mysterious disappearance of my Cousin Celimene's necklace," began Diane, digging the tip of her parasol into the gravel. "Well, yesterday, on my return from Bourg-la-Reine, where my husband and I were making my cousin a visit, I found a little mystery of my own."

She paused a moment, and M. Joly leaned back against the wall to gain a fuller command of her face.

"Our apartment is on Boulevard Haussmann, number 190. During our absence some one has been searching it--I say searching," she repeated with emphasis, "because nothing was taken. On the contrary, something was left. Examine this, please. I found it among my lingerie, in my chiffonier."

He took the small silver pencil which she held out to him, and, turning it slowly over in his hand, read the words "L. Pichon, Inspecteur," engraved on the side. "What carelessness!" he thought. But he said nothing.

"Perhaps you will say," she went on, "that it does not follow because Monsieur Pichon's pencil is found in the drawer of my chiffonier that Monsieur Pichon himself left it there. But I have made inquiries. First, of the concierge, who says two men, workmen, came with a permit duly authorized by the police to inspect the electric installation in our rooms. But the electric company deny that any such inspection has been ordered. What I wish to know," she said, lifting her eyes to his, "is, what Monsieur Pichon was doing in my apartment. Naturally I thought to write my husband, who remained for a few days at Bourg-la-Reine. Then I said to myself: 'No, he will be furious--he will return at once, and his vacation will be spoiled. I will first consult that Monsieur Joly who found my Cousin Celimene's diamonds.' But it seems"--her eyes were still studying his

face--"that you are no longer at the prefecture."

"That makes no difference," he said, with superb disregard for the Paradise of Monrepos.

"At first I was indignant. Then I reflected. When the police search, it is because some one is suspected. Who? Of what? I am consulting you professionally, Monsieur Joly."

He waited for her to go on.

"There is Valerie, my maid, who has been with me since I left the convent--"

"Madame," interrupted M. Joly protestingly, "I am not one of those persons who believe that to extinguish the lights is to make one's neighbor a thief. And in the case of a mystery, which so resembles darkness, I refuse to entertain suspicions whose only foundation is our own mystification. Let us begin by ascertaining what my friend Pichon has got into his head."

"Oh, you know Monsieur Pichon?"

"Intimately."

"And you will see him?"

He rose. "At once."

"How good you are!" she cried impetuously; "will you accept a seat in my carriage, Monsieur Joly?"

"I am afraid," he said, smiling, "madame drives too rapidly for an old tortoise who between here and the Boulevard du Palais must have time to reflect."

One foot on the step of the carriage, she turned: "You approve of my not writing my husband?"

"Absolutely."

"Wait"--as he closed the door-- "my card."

"You forget the good memory. Boulevard Haussmann, 190."

She laughed, and he signed to the coachman.

He watched the carriage till it disappeared beyond the turn in the road, then stood gazing thoughtfully up the gravel path of Monrepos. The cure was still sleeping in the arbor. The bees were droning above the parterres. The goldfish, motionless, lay in the shadow of the stone coping.

"Come now, friend Pichon," he said, closing the gate of Paradise behind him, "let us see about this pencil."

An hour later he descended from the omnibus on Boulevard du Palais. It was raining and he had no umbrella. Buttoning up his coat and lowering his head, he made a dash for the archway of the prefecture. Although the clock in the bureau of the prefect struck only three times, the lamp on the prefect's desk was burning, the sudden summer storm having enveloped the city in mid-afternoon darkness. Except for the circle of light under the green shade the room was in shadow. In this shadow, midway between the desk and the door, stood Pichon, lately promoted to the grade of inspector in place of Joly, resigned.

Pichon was often taciturn because he had so much to say. That his silence on this occasion was due to other causes was clear from his abject appearance. Under the gaze of the prefect his figure seemed to grow smaller and to retreat still further into the shadow.

"So, no progress."

The prefect's voice was cold, and Pichon remained silent. It was true, he had made no progress. The prefect went to the window. Through the veils of the falling rain lights were beginning to appear in the neighboring buildings.

"What a pity Monsieur Joly took it into his head to retire. You used to work together so admirably."

Pichon winced. Watching the prefect's form dimly outlined against the window, he had the sensation of being slowly effaced, of no longer counting for anything.

"How often it happens that a good soldier makes a poor general."

Unable to dispute the truth of this aphorism, Pichon contented himself with shifting his weight uneasily from one foot to the other. At that moment the

prefect, drumming absent-mindedly on the window-pane, in the flash of lightning which illumined the room for an instant saw a man, struggling with the storm, crossing Boulevard du Palais.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; "and to think there are people who refuse to credit miracles!"

Pichon, mystified, pricked up his ears. Any miracle which would put an end to his misery was welcome.

"Speaking of Monsieur Joly, be so good as to say I wish to speak to him."

Pichon's mystification changed to astonishment. One would think M. Joly was in the next room! He stared at the prefect in a sort of stupor.

"I will look for him, Monsieur le Prefet," he stammered, collecting himself.

"That is unnecessary. You will find him on the stairway or in the anteroom."

As he went softly out the door Pichon was aware that his chief was smiling, and the sense of effacement deepened. In the corridor at the head of the stairs, to his amazement he saw M. Joly, and from force of habit touched his hat.

"Monsieur le Prefet has sent for you," he said.

"Well, you see I am coming," replied M. Joly.

While standing before the prefect's desk, his hat in his hand, as he had so often stood before, M. Joly had the time to speculate a little. He reasoned that if he was sent for it was because he was wanted, and that if he was wanted it was because some one had failed which accounted for the dejected countenance of Pichon. Well acquainted with the little mannerisms of his former chief, he waited patiently. Watching the quill pen traveling to and fro in the circle of light under the green shade, he said to himself, "At the end of the fifth line he will stop." But at the end of the fifth line the pen began a new journey. "Ah!" thought M. Joly, "it is something serious."

At last the pen paused and M. Levigne looked up.

"It is you, Monsieur Joly? So the prodigal returns."

M. Joly was silent.

"It was not by chance, I suppose, that of all the doorways in Paris you should choose that of the prefecture to escape the rain."

"Monsieur le Prefet, if I sought shelter within the walls of the prefecture it was not because I expected to find there a fatted calf."

M. Levigne moved the lamp to the edge of the table and leaned back in his chair.

"What a lucky dog you are, Monsieur Joly! Here am I beset with perplexities, while you can pass your days in repose without a care. You call it Monrepos, do you not? An excellent name."

"He will continue in this manner two minutes yet," thought M. Joly, "then he will come to the point."

"But what astonishes me is that a man who possesses such advantages should be wandering about the streets of Paris like a dog without a home."

"It is not necessary to remind Monsieur le Preset that a dog is the most faithful of animals."

The prefect lifted the green shade from the lamp, which now cast its light full on their faces. "Good!" said M. Joly to himself, "we shall now know something."

"Monsieur Joly, there is a wineshop on the corner of Rue de la Colombe which has a room where one may converse quietly with a friend. I recommend you to go there and to take with you Pichon--who is in need of advice."

M. Joly did not move.

"Well," said the prefect.

"Monsieur le Prefet, there is a condition."

"Ah, there is a condition?"

"That I have carte blanche."

"Come, come," replied M. Levigne, pushing toward him on the table the sheet on

which he had been writing, "that goes without saying."

M. Joly folded the precious paper tranquilly, deposited it carefully in the pocket of his waistcoat, then, seeing the prefect's pen beginning its travels again, stole noiselessly from the room.

Tormented with anxiety, Pichon was pacing the corridor.

"It is such a pleasure to see you again, old friend!" cried M. Joly, linking his arm in his. "How goes it? You are well? Really, to see you is like a draught of old wine. What do you say, shall we have a little chat together as formerly in the cafe on Rue de la Colombe? We see each other so rarely."

"Then you do not remain with us?" said Pichon, as they went down the stairs.

"I, remain? What an idea! To risk my skin a hundred times a year for nine hundred francs! You are joking, Pichon."

"That is true," admitted Pichon, his anxiety somewhat appeased. "Nine hundred francs is very little."

"It is worse than nothing. If you are not paid at all, you receive a gold medal for a fine action. But if this action is paid for, you are not even noticed. It is impossible to be a hero when one is a mercenary."

"I had not thought of that," said Pichon; "but not every man's wife," he added mournfully, "is so fortunate as to receive a legacy like Madame Joly."

"That is what the prefect said to me. 'Monsieur Joly,' he said, 'you are a lucky dog.'"

As they crossed the open space before Notre Dame, Pichon's anxiety returned.

"I do not deny," continued M. Joly, "that sometimes, when I remember--we have had some interesting quarter-hours together, eh, Pichon? Tell me"--entering the Cafe de l'Esperance and pushing open the door to the room in the rear-- "tell me, is there anything interesting going on at this moment?"

