THE COMPLETE STORIES VI

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

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GUY DE MAUPASSANT (1850–1893)

IMPRINT

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USELESS BEAUTY

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II

The Comtesse de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner time as a criminal sentenced to death awaits the hour of his execution. What was her husband going to do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every moment she looked at the clock. Her lady's maid had come and dressed her for the evening and had then left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and announced dinner.

"Has the count come in?"

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse. He is in the diningroom."

For a little moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time before, foreseeing the tragedy which was being rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a bottle of smelling salts. He rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow and sat down. The three boys with their tutor, Abbe Martin, were on her right and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The abbe said grace as usual when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when guests were present. Then they began dinner. The countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the count scrutinized now the three boys and now the three girls. with an uncertain, unhappy expression, which travelled from one to the other. Suddenly pushing his wineglass from him, it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth, and at the slight noise caused by this little accident the countess started up from her chair; and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they continued to exchange looks, rapid as pistol shots.

The abbe, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, attempted to begin a conversation and tried various subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, attempted to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly her husband said to her, bending forward: "Here, amid your children, will you swear to me that what you told me just now is true?"

The hatred which was fermenting in her veins suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing toward the boys and the left toward the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice and without any hesitation: "On the head of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth."

He got up and throwing his table napkin on the table with a movement of exasperation, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall, and then went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: "You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be all right again in a few days."

Then she talked with the abbe and Miss Smith and had tender, pretty words for all her children, those sweet, tender mother's ways which unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over she went into the drawing-room, all her children following her. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them for a long time and then went alone into her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that the count would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to protect herself as a woman of the world as she would protect her life, and in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver which she had bought a few days previously. The hours went by, the hours struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs, continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was only heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, full of nervous energy, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually during every moment of his life.

But the first gleam of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtain without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, with much amazement, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last and remained there, with her eyes open, thinking and barely understanding it all, without being able to guess what he was going to do.

When her maid brought her tea she at the same time handed her a letter from her husband. He told her that he was going to undertake a longish journey and in a postscript added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

It was at the opera, between two acts of "Robert the Devil." In the stalls the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large amount of white shirt front, in which gold and jewelled studs glistened, and were looking at the boxes full of ladies in low dresses covered with diamonds and pearls, who were expanding like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of their faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be gazed at, amid the sound of the music and the heat.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra, were scanning those rows of elegance, that exhibition of the finest fine fabrics, of swels, of luxury and of pretension which displayed itself in all parts of the Grand Theatre, at one of them, Rigal, to his friend and his companion, Bernard Grandin.

"Just look how beautiful the Countess de Fauscret still is."

The older man in turn looked through his opera glasses at a tall lady in a low opposite, who appeared to be still very young, and her striking beauty seemed to attract all eyes in every corner of the house. "Why, she must be forty-six or forty-eight, I tell you, gave her the appearance of a statue, with a small diamond coronet glittering on her black hair like a jewel of fire."

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied, with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful!"

"How did you think she is?"

"Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child and I saw her before she was married, when she was quite a girl. She is—she is—thirty-thirty-six years."

"Impossible!"

"I am sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"She has had seven children."

"It is incredible!"

"And what is more, they are all seven alive, as she is a very good mother. I occasionally go to her house, which is a very pleasant residence, where one may see the phenomenon of the family in the midst of society."

"How very strange! And have there never been any reports about her?"

"Never."

"But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"He is mad. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic drama which one suspects, never finds out exactly, but guesses at pretty closely."

"What is it?"

"I do not know anything about it. Mangeclaque leads a very life of a very, very, very model husband. As long as he remained a good spouse he had a wonderful wife, so much exalted and easily took offence, but since he has been leading his present wild life he has become quite different, he has made a surprisingly fine husband, a worth, a woman growing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

"Do people say that the Countess called philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknown and mysterious, which affections of character or perhaps physical antipathies, which were not perceived at first, give rise to in families, and then, looking at the opera glass, still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera glasses, said: "It is almost incredible that this woman can have had seven children."

"Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she refused to have any more, in order to take her place in society, which she seems likely to do for many years."

"Poor woman!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! Eleven years in a confinement, and then, behind the such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, every hope of every kind, every part of a lofty ambition, all sacrificed to your abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for bringing children into the world."

"Then you would have them not born?"

"Why, no, I do not say that, but I say that it is degrading, it is, I repeat, degrading, that a woman, by interpreting it, by admitting it as a poet, idealizing it as an artist and by explaining it through science, should be transformed into a mere machine, but finding ingenious reasons, hidden graces, delicate reasons, which make it seem to us, in the various phenomena of Nature. God created only coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, who, after a few years of life, of enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the waste of power of human decrepitude. He seems to have created them only in order that they may reproduce their species in an ignoble manner and then they have resolved and always will resolve: Since all the Divine, and the Divine alone, is hidden this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did He not choose another method of perfecting the human machine? which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by mouthfuls of nourishing food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh renews itself in every moment, and we are thinking about it. The efficacy organs, through which the vital air reaches the lungs, communicate all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The eat, which enables us to communicate with our fellows, which has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, infinite and even physical pleasure by means of sound. Are not the organs of hearing, of touch, of taste, of smell, of sight, of the mouth, of the ear, which, by means of speech, of the sense of hearing, of touch and of taste, of smell and

IV

The Comte and Comtesse Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them home from the Opera, without speaking but suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years?"

"What do you want? I cannot help it."

"Then tell me which of them it is."

"Never."

"Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you and treat it like the others."

"I have not the right to do so."

"Do you not see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am constantly asking myself, this question which tortures me each time I look at them? It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize and who prevents me from loving the others?"

"Then you have really suffered very much?" she repeated.

And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture to me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably toward me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh! I shall never forget the things you said to me, but from that day I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our–of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them on my knee without asking myself, 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior toward you for six years, and even kind and complaisant. Tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved, and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me" he said.

"I have been more guilty than you think perhaps," she replied, "but I could no longer endure that life of continual motherhood, and I had only one means of driving you from me. I lied before God and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's head, for I never have wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered:

"Is that true?"

"It is true."

But, wild with grief, he said with a groan: "I shall have fresh doubts that will never end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me, 'It is Jacques or it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove into the courtyard of the house and when it had drawn up in front of the steps the count alighted first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm to mount the stairs. As soon as they reached the first floor he said: "May I speak to you for a few moments longer?" And she replied, "I am quite willing."

They went into a small drawing-room and a footman, in some surprise, lighted the wax candles. As soon as he had left the room and they were alone the count continued: "How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have remained dumb, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now to-day you tell me that you have been lying. For six years you have actually allowed me to believe such a thing! No, you are lying now, I do not know why, but out of pity for me, perhaps?"

She replied in a sincere and convincing manner: "If I had not done so, I should have had four more children in the last six years!"

"Can a mother speak like that?"

"Oh!" she replied, "I do not feel that I am the mother of children who never have been born; it is enough for me to be the mother of those that I have and to love them with all my heart. I am a woman of the civilized world, monsieur–we all are–and we are no longer, and we refuse to be, mere females to restock the earth."

She got up, but he seized her hands. "Only one word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth!"

"I have just told you. I never have dishonored you."

He looked her full in the face, and how beautiful she was, with her gray eyes, like the cold sky. In her dark hair sparkled the diamond coronet, like a radiance. He suddenly felt, felt by a kind of intuition, that this grand creature was not merely a being destined to perpetuate the race, but the strange and mysterious product of all our complicated desires which have been accumulating in us for centuries but which have been turned aside from their primitive and divine object and have wandered after a mystic, imperfectly perceived and intangible beauty. There are some women like that, who blossom only for our dreams, adorned with every poetical attribute of civilization, with that ideal luxury, coquetry and esthetic charm which surround woman, a living statue that brightens our life.

Her husband remained standing before her, stupefied at his tardy and obscure discovery, confusedly hitting on the cause of his former jealousy and understanding it all very imperfectly, and at last lie said: "I believe you, for I feel at this moment that you are not lying, and before I really thought that you were."

She put out her hand to him: "We are friends then?"

He took her hand and kissed it and replied: "We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Then he went out, still looking at her, and surprised that she was still so beautiful and feeling a strange emotion arising in him.

4

THE FATHER

I

HE WAS A CLERK IN THE Bureau of Public Education and lived at Batignolles. He took the omnibus to Paris every morning and always sat opposite a girl, with whom he fell in love.

She was employed in a shop and went in at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those girls whose eyes are so dark that they look like black spots, on a complexion like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street, and she generally had to run to catch the heavy vehicle, and sprang upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then she got inside, out of breath, and, sitting down, looked round her.

The first time that he saw her, Francois Tessier liked the face. One sometimes meets a woman whom one longs to clasp in one's arms without even knowing her. That girl seemed to respond to some chord in his being, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart, without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, not meaning to be rude, and she became embarrassed and blushed. He noticed it, and tried to turn away his eyes; but he involuntarily fixed them upon her again every moment, although he tried to look in another direction; and, in a few days, they seemed to know each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full, and got outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time she had got so far as to greet him with a little smile; and, although she always dropped her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid friendship had become established between them, a daily freemasonry of half an hour, and that was certainly one of the most charming half hours in his life to him. He thought of her all the rest of the day, saw her image continually during the long office hours. He was haunted and bewitched by that floating and yet tenacious recollection which the form of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that if he could win that little person it would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning she now shook hands with him, and he preserved the sense of that touch and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers until the next day, and he almost fancied that he preserved the imprint on his palm. He anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride, while Sundays seemed to him heartbreaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him, for one Saturday, in spring, she promised to go and lunch with him at Maisons-Laffitte the next day.

II

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: "Before going, I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes, and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say."

She trembled as she hung on his arm, and looked down, her cheeks pale, as she continued: "I do not want you to be deceived in me, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear–not to do–not to do anything–that is at all improper."

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy, and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious to have a little flirtation.

As he did not say anything, she began to speak again in an agitated voice and with tears in her eyes. "If you do not promise to respect me altogether, I shall return home." And so he squeezed her arm tenderly and replied: "I promise, you shall only do what you like." She appeared relieved in mind, and asked, with a smile: "Do you really mean it?" And he looked into her eyes and replied: "I swear it" "Now you may take the tickets," she said.

During the journey they could hardly speak, as the carriage was full, and when they reached Maisons-Laffite they went toward the Seine. The sun, which shone full on the river, on the leaves and the grass, seemed to be reflected in their hearts, and they went, hand in hand, along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank, and they walked on, brimming over with happiness, as if they were walking on air.