"There is always something interesting going on," Pichon replied moodily. "Not ten minutes ago the prefect said to me it was a pity you had resigned."

"Really," exclaimed M. Joly, leading the way to a quiet corner, "he said that? You amaze me."

Pichon sank into a chair. "But since these things interest you no longer--" he said, plunging his hands into the deep pockets of his loose trousers.

"Messieurs?" inquired the waiter.

"Ah, Joseph, it is you? A sir op de groseitte, if you please, And you, Pichon, a fine champagne, as formerly?"

Pichon nodded.

"What you say is quite true," resumed M. Joly when they were alone again; "these things interest me no longer. Do you remember that little girl they called Dorante whom we found at the Restaurant, des Tournelles in that affair of the Bank of France? She has become my own flesh and blood. I am teaching her the history of France. In the month of May we go into the woods for primroses. A small hand slips into yours and you break with the habits of a lifetime. No, my friend,"--shaking his head,-- "it is finished."

Moving his glass uneasily to and fro over the table, Pichon observed him doubtfully. Distrust of himself, the longing to profit by the experience of a superior intelligence, and a sudden resurgence of loyalty were working in his brain. Against this tide he struggled for a moment, then set his glass down sharply.

"Comrade," he said abruptly, "I am in a fix."

"You need money, Pichon?" asked M. Joly sympathetically.

Pichon dismissed the suggestion with a wave of his hand.

"A document has disappeared from the Ministry of War"--he paused in order that this fact might have time to sink into the mind of his listener--"an important document which has to do with the mobilization of the army. This document was deposited in the safe in a room occupied by Colonel de Wimpffen, a safe of which he only"--another pause--"and General Texier, of the staff, possessed the combination. On the morning of August 13, Colonel de Wimpffen and his wife go to Bourg-la-Reine to pass a few days with a cousin. On the 14th, General

Texier, takes it into his head to consult this document. He opens the safe. The document in question has taken wing. He sends for the prefect. The prefect sends for me--and where we began, there we are now."

He stopped, took a turn up and down the room, shrugged his shoulders, and dropped into his chair.

"But you have a theory," said M. Joly; "develop your theory, Pichon."

"There is but one theory," replied Pichon testily. "Two men possess the key to a combination. One is above suspicion. There remains the other."

"What a devil of a logician you are, Pichon! You subtract one from two and one remains."

Pichon shook his head. "Logic is a fine thing, Monsieur Joly, but sentiment is still finer. This de Wimpffen is a friend of General Texier, who knows him from childhood. He served with him in Africa. He is the soul of honor! We have heard such arguments before." And Pichon shrugged his shoulders again disdainfully.

"In the operation of subtracting one from two," observed M. Joly thoughtfully, "there is always the question which of the two is the remainder." "Oh, of that there is no doubt. Think of it! A general of the staff!"

"In that case, since this remainder is the soul of honor--one consults a man of honor."

"Parbleu! They have sent for him. He arrives to-morrow."

M. Joly's hands clasped over his waistcoat. "And you, Pichon, what have you done?"

Pichon took another turn in the room, then planted himself squarely before his companion.

"To consult an innocent man is to learn nothing. A guilty man denies. Why, then, consult him at all?"

M. Joly nodded approvingly. "I understand. So you put this soul of honor under your microscope. Tell us what you have discovered, Pichon."

"Nothing. His correspondence?--he has none. His friends?--irreproachable. His desk, his apartment?--not a straw."

"And then?" pursued M. Joly encouragingly.

Pichon hesitated.

"I will tell you," he replied, the desire to prove his adroitness overcoming his caution: "when a man is not suspected, he becomes careless. This man is not careless. But when a man knows that he is suspected, he becomes troubled--that is, he makes mistakes. I learned that Madame de Wimpffen was to return to Paris alone, and I had an idea." M. Joly's hands tightened. "I said: 'I will leave my tracks in the den of the fox--I will make them so plain that even a woman can see them--and this woman, alarmed, perplexed, will hasten to show them to her husband--and this husband, seeing that the hounds are on the trail, will betray himself.'"

"Really, Pichon, I had no idea you were capable of such cleverness."

Pichon's face wore a smile of self-satisfaction. "Tomorrow," he said significantly--"tomorrow we shall see something."

"Has it occurred to you," said M. Joly, after a pause, "that a man, distrustful of his memory--figures are so elusive should make a note of a combination?--a note which falls into the hands of another?"

"Why?" retorted Pichon obstinately; "to what end? Two men do not forget, or, if that be so, which is improbable, in an emergency a safe can always be broken open."

"Forgive me, another question: no one occupied this room with Monsieur de Wimpffen?"

"Yes, a clerk, one Bulow--an old man whose nose is in his papers from morning till night. He lives on Rue Monge, No. 176. Be easy, I forget nothing. He is under surveillance."

Studying the bottom of his now empty glass, M. Joly appeared lost in thought.

"Pichon," he said, at length, "if you should carry off from the Galerie d'Apollon

in the Louvre the crown of Napoleon, what would you do with it?"

"Dame! one is not so naive as to offer the crown of Napoleon for sale. I would demand a ransom."

"But if you preferred the document on the mobilization of the army to the crown of Napoleon?"

Pichon reflected. "I would make a copy, and I would return the original before its loss was discovered."

"Doubtless that has already occurred to you."

"Certainly, certainly," said Pichon, in an offhand manner.

M. Joly took out his watch.

"Heavens!" he cried, "five o'clock--I must be off." And, rapping on the table, he called for the score.

"You approve of what I have done?"

"How can you ask such a question?" said M. Joly playfully. "Have times changed so that nowadays one asks for approval before one has succeeded?"

"Even afterward one is not sure of it," grumbled Pichon. And, the score being settled, they passed out into the street.

"To whom is this affair known?" asked M. Joly as they neared the corner.

"Except to those I have mentioned, to no one--General Texier, the prefect, myself, and you."

"And Monsieur Bulow."

"Not at all. When Colonel de Wimpffen went to Bourg-la-Reine he said to him: 'I am going into the country--I give you a holiday. On my return I will send for you.' Consequently he knows nothing."

An omnibus drawn by three white horses was approaching.

"Pichon," said M. Joly, "you almost make me regret that there are such things as legacies--what you tell me is so interesting. I am dying to hear what Madame de Wimpffen will do when she finds--" His words were lost in the rumble of the wheels.

Pichon, on tiptoe, shouted in his ear, "If you will come to-morrow, at this hour--"

"That was what I was about to propose to you. Good-night, Pichon. Good luck to you."

After all, thought Pichon, gazing after the retreating omnibus, he did not tell me why he came to the prefecture.

Retracing his steps, he went over in his mind the conversation in the Cafe de l'Esperance. M. Joly was certainly right. One's first endeavor would be to replace the paper before its absence was discovered. But Colonel de Wimpffen was still at Bourg-la-Reine and had intended to remain there. Clearly he had had no opportunity, nor was he in any haste, to put back the stolen document. This thought troubled Pichon, for it threatened his theory. What if the document was already back in its place! He rejected this idea as preposterous. A general of the staff! The alternative was inconceivable. Yet this idea, having once found a lodgment in his brain, returned with a disquieting persistence.

Meanwhile M. Joly, descending from the omnibus at Place de la Concorde, was following Boulevard Saint-Germain to the Ministry of War. He passed in unnoticed, but at the head of the stairs an usher asked what he wanted.

"The room of Colonel de Wimpffen."

"Colonel de Wimpffen is in the country."

"I did not ask for Colonel de Wimpffen. I asked for his room," replied M. Joly blandly.

"Since Colonel de Wimpffen is not in town, naturally his room is closed."

"Very well, then, I will see General Texier."

The usher eyed him superciliously.

"Your card, if you please. It is the order."

"My card? I have none. Say to him that I come from the prefecture."

"It makes no difference where you come from," said the usher, losing patience; "to see General Texier a card is necessary."

"I have something better," smiled M. Joly, "but since a card is necessary I will make one."

He tore a leaf from his notebook, wrote his name in pencil, and while waiting in the corridor remarked to himself, "It seems that in the Ministry of War it is easier to penetrate a safe than to penetrate to a general."

When, fifteen minutes later, he emerged from General Texier's office, he was accompanied by a secretary.

"You will take your instructions," said the latter, calling the usher and indicating M. Joly, "from this gentleman. Monsieur, here are the keys."

"The room of Colonel de Wimpffen, if you please," repeated M. Joly politely, slipping the bunch of keys into his pocket.

Reaching at last the door, he took out his watch. "At what hour does the Ministry close?" he asked.

"At six o'clock, monsieur."

"It is now twenty minutes of six. For carrying out your orders so faithfully I present you with these twenty minutes." Saying which he unlocked the door and went in.