At last she said: "How foolish you must think me!"

"Why?" he asked. "To come out like this, all alone with you."

"Certainly not; it is quite natural." "No, no; it is not natural for me –because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month and every month in the year. I live quite alone with mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can, and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do not always succeed. But, all the same, it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry."

By way of an answer, he kissed her ardently on the ear that was nearest him, but she moved from him with an abrupt movement, and, getting suddenly angry, exclaimed: "Oh! Monsieur Francois, after what you swore to me!" And they went back to Maisons-Laffitte.

They had lunch at the Petit-Havre, a low house, buried under four enormous poplar trees, by the side of the river. The air, the heat, the weak white wine and the sensation of being so close together made them silent; their faces were flushed and they had a feeling of oppression; but, after the coffee, they regained their high spirits, and, having crossed the Seine, started off along the bank, toward the village of La Frette. Suddenly he asked: "What-is your name?"

"Louise."

"Louise," he repeated and said nothing more.

The girl picked daisies and made them into a great bunch, while he sang vigorously, as unrestrained as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left a vine-covered slope followed the river. Francois stopped motionless with astonishment: "Oh, look there!" he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a purple wood! A kind of great carpet of flowers stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles off. She also stood, surprised and delighted, and murmured: "Oh! how pretty!" And, crossing a meadow, they ran toward that curious low hill, which, every year, furnishes all the lilac that is drawn through Paris on the carts of the flower venders.

There was a narrow path beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing, sat down.

Swarms of flies were buzzing around them and making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the bright slopes and from that forest of blossoms a powerful fragrance was borne toward them, a breath of perfume, the breath of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance, and they embraced gently, then, without the knowledge of anything but that kiss, lay down on the grass. But she soon came to herself with the feeling of a great misfortune, and began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to start to return and to go home immediately; and she kept saying, as she walked along quickly: "Good heavens! good heavens!"

He said to her: "Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here." But now her cheeks were red and her eyes hollow, and, as soon as they got to the railway station in Paris, she left him without even saying good-by.

III

When he met her in the omnibus, next day, she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: "I want to speak to you; we will get down at the Boulevard."

As soon as they were on the pavement, she said:

"We must bid each other good-by; I cannot meet you again." "But why?" he asked. "Because I cannot; I have been culpable, and I will not be so again."

Then he implored her, tortured by his love, but she replied firmly: "No, I cannot, I cannot." He, however, only grew all the more excited and promised to marry her, but she said again: "No," and left him.

For a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and, as he did not know her address, he thought that he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened the door, she was there. She threw herself into his arms and did not resist any longer, and for three months they were close friends. He was beginning to grow tired of her, when she whispered something to him, and then he had one idea and wish: to break with her at any price. As, however, he could not do that, not knowing how to begin, or what to say, full of anxiety through fear of the consequences of his rash indiscretion, he took a decisive step: one night he changed his lodgings and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look, for the man who had abandoned her, but threw herself at her mother's knees and confessed her misfortune, and, some months after, gave birth to a boy.

IV

Years passed, and Francois Tessier grew old, without there having been any alteration in his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of an office clerk, without hope and without expectation. Every day he got up at the same time, went through the same streets, went through the same door, past the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair, and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone during the day in the midst of his different colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings, and he laid by a hundred francs a month against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the Champs-Elysees, to watch the elegant people, the carriages and the pretty women, and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the Bois du Boulogne was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the Parc Monceau, where the mothers and nurses, sitting on the sides of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly Francois Tessier started. A woman passed by, holding two children by the hand, a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she!

He walked another hundred yards anti then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting down now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she, it was certainly she, but she had the reserved appearance of a lady, was dressed simply, and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to go near; but the little boy raised his head, and Francois Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son, there could be no doubt of that. And, as he looked at him, he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially tormented him. His son! Oh, if he could only have known, have been sure! But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she lived and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her, and had even recognized the child, his, Francois Tessier's child, as his own.

He returned to the Parc Monceau every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, an irresistible longing to take his son into his arms, to cover him with kisses and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor, with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, longing and jealousy and from that need of loving one's own children which nature has implanted in all. At last he determined to make a despairing attempt, and, going up to her, as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me." She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror, and, taking the two children by the hand, she rushed away, dragging them after her, while he went home and wept inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again, but he suffered, day and night, for he was a prey to his paternal love. He would gladly have died, if he could only have kissed his son; he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and, after writing her some twenty letters, he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination, and then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver, if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

"Monsieur: You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so wretched, so overcome by misery that my only hope is in you, and, therefore, I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes.

"I have the honor, etc."

The next day he received the reply:

"Monsieur: I shall expect you to-morrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock."

As he went up the staircase, Francois Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent thumping noise in his breast, as of some animal galloping; and he could breathe only with difficulty, and had to hold on to the banisters, in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maid servant had opened the door, he asked: "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?" "Yes, monsieur. Kindly come in."

He was shown into the drawing-room; he was alone, and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened, and a man came in. He was tall, serious and rather stout, and wore a black frock coat, and pointed to a chair with his hand. Francois Tessier sat down, and then said, with choking breath: "Monsieur–monsieur–I do not know whether you know my name–whether you know—-"

Monsieur Flamel interrupted him. "You need not tell it me, monsieur, I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you." He spoke in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, and with the commonplace stateliness of an honorable man, and Francois Tessier continued:

"Well, monsieur, I want to say this: I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once to kiss the child."

Monsieur Flamel got up and rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he said: "Will you bring Louis here?" When she had gone out, they remained face to face, without speaking, as they had nothing more to say to one another, and waited. Then, suddenly, a little boy of ten rushed into the room and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father, but he stopped when he saw the stranger, and Monsieur Flamel kissed him and said: "Now, go and kiss that gentleman, my dear." And the child went up to the stranger and looked at him.

Francois Tessier had risen. He let his hat fall, and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while Monsieur Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise; but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then Francois, taking the child up in his arms, began to kiss him wildly all over his face; on his eyes, his cheeks, his mouth, his hair; and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses, tried to avoid them, turned away his head, and pushed away the man's face with his little hands. But suddenly Francois Tessier put him down and cried: "Good-by! good-by!" And he rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

SOME PEOPLE ARE Freethinkers from sheer stupidity. My Uncle Southern was one of these. Some people are atheists religious for the same reason. The very sight of a prince throw my uncle into a violent rage. He would shake his fist and make grimaces at him, and would then touch a piece of iron when the prince was out of earshot, for getting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye. Now, when beliefs are unreasonable, one should, if one or none at all. I myself am a Freethinker, I credit all dignitaries, but feel in my inward places of worship, be they Catholic, Apostolic, Protestant, Greek, Jewish, Russian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that they are simpler-minded men than devotees. That is my opinion, and I maintain that it must have any influence, if, all the same, it is good enough for me.

What is the Lodge, then? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I am no harm in it, but I do not see the practice the Christian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about tickling a piece of flesh with a crown.

To all my arguments my uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion. Free Thought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the strongest Lodge of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, if that is your uncle," I would reply, in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot, it is just that which is making you free. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition, it is and it will be growing stronger. And then, if you admitted only Freethinkers among you, I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have a number of Catholics among you, even the leaders of the party. Pius IX. is dead, but have you not seen the before he became pope. If you call a society with such an organization a society against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one."

"My dear boy," my uncle would reply, with a wink, "we are more in the world than people imagine."

Then I broke out: "Yes, you are very clever! Well, I am a Freethinker, and, as an electric machine, I will grant it. I will never deny that it is a machine or conceal the existence of all shades; if you say that it is only used to bookish people, to drill them to go on the path as soldiers are trained to go on. I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political societies, and that it is good for its members into electoral agents, I should say yes. That is as clear as day, and I see that when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face.

"Just consider that gigantic and secret democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its grand master under the Empire, which the Government tried to get rid of, and which, in spite of the Czar's brother in Russia, and in Prussia, and in Austria, and in Italy, and in Germany, and all the crowned heads of the globe belong.

"You see quite right," my uncle said, "but all these persons are serving our projects without guessing it."

I felt inclined to tell him he was talking a lot of nonsense.

It was, however, indeed a slight to see my uncle when he had a Freemason's apron.

On meeting they shook hands in a manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a secret sign, mysterious signs.

When they were would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and I guess that they had a special code of knocking for each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: "We know all about it, you, don't we?"

And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are ignorant of such mysteries! Ridiculous!

Now, in our town there was also an old Jesuit who was my uncle's detestation. Every time he met him, he would cross to the other distance, he used to say: "Get away, you toad!" And then, taking my arm, he would whisper in my ear:

"See here, that fellow will play me a trick one day or other, I feel it in my bones."

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was a Freemason's prophecy that came true fairly.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, cold dinner, with lots of meat, cheese, lings and black puddings. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

"I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, quietly, with my relations, connections, or, to call it, in an idiotic idea. Why should you mutilate? Was does it matter to you if people do not eat any meat?"

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He called three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and he was going to invite the old Jesuit, if, forsooth, after all, no scruples about manifesting.

I arranged my mind, so as to go a look of great distress, and went and, rang loudly at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf he made me wait a length while, but at last he appeared as his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted out at the top of my voice:

"Father Isaac, someone has broken open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations."

The good Jesuit, kind man as his trousers as quickly as he could, and came down without ceremony. I told him on the way that it was not that my uncle, the Freethinker, had been taken ill, and that, if he would, he was going to be something serious, he had been seized with a sudden dread of his death, and wished to be in peace and talk to him, to have his advice and comfort, to make his peace with the Church, and, to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold as peace with himself, and called in a mocking tone:

"At any rate, he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was a good man, and almost trembling, said to me:

"For a moment, my son, I will come with you." But I replied: "Pardon me, reverend father! If I do not go with you, my uncle's conscience will not allow me to do so. I even refrained to come and fetch you, for I was afraid of your thus you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment—a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented and went off quickly, knocked at my uncle's door, and was seen by me, and I saw the black cassock disappear into the vestibule and the door shut.

I had under a neighboring gateway to wait for him. Had he been alone, I should would have half murdered the Jesuit, but I knew that he would scarcely be able to move an arm, and I relied upon my dagger, which was of a sort that would take place between these antagonists, whose, although, I was a Freethinker, I was a bit bob, and what would be the issue of the situation, which my uncle's conscience would render still more tragic?

At a quarter to five the door opened, and the Jesuit appeared.

Meanwhile it was getting very cold, and I noticed that the Jesuit seemed to long time, and I thought: "They are having an argument, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the crossbed gentleman? Perhaps they had fought and killed each other? This last supposition appeared improbable, for I knew that my uncle was quite incapable of swallowing a grain more mortification and humiliation.

At last the day broke.

I was very uneasy, and, not venturing to go into the house myself, went to one of my friends who lived opposite. I woke him up, explained matters to him, and he was as uneasy as I was.

"Go and inquire," he said, not venturing to go into the house myself.

At nine o'clock he relieved me, and I got home to sleep. At two o'clock I was there, replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o'clock the door of the house, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, I rushed and, unlatched, I went and knocked at the door of my uncle's house; and when the servant opened to I did not dare to ask her any questions, but went upstairs without saying a word.

My uncle was lying, pale and exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious paper was lying across one of the bed curtains with a pin.

"Why, uncle?" I said, "what is this? Are you not well?"

He replied in a feeble voice:

"Oh, my dear boy, I have been very ill, I thought, dead."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know; it was most surprising. But what is strange of all is that the Jesuit priest who has just left—you know, that excellent man whose I have made such a fool of, and a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me."

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: "Oh, uncle!"

"Yes, he came. He heard a voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. I was a revelation."

I pretended to assent, so as not to burst out laughing. I felt inclined to roll on the floor with uncontrollable mirth.

In about a minute I managed to say indignantly:

"And you received him, uncle? You, a Freethinker, a Freemason? You did not have him thrown out of doors?"

He seemed confused, and stammered:

"Listen a moment, it was so astonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father, it seems he knew him formerly."

"Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for pardoning a Jesuit!"

"I know that, but I was very ill, and he said that my father was a good man, and that He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life, and then all known a little of medicine."

"Oh! he looked after you all right! But you said just now that he had only been gone a very short time."

"That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after which I sent him out to get a cup of tea by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea."

"And he ate meat?"

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very unfitted for, and then added:

"Yes, I ate, Guess, and he was going out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than ever I could have dreamed have done, and I expect to have his convictions respected."

This rather upset me, but I answered, nevertheless: "Oh! uncle, and what did you do after breakfast?"

"We played a game of Bezique, and then he repeated his Breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have in his pocket, and which was not by any means bad, in fact, "A religious book, uncle?"

"Yes, it was, I think, a novel."

"Well, what?"

"When is your Jesuit coming back?" I asked.

"I don't know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps, but it is not certain."

I went out, altogether overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became thoroughly converted, and if I had not been ill I should have cried aloud so much. Clerical or Freemason, to me it is all one, and I have no hate for the clerics of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will, my uncle, to his wife and he has disinherited me in favor of that rascally Jesuit!

6

THE BARONESS

"Come with me," said my friend Boisrene, "you will see some very interesting bric-a-brac and works of art there."

He conducted me to the first floor of an elegant house in one of the big streets of Paris. We were welcomed by a very pleasing man, with excellent manners, who led us from room to room, showing us rare things, the price of which he mentioned carelessly. Large sums, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty thousand francs, dropped from his lips with such grace and ease that one could not doubt that this gentleman-merchant had millions shut up in his safe.

I had known him by reputation for a long time Very bright, clever, intelligent, he acted as intermediary in all sorts of transactions. He kept in touch with all the richest art amateurs in Paris, and even of Europe and America, knowing their tastes and preferences; he apprised them by letter, or by wire if they lived in a distant city, as soon as he knew of some work of art which might suit them.

Men of the best society had had recourse to him in times of difficulty, either to find money for gambling, or to pay off a debt, or to sell a picture, a family jewel, or a tapestry.

It was said that he never refused his services when he saw a chance of gain.

Boisrene seemed very intimate with this strange merchant. They must have worked together in many a deal. I observed the man with great interest.

He was tall, thin, bald, and very elegant. His soft, insinuating voice had a peculiar, tempting charm which seemed to give the objects a special value. When he held anything in his hands, he turned it round and round, looking at it with such skill, refinement, and sympathy that the object seemed immediately to be beautiful and transformed by his look and touch. And its value increased in one's estimation, after the object had passed from the showcase into his hands.

"And your Crucifix," said Boisrene, "that beautiful Renaissance Crucifix which you showed me last year?"

The man smiled and answered:

"It has been sold, and in a very peculiar manner. There is a real Parisian story for you! Would you like to hear it?"

"With pleasure."

"Do you know the Baroness Samoris?"

"Yes and no. I have seen her once, but I know what she is!"

"You know–everything?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me, so that I can see whether you are not mistaken?"

"Certainly. Mme. Samoris is a woman of the world who has a daughter, without anyone having known her husband. At any rate, she is received in a certain tolerant, or blind society. She goes to church and devoutly partakes of Communion, so that everyone may know it, and she never compromises herself. She expects her daughter to marry well. Is that correct?"

"Yes, but I will complete your information. She is a woman who makes herself respected by her admirers in spite of everything. That is a rare quality, for in this manner she can get what she wishes from a man. The man whom she has chosen without his suspecting it courts her for a long time, longs for her timidly, wins her with astonishment and possesses her with consideration. He does not notice that he is paying, she is so tactful; and she maintains her relations on such a footing of reserve and dignity that he would slap the first man who dared doubt her in the least. And all this in the best of faith.

"Several times I have been able to render little services to this woman. She has no secrets from me.

"Toward the beginning of January she came to me in order to borrow thirty thousand francs. Naturally, I did not lend them to her; but, as I wished to oblige her, I told her to explain her situation to me completely, so that I might see whether there was not something I could do for her.

"She told me her troubles in such cautious language that she could not have spoken more delicately of her child's first communion. I finally managed to understand that times were hard, and that she was penniless.

"The commercial crisis, political unrest, rumors of war, had made money scarce even in the hands of her clients. And then, of course, she was very particular.

"She would associate only with a man in the best of society, who could strengthen her reputation as well as help her financially. A reveller, no matter how rich, would have compromised her forever, and would have made the marriage of her daughter quite doubtful.

"She had to maintain her household expenses and continue to entertain, in order not to lose the opportunity of finding, among her numerous visitors, the discreet and distinguished friend for whom she was waiting, and whom she would choose.

"I showed her that my thirty thousand francs would have but little likelihood of returning to me; for, after spending them all, she would have to find at least sixty thousand more, in a lump, to pay me back.

"She seemed very disheartened when she heard this. I did not know just what to do, when an idea, a really fine idea, struck me.

"I had just bought this Renaissance Crucifix which I showed you, an admirable piece of workmanship, one of the finest of its land that I have ever seen.

"'My dear friend,' I said to her, 'I am going to send you that piece of ivory. You will invent some ingenious, touching, poetic story, anything that you wish, to explain your desire for parting with it. It is, of course, a family heirloom left you by your father.

"'I myself will send you amateurs, or will bring them to you. The rest concerns you. Before they come I will drop you a line about their position, both social and financial. This Crucifix is worth fifty thousand francs; but I will let it go for thirty thousand. The difference will belong to you.'

"She considered the matter seriously for several minutes, and then answered: 'Yes, it is, perhaps, a good idea. I thank you very-much.'

"The next day I sent her my Crucifix, and the same evening the Baron de Saint-Hospital.

"For three months I sent her my best clients, from a business point of view. But I heard nothing more from her.

"One day I received a visit from a foreigner who spoke very little French. I decided to introduce him personally to the baroness, in order to see how she was getting along.

"A footman in black livery received us and ushered us into a quiet little parlor, furnished with taste, where we waited for several minutes. She appeared, charming as usual, extended her hand to me and invited us to be seated; and when I had explained the reason of my visit, she rang.

"The footman appeared.

"'See if Mlle. Isabelle can let us go into her oratory.' The young girl herself brought the answer. She was about fifteen years of age, modest and good to look upon in the sweet freshness of her youth. She wished to conduct us herself to her chapel.

"It was a kind of religious boudoir where a silver lamp was burning before the Crucifix, my Crucifix, on a background of black velvet. The setting was charming and very clever. The child crossed herself and then said:

"'Look, gentlemen. Isn't it beautiful?'

"I took the object, examined it and declared it to be remarkable. The foreigner also examined it, but he seemed much more interested in the two women than in the crucifix.

"A delicate odor of incense, flowers and perfume pervaded the whole house. One felt at home there. This really was a comfortable home, where one would have liked to linger.

"When we had returned to the parlor I delicately broached the subject of the price. Mme. Samoris, lowering her eyes, asked fifty thousand francs.

"Then she added: 'If you wish to see it again, monsieur, I very seldom go out before three o'clock; and I can be found at home every day.'

"In the street the stranger asked me for some details about the baroness, whom he had found charming. But I did not hear anything more from either of them.

"Three months passed by.

"One morning, hardly two weeks ago, she came here at about lunch time, and, placing a roll of bills in my hand, said: 'My dear, you are an angel! Here are fifty thousand francs; I am buying your crucifix, and I am paying twenty thousand francs more for it than the price agreed upon, on condition that you always–always send your clients to me–for it is sill for sale.'"

THE PARTS OF MIS WERE chatting in a smoking room after dinner. We were talking of unexpected legacies, strange inheritances. Then M. le Brunnet, who was sometimes called "the illustrious judge" and at other times "the illustrious lawyer," went and stood with his back to the fire.

"I have," said he, "to search for an heir who disappeared under peculiarly distressing circumstances. It is one of those simple and terrible dramas of ordinary life, a thing which possibly happens every day, and which is nevertheless one of the most dreadful things I know. Here are the facts:

"Nearly six months ago I was called to the bedside of a dying woman. She said to me:

"Monsieur, I want to intrust to you the most delicate, the most difficult, and the most important business that I have ever accepted. Be good enough to notice my will, which is there on the table. A sum of five thousand francs is left to you as a fee for your services, and a fee of a hundred thousand francs if you do succeed. I want you to find my son after my death."

"She asked me to take her to my up in bed, in order that she might talk with greater ease; for her voice, broken and hoarse, was trembling in her throat.

"It was a very wealthy establishment. The luxurious apartment, of an elegant simplicity, was upholstered from top to bottom in thick as velvets, with a soft carpet which yielded to the touch.

"The dying woman continued:

"You are the only man I can trust my horrible story. I will try to have strength enough to finish it. You must know all, in order that you may know how to act in the unknown search, as well as a man of the world, may have a sincere desire to aid me with all your power.

"Listen to me:

"Before my marriage, I loved a young man, whose suit was rejected by my family because he was not rich enough. I married, however, I married a man of great wealth. I married him through ignorance, through obedience, through indifference, through all that is dreary.