He first relocked the door and removed the key; then he looked about him. Midway along the side wall stood a mahogany desk, behind which hung portieres. Behind these portieres he expected to find a door, but on drawing them aside he perceived an arch, within whose recess appeared the partition wall. Evidently, he thought, this room once formed part of a larger one which in the interests of economy has been divided. Opposite the desk was a door on either side of which were shelves filled with books and pasteboard pockets. Pushing a chair in front of this door, he sat down and took out the bunch of keys. After one

or two trials this door opened, disclosing a safe let into the wall. Without hesitation he took hold of the dial, turned it successively to the right and left, till the massive front door swung on its hinges. Between the pigeon-holes another smaller door confronted him. Selecting once more a key, he surmounted this last barrier, and, thrusting in his hand, pulled out a heavy blue envelope sealed with three seals bearing the words "Ministere de la Guerre." On the face of the envelope was the word "Mobilisation."

At this instant a quick step resounded in the corridor. Replacing the envelope, he closed the safe and stood up, listening. Some one was about to enter. He had barely reached the portieres when the door was opened, shut, and locked again. Motionless, holding his breath, he waited. A few steps--then silence. He parted the curtains gently--and saw the back of Pichon!

Seated in the chair before the safe, Pichon was repeating one by one the maneuvers of his predecessor. Finally he, too, thrust his hand into the inner vault and pulled out the blue envelope

"Thunder of heaven!" he exclaimed, "I have made the wrong subtraction."

After astonishment came reflection. Firmly wedded to his theory, he found himself forced to suspect one so high in the hierarchy that his spirit of subordination revolted. To impart this suspicion to any one seemed to him impossible. Yet in his own mind it took the form of a conviction. Closing the safe mechanically, he left the room.

Shortly after six o'clock M. Joly had finished his investigation. The hall was filled with employees hurrying homeward. The expression on his face indicated that some problem more difficult than Pichon's subtraction was troubling him. "But why," he muttered, "if he is deaf--" Mingling with the throng, he descended the stairs slowly. At the entrance he accosted the porter.

"Monsieur," he asked, "this Bulow, the deaf clerk of Monsieur de Wimpffen--"

"Bulow?" replied the porter; "he is no more deaf than I am."

"But why, then, since he is not deaf--"

The porter thought he had to do with a crazy man.

"Norn de Dieut" he retorted angrily, "go about your business. If you want a deaf man you will find a number of them in the Asylum on Rue Saint-Jacques--we do not keep them in the Ministry."

"Thank you," said M. Joly; "I have been misinformed."

At the corner of the street he found a commissionaire, and, tearing a second leaf from his note-book, sent the following message to Monrepos:--

"I am detained in Paris for the night. Say to Dorante that she may read on as far as the battle at Vouille, where Clovis defeated the Visigoths under Alaric II."

Then, hailing a cab, he gave the direction, "Rue Monge."

"What number?" asked the driver.

"Any number which pleases you," replied M. Joly.

As he anticipated, the cab drew up at No. 1. He paid the fare and continued on foot. Just before reaching No. 176 he saw on the opposite side of the street a cafe. The sky had cleared and the tables on the sidewalk were already crowded. At one of these tables a man was seated before a tall glass of black coffee. Seeing M. Joly approaching, this man rose with a gesture of surprise.

"Do not disturb yourself, Meneval," said M. Joly, taking the vacant chair at the same table. "We are in the same business."

"You are one of us again, Monsieur Joly?" asked Meneval respectfully.

"You used to take orders from me without asking questions, Meneval. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am alone."

"Well, go and tell Pichon I wish to speak with him; and in order that your conscience may not suffer, I permit you to read this."

M. Joly took from his pocket the paper given him by the prefect.

"It is not necessary," replied Meneval, recognizing the prefect's signature. "I am

going."

"But first tell me," said M. Joly, deliberately tearing the paper into small pieces, "what manner of man this Bulow is."

Meneval described him. "There is a light in his window now, the third above the thread-shop."

"Good. Tell Pichon to bring with him what is necessary. You have your pistol? Slip it into my pocket, Meneval. You will take a cab." Saying which M. Joly ordered another sirop and the "Figaro."

The light was still burning in the third-story window when Pichon arrived with two agents. His face still wore the expression of surprise and anxiety with which he had received the message delivered by Meneval.

"Sit down, Pichon," said M. Joly in his quietest manner. "Tell me, did you notice anything in particular this afternoon when you opened the safe at the Ministry?"

Pichon's small eyes opened to their widest capacity.

"You know, then,--"

"What I know is not the question. In fact, as yet I know nothing. So you did not notice anything?"

Pichon shook his head blankly.

"Nevertheless," said M. Joly, "it is worth thinking of. If agreeable to you we will consult Monsieur Bulow. Will you accompany me?"

Pichon followed him across the street into the doorway of No. 176 without a word.

"Pichon," said M. Joly at the foot of the stairs, "you remember that you said to me, 'I am in a fix.' It is therefore at your request that I interfere in your affairs. But if you wish--will you go first?"

"After you, master," said Pichon.

At the door on the third landing M. Joly knocked gently. A moment of silence intervened, then a voice said: "Come in."

M. Joly took off his hat.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Monsieur Bulow?" he asked.

"That is my name. What do you want of me?"

"I?" replied M. Joly--"I want nothing. I come on behalf of my friend here, Monsieur Pichon. It is he who wishes to consult you on a matter of importance."

Pichon glanced at his friend appealingly.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said M. Bulow.

"You are very good to receive a stranger so affably," replied M. Joly. "The truth is my position is a delicate one. Monsieur Pichon is afflicted with an insatiable curiosity. He wishes to know why a man who is not deaf provides himself with one of those instruments called audiphones--or, if he be deaf, why he leaves it at the Ministry instead of carrying it on his person. Keep your seat, Monsieur Bulow," continued M. Joly, taking the pistol from his pocket and laying it on his knee. "I understand your feelings--do not move, please. I admit the question is an impertinent one. I admit even that I have no authority to ask impertinent questions of any one. For that reason, as you perceive,--" His hand closed over the handle on his knee.

Suddenly regaining his composure, the man burst into a boisterous laugh of affected gayety.

"What joke is this you are perpetrating?" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur Bulow," said M. Joly, "it is plain that you are saying to yourself that the blue envelope, with its seals affixed, is reposing safely in the vault at the Ministry. But there are cases in which a copy is of more value than the original--quick! Pichon!"

Of all this conversation Pichon understood nothing. But if his brain moved sluggishly his hands deserved no such reproach. He had seen the crisis approaching and was ready, ending the brief struggle by transferring the

handcuffs in his pocket to the wrists of his assailant.

M. Joly went to the window and made a sign. The two agents appeared, breathless.

"One of you call a cab," said M. Joly, "and you, Pichon, go down with Meneval and Monsieur Bulow."

When, at the end of a few minutes, Pichon returned, he found M. Joly also ready to leave. "This fellow," he was saying, "is a simpleton. Here is the stamp whose impression you doubtless observed on the three wax seals, and here under this portfolio is the copy. I give them to you, Pichon."

"But I understand nothing," cried Pichon.

"Pichon," said M. Joly, "I once read in a book--one of those books in which we are held up to ridicule--of a man with an ear so acute that he could hear the tumblers of a lock fall into their places. I did not believe it. I do not believe it yet. Nevertheless, given a lock of a certain age and an audiphone--do you know what an audiphone is, Pichon? You will find one under the loose papers of the third drawer in Monsieur Bulow's desk at the Ministry--given these things, and it is possible."

"I am disgraced," cried Pichon.

"You disgraced, my friend! Why do you say so?"

"I have left that damned pencil in the lingerie of Madame de Wimpffen."

"Oh, as to that," replied M. Joly, "be tranquil. Here is your pencil, Pichon."

On reaching Monrepos late that evening M. Joly said to his wife:--

"Marie, I have to make a confession. Passing this afternoon before the prefecture, I was like a boy at the door of the pastry-cook, and I went in."

"I know it," she said.

"You know it!" exclaimed M. Joly in astonishment.

"Do you think I have observed nothing all these weeks?" said Madame Joly, smiling.

M. Joly made no reply. After all, Paradise also had its attractions.

X

HOW DORANTE CROSSED THE RUBICON

Dorante always addressed M. Joly as "monsieur." Having no recollection of her own father, it might be supposed that when M. Joly assumed the paternal role, Dorante would have recognized his claim to the paternal title. It is not to be inferred that because she did not do so she had withheld her love. She adored him. When, dressed in her best frock, she went out for a walk with him, to hold his hand produced in her a sort of ecstasy. That M. Joly returned this adoration was a secret Dorante had discovered at the very beginning of their acquaintance. Perhaps the very fact that this man who had rescued her from poverty and toil was not her father had something to do with the ecstasy and timidity of her love. For Dorante, if not at this time a woman, was going to be one, and therefore discriminated between the affection of a real father and that of a substitute--that is, between love acquired by the accident of birth and love inspired by herself. To say "father" was to say something commonplace. To say "monsieur" was to liberate emotions which gave her much happiness which she did not comprehend.