"I had a child, a boy. My husband died in the course of a few years.

"He whom I had loved had married, in his turn. When he saw that I was a widow, he was crushed by grief at knowing he was not free to come to me—he who had loved me so dearly, that it was enough to break my heart. He came to see me at first as a friend. Perhaps I might not have resisted him. What could I do? I was alone, so sad, so sorrowful, so lonely! And I loved him still. What sufferings we have been through! What tears!

"I had only him in the world, my parents being dead. He came frequently, he spent whole evenings with me. I felt that I was lost. He him come so often, seeing that he was married, but I had not enough will- power to prevent him from coming.

"How can I tell it?—let me pass over. How did this come about? Can I explain it? Can anyone understand it? Do you think it could be otherwise when two human beings are drawn to each other by an irresistible force, and are separated? Do you believe, monsieur, that it is always in our power to resist, that we can keep up the struggle forever, that we can refuse to yield to the prayers, the supplications, the tears, the frenzied words, the appeals on bended knees, the despairing cries of a man who is dying? Do you think it could be otherwise when two human beings are drawn to each other by an irresistible force, and are separated? Do you believe, monsieur, that it is always in our power to resist, that we can keep up the struggle forever, that we can refuse to yield to the prayers, the supplications, the tears, the frenzied words, the appeals on bended knees, the despairing cries of a man who is dying? Do you think it could be otherwise when we were so grievously tried in our weakness, when we were so grievously tried in our weakness?

"Yes, I have, monsieur, I have, I have, I have, almost as fond of him as my son. I have been in my house, at my side, and at his side, always concerned about his health.

"One evening the three of us were to dine together—this was my chief amusement—and I waited for my son, who was late, and was in convulsive sobs rose in my throat, and I was, in my turn, seized with a fever. I felt, shivering, my nerves writhing with the horrible sensation of an irreparable, misfortune, and with the fearful sense of the future, which, in such moments as this, fills a mother's heart.

"I was looking at him in a terrified manner, I was waiting for an approach, I was waiting, I was in touch, too, for the sort of the boy's return. At last he said:

"I am going to follow him to talk to him—to explain matters to him. In short, I must see him and let him know—"

"And he hurried out.

"I waited—waited in a distracted frame of mind, waited, and, in the meantime, started, starting with fear and with some unutterably strange and intolerable emotions at every slight crack being of the fine in the grate.

"I waited in this way two hours, feeling my heart swell with a dread I had never before experienced, such anguish that I would not wish the greatest criminal to endure ten minutes of that misery. Where was my son? What was he doing?

"About midnight, a messenger brought me a note from my lover. I still know its contents by heart:

"You can not see returned! I did not find him. I am down here. I do not want to go up and his place.

"I wrote a note to him, begging him to pop:

"Jean has not returned. You must find him, Jean."

"And I "remained all night in the armchair, waiting for him.

"At five in the morn going mad, I longed to run wildly about, to roll on the ground. And yet I did not even sit, but kept waiting here, waiting, waiting, with my heart so frozen I could not imagine, to guess. But I could form no conception, in spite of my efforts, in spite of the torment of my soul.

"And now I feared that they might meet. What would they do in that case? What would he do? My mind was in a state of terrible doubts, with terrible suspicions.

"You can understand my feelings, can you, monsieur? Perhaps, I should have known nothing, who understood nothing, came into the room every moment, believing, naturally, that I had lost my reason, and I was in such a word or a movement of the hand. She went for the doctor, who found me in the throes of a nervous attack.

"I was put to bed. I had brain fever.

"When I regained consciousness, after a long illness, I was beside my bed my—lover—alone with me.

"I exclaimed:

"My son? Where is my son?

"He made no reply.

"Dead-dead. Has he committed suicide?

"No, no, I swear it. But we have not found him in spite of all my efforts.

"Then, becoming suddenly exasperated and even indignant—for women are subject to such outbursts of unaccountable and unjust zoning anger—I said:

"I forbid you to come near me or to see again unless you find him. Go away!

"He did go away.

"I have never seen one or the other of them since, monsieur, and this I have lived for the last twenty years.

"Can you imagine what all this meant to me? Can you understand my continuous torment, my lethargic, this slow, perpetual laceration of a mother's heart, this abominable, endless wait? I know that I ought to be, I am, deeply condemned me, into what depths of despair, into what torment, he cast me while I was still living! Ever since, I have been tortured with this moment, when I am about to die-me, his mother, who loved him with all the intensity of a mother's heart! Ever since, I have cried:

"You will tell him all this, monsieur—will you not? You will repeat to him my last words. Why shall, one day, I have died with the harsh toward poor women? Life is already brutal and savage enough in its dealings with women. My dear son, I have suffered the existence of your poor mother has been ever since the day you left her. My dear child, forgive me, forgive me, for I have not the heart to asked for. Ah, has had to endure the most frightful penance ever inflicted on a woman."

"She paused for breath, trembling, as if she had addressed the last words to her son and as if he stood by her bedside.

"Then she added:

"You will tell him also, monsieur, that I never again saw-the other.

"Ever more she continued speaking, then, in a broken voice, she said:

"Leave me now, I beg of you. I want to die all alone, since they are not with me."

Maitre Le Brunnet added:

"And I left the house, monsieur, crying like a fool, so bitterly, indeed, that my coachman turned round to stare at me.

"And to think that, every day, dramas like this are being enacted, and I know of one.

"I have not found the son-that son-well, say what you like about him, but I call him that criminal son!"

LE VERE CROWDING around M. Bermuze, the judge, who was giving his opinion about the Saint-Cloud mystery. For a month this in explicable crime had been the talk of Paris. Nobody could make head or tail of it.

M. Bermuze, standing with his back to the fireplace, was talking, citing the evidence, discussing the various theories, but arriving at no conclusion.

Some women had risen, in order to get nearer to him, and some, leaning on each other eyes fastened on the clean-shaven face of the judge, who was saying such weighty things that, very soon, they had become bewildered, half in fear and curiosity, and by the eager and intense light in his eyes. He was a little man, with the soul of every woman. One of them, paler than the others, said during a pause:

"It's terrible. It verges on the supernatural. The truth will never be known."

The judge turned to her.

"True, madame, it is likely that the actual facts will never be discovered. As for the word 'supernatural' which you have just used, it has nothing to do with the matter. We are in the presence of a very simple, premeditated and executed crime, so well embroidered in mystery that we have to acknowledge it being the involved circumstances which surround it. But once I had to take charge of an affair in which the supernatural was a very big part. In fact, the case became so confused that it had to be given up."

Several women exclaimed at once:

"Oh! Tell us about it!"

M. Bermuze smiled in a dignified manner, as a judge should, and went on:

"It was, I think, in 1866. I had, for one minute, ascribed anything in the case to supernatural influences. I believe only in natural causes. But, if I was not right, the word 'supernatural' to express what we do not understand, we must admit that there are, and that word 'inexplicable,' it would be much better. At any rate, in the affair of which I am about to tell you, it is especially the accompanying preliminary circumstances which impressed me. These are the facts:

"I was, at that time, a judge at Alpacion, a little white city on the edge of a bay which is surrounded by high mountains.

"The majority of the cases which came before me were commonplace enough. There are some that are superb, dramatic, ferocious, heroic. We find there the most beautiful causes for revenge of which the ancient dramatic masters of years old, quieted by time, have never exploited. Imagine, Mediterranean strangers, murders becoming massacres and almost deeds of glory. For two years I heard of nothing but the price of blood, the vile corsican prejudice which compels revenge for insults received, the cowardly ambushes, deeds that it was affirmed that he was in hiding after having committed some abominable crime. Some particularly horrible circumstances were even mentioned.

"In my judicial position I thought it necessary to get some information about this man, but it was impossible to learn anything. He had climbed Sir John Rowell's hill.

"I therefore had to be satisfied with watching him in order, if possible, but I could not nothing suspicious about his actions.

"However, as rumors about him were growing and becoming more and more alarmed, I decided to try to see this stranger myself, and I therefore went to the house he occupied every morning he would practice for an hour or so with his revolver and rifle.

"Legrand was built up around him. It was said that he was some high personage, fleeing from his relatives, and I thought from what I saw of him and the behaviour of his relatives. I had seen two of his brothers, cousins murdered, my head was full of these stories.

"One day I learned that an Englishman had just hired a little villa on the top of the bay for several years. He had brought with him a French servant, whom he had engaged on the way at Marseilles.

"Soon this peculiar person, living alone with his group, not to have left the grounds, excited widespread interest. He never spoke to anyone, he went to the town every morning to buy meat, he would practice for an hour or so with his revolver and rifle.

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A TRESS OF HAIR

THE WALLS OF THE CELL were bare and white washed. A narrow grated window, placed so high that one could not reach it, lighted this sinister little room. The mad inmate, seated on a straw chair, looked at us with a fixed, vacant and haunted expression. He was very thin, with dark hollow eyes, and a brown white, which one guessed might have turned gray in a few months. His clothes appeared to be too large for his shrunken limbs, his sunken chest and empty paunch. One felt that this man's mind was destroyed, eaten by his thoughts, by one thought, just as a fruit is eaten by a worm. His voice, his whole face, was full of despair, sadness, harassing, destructive. It wasted his frame little by little. It—the invisible, intangible, intangible, immaterial, idea—was mining his health, drinking his blood, snuffing out his life.

What a mystery was this man, being killed by an idea? He amused ourselves by talking to us, this madman. What strange, tremendous and terrible thoughts dwelt within this fleshless? which they created with deep wrinkles which were never at rest?

"He has terrible attacks of rage," said the doctor to me. "This is one of the most powerful fits we have ever seen. He has seizures of erotic and maniacalmegic madness. He is a sort of monomaniac. He has lost a portion of which he sets forth his disease with the sermon clerical. He is in one, as in a vise, and he can forget on it. He would interest you, you may go over this document."

I followed the doctor into his office, where he handed me a sheet of paper, and said to me, "Read it and tell me what you think of it." I read as follows:

"Until the age of thirty-two I lived peacefully, without knowing love. Life appeared very simple, very pleasant and very easy. I was rich. I enjoyed so many things that I had no experience of the sufferings of love. I was good to be alive! I smoke happy every morning, and I slept soundly. I was happy in the day and were to bed at night contented, in the expectation of a peaceful tomorrow and a future without anxiety.

"I had had a few flirtations without my heart being touched, and I was very much wounded by any of the sensations of true love, I felt it to be like this: I felt it to be love, but it is terrible. And yet those who live in the ordinary way, who experience another happiness, though less than simple love, for love came to me in a remarkable manner.

"As I was walking, I found all kinds of old furniture and old curiosities, and I ebbed through the unknown, the place that had reached these objects, of the eyes that had followed, the souls that had lived in the hearts there, for one does love things! I sometimes discovered boxes and boxes of letters, the watch of the last century. It was so tiny, so pretty with its enamel and gold chasing. And I felt a desire to see the lady who possessed this bought it, enraptured at owning this dainty trinket. I had seen a woman's face, a face of mechanical life, and it had kept up its regular movement for the last century. I felt that I were it on her bosom and the warmth of her clothing, the heart of the woman beating beneath the heart of the woman? What hand had held it in its warm fingers, had turned it over and then wiped the enamelled dial with a soft cose to remove ,the slight moisture from her breath? What eyes had looked at the hands on its ornamental face for the expected, the beloved, the ever-desired?

"How I wished I had known her, seen her, the woman who had selected this exquisite and rare object! She is dead! I am possessed with a longing for women of former days. I love them, all those who have loved. The story of those dead and gone loves fills my mind, haunts me, like a fever, the sorrows, the youthful caresses, the hopes! Should not all that perish?

"How I have wept whole nights-thinking of those women whose hearts I have broken, cried, so loving, so sweet, whose arms were extended in an embrace, and who now are dead! Who is immortal? It grieves me to my bones from century to century, from age to age. Men come then, give place and die.

"The past attracts me, the present terrifies me. Because I have loved too much in the past, that has gone by. I mourn all who have lived, I would like to check time, to stop the clock. But time goes, it goes, it passes, it takes from me each second a little of myself for the annihilation of so-morrow. And I feel that I were dying.

"I myself, or women of yesterday. I love you!

"But I am not to be pitied. I found her, the one I was waiting for, and through her I enjoyed inestimable pleasure.

"I was sauntering in Paris on a bright, warm morning, with a happy heart and a light step, looking in at the shop windows and with a vague interest of an idle. All at once I noticed in the depth of a dealer in curiosities a piece of Italian furniture of the seventeenth century. It was beautiful, I thought, and I felt it to be as being the work of a Venetian artist. Suddenly I felt a shiver, a shiver of love.

"Yes, I felt love, I felt love, I felt love! Why? Because I felt love, I felt love, I felt love! Why? Because I felt love, I felt love, I felt love! Why? Because

Rented a little country house last summer on the banks of the Seine, easily reached from Paris, and went out there to sleep every evening. After a few days I made the acquaintance of one of my neighbors, a man between thirty and forty, who certainly was the most curious specimen I ever met. He was an old boating man, and crazy about boating. He was always beside the water, on the water, or in the water. He must have been born in a boat, and he will certainly die in a boat at the last.

One evening as we were walking along side banks of the river, he told me that he lived for some stories about his life on the water. The good man at once became animated, his whole manner changed, he became a Homer, a Homer, if, most poetical. There was in his heart one great passion, an absorbing, irresistible passion—the river.

Ah, he said to me, how many memories have, connected with the river, those who have lived, or flowing beside us! You people who live in streets know nothing about the river. But there is no fisherman in the country who does not. To him it is a mysterious thing, profound, unknown, a kind of strange and mysterious country where one sees by night things that do not exist, hears sounds that one does not recognize, remembrances that come to one, as to a passing through a cemetery—and it is, in fact, the most sinister of cemeteries, one in which one has no tomb.

The land seems limited to the river boatman, and yet, if one reflects, that, on the one hand, the river seems limitless. A sailor has not the same feeling for the sea. It is often remembered, and yet, it is always the same. The coasts, it is honest, the great sea, while the river is silent and perfidious. It does not speak, it slows down without a sound, and the rapid motion of flowing water is more terrible to me than the high waves of the sea.

Dreamers maintain that the sea hides in its bosom vast tracts of blue where those who are drowned come sometimes to the light, amid strange forests and crystal grottoes. The river has only black depths where one rots in the slime. The sea, sometimes, when it sparkles in the light of the rising sun and gently lays its banks covered with whispering reeds.

The poet says, speaking of the ocean, O waves, what mournful stories could you tell, deep waves, the dread of kneeling mothers' hearts? Yet tell them to each other as ye roll in flowing tide, and let the sea, in its joy, let dispairing tones unto your voice. As on ye roll, ye are by mourning dirges.

Well, I think that the stories whispered by the slender reeds, with their little soft voices, are the more sinister than the dirges

THE FOLLOWING ADVENTURE happened to me about 1885. I had just taken the train and settled down in a corner, hoping that I should be left alone, when the door suddenly opened again and I heard a voice say: "Take care, monsieur, we are just at a crossing; the step is very high."

Another voice answered: "That's all right, Laurent, I have a firm hold on the handle."

Then a head appeared, and a hand grasped the leather straps hanging on either side of the door and slowly pulled up an enormous body, whose feet striking on the step, sounded like two canes. When the man had lifted his torso into the compartment I noticed, at the loose edge of his trousers, the end of a wooden leg, which was soon followed by its mate. A moment later behind this traveller and asked; "Are you all right, monsieur?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Then here are your packages and crutches."

And a servant, who looked like an old soldier, climbed in, carrying in his arms a stack of bundles wrapped in black and yellow papers and carefully tied; he placed one after the other in the net over his master's head. Then he said: "There, monsieur, that is all. There are five of them—the candy, the doll the drum, the gun, and the pate de foies gras."

"Very well, my boy."

"Thank you, Laurent; good health!"

The man closed the door and walked away, and I looked at my neighbor. He was about forty-five, although his hair was almost white. He wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor; he had a heavy mustache and was quite stout, with the ruoneuss of a strong and active man who is kept moderates on account of some infirmity. He wiped his brow, sighed, and, looking me full in the face, he asked: "Does smoking annoy you, monsieur?"

"No, monsieur."

Surely I knew that eye, that voice, that face. But when and where had I seen them? I had certainly met that man, spoken to him, shaken his hand! That was a long, long time ago. It was but in the blurred memories that seems to feel around blindly for memories and pursues them like fleeing phantoms without being able to seize them. He, too, was observing me, staring, as one of acquaintance with the persistence of a man who remembers slightly but not completely. Our eyes, embarrassed by this persistent contact, turned away; then, after a few minutes, drawn together again by the obscure and tenacious will of working memory, they met once more, and I said: "Monsieur, instead of staring at each other for an hour or so, would it not be better to try to discover where we have known each other?"

My neighbor answered graciously: "You are quite right, monsieur."

I named myself: "I am Henri Bonclair, a magistrate."

He hesitated for a few minutes; then, with the vague look and voice which the memory great mental tension, he said: "Oh, I remember perfectly. I met you twelve years ago, before the war, at the Poinecli"

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! Ah! You are Lieutenant Revaliere!"

"Yes. I was Captain Revaliere even up to the time when I lost my feet— both of them together from one cannon ball."

Now that we knew each other's identity we looked at each other again. I remembered perfectly the handsome, slender youth who had the cordiality with such frenzied agility and gracefulness that he had been nickname "the fury." Going back into the dim, distant past, I recalled a story which I had heard and forgotten, one of those scenes in which one listens but forgets, and which leaves but a faint impression upon the memory.

There was something about love in it. Lit by little the shadows cleared up, and the fresh face of a young girl appeared before my eyes. Then her name struck me with the force of an explosion: Mademoiselle de Mandel. I remembered everything now. It was indeed a love story, but quite commonplace. The young girl loved this young man, and when I had met them there was already talk of the approaching wedding. The youth seemed to be very much in love, very happy.

I raised my eye to the net, where all the packages which had been brought in by the servant were rembling from the movement of the train, and the voice of the servant came back to me, as if he had just finished speaking. He had said: "There, monsieur, that is all. There are five of them: the candy, the doll, the drum, the gun, and the pate de foies gras."

Then, in a second, a whole romance unfolded itself in my head. It was like all those tales I had read, or heard, where the young lady married notwithstanding the catastrophe, whether physical or financial; therefore, this officer who had been maimed in the war had returned, after the campaign, to the young girl who had given him her promise, and she had kept her word.

I considered that very beautiful, but simple, just as one, contrary to the rules of novels and climaxes in books or in plays. It always seems, when one reads or listens to these stories of magnanimity, that one could sacrifice one's self with enthusiasm if opportunity were whelming joy. But the following day, when an unfortunate friend comes to borrow some money, there is a strange revulsion of feeling.

But, suddenly, another supposition, less poetic and more realistic, replaced the first one. Perhaps he had married before the war, before this frightful accident, and she, in despair and resignation, had been forced to receive, care for, cheer, and support this husband, who had departed, a handsome man, and had returned without his feet, a frightful wreck, forced into immobility, powerless and fatal obesity.

Was he happy or in torture? I was seized with an irresistible desire to know his story, or, at least, the principal points, which would permit me to guess what he had in his heart or would not tell me. Still thinking the matter over, I began talking to him. We had exchanged a few commonplace words, and I asked my opposite if he was married. "He must have three children: the bonbons are for his wife, the doll for his little girl, the drum and the gun for his sons, and this pate de foies gras for himself."

Suddenly I asked him: "Are you father, monsieur?"

He answered: "No, monsieur."

I suddenly felt confused, as if I had been guilty of some breach of etiquette, and I continued: "I beg your pardon. I had thought that you were when I heard your servant speaking about the toys. The listens and draws conclusions unconsciously."

He smiled and then murmured: "No, I am not even married. I am still at the preliminary stage."

I pretended suddenly to remember, and said:

"Oh! that's true! When I knew you, you were engaged to Mademoiselle de Mandel, I believe."

"Yes, monsieur, your memory is excellent."

I grew very bold and added: "I also seem to remember hearing that Mademoiselle de Mandel married Monsieur-Monsieur—"

He calmly mentioned the name: "Monsieur de Fleurel."

"Yes, that's it! I remember it was on that occasion that I heard of your wound."

I looked him full in the face, and he blushed. His full face, which was already red from the sympathy of blood, rushed to the temples. He answered quickly, with a sudden ardor of a man who is pleading a cause which is lost in his mind and in his heart, but which he does not wish to admit.