With this title M. Joly was equally content. That he should be so addressed when, a stranger, he first took her hand in his, was to be expected. That she should persist in so addressing him both amused and pleased him. Dorante had not arrived in the ordinary course of nature--an event which, however agreeable, is nevertheless to be expected. Dorante was the unexpected. Her love was not an obligation; it was a gift. In each case there was that vague sense of possessing something which was not a primary right. Perhaps these subtle distinctions were the result of sex. Perhaps, if Dorante had been a boy, they would have vanished. For it was also true that from the very outset she had not hesitated to call Madame Joly "mamma."

On none of the new duties consequent upon Dorante's adoption had M. Joly entered with more enthusiasm than that of her education. Having peculiar views on this subject, it was fortunate that he could begin with a blank page; for the atmosphere of the Restaurant des Tournelles, in which Dorante's earlier years had been passed, redolent as it was of delectable things, was suggestive of drudgery rather than learning. In arithmetic, for example, she had never gone

beyond the calculation of the number of revolutions of the spit required to roast the fowls and joints in whose subsequent fate she had so infinitesimal a share. In this direction M. Joly confined his instruction to the lower levels of the multiplication table; for, he said, as mathematics is an organ of expression, and as Dorante will never have any ideas worthy of expression in that language, it is useless to acquire it.

In history, especially that of his beloved France, he had his own methods. When making an excursion into the past, he followed the same path which he took in their walks--that is to say, the path of the woods and the flowers--with the result that a stretch of monotonous white road which covered her shoes with dust was forgiven for the sake of the mystery and charm of the byway to which it led. Thus, even of that dreary and chaotic period of the Merovingian kings, Dorante had some very definite knowledge, her memory being tricked into obedience by such romantic details as that the slave Ingonda had become the wife of Clothar, and that the great Queen Fredegonde was reputed to be a witch with a magic ring. M. Joly himself had felt no great interest in Fredegonde's ring until after Dorante had proclaimed its importance. Not infrequently, in opening her eyes to one world, he was surprised to find that she opened his to another, and that while he was beginning her education she was completing his own. In sharing thus with her his mental estate he found a number of coins which had been overlooked.

The fear that somewhere in Dorante's unknown past the seeds of evil were waiting for their springtime had gradually faded from Madame Joly's thought. Dorante was uniformly happy, and happiness rarely mates with predestined evil. She illustrated the paradox that happiness forgets past misery, though misery never forgets past happiness. The Restaurant des Tournelles, from which she had been rescued, before whose big fireplace she had so often turned the spit at the peril of her complexion, had passed into an oblivion which would have been complete but for an occasional dream, in which M. Joly's protecting hand was suddenly transformed into another--a hand rough and hard, which had a disagreeable habit of cuffing. She awoke then with a start of terror, endeavoring to grasp the handle of the spit which in her sleep had slipped from her tired fingers--to realize subsequently the immense advantage of misery in dreams over misery in life.

Nevertheless, entranced as Madame Joly had been to take to her bosom what the good God had not seen fit to give her, she had had her misgivings. What might

not this waif from the nest of criminals whom her husband had tracked to the cellar of the Restaurant des Tournelles inherit from her mysterious past! She had therefore devoted herself to that branch of Dorante's education to which M. Joly paid no attention whatever. Contrary to all that might be expected from a man whose life had been spent in the detection of crime, M. Joly, late inspector of police, seemed absolutely oblivious to any danger from the malignant germs which might lurk in the dower bequeathed to Dorante by her ancestors. He had a theory that with good material the problem of education did not exist, and that with bad material it was hopeless. Association with criminals, and above all with Madame Joly, had confirmed his theory of human nature.

Madame Joly went regularly to confession. He had ceased to speculate upon what she confessed, never having been able to convict her of anything worth confessing. He classified this act of contrition with certain other harmless luxuries necessary to normal feminine life--as the lace and like trifles in the upper drawer of Madame Joly's chest. He even shared some of Dorante's excitement over the white dress in preparation for her first communion.

With the consummation of this sacrament, Madame Joly's confidence in the future deepened. She was therefore astonished when, one day, M. Joly said:--

"Wait till she has crossed the Rubicon."

"What Rubicon?" she asked, looking up in surprise.

"The Rubicon of Knowledge."

At this remark Madame Joly became lost in reflection. She had crossed that Rubicon at the door of a little cabinet in a certain restaurant known as the Fountain of Health--not at the Mairie, where signatures were affixed to official documents, nor at Saint-Medard, where the cure had mumbled his Latin, not even when friends kissed her cheeks and said farewell as if she were setting out for some far country--but on the threshold of that cabinet where the door opened upon the little table set for two, and closed upon the world. Her head bent lower over her needle, but not in disquietude. The Promised Land had made good the promise. If M. Joly had not been there, the needle would have dropped from her hand.

"Monsieur," asked Dorante, on the day of the ceremony at Saint-Medard, "why do you not go to confession like mamma?"

"Dorante," said M. Joly, unable on the spur of the moment to explain why heresy was not synonymous with depravity, "get my hat and we will go for that scarf embroidered with paillettes which you admired in the window of that brigand who sells the treasures of the Orient made in Nuremberg."

With the passing of years Dorante made a discovery. In the Restaurant des Tournelles the strange characters on the menu which in some mysterious manner stood for the delicacies in its larder had often excited her curiosity. Why should any one devote so much time to the study of that bit of pasteboard in order to satisfy so simple a thing as hunger? When, later, Madame Joly had with much labor pieced together for her these strange characters into words, she was on the road to knowledge--the knowledge of all those discoveries made by her forebears and recorded for her benefit or undoing. Her astonishment at this unexpected freedom to satisfy her curiosity without asking questions was as if, in the Restaurant des Tournelles, permission had suddenly been given her to work her will in its larder.

On "monsieur's" bookshelves were inexhaustible mines of information. Not all that she found there was wholly intelligible. But that did not matter. When she did not understand, it was enough to wonder.

It was not, however, in a book that she made her discovery. The book had only said--it was a lady of the Middle Ages speaking through the lips of a troubadour--"All that I possess would I give for the beauty that was mine on that day when my lover kissed me in the wood"--and straightway closing the book, Dorante looked in her mirror and made her discovery.

"Monsieur," she asked one day, "is not Dorante the name of a man?"

They were sitting under the lime tree in the wood of Verrieres, from which the forest paths radiated like the spokes of an immense wheel.

"Yes, of a certain nobleman, a count or marquis, in one of Monsieur Moliere's comedies."

Dorante knew this nobleman well, having made his acquaintance on one of M. Joly's bookshelves. She also recollected at that moment that the lover who had stolen that kiss in the Middle Ages was a marquis, keeper of the Marches of Poitou.

"It does not please you?" asked M. Joly.

"I am accustomed to it, monsieur; but it seems to me that--if it belongs to a man--"

"Be tranquil. We also are accustomed to it, and those who are not so will not on that account mistake you for a marquis."

At the thought of being so mistaken Dorante smiled, her eyes fixed upon the far reaches of the forest road already filling with shadows.

"Are there marquises at the present time?" she asked, after a silence.

"They exist," replied M. Joly thoughtfully, "but they are no longer of the same importance."

It was not long after this conversation that, sitting with Madame Joly one evening in the library, he said:--

"Marie, do you know that Dorante is seventeen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And that--" he hesitated.

"Yes, I have been thinking of that," said Madame Joly tranquilly.

"You have been thinking of what?"

"Of what you were about to speak to me."

"How could you know of what I was about to speak when it only occurred to me today?"

"Why to-day?" asked Madame Joly, looking up quickly.

"Why does any idea occur at any time?"

"It occurs to me often."

M. Joly laid down his book and took off his glasses.

"Marie, you have something to tell me."

"I? What should I tell you that you do not know?"

"Tell me what I know, if you please."

Madame Joly's needles fell into her lap.

"You observed nothing last week at the theater?"

"I observed Monsieur Coquelin and Madame Bartet."

"And in the garden, when Dorante reads with you, you observe nothing?"

"Really, Marie, one would say I was entering upon my dotage."

"No, but we observe different things."

"Well, are you never going to tell me what it is you observe which I do not?"

"I observe that when sitting in the arbor you turn your back to the wall of our neighbor's garden."

"Well?"

"And that consequently you do not see the young man at the window which overlooks the wall."