"It is wrong, monsieur, to couple my name with that of Madame de Fleurel. When I returned from the war—without my feet, alas! I never thought of my engagement to become my wife. Was it possible? When one marries, monsieur, it is not in order to parade one's genosity; it is in order to live every day, every hour, every minute, side by side beside a man; and if this man is disfigured, as I am, it is a death sentence to marry him! Oh, I understand, I admire all sacrifices and resolutions when they are made in haste, but I do not admit that a woman should give up her whole life, all joy, all her dreams, in order to satisfy the admiration of the gallery. When I hear, on the floor of my room, the sounds of my wooden legs and of my crutches, I grow angry enough to strangle my servant. Do you think that I would permit a woman to drag her feet toward an unable to rolevate? And, then, do you think that my stumps are pretty?"

He was silent. What could I say? He certainly was right. Could I blame her, hold her responsible, even, for her first impulse? No. However, the end which conformed to the rule, to the truth, did not satisfy my poetic appetite. These heroic deeds demand a beautiful sacrifice, which, instead of a lacking, and I felt a certain disappointment. I suddenly, asked: "Has Madame de Fleurel any children?"

"Yes, one girl and two boys. It is for them that I am bringing these toys. She and her husband are very kind to me."

The train was going up the incline to Saint-Germain. It passed through the tunnel, entered the station, and stopped. I was about to offer my arm to the wounded officer, in order to help him descend, when two hands were stretched up to him through the open door.

"Hello! my dear Revaliere!"

"Ah! Hello, Fleurel!"

Standing behind the man, the woman, still beautiful, was smiling and waving her hands to him. A little girl, standing by her side, was jumping for joy, and two young boys were eagerly watching the drum and the gun, which were passing from the car into their father's hands.

When the cripple was on the ground, all the children kissed him. Then they set off, the little girl holding in her hand the small varnished rung of a crutch, just as she might walk beside her big friend and mentor.

A STROLL

THIS OLD MAN, bookkeeper for Messieurs Labaze and Company, left the store, he stood for a minute bewildered at the glory of the setting sun. He had worked all day in the yellow light of a small jet of gas, far in the back of the store, on a narrow court, as deep as a well. He knew not the sphere he had been spending his days for forty years was so dark that even in the middle of summer one could labor there without gaslight from eleven until three.

It was always damp and cold, and from this he had to which his window opened came the musty odor of a sewer.

For forty years Monsieur Leras had been performing exactly the same duties, in exactly the same place, and he would remain there until seven at night, bending over his books, writing with the industry of a good clerk.

He was now making three thousand francs a year, having started at fifteen hundred. He had economized, lived like a miser, his life not allow him the luxury of a wife, and as he had never enjoyed anything, he desired nothing. From morn to noon, he toiled, tired of this continuous and monotonous work, he formed a platonic wish: "God! If I only had an income of fifteen thousand francs, I would take life easy."

He had never taken life easy, as he had never enjoyed life, or anything pleasant either. His life had been uneventful, without emotions, without hopes. The faculty of dreaming with which every man is endowed had been developed in the mediocrity of his ambitions.

When he was twenty-one he entered the employ of Messieurs Labaze and Company, and he had never left them.

In 1859 he had lost his father and his mother in 1863, the two deaths of which incidents in his life was when he moved, in 1868, because his landlord had tried to raise his rent.

Every day his aliment was the same, a frightful noise of rattling chains, made him spring out of bed at 6 o'clock precisely.

Twice, however, this piece of mechanism had been out of order—once in 1866 and again in 1874; he had never been able to find out the reason why. He washed himself, his hair he had swept his room, dust his chair and the top of his bureau. All this took him an hour and a half.

Then he would go out, buy a roll at the Labaze Bakery, in which he had seen eleven different crews succeed each other in their charge, and he would eat this roll on the way to the office.

His meager existence had been the prey of a monotonous routine, which was still decorated with the same wall paper. He had entered there, as young man, as a novice in Monsieur Brument, and with the desire to replace him.

He had taken his place and wished for nothing more.

The whole harvest of memories which other men reap in their youth, and which they transported, every one, into the tragic lives, and tumultuous journeys, all the occurrences of free existence, all these things had remained strangers to him.

Days, weeks, months, seasons, years, all passed in the same way. He got up every day at the same hour, started out, arrived at the office, ate luncheon, went away, had dinner and went to bed without ever interrupting the regular monotony of similar actions, deeds and thoughts.

Formerly he used to look at his blood more active and wary hair in the little round mirror left by his predecessor. Now, every evening he saw the facing, he saw the face of a white-moustache and bald head in the same place. Years years had rolled by, long and rapid, decay as a river which flows and flows and never stops in its sleepless night. Forty years passed in the same place, in the same office, and nothing more.

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Monsieur Leras went in front of the store, under the sidewalk, he crossed the street successfully for a wagon, he approached the immense monument, the old bookkeeper noticed that he was hungry, and he went into a wine dealer's for dinner.

The meal was served

13

ALEXANDRE

At four o'clock that day, as on every other day, Alexandre rolled the three-wheeled chair for cripples up to the door of the little house; then, in obedience to the doctor's orders, he would push his old and infirm mistress about until six o'clock.

When he had placed the light vehicle against the step, just at the place where the old lady could most easily enter it, he went into the house; and soon a furious, hoarse old soldier's voice was heard cursing inside the house: it issued from the master, the retired ex-captain of infantry, Joseph Maramballe.

Then could be heard the noise of doors being slammed, chairs being pushed about, and hasty footsteps; then nothing more. After a few seconds, Alexandre reappeared on the threshold, supporting with all his strength Madame Maramballe, who was exhausted from the exertion of descending the stairs. When she was at last settled in the rolling chair, Alexandre passed behind it, grasped the handle, and set out toward the river.

Thus they crossed the little town every day amid the respectful greeting, of all. These bows were perhaps meant as much for the servant as for the mistress, for if she was loved and esteemed by all, this old trooper, with his long, white, patriarchal beard, was considered a model domestic.

The July sun was beating down unmercifully on the street, bathing the low houses in its crude and burning light. Dogs were sleeping on the sidewalk in the shade of the houses, and Alexandre, a little out of breath, hastened his footsteps in order sooner to arrive at the avenue which leads to the water.

Madame Maramballe was already slumbering under her white parasol, the point of which sometimes grazed along the man's impassive face. As soon as they had reached the Allee des Tilleuls, she awoke in the shade of the trees, and she said in a kindly voice: "Go more slowly, my poor boy; you will kill yourself in this heat."

Along this path, completely covered by arched linden trees, the Mavettek flowed in its winding bed bordered by willows.

The gurgling of the eddies and the splashing of the little waves against the rocks lent to the walk the charming music of babbling water and the freshness of damp air. Madame Maramballe inhaled with deep delight the humid charm of this spot and then murmured: "Ah! I feel better now! But he wasn't in a good humor to-day."

Alexandre answered: "No, madame."

For thirty-five years he had been in the service of this couple, first as officer's orderly, then as simple valet who did not wish to leave his masters; and for the last six years, every afternoon, he had been wheeling his mistress about through the narrow streets of the town. From this long and devoted service, and then from this daily tete-a-tete, a kind of familiarity arose between the old lady and the devoted servant, affectionate on her part, deferential on his.

They talked over the affairs of the house exactly as if they were equals. Their principal subject of conversation and of worry was the bad disposition of the captain, soured by a long career which had begun with promise, run along without promotion, end ended without glory.

Madame Maramballe continued: "He certainly was not in a good humor today. This happens too often since he has left the service."

And Alexandre, with a sigh, completed his mistress's thoughts, "Oh, madame might say that it happens every day and that it also happened before leaving the army."

"That is true. But the poor man has been so unfortunate. He began with a brave deed, which obtained for him the Legion of Honor at the age of twenty; and then from twenty to fifty he was not able to rise higher than captain, whereas at the beginning he expected to retire with at least the rank of colonel."

"Madame might also admit that it was his fault. If he had not always been as cutting as a whip, his superiors would have loved and protected him better. Harshness is of no use; one should try to please if one wishes to advance. As far as his treatment of us is concerned, it is also our fault, since we are willing to remain with him, but with others it's different."

Madame Maramballe was thinking. Oh, for how many years had she thus been thinking of the brutality of her husband, whom she had married long ago because he was a handsome officer, decorated quite young, and full of promise, so they said! What mistakes one makes in life!

She murmured: "Let us stop a while, my poor Alexandre, and you rest on that bench:

It was a little worm-eaten bench, placed at a turn in the alley. Every time they came in this direction Alexandre was accustomed to making a short pause on this seat.

He sat down and with a proud and familiar gesture he took his beautiful white beard in his hand, and, closing his, fingers over it, ran them down to the point, which he held for a minute at the pit of his stomach, as if once more to verify the length of this growth.

Madame Maramballe continued: "I married him; it is only just and natural that I should bear his injustice; but what I do not understand is why you also should have supported it, my good Alexandre!"

He merely shrugged his shoulders and answered: "Oh! I–madame."

She added: "Really. I have often wondered. When I married him you were his orderly and you could hardly do otherwise than endure him. But why did you remain with us, who pay you so little and who treat you so badly, when you could have done as every one else does, settle down, marry, have a family?"

He answered: "Oh, madame! with me it's different."

Then he was silent; but he kept pulling his beard as if he were ringing a bell within him, as if he were trying to pull it out, and he rolled his eyes like a man who is greatly embarrassed.

Madame Maramballe was following her own train of thought: "You are not a peasant. You have an education–"

He interrupted her proudly: "I studied surveying, madame."

"Then why did you stay with us, and blast your prospects?"

He stammered: "That's it! that's it! it's the fault of my dispositton."

"How so, of your disposition?"

"Yes, when I become attached to a person I become attached to him, that's all."

She began to laugh: "You are not going to try to tell me that Maramballe's sweet disposition caused you to become attached to him for life."

He was fidgeting about on his bench visibly embarrassed, and he muttered behind his long beard:

"It was not he, it was you!"

The old lady, who had a sweet face, with a snowy line of curly white hair between her forehead and her bonnet, turned around in her chair and observed her servant with a surprised look, exclaiming: "I, my poor Alexandre! How so?"

He began to look up in the air, then to one side, then toward the distance, turning his head as do timid people when forced to admit shameful secrets. At last he exclaimed, with the courage of a trooper who is ordered to the line of fire: "You see, it's this way–the first time I brought a letter to mademoiselle from the lieutenant, mademoiselle gave me a franc and a smile, and that settled it."

Not understanding well, she questioned him "Explain yourself."

Then he cried out, like a malefactor who is admitting a fatal crime: "I had a sentiment for madame! There!"

She answered nothing, stopped looking at him, hung her head, and thought. She was good, full of justice, gentleness, reason, and tenderness. In a second she saw the immense devotion of this poor creature, who had given up everything in order to live beside her, without saying anything. And she felt as if she could cry. Then, with a sad but not angry expression, she said: "Let us return home."

He rose and began to push the wheeled chair.

As they approached the village they saw Captain Maramballe coming toward them. As soon as he joined them he asked his wife, with a visible desire of getting angry: "What have we for dinner?"

"Some chicken with flageolets."

He lost his temper: "Chicken! chicken! always chicken! By all that's holy, I've had enough chicken! Have you no ideas in your head, that you make me eat chicken every day?"

She answered, in a resigned tone: "But, my dear, you know that the doctor has ordered it for you. It's the best thing for your stomach. If your stomach were well, I could give you many things which I do not dare set before you now."

Then, exasperated, he planted himself in front of Alexandre, exclaiming: "Well, if my stomach is out of order it's the fault of that brute. For thirty-five years he has been poisoning me with his abominable cooking."

Madame Maramballe suddenly turned about completely, in order to see the old domestic. Their eyes met, and in this single glance they both said "Thank you!" to each other.

THE DRAWING-ROOM was small, full of heavy draperies and discreetly fragrant. A large fire burned in the grate and a solitary lamp at one end of the mantelpiece threw a soft light on the two persons who were talking.

She, the mistress of the house, was an old lady with white hair, but one of those old ladies whose unwrinkled skin is as smooth as the finest paper, and scented, intensely stated with perfume, with the delicate essences which she had used in her bath for so many years.

He was a very old friend, who had never married, a constant friend, a companion in the journey of life, but nothing more.

They had not spoken for about a minute, and were both looking at the fire, dreaming of no matter what, in one of those moments of friendly silence between people who have no need to be constantly talking in order to be happy together, when suddenly a large log, a stump covered with burning roses, fell out. It fell over the firedogs into the drawing-room and rolled on to the carpet, scattering great sparks around it. The old lady, with a little scream, sprang to her feet to run away, while he kicked the log back on to the hearth and stamped out all the burning sparks with his boots.

When the disaster was remedied, there was a strong smell of burning, and, sitting down opposite to his friend, the man looked at her with a smile and said, as he pointed to the log:

"That is the reason why I never married."

She looked at him in astonishment, with the inquiring look of women who wish to know everything, that eye which some have who are no longer very young—in which a complete, and often equal, curiosity is reflected, and she asked:

"How so?"

"Oh, it is a long story," he replied, "a rather sad unpleasant story.

"My old friends were often surprised at the coldness which suddenly sprang up between me and my best friends when I married my cousin was Julien, and myself. They could not understand how two such intimate and inseparable friends, as we had been, could suddenly become almost strangers to one another, and I will tell you the reason of it.

"He and I used to live together at one time. We were never quite, and in the friendship, we united us seemed so strong that nothing could break it.

"One evening when he came home, he told me that he was going to get married, and it gave me a shock as if he had robbed me or betrayed me. When a man's friend marries, it is all over between them. The greatest affection of a woman, that suspicious, uneasy and carnal affection, will not tolerate the sturdy and frank attachment, that unreserved of the mind, of the heart, and that mutual confidence which exists between two men.

"You see, however great the love may be that unites them a man and a woman are always strangers in mind and intellect; they remain belligerents, they belong to different races. There must always be a conqueror and a conquered, a master and a slave; now the one, now the other—they are never two equals. They press each other's hands, their hands trembling with amorous passion; but they never press them with a long, strong, loyal pressure, with that pressure which seems to open hearts and let lay there bare the heart of sincere, strong, manly affection. Philosophers of old, instead of marrying, and procreating as a consolation for their old age, children, who would abandon them, sought for a good, reliable friend, and grew old with him in that communion of thought which can only exist between men.

"Well, my friend Julien married. His wife was pretty, charming, a little, curly-haired blonde, plump and lively, who seemed to wonder ship him. At first I went but rarely to their house, feeling myself de trop. But, somehow, they attracted me to their house. They were constantly inviting me, and seemed very fond of me. Consequently, by degrees, I allowed myself to be allured by the charm of their life. I often dined with them, and frequently, when I returned home at night, thought that I would do as he had done, and get married, my empty house now seemed very dull.

"They appeared to be very much in love, and were never apart.

"Well, one evening Julien wrote and asked me to go to dinner, and I naturally went.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I must go out directly afterward on business, and I shall not be back until eleven o'clock but I hope that by that eleven precisely, and I will be back.

"I went home, and, sitting down opposite to her, I said, "I hold out my hand to her.

"You are as nice as ever, I said, and I felt a long, friendly pressure of my fingers, but I paid no attention to it; so we sat down to dinner, and at eight o'clock Julien went out.

"As soon as he had gone, I felt a strange embarrassment immediately seemed to arise between his wife and me. We had never been alone together yet, and in spite of our daily intercourse intimacy, this tete—a—tete placed us in a new position. At first I spoke vagarly of those indifferent matters with which one flies to fill an embarrassing silence, but she did not reply, and remained opposite to me with her head down in an undecided manner, as if she were thinking over some difficult subject, and as I was at a loss for small talk, I held my tongue. It is surprising how hard it is at times to find anything to say.

"And then, I felt something in the air, something I could not express, one of those mysterious premonitions of the future which are sent by the spirits of evil.

"Suddenly she raised her head and looked at me, and I said to her:

"Will you kindly put a log on the fire for it is going out."

"So I opened the box where the wood was kept, which was placed just where yours is, took out the largest log and put it on top of the others, which were three pars burned, and then silence again reigned in the room.

"In a few minutes the log was burning so brightly that it scorched our faces, and the young woman raised her eyes to mine—eyes that had a strange look to me.

"It is too hot now,' she said; 'let us go and sit on the sofa over there.'

"So we went and sat on the sofa, and then she said suddenly, looking me full in the face:

"What would you do if a woman were to tell you that she was in love with you?"

"Upon my word, I replied, I am much at a loss for an answer, 'I cannot foresee such a case; but it would depend very much upon the woman.'

"She gave a hard, nervous, vibrating laugh; one of those false laughs which seem as if they must break this glass, and then she added: Men are never either venturesome or spiteful? And, after a moment's silence, she continued: 'Have you ever been in love, Monsieur Paul?' I felt so obliged to acknowledge that I certainly had, and she asked me to tell her all about it. Whereupon I made up some story or other. She listened to me attentively, with frequent signs of disapproval and contempt, and then suddenly she said:

"No, you understand nothing about the subject. It seems to me that real love must unnerve the mind, upset the nerves and distract the head; that it must—how shall I express it?—be dangerous, even criminal, almost criminal and sacrilegious; that it must be a kind of treason; I mean to say that it is bound to break loss, fraternal bonds, sacred obligations, when love is tranquil, easy, lawful and without dangers, it is really love?

"I did not know what answer to give her, and I made this philosophical reflection to myself: 'Oh! female brain, here; indeed, you show yourself!'

"While speaking, she had assumed a demure saintly air; and, resting on the cushions, she stretched herself out at full length, with her head on my shoulder, and her dress pulled in a little so as to show her two stocking, which the firelight made look still brighter. In a minute or two she continued:

"I suppose I have frightened you?" I protested against such a notion, and she leaned against my breast altogether, and without looking at me, she said: "If I were to tell you that I love you, what would you do?

"And before I could think of an answer, she had thrown her arms around my neck, had quickly drawn my head down, and put her lips to mine.

"Oh! My dear friend, I can tell you that I did not feel at all happy! I thought, 'Poor Julien!' become the lover of this little, silly, wrong- headed, deceitful woman, who was, no doubt, terribly sensual, and whom her husband no longer satisfied.

To betray him continually, to deceive him, to play at being in love merely because I was instructed by fashionable friends, I thought in current and the friendship betrayed! No, that did not suit me, but what was I to do? To imitate Joseph would be acting a very stupid part, moreover, difficult, for, if this woman was enchanting in her perfidy, inflamed by audacity, palpitating and excited. Let the man who has never felt such a kiss lay the first stone of a woman who is ready to give herself to him throw the first scone at me.

"Well, a minute more—you understand what I mean? A minute more, and—I should have been—no, she would have been!—I beg your pardon, he would have been—when a loud noise made us both jump up. The log had fallen into the room, knocking over the fire irons and the fender, and on to the carpet, which it had scorched, and had left a burnt mark in armchair, which it would certainly set alight.

"I jumped up like a madman, and, as I was replacing on the fire that log which had saved me, the door opened hastily, and Julien came in.

"I am free," he said, with evident pleasure. "The business was over two hours sooner than I expected!"

"Yes, my dear friend, without that log, I should have been caught in the very act, and you know what the consequences would have been!

"You may be sure that I took good care never to be found in a similar situation again, never, never. Soon afterward I saw that Julien was giving me the 'cold shoulder,' as they say. His wife was evidently undermining our friendship. By degrees he got rid of me, and we have altogether ceased to meet.

"I never married, which ought not to surprise you, I think."

15

JULIE SONIAN

NO YEARS AGO THIS SPRING. I was twenty-two, and I was a fool. I was a fool because I was in love with a man, who was anything more than a fool. Or, more accurately, who was a good-year along a high-way? One walks in the sunlight, enough the connecting breeze, at the base of the mountains, doing the cross of the sea. And one dreamt: What a Fool! Fool! Fool!

16

THE RONDOLI SISTERS

I

I SET OUT TO SEE Italy thoroughly on two occasions, and each time I was stopped at the frontier and could not get any further. So I do not know Italy, said my friend, Charles Jouvent. And yet my two attempts gave me a charming idea of the manners of that beautiful country. Some time, however, I must visit its cities, as well as the museums and works of art with which it abounds. I will make another attempt to penetrate into the interior, which I have not yet succeeded in doing.

You don't understand me, so I will explain: In the spring of 1874 I was seized with an irresistible desire to see Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples. I am, as you know, not a great traveller; it appears to me a useless and fatiguing business. Nights spent in a train, the disturbed slumbers of the railway carriage, with the attendant headache, and stiffness in every limb, the sudden waking in that rolling box, the unwashed feeling, with your eyes and hair full of dust, the smell of the coal on which one's lungs feed, those bad dinners in the draughty refreshment rooms are, according to my ideas, a horrible way of beginning a pleasure trip.

After this introduction, we have the miseries of the hotel; of some great hotel full of people, and yet so empty; the strange room and the doubtful bed!

I am most particular about my bed; it is the sanctuary of life. We entrust our almost naked and fatigued bodies to it so that they may be reanimated by reposing between soft sheets and feathers.