"That is true, I had not observed him. And this young man, is he also interested in the House of Moliere?"

"Since he always selects the same evening which we do, you can judge whether it is monsieur Coquelin on the stage or some one in the audience who most interests him," said Madame Joly, taking up her needles again.

M. Joly watched for a time their regular movements in silence.

"Marie," he said, at length, "I have imagined that some day Dorante would disappear as she came-- that in some moment of aberration--for what happens to others when the blood takes fire might also happen to her. I have thought, too, of those ruffians who once abused her--that they would some day return to claim

her--for that also happens. But I had not thought of the young man in our neighbor's garden."

Madame Joly smiled.

"Have you made other observations also?"

This time Madame Joly laid aside her work altogether, sitting down on the footstool beside him and resting her cheek on his knee.

"Do you remember the seat in the Luxembourg garden?"

"By the Fontaine de Medicis? Yes, certainly. It was there I first saw you. You used to sit there dreaming, your hands folded in your lap."

"I was not dreaming."

"And once, as I passed on the way to the prefecture, you looked up and smiled."

"Not the first time."

"Well, no, I admit it was not the first time."

"Nor the second."

"In those days I was not keeping account of the number of times I passed, but of the time that must elapse before I should pass again. At all events, you confess that you smiled."

Madame Joly raised her head.

"So has Dorante."

"The little wretch!" exclaimed M. Joly. "But why have you not spoken of all this before?"

"Because for the past few days this young man has disappeared. I said to myself, he has perhaps gone away altogether and will be forgotten. But from certain signs I discovered to-day I know that Dorante has not forgotten."

Hitherto M. Joly had found the duties of paternity agreeable. Now for the first

time they began to oppress him. There had never been in his mind the least doubt that Dorante would marry--in some indefinite future. He would in due time select a suitable companion for her, with the result that in addition to a daughter he would have a son. It had not occurred to him that, like Diogenes, he would require a lantern to find this suitable person, or that for Dorante there should exist a Fontaine de Medicis.

The truth is that this marriage, like death, of all things the most certain, had been, like death, of all things the least thought of. The buds were swelling, the sap beginning to flow, and he was not ready! Marriage! What uncertainties, what tragedies it concealed! To transplant to an unknown soil a plant just about to flower was to coquette with chance, that element which in his professional life he had above all others sought to eliminate. It was contrary to all reason that this most common of all human events should be the least subject to control. Who the devil was this young man who, without asking leave, uprose in his life like an island from the sea, to disturb its peace! He went back in thought to the little girl of the Restaurant des Tournelles. How willingly, how confidingly, she had forsaken the old for the new. To be sure, that was only natural. No one would hesitate to exchange blows and misery for caresses and comfort. Was she grateful? Unquestionably. But what is gratitude, or even affection, when opposed to love?

"What signs, Marie?"

"When you spoke to me just now," said Madame Joly, who had been waiting patiently during these reflections, "I was about to confide them to you. To-day, while you were absent with Dorante in the town, I entered her room to put away the clothes which came from the laundry. While so doing, I saw in a drawer, hidden under a nightdress, the silver box in which she keeps the chain you gave her on her birthday, and which always stands on the writing-desk by the window. 'What is it doing here?' I said to myself. When I had finished, as I was leaving, I saw the chain hanging by her mirror. She had forgotten to put it away, I thought; I will put it back in its place myself and I went again to the drawer and took out the box. Always she kept the key in her desk. I opened it. The key was not there. 'She has taken it with her' I said--and replaced the box where I found it. At that moment the key fell from the folds of the nightdress. I opened the box. Inside was another key--a much larger one."

"Go on," said M. Joly.

"You remember, before our neighbor bought from us the land which adjoins ours, there was in the wall a wooden door leading to the kitchen garden which we formerly had in the plot where his house now stands. When that garden was abandoned to him the door was closed--and then forgotten. It is now quite hidden by shrubbery."

M. Joly made a movement of assent.

"And under the key was a paper, on which I recognized the handwriting of Dorante. Did I do wrong in reading it?"

"What did it say?"

"It said, 'All that I possess would I give for the beauty that was mine on that day when my lover kissed me in the wood.'"

"The devil!" muttered M. Joly.

"Within this paper was folded another--rolled into the shape of a little ball--and containing three words in a handwriting which I did not recognize."

"What were those three words? Speak, Marie."

"Can you not guess? There are only three words which, when they cannot be spoken, must be written, and which no wall can separate from the one for whom they are destined."

M. Joly was silent. It was useless to pretend that he did not comprehend. He went to the window, drawing aside the curtain.

"She is asleep. There is no light on the trees from her room."

"Yes, doubtless, she is asleep."

He turned toward her, throwing up his hand with one of those gestures of mingled incredulity and distress.

"What you tell me, Marie, I would not believe if another than you told it to me."

She looked up at him, a momentary smile passing over her face.

"Such things occur only on the stage," he said stubbornly.

"They occur on the stage," replied Madame Joly, "for the reason that they have first occurred elsewhere. When you were inspector you used to tell me of things far more incredible."

"Have you that key, Marie?"

"No, I replaced it. Where are you going?"

"I am going into the garden to get the air."

The night was warm and dark. Stirred by the light summer wind the leaves made a whispering sound. His hands crossed behind his back, M. Joly walked slowly down the gravel path. At the arbor where he was in the habit of reading with Dorante he stopped. "The little wretch!" he kept repeating--"the little wretch!" It was only by repeating these words that he kept alive the flame of his resentment. When arresting the counterfeiter in the Restaurant des Tournelles, he had said, "You will pay with twenty years for the few thousand francs you have enjoyed. A laborer at three francs a day makes a better bargain." Why should Dorante seek by stealth what was to be had for the asking? Was there, then, a pleasure in what could be possessed only under the cover of darkness? and did darkness itself give zest as well as cover to crime? Bah! what madness! to speak of Dorante and crime in the same breath. He would light a cigar. To smoke was tranquillizing.

A distant bell was striking ten. At the last stroke, feeling for his matchbox, he heard a sound--yes, the sound of footsteps. He was about to say, "Marie, is it you?" when he realized that the footsteps were approaching, not the arbor, by the gravel path, but the gate in the shrubbery, over the soft turf. He returned the cigar to his pocket and listened. Another sound, as of a key grating in a rusty lock. An older hand would have oiled that lock, he thought, mechanically. Low voices warned him that to remain was to be discovered. He stepped out softly on the grass, and sat down on the wooden seat encircling the arbor.

"Dorante, dear Dorante--how good you are -"

"I do not know whether I am good or not -"

"Oh, yes, you are good, since you are here -"

"Please--"

"But I love you, Dorante--are you not happy as I am?"

"Yes, I am happy--but I am afraid."

"Of what? Have you not confidence in me? Tell me--once--that you love me?"

"Oh, yes, I think so -"

"But say so, Dorante--will you not say so --I wish to hear it!"

"I do--I do."

Silence. M. Joly rose to his feet.

"Do you remember the day I first saw you? You were sitting here--your hands folded in your lap--like one dreaming -"

"I was not dreaming."

"And when you raised your eyes to mine you smiled--"

"Not the first time."

M. Joly sighed. He saw Marie sitting by the Fontaine de Medicis.

"The second, then--"

"No, nor the second."

"Does that matter? You smiled, and at that smile I loved you; and you--did you not love me then also--a little?"

"Perhaps--a little--I do not know."

"But now--you know now?"

"Hark!"

"It is nothing."

"Hush! I heard something."

"Dorante, you are trembling--yes, you shall go but once more, tell me--"

"Yes - yes - yes--Oh, I am afraid--let me go--I cannot bear it."

"There--see--I obey you--you will come again?"

"No - yes--I do not know--"

"Dorante, Dorante--"

A light footstep hurried over the grass and all was still.

M. Joly had made up his mind. To the entrance of the arbor was but a step, and, taking this step, he drew from his pocket his matchbox and began lighting his cigar. By the light of the taper he saw a young man, pale and trembling.

"Sit down," he said quietly. "We will have a little conversation together. It is true that it is dark here, but I observe darkness does not prevent people from coming to an understanding."

"Monsieur--"

"I owe you no apology for listening," pursued M. Joly calmly, "for if I had not listened you would not have heard much that was agreeable to you. Moreover, in one's own garden one is not obliged to retire to some distant corner at the mere sound of voices. Have you, perchance, the key to my gate?"

"Here it is, monsieur."

"Good. Hereafter you will come in by the other door, which has a bell provided for visitors."

"Monsieur, I have done wrong--I confess it."

"At the prefecture we value confessions only when we lack evidence. Or do you take me for a priest who gives absolution?"

"Monsieur, you have the right to upbraid me--I have done wrong--but, believe me, I love her--"

"Oh, as to that sentiment, I share it. Between us there is, however, a difference. In expressing this sentiment, I choose the daytime, whereas you prefer the night."

"Monsieur, I entreat you. Mademoiselle Dorante is innocent--I swear it--it is I who am to blame."

"Have I blamed her?" said M. Joly blandly. "If there is blame it will fall where it belongs. But what is done is done. There remains only Madame Joly who is ignorant of your sentiments. Come, then, I wish to present you to my wife."

"But, monsieur -"

"Oh, Madame Joly is a most amiable person. Fear nothing." And M. Joly led the way up the gravel path.

"Marie," he said, opening the library door, "here is a gentleman who wishes to pay you his respects. For the moment I leave you. I have a visit to make."

As he passed through the gate into the street, M. Joly saw a light shining in Dorante's room. "Ah," he muttered, "that young man will arouse the whole neighborhood."

Closing the gate behind him, he hurried down the deserted street and rang his neighbor's bell. A servant, astonished to see a man without a hat at such an hour, opened the door grudgingly.

"Is your master in?"

"He has not gone out, Monsieur Joly," replied the servant, recognizing him.

"Well, then, announce me."

She led the way along a narrow hall, and threw open a door at its farther extremity. Following close upon her heels, M. Joly announced himself.

A little old man in a dressing-gown and velvet skull-cap was seated at a table loaded with books and papers and lighted by a single candle.

"Ah, it is you, neighbor, at this hour!"

"I disturb you?" said M. Joly.

"By no means, by no means; I am delighted. Sophie, another candle."

"One is sufficient," said M. Joly, bestowing on Sophie a glance which said, "Leave us," and seating himself in the chair offered him. "You will pardon my visit at this hour, which, as you have just observed, is a late one. For that, however, it is not I who am responsible--but your son."

"My son! but my son is in Paris."

"At this moment," said M. Joly dryly, "your son is asking Madame Joly for the hand of Dorante."

"What are you saying, Monsieur Joly! It is impossible."

"When the impossible becomes true, in time one gets accustomed to it, and I assure you I am not inventing anything, Monsieur Laurens."

"He has done this without asking my permission--without consulting me!"

"Oh, as to that, you are under no disadvantage. Dorante has not consulted me, either."

"But, monsieur, I repeat, this is impossible. I have other plans for Edmond --I--"

"In that respect, then, the advantage is mine. For as regards Dorante, I have made none. As to yours, they are impossible."

"I understand nothing," said M. Joly's neighbor, staring at his guest, bewildered.

"Monsieur," replied M. Joly, smiling, "my life has been spent in interfering with the plans of others. At the prefecture it is our sole business. It is with regret that in this instance I interfere with yours. Whether we two shall interfere with those of two children whom a wall four metres in height has not been able to separate is the question I have come to propose to you. When, taking the air in my garden, I find these two children exchanging--what shall I say? --those promises which to persons of our age would seem extravagant if we did not remember that we also were at one time inclined to indulge in them -"

"Monsieur Joly, you amaze me."

"The question arises whether your son, who, as I said, is at this moment asking my wife for the hand of Dorante, is worthy of that hand, and whether the hand of which he has already possessed himself in my garden can be withdrawn without doing violence to the heart which has surrendered it. I have not the honor of knowing your son intimately. Doubtless he will explain to you what he is now explaining to Madame Joly--Ah!--turning to the door at whose threshold appeared a face radiant with that hope of youth which fears no obstacles--"here he is. I leave you together."

"Papa! Papa!" cried Dorante, springing to his neck before he had time to close the door of his library.

"It is not worth while at this late day to begin calling me papa," said M. Joly, half-suffocated.

When, some months later, he stood for the second time before the altar of Saint-Medard, and Dorante, on tiptoe, lifted her face for the kiss of blessing, he whispered:--

"Well, he is not a marquis--but, as I once told you, marquises are no longer of the same importance."

XI

THE AMBASSADOR

M. De Sade was visibly disturbed. Somewhat late in life he had conceived for Diane de Wimpffen one of those admirations untainted by the desire of possession. He concealed this admiration under an affectation of cynicism which almost deceived himself. But it did not deceive Madame de Wimpffen. Well aware both of the admiration and of its character, she counted upon him as upon an ally with whom a formal treaty is unnecessary.

Like many alliances, this one had had its birth in hostility. But that was long ago.

There had been a wedding at the Madeleine. M. de Sade stood upon the steps as the guests dispersed, thoughtful and undecided. As a man of the world he made light of all expansions of the heart--while secretly cherishing one. During the pauses of the service Madame de Balloy had confided to him that she had the day before asked on behalf of her son the hand of Anne--and Anne was the daughter of Madame de Wimpffen.

He was not the guardian of that hand. That some one would some day aspire to it was inevitable. He had foreseen that contingency, but never in the person of M. de Balloy--that idiot who was squandering his fortune at baccarat and flaunting Mademoiselle Luna of the Varietes in the face of all Paris except his mother. The fact that Madame de Balloy's confidential communication had been made at a wedding rendered it the more disagreeable. Anne, so young, so fearless, so innocent--and so like her mother! The thought that if he were younger--but that was only the shadow of a thought which traversed his mind without leaving a trace, as the shadow of a bird passes over a landscape.

Slowly descending the steps, too preoccupied with the enumeration of M. de Balloy's disqualifications even to acknowledge a friendly greeting, he turned up the Boulevard in the direction of the Pare Monceau. To the shop-windows, which generally attracted him, he paid no heed. Absorbed, his cane dangling from the hands crossed behind him, he had the air of a man going nowhere in particular--an appearance often presented by one who, knowing well his destination, has not yet confessed it.

Adjoining the park, its tiny garden protected by an iron grille whose gilded spikes were barely visible above the enveloping ivy, was the small Hotel of which M. de Sade was the proprietor. He had recently offered it to his friend de Wimpffen, who, since his promotion to the grade of colonel, had been assigned to duty at the War Office. For M. de Sade, not being burdened with duties, was going to get rid of the summer, and incidentally some of the boredom of living, at the seaside. On reaching the park entrance he took out his watch. It was eleven o'clock. He had no more time than was necessary for breakfast and a change of costume. His seat was reserved in the express which left at two. He had already said farewell. But there was the key to the garden gate, which he had forgotten to deliver. He had intended to send this key by messenger, but fortunately it was still in his pocket--to serve his present purpose. Yes, certainly, he would deliver it in person.

Just within the ivy screen, at the little table laid for breakfast near the foot of the steps leading to the salon windows, M. de Wimpffen was reading "Le Matin." That he was waiting for something more important than breakfast was evident from the glances he directed toward these windows. His orderly had gone for the morning mail. There was also the Abbe d'Arlot, whom Madame de Wimpffen had persuaded to visit her and who might arrive at any moment from Freyr. But it was neither the orderly nor the abbe for whom he was waiting. Only yesterday Madame de Balloy had formally asked for her son the hand of Anne. He had proposed to settle the matter offhand in the blunt, straightforward manner characteristic of him, M. de Balloy's reputation not being such as to render a favorable answer within even the range of discussion. But Madame de Wimpffen had said, "No, Raoul, leave it to me"; and he had left it to her, with a good nature as characteristic as the bluntness and a confidence justified by long experience.

It was the footstep of Diane he was listening for, and in spite of the confidence, her prolonged absence was beginning to engender misgivings. He had read for the third time the political article in "Le Matin" without comprehending a word of it, when the glass doors opened and Diane came lightly down the steps.

She was smiling. It was a good sign.

"Well," he said confidently.

She was sitting now opposite him, her hands crossed before her on the white cloth, tranquil as the June morning itself.

"She loves him"--"Le Matin" fell to the gravel--"madly, with all her soul."

He stared into the blue eyes, stupefied. Their smile, contrasted with the finality of the reply, perplexed him.

"Not possible--not possible," he repeated.

"But true," said Diane.

Speechless, he continued to search the blue eyes. Twenty years of practice had not enabled him to read them with certainty. As M. de Sade said, "They are too clear."

It was at this instant that the lock grated in the iron gate and M. de Sade himself entered.

"Good-morning, my friends," he said gayly; "I bring you the garden key. I am off by the express at -" He stopped, fingering his gray mustache and looking from one to the other. "What has happened--a quarrel?"

"De Sade," exclaimed Raoul, bringing his fist down on the table, "what has happened is this that fellow De Balloy has asked for the hand of Anne."

M. de Sade deposited his overcoat carefully on the back of a chair, seated himself with deliberation, and took out his cigarette-case.

"I see nothing strange in that," he said. "Monsieur le Prefet has done his best, but the race of beggars is not yet extinct." And, lighting his cigarette, he turned to Diane, "With your permission, madame."

"I was telling Raoul when you came," said Diane.