There we find the most delightful hours of our existence, the hours of love and of sleep. The bed is sacred, and should be respected, venerated and loved by us as the best and most delightful of our earthly possessions.

I cannot lift up the sheets of a hotel bed without a shudder of disgust. Who has occupied it the night before? Perhaps dirty, revolting people have slept in it. I begin, then, to think of all the horrible people with whom one rubs shoulders every day, people with suspicious-looking skin which makes one think of the feet and all the rest! I call to mind those who carry about with them the sickening smell of garlic or of humanity. I think of those who are deformed and unhealthy, of the perspiration emanating from the sick, of everything that is ugly and filthy in man.

And all this, perhaps, in the bed in which I am about to sleep! The mere idea of it makes me feel ill as I get into it.

And then the hotel dinners–those dreary table d'hote dinners in the midst of all sorts of extraordinary people, or else those terrible solitary dinners at a small table in a restaurant, feebly lighted by a wretched composite candle under a shade.

Again, those terribly dull evenings in some un known town! Do you know anything more wretched than the approach of. dusk on such an occasion? One goes about as if almost in a dream, looking at faces that one never has seen before and never will see again; listening to people talking about matters which are quite indifferent to you in a language that perhaps you do not understand. You have a terrible feeling, almost as if you were lost, and you continue to walk on so as not to be obliged to return to the hotel, where you would feel more lost still because you are at home, in a home which belongs to anyone who can pay for it; and at last you sink into a chair of some well-lighted cafe, whose gilding and lights oppress you a thousand times more than the shadows in the streets. Then you feel so abominably lonely sitting in front of the glass of flat bock beer that a kind of madness seizes you, the longing to go somewhere or other, no matter where, as long as you need not remain in front of that marble table amid those dazzling lights.

And then, suddenly, you are aware that you are really alone in the world, always and everywhere, and that in places which we know, the familiar jostlings give us the illusion only of human fraternity. At such moments of self-abandonment and sombre isolation in distant cities one thinks broadly, clearly and profoundly. Then one suddenly sees the whole of life outside the vision of eternal hope, apart from the deceptions of our innate habits, and of our expectations of happiness, which we indulge in dreams never to be realized.

It is only by going a long distance from home that we can fully understand how short-lived and empty everything near at hand is; by searching for the unknown, we perceive how commonplace and evanescent everything is; only by wandering over the face of the earth can we understand how small the world is, and how very much alike it is everywhere.

How well I know, and how I hate and almost fear, those haphazard walks through unknown streets; and this was the reason why, as nothing would induce me to undertake a tour in Italy by myself, I made up my mind to accompany my friend Paul Pavilly.

You know Paul, and how he idealizes women. To him the earth is habitable only because they are there; the sun gives light and is warm because it shines upon them; the air is soft and balmy because it blows upon their skin and ruffles the soft hair on their temples; and the moon is charming because it makes them dream and imparts a languorous charm to love. Every act and action of Paul's has woman for its motive; all his thoughts, all his efforts and hopes are centered in them.

When I mentioned Italy to Paul he at first absolutely refused to leave Paris. I, however, began to tell him of the adventures I had on my travels. I assured him that all Italian women are charming, and I made him hope for the most refined pleasures at Naples, thanks to certain letters of introduction which I had; and so at last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

He said, in a voice that was low, but clear as a bell, "Pardon, citizens, pardon! I am a poor man, and I have a family to support. I have been a long time in the service of the Duke of Ventadorn, and I have always been a good servant. I have never committed any other fault than that, and for that fault I have already paid. I have lost my place, and I am now a poor wandering fiddler, who has his living only by his fiddle. I ask you, citizens, what harm there is in a fiddler who wishes to earn a little money by playing his fiddle? I ask you, what harm there is in a poor man who wishes to earn his bread by his fiddle? I ask you, what harm there is in a poor man who wishes to earn his bread by his fiddle, when he has a family to support? I ask you, citizens, what harm there is in a poor man who wishes to earn his bread by his fiddle, when he has a family to support, and when he has been a long time in the service of the Duke of Ventadorn, and has always been a good servant, and has never committed any other fault than that, and for that fault he has already paid, and has lost his place, and is now a poor wandering fiddler, who has his living only by his fiddle?

III

The next year, at just about the same period, I was seized as one is with a periodical fever, with a new desire to go to Italy, and I immediately made up my mind to carry it into effect. There is no doubt that every really well-educated man ought to see Florence, Venice and Rome. This travel has, also, the additional advantage of providing many subjects of conversation in society, and of giving one an opportunity for bringing forward artistic generalities which appear profound.

This time I went alone, and I arrived at Genoa at the same time as the year before, but without any adventure on the road. I went to the same hotel, and actually happened to have the same room.

I was hardly in bed when the recollection of Francesca which, since the evening before, had been floating vaguely through my mind, haunted me with strange persistency. I thought of her nearly the whole night, and by degrees the wish to see her again seized me, a confused desire at first, which gradually grew stronger and more intense. At last I made up my mind to spend the next day in Genoa to try to find her, and if I should not succeed, to take the evening train.

Early in the morning I set out on my search. I remembered the directions she had given me when she left me, perfectly–Victor-Emmanuel Street, house of the furniture-dealer, at the bottom of the yard on the right.

I found it without the least difficulty, and I knocked at the door of a somewhat dilapidated-looking dwelling. It was opened by a stout woman, who must have been very handsome, but who actually was only very dirty. Although she had too much embonpoint, she still bore the lines of majestic beauty; her untidy hair fell over her forehead and shoulders, and one fancied one could see her floating about in an enormous dressing-gown covered with spots of dirt and grease. Round her neck she wore a great gilt necklace, and on her wrists were splendid bracelets of Genoa filigree work.

In rather a hostile manner she asked me what I wanted, and I replied by requesting her to tell me whether Francesca Rondoli lived there.

"What do you want with her?" she asked.

"I had the pleasure of meeting her last year, and I should like to see her again."

The old woman looked at me suspiciously.

"Where did you meet her?" she asked.

"Why, here in Genoa itself."

"What is your name?"

I hesitated a moment, and then I told her. I had hardly done so when the Italian put out her arms as if to embrace me. "Oh! you are the Frenchman how glad I am to see you! But what grief you caused the poor child! She waited for you a month; yes, a whole month. At first she thought you would come to fetch her. She wanted to see whether you loved her. If you only knew how she cried when she saw that you were not coming! She cried till she seemed to have no tears left. Then she went to the hotel, but you had gone. She thought that most likely you were travelling in Italy, and that you would return by Genoa to fetch her, as she would not go with you. And she waited more than a month, monsieur; and she was so unhappy; so unhappy. I am her mother."

I really felt a little disconcerted, but I regained my self-possession, and asked:

"Where is she now?"

"She has gone to Paris with a painter, a delightful man, who loves her very much, and who gives her everything that she wants. Just look at what she sent me; they are very pretty, are they not?"

And she showed me, with quite southern animation, her heavy bracelets and necklace. "I have also," she continued, "earrings with stones in them, a silk dress, and some rings; but I only wear them on grand occasions. Oh! she is very happy, monsieur, very happy. She will be so pleased when I tell her you have been here. But pray come in and sit down. You will take something or other, surely?"

But I refused, as I now wished to get away by the first train; but she took me by the arm and pulled me in, saying:

"Please, come in; I must tell her that you have been in here."

I found myself in a small, rather dark room, furnished with only a table and a few chairs.

She continued: "Oh, she is very happy now, very happy. When you met her in the train she was very miserable; she had had an unfortunate love affair in Marseilles, and she was coming home, poor child. But she liked you at once, though she was still rather sad, you understand. Now she has all she wants, and she writes and tells me everything that she does. His name is Bellemin, and they say he is a great painter in your country. He fell in love with her at first sight. But you will take a glass of sirup?-it is very good. Are you quite alone, this year?"

"Yes," I said, "quite alone."

I felt an increasing inclination to laugh, as my first disappointment was dispelled by what Mother Rondoli said. I was obliged; however, to drink a glass of her sirup.

"So you are quite alone?" she continued. "How sorry I am that Francesca is not here now; she would have been company for you all the time you stayed. It is not very amusing to go about all by oneself, and she will be very sorry also."

Then, as I was getting up to go, she exclaimed:

"But would you not like Carlotta to go with you? She knows all the walks very well. She is my second daughter, monsieur."

No doubt she took my look of surprise for consent, for she opened the inner door and called out up the dark stairs which I could not see:

"Carlotta! Carlotta! make haste down, my dear child."

I tried to protest, but she would not listen.

"No; she will be very glad to go with you; she is very nice, and much more cheerful than her sister, and she is a good girl, a very good girl, whom I love very much."

In a few moments a tall, slender, dark girl appeared, her hair hanging down, and her youthful figure showing unmistakably beneath an old dress of her mother's.

The latter at once told her how matters stood.

"This is Francesca's Frenchman, you know, the one whom she knew last year. He is quite alone, and has come to look for her, poor fellow; so I told him that you would go with him to keep him company."

The girl looked at me with her handsome dark eyes, and said, smiling:

"I have no objection, if he wishes it"

I could not possibly refuse, and merely said:

"Of course, I shall be very glad of your company."

Her mother pushed her out. "Go and get dressed directly; put on your blue dress and your hat with the flowers, and make haste."

As soon as she had left the room the old woman explained herself: "I have two others, but they are much younger. It costs a lot of money to bring up four children. Luckily the eldest is off my hands at present."

Then she told all about herself, about her husband, who had been an employee on the railway, but who was dead, and she expatiated on the good qualities of Carlotta, her second girl, who soon returned, dressed, as her sister had been, in a striking, peculiar manner.

Her mother examined her from head to foot, and, after finding everything right, she said:

"Now, my children, you can go." Then turning to the girl, she said: "Be sure you are back by ten o'clock to-night; you know the door is locked then." The answer was:

"All right, mamma; don't alarm yourself."

She took my arm and we went wandering about the streets, just as I had wandered the previous year with her sister.

We returned to the hotel for lunch, and then I took my new friend to Santa Margarita, just as I had taken her sister the year previously.

During the whole fortnight which I had at my disposal, I took Carlotta to all the places of interest in and about Genoa. She gave me no cause to regret her sister.

She cried when I left her, and the morning of my departure I gave her four bracelets for her mother, besides a substantial token of my affection for herself.

One of these days I intend to return to Italy, and I cannot help remembering with a certain amount of uneasiness, mingled with hope, that Madame Rondoli has two more daughters.

COLOPHON

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