"Begin at the beginning," interrupted her husband. "I wish de Sade to hear also."

"Well, she was at the piano. 'Anne,' I said, standing beside her, 'I have something to say to you.' She looked up quickly and I knew that she knew. Therefore I went straight to the point. 'Monsieur de Balloy,' I said 'has asked for your hand.' She took both mine in hers and covered her face. Looking down on her bent head, I laughed to myself."

"Diane!" exclaimed Raoul reproachfully.

She spread out her hands.

"At myself, in her. Do you remember nothing? The English express certain things better than we do. They say 'to fall in love'--which is the fact. It is a precipice."

"And no parapet," nodded M. de Sade.

"De Sade," cried Raoul resentfully, "I beg of you."

Diane resumed.

"'Anne,' I said, 'you have seen Monsieur de Balloy twice once at the opera and once at Madame Texier's ball.' 'Mamma, dear little mamma,' she replied, looking up into my face, 'I adore him.' 'And you are ready to give yourself to a man you have seen but twice?' 'Yes, mamma, I am ready--to-morrow.' 'But, Anne,' I said, 'do you know that this man is a roue and a gambler?' 'To-morrow,' she repeated, burying her face again in my hands."

Raoul made a gesture of incredulity.

"And then you said--"

"I said nothing," replied Diane.

M. de Sade nodded again in approval.

"You did not reason with her--you--"

"Raoul, years ago, in Algeria, if my father had said, 'No, she is not for you "

"The case was different," he interrupted. "It would have made no difference."

"Well, then, you see," she replied quietly.

"But, Diane," he protested, "between Monsieur de Balloy and myself--"

"Oh, I know that very well, there is a difference. Confess now, you would like to run him through with your sword this very instant. But"--she hesitated a

moment--"between Anne and myself the difference is not so enormous."

Behind his gray mustache M. de Sade smiled.

"What I wish to know is this," persisted Raoul, tapping the table with his forefinger: "did you tell her plainly, in so many words, what manner of man--"

"Yes, I told her."

"And what answer did she make?"

"Oh, she had an answer. 'Mamma,' she said, 'you once told me that you loved papa without knowing why, without a reason.'"

"You had the imprudence to tell her that!"

"Why not? It is true, isn't it?"

"Diane"--he reached across the table and took her hands--"be serious, you are laughing."

"No, I am not laughing. I am quite serious. You think you have to deal only with Monsieur de Balloy. But you see I was right. We have also to deal with Anne that is, with you and with me. With her truthfulness and obstinacy, which is you, and with--all the rest, which is me. Do you remember when we were at Freyr how passionately, a mere child, she became attached to the Countess Anne? How she insisted she would no longer be called Diane, but Anne, and wept with rage whenever we said Diane, till we yielded? And now," she said, appealing to M. de Sade, "he wishes me to play the tyrant with her affections, the one liberty tyrants have never been able to suppress!"

"But a roue, a gambler!" expostulated Raoul. "How is it possible!"

"Bah!" said M. de Sade, "the words are not in the catechism. I warrant you she does not know what they mean. Think what a fascination exists in things which we do not understand."

Raoul, walking to and fro on the gravel, stopped abruptly.

"And you wish Monsieur de Balloy to teach Anne the meaning of these words,"

he exclaimed scornfully.

"My dear friend," replied M. de Sade, "you have not asked me what I wish. But ask madame if there exists a woman who would not prefer to learn from experience what she might learn with less trouble from the dictionary. If you ask my opinion -"

"Yes, we ask it," said Madame de Wimpffen, observing him closely.

M. de Sade looked up from the blue eyes to the blue sky above the roofs, as if his opinion were not within immediate reach.

"Let us recapitulate," he said, addressing Raoul. "There is, on the one hand, Mademoiselle Anne, who, thanks to her mother, has her good points--not to mention the dot promised her by the Countess Anne. And there is Monsieur de Balloy, who possesses all the good qualities of his defects--not to mention his debts. He is young, he is handsome, he is witty, he dances well, and he has the good fortune to present himself precisely at the moment when one feels the imperious necessity of loving some one. What does it matter to the tendrils of the vine what offers! A tree, a leaden gutter, a bit of broken tile--it touches and it clings."

"De Sade," broke forth Raoul impetuously, "you know very well this marriage is impossible--and you, Diane, you know it also."

"Why, of course, Raoul, dear. I am absolutely of your opinion. The idea of it is so monstrous that you wish to stamp on it with your foot. But let us not stamp at the same time on the heart of Anne. Monsieur de Balloy wishes to marry her--well, let him wish. To wish and to have are not the same thing. I will say to Anne: 'You love Monsieur de Balloy. That being the case, it only remains to be seen whether he loves you. On that point it is better to satisfy yourself, as I did, beforehand. And when you are satisfied you will tell me.' And I will say to Madame de Balloy, 'Let us wait and see if these young birds are ready to fly.' Meantime it is possible that that angel who is said to tell a woman that she is beautiful will tell Anne some of those less obvious things which are far more important."

Raoul gave a sigh of relief.

"You see," he said to de Sade. "Diane and I agree absolutely."

"I foresaw it," he replied dryly, resuming his cane and overcoat. "And, now that we are all agreed, I must be going. Might I see the dear child?" he asked, lifting Diane's hand to his lips. "If you will allow me I will pass out through the salon. Ah, the garden key--I had forgotten it. Here it is. Au revoir, my friends." And he went up the steps.

The salon was empty. But in the mirror between the windows he saw a man, tall, correct, with thin, iron-gray hair. For a long minute he surveyed this man critically, then touched the bell.

"Say to mademoiselle that I have come to take my leave."

Then the door opened and Anne entered. She came forward eagerly, her hands extended.

"You are going! You will not breakfast with us?"

"No, mademoiselle," he said, taking the extended hands and touching the forehead with his lips, "but I could not go without seeing you, without -"

"But you must not go this minute, dear Monsieur de Sade." The clear blue eyes were like her mother's. "I wish to speak to you." She drew him to the sofa. "Tell me, have you seen mamma?"

"Yes, certainly, just now."

"Did she tell you anything?"

"Did she tell me anything? What should she tell me?"

"Nothing." The eyes fell, then rose to his again. "Monsieur, do you gamble?"

"I?" he laughed. "What a question!"

"Answer me, please. I wish to know what it is--it is very important that I should know what it is--to gamble."

"To gamble," he replied, twisting the ends of his gray mustache thoughtfully, "is to risk what one has in the hope of gaining more."

"Does papa gamble?"

"I think not," he said doubtfully. "One must have something to risk--to gamble properly."

"Do not laugh, please. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you why I wish to know about this. Then you will understand how necessary it is. Tell me truly, is it a sin to gamble?"

"A sin to gamble? That depends. There is no sin in moderation. For example, you are about to breakfast, which in itself is quite harmless. But if you should eat to excess -"

"Of course. What is it to gamble to excess?"

"To gamble to excess" M. de Sade thought for a moment "is to risk what one cannot afford to lose, to incur a debt one cannot pay."

"Oh, that is frightful," cried Anne. "I should die if I could not pay what I owe."

"That is what happens to some gamblers, my child. They go to some quiet spot and end their lives or else, sometimes, they look about for a young girl with a dot--in order to commence again."

Anne was silent. Then she said, gravely, "You know that the Countess Anne is to give me a dot when I marry."

"Yes, I know it; and you think I am that gambler," he laughed, "who wishes to pay his debts with it!"

"Oh, no, monsieur," blushing furiously. "What an idea! I only wished to know."

"You will never know truly till you gamble a little yourself, Anne."

She burst into laughter.

"Why, I have only the gold-pieces which the Countess Anne gives me on my birthdays!"

"Ah, she gives you gold-pieces on your birthday? What an excellent idea! Why

did I not also think of that?"

"But you gave me my doll Nanette, which I love far better."

"Anne," said M. de Sade, "what a memory you have! It is not possible that you still play with Nanette!"

"I do not exactly play with her," she replied, thoughtfully. "Formerly I played with her, but now--now she is, I would not say a plaything, but a companion. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. But what I do not understand is that you should love Nanette at all--a thing of papier-m~~ch~~ and sawdust."

"One does not think of those things. I assure you Nanette has quite the appearance of a real person."

"I admit that in the case of dolls it is permissible to trust to appearances." He made a movement to go.

"Dear Monsieur de Sade"--she seized his hand, holding him fast--"please, just one little minute more. I have something to tell you."

"I know it. That is why I am going."

She looked at him dismayed, the color deepening in her cheeks again.

"Anne," he said, holding to the hand which was slipping away, "you know that I love you."

"I know that you are always kind to me."

"That is not the same thing. No, if I listen to you, if you should tell me that you are about to gamble with what is more precious than the gold-pieces of the Countess Anne,--with yourself,--I should have to tell you what would cause you to say, 'He is unkind to me, he loves me no longer': and to hear that I have not the courage."

The clear, unflinching eyes filled with tears. "Monsieur, I will have the courage for two."

"Oh, Anne, my child," he cried, "how like your mother you are!" He had risen and stood looking down on the rigid little figure on the sofa. One of those expansions of the heart which he affected to despise had nearly mastered him. "But no, believe me, I am right. Tell me nothing. I should bring against you all that belongs to my age--experience, knowledge, prudence--and you would answer me with all that belongs to yours--faith, and ignorance, and enthusiasm, and, alas! also indignation, and I should be defeated." Midway across the room he turned. "Anne, you have said you would die if you could not pay what you owe. You cost the woman whom you call mother pain and blood and tears--do not forget to pay that debt--it is a debt of honor."

She spoke as one stunned. "No, monsieur, I will not forget it."

"I am sure of it. Good-bye, my child."

She followed him with her eyes to the door. But he did not turn again.

Pain and blood and tears! What did it mean?

Precisely at the moment M. de Sade's valet was frantically searching for his master in the northern station, the latter was standing hat in hand in a little Louis XV salon, admiring the taste of its decoration. At the door the servant had said, "Madame is not receiving"; and M. de Sade had replied, "Take in my card just the same"; and the servant, with that fine instinct which knows when to disobey orders, had bowed in acquiescence.

M. de Sade in the mean time examined the territory of the enemy. An open book on the canape bore the title "Causeries du Lundi," an indication which both surprised and reassured him. A vitrine filled with Sevres and Saxe figurines interested him immensely, for he was a connoisseur of precious trifles. Its pendant on the other side of the console was devoted to jade, amid whose curious branched designs elephants with jeweled eyes paraded and Buddhas slept on teakwood pedestals.

At the rustle of a dress he turned to see a little figure with Venetian hair, whose complexion rivaled that of the shepherdess in the cabinet, holding his card in its hand and inspecting him with a frank curiosity. For a moment he was possessed by the illusion that one of the figurines in the vitrine had stepped down from its glass shelf to confront him.

"Madame," he said, bowing, "I owe you a thousand apologies for disturbing you at this hour."

The little figure dropped into the chair of Aubusson tapestry, self-poised and expectant.

"I have not the honor to know you, monsieur," it said.

"That happens often in the case of celebrities," replied M. de Sade gallantly. "I am only one of the orchestra chairs. But I have something serious to say to you, and when I have a serious thought in my head I have no peace till its ghost is laid."

"Monsieur," the little figure replied in a business-like manner foreign to Dresden shepherdesses, "I give you fifteen minutes to lay your ghost, for I also have a serious matter in hand. At half-past two I have an appointment at Drecol's for a last fitting."

"Let us, then, come quickly to the point," said M. de Sade, sitting down beside the morocco-bound "Causeries." "But first I must confess to you that I am an ambassador without credentials. For when one is deeply interested in the welfare of any one, in an emergency one does not wait for the formality of documents. Moreover, in this case they would not be forthcoming."

"Monsieur counts, then, on his superior judgment."

"And on your indulgence. Imagine a young girl, fearless, innocent, at that age when one defies the world in order to commit a folly. For madame who is herself so near that age, to imagine such a--"

"They exist in every forest. Proceed, I beg of you."

"Into the forest in question," continued M. de Sade, "comes a man I might even say a hunter--"

"And the folly is committed."

"Oh, no, madame, you proceed too rapidly. But on some bright morning, at Saint-Roch, or under the patronage of some other distinguished member of the company of saints--"

"I understand. But I? Why should this folly interest me?"

"Because, madame, the name of this hunter is Monsieur de Balloy."

The figure in the Aubusson chair did not move, but a look of quick intelligence passed over the face.

"Ah! So you wish me to assume the role of la Dame aux Camelias to surrender Monsieur de Balloy to Mademoiselle Innocence."

"On the contrary, madame, I wish you to keep him."

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, you come too late. Monsieur de Balloy and I have quarreled."

Here M. de Sade lost one of his precious minutes in reflection.

"Pardon me," he said at last, "pardon me if I am about to commit an indiscretion. But quarrels proceed from grievances. Those of Monsieur de Balloy do not interest me but yours, if perchance they were of such a nature as to excite in you a sympathy for those who have not yet quarreled but are sure to do so hereafter if you whose eyes are opened would consent to touch those that are yet blind "

"Monsieur, there remain exactly eleven minutes. What do you wish of me?"

"Madame," said M. de Sade, "if your charity toward Monsieur de Balloy does not exceed that for my friend I say friend because, as you perceive, I am too old for the role of lover--"

"Really, Monsieur de Sade, I believe you would make an excellent one."

"On the stage possibly. But permit me to remind you that we have but ten minutes left. You have had the grace to ask what I wish of you. In so doing you use a word which is not in the vocabulary of suppliants--but if you will allow me--" He went to the desk by the window, took a sheet of note-paper from the portfolio, and began to write rapidly, conscious meanwhile that the figurine had left its seat and was standing over him.

"MADEMOISELLE,--Monsieur de Balloy aspires to your hand. In exchange he offers you--what! A heart without honor. But black as is that heart, it is mine,

and I will not surrender it to you."

"You wish me to sign that?" said a voice over his shoulder. "Oh, how little you understand us! Give me the pen."

She took his place and wrote in turn:--

"MADEMOISELLE,--Monsieur de Balloy aspires to your hand. The heart which he offers you I, who once believed in its promises, give you willingly. It is too black for even me."

"There," she said, looking up into his face, "is what I will sign. Are you satisfied?"

Tears are not becoming to Dresden complexions, but the lips quivered.

"Madame," said M. de Sade, whose voice also trembled a little, "if in the three minutes which remain to us you would consent to sign the other also--a mother will know better than we which to deliver."

"Willingly--since you are a man of honor."

She rewrote the first, signed and folded both and gave them to him.

"Madame," said M. de Sade, whose voice still trembled, "you have left me but one minute in which to do what is more difficult than to ask--to thank you. Whatever the result of your"--he hesitated a moment for a word--"of your charity--"

"Oh, as to that I am indifferent."

"No, I do not believe it."

"Monsieur de Sade," she said, pointing to the clock, "the mauvais quart-d'heure de Rabelais is over."

"You are right. I renounce the effort--to thank you is useless."

For the first time a faint smile came into the eyes.

"Since you are one of the orchestra chairs, you might come to-morrow night to

admire my new costume."

"No--after realities one does not seek illusions. But--"

She raised her hand. "No promises, I beg of you. One can do everything with promises but rely upon them." And before he could reply she had vanished through the portieres.

M. de Sade took up his hat and cane, glanced once more at the desk by the window, the open book, the figurines on the glass shelves of the cabinet, at the still swaying portieres. No, it was not an illusion he held the two notes in his hand.

On the beach at Ostend M. de Sade had found a Bath chair which sheltered him from the fresh breeze off the Channel. Children were playing in the sand, erecting bastions against the invading sea. Men and women sat in groups in the warm sun or strolled along the seawall to meet the incoming steamer. But none of these attracted his attention. One by one he took up the letters on his knee, reading them leisurely and consigning them again to their envelopes, till one--the one long waited for--remained unopened. For a long time he looked at the firm, clear handwriting of the superscription, like one who listens to a voice calling from out the past. The mere address of a letter may contain a message. Then he broke the seal.

"My Friend,--What did you say to Anne that after you had gone she should fling herself into my arms with such a passion of weeping and affection? She has gone with the Abbe d'Arlot to make a visit in Freyr. Do not worry about her. At her age hearts bleed, but do not break.

"Oh, my friend--No, I will not attempt to--my heart is too full.

"Of curiosity also! By what process did you extract from that drollesse--Ah, I know what you are saying--that my world never forgives that other. It is true.

"There was a time when your sarcasm, your irony, your nature, oppressed and fascinated me. You produced in me a kind of pain of which you alone possessed the secret which stings and yet gives pleasure. How is it that you reverse the order of time? that years soften instead of hardening you? Would for your sake oh, and Anne's also--that these years--

"Forgive me--what is written is written. Do you know what Raoul said to me to-day? 'There is more good in De Sade than I imagined!'

"DIANE."

Far beyond the sea flecked with white sails, beyond the horizon banded with trails of smoke, he saw the writer as plainly as he saw the written.

"Would monsieur," said the voice of a boatman, "like to take a sail? I have a good boat and the sea is fine."

"No, my friend," said M. de Sade; "at my age one prefers havens to horizons."

The letter which he mailed that evening contained a single sentence:--

"Oh, woman, woman! not to tell me which note you made use of!"

THE END

(e-text prepared by Joe Harvat